



Opening Statement of Paschal Hayes, Executive Chairperson,
Sea Fisheries Protection Authority

18th November 2025

Good morning, Chairman and Committee Members. I would like to thank the committee for your invite to appear today. We welcome interest in the role of the SFPA, in particular our work as a regulator for the sea-fisheries and seafood sectors and to have the opportunity to outline how we seek to ensure effective and fair regulation of the areas under the Authority's mandate, to support safe, authentic and sustainable seafood.

I am joined today by my colleagues:

- Mr Michael Finn, Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority member and Senior Executive Manager for Operations.
- Ms Louise Murphy, Senior Executive Manager for Corporate Services / Director of Finance.
- Mr Barry Murphy, Executive Manager Legal Services

Effective regulation and oversight of the sea-fisheries and seafood sectors is essential to the achievement of our shared ambitions for the development of Ireland's seafood sector, as well as ensuring that Ireland's shared marine resources are sustainable for future generations of fishermen and fisherwomen, coastal communities, and Irish and international consumers.

The SFPA plays a key role in promoting compliance, verifying it and, where necessary, using the powers provided under legislation to enforce sea-fisheries and seafood safety laws for all areas under our remit. This includes all seafood produced in Ireland's seafood-processing companies, all fishing vessels operating within Ireland's 200-mile limit, and almost 2,000 Irish registered fishing vessels, wherever they operate.

The SFPA's scope of work is broad and varied. In total the SFPA has 191 employees, with 88 of these being of the Grade of Sea-Fisheries Protection Officers (SFPOs) with a further 9 Senior Port Officers (SPOs), based at key locations around the country, predominately in the major fishing ports. This enables our organisation to fulfil our statutory requirements as laid down in the Sea-Fisheries & Maritime Jurisdiction Act 2006, several of which include direct interaction with the sea-fisheries and seafood sectors including:

Official controls of seafood processing establishments and of aquaculture production sites and wild shellfish fisheries

Regulation of the commercial sea-fishing industry and verifying compliance with the EU Common Fisheries Policy

Seafood trade support and controls including the provision of Catch and Health Certification for exports and the application of seafood import controls

Promotion of compliance across the seafood sector

Our Strategic Plan 2024-2026 focuses on three core areas namely the protection of sea-fisheries and seafood safety, organisational excellence and communication and engagement. In line with wider Government and Public Service Strategy we are advancing organisational efficiency through best-in-class support for staff, processes, systems and data. We have embarked on an ambitious programme of digitalisation which aims to enable us to optimally deliver on our mandate as a regulator. In line with our strategy, we have worked to enhance our position as an effective regulator, an employer of choice, an active participant in Ireland's climate action journey and an important stakeholder in our global food producing ecosystem.

To give some context as to the importance of the fishing and seafood sector to Ireland, the total GDP of the Irish seafood industry in 2024 was €1.24 billion with just under 17,000 livelihoods dependent on the sector, most of which are in coastal communities around Ireland. Over the past six decades the consumption of fish per capita has tripled with on average 22 Kg now being consumed annually.

Ireland has an excellent reputation as a high-quality producer of seafood and the SFPA plays an important role in maintaining this reputation with robust monitoring and

inspection programmes in place. For this area of our remit, we operate under a service contract with the FSAI. Under this contract the SFPA is tasked with:

- *approving seafood processing establishments, including fishing vessels that freeze and/or process onboard*
- *the implementation of an inspection programme in line with the risk assessment associated with the processing activity, size and compliance history of the establishment.*

At the present time there are 182 approved establishments, 49 Irish registered fishing vessels approved to freeze onboard, and one Irish registered factory vessel. Samples of products are taken for analysis in line with the regulatory limits and where samples are found to be outside of acceptable limits, follow-up action including the withdrawal and recall of product may be necessary. Protecting seafood safety is crucial, not only to the reputation of Ireland's seafood offering both at home and abroad, but ultimately for the health and well-being of consumers of Irish seafood products. In 2024, the SFPA promoted and oversaw compliance with relevant food safety legislation in 2,290 food businesses. Overall, a total of 2,593 food safety controls were carried out. Of these official controls, 476 were categorised as inspections of approved establishments, 1,965 consisted of official control checks, such as checks prior to certifying a consignment of food being exported to a third country, temperature checks and labelling checks.

Shellfish production and wild shellfish fisheries are a significant sector and the SFPA is responsible for the implementation of classification and biotoxin sampling plans to ensure that the products are safe for consumption. On an annual basis just under 1,800 samples of shellfish are taken by the SFPA for analysis by the Marine Institute, additional phytoplankton samples and biotoxin samples are taken by the SFPA. Offshore fisheries for species such as Scallop and Razor Clam are also required to be sampled.

Much of the fresh and processed fishery products are exported from Ireland to markets in the EU, the UK and Asia predominately. We are responsible for certifying product for export from both an IUU Regulation (illegal, unreported, unregulated fishing) compliance perspective as well as a food safety perspective. The first of these is done through catch certification whereby an SFPO attests that the product that is to be

exported was caught legally by a fishing vessel and that the catch has been reported correctly. The latter is by means of a health certificate which indicates that the product was processed in an approved premises and is fit for human consumption or in the case of fishmeal, that it is safe for it to enter the food chain as a food ingredient.

Our resources are limited and therefore we cannot be present at all landings of fish; accordingly, and in line with EU regulations, inspections on commercial fishing vessels are undertaken on a risk basis. Where individual fishing vessels are of a higher risk, or where fishing vessels are operating in a higher risk-rated fleet segment and/or a higher risk fishery, they are more likely to be selected for inspection. There are also some regulatory obligations to be met in relation to fisheries control, for example all landings of pelagic species must be authorised to land and therefore a preliminary inspection is required of all these landings. All Member States, Ireland included, must inspect 20% by weight of demersal species subject to a multiannual plan, this includes for example Hake, Monkfish, Nephrops, Cod. In addition, 5% by number of landings and 7.5% by volume of Mackerel, Horse Mackerel, Herring and Blue Whiting of landings greater than 10 Tonnes must be inspected in their entirety; as a result, these are subject to supervised weighing on landing. Therefore, fishing vessels that fish for these species are subject to a greater number of inspections than smaller fishing vessels targeting lower risk species. Inspections are also required, from a fisheries control perspective, at various stages within the chain including transport and in premises. As part of inspections SFPOs may inspect some or all elements associated with the fishing trip including, but not limited to, documentary checks, inspection of the fish stored in the hold, gear, fish quality etc.

From a sea-fisheries control perspective, 2024 saw the continued implementation of Ireland's EU Commission approved Sea-Fisheries Control Plan. The functioning of the Control Plan progressed satisfactorily over the course of the year, and I would like to acknowledge the contribution of our own staff, and the cooperation of the sea-fisheries and seafood processing sector, for embracing the control regime.

Aspects of the new European Union (EU) Fisheries Control Regulation began to come into effect in 2024 and will continue through various Implementing Regulations and Delegated Regulations until 2030. The SFPA has engaged with EU Commission Officials on the development of the implementing and delegating Acts and we continue

to provide advice and feedback on technical, control and enforcement measures on behalf of Ireland. We engaged with industry to provide timely information and guidance on the requirements of the developing legislation through meetings, briefings and training sessions and will continue to do so as further aspects of the legislation come into force in the years ahead.

Protecting consumers of seafood produced in Ireland, ensuring sea-fisheries sustainability and safeguarding against illegal fishing activities is one of the critical activities of the SFPA and is fulfilled by our Sea-Fisheries Protection Officers (SFPOs) operating throughout the country, and at sea through our partnerships with the Irish Naval Service and with the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA). During 2024, our SFPOs undertook 2,276 inspections of fishing vessels. A total of 108 case files were opened, comprising of 84 sea-fisheries law enforcement cases and 24 food safety law enforcement cases. Twenty-four (24) points cases for alleged serious infringements of the Common Fisheries Policy rules were submitted to the Determination Panel in 2024.

We recognise the challenges that the industry is facing, in particular with proposed quota reductions and so now, more than ever, it is vital that the SFPA steadfastly ensures accurate recording of catches by operators. For example, the impact of declaring less fish than are actually caught and/or misreporting the catch area has wide implications for the entire industry, it threatens the sustainability of fishing stocks, undermines the actions of the vast majority of law-abiding members of the industry, and has consequences for future generations. Where such behaviour is detected, the SFPA is duty bound to take action in order to minimise the adverse impact on sustainable fishing and, by extension, the industry and fishing communities as a whole, regardless of the nationality of the fishing vessel or the Master.

The SFPA does not have a policy remit, nor do we have a legislative role but we strive to fulfil our mandate, without fear or favour, in implementing the legislation and regulations passed by the Oireachtas and the European Parliament.

Again, I thank you for the invitation to speak to you today. My colleagues and I are happy to provide additional information or answer any questions you may have.