

9 February 2022

STATEMENT BY ATLANTIC HIGH SEA FISHING COMPANY, MEMBER OF THE PFA

The Atlantic High Sea Fishing Company, owner of the Margiris vessel, and a member of the Pelagic Freezer-trawler Association (PFA) would like to point out that the incident that took place on board the vessel off La Rochelle on 3 February was in no way related to the capture of unwanted fish, contrary to the accusations made.

An amount of blue whiting – a quota species, particularly valuable for freezer-trawlers – was involuntarily released into the sea from the Margiris, due to a rupture in the cod-end part of its net. It was caused by the unexpectedly large volume of the fish caught.

In line with EU law, the incident and the quantities lost have been recorded in the vessel's log book and reported to the authorities of the vessel's flag state, Lithuania.

The Atlantic High Sea Fishing Company is cooperating fully with the investigation opened for failure to comply with the "obligation to land caught species". This obligation would require the fish to have been hauled aboard the vessel, which was never the case as it was unintentionally released during the hauling of the trawl. It should also be noted that pelagic trawlers use mid-water trawls and are not equipped to fish on the surface of the water.

The Margiris was thoroughly checked by French authorities on the 2nd of February, the day before the incident. The inspection report concluded that the vessel was operating fully in-line with EU law, which includes provisions drawn up to make it technically impossible to discard fish already onboard;

The report also established that the only species onboard were blue whiting, AHSFC's target species. Although being a very low priced fish, blue whiting is of great value for AHSFC and all other PFA members as it is an integral part of the PFA members' business strategy. Together, they provide on average 6 million affordable meals per day, of which 5.5 million contribute to food security in Africa.

The incident has had major consequences for AHSFC:

- The quantities lost have been recorded in the vessel's log book and have been deducted from the vessel's quota, which severely restricts its remaining available fishing volumes ;
- It is also a loss of turnover because the lost fish were intended for sale;
- This incident also had significant organisational consequences, again resulting in losses: immobilisation of the boat and the incapacity to fish while the trawl was being repaired, modification of the fishing plan.

The Atlantic High Sea Fishing Company is committed to full, open and transparent cooperation with all authorities involved. The PFA along with all its members support the AHSFC's position and also stand ready to be of service to the authorities.