An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

Minister Martin Heydon T.D
Minister for Agriculture, Food & the Marine
Agriculture House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

CC: Taoiseach Micheál Martin T.D

18th June 2026

Dear Martin,

Further to a recent phone call and Tuesday's meeting, I wanted to outline my concerns regarding your proposal that, for the duration of Ireland's upcoming EU Presidency, you would take effective control of Fisheries and Marine matters at European level, including chairing relevant Council meetings, hosting the informal Fisheries Council in Cork, and representing Ireland at the December Council meeting at which fisheries opportunities and quotas for 2027 will be decided.

I was surprised by this proposal given the clear delegation of responsibilities made to the office of Minister of State for Fisheries and Marine under statutory instrument SI368/2025 following the formation of this Government in 2025, and the way that we have both worked over the past sixteen months to honour and deliver on the Programme for Government commitments in this area.

As you know, the Programme for Government made a deliberate and significant decision to establish a dedicated Minister of State role for Fisheries and Marine. This addressed the sector's longstanding concerns that fisheries and marine issues had lost visibility, priority and dedicated political representation at senior levels in Government.

The Programme for Government recognised the importance of fisheries and marine matters to the future of the country and to the coastal communities whose livelihoods depend on the sector. It also committed to a broader programme of work including the development of a new Fisheries Sector Strategy, investment in marine infrastructure and harbour centres, and stronger advocacy for Ireland's interests at EU level.

Minister
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In addition, it gave recognition to the importance of the role played by our ocean space in the generation of renewable electricity and the importance of honouring Irelands commitment to the establishment of marine protected areas in line with international agreements. For this reason, the Minister of State role was embedded in both DAFM and DCEE.

The creation of the role was not symbolic. It was a direct response to concerns repeatedly raised by the sector itself and to a very real belief that fisheries and marine interests had become increasingly deprioritised within the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine and across Government.

You may recall that efforts were made by a senior official in DAFM to discourage my efforts to protect the Hague preferences in advance of the December 2025 Council of Ministers meeting. The reasoning advanced at the time was that my efforts might undermine the DAFM priority to get an agreement on the nitrates derogation for Ireland, reinforcing the lower priority that fisheries has within DAFM.

Since my appointment I have taken this mandate seriously. Over the past sixteen months, I have engaged extensively with stakeholders across the sector; built strong working relationship with Fisheries Ministers in other Member States and with the European Commission; commissioned and completed an independent review of the sector under Kieran Mulvey and, along with you, established a group under the auspices of Food Vision 2030 chaired by Michael Berkery to respond to the challenges posed by the reduction in fishing opportunities for 2026, with the task of developing "a framework for support for the sector to address the substantial challenges in the time ahead".

I have represented Ireland proactively in negotiations and discussions concerning quota opportunities and wider fisheries policy for the past sixteen months.

That work has delivered real results for Ireland, including securing an increase in mackerel quotas earlier this year worth approximately €32million to the Irish economy. It has also helped strengthen Ireland's standing and credibility at European level at a particularly important time for the future direction of fisheries policy.

With all this in mind, I am concerned that revoking responsibility for Fisheries and Marine representation during the Presidency would significantly undermine both the office itself and the wider signal that we, as a government, wanted to send the sector both at home and abroad.

It risks creating confusion among other EU Fisheries Ministers, officials, and stakeholders that I have been engaging with consistently on behalf of Ireland. It

also risks reinforcing the exact perception that the Programme for Government sought to address - that fisheries and marine matters are secondary to the broader priorities within the DAFM, and can just be folded back in when it's politically convenient to do so.

This is the very fear which was articulated by Mr. Brendan Byrne, CEO of the Irish Fish Processors and Exporters Association at yesterday's stakeholder event in Portlaoise. The Irish Fish Producers Organisation whose CEO was present at yesterday's gathering recently hired an executive to work in Brussels and she is picking up the very same message through her contacts in Brussels.

During the Polish presidency, a similar structure to Ireland existed whereby there was a senior Minister responsible for the Department and Minister of State responsible for fisheries. In that instance, the Minister of State with responsibility for fisheries chaired the meetings related to fisheries matters.

One of the clearest messages repeatedly communicated to us by fisheries stakeholders over many years was the belief that fisheries and marine interests had become an afterthought within the Department and political decision making at a central level.

The decision to establish a dedicated Minister of State role was a recognition of those concerns and an effort to address them.

I believe we should be very careful not to reverse that progress during Ireland's EU Presidency, particularly at a time when the review of the Common Fisheries Policy presents significant opportunities for Ireland and for the future of the sector here.

It is also important to note that we have a real opportunity during the EU Presidency to progress important marine and ocean related files to the benefit of Ireland's fisheries sector and our coastal communities. At yesterday's event Mr. John Nolan, CEO of Castletownbere Fisheries Coop raised the question of securing a national quota for Bluefin tuna as a targeted fishery and the current Irish fishery issues in the Porcupine Bank specifically the heavily restricted fishery for prawns with disputes over catch monitoring methods.

Those opportunities are examples that will require the Minister of State for Fisheries and Marine being in a central role when fisheries and marine matters are being discussed. That is why the role was created, and why it matters that the office holder continues to lead on these issues during the Presidency.

You will remember that, following the formation of the government, concerns were raised by some quarters regarding whether meaningful delegated authority would in fact be afforded to the Minister of State roles in Fisheries and

Forestry. The Government chose to proceed with clear delegated responsibilities, recognising the importance of providing both sectors with dedicated political representation and focus notwithstanding the reservations of a senior official. I believe that decision has been vindicated over the past sixteen months through the progress achieved across both portfolios.

This is not about any individual officeholder. It is about preserving the integrity, authority, and purpose of a role that our Government deliberately chose to create in response to longstanding concerns within the sector. It is also about ensuring continuity, credibility, and clarity of representation for Ireland during an exceptionally important period for European fisheries policy.

I would respectfully request that you review your decision in this matter.

Yours sincerely

Timmy Dooley T.D
Minister of State for Fisheries & the Marine
Department of Agriculture, food & the Marine
Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment