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Peterhead hosts important international fishing conference on control and compliance

Peterhead will host an important conference on control and compliance in the fishing industry, one of a series of major meetings on fishing in the town next week.

It is being hosted by the North Sea Regional Advisory Council (NSRAC) in cooperation with the Scottish Government and the Community Fisheries Control Agency (CFCA).

Assistant Director General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Ichiro Nomura and European Commissioner for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs Joe Borg will both attend.

Commissioner Borg will give the Keynote Speech on the first day of the conference, which will take place at Peterhead's Palace Hotel on February 21 and 22.

Control and Compliance is one of the EU Commission's high priorities this year, so the organisers are looking forward to hosting the Commissioner.

Mr Nomura has been invited to act as Conference Moderator because of his background and expertise.

His presence will also help to establish links between the RACs and the FAO and make him more aware of the work of the RACs. It will also allow delegates to learn from the experiences of the FAO in the field of control and compliance.

The conference will include workshops on realtime closures, technical conservation and influencing behaviour, as well as a presentation on the European Parliament's opinion by Ian Hudghton MEP.

Commissioner Borg said: "I warmly welcome this joint initiative which provides an excellent opportunity for all stakeholders to work together towards developing and strengthening a culture of compliance.

"Better implementation of agreed conservation and control measures is key to effective and equitable fisheries management in Europe."

The NSRAC is the formal channel for stakeholders to provide suggestions and advice to the EC and the Council of Ministers on fishing in the North Sea.

The Regional Advisory Councils, of which six are operational, are a key element of the 2002 reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

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They aim for better engagement of the people the policy affects and for more regionally-focused fisheries management.

Aberdeenshire Council provides the secretariat for the NSRAC, which will host its Executive Committee Meeting in the town's Arbuthnot House on Wednesday, ahead of the control and compliance conference.

The local authority's European Fishing Projects Coordinator and NSRAC executive secretary, Ann Bell, said: "The NSRAC is very pleased that Commissioner Borg has agreed to come and give the keynote speech, particularly as control and compliance are among the Commission's main priorities for 2008.

"We look forward to hearing his views on this important area of policy, which is vitally important to the fishing industry throughout Europe."

The aim of the conference is to try to develop a culture and a language of compliance and involve the fishing industry in the development of any new regulations.

Fisherman John Buchan, of the MV Fairline, and processor Danny Couper, of Couper Seafoods, are both expected to speak at the conference to represent the industry view of "Reality: then and now".

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment Richard Lochhead said he was sorry to be unable to attend the conferences due to other commitments.

He said: "There is no question in my mind that control is key to compliance.

"Without compliance there is no way to deliver all the benefits that we are seeking for a thriving Scottish Seafood Industry that works in a well managed, sustainable and ultimately profitable manner.

"I am confident the conference will be a success and I look forward to seeing the results."

Provost of Aberdeenshire, Bill Howatson, who will have dinner with Commissioner Borg on Wednesday night, said: "The conference offers a unique opportunity to articulate critical concerns about the future of the fishing industry to Commissioner Borg and Mr Nomura.

"It is not every day that such key players are together in one of our most prestigious ports before an international and local audience, and their attendance is clear recognition of the importance of fishing to the economy of north-east Scotland.

"I am particularly pleased that Aberdeenshire Council is hosting the conference and the dinner and I look forward to meeting Commissioner Borg and Mr Nomura."

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Notes to editors:

Countries involved in the NSRAC are: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

These stakeholder-led forums give fishermen and other interested parties, including environmental organisations and consumer groups, a say in the way the CFP operates. They are the formal channel through which stakeholders can give suggestions and advice to the European Commission and the Council of Ministers.

Various picture and interview opportunities will be made available, including a photocall with Mr Nomura and Provost Howatson on board the Sea Fisheries Protection vessel Jura on Wednesday at 7pm.

There will also be a chance to speak to Commissioner Borg at the Palace Hotel at 11am on Thursday.

Contact Gordon Lyon for further information.

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