

EU, Iceland and Nordic mackerel quota talks break down

March 6 2014



A picture taken on February 13, 2014 in Bordeaux, western France, shows mackerels at a fish shop

Negotiations over mackerel fishing quotas have fallen apart, Iceland said Thursday, extending a dispute dubbed "the mackerel war" that has been a thorny issue in the country's EU membership bid.

The European Union, Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Norway left a

meeting in Edinburgh on Wednesday without reaching an agreement for 2014.

Iceland's government said that the parties should leave it there.

"It is evident that the opportunity to reach an agreement for the 2014 fishing season has slipped away," the Icelandic Ministry of Fisheries said in a statement.

Fishing is the main obstacle stopping Iceland from joining the EU. Reykjavik pulled out of accession talks indefinitely in September despite public support for a promised referendum on joining the bloc.

Iceland and the Faroe Islands, a Danish territory with autonomy in fishing matters, have been engaged in a "mackerel war" with the EU since they unilaterally increased their quotas in 2010.

The issue has heated up as mackerel started migrating north to the islands' fishing waters in response to rising sea temperatures.

Brussels responded with sanctions against the Faroe Islands for overfishing herring, banning import of both [mackerel](#) and herring from the archipelago and forbidding some of its fishing boats from docking in EU ports.

Iceland has not suffered any sanctions so far.

Icelandic Fishing Minister Sigurdur Ingi Johannsson blamed the failure of the talks on Norway which, like the island nation, is not a member of the EU.

"We had reached an understanding with (the) EU based on a sustainable utilisation of the stock," Johannsson said.

"Unfortunately, Norway was not willing to negotiate on that basis and insisted on a fishing level far above the ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Sea) advice."

Norway threw the blame back on Iceland and the Faroe Islands.

"Norway has gone very far in this negotiation and it is hard to understand that it was not possible to find a balanced solution," Norway's Fisheries Minister Elisabeth Aspaker said in a statement.

As in previous years, Oslo must now take its case to Brussels.

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