

Russian Military Drills Off Irish Coast to Go Ahead Despite Ukraine Tensions

By [AFP](#)

January 27, 2022



Russia is planning a number of military exercises in the coming weeks, as tensions remain high over the situation around Ukraine. **Russian Defence Ministry/TASS**

The Russian navy is to go ahead with live fire exercises off the coast of Ireland despite heightened tensions with the West over Ukraine, the Irish fishing industry said on Thursday.

The drills, expected February 1-5 around 200 kilometers (130 miles) southwest of Ireland, had raised fears Irish fishermen would be unable to operate in the area — in international waters but inside Ireland's Exclusive Economic Zone.

Irish Fish Processors and Exporters Association (IFPEA) representatives held talks with Russian ambassador to Dublin Yury Filatov Thursday and a "fair deal" was reached for the

drills and fishing to continue, the IFPEA's Brendan Byrne told AFP.

The announcement came with relations between Russia and the West at their lowest point since the Cold War after Moscow deployed tens of thousands of troops on the border of Ukraine.

Russia denies any plans to invade but last month demanded wide-ranging security guarantees from the West, including assurances Ukraine never be allowed to join the U.S.-led NATO military alliance.

Ireland is neutral and not a NATO member.

IFPEA chief executive Byrne complained that the fishing industry "got no traction from the [Irish] government" in the discussions.

Ireland's foreign and defence minister Simon Coveney, who represents Cork in southwest Ireland, has said they had no powers to prevent the exercises from taking place but had told Filatov they were "not welcome."

"This isn't a time to increase military activity and tension in the context of what's happening with and in Ukraine at the moment," he said in Brussels on Monday.

Byrne said Filatov was "extremely well informed about the difficulties the Irish fishing industry is in" and that there was "no intention on the part of the Russian navy to discommode the Irish fishing industry."

"Through the discussion both sides could see a pathway whereby the naval exercises can continue uninterrupted and we can continue fishing on our traditional fishing grounds uninterrupted and that would be done by a buffer zone between both," Byrne said.

"We're not getting involved in the politics of naval drills," he added, describing the area where the exercises are to be held as a "very lucrative and valuable fishing ground," particularly for shrimp.

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