



*European Parliament Forum on Recreational Fisheries and Aquatic Environment*

## **REPORT**

### **State of play of recreational fisheries in the EU**

#### **The anglers' point of view & the importance of recognition of recreational fisheries at the EU level**

25 January 2018

European Parliament

**MEP Alain Cadec** opened the conference by stressing the big importance of the recreational fisheries sector in terms of business and jobs for coastal areas and beyond. He also urged for a clear definition of recreational fisheries to support the inclusion of the sector in the EU legislation in the most appropriate way. He stated that recreational fisheries is too often put in competition with professional fisheries while they should be put in the 'same boat' to protect marine resources. The two sectors need to be dealt with in a complementary way. He also stressed the importance of data collection as the lack of precision regarding certain stocks may lead to scientific ideas that are sometimes very far from reality.

Also, Mr. Cadec said that the Commission should not propose different measures for the Northern and Southern Western Atlantic because the stocks are the same. He called for innovative solutions to have better monitoring and understanding of stocks. He mentioned the pilot project to create a control scheme for catches of sea bass made by recreational fishers that has been included in next year budget. Following its implementation, Mr. Cadec hopes that similar systems will be extended to other species.

He concluded by stating that it is important to establish an EU long term legal framework for recreational fisheries. It is not possible to continue with annual emergency measures to manage the stocks.

**MEP Ole Christensen** agreed with Mr. Cadec and stated that the main challenge today is the lack of data. In particular, data is missing to properly assess the socio-economic aspects of recreational fisheries. However, the main goal remains to secure a sustainable management of the fish stocks and he believes that good quality data would help in this regard. One way to do that would be to establish more consistent licensing systems in all EU countries. Currently the licensing systems vary between Member States. However, Mr. Christensen doesn't believe that 'one size fits all' but he thinks that there should be regionally adapted controls in all Member States.



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Another issue he mentioned is the lack of clear definition of recreational fisheries. Currently, there are several different definitions in EU legislation and this makes enforcement difficult. It is also important to clarify the difference between recreational fisheries and semi-subsistence fisheries. In particular, it needs to be ensured that all fishers who sell catches are registered and counted as commercial and not recreational fishers.

**David Vertegaal, from the Dutch association *Sportvisserij Nederland*, member of EAA,** opened with a remark on the report by MEP Norica Nicolai: *“if the fish stocks are good, the fishermen will go out and fish, whatever the circumstances”*. He declared that if good care is taken of the stocks then this will have a positive impact on the efforts that recreational anglers are willing to make, as well as on their socio-economic impact. Mr. Vertegaal clarified that recreational fisheries can be defined as the capture or attempt to capture living resources mainly for leisure or personal consumption. This covers active fishing methods including line, spear, hand gathering and passive fishing (nets traps).

He also recalled the importance of the sector by mentioning few numbers: about nine million people fish at sea recreationally in Europe and this activity sustains about 100.000 full time jobs and generates around €10.5 billion in spending annually. He reiterated the importance of data collection and explained that good quality data is lacking because not all countries collaborate in the same way to collect and provide data to policy-makers. He agrees with the view expressed by Ms Nicolai in her report regarding multi-annual plans and the fact that they might not achieve the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) if reliable data is not properly integrated.

Moreover, Mr. Vertegaal made a point concerning semi-subsistence fisheries. He pointed out that these hardly registered catches are difficult to describe but they can have a substantial impact on the stocks. Since semi-subsistence fisheries is not covered by the EU legislation, this activity is not managed in any way. In conclusion, Mr. Vertegaal suggested that when fish are sold, the catches should be counted as commercial and that semi-subsistence fisheries must be transparently managed.

Mr Vertegaal also stated that it is time to fully integrate marine recreational fisheries in the CFP because of the socio-economic importance of the sector but also for the impact it has on the fish stocks. According to him, the inclusion of recreational fisheries in the CFP is instrumental in achieving the policy’s main goals and notably for ensuring the sustainable management of stocks. He mentioned that, generally speaking, stock recovery is mostly on schedule for the commercially most important stocks, and that for the big commercial stocks a lot of data is available which makes management easier. However, the situation for other stocks is poor as they suffer from lower management priority, lack of data, and often fall prey to bycatch and discards. Mr Vertegaal suggested that a reinterpretation of the term



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*“maximum sustainable yield, is needed in the next CFP. The yield should be defined as the total sum of economic, social and environmental factors.*

In conclusion, Mr. Vertegaal stated that maritime recreational fisheries and the commercial sector need to work together in order to have the best outcome for all parties. According to him, there shouldn't be big clash between the recreational sector and the large scale commercial fleet while the interactions are more peculiar with the small scale fleet. However, close contact between commercial and recreational is needed especially for shared stocks such as sea bass. According to him, this objectives could be better achieved within the framework of the CFP. Finally, he emphasized that fish stocks are a public resource and that recreational fisheries is a sector that represents millions of people and that it needs to be considered as equal to the other sectors in the next CFP. In this regard, he reminded that *“A CFP without recreational fisheries is like having a member State in the EU with no voting rights”*.

**Jean-Claude BEL, CEO at the European Fishing Tackle Trade Association (EFTTA)**, reiterated the importance of the recreational fisheries sector in numbers and reminded that its estimated economic value is 10.5 billion euro of which 5.1 euro in direct expenditures. He also referred to how the EU legislation knows only two fisheries sectors: commercial and recreational. Semi-subsistence and semi-commercial fisheries are terms in use, but EU legislation-wise they don't exist. Any 'hybrid fishery' should be adapted to and managed as either recreational or commercial fishing. If sales of catches are allowed, it can only be termed commercial fishing. If not then it becomes poaching, and even though there are exceptions, this infringes the rules.

Mr. Bel insisted there be robust and timely fisheries data collection, which is a condition for good and fair legislation and sound fisheries management. The annual fishing opportunities as proposed by the Commission are based on the “best scientific evidence”, which can be of very different quality. However, he pointed out that the amount and quality of recreational fisheries data is generally quite poor. He mentioned that the European Maritime Fisheries Fund (EMFF) is available for data collection on the recreational sector but very little is spent in that regard. He then gave examples of shortcomings in data collection: very few species are targeted, for few time and only for some countries. Moreover, data collection is often initiated too late when a stock is already overfished and this can lead to unfair and drastic measures, like the 2018 ban of keeping any Northern sea bass.

Mr Bel stated that the CFP is too vague on recreational fisheries and pointed out that the only explicit mention of the sector is found in Recital 3. Therefore, this makes it open for interpretation: which CFP articles and provisions concern recreational fisheries? In this regard,



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Mr Bel called for explicit, clear and prominent phrasing of recreational fisheries in the next CFP.

Mr. Bel then explained how the vague CFP phrasing can cause unfair treatment of the recreational sector. He said that the way fish stocks are currently managed depends too much on national interest and this leads to bigger Total Allowable Catches (TACs) than the ones proposed by the European Commission, or to less stringent targets and limitations. The interests and needs of recreational fisheries are completely forgotten harming the sector as well as the related business and dependent jobs. In this respect, he reminded the audience that fish are a publicly owned resource and this should be reflected in the way the stocks are managed.

To improve the current situation, Mr Bel proposed to create a Unit in the European Commission DG for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, devoted to recreational fisheries management following the example of ICES that already created a Working Group on recreational fisheries.

Next, Mr Bel presented four ways to improve data collection:

Licenses, permits, registration: In about half of the EU Member States with a coastline, a recreational fishing license and/or permit is required. The introduction of a marine license or permits could represent a solution if the revenues are invested in the development of the sector. Otherwise, if the purpose of a license scheme is only data collection, there are other, free, means to proceed.

Funding: The EMFF could provide a solution for ensuring better data collection but currently it is not exploited to its full extent.

New technologies: In next year budget, 300.000 euro have been allocated to a Pilot project “Control scheme for recreational catches of sea bass”. Unfortunately, the EU has adopted this year a total ban on keeping any recreational catch of Northern Sea bass making the implementation of such a project very hard.

Mr Bel concluded by stating that good quality data are needed both by decision-makers and businesses dependant on recreational fishers’ spending. The EFTTA would like to suggest to the European Commission to create a table bringing together experts from national ministries and stakeholders to discuss and deliver a strategy and plan for improving data and statistics on recreational fisheries. The EU should follow the example of the US where a survey on the sector is carried out every five years.

**Evangelia Georgitsi, European Commission (EC)** mentioned that there are already some extensive researches regarding the socio-economic aspects of recreational fisheries, and now, thanks to MEP Nicolai’s report also on the legal and political aspects. She believes that the EC



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would subscribe that recreational fisheries is a very important topic that everyone needs to look at with the attention it deserves. There is a component that directly affects the CFP and its objectives to ensure sustainability and the conservation of marine biological resources. But also, beyond environmental sustainability, recreational fisheries can have an important socio-economic impact.

On the diagnostic of the current situation, the report by MEP Nicolai is very precise and accurate. Ms Georgitsi agreed that the CFP only has a small provision on recreational fisheries but she also believes that more and more attention has been given to the sector in the last years and that more work has been done on recreational fisheries. She then spoke about the future CFP and the very important step which was the new data collection framework that entered into force in 2017, where for the first time there is a full list of species for which data collection is compulsory. She reminded that Member States have the obligation to carry out pilot projects and to provide reliable data and she stated that there is room for improvement but this is still a good starting point.

Ms Georgitsi emphasized that the Commission agrees that more could be done but for this, good data is needed. The difficulty of the exercise is that policy-makers need data to regulate and, and at the same time, they need to regulate to have data. This is what explains all the delay and progressive approach. Some sort of control obligations and tools are needed to have data and policy-makers need data to be able to regulate and to decide on what precisely they need data on.

She closed her intervention by saying that the revision of the control regulation is also a good opportunity to improve the situation. The Commission fully agrees with the diagnostic made by MEP Nicolai in her report, and they are committed to achieve the objectives of the CFP.

### **Debate**

**Fred Bloot, EAA**, asked if the Commission is in favour of the integration of recreational fisheries in the CFP

**Evangelia Georgitsi** stated that until there is a Commission proposal on the table they are in favour of anything. However, to which extent this could happen is something that nobody would be able to answer without looking into a specific impact assessment, at what will be the outcome of the revision of the control regulation and what will be the outcome of the negotiations of the technical measures regulation. She also warned that she would be imprudent to say anything at this stage.



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**Jean Kiffer, Fédération nationale de la plaisance et des pêches en mer (FNPP)**, asked more information about the issue of monthly quotas and the resources that have been allocated for that.

**MEP Werner Kuhn (Germany, EPP)** said that for MEPs it is interesting to listen to the experiences from representatives of recreational fisheries associations, on how they collect data and pass it to their government. This can be supported through the EMFF, to provide funds to the Member States to be combined with national budgets. He emphasized that the situation of statistics and data collection must be improved.

**Jean Kiffer** followed up by saying that in some countries some tools already exist, which make it possible to have good data on catches. All the anglers from FNPP today have different tools that allow to gather information in one simple database.

**Kieran Hyder, from the Center from Environmental Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS)**, stated that without a clear definition of recreational fisheries and without the recognition of this sector in the CFP, it cannot be treated on an equal footing with commercial fishing and aquaculture. In terms of data, there are some good data sets but some countries are lagging behind. He also stated that that it seems sensible to run multi-species surveys because by the time you start to know what you need, it's too late to start the data collection. Also, he commented that pilot projects as the one mentioned are a positive thing but only if they are multi-species.

Mr Hyder also stated that more research is needed, it is not just the collection of data itself, it is also the development of methods that allow the scientists to examine the trade-offs between socio-economics and sustainability.

**MEP Ricardo Serrao Santos**, commented about the European Commission upcoming proposal for the Multiannual Management Plan for Western Waters that is not going to differentiate between Northern and Southern waters. He believes that, given the different conditions, two plans are needed.

**Jean-Claude Bel, EFTTA**, commented that this is an endless discussion. The commercial fisheries sector understands the problem and they are aware of the fact that they are damaging the sea bass stocks. Some commercial fishers from the north go to the south, fish as much as they can, and then sell it in the north, at the expense of southern fishers.

**Brian O'Riordan, from Low Impact of Fisheries in Europe (LIFE)**, said that it is very good to hear so many positive suggestions about the inclusion of recreational fisheries in the CFP. Small-scale fisheries were included during the last reform but it was not the case until 2012. A very popular say claims: "if you are not in the room, you are nowhere" or "if you are not sitting at the table, you are probably on the menu and someone is eating you".



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Moreover, he stated that one of the big challenges today is organisation. There are many small-scale fishers who are not affiliated to any organisation, which makes it hard to keep track of them and difficult for them to know what is happening in policy changes and how they are being affected. A big issue when you are integrated in the CFP is to get organised.

About the discussion on sea bass and how it should be managed, Mr O’Riordan stated that it is a very important topic because fish move around and fishers move below the 48-parallel line into the Bay of Biscay to catch bass. He commented that all sort of boats from various European countries fish where the concentration of sea bass is.

**Jean Kiffer** answered that artificially dividing the sea bass stocks into two stocks on the 48<sup>th</sup> parallel would cut France in two. Creating different management conditions for the northern stocks and the southern one is not the best way to deal with the issue. He accentuated that he is against this idea of division, and that they should not be considered as two different stocks.

**Kiran Heider** pointed out that a stock is not about the catching unit but the biological unit, and that the reason there are four stocks of bass is based on genetic studies which show that there are genetic differences between these stocks. While there is some mixing, there is genetic separation.

**Stéphane Sence, CEO of GIFAP**, underlined that retailers are aware of the current status of the sea bass stock and they are removing the fish from the stores on the ground that it is a seasonal product. This issue needs to be taken into account as it is very important for sustainability.

**MEP Norica Nicolai** closed the conference by saying that a ‘sea bass war’ should be avoided.

She said that the CFP is based on an old vision of economics as it privileges the industry, but that we are now slowly moving towards bio-capitalism. She accentuated that one of the important industries of the future will be the recreational industry, and recreational fishing is part of it. The recreational fisheries industry showed its importance for humans, fish stocks, and for the environment. She also indicated that drafting the report was not easy because people consider that only those who make money are important but the aim was to show that maritime recreational fisheries and the related industry can create revenues too, and that it cannot be ignored by the EU authorities anymore.

Ms Nicolai stated that she was glad that her colleagues supported the pilot project to collect data on recreational catches of sea bass and that it is good to involve associations such as the EAA and the EFTTA in data collection because to make good decisions, good data is needed.



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She stated that she was happy to promote this report and she pointed out that it is not easy to put a subject on the agenda in the EU. She concluded by saying that another vision for fisheries in Europe, one that gives to recreational fisheries its proper place, is needed.