

EP(14)92

28th November 2014

JOINT POSITION OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL PARTNERS OF THE FISHERIES SECTOR ON COMMISSION PROPOSAL ON FISHING OPPORTUNITIES FOR 2015 IN THE ATLANTIC AND THE NORTH SEA (COM(2014)670)

Background

The proposal under consideration fixes the fishing opportunities available in Union waters and to Union vessels, in certain non-Union waters for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks. The Commission prepares the proposals, based on scientific advice of the stock status from EU and intergovernmental organisations such as the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF). TACs are set annually by the Council of the EU for the stocks referred to. Concerning the stocks shared and jointly managed with non-EU countries, the TACs are agreed with those non-EU countries or set by Regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs).

Furthermore, this is the first proposal for a regulation on fishing opportunities in the Atlantic and North Sea since the reform of the CFP, whose new rules and objectives will cause upheaval for the sector and may involve changes to the total allowable catch. Therefore, the EU social partners in the Sea Fishing Sector, the ETFⁱ and Europêcheⁱⁱ/COGECAⁱⁱⁱ, would like to express their views on the subject since this regulation has a direct socio-economic impact on the sector.

State of fish stocks

The Commission Communication (COM/2014/388) provides an overview of the state of the stocks based on the findings of scientific advice issued in 2013. The Communication reports that, among the stocks for which a full analysis is available, **those fished above sustainable levels (MSY) have fallen from 86 % in 2009 to 41% in 2014.**

According to the ICES advisory committee, we have experienced an improvement in the last decade for many fish stocks in the Northeast Atlantic. In general, fishing mortality is decreasing and the proportion of fish stocks which are being fished at sustainable levels is increasing. This positive trend is shown by the facts given by the Commission Communication which states that **27 stocks are already fished at levels corresponding to MSY, compared to 2 in 2003.** The number of overfished stocks has reduced from 32 in 2005 to 19 in 2014 and the number of stocks within safe biological limits has almost doubled in the last decade.

During the seminar on “The State of Fish Stocks” organised by the European Commission on 26th September 2014, the scientific data presented showed a positive long term trend of increasing fish populations and a reduction of fishing mortality. Many stocks have recovered and have delivered stable and sustainable catches, highlighting that long-term management plans and consequent management over the years have been successful.

Socio-Economic Impact

EU Social Partners take note of the above-referenced Commission proposal, which must be consistent with the overall objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). However, EU fishermen are already under pressure since fishing opportunities for 2015 will be set against the backdrop of the new Common Fisheries Policy. It will be a challenging period of adjustment for our fishermen to adapt to the new objectives. For instance, we will see an end to discarding fish overboard and measures to progressively restore all stocks to levels above maximum sustainable yield (MSY).

EU Social Partners reiterate their commitment to achieving MSY levels in the shortest possible time-frame. Nevertheless, there must be room for flexibility, since the new CFP allows for much-needed leeway with respect to this target, which shall be obtained by 2015, where possible and 2020 at the latest. **Any significant cut in quota will affect the long term profitability of the sector and given this evident stock recovery, would be unjustifiable.** EU Social Partners urge that fishing opportunities must be better adapted to the state of the stocks given that scientific knowledge is constantly improving¹. Furthermore, it is essential that the positive trends and advice experienced in many stocks are translated into positive quotas which will be translated into more and better jobs and business opportunities.

The state of fish stocks is improving due, in part, to the sacrifices made by the sector with reduced effort and capacity. These measures have subsequently led to economic uncertainty and reduced levels of employment, a decrease in sales and a loss of competitiveness. To give an idea of the huge efforts made by the catching sector, until just seven years ago there were 50 Spanish flag boats fishing megrim in the Celtic Sea and the Bay of Biscay. Nowadays, only 15 remain (33 of which have been scrapped) in order to ensure the sustainable catch of this species.

This must be transmitted to EU citizens/consumers by the European Institutions who should make their informed and sustainable choice based on all factors, not solely the environmental pillar. **The EU citizens must be aware at all times that not only is the fish part of an abundant stock but that the fishing sector behind the catch is also sustainable.**

From an economic point of view, the Annual Economic Report (AER) on the EU fishing fleet drafted by STECF, showed that despite the improved general economic data of the fishing industry in Europe, the sector remains vulnerable with regard to reduced quotas, rising fuel price crisis, loss of fishing grounds devoted to nature conservation and offshore wind farms, fewer young people entering the sector and market saturation. Whilst the AER states that performance of the large scale fleet has fared reasonably well (this should be analysed on a case-by-case basis), **the small scale fleets of coastal regions are still suffering, with jobs and vessels slowly disappearing.**

¹ Facts and figures on the Common Fisheries Policy, basic statistical data 2014 edition. In the Atlantic and adjacent waters, the number of data-poor stocks has decreased from 61 in 2011 to 41 in 2013. Fishing can therefore be better adapted to the state of stocks.

From a scientific point of view, there are still many obstacles to overcome since scientists are still unable to explain certain situations, such as eastern Baltic cod, where they have observed a decrease in fishing mortality and juveniles but in spite of these positive parameters, the stock does not grow. Even if science cannot give an answer to this trend, we have recently witnessed cuts of -22% in this stock² to “improve the situation”. **Fishermen should not pay for the consequences of poor scientific advice.** They have stuck loyally to the management plan and the final Council’s decision is a blow to their hard work and commitment. This will lead to a lack of credibility of EU policies and mistrust from the industry on EU decisions.

Furthermore, opposite to the positive trend described in the second section of the present paper, the Community legislator has recently adopted a reduction of a massive -52% in 2015 and -51% in 2016 for Red sea bream³, going from 780 tonnes in 2014 to just 183 tonnes for 2016. The fishermen targeting this stock will suffer the consequences with no room for manoeuvre despite their contribution to sustainable fishing through management plans and effort reductions. **For many years, the EU fishing industry have constantly reminded EU Institutions that cuts more than -15% in TACs and/or fishing effort from one year to another were economically totally unbearable.**

Safety at Sea

The proposal establishes the catch and effort limitations applicable to Union fisheries in order to achieve the CFP's objective of ensuring fisheries at levels that are environmentally, economically and socially sustainable. The last two objectives are enshrined in Art. 9 TFEU which lays down that “In defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health.”

The interpretation of the term ‘social’ in the CFP is far too limited in respect of the international safety at sea duties concerning social matters which include taking internationally induced measures with regard to the manning of fishing vessels and the labour conditions and training of their crews.

This too limited understanding of the term ‘social’ can be clearly observed in the impact assessment carried out by the Commission prior to the adoption of the new CFP Basic regulation⁴. It states that « *Employment will continue to decline in the catching sector, decreasing by 16% in 2017 and by 23% in 2022. [...] Crew wages would increase by 76% in 2017 and 131% in 2022 and improve the attractiveness of the sector. This is a result of increasing fishing opportunities accompanying a reduction in the fleet at the same time as increasing catches. This will be positive in safety terms as it appears that many vessels go to sea short-handed.* » That assumption is far too simplistic since safety at sea depends, *inter alia*, on sufficient numbers of qualified crew on board fishing vessels that are properly constructed and maintained. Moreover, it depends on the effective increasing of the fishing opportunities which so far did not occur (even if the state of fish stocks is improving).

² COUNCIL REGULATION fixing for 2015 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks applicable in the Baltic Sea

³ COUNCIL REGULATION fixing for 2015 and 2016 the fishing opportunities for Union fishing vessels for certain deep-sea fish stocks

⁴ SEC(2011) 891 final of 13-07-2011, paragraph 7.2.3. «Social sustainability», p. 44

Conclusions

The EU Social Partners are well aware of the importance of the fixation of fishing opportunities and are fully supportive of contributing to more sustainable fisheries management of the stocks, fully adhering to the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and striving to integrate these goals into their activities on a daily basis without jeopardising the future of the sector.

Temporary technical rules from the reformed CFP are being decided in the next few months leaving practically no time for adjustment. The discard ban will put further pressure on fishermen and maintaining a viable sector will be almost impossible given the high targets of stocks reaching MSY. Our fishermen are being given no guidance and are being told they could see massive cuts in quota for stocks that have shown huge increases. Such challenges and **socio-economic disturbances must be taken into consideration when adopting the fishing opportunities for 2015 in the Atlantic and the North Sea**. It is in the best interests of the EU Institutions to ensure the survival of the fishing industry and their rapid adaptability to the new changes which is essential to maintain the entire chain of fisheries production.

Scientists have recently highlighted positive trends in the state of fish stocks, notably in the North-East Atlantic. Fishing opportunities, therefore, must reflect the realities of stock recovery. In the absence of accurate and up to date scientific advice, the **precautionary approach is of absolutely no benefit to the fishing sector**. Member States should be encouraged to transmit scientific knowledge in order for ICES and STECF to have a complete overview of the state of the stocks in all European waters. A lack of data only translates to poor quota for fishermen.

Furthermore, the EU Social Partners stress that **in the same way that there is a red line of biological safe limits that cannot be crossed; there should also be a similar gauge for the social and economic limits to safeguard the sector**.

Finally, the EU should ensure **consistency between measures concerning the conservation of marine biological resources on the one hand and social and economic promotion as well as safety at sea in a broad sense on the other hand**. Therefore, all fisheries related proposed regulations, such as the one under consideration, should cover at least:

- a. employment;
- b. income;
- c. fishing vessels' construction, equipment, fishing gears, and seaworthiness;
- d. manning of fishing vessels;
- e. training and certification of fishers; and
- f. living and working conditions of fishers
- g. international standards and guidelines on safety at sea

ⁱ The **ETF** represents more than 2.5 million transport workers from 243 transport unions and 41 European countries, in the following sectors: railways, road transport and logistics, maritime transport, inland waterways, civil aviation, ports & docks, tourism and fisheries.

ⁱⁱ **Europêche** represents the catching sector in Europe. Currently, the Association comprises 16 national organisations of fishing enterprises from the following 10 EU Member States: BE, DE, DK, ES, FR, IT, MT, NL, PL and UK.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Cogeca** is the united voice of agricultural cooperatives in the EU. It also represents the interests of fisheries cooperatives in Europe through its FISH Working Party which it shares with Copa. Currently, the fisheries representatives come from the following 5 countries: DE, IE, IT, MT, SI.