

## **Getting the Governance Right: co-management a powerful tool, not a panacea**

Getting the governance right is one of the key challenges facing fisheries today. The challenge is ever more complex given the development of the blue economy and the need to accommodate new economic sectors (aquaculture, tourism, renewable energy, etc.) within areas traditionally occupied by fisheries. Part of the solution could be reserved areas dedicated to small-scale inshore fisheries, co-managed by fishers' representatives with the authorities, advised by scientists, and with the active involvement of local communities. From the Baltic to the Mediterranean, co-management combined with Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) is increasingly cited as a prerequisite tool for sustaining coastal fishery activities in a context of increasing competition for space and resources, often as a part of marine reserves. However, experience to date has been with relatively small projects, and one big question is how to scale these up to reduce administrative and financial burdens, and to include larger and more meaningful areas of the sea.

On Thursday, 7 June, a delegation from the Finisterre coast of Galicia came to Brussels to present their experience with a co-managed fishing reserve over the past decade. The visit was organized by the Fundación Lonxanet and the Costa Sostible FLAG and was hosted by the Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE), Farnet and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). The timing of the event to coincide with World Environment Day and IUU Day was serendipitous.

One of the key objectives of the visit was to discuss their proposal to scale up a project in 2 adjacent fishing communities with representatives from EU institutions and others implicated in European and regional level decision taking processes. Under their proposal, the co-managed area will be increased from 2,100 ha to 98,000 ha. It will also incorporate 1,200 fishers from 8 neighbouring communities, with annual landings worth 25 to 30 million Euros in terms of first sale value, into a single fisheries management plan.

## **Bucking the trend: promoting rural employment, reversing emigration**

Galicia is Europe's most important fishing region. It accounts for over 50% of the Spanish catch, 50% of the employment in fisheries, and 81% of Spain's fishery related exports by volume. The small scale under 12 metre passive gear (*artes menores*) sector accounts for around 80% of the fleet by numbers and around 50% of the employment in fishing. However, for over a decade, small scale fisheries in Galicia have been in decline, and with relatively high unemployment and rural migration (2 to 3% per year), the future prospects are worrying.

In his opening remarks, Arturo Iñiguez, responsible for Agriculture and Fisheries at the EESC, drew participants attention to the yet unacknowledged threat of hyper-urbanisation, or growth of "megacities", most evident in developing countries but also a trend in Europe. To reverse this trend, the EESC proposes a deliberate public policy of decentralisation in the pursuit of a more balanced territorial development.

## **A Local Pact for collective action and sustainable development**

Manuela Oviedo, Manager of the Costa Sostible FLAG, described how the EU funded initiative she manages, which links 9 municipalities with a population of 62,000 people, is trying to buck the trend

of rural emigration, through the development of an innovative tool for affirmative action, the “Local Pact”. The Local Pact provides a framework for bringing all the necessary actors and interest groups together with a common purpose, a shared set of values, and providing an inclusive structure through which local authorities, local fishery, tourist and other enterprises, scientists, and citizens can engage in a bottom up process to manage both the coastal areas and access to the rich and diverse natural resources contained within it. She underscored the primal role of the sea as the main source of jobs, food, economic activity and quality of life in the region, and the need to integrate sea and land-based activities into a single framework for resource management and spatial planning.

### **We want a future with viable employment and decent prospects**

Primitivo Pedrosa, a vessel owner and fishing skipper from the Cofradia of Muros, highlighted the importance of the *artes menores* fleet in the economy and social fabric of the coastal communities. He highlighted how fishing is the engine driving ancillary activities and providing the raw material for downstream activities in the value chain, indirectly generating wealth and employment. As fishers, the members of the Muros and neighbouring Cofradias depend on the sustainability of the fishery. However, changes in recent years are undermining their confidence in the future and fuelling a growing fear that small-scale fisheries will be swept aside by the insensitive, albeit well intentioned, adaptation of European and national laws to local contexts.

Threats to their activities include unfair competition with other users of the sea, lack of cohesion within the sector, climate change impacts, and increasing scarcity of resources combined with a quota management system, all of which is leading to reduced opportunities, fewer vessels and fewer new entrants to the fishery. He emphasised the importance of the fishing Cofradias – the Spanish fishing guilds - and their potential to engage in the management of resources. The local fisheries knowledge of Cofradia members could for example feed into management decisions on spatial and temporal closures during spawning, on determining dates of the main fishing seasons, defining minimum catch size, and restricting fishing effort.

Because fishing is a highly individualistic activity, co-management is not immediately attractive as a model to fishers. But given their plight, they are willing to consider it. The Cofradia structure does provide the basis for joint decision taking and enforcement, as well as for scaling up local decisions by grouping several Cofradias into a single management structure. Of interest for the fishers from Muros in the neighbouring Os Miñarzos co-managed marine reserve project is the possibility to have an equal say in the co-management decisions taken on a parity basis with the authorities. They are also interested in the role played by fishers in developing the management plans, in the possibility for the adaptive management model to be modified in line with local realities, the “bureaucratic agility” (relatively short time taken for implementing decisions), and the record of a high level of compliance with the rules.

So far 6 out of 8 Cofradias, representing 80% of the fishers in the area, have voted unanimously in favour of expanding the co-managed reserve, and the National Federation of Cofradias have given their unanimous support to it. Within this expanded area, combining their local knowledge with scientific knowledge, the fishers have already mapped out 18 different habitats based on the European Nature Information System (EUNIS), and have established 19 different areas as fishing zones, no take zones, restricted areas, and conservation zones of various sorts.

For the fishers, the co-managed marine reserve is a tool to improve collaboration between fishers, scientists and the administration with the following common objectives:

- More credible management plans, using more realistic data, in collaboration with scientists

- Improved compliance and a reduction in bad practice and conflicts, because fishers are making the rules
- Greater stability in the annual cycle of fish catches thanks to greater control of fishing effort and more conservative management plans
- Increasing the profitability of the fisheries under the management plans
- Greater environmental awareness, and a reduction in social, environmental and production related conflicts.
- Potential economic and market benefits from the ecological and geographical certification of products caught in the reserved area.

### **Bridging the gap between empirical knowledge and scientific research**

Dr Pablo Carrera from the Spanish Oceanographic Institute (IEO) described the role of scientists in the co-managed reserve. He explained that fishing has a 2,000 plus year history in Galicia, and thanks to the empirical knowledge developed and passed on between generations, there has been no big impact on the environment. The role of scientists is to compliment this knowledge with scientific research, he said, and to help fishers optimize their catches within sustainable limits. In his view, sustainable fisheries management requires a multi-species ecosystems-based approach, building in an understanding of climate change impacts on the spatiotemporal distribution of species.

Given the problems of ineffective top-down governance, co-management provides a useful tool for promoting collaboration and buy in to management decisions, in his view. Without collaboration, scientists will be unable to get the proper information needed to manage the impact of fishing on stocks.

### **Co-management: a stakeholder led, participative process of legitimising, enacting and complying with rules.**

Dr Antonio Garcia Allut, who, as founding Director of the Lonxanet Foundation, has been involved with the development of the Os Miñarzos reserve since its inception in 2002, gave a brief historical overview of the project. For him a unique but essential feature of the Os Miñarzos project is the balanced co-management system, which establishes decision making parity between fishers and authorities. He explained how in 2015 the Spanish Parliament (Congreso de los Diputados) through the cross-party Committee for Agriculture, Food and Environment adopted unanimously an institutional declaration of support for the establishment and development of the “Os Miñarzos-Fin da Terra” marine fishery reserve. This backing was provided in parallel to the development of the strategic plan of the Costa Sostible FLAG.

He drew attention to the difficulty faced by traditional management structures to cope with increasing levels of complexity. This where governance comes in. However, there are few tools that small scale coastal fisheries can use; they have the least power and resources, and the least representation in decision taking processes.

The marine reserve is a tool for managing an area which places small scale fishers both at the centre of both managing resource usage and fisheries governance. It is an example of Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) in action; it is a practical model of collaborative governance through *de facto*, not *de jure* co-management; and it provides an opportunity for developing small scale coastal fisheries and a blue economy in line with CFP objectives within the area under the jurisdiction of the Costa Sostible FLAG.

Responding to questions on monitoring, and how the project would demonstrate whether the area was working or not, and whether there was funding to deal with all these issues, Allut confirmed that the project is as yet unapproved, so only exists on paper. However, this has not meant that the actors are inactive. Already a great deal of work has been carried out to garner support for the project, to categorize and classify the different fisheries and associated habitats. There has been no scientific monitoring since 2016, but a number of vessels now carry tracking and catch monitoring devices. If the project for the expanded reserve is approved, all the artes menores vessels operating in the reserve will carry tracking and monitoring equipment.

Allut hopes that the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund will fund such monitoring, as well as monitoring the social, economic and environmental aspects of the fishery activities. Dr Carrera stressed that without long term funding, the project was on a road to nowhere.

Representatives from the European institutions commented that both top down and bottom up processes of governance are needed, and need to be made compatible, with local, regional, and national level initiatives harmonized within the framework of EU directives. It was also noted how similar problems in different sea basins could benefit from a co-management approach, and in the Mediterranean the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean and Black Sea (GFCM) was preparing an action plan for small-scale fisheries with co-management a core component.

Whilst being ethically inspired to promote environmental sustainability, economic wellbeing, and social stability, the Os Miñarzos co-management model is founded on pragmatic principles. It is an example of local bottom up innovation in response to top down decision taking that is insensitive to local needs. In the absence of alternatives, it is urgent that the project gets the political and financial support needed for the co-managed reserve to become a reality.