



PRESS RELEASE

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CONTACTS:

Brian O’Riordan c/o Claudia Orlandini
LIFE Communications Officer
Landline: +32 (0)2741 2433
Mobile: +32 (0)499 197 858
communications@lifeplatform.eu

ITQs: A Road of No Return. A bad idea for small-scale coastal fishers

Thursday 15th December, Brussels - In a position paper published today, The Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE) Platform **rejects Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQs) as an integral component of EU fisheries policies and management**, because of the disproportionately negative impact they may have on small scale coastal fishers (SSCF) and fishing communities.

The paper, entitled **Rights Based Management and Small Scale Fisheries in the EU: Human Rights Versus Property Rights**, analyses Rights Based Management (RBM) from a SSCF perspective, and concludes that, under ITQs regimes, SSCF always tend to lose out.

ITQs are a system based on an economic logic that does not account for wider impacts and different forms of value. They make access to fisheries more difficult for SSCF, prevent access for new fishers, result in excessive concentration of quotas, drive inequality, and negatively impact small coastal communities.

Sweden is set to establish an ITQ system for demersal fisheries in the Baltic and North seas in January 2017. Although it is reported that measures will be included to protect SSCF, much will depend on whether they receive a fair quota share to begin with, and to what extent the SSCF quota is ring fenced from the quota trading system.

LIFE opposes the introduction of ITQs, and judges that many of their purported benefits are hypothetical, false, ideologically motivated, exaggerated, or all of these. ITQs do not improve sustainability or stewardship, and **only improve efficiency in a narrow economic sense**. Sustainability and stewardship are mainly determined by rigorously set and enforced TACs, and by engaging fishers in genuine co-management.

Alternative forms of allocating fishing opportunities can deliver the social, environmental and economic benefits that the CFP seeks to achieve, without jeopardising the survival of the small-scale fleet and the wider value they provide to Society. The alternatives presented in LIFE’s paper would require **a differentiated approach to managing the SSCF** and large scale sectors, and would include:

- A ring-fenced community quota or quota pool, allocated to and managed by a SSCF PO, Cooperative, or other organization collectively owned and run by the SSCF;

- Allocation based on social, economic and environmental criteria, as per Article 17 of the CFP, to reward those who fish the most sustainably;
- Capacity regulated by effort control, rather than by economic efficiency; and
- State maintains clear ownership of the TAC, with unambiguous legally binding procedure for revoking rights where appropriate.

Wherever they have been introduced, ITQs have caused no end of controversy. It is therefore essential that we confront and examine this approach to allocating fishing rights, **given the risk that they are making a comeback in the EU**. Compulsory Transferable Fishing Concessions (TFCs) were initially proposed by the Commission during the last CFP reform. Although rejected, TFCs are still an integral part of the reformed CFP. This leaves open the opportunity for Member States to institute transferable fishing rights systems, but **without compulsory safeguard measures at EU level to ensure responsible behaviour of the industry**, including the need to protect small-scale fisheries from the perverse effects of ITQs.

Whilst the December Fisheries Council meeting outcome is to be welcomed as positive for the fishing industry with significantly increased quotas for many stocks, in the main these benefits will accrue to larger scale fishing companies, rather than to SSCF. Increasingly SSCF must depend on non-quota species, as the quota allocation process discriminates against them.

As a matter of principle fish should remain a public resource, and access to fish stocks managed and regulated by the Government. **Privatisation of access rights to fisheries resources is unacceptable** to LIFE, and not in line with the public interest, with the interests of our members, or those of coastal communities.

Where ITQs or similar systems are imposed, LIFE demands that: adequate safeguards are put in place to ensure that only active fishers are able to hold quotas; that genuine limits on the concentration of quotas are set and enforced; that sufficient and equitable amounts of non-transferable quota are set aside and ring fenced for small scale fishers, a proportion of which is reserved to ensure young fishers can enter the industry.

But most of all, LIFE urges you **to consider the alternatives we have outlined before turning to ITQs, because that would lead down a road with no return.**

LIFE is a platform aiming to provide a clear and coherent voice at EU level for the previously mainly silent majority of European fishers, who are smaller scale and who use low impact fishing gears and methods, but have historically lacked dedicated and effective representation in Brussels and at Member State level. More information can be found at www.lifeplatform.eu.