



## **Slow Fish 2017**

### **Workshop of the Low Impact Fishers of Europe: Outcomes & Recommendations**

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*Panel: Thomas Horup and Jesper Olsen (Denmark), Tero Mustonen (Finland), Caroline Bennett (Sole of Discretion), Wim Mertens (Pintafish), Claudia Orlandini (LIFE) – Chair of the Panel: Jeremy Percy (LIFE)*

Consumers can help foster better market conditions for small scale fishermen but an appropriate policy framework is the basis necessary to develop incentives and guarantee protection for both common coastal resources and local economies that depend on them. The LIFE platform provides a very much needed voice for small-scale low impact fishers of Europe at EU, national and regional levels as well as support, including training to participate in shaping these policies.

Within the framework of the Slow Fish initiatives, on Sunday, 21<sup>st</sup> of May the Low Impact Fishers of Europe held a workshop addressed to the stakeholders of the sector to discuss together the policy needed in the EU for small scale fishers and to better inform the future work to be carried out by LIFE and its members at all institutional levels.

After a brief presentation of LIFE, the following questions were subject to debate:

*Do small-scale fisheries merit a separate policy, and if so,*

- *what should it look like?*
- *what elements should it contain?*
- *how can artisanal fishing communities be more involved in shaping and implementing such policies? and*
- *how can the pre-harvest, harvest and post-harvest elements of the value chain be better integrated?*

## Background

The 2014 reformed CFP contains a number of elements that are relevant for small-scale low impact fishers. In particular:

- ❖ Art.2: underlining how the objectives of the CFP are to “promote coastal fishing activities, taking into account socio-economic aspects” and “contribute to a fair standard of living for those who depend on fishing activities, bearing in mind coastal fisheries and socio-economic aspects”
- ❖ Art. 4: defining the term “low impact fishing”
- ❖ Art.5: stating that Member States, in the waters up to 12 nautical miles” are authorised “to restrict fishing vessels that traditionally fish in those waters from ports on the adjacent coast”
- ❖ Art 6 and 7: stating that to correctly implement the CFP the EU shall adopt conservation measures, including “incentives of an economic nature, such as fishing opportunities, to promote fishing methods that contribute to more selective fishing....”
- ❖ Art.17: requiring Member States to use transparent and objective criteria, including those of an environmental, social and economic nature when allocating fishing opportunities.

If on the one hand the reformed CFP contains some positive elements and requirements that at first sight benefit local fishing communities, on the other the panel underlined how there still are many weaknesses in terms of enforcement, mainly but not only stemming from a lack of implementation of these requirements by Member States. While in the fisheries sector small vessels make up 80% of the fleet, thus representing over 70.000 vessels (if sticking to the EU Commission’s definition of under 12 using non-towed gears) the way the CFP is implemented distorts these few articles thus favouring large-scale interests.

### The case of Denmark:

In Denmark ITQs, larger boats and better technology meant that many small independently owned fishing businesses have gone out of business. Thomas Højrup, a professor in Ethnography at the University of Copenhagen, and Jesper Olsen, fisherman, explained their experience in relation to ITQs and the actions undertaken by local communities to save their businesses.

The hegemony of industrial fisheries started to strengthen in 2006 when a system of transferrable quotas of fishing rights was put in place by the Danish government. The system quickly led to concentration of rights in the hands of few and increased inequalities. A few weeks only after the introduction of catch shares, a number of local fishing business started to close and fishing boats were abandoned.

The fishers of the village of Thorupstrand realized that they needed to take immediate action if they did not want to disappear. By joining their forces, they created a guild that cooperatively bought up and now owns fishing quotas. Today thanks to the guild all members have the possibility of having the size of quota they need – while avoiding any internal bidding competition. By reacting to the introduction of ITQs fishers maintain a traditional way of living that they enjoy and at the same time generate social and economic benefits to keep their entire local community and culture alive. In

addition, since 2013 a fishing boat from Thorupstrand has been moored in the city center of Copenhagen to sell fresh and sustainable fish in the capital.

The guild allows the fishers of Thorupstrand to be masters of their future instead of being victims of the forces of industrial markets that would have inevitably ended with the quick disappearance of their community and heritage. [It should be noted however that this group of fishermen are rare in terms of having the foresight and the courage to enter the ITQ market. It remains a fundamental nonsense that small scale fishers and their communities have to fight against much more powerful financial interests and put their local economies at risk simply to maintain the wide ranging social, economic and cultural benefits that coastal fishing provides. In other areas where fishermen were not able to follow suit, whole communities have disappeared solely as a result of losing just a few fishing boats from the local beach or harbour – Ed]

- **Recommendations:** There is still a lack of implementation of Art.17 by EU Member States. Unfortunately, TFCs remain an integral part of the reformed CFP, underpinned by the use of historic track record instead of social, economic and environmental criteria for the allocation of rights. The fishers of Thorupstrand had to get organized to face the threats of TFCs, therefore a separate policy would need to include a preferential access to low impact small-scale fisheries in order to ensure that rights are allocated fairly and safeguard the inshore fisheries from a transferable rights regime. To avoid indebtedness of fishing community to buy quotas, a percentage of fishing opportunities should be reserved to local small-scale cooperative quota companies, based on specific requirements and restrictions.

### **The case of Finland:**

If in many of the European seas one of the main issues is the failures of the control and management of the activity of industrial fleets and the collapsing the stocks, the situation in Finnish inland fisheries is different. The lakes abound with resources, but it is the fishing communities who are struggling to survive. Tero Mustonen explained the main challenges for northern inland fisheries and what policies should look like to protect their cultural heritage.

Tero Mustonen leads the Kesälähti fish base, a group of fishers who operate on lake Puruvesi, a pristine lake where water is so clear you can drink it, and see 15 metres down. The local community fishes for Vendace, a small whitefish, with the same traditional method in use for centuries: an artisanal seining to fish under the thick ice covering the lake during winter time. A technique that needs dedication, patience and a deep knowledge of the local environment and seasons to be carried out. The community of Puruvesi is very lively and active, and acted to get more value for their fish. In December 2013 they obtained a special recognition for their Vendace and fishing technique via an EU Geographical Indicator (Protected Designation of Origin – PDO). PDO is granted to products that are produced, processed and prepared in a specific geographical area, using the recognised know-how of local producers and ingredients from the region concerned. These are products whose characteristics are linked to their geographical origin and, in this case, it recognizes traditional seining and fish traps as the only sustainable ways of harvesting. Unfortunately, the community of Puruvesi has to face two major threats: industrial companies that had their eyes on the lake and are putting pressure to set up a trawling activity and climate change that is changing the seasons and the thickness of the ice, thus shortening the fishing season and making the fishing activity more and more dangerous.

- **Recommendations:** A separate policy for low impact small-scale fisheries should have specific requirements for the protection of local communities and the traditional knowledge and

cultural heritage that they embody. The fight to reverse climate change and global warming at European and global level should be a top priority for governments who must recognise that environmental damage generates social and economic consequences and puts the very survival of communities at risk. Many of those communities live in areas where there are special natural conditions to which over centuries they have adapted their way of life. They live within a sensitive biodiversity that needs the vital and irreplaceable knowledge of those communities for sustainable long-term management.

### **A Pan European view:**

Claudia Orlandini is the Communications Officer for LIFE and noted that there had been a 20% decline in the number of specifically small-scale fishers in the EU over the last 10 years, a much higher rate of reduction than with regard to the large-scale fleet. The reasons for this decline are numerous but importantly among them is that over decades, Member States have heard only from the large scale, mobile gear fleet and consequently, the majority of fishing related policies have been designed and implemented, and funding streams provided without due consideration being given to the 80% of the EU fleet that is deemed to be small scale.

- **Recommendations:** Large scale operators therefore had the time and space to influence fishing policies without the input of the small-scale sector. We are therefore playing catch up but thanks to the creation of LIFE and the subsequent terrific support, knowledge and expertise of our member organisations across Europe, small scale fishers are now on track and making a positive contribution to the implementation of current and the development of future policies. On that basis, a specifically small scale friendly policy would be of benefit to this sector. It is only in the last couple of years that small scale sector has been given a voice and a conduit to the decision makers through LIFE. It is on this basis that we are able to claim our own space in the policy matrix and argue for support, recognition and protection for the social, economic and cultural aspects of small scale fisheries.

### **Marketing:**

Low impact small-scale fishers provide European citizens with fresh and healthy products. The revised Common Market Organisation (CMO) is one of the pillars of the Common Fisheries Policy and the EU tool for managing the market in fishery and aquaculture products. Its establishment was supposed to be an opportunity for small-scale producers to better access the market and to compete successfully with imported fishery products. However, there is still a lot to be done, and Caroline Bennett from Sole of Discretion (UK) and Wim Versteden from Pintafish (Belgium) provided their point of view as fish box schemes managers.

The aim of Sole of Discretion and Pintafish intervention is to give consumers the opportunity to buy fresh, safe, and environmentally-friendly products, and to guarantee an acceptable income to local SSF fishers.

Sole of Discretion is a collective of small-scale fishers fishing out of Plymouth harbour. They are committed to procuring fish and shellfish that have been caught with as little damage to the marine environment as possible and contributed to the livelihood of small-scale fishers and their communities. Pintafish is a direct supplier and purchaser. They buy directly from low impact small-scale fishers from the Netherlands and Belgium, skipping the auction as considered a step that only increases costs. Sole

of Discretion and Pintafish are now working together and when Sole of Discretion found itself with marketing challenges Pintafish showed solidarity and helped them.

- **Recommendations:** A separated policy for low impact small-scale fisheries should improve consumer information and competition rules. When selling local products, transparency and trust are key drivers for a productive relationship between the buyer and seller. Small-scale fishers have a nice story to tell, and one role of fish box schemes is to tell this story so as to improve the visibility of the products and information to consumers. In addition, it is difficult for an individual fisher to access the market directly, apart from some possibilities to sell directly to restaurants or customers on the dockside. Therefore, organisation is the key. Several types of small-scale fishers' groupings already exist, but these associations or organisations look mainly after the fishing aspect, rather than the marketing aspect of their members. Fish box schemes can fill this gap, but this must go along with a change in mindset and additional capacity-building of the main actors, SSFs and their families.

## Conclusions

Following the comments from the Panel, a wide ranging and lively debate followed with members of the audience, representing a wide range of stakeholders, making erudite comments and insights:

- There are already a number of legal requirements of potential benefit to small-scale fisheries but these are still not implemented as they should be;
- The work carried out by LIFE and its members is vital in terms of lobbying and representation of low impact small-scale fishers' interests at all institutional levels;
- For national and European policies to be effective, small-scale fishers need to be included in decision-making processes. On the other hand, they need to identify among their communities' spokespersons to represent their interests, with the support of LIFE staff;
- Co-management is vital to ensure that management is carried out in a way that is consistent with local situations and tailored to the needs of local communities and the environment;
- There is no clear definition of the economic value of the social, cultural and environmental heritage/benefits of small-scale fisheries. This lack of value impedes the long-term benefits generated by local communities. Small-scale fishers are the guardians of a millennium tradition whose social, cultural and economic values are incalculable.
- There is lack of data relating to small-scale fisheries. Need to build an information system infrastructure to gather, archive, update and disseminate information on the status and trends of fisheries and their management.
- It is not important whether we have a specific small scale fisheries policy or simply a small scale friendly approach, the need for political support, recognition and rewards are equally valid and necessary. Both the current and immediate past Fisheries Commissioners have noted the vital importance of the small scale and the need for it to have a specific and dedicated voice, hence the creation of LIFE
- In marketing terms, a focus on currently underutilised species is of benefit to consumers and potentially fish stocks as it reduces pressure on traditional stocks, increases the public awareness of alternatives but must always be underpinned by the development of management plans for all species pursued commercially.

- There is a clear need for transparency throughout the supply chain including effective labelling systems providing sufficient information to inform the public on date of capture [not landing], area caught, method used and perhaps a sustainability index.
- It is no longer possible to inherently trust 'scientific' papers as there is a growing academic oligarchy that ensures that a particular sub sector of academia gets published more often than others and is supported by an increasing bias based on financial resources that can 'buy' a particular view.
- All fishing sectors complain at over regulation. This can be overcome by the introduction of genuine co-management, making fishers equally accountable and responsible for the development of effective rules. This approach needs to incorporate a rebalancing of access to the resource that more fairly reflects the needs and benefits of small scale operations.
- Following on from the point above, audience members made clear that there was so much more to 'fishing' than just the economics, especially in the Mediterranean where 80% of the fleet fell within this descriptor. With the current dire situation facing the Region, it was vital to look at the overall costs and benefits of fishing in both large and small scale terms. The costs, in their widest sense, due to widespread overfishing over many years by increasingly powerful vessels and operators should be taken into account in any new or revised strategy.
- There was general agreement at the lack of effective fisheries data combined with the lack of effective systems for collection. This issue needed to be addressed urgently so that all concerned could more clearly understand cause and effect of both commercial and recreational fisheries. All concerned recognised the importance of science based decisions but these would be of little use without data to back them up.
- A new regime for fisheries management is required based on trust and transparency, with the latter underpinning the former. The public need to get involved, demand clearer information across the whole spectrum of fisheries, not least as they don't understand much of it at present including the power frameworks of fish buying and selling that tend to discriminate against small scale fishers. This tends to be exacerbated by difficulties in supply chain logistics that again favour high volume transport over small scale production.
- Overall there was no entirely clear view on whether small scale needed a specific policy or one that ensured equality of opportunity and a recognition of the particular benefits provided by the small scale sector.
- The key words and phrases that came up time and again in the debate were balance, fairness, equality, bottom up, co-management and co-operation, influence and impact, access, transparency and knowledge.

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