



COMMON MANAGEMENT OF THE ADRIATIC ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

The Steering Group on Fishing, part of the Adriatic Chambers of Commerce Forum, was set up to encourage closer relations between representatives of the industry from the coastal regions involved, including delegates from the Chambers of Commerce, local research institutions, universities and fishermen's organisations. They are experts in the sector who work with great commitment and enthusiasm, providing their skills and experience in order to deal with fishing-related issues according to a common and constructive approach.

The characteristics of the Adriatic, a long, narrow sea in which any initiative inevitably has repercussions on both shores, require integrated action in order to produce incisive, more effective results. Fishermen and people living along the coast must work together in order to support the fishing industry and all the other related economic and leisure activities in order to protect it against all forms of pollution.

The final aim of the Steering Committee on Fishing is to lay the foundations for a single fishing policy in the Adriatic Sea, which will form part of the Community fishing policy in Europe. In this regard the aim is to propose rational, effective measures agreed by all parties, to ensure common and sustainable management of the Adriatic Sea. The aim of the fishing industry is "responsible self-management" which requires collaboration and an open-book approach rather than barriers.

All the Adriatic countries, including those which are not members of the EU, especially Croatia, Montenegro and Albania (awaiting membership although on different timescales), are affected by the EC fishing policy. EC directives and regulations have already been issued in favour of these new entrants, to provide



financial support to Eastern Adriatic countries in the form of cross-border projects, technical, scientific, economic and production-related partnerships between regions on the Adriatic shores, to be implemented in various sectors including the fishing industry.

The European policy is based on the ecological protection of the marine environment and conservation of its biological heritage, which is also a requirement of the FAO's "Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing" and has been firmly supported by research institutes and universities in the Adriatic region. This demands a radical cultural transformation across the whole industry in order to guarantee that fishing is sustainable in both biological and economic terms. A new style of fishing operations needs to be planned, based on modern technological, scientific and eco-sustainable criteria. Common fishing methods must also be agreed to take account of the complexity of the production sector, the variety of meteorological and marine conditions in each area and the biological characteristics of the fish found along the geographical parallels and meridians which intersect in the Adriatic Sea. It must also be borne in mind that there are differences between the fishing zones in terms of the existing fish stocks, "target" species, the number of motorised fishing boats and fishermen, the unloading points and the scope and organisation of the support systems (landing stages, services for fishing vessels and businesses, mooring points, boatyards, supply systems, depots, facilities and fish markets etc).

Some of the key players in this inevitable "cultural revolution" are of course the fishermen, alongside the representatives of national institutions, study and research centres. Fishermen know the job and all the difficulties it entails, they have a wealth of experience and are aware of their own responsibilities. They can play an active part and, as has often been shown, can contribute to planning and regulatory decisions which affect the industry.

The involvement of fishermen is essential in order to produce a policy of responsible fishing agreed by all the countries involved and that will be recognised and respected in Adriatic fisheries.



ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE FISHING:

Ecological and Fisheries Protection Zone (ZERP)

March 2008 saw the end of the dispute relating to the Croatian government's establishment of an Ecological and Fisheries Protection Zone (ZERP), by allowing Italian and Slovenian fishermen to return to full operations in the Adriatic.

The ZERP is an area of 23,870 sq m which is closed to vessels from EU countries. It stretches from the borders of Croatian waters and the halfway line between the Croatian and Italian coasts. It was created in 2003 in order to protect the reserves of a zone rich in fish, particularly crustaceans, sole and red mullet, which are species much in demand. On 1 January 2008, the Croatian government set up the ZERP in the Adriatic, extending the fishing ban to Italy and Slovenia. This generated great alarm in Italian and Slovenian fisheries and there was great concern that it could re-ignite the hazardous tensions of the past: violation of marine boundaries, captures of motorised fishing boats, criminal proceedings and seizures etc.

These fears were expressed at all the annual meetings of the Adriatic Chambers Forum, and were debated during the discussions at the planned Fishing Steering Committee meetings.

Suspension of the ZERP is one of the requirements that Croatia must fulfil in order to join the EU, and was recently the subject of a discussion between the President of the European Commission, Mr. Barroso, and the Croatian prime minister Mr. Sanader. The Croatian Parliament's vote to suspend the ecological protection zone brings a definitive conclusion to the dispute which has deepened with Croatia in recent months. The solution comes as recognition for the long and arduous diplomatic work between the parties, also with the direct participation of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in concert with the European Commission.

This affair should provide food for thought to all traders in the sector in order to encourage processes of collaboration, partnership and harmonisation of fishing



regimes and achieve common management of the Adriatic's fish stocks as part of a single, coherent policy for the region.

Ecological protection of the Adriatic and its fish species

Safeguarding the production potential of the sea is one of the main issues facing the Adriatic, and it is therefore necessary to encourage scientific research in order to deal with all types of pollution, such as illegal fishing and all those things which cause the disturbing rise in temperature.

Reduction of fishing effort

Scientific and technological research, supported by the experience of workers in the industry, must encourage fishermen to test and apply techniques and systems which favour greater selectivity of the nets and other equipment used in catching fish, and which regulate fishing times and areas while maintaining economic viability. Other initiatives may relate to:

- a reduction in the number of fishing days (weekly or longer-term) and an increase of equipment downtime, during which normal onboard operations should be performed such as maintenance of the vessels, engines, installations, nets and equipment;
- a fishing ban for at least 45 days a year to be ordered in large areas and districts during the delicate phase of growth of juveniles of various fish species;
- suspensions and temporary or permanent bans in particular zones (nurseries) for biological reasons;
- identification and delimitation of areas in which fishing periods can be alternated with periods of rest;
- a limit on the number of motorised fishing boats (alternatively) and the use of certain types of net in various fishing zones during certain months of the year;



- creating incentives for the discontinuance and demolition of old vessels whose maintenance costs are too high, or for which modifications and restoration is not financially viable;
- encourage the demolition of obsolete vessels and their replacement with modern, standardised vessels with a smaller capacity and reduced power, whose returns will certainly be more valid and ecologically sustainable;
- temporary or permanent transfer of vessels to other areas and centres where the fishing pressure is lower;
- suspension of professional fishing during certain months of the year, and use of the vessels for fishing or sea tourism.

Regulations and controls on fishing

There is a need to create an efficient system of surveillance coordinated by the Adriatic marine authorities with reference to the “Community Fisheries Control Agency” and its body of inspectors, or the more general “Coastguard Service” referred to in the “Green Paper on Integrated Maritime Policy” presented by the Brussels Commission (2006 – 689, page 44).

A recommended measure for the very short term would be the installation of BLUE BOXES onboard motorised fishing boats of medium tonnage (over 15 m in length). These instruments allow constant tracking of vessels during sailing and fishing.

Adriatic fishermen must also show that they can assume the responsibilities which fishing involves, and that they can exercise self-governance by joining specific trade associations which are yielding excellent results in various European countries: Spain with the “Confradies”, France with the “Proudhommes” and Italy with the “Consorti di gestione delle vongole”, “Consorti della piccola pesca” and other producers’ associations accredited by the EU.

These self-governance bodies make an active contribution to regulating their members’ activities: fishing hours and rest periods, the use of nets and equipment, the species and quantities to be caught, systems for the selection and packaging of the catch etc.



Profitability of the fishing industry

The Adriatic Sea must be protected in both environmental and economic terms. The equilibrium and economic viability of the fishing industry must be restored. This does not mean intensifying fishing operations but adopting rational fishing methods, using more selective nets and equipment to ensure that the product is given a proper value, especially in respect of the large-volume species (sardines, anchovies and oily fish in general) which are also less popular with consumers.

Other interventions could relate to the adoption of new techniques for the processing of fish on land and onboard the fishing vessel, for example: selection, trimming, and other methods to improve conservation at each step in the fishing chain, from the catch through to the point of sale and consumption. This would ensure brand protection of and would enable health checks to guarantee quality, healthfulness and traceability for the consumer.

Currently, the balance sheet of most fishing businesses shows a loss, and the growth in income which could be obtained through the new measures of revaluing the catch is in itself limited. In any case, it will not be sufficient to limit the steady rise in operating costs.

The rising price of fuel is the main example, given that it accounts for more than 45% of the running costs of fishing vessels which practice dragging and trawling. It is therefore crucial that the costs which should sustain fishing businesses are reduced. These include the costs of investment in the construction or modernisation of fishing vessels and also normal running costs.

It should also be borne in mind that the fishing fleets of Adriatic countries, including the Italian ones, are mainly made up of obsolete vessels which need constant (and expensive) maintenance and repair. Their engines are technologically outdated and use too much fuel.



Many of the vessels are oversized in terms of tonnage, engine power, nets and equipment compared to the production potential in fishing areas in which they normally operate. This was a necessary decision in an attempt to increase the catches, thereby increasing income and obtaining higher profits. This increase in the “fishing effort” has in actual fact only contributed to an impoverishment of the biological resources in the sea.

Clearly, running these vessels is not cost effective. They are mainly family-run and are the only source of income known to the fishermen.

Renewal and rationalisation of the Adriatic fishing fleet

For economic reasons, a renewal of the fishing fleets is not currently possible. It is therefore necessary to plan a gradual introduction of new vessels designed according to modern standards, by changing the techniques, innovations and the use of materials already tested in yachting and other naval sectors such as fibreglass for example. This material can be used to mould bottoms and entire hulls, significantly reducing costs and labour times. At the same time, it also generates the possibility of constructing standardised vessels with uniform tonnage and fishing systems and which operate at the same distances.

There should also be greater guarantees in respect of other factors: safety of navigation, the safeguarding of human life at sea and the onboard and working conditions for the crew. In existing vessels with appropriate structural conditions and whose owners have the financial means and access to adequate public finance, it would be useful to install new high-performance engines, replace the propeller with larger, variable pitch ones with lower revs and fitted with a korten cladding in order to increase the fishing yield and reduce fuel consumption.

For this purpose it would be a good idea to experiment with the onboard installation of small systems to produce alternatives to diesel, such as photovoltaic energy, using solar panels or strips formed of tiny silicon cells or the use of wind energy which uses the forward momentum of the vessel as it sails. These energy



sources could initially be used to recharge batteries or to power certain onboard systems and installations.

Reduction in fuel consumption

With a view to sustainable fishing, all fishing vessels in operation should adopt a fuel-saving policy by taking certain measures including:

- reducing the vessel's speed during transfers
- accurately maintaining the engine and other onboard systems, machinery and equipment;
- installing a fuel gauge;
- removal of hull fouling.

Clearly, other appropriate suggestions should also be sought, accepted, followed up and listed in a handbook to be distributed to fishing boat skippers and crews.

Vocational training

Fishing operations are increasingly characterised by complex technical, scientific and ecological issues and the need to ensure a steady increase in the quality and healthfulness of the fish caught. These issues require greater commitment from public institutions and trade associations in terms of training and re-training workers in the industry. This training must cover every step in the fishing chain: the catching, selection, packaging and conservation of fish on board, land-side transport, and the commercial distribution network through to the points of sale to the consumer.

The knowledge and expertise of fishermen and other workers in the industry must therefore be increased, and especially among younger workers in order to favour the generational turnover within fishing businesses and subsidiary services.

In this regard we must mention the project "Peschiamo il futuro", funded by the Region of Marche and developed by the local fishing cooperatives and Federpesca. This project is intended to facilitate young people's entry into the fishing industry and takes the form of training sessions and apprenticeships



conducted onboard fishing vessels. “Peschiamo il futuro” is accompanied by other training initiatives designed to adapt the vocational skills of fishermen and other workers in the industry to the ecological defence of the sea and fish species, the development of modern fishing techniques, handling of the catch, and safety at work.

Finally, all workers must be familiar with the specific characteristics and nature of the fishing industry, its service sector and other complementary activities such as the construction of fishing boats and onboard systems.

Similar efforts should be directed at the other links in the chain (processing, conservation of the catch, the distribution network, health checks etc), to ensure that sufficient capacity and energy is dedicated to these areas.

The intervention of research institutions, universities, health departments and training bodies such as nautical institutions is also necessary in order to conduct an analysis of the fishing industry as a whole, the demand, supply, and the characteristics of all the production processes and services which it normally entails.

CONCLUSIONS

These issues could be resolved (although not in the short term) as part of an approved fishing policy for the Adriatic Sea which dovetails with EC policy as a whole. However, all fishing workers on both sides of the Adriatic, in partnership with researchers and experts in the field must share this vision of common management and must also be involved right from the planning stage.

Alliances must also be formed with those working in ancillary industries and also with the public and consumers, who have the right to a healthful, quality product at a fair price. Political, technical and financial support from the countries involved is also of fundamental importance, as well as support from the local authorities in the regions, counties, provinces and municipalities.

One example of common fishing management comes from France, where fishing is considered to be a major sector of the economy. French fishermen have managed to obtain significant state intervention, with the issue of a three-year



plan from 1 February 2008 worth €310 million, to guarantee economic sustainability and competitiveness of fishing businesses. This plan includes:

- work to modernise the fishing fleet and reduce the dependency on diesel;
- promoting and enhancing the value of the catch, also by introducing quality labels and certifications;
- providing increased support for scientific research into fish stocks and safeguarding measures;
- improvements to the vocational training of fishermen, partly with a view to the generational turnover;
- improving onboard safety systems.

There is no doubt that this is an important contribution which will help to ward off the crisis in European fishing, and sets an example for all the Adriatic countries.

Each country has specific laws and financial measures for the fishing industry which must as a matter of course be streamlined and placed into the context of a sought-after policy on fishing in the Adriatic. This action is necessary so that the exercise of this important industry does not degenerate into a fragmented operation which brings no benefit to the overwhelming majority of fishermen and is damaging to the marine environment.

The ultimate aim is to achieve a rational exploitation of fish stocks, supported by studies, trial schemes and subject to appropriate controls. In this way, fishing could become one of the strategic sectors for an integrated maritime policy of the EU and all the countries involved, and for the super national institutions recently formed, such as the Adriatic Euroregion and the General Secretariat of the Adriatic and Ionian Regions.