

NATURA 2000 & FISHERIES

NATURE, ECONOMY AND CULTURE: CONFLICTIVE OR COMPATIBLE?

REPORT

Brussels, 31st July, 2008

The European Parliament Intergroup on Sustainable Development organized a meeting on Natura 2000 and its implications to fisheries.

EBCD organized on behalf of the European Parliament's Intergroup for Sustainable Development¹, a meeting on 24th June 2008 on Natura 2000 and its implications to fisheries.

The meeting was very well attended by more than 70 people, including European Parliamentarians, European Commission officials, representatives of Member States, the fishing sector, NGOs and other stakeholders.

Struan Stevenson, MEP, chaired the meeting and presented his views on Natura 2000 sites as a fisheries management tool and Elspeth Attwooll, MEP, talked about the North Sea Commission's approach and presented the conclusions to the event.

Speakers included Leticia Martinez and Fotios Papoulias from the European Commission, Euan Dunn from BirdLife International, Stuart Rogers from ICES and Michael Anderson from EUROPECHE.





Leticia Martinez Aguilar and Fotios Papoulias from the European Commission (EC), described the EU regulatory framework, the objectives of the Habitats Directive and the opportunities of Natura 2000 sites.

¹ Multistakeholder' *forum*, recognized by the European Parliament (EP), aiming at informing his Members (MEPs) on different topical issues. They are chaired by MEPs.

They highlighted the role of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) on Natura 2000 sites, describing the current state of affairs, the area of application, the way of their designation, not only in territorial waters but also offshore.

It was mentioned that full implementation of the Habitats and Birds Directives to the offshore marine environment of the EU was a key challenge for EU biodiversity policy in the coming years.

The different steps of the procedure before the Commission took a decision on management measures within the CFP were:

-  Request for scientific advice
-  Consultation with stakeholders
-  Assessment by control experts
-  Implementation in Community fisheries legislation

The EC has adopted guidelines and distributed them to Member States which have been asked to contribute in the identification, the designation and the management of sites, after having widely consulted all stakeholders, including RACs.

A first step was to receive a substantial number of proposals from Member States by the end of 2008.

A second step would be the assessment of the sites.

An initial list of sites should be sent by Member States by 1st September 2008.

The fisheries sector, represented by Michael Anderson – EUROPECHE- deplored the fact that the whole procedure didn't allow for proper consultation and that the socio-economic aspects were not taken into account in the site selection and designation phases.

He pleaded for a more flexible and dynamic management tool, not rigid like Natura 2000, which was not a fish management tool, according to Mr. Anderson.

He added that the main challenge for the sector was how to deal with the complexity and the extremely limited capacity of users and how best to involve Regional Advisory Councils (RACs).

A *perceived* concern about the lack of information was also highlighted by the Scottish Association of Fishermen.



A *real* constraint was the lack of equity and coherence between Member States in the interpretation of the Directive and the designation of sites.

According to Euan Dunn, who briefed the audience about the outcome of a seminar organized by the RACs on Natura 2000 and fisheries, it was imperative to advance through the dialogue between the EC and all those involved in the decision making process in order to avoid any kind of conflict.

This development needed a balanced management between nature & business, to explore how best the fisheries sector and other RAC stakeholders should engage with the designation and management issues arising from the emerging offshore marine Natura 2000 network.

It was highlighted that the more the RACs were informed, the better their dialogue with decision-makers would be, and the greater the likelihood of fishing activities in and around Natura 2000 sites being managed so as to protect sites with least possible disruption to fishing would be.

The Commission had the responsibility (exclusive competence) to introduce management measures through the CFP in order to maintain sites in a ‘favorable conservation status’.

Sites could only be selected, and their boundaries set and designated, on scientific – not socioeconomic – evidence.

Fishermen’s concerns, according to Euan Dunn, principally were:

- ✚ inadequate and too late consultation
- ✚ Socio-economic issues not taken into account in the site selection and designation phases
- ✚ Lack of equity and coherence across Member States in:
 - (a) Interpretation of the Directives;
 - (b) Designation of sites and management proposals.
- ✚ Member States would favour larger areas closed to all fisheries to facilitate control

RACs key role should be improved in 4 areas:

- ✚ Suggest technical improvements (e.g. changes in boundaries of buffer zones)



- ✚ Provide data on fleet activity (mapping etc)
- ✚ Ensure level playing field by removing discrimination
- ✚ Avoid side effects by engaging on issue of effort displacement

RACs should also be proactive on:

- ✚ Urging their Governments to consult (and early) on proposed sites
- ✚ Putting MPAs on own agenda – RACs need to give higher priority to the Ecosystem Approach in general
- ✚ Urging Commission to provide more resources for translating knowledge into policy

The scientific community was represented by Stuart Rogers – ICES – who made a presentation on the role of science in the adoption of management measures in fisheries.

He focused on the sources of information used on developing management measures, as:

- ✚ Scientific data, sampling and research into response of feature to impact.

Many years of site records and observations were often available inshore while data beyond the territorial waters were often unreliable, imprecise and old.

He highlighted the importance of substantial knowledge of effects of fishing gears on the sustainability of stocks, and the impact on sensitive habitats from experimental studies.

- ✚ Location of sites from fishers knowledge

According to Mr. Rogers, fishermen had valuable knowledge and recent data on habitat location, a good local understanding of gear operation and fleet dynamics.

The sector would be able to make a real contribution, although spatial coverage was not comprehensive and involvement was not complete.

- ✚ Location of fleets using satellite tracking, and their catches.



This last source of information was almost comprehensive for larger vessels, generally reliable and accurate, even if some fleets' data were missing, and interpretation was not simple.

According to Stuart Rogers, all three methods of collecting information and data were necessary for selecting the appropriate measures and engaging the industry, with the aim of reducing frictions and increasing cooperation.

Struan Stevenson, stressed the important to realise the full potential of Europe's maritime interests and to realise the vision of clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas.

He argued that we had to implement a management plan that aimed at sustainability in every area and that the best way to achieve that was to devolve more management responsibility to RAC's..

Furthermore, he added that fishing would have to be restricted in the future through a precautionary approach by making sure that we maintain healthy ecosystems and protect rare, vulnerable or valued species and habitats.

According to Mr.Stevenson, this would inevitably mean more environmental protection than before, involving a network of MPA's across EU waters and a system of integrated coastal zone management, to ensure that we put a stop to the degradation of habitats and to the loss of biodiversity.

The fisheries sector needed certainty and clarity in order to be able to plan ahead through multi annual management plans providing a foundation of stability for the sector and that there should be a fair balance among the diverse objectives for MPAs.

In consultation with scientists, RACs and all the stakeholders, UE should be able to identify areas where sustainable fishing could continue in an environmentally responsible manner.

Maritime, environmental and fisheries interests had to be taken into consideration on an equal basis; in this way UE would be able to balance economic, social and environmental priorities.

Elsbeth Attwooll, MEP, Vice-Chair of the EP Fisheries Committee closed the meeting with an excellent summary of the various issues raised during the presentations and questions.



The key conclusions emerged were:

- ✚ The aim of the meeting was to examine how nature, economy and social values could be reconciled. Even if socio-economic considerations were not taken into account in the designation phase of the Natura 2000 sites, it was recognized that these aspects should be integrated to the designation of fisheries management measures.
- ✚ Most participants were of the opinion that a revision of the environmental legislation to include socio-economic considerations was not necessary at this stage.
- ✚ Member States should be encouraged to ensure adequate consultation takes place in the designation phase.
- ✚ The purpose of the designation of sites needed of protection under Natura 2000 was to halt biodiversity loss by 2010 and the target was to preserve certain types of valuable biodiversity.
- ✚ There would be merit in identifying the objectives appropriate to each particular site.
- ✚ Involvement of stakeholders was of primary importance. The use of local knowledge of fishermen could help, for instance, to avoid the displacement of fishing effort. This should be coupled with scientific data.
- ✚ The designation of Natura 2000 sites is a key element of the ecosystem approach. There was a need of an integrated approach through maritime spatial planning. The designation of Fishing Priority Zones and recreational angling parks could be envisaged in that context.
- ✚ The development of management plans was necessary. Once a site was designated, this would not automatically mean that no economic activity could take place.
- ✚ Complexity vs Simplicity: the procedures for designation seem to be complex as sites in need of protection are proposed by Member States whereas fisheries management measures are adopted in the context of the CFP. Simple guidelines should accompany the implementation of fisheries management measures.
- ✚ Consistency vs Coherence: a level playing field should be ensured. Up to now, CFP was not delivering this target.

- ✚ Flexibility in management measures was needed effectively to achieve the initial objectives of the Natura 2000 sites.
- ✚ RACs could be the appropriate forum to discuss fisheries management measures as legitimacy is ensured by a bottom-up functioning. Then the industry would buy in. But RACs needed support for that.

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