



THE NORTHUMBERLAND SEA FISHERIES COMMITTEE

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RESPONSE TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION GREEN PAPER ON REFORM OF THE COMMON FISHERIES POLICY

INTRODUCTION

This Committee welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation and has set up a subcommittee with that purpose. The Subcommittee comprises the Committee Chief Executive, Chief Fishery Officer, Environmental Fishery Officer and Members representing a diverse range of interests in local fisheries, including commercial and recreational activity.

The response is intended to have a particular slant in respect of the fisheries in the district of the Northumberland Committee. This is a mixed fishery for which the Committee has management and regulatory responsibility. The main species caught and landed on the Northumberland coast are lobsters, crabs and nephrops, together with white fish.

The commercial fishing industry in Northumberland has over 120 holders of the committee's shellfish permit, and over 200 hobby fishermen who are registered with the Committee under its pot limitation byelaw scheme. There are also approximately 46 local trawlers currently working from ports in the district, as well as a visiting fleet (currently numbering approximately 50 vessels) targeting mainly nephrops in the winter and nephrops and white fish in the summer. Angling activity is also very important in the district – upon which see further in 2 below.

Fishing activity takes place from a number of ports and harbours and at various other locations along the coast. A copy of the Committee's latest 'Insight into Fisheries in the District' document for 2008 is attached, although a number of vessels have since been decommissioned or sold, with some new vessels coming into the district. Further information about the committee can be obtained from the committee website at www.nsfc.org.uk.

The subcommittee feels that the two key issues for the Common Fisheries Policy to resolve and reform are (a) satisfactory and sustainable quotas for commercial

fishermen and (b) discards. Regarding quotas, success can be achieved by knowing and understanding better the whereabouts and amounts of fish in the sea. Achieving this knowledge will entail better fishing science. Carrying out more scientific surveys will help to achieve that. The knowledge of fishermen is indispensable to the scientific process – for example, fishermen are now widely reporting on large quantities of whiting in the North Sea. Whiting of course is a predator which can decimate juvenile cod. Whiting quota is generally taken up very quickly, although fishermen report that there is still whiting to fish and that should be investigated. Also see below on Producer Organisations, to enable effort to be targeted more sustainably.

Regarding discards, better technical measures are required. Fishermen should also be educated and encouraged to catch less fish of better quality. This should be financially encouraged/ incentivised and improved technical measures which are taken up by fishermen should be supported.

KEY POINTS ARISING FROM NSFC SUBCOMMITTEE DELIBERATIONS

1. Crucial Importance of the Local Industry

The fishing industry in Northumberland is of crucial importance to local communities and the economy throughout the district. There have already been cuts in the number of fishing vessels and fishermen since the last CFP Review. The Committee feels there should be more control on future fleet increases until the maximum sustainable yield is reached and that should apply throughout the community. The reintroduction of unused licences should also be limited and greater control imposed upon the sale of/leasing of licences which are held as investments by non-active fishermen. Future decommissioning should also ensure that all unused quotas return to the active industry, which would help to develop new fisheries, e.g. a mackerel hand-line fishery in Northumberland.

Overall, the Committee feels there is need to sustain jobs within the industry whilst achieving a sustainable fishery. We realise that this is a difficult balance to achieve but it is key to the future success of commercial fishing and the CFP. Also see 3. below.

2. Recreational Fishing Activity (Recreational Sea Angling/RSA)

This is an important activity, with a large number of local anglers throughout the district both with Clubs and unaffiliated. Angling is also particularly important for tourism and related businesses/communities. Hotels, public houses, bed and breakfast establishments and restaurants in fishing communities at the coast and nearby will all rely to an extent on visiting sea anglers. RSA should therefore be supported. It is also noted that there is a proposed Article 55 on Recreational Fisheries in the EU Fisheries Control Regulation. The view of this subcommittee is that although there are a lot of recreational sea anglers they catch relatively few fish, almost all for their own consumption and that it will be virtually impossible to satisfactorily regulate the whole of this sector. It is therefore noted that Member States should monitor recreational catches of recovery stocks on the basis of a sampling plan, with detailed rules to be adopted before this Article can be implemented. It is vital that these rules are proportionate and flexible so that sampling can be properly targeted. The data collected should then be shared with all Fisheries Managers.

3. Maintaining the Industry

There should be encouragement for those who are willing and able to return to or commence working in the fishing industry and related occupations/activities. The emphasis must be on maintaining the industry, whilst at the same time creating alternative jobs in coastal communities. Some fishermen have shown initiative and already have diversified into related activity, e.g. taking tourists on fishing trips, but a balance must be maintained between such diversity and commercial fishing activity. There should also be more encouragement of diversification of activity into non quota white fish for which there is a market, e.g. in this region Pollack.

The Committee sees an essential link between a sustainable fishery, a sustainable fleet and sustainable communities.

4. Producer Organisations (POs)

POs should be given more power and thus the industry be given more say in managing the fishery, including the suspension of licences for breach of rules. This could also prevent quota being taken too quickly. The under 10 fleet should also become fully joined up to POs¹. This will encourage greater “ownership” and responsibility on the part of the industry for the fishery. See also 7 below.

5. Training

There should be improved training, leading to better skills and also a system of UK and hopefully EU-wide qualifications for those working in the industry, which would help encourage best practice. Bringing in a qualification or at least an optional course of study at secondary school level would also be beneficial in the long term to the sustainability of fisheries, fleets and fishing communities. Available grant aid should be maximised for the purpose of training from an early age and be particularly directed at smaller coastal communities. Improved training would also benefit all marine users in the long-term, with the lessons learned being naturally dispersed to other members of the marine-using community, aiding sustainability and generally improved practices.

6. Branding

Local branding should be encouraged and incentivised with suitable funding provided to assist with this process. Political will should be encouraged at a national and not just local level.

7. Local Decision-Making

There should be more local decision-making, even more local than at RAC level. In England for example more decisions should be delegated to the prospective IFCA's which should have an increasing role, including a place on Producer Organisation Boards.

¹ This is the agreed view of the NSFC Subcommittee on this consultation, although representations have been received on behalf of members of the local under 10 metre fleet disagreeing with this approach.

8. **Fishing Vessels' Catches**

Moves should be made where applicable towards landing the whole of a vessel's catch or at least everything potentially commercial. Undersized fish in such a catch can be used for fishmeal and over-quota can be put into fish farming and the catcher not paid for it. In that way the motive to profit from overfishing is removed. Also landing the whole of the catch has a built-in restriction by virtue of the size of each fishing vessel controlling the quantity of fish landed.

9. **Industrial Fishing**

It is appreciated that this is particularly important for the fishmeal industry, but its effects on stocks can be harmful and improved control is needed. Once again, a balance needs to be struck between sustainable activity and the needs of a viable fish-farming industry in receiving suitable fishmeal products.

PLEASE ALSO SEE THE ANNEXED PAPER IN PAGES (1) TO (8) DEALING WITH QUESTIONS IN THE GREEN PAPER.

CONCLUSION

There is no dispute on the need for reform of the Common Fisheries Policy. This early consultation is to be welcomed and will hopefully produce a response from and on behalf of all sectors of fisheries activity and stakeholders with a shared belief in the need to create a long-term viable future for sustainable activity in the waters of the European Union. The views in these pages on behalf of The Northumberland Sea Fisheries Committee and its members are of particular relevance to this important area in North Eastern England and its coastal waters, but also reflects the concerns which are felt in respect of the full spectrum of EU fisheries policy.