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Common Fisheries Policy at the crossroads

We are faced with three important issues in 1997:

Obviously, the most significant is the restructuring of the industry. Fishing must remain competitive. The setting-up of the new Multiannual Guidance Programmes (MGP IV) is our top priority and the most important challenge facing us this year.

Greater competitiveness in the industry also lies in more fully integrating the various elements in the industry, developing products and streamlining distribution channels.

Furthermore, the implementation of recently adopted instruments at an international level to ensure compliance with management measures involves intensive action among regional fishing organizations, which the Union will carry out in 1997.

Lastly, we must complete the regulatory structure regarding the preservation and control of resources, which will ensure the necessary balance between resources and their exploitation.

Having just arrived at the head of the Directorate-General for Fisheries, I aim to take on these challenges. My actions will demonstrate the need to combine the interests both of the industry and of a resource for whose continued existence we are all responsible. As Mrs Bonino emphasized in these very columns, I will ensure that an ongoing and open discussion is set up between my own division and all those involved in fishing on a daily basis.

It is a difficult task; nevertheless, I am confident that neither will nor spirit is lacking among the Community Institutions, political representatives or fishermen to enable fishing in the Community to regain its acclaim and position in tomorrow's world.

António CAVACO

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Region of the month

Yerseke: mussels go European

Yerseke may appear to be no more than a fairly ordinary fishing port on the former island of Zeeland, located in the province which bears the same name. But this small town running alongside the eastern Schelde River (Oosterschelde) boasts Europe's only mussel market.

Several EU Member States are involved in mussel-growing. France uses vertical beds, mussel beds or floating channels to grow its mussels or fishes them from wild banks. Ireland, Spain (especially Galicia) and Greece prefer channel farming. Marketing the product is of interest both to producers and consumers in the EU.

At Yerseke, this European element is very much in evidence. While the market may be attended exclusively by Dutch producers who bring their produce sown beforehand on beds in Zeeland and the Waddenzee, part of the mussels dredged on these beds by large fishing vessels are originally from the seas around the Frisian Islands.

Marketing of mussels is not limited to The Netherlands. A significant proportion (around 60%) of fresh produce is exported to Belgium and France. The concentration of packaging and processing firms in Yerseke is impressive. The great names involved in marketing fresh mussels are all here: Roem van Yerseke, Prins and Dingemans, Aqua-mossel, Deltamossel, etc. In addition, there are a number of firms involved in tinning and various preparations. Mussels are the main activity, but oysters and cockles can also be found.

The landings make for a novel sight. Large vessels 30-40 m long land alongside a floating hulk where samples are removed and brought to market. The mussels are then washed, graded according to size, weighed intact and shelled in order to provide buyers with information on the lots. Using this information, the mussels can then be marketed. The buyers are mostly made up of local firms concerned with the origin and the image of their produce, as the following interview illustrates.

Data sheet

Yerseke

- *Location:* Zeeland, The Netherlands
- *Type of fishing:* dredging of mussels on the beds of the eastern Schelde and the Waddenzee.
- *Fleets:* 80 vessels, including 40 based at Yerseke.
- *Catches (1995/1996):*
 - *species:* mussel (*Mytilus edulis*) and to a lesser extent oysters, cockles, lobsters and periwinkles
 - *haul:* **83,800 tonnes of mussels** sold at Yerseke, including 52,400 from Zeeland and 31,400 tonnes from the Waddenzee.
 - *value:* 126 million guilders
(56 million Ecus)
- *Number of fishermen (1996):* approximately 100 on boats based at Yerseke (over 200 in The Netherlands)
- *Processing:*

- *number of companies*: 31
- *jobs*: approximately 1,500

Questions put to F.H.A. DE GROOT of AQUA-MOSSEL at Yerseke:

Pesca Info: Your firm is an example of the European dimension to the mussel trade. Could you tell us briefly about this?

F. DE GROOT: While we buy our produce in The Netherlands, we also have customers in Belgium, France and Germany. In addition, we are members of Aqua Groupe, which, apart from our company and a Dutch wholesale fish trader, also includes the French production and marketing firm Marion Marée and the Belgian pre-cooked-food firm, Maridel.

Pesca Info: What problems have you come across marketing mussels in Europe?

F. DE GROOT: The main problem is the lack of appreciation of the quality of our produce. We have high-quality waters and our mussels are grown with great care. Before selling them we, the processors, put the shells we have just bought from the growers straight back into the eastern Schelde to be refined and purified. Before going to market, the mussels are once again removed and brought to our factories to be washed, purified and graded again before being bagged. Information campaigns are conducted in the European fishing press, especially in France, to make people more aware of the origin and packaging of our fresh mussels. These information campaigns set out the production, monitoring, processing and packaging conditions throughout the industry. We would like our produce to be clearly identifiable to consumers.

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Common Fisheries Policy

Monitoring the activities of the fishing industry

Within the framework of the revision of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) carried out in 1991, and having observed a number of deficiencies in the monitoring system then in force, the Council adopted Regulation 2847/93 in October 1993, establishing a new monitoring system covering the whole CFP.

Comprehensive monitoring of all levels of the industry

The regulation emphasizes that all activities must be monitored, both at sea (compliance with technical measures) and on land, in particular with landing, sales, transport and storage activities. Inspectors from the Member States must be in a position to collect comprehensive information to account for the origin of the fish on every step of its journey until it reaches the customer's plate. This includes the log books, sales bills and travel warrants listed in the regulations.

Monitoring made easier with modern techniques

In order to increase its efficiency while at the same time reducing costs, the new system for monitoring opens the way for modernization by using modern techniques, in particular the computer systems for processing and transmitting information relating to catches, along with automatic or satellite recording devices, to provide necessary information on the movements of fishing vessels.

The feasibility of integrating these techniques was established during pilot projects conducted in the Member States between 1994 and 1995. A new regulation now allows for all vessels over 24-m long or at sea for over 24 hours being fitted with automatic devices to track their position.

Theoretically, a Member State should now possess a range of relational data bases, one of whose functions will be to enable suspicions of fraud to be detected by matching information picked up on landing and marketing activities.

Fishing catches also monitored

Efficient monitoring of the fish catching methods in use is now recognized as necessary. In 1995, the system for monitoring was updated to add to existing provisions for monitoring measures for integration aimed at the follow-up and monitoring of fishing activities subject to limits in fish catches. The regulations regarding the recording of information on catches has been amended so that information recorded is integrated in the data log book, including the duration of fishing in particular grounds or how long fishing gear has been immersed.

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PESCA on the spot

Aberdeen: restructuring possibilities in exploiting oil at sea

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF) has put forward a support project for the retraining of fishermen and the restructuring of vessels. The project recently received backing from PESCA.

The offshore oil industry offers opportunities for diversification/ restructuring to fishermen and their vessels. The requirements relate to recruiting seamen capable of ensuring communication between the oil industry and others involved in sea industries to prevent interference between users. Furthermore, fishing vessels can now be used for monitoring and protecting vessels left on a sea bed by the oil industry without protection of any kind.

The requirements of the oil industry can be fulfilled by fishermen from the region with a good knowledge both of the physical environment and other marine activities carried out in the sectors involved.

Between 10 and 15 skippers could receive offers of employment in liaison with other activities (marine liaison personnel) and a similar number of vessels could be used for surveillance.

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Interview of the month

Interview with Allard Johan KLOOSTERBOER, Sales and Purchasing Manager of the LANDESMANN Group, Vienna, Austria

Editor's note: intended as a medium for freely voiced opinions, the PESCA bulletin reflects the views held by professionals. Articles express the opinions of the authors alone.

P.I. (Pesca Info): Would you briefly tell us about your activities in the industry?

A.J.K. (Allard Johan KLOOSTERBOER): The Landesmann Group is mainly involved in Agro/Food business, especially with former Eastern-bloc countries, importing and exporting beef and pork products. About 5 years ago, due to increasing competition and to keep our position in the industry, I personally added fish products for export, mostly to Eastern Europe.

We are presently moving annually about 10,000 t of frozen seafood products, such as herring and mackerel from EU countries (mainly Netherlands and UK), hake from Argentina and Peru, hoki from Chile, red cod from New Zealand, and salmon from USA. We bring these goods in bulk or containerised into coldstore in the Netherlands and distribute them to clients. About 70% goes to the former Eastern bloc and the rest into Western Europe.

P.I.: What changes have you noticed since Austria joined the EU trade of sea-products in Europe?

A.J.K.: The main change has been more and more paperwork, with less importance attached to the commodity - the fish being traded. Presently the EU is more concerned with what is written on paper rather than what is really in the box. Veterinary/health documents from many exporting countries are not always in good order, and veterinary inspectors in the EU countries sometimes prohibit entry of some cargo without inspection of the goods only because of errors in the documents.

P.I.: How would you propose to improve fish quality and, more generally, the trade in sea products within the EU?

A.J.K.: As we are working with a natural product, we will never get it perfect (but what is perfect?). I think that the quality of most products is already at such a high level that further improvements are hard to make. Yet the hygiene practices could be improved in some companies through education of the workers who are directly handling the products.

Concerning the trade in sea products in Europe, I think that EU officials should listen more to the producers and traders themselves, and be more flexible, rather than follow the regulations from Brussels. I would like to see a working committee created, made up of producers, traders, and EU officials, to discuss problems and proposals associated with trade, and to find practical solutions to some of the issues at stake.





Newsflash

On 18 March, Mrs Bonino launched the first European fish campaign. The aim of the campaign, which will take place throughout 1997, is to inform European consumers of the dietary benefits of sea products and promote responsible consumption, in particular making people aware of and appreciate less noble species whose stocks have not been overexploited.

The FIGF will ensure the financing of the campaign at a value of 1.7 million Ecus.

PESCA Info will provide more detailed information on this campaign and programmes to be carried out in a later issue.

This column is available to you if you wish to announce various events or actions likely to interest the fishing world.

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