




European Commission

No 36 November 2007

# Fisheries and aquaculture in Europe

 Fisheries stakeholders have their say



 **Bulgaria:**  
redirecting the sector's potential

 **Protecting**  
fragile ecosystems

# [Calendar

## Shows and exhibitions

- **ICCAT, regular meeting of the parties, Antalya (Turkey), 9-18 November 2007**  
The meeting will lay down guidelines, based on the recommendations of the scientific board, for the management of Atlantic and Mediterranean tuna stocks and will review conservation measures adopted for the main endangered stocks of the region (bluefin tuna, albacore, etc.).

> **For more information:**

Tel: +34 91 416 56 00  
E-mail: [info@iccat.int](mailto:info@iccat.int)  
Website: [www.iccat.int](http://www.iccat.int)

- **NEAFC, annual meeting, London (United Kingdom), 12-16 November 2007**

States with fleets operating in the northeast Atlantic will gather for the yearly meeting of their regional fisheries organisation (RFO) of establish guidelines for stock management, based on the recommendations of the scientific committee.

> **For more information:**

Tel: +44 207 631 00 16  
E-mail: [info@neafo.org](mailto:info@neafo.org)  
Website: [www.neafo.org](http://www.neafo.org)

- **WCPFC, regular session, Tumon (Guam, United States), 3-7 December 2007**  
Parties of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, a recently established tuna RFO, will review resource management measures at their annual meeting.

> **For more information:**

Tel: +691 320 1992  
E-mail: [wcpfc@mail.fm](mailto:wcpfc@mail.fm)  
Website: [www.wcpfc.int](http://www.wcpfc.int)

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#### Note to readers

We welcome your comments or suggestions at the following address:  
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Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 200 – B-1049 Brussels  
or by fax to: (+ 32) 2 299 30 40 with reference to *Fisheries and aquaculture in Europe*. E-mail: [fisheries-magazine@ec.europa.eu](mailto:fisheries-magazine@ec.europa.eu)

For further information on fisheries and maritime affairs, please consult the following sites:

[http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_barroso/borg/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/borg/index_en.htm)

<http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries>

<http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs>

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## Consultation of interested parties: pillar of a new governance

In today's increasingly complex societies, it is no longer possible to adopt decisions without being tuned in to the realities experienced by the players concerned. At the European level, the geographical expanse as well as the full range of social, economic and cultural situations must also be taken into account. That is why the consultation of interested parties during the preparation of new regulations represents one of the pillars of the 'new governance' recommended by the European Commission.

In the fisheries sector, the great variety of ecosystems, pollution levels, situations of fish stocks, etc. come on top of geographical, social and cultural differences. As a result, the importance attached to consultation is nothing new in the management of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Indeed, the Advisory Committee on Fisheries (which today also covers aquaculture), whose aim is to provide support for the development of the CFP by issuing opinions, was created in the early 70s.

Consultation arrangements have obviously evolved over time to make the exercise more effective and in keeping with developments in the sector. When assessing the Common Fisheries Policy in preparation for its 2002 reform, it became obvious to European officials that a more effective CFP would require more innovation and boldness, meaning closer involvement of players in the field upstream from policy-making, as proposals are put together. In time, such involvement would guarantee better application of the decisions adopted.

Therefore all players are now systematically consulted when policies and regulations are still on the drawing board. To take just a few very recent examples, consultations have been held on a future maritime policy for the Union, illegal fishing, aquaculture and rights-based fisheries management (the latter consultation is still under way).

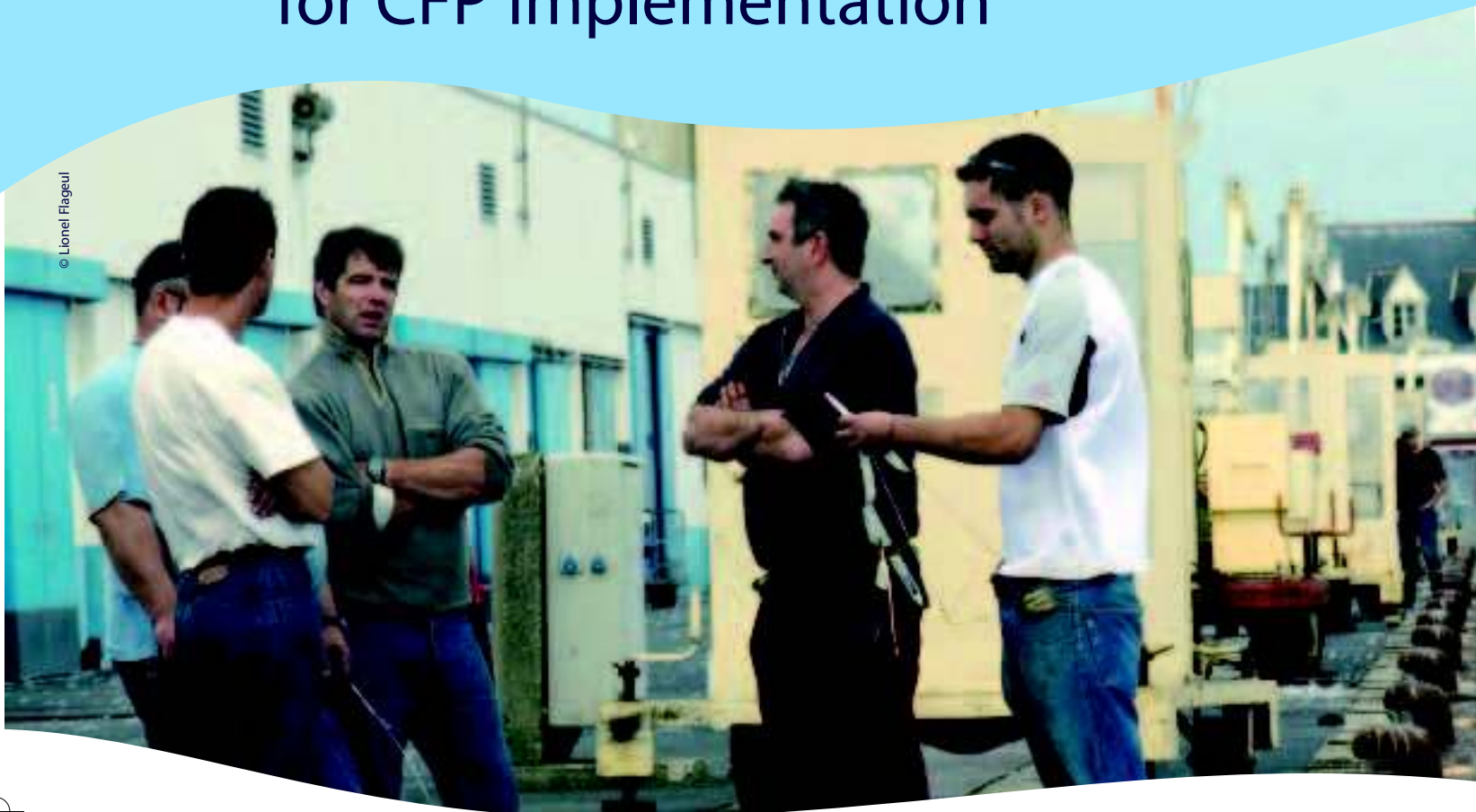
The creation of Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) was one of the most important and innovative measures of that reform. The Commission took a gamble: it brought around the same table the professionals experiencing similar problems and other fisheries stakeholders – e.g. environmental and consumer associations, women's organisations and recreational fishing groups – and gave these structures not only real advisory power, but also the power of initiative. Yet that gamble is paying off: the RACs will soon all be in place and their first opinions and initiatives have already produced very concrete results.

Of course, this type of governance also has its limits. The opinions and suggestions submitted cannot be taken on board if they run counter to the fundamental objectives of the CFP. What is more, consultation must single out the collective interest that has to steer proposals, namely protecting stocks and marine ecosystems and, more generally, developing economically, socially and environmentally sustainable fisheries.

The Editor



# ○ Consultation, a vital aspect for CFP implementation



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The Commission's consultations result in a high level of participation by the different players in the sector. To nurture their recommendation on the long-term plan for cod, the North Sea RAC and the North-western Waters RAC organised an important colloquium on the management of these stocks in March 2007.

**Consultation of interested parties, ongoing dialogue, impact assessment, adaptation of policies to the realities in the field, and transparency: today, these principles constitute the modern governance methods which are gradually becoming imperative in all European policies and in many Member States. The Common Fisheries Policy is perfectly aligned with this movement.**

**For** the past several years, the European Commission has been putting in place an ambitious 'better regulation' strategy aimed at simplifying and updating the regulatory environment of the Community. The initiative is based on different types of measures:

- systematic evaluation of the economic, social and environmental impact of the Commission's major proposals;
- implementation of a simplification programme for existing legislation;
- reduction of administrative burdens;
- wide consultation of stakeholders prior to implementation of a strategy or important legislation.

These different types of measures are all put into practice in the context of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP); consultation of parties, which has been in place for a long time, is particularly well developed.

## **A long-standing practice**

One of the first steps in this direction was the introduction of the Advisory Committee on Fisheries in the early 1970s. It was modernised in 1999: new sectors and interest groups (aquaculture, non-governmental organisations, scientists) were invited to participate in the work of the committee, which has since been renamed the Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture (ACFA). The ACFA is composed of 21 members representing different interests, ranging from vessel owners and fishermen to fish farmers, shellfish farmers, processors and traders, and relevant non-governmental organisations. The Commission consults the committee on measures related to the CFP and other policies affecting the sector. The ACFA may also issue opinions on its own initiative.

With this reform of the ACFA, the role of professional organisations at European level was reinforced. They were given funding to enable them to prepare participation in the committee meetings with their members from the different Member States. Initiatives were also taken to ensure that stakeholders are better informed about legislative proposals in the making, about scientific advice and about other elements of interest to the sector.

Over the years, other consultation initiatives have also been launched: regional workshops on conservation issues, public hearings on key areas of the CFP such as monitoring and fleet capacity (in 2000), as well as an all-encompassing consultation on the CFP reform brought to successful conclusion in 2002, including a questionnaire sent to 350 fisheries organisations, regional meetings with stakeholders in the Member States and a hearing in which some 400 stakeholder representatives took part. These are just a few examples.

### Systematic consultations

In the last few years, the consultation of interested parties has become a systematic element of the preparation of new CFP measures. Several consultations have been held just in the last few months confirming the keen interest of the sector and of other players in this type of initiative.

For example, the consultation on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing gave rise to contributions from different parties (from NGOs like Greenpeace and WWF to fishermen's associations, research institutes, Member States and international organisations such as the World Bank). Other recent examples include the consultations held on development opportunities of Community aquaculture and on rights-based fisheries management.

At a more general level, but also relevant to the CFP, the Green Paper on a Maritime Policy for the European Union was the subject of consultation prior to its drafting and subsequently on its content. This far-reaching exercise, which concluded on 30 June, brought in over 500 written contributions from different trade interests and led to the organisation of over 200 events and conferences.

### RACs: in the front line of new governance

Yet one of the most important and innovative consultation initiatives was the creation of the Regional Advisory Councils (RACs). The launch of this new type of advisory bodies was one of the key measures of the 2002 CFP reform: the Commission wished to involve fisheries professionals and other players more closely in the development of fisheries management measures so as to factor in more effectively the regional and local realities or those linked to specific types of fisheries. It also wanted to encourage dialogue between the different parties concerned (fishermen, vessel owners, processors and traders, fish farmers, women's fisheries groups, environmental organisations and so on), and between the stakeholders, scientists as well as institutions.

It was consequently decided to establish regional advisory bodies, whose area of competence covers either certain geographical zones or specific fisheries with comparable operating conditions. They are made up of professionals from the fisheries sector in the wide sense and of representatives of the different interest groups concerned with fishing activities, such as environmental defence

and consumer protection groups, women's organisations or representatives of recreational fishermen. Their role is to submit opinions to the Commission and the Member States on different aspects of fisheries management. Their opinions are issued either on a specific request or on their own initiative. The Council decision establishing the RACs set up seven geographical or fisheries zones to be covered by these advisory bodies: North Sea, Baltic Sea, Mediterranean Sea, North-western waters (from the English Channel to Iceland), South-western waters (from the Bay of Biscay to the Canary Islands), pelagic stocks and high seas fisheries (beyond EU waters). Six are operational at present. The Council decision also establishes a yearly financial contribution from the EU budget.

Together with the ACFA, the RACs quickly became essential partners for the Commission, which keeps them informed and seeks their opinion when drafting proposals. The RACs have put out some 60 recommendations since their start-up in 2004. Most have been in response to requests from the Commission, but the RACs also make use of their right of initiative. In the latter case, they call on the Commission to address an issue they would like to see taken under consideration.

As well as advising the Commission, the RACs have become structures for debate where representatives of the sector can engage in dialogue with other players covering similar areas within the sector. Experiences and information now circulate more readily from one bank of the Baltic to the other or from one North Sea port to the next. The different interests at stake are expressed and contribute to drawing up opinions to be handed in to the institutions. Scientists are invited to contribute to this work and the different parties benefit from each others' experiences.

### Input from scientists

To protect their independence, scientific institutions are not full members of the RACs. However, one of the aims of the RACs is precisely to improve dialogue between the sector and scientists. Accordingly, from the time these bodies were first created, representatives of the International Council for Exploration of the Sea (ICES), for example, have regularly taken part in their work as observers or invited experts. These exchanges led up to an initial ICES-RAC meeting in Copenhagen in February 2006, where it was agreed to convene an annual meeting to assess the evolution of their relations (the second meeting took place in January 2007). Since then, there have been numerous examples of cooperation: the RACs are invited to the ICES annual scientific meetings, the possibility of involving fishermen more closely in data collection is discussed, analysis is under way on how to mainstream the RACs into the process of drafting ICES recommendations for submission to the European Commission, and so on. Based on proposals drawn up by certain RACs, the Commission asked the ICES to carry out two studies on specific issues.



The RAC allows constructive discussion among all the partners represented, who come from very different backgrounds (the sector, NGOs, fish farmers, etc.), but who all have to deal with some of the same fisheries management issues.

### Real expectations

As with other consultation mechanisms, experience demonstrates that the parties concerned have real expectations. The example of revision of the cod recovery plan, for which the RACs concerned were invited to submit their opinion to the European Commission, is particularly interesting. To nurture their recommendation and make it as constructive as possible, the North Sea RAC and the South-western waters RAC decided to team up and organised a colloquium on the management of these stocks. It was held in March 2007 in Edinburgh, Scotland. Registration forms poured in and the registration process had to be closed three months before the event, which was an outstanding success.

### Visible benefits

The consultation of interested parties has consequently become firmly anchored in the Common Fisheries Policy and the main benefits of this practice are being seen. First, consultation provides valuable assistance for the development of rules adapted to the realities on the ground. In a number of cases, Community proposals have been adapted or changed as a result of opinions expressed during consultations or by RACs. Initiatives, suggestions and opinions are regularly reviewed and taken into account: players feel more involved in policy-making and would like to see their involvement go even further. There is also a better understanding on behalf of the sector in regards to the need for certain conservation measures recommended by the institutions, in the interest of a sustainable economic activity in the fisheries sector. In the case of the RACs, a new dynamic between players has developed: there is far more sharing of information and best practice, and confidence between stakeholders and scientists is growing.



## Cooperation with scientists: an effective choice

**The opinion of the North Sea RAC on the future of the Shetland Box is a good illustration of the contribution resulting from good collaboration between the RACs and scientists. The box aims to maintain a protection zone for juvenile cod and haddock. A number of members of the North Sea RAC voiced doubts over the effectiveness and usefulness of maintaining the box. Consequently, in July 2005, its Demersal Working Group reviewed the issue to determine the advisability of maintaining the restricted access scheme or of easing the restrictions. The RAC members consulted different scientists and experts in the field.**

**This** preliminary work resulted in an extremely qualified opinion, quite close to the Commission's view: it confirmed the importance of maintaining the protection zone, but underlined the lack of precise data on the positive effects of the box. The RAC therefore recommended that the box should continue on a provisional basis pending the conclusions of a thorough scientific evaluation. The Commission had proposed to maintain the restricted access scheme for an additional three-year period and to continue evaluations.

### Many spontaneous contributions

With 13 opinions and recommendations issued since its creation, the Pelagic RAC holds the record in terms of the number of own-initiative opinions submitted to the Commission. The subjects are quite varied, ranging from a technical recommendation on pelagic trawl cod ends to a position on regulations concerning residues of dioxins and PCB or opinions on measures for the management of mackerel, sprat and herring.

Since their creation, the RACs have submitted some 30 unsolicited opinions on different subjects, most related to the management of sensitive stocks. This demonstrates the necessity of such bodies and their attentiveness to the evolution of the Common Fisheries Policy.

Since the ACFA has been around much longer, it would be difficult to draw up a full list of its own-initiative interventions, but over the past two years it has intervened on all the important issues impacting on the Common Fisheries Policy: maximum sustainable yield, fishing possibilities, simplification, discards, illegal fishing, etc.

Meeting reports and the opinions of the ACFA, as well as links to the sites of the different RACs are available on the DG Fisheries and Maritime Affairs site:

[http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/governance\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/governance_en.htm)

### • Iain MacSween

*Chairman of the Pelagic Stocks RAC*

When he was elected Chairman of the Pelagic RAC two years ago, Iain MacSween already had a lot of experience in representation. For years, he has headed the Scottish Fishermen's Organisation. Yet he recognises that the job he does in the RAC is very different.

*"For small pelagic stocks, we concentrate on long-term management, whereas the work of fishermen's organisations is made up of many different things. In any case, it is very positive and very encouraging. The RAC allows us to hold constructive talks with other partners such as NGOs and to work out common solutions to propose to the Commission. Obviously, it isn't easy. But it obliges partners to engage in a healthy debate and to review their positions constantly."*

The chairman acknowledges that his task is made easier by a situation that is generally free of conflicts. Most of the pelagic stocks covered by the RAC are in a relatively good state and the organisation does not have to deal with extremely sensitive issues, unlike its North Sea counterpart, which has to adopt a position in regards to managing scarce resources.

### • Victor Badiola

*Chairman of the South-Western Waters RACs*

On 29 June 2007, the South-western Waters RAC held its inaugural meeting in Lorient, chaired by Victor Badiola, elected chairman on 11 April. In spite of difficulties encountered in setting up the RAC due to divergences between Spain and France, the new chairman is very confident and optimistic in the face of the diversity of the tasks ahead: *"improving fisheries management and the TACs and quotas system, working on the question of climate change and ensuring sustainable stock management."*

He admits that there are problems related to the limited number of seats for representatives of the catch sector (16) compared to the number of countries represented (five), and a tight budget for translation, which concerns four languages (English, French, Portuguese and Spanish), and travel. Those points need to be discussed with the European Commission, along with his goal of *"improving cooperation between the different RACs to allow us to present common positions."* Badiola has already developed close contacts with some of the other RAC chairmen and intends to do the same with the others.

## North Sea RAC

**Creation:** 1 November 2004.

**Seat:** Aberdeen, United Kingdom.

**States concerned:** 9 – Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Spain, France, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and United Kingdom.

**Chairman:** Hugo Andersson.

The North Sea RAC has set up four working groups. Two are directly related to resource management: one focuses on **demersal stocks and flat fish** and the other on the **Kattegat & Skagerrak**. The other two working groups have wider competences. The **socio-economic** group reviews the impact of decisions on the sector's economic health and the **spatial planning** group focuses on environmental matters affecting protection zones and fishing restrictions.

## Pelagic Stocks RAC

**Creation:** 16 August 2005.

**Seat:** Rijswijk, Netherlands.

**States concerned:** 10 – Denmark, Germany, Spain, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden and United Kingdom.

**Chairman:** Iain MacSween.

This RAC has no specific geographical boundaries, but focuses instead on small pelagic fisheries in all Community waters, except for the Mediterranean and the Baltic. It covers fishing for human consumption and industrial fishing (catches processed into fish oil and meal). The work is divided up between two working groups based on target species, one dealing with **mackerel and herring** and the other with **other species** (blue whiting, horse mackerel, sand eels, sprat, etc.).

## North-Western Waters RAC

**Creation:** 26 September 2005.

**Seat:** Dublin, Ireland.

**States concerned:** 6 – Belgium, Spain, France, Ireland, Netherlands and United Kingdom.

**Chairman:** Sam Lambourn.

This RAC deals with fisheries in EU waters situated west of the British Isles, a zone accounting for a large share of catches of deep-water species. Its work is organised on a strictly geographical level, with four working groups covering the four sub-divisions: **West Scotland, West Ireland/Celtic Sea, English Channel** and **Irish Sea**.

## Baltic Sea RAC

**Creation:** 13 March 2006.

**Seat:** Copenhagen, Denmark.

**States concerned:** 8 – Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland and Sweden.

**Chairman:** Reine Johansson.

Created a year and a half after the 2004 enlargement, which brought the Baltic States and Poland into the European Union, this RAC plays an important role in integrating these new players into the Common Fisheries Policy. Unlike the other RACs, its way of organising its work was not decided immediately, but after discussions by its Executive Committee. Three groups were set up, based on the type of fishery: **demersal** (cod, flat fish), **pelagic** (sprat, herring) and **salmonids** (trout, salmon).

## Long Distance Fleet RAC

**Creation:** 30 March 2007.

**Seat:** Madrid, Spain.

**States concerned:** 12 – Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and United Kingdom.

**Chairman:** Antonio Cabral.

This RAC deals with fishing activities taking place beyond EU waters, namely in high seas fisheries, whether or not these are managed by regional fisheries organisations (RFOs), and in the exclusive economic zones of non-EU states with which the European Union has signed fisheries agreements. It therefore covers the big tropical tuna fleets, as well as the freezer fleets active in the northern and southern Atlantic, and small-scale Spanish fleets operating off the coast of west Africa. The work of the Executive Committee was divided up among five groups, in terms of the institutional framework of the fishery: the first focuses on **tuna RFOs** (with the exception of bluefin tuna, which comes under the Mediterranean RAC); the second deals with **RFOs and Nordic fishing agreements** (Norway, Iceland, Faeroe Islands, Greenland); the third handles **fisheries agreements** with the Southern countries; the fourth handles **other international zones**, whether or not covered by RFOs; and a fifth working group addresses **horizontal matters**.

## South-Western Waters RAC

**Creation:** 9 April 2007.

**Seat:** Lorient, France.

**States concerned:** 5 – Belgium, Spain, France, Portugal and Netherlands.

**Chairman:** Victor Badiola.

The newest RAC covers the huge expanse of waters stretching from south-western Brittany to the Azores, Madeira and Canary Islands. Its work is organised primarily according to type of fishery, with two working groups based on geographical zones: **Bay of Biscay** (apart from small pelagic stocks) and **outermost regions** (Azores, Madeira, Canary Islands). The other groups deal with **pelagic fishing, tuna fishing, Spanish and Portuguese coastal fishing, traditional fishing** and **deep-water fishing**.





Today, the Bulgarian fleet is made up of over 2 200 vessels, mostly small boats used for small-scale fishing, but also 85 vessels over 12 metres long.

## Fishing in Bulgaria: from obstacles to opportunities

**Similar to Romania, featured in our last issue, Bulgaria became a member of the European Union on January 1, 2007. Its fishing and aquaculture activities, after declining sharply for a number of years, are still in a phase of transition and reorientation.**

**From** 1965 to 1990, Bulgaria headed a large high-seas fleet active in the Atlantic Ocean. Due to various difficulties, however, from the early 1990s Bulgarian sea fisheries refocused on the Black Sea, in the country's coastal zone. The Bulgarian fleet is made up of over 2 200 vessels at present<sup>(1)</sup>, mostly small boats used for small-scale fishing, but also 85 vessels over 12 metres long.

### Sprat and *Rapana*

In 2005, sea fishing amounted to 17 620 tonnes. Discussions between neighbouring states are in the preliminary stage (the EU for Romania and Bulgaria, as well as Ukraine, Russia, Georgia and Turkey) for the establishment of a Black Sea resource management and fisheries control policy.

The sea fishing sector currently employs 3 430 fishermen. The two main resources are sprat and sea snail, which account for some 90% of total sea catch.

Sprat (7 200 tonnes in 2005) is caught for human consumption using big trawlers. Other small pelagic species are also caught, in much smaller quantities, including anchovy, horse mackerel, whiting and Black Sea shad (a local herring species that also swims back up the Danube). The small pelagics are sold whole (fresh or frozen) or processed locally (curing or preserves) by a few companies still in operation, which also import sprat from the Baltic.

*Rapana venosa* (8 200 tonnes in 2005) is a snail weighing in at nearly half a kilo. It was introduced accidentally in the 1940s, probably by a few specimens that were detached from the hull of a vessel coming from their native waters, namely the Yellow Sea, East China Sea or Sea of Japan. The species developed in the Black Sea and has become a very profitable resource. In Bulgaria, the snails are fished on a small scale by divers who gather them by hand. They are then processed by a few companies that cook its flesh, vacuum pack it and ship it to Japan.

The other species caught in non-industrial fishing are primarily bluefish, pelamid, spurdog and Black Sea turbot. For the latter species, a national total allowable catch is set yearly to ease pressure on this extremely profitable resource<sup>(2)</sup>. For the year 2008, the European Commission is considering proposing TACs and quotas for turbot and sprat.

### Inland fisheries and aquaculture

Inland fisheries are an important activity for certain communities situated along the Danube, the country's northern border. Some 1 600 fishermen make a living from this activity. Annual catches in the Danube amount to around 500 tonnes of different species: shad, sturgeon, catfish and carp. Another 2 000 tonnes of carp are caught in lakes and ponds throughout the country.

Aquaculture, which employs 5 000 people, produced 3 200 tonnes in 2005. It focuses mainly on freshwater species and the bulk of its production is carp, a traditional farmed fish in central Europe. Carp and trout production alone already employs 250 people. However, local know-how is such that the activity can be developed further and diversified into other species, such as rainbow trout, sea trout, speckled trout, whitefish, crayfish and frogs. Marine aquaculture is also starting to develop, with a small production of Mediterranean type mussels (200 tonnes a year).

(1) The figures are taken from the Operational Programme submitted by Bulgaria to the Commission under the European Fisheries Fund.  
(2) See *Fishing and Aquaculture in Europe*, No 35, pp. 10-11.

## In the news

# The European Union comes to the aid of threatened marine ecosystems

**Up until the mid-1980s, deep seabeds were not exploited by the fishing industry. With the decline in stocks in traditional zones, however, fleets have been targeting new species living at great depths on the high seas, such as blue ling, orange roughy, round-nose grenadier, black scabbardfish and so on. Meanwhile, increasingly sophisticated observation techniques have enabled scientists to learn more about these deep seabeds, which were previously thought to be huge cold deserts. In fact, they are proving to be veritable virgin forests urgently in need of protection.**

**Until** not long ago, only the corals of warm shallow waters were well known. The discovery of cold-water coral reefs at great depths was a huge surprise even to the scientific community. Countless species live at depths of up to over 2 000 metres, amongst corals that look like groves and sometimes like trees towering dozens of metres high.

Fish that live in extreme conditions – a near-total absence of light, high pressure and little water movement – are particularly vulnerable. While they have a very long life expectancy (25 years for blue ling, 80 years for grenadier and 150 years for orange roughy), their growth and reproductive cycles are very slow – orange roughy reaches sexual maturity at around 20 to 30 years of age. What is more, these species are particularly vulnerable to disruptions to their ecosystem.

This ecosystem is feeling the devastating impact of the use of certain fishing gears. The steel rollers and panels of bottom trawls, for example, can destroy coral concretions, which have a very crumbly limestone structure. Some findings show that a single vessel can damage up to 33 km<sup>2</sup> of seabed in two weeks at sea. In 2002, environmental non-governmental organisations began to call for a moratorium on bottom trawling on the high seas.

### The European Union takes action

In 2002, the European Union reformed its Common Fisheries Policy. Among other recommendations, it called for an ecosystem approach to fisheries management, namely an approach that takes into account not only the state stocks, but also the protection of their environment. This commitment was confirmed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002.

Alerted by the growing number of scientific studies bringing to light the fragility of these deep seabeds, the European Union

made a commitment to eradicate destructive fishing practices. It began by taking action in its own waters, shutting down fisheries in the coral-rich zones of the Atlantic: in the Darwin Mounds in 2004, and in the Azores, Madeira and Canary Islands in 2005.

The European Union also decided to act at international level, particularly through regional fisheries organisations (RFOs). It encouraged these organisations to adopt an ecosystem approach to fisheries management. From 2004 to 2006, it led a very active campaign in the RFOs aimed at banning fishing activities in the zones where deep water corals had been identified.

### United Nations: a balanced solution

The European Union played an equally essential role in the United Nations. As debate swelled on a moratorium on bottom trawling, the EU called for a more consensual and effective measure, while demanding strict regulation of this type of fishery. This position, defended by the European Union in a report submitted to the United Nations in April of 2006, drew a very favourable reaction.

In the autumn of 2006, the United Nations General Assembly nevertheless tabled a draft resolution establishing a moratorium on deep-water fishing. This was not an acceptable solution for the European Union. The debates had brought to light that a moratorium would apply only to the zones where a regional fisheries organisation regulating non-tuna species did not exist.



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The European Commission aims to protect fragile deep-water ecosystems with its proposal for a strict regulation on bottom trawling.

The measure would be hard-hitting for one zone in particular: the south-west Atlantic, where a large number of EU fishing vessels operate. In that zone, European Union vessels do very little deep-water fishing. They catch hake and squid on the continental shelf, at depths rarely over 200 metres. While there is an obvious need to ensure that these vessels avoid great depths or high-risk areas, the total halt of this fishing activity would be disproportionate and difficult to justify.

A number of other countries, including China, Japan, Canada, Iceland and Russia, were also opposed to such a radical measure. The resolution could have been pushed through by means of a simple majority vote. In that case, however, it would have carried little weight. With this type of non-binding regulation, all states must agree to play by the rules, especially in a context where even a few vessels can cause irreparable damage. That is why the European Union defended a 'balanced' position: no moratorium, but a solution that responds to the gravity of the problem, without penalising the fishermen who do not damage the rich resources of the deep seabed.

The United Nations Resolution on Sustainable Fisheries, adopted by consensus in December 2006, recommends that by the end of 2008, states and RFOs prohibit all activity endangering these fragile marine ecosystems, in accordance with the precautionary approach. The totally innovative element in terms of fisheries management is that the states are asked to authorise fishing only once the potential impacts of the activity in question have been assessed. Accordingly, they must require their fishermen to transmit their fishing plans before going out to sea. The RFOs are invited to implement similar measures, ensuring that vessels authorised to fish in their zone of competence participate in scientific research through exploratory fisheries, protect the identified deep-water ecosystems and stop fishing in fragile zones.

### Application to the EU fleet

The European Commission now proposes to give the force of law to these recommendations by adopting them in the form of a regulation. This autumn, it presented a communication on all the actions it intends to take. First, it will continue the work begun years ago in the RFOs to develop the ecosystem approach: measures have already been taken, since the NAFO (Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organisation) and SEAFO (South East Atlantic Fisheries Organisation) have closed fishing zones and put in place a system of exploratory fisheries and data collection. A system has also been introduced by the GFCM (Mediterranean). The Commission, moreover, continues to play a leading role in collecting and transmitting to the FAO data on deep seabed ecosystems, so that all these organisations and the states participating in deep-water fisheries can coordinate their conservation efforts.

Lastly, it proposes to take measures in non-EU waters not covered by a regional fisheries organisation, like the southwest Atlantic. The Commission will come forward with a regulation applying to vessels flying the flag of any of the EU Member States: bottom trawling will be subject to a licensing requirement and permits will only be issued after potential impacts have been assessed, on the basis of fishing plans. It will also propose to prohibit, as a precautionary measure, the deployment of fishing gear at depths of over 1 000 metres. Scientific observers aboard vessels will be charged with drawing up precise reports on the nature of catches, the depth of use of nets and the existence of corals.

All these strict measures aim to protect the exceptional and – until only recently – unknown biodiversity of the deep seabeds.



# [ In brief

## > Commission calls for more determination in setting TACs and quotas for 2008

In its annual policy statement, as a prelude to the consultations that will culminate in the establishment of fishing possibilities for 2008, the European Commission paints a realistic picture of the state of stocks in Community waters. While certain long-term plans are starting to have an impact on hake (northern waters), sole (Bay of Biscay), haddock (North Sea), mackerel and saithe, 80% of stocks are still outside safe biological limits. That is not very reassuring, particularly when considering the situation in terms of the objectives of maximum sustainable yield (MSY). Only three of 33 stocks meet the criteria to which the European Union committed itself in Johannesburg in 2002. (Maximum sustainable yield refers to the level of fishing resulting in the highest yield without endangering catches for subsequent years).

The reason for the above mentioned situation is well known. Every year, the annual catch limits agreed by the Council of Fisheries Ministers exceed those recommended by scientific institutions. The difference can range from 42 to 57%. In its statement, the Commission therefore calls on stakeholders and on Member States to show greater determination in setting fishing possibilities for 2008 and in enforcing them. The Commission proposes, as it did last year, to establish fishing possibilities in terms of the level of overexploitation of the stock:

- TACs for stocks exploited within safe biological limits will be set so as to avoid moving away from maximum sustainable yield conditions, as discussions continue on ways of moving closer to that objective, and simultaneously limiting TAC increases or decreases to 15%.

- For overexploited stocks, the Commission will propose TACs in conformity with scientific recommendations, trying not to increase or decrease them by more than 15% where the situation allows.
- Stocks covered by long-term plans will be assigned TACs that conform to those determined under the plans.
- TACs for species with short life cycles (North Sea sand eel and sprat, and Bay of Biscay anchovy) will be determined by an evaluation in the course of the year, in terms of the level of recruitment.
- For stocks whose state is not known, the Commission will adopt a precautionary approach aimed at maintaining the fishery at its present level without increasing it. The Commission also stresses the importance of taking account of scientific recommendations in cases where a lack of data makes mathematical analyses impossible.

This statement marks the launch of consultations at sector and at Member States levels on TACs and quotas for 2008. Based on these consultations the Commission will draw up its proposals this autumn.

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