

# European Artisanal Fishermen's Congress - 2012

The small-scale, coastal fishermen and shellfish harvesters of Europe

## Joint declaration of European artisanal and low impact fishers and shellfish harvesters

November 2012

### **We, the artisanal and low impact fishers and shellfish harvesters of Europe...**

... have come together to discuss our plight and to petition decision-makers in the European Union (EU) to protect our livelihoods, communities and heritage. We firmly believe that for Europe's fisheries to thrive, the new Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) needs to stop unsustainable fishing and place artisanal and low-impact fishers at the centre of Europe's fishing future.

Our businesses and livelihoods have always depended on the fish stocks in our local fishing grounds. Unlike larger vessels, we cannot shift into new fishing grounds when ours are being overfished. Today, our work is threatened by human pressure on coastal areas, including unsustainable fishing, and changing marine ecosystems.

We are good stewards of the environment where we have worked for centuries, regulating our fishing effort according to the available stocks, to preserve our business and way of life. We have always adapted to the particularities of our fishing grounds by adjusting our techniques, by focussing on different species and by taking into account the seasonal biological pattern of fish. Our work has a comparatively low environmental impact on marine habitats and generates only small amounts of discards.

We use selective, low impact fishing gear. The owner works on the fishing vessel and we respect management rules or, if such rules are absent or insufficient, we apply self-imposed measures to protect the fish resources and their habitats. This way of working creates a firm social, cultural and economic link with our communities.

We have an important role to play in the seafood market, as we are able to supply fresh, high quality, diverse, locally-caught products, respecting the seasonal biological patterns of species, and often delivering straight to the consumer.

We represent around 80% of the EU's fishing fleet by vessel number. In the UK, for instance, we make up more than half of the full-time workforce at sea. Our businesses also generate many shore-based ancillary jobs.

Since the CFP's inception, we have suffered from an unjust and imbalanced policy framework: the majority of fishing quotas and EU subsidies have been funnelled to large-scale fishing operations across Europe, increasing the catching capacity of the offshore fleet, whilst at the same time disenfranchising and marginalising small-scale, sustainable fishing operations. It is outrageous that so much support is given to high-impact operators who often use short-term employment contracts and unskilled labour and provide little real benefit to local communities. Meanwhile, many of us are losing our jobs or are forced to look for a second income.

We do not feel adequately represented by our national governments, representatives of the fishing sector in Brussels, nor by the European Union.

We firmly believe that Europe's fishing future lies in the sustainable, low-impact coastal fishing operations that we practice.

Currently, more than 60% of European fish stocks are fished at or beyond sustainable limits. Only if the CFP advocates a shift away from unselective, high-impact and fuel intensive fishing methods can we recover

Europe's fish stocks, continue to supply sustainably caught seafood and ensure a durable source of income for the fishing sector, as well as for the coastal communities which depend on it.

It is high time to put Europe's sustainable, artisanal and low-impact fishers at the heart of the future CFP. We ask EU decision-makers to:

- 1) **Grant the right to fish to those who fish sustainably;**
- 2) **Reduce fleet overcapacity where it exists, while preserving jobs in artisanal, low impact fisheries;**
- 3) **End harmful subsidies and unsustainable and destructive practices;**
- 4) **Restore the health of our seas in Europe and the rest of the world.**

### **We, the European artisanal and low impact fishers ...**

... want to leave a legacy of healthy seas and oceans in a world where there is less fishing, but better fishing. We want our sons and daughters to fish in healthy oceans with thriving fish stocks and to eat better quality fish than most people eat today. We, the majority of fishers who are stewards of the marine environment, demand that our collective voices are heard before it is too late.

### **Detailed considerations for EU decision-makers**

#### **1) Grant the right to fish to those who fish sustainably**

The CFP must grant priority access to those fishers who have the least impact on the environment and add the most value to local fishing activities and communities. **Access to fish must be linked to the performance of individual operators based on environmental, social, and economic criteria. Fishers that use sustainable practices, with minimum by-catch, a high employment rate with respect to the volume of catch and less dependence on subsidies and fuel must be favoured.** In this way, fishing-related employment can be sustained and the benefits from fishing activity spread more widely around coastal communities.

The CFP must acknowledge that quota (the right to fish) is a public good, **not private property**, and allocate fishing opportunities in a way which rewards sustainable fishing methods. Consequently **we are against transferable fishing concessions (TFCs)**, a system which effectively privatises access to fishing opportunities and is likely to consolidate marine resources in the hands of fewer, more powerful players. We are against the privatisation of the sea and its resources.

#### **2) Reduce overcapacity where it exists, without putting artisanal, low impact fishers out of business**

It is estimated that EU fishing fleets can, in many cases, exert fishing pressure on stocks that is two to three times the sustainable level. The new CFP must include a detailed inventory of overcapacity, ensuring that it is assessed in relation to the state of stocks in target fisheries. Efforts to measure fishing capacity must consider the ability of a vessel or fleet to catch fish and not just the number, size and engine power of vessels.

EU member states must urgently put in place action plans to reduce fishing capacity, where overcapacity exists, and shift capacity into low-impact fishing methods without exceeding sustainable levels of fishing pressure. These efforts should be closely aligned with regional fisheries management plans and ensure that we do not merely export the overfishing and overcapacity problems to fishing grounds outside EU waters. There are many misguided cases of public money being used simultaneously to scrap vessels and to renew part of

the fleet, resulting in a net increase of fishing capacity, particularly in the high-impact part of the fleet, and stock depletion.

**We stress the need to fish less at European level, but this must not happen to the disadvantage of those using more sustainable practices. The new CFP must guarantee a fishing sector that prioritises quality over quantity: fishing less, but more intelligently.**

### **3) End harmful subsidies and unsustainable fishing practices**

The industrialisation of the fishing sector has resulted in European seas suffering from decades of destructive fishing and overfishing.

The European fleet receives several million Euros in subsidies every year. A big portion of this money is spent on destructive and sometimes even illegal fishing operations. **The new European Marine and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) must instead focus on supporting the transition of fishing communities and operators to a more sustainable approach.**

All European fishermen must strictly follow regulations. Vessels or operators that are caught fishing illegally should not receive future subsidies. The new CFP must strengthen and reinforce monitoring and control measures that must be exercised evenly and fairly across the Union and beyond.

A staggering 1.3 million tonnes of fish are discarded from European vessels in the north east Atlantic every year. The reformed CFP must include clear steps towards **a zero discard objective**, complemented by strict rules on the selectivity, size and weight of, in particular, trawl, dredge and other mobile gears. This would reduce unwanted catches and the hunger for constant increases in engine power. **The EMFF should support the development of more selective fishing practices, encourage collaborative work between fishers and scientists and provide meaningful support for the creation of representative bodies of the low impact artisanal sector.** Destructive fishing methods that exert a harmful impact on the marine environment, like certain forms of heavy mobile gears and the targeting of immature, undersized fish, must be banned. **Those engaging in destructive fishing practices should not be regarded as artisanal, sustainable fishers under the CFP.**

### **4) Restore the health of our seas in Europe and the rest of the world**

**European fisheries management should take into account different local and regional realities and place the artisanal fishing sector at its heart. It should build on the experience and skills of people who are directly linked with the fishery.** Their know-how and empirical knowledge must be valued and made use of in greater collaboration with government regulators, scientific bodies, advisory committees, low impact and artisanal fishermen and other stakeholders within a co-management structure, including the development of sustainable management plans.

Under the new CFP, research on the state of fish stocks and recovery measures must be significantly strengthened, including through increased funding from the EMFF.

**The implementation of an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management, safeguarding the marine environment, should be a prerequisite. Fishing limits should not exceed scientific advice and the new CFP must ensure that by 2015 all fish stocks are recovered to levels above those that can ensure sustainable catches.**

Marine reserves are one of the solutions to protect the marine environment from the impacts of fishing. As for any other conservation measure, their establishment must be undertaken with proper consultation and consideration for the needs of low impact fishers.