



For the attention of Ms Maria Damanaki

European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
European Commission
B - 1049 Brussels

Via e mail

Date: 18.5.14

Reference: Proposal for a Blanket Ban on Drift Nets in EU Waters

Dear Ms Damanaki,

Many have recognised that one of the numerous disasters in European fisheries management under the Common Fisheries Policy in the past has been the broad brush, one size fits all approach that fundamentally failed to distinguish between the activities and impacts of the huge range of fishing gears and methods in use across the Union.

We had hoped that the latest CFP Reform would have addressed this issue head on but your recent statement with regard to the imposition of a blanket ban on the use of drift nets in EU waters clearly illustrates that this is not the case.

Whilst all concerned recognise and revile the use of driftnets in the well-publicised Mediterranean fisheries where extensive lengths of deep nets take an apparently massive by catch of cetaceans, turtles and other non-target species, this form of drift netting is distant, both geographically and metaphorically from the far smaller scale and environmentally acceptable use of drift nets in UK and adjacent waters.

As an inshore fisherman, I, along with thousands of others have used drift nets for many years in pursuit of a range of species and can honestly say that I have had an almost zero mortality rate for anything other than the target species, usually Herring, Mackerel, Salmon or Sprat.

The key elements of this lack of impact have been the relatively short lengths of net involved and the fact that they are almost exclusively accompanied at all times. So even in the event that a non-target species did come into contact with the nets, it was almost always possible to remove it without damage or mortality.

This form of activity has been a widespread and traditional part of coastal fishing for hundreds of years and has not had, almost without exception, any appreciable environmental impact at all.

I am therefore concerned to read your recent comments such as *“drift net fishing with vertical nets is an irresponsible practice”* – this is certainly not the case in our waters and I have watched fishermen take significant care and dare I say gentleness in carefully removing any unintended catch from the nets to ensure no harm came to it, or;

“It is a non-selective fishery which leads to non-targeted catches. It threatens marine wildlife and species which are protected under EU legislation.” To the contrary, responsibly fished drift nets are entirely selective, not just in terms of species but also the size of the individual fish. Like passive netting generally, by setting the mesh size, one can ensure that juveniles are neither caught nor harmed in the fishing operation. At the same time and for the reasons provided above, the methods used traditionally in the UK and other adjacent countries pose no threat to *‘marine wildlife and species which are protected under EU legislation’*. Like many pelagic fisheries, drift netting is a clean fishery, with only the target species being taken.

So we would ask that you urgently review your aspirations with regard to the introduction of any unnecessary and damaging blanket ban to drift netting in general. This method has been and continues to be a vital part of the seasonal fishing activities for a large number of coastal fishers and one that has been carried out for centuries without any significant adverse impact on non-target species.

Whilst no one would pretend that human activities generally do not have some form of often negative impact on the environment, we are after all busily messing up the planet on a collective basis, fishing particularly does appear to be an easy target for the naysayers.

Although we were not aware of the previous consultation on drift netting, (and I note no responses from any other UK based organisations so perhaps the way that these are publicised should be reviewed?) not least as like so many other organisations, we suffer from ‘consultation overload’ and often just do not have the time or resources to respond to every one of them, I note from the responses listed at:

(http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/maritimeaffairs_fisheries/consultations/driftnet/contributions/index_en.htm) that a number of respondents were clearly against such a blanket ban. The moving response from the Cheekpoint Association in Ireland that so clearly illustrates the massive socio economic impacts of the loss of fishing on their local community that should by itself give you pause for thought in relation to EU fisheries management generally, as well as the drift net proposals in particular and its effects on small and vulnerable coastal groups and even Greenpeace Europe’s response makes it abundantly clear that they disagree at a basic level with the proposed ban and recognise the adverse impact it would have on coastal communities. These comments have been echoed more recently by Xavier Pastor, Executive Director of Oceana in Europe so there is clearly a widespread and diverse agreement that the proposals are entirely misplaced.

There are of course a number of responses from those that agree with your view but with the greatest of respect, some of those responses illustrate an almost complete lack of understanding, or at least the lack of will to understand the wider issues.

We would therefore ask that you urgently reconsider the blanket ban proposals that you currently espouse and take note of our comments and concerns in this respect.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue with you at your convenience as we are confident, and it is vital, that you can deal with the real issue of uncontrolled Mediterranean drift netting without unduly and unnecessarily impacting traditional activities that fall under the same name but differ so much in both operation and impacts.

Yours sincerely,

Jerry Percy

Chief Executive

New Under Ten Fishermen's Association

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