

Newsletter

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Scraping a living or making a Killing?

A question raised by fishworkers in the artisanal and traditional sector both in ACP states and in Europe! Whilst they see the resources they depend on diminishing, at the same time, increasingly powerful industrial fishing vessels are being built, creating unsustainable pressures on fisheries resources.

The issue of fishery overcapacity is not new. For several years, it has been the subject of debate in Europe and several measures have been proposed by the European Commission to reduce it. However, due to a lack of political will in several member states and due to pressures applied by the industrial sector, these costly measures have not achieved the results intended. Overcapacity is still there, and the ultra subsidised European industrial fishery is flourishing more than ever.

Thanks to EU subsidies provided for vessels transfers, the invasion of third country waters is increasing. Through the use of large subsidies, the EU is dumping its overcapacity problems on others.

In the mean time, several institutions, (the European Parliament, the EU-ACP Joint Assembly, FAO), fishworkers organisations, scientists and NGOs have highlighted the risks of transferring this subsidised overcapacity to developing countries: the plundering of stocks (cephalopods in Mauritania); environmental destruction (prawn trawling); abuse of coastal fishworker's and crew member's rights; and marginalising of European coastal communities in the way subsidies are provided.

How can this misuse of European taxpayer's money be justified?

Fishing Overcapacity: *The EU is short-sighted*

At a recent hearing in the European Parliament, the new Fisheries Commissioner, Franz Fishler, confirmed that in the short term, his priorities would be to conclude new fisheries agreements with Morocco and Argentina. Backed by scientific evidence, these two countries have accused the European fleets of overfishing their waters through recent fisheries agreements. Such overfishing is neither sustainable for the stocks, or for the European (mainly Spanish), industrial fishery present in these waters. The main victims are likely to be the fishing crews who risk losing their jobs if the fishery is no longer profitable due to a lack of fish. Already, they are having to work longer hours to catch the same quantity of fish.

However, Commissioner Fishler's proposal to relieve the crisis seems short-sighted. In effect, the Commissioner proposes to use all available means to apply pressure to force these two countries to sign an agreement, despite the stocks targeted by the European fleets being unable to support such fishing pressure.

To cure this myopia, and to adopt a longer term vision requires the EU to take drastic measures to reduce its overcapacity fishing fleet. They have an opportunity to do this on October 26, when European Fisheries Ministers will examine for the second time a proposal to review the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG), having been unable to agree on the text proposed at their June meeting.

The objective of FIFG is, through the use of subsidies, to bring fishing capacity into balance with available resources. For over 10 years, large subsidies have been provided by FIFG for this purpose. But this mountain of money has had only a minor impact. Fleet tonnage has been reduced by a mere 5% .

A new proposal for FIFG was put forward by the Commission last June. It has some positive elements: the European artisanal sector is included; member states who do not achieve their capacity reduction targets will be penalised; it requires that for any new tonnage added, a greater tonnage is removed (in the proportion of - 1.3 to + 1). This should take better account of technological creep - where new technology

creates increases in the fishing capacity of vessels of the same tonnage.

These new provisions have been introduced by the Commission to avoid repeating the errors of the past, caused by the bad will of certain member states and industrial operators in applying fully the capacity reduction plans proposed by the Commission.

Also, in the previous FIFG scheme, the scrapping of vessels did not always lead to the intended reduction in fishing capacity. Old, under-performing vessels were scrapped whilst the new vessels which replaced them used more and more efficient fishing techniques. The capacity of some EU vessels fishing in West African waters has increased by 14%/year /unit of tonnage due to the use of more sophisticated fishing techniques. The effect of this modernisation, which has also been subsidised by the EU with the same FIFG funds, has had the opposite effect of capacity reduction.

Incoherence is not the only problem of FIFG. In their report on subsidised joint enterprises (N°18/98), the Court of Auditors underlined that the use of FIFG funds was far from transparent. For example, in the case of a Spanish fishing company which received FIFG monies to transfer a vessel to a third country, the vessel had been sunk for a long time.

Furthermore, the Commission proposal does not provide a solution to the problems raised by the transfer of vessels to third country waters. On the contrary, the Commission is proposing to reduce overcapacity in Community waters by providing financial incentives for joint enterprises and second generation fisheries agreements to transfer vessels to third country waters. The EU is using these measures to dump its fishing overcapacity elsewhere, particularly developing countries.

Putting pressure on third countries to sign fisheries agreements to gain access to already overexploited resources, to subsidise the transfer of vessels as a way of getting rid of a European overcapacity problem, is far from the long term commitment made by the EU in October 1998 during the FAO Consultation on overcapacity:

"States should reduce and progressively eliminate all factors, including subsidies (...) and economic incentives which contribute, directly or indirectly, to the build-up of excessive fishing capacity thereby undermining the sustainability of marine resources, giving due regards to the needs of artisanal fisheries".

A report entitled *«The European Union: Fleet capacity and subsidies»* was published in November 1998 by CFFA and is available from the Secretariat.

Mauritania - Morocco - EU

Octopus in danger

The President of the Federation of the Moroccan Fishing Industries stated that: *«the fisheries agreement with the European Union is lame and has been implemented in a naive way»*. The agreement, which will finish at the end of November, has encouraged the overfishing of octopus by European vessels. Between 500 000 and 1 million jobs in Morocco depend on fisheries. Local fishworkers are proposing that, in order to protect their resources, a new agreement should not be signed.

Anticipating the end of the agreement, the Spanish cephalopod fleet fishing in Moroccan waters is already turning its attention to Mauritania's octopus resources, despite these already being overexploited and thus further threatened. According to the latest news, due to overexploitation, the catch potential of Mauritanian octopus has declined from 50 000 tons to less than 20 000 tons. Thanks to the access provided to around 50 vessels under the 1996 fisheries agreement, the EU has the largest industrial octopus fleet in Mauritania.

Octopus provides the main source of foreign exchange earnings in Mauritania, and its overfishing could have disastrous effects on the economy of one of the poorest countries in the world. The quantities of cephalopods exported from Mauritania shows declining trends. This prompted a World Bank representative, during the recent debt relief negotiations to say: *«the funds being made available are in no way intended to cover the income deficit caused by the reduction in fishery resources»*.

Dr Chérif, a Mauritanian fisheries scientist, has stated that: *«any agreement with the European Union must exclude access to cephalopods, giving priority access to this resource to the local artisanal fishing fleet.»* An analysis of EU - Mauritania fisheries relationships together with a number of proposals are contained in a recent report by Dr Chérif, published by Greenpeace.

Octopus:

Mauritania's golden egg

50% of Mauritania's export earnings come from its fishery. Octopus is the main species exported, principally from the artisanal fishery. In addition to employment and foreign exchange earnings, the artisanal fishery has another advantage: their pots are more selective than the trawls used by the Europeans.

Although the trawlers may be less selective, this is not only for technical reasons: there is also an important market in Spain for juveniles.

West Africa

A regional approach needed

The West African Sub-regional Fisheries Committee (Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Cape Verde), is currently discussing arrangements for a regional fisheries agreement.

This initiative is particularly important for the management of such fish stocks as cephalopods and small pelagics (sardines and sardinellas) which are shared by several of these countries. The management of small pelagics is a particular concern for the governments in the sub-region. In the case of sardinellas, the access provided for up to 22 Dutch super trawlers through the fishery agreement with Mauritania in addition to the access provided to the same trawlers under the EU Sénégal agreement is said to already be having an impact on the availability of this "fish of the poor", targeted by Senegalese artisanal fishermen .

At the "Fish not Hunger" Seminar organised by the German NGO "Germanwatch" at the end of April, the CNPS (the National Senegalese Artisanal Fishworkers Collective) delegate, a women fish processor, stated that: "*sardinella is getting scarcer on our beaches; there is a lack of fish for us to process and today, it is becoming more difficult for the poorer families to get their supply of "Yaboye" (sardinella).*" Seminar participants also highlighted the threat represented by private joint ventures in ACP states, which, unlike the bilateral fisheries agreement, have no transparency requirements. It will therefore be even more difficult for local fishworkers and those who support them to know why fish is getting scarcer...

EU Fisheries Agreements

Who pays? Who benefits?

On June 10, the European Commission presented some preliminary findings of a cost-benefit study on fisheries agreements.

For every Euro invested by the EU in a fisheries agreement, on average 3 Euro are generated. Thus, for each billion Euro spent, the value of the fish catch provided would be 3 billion Euro. The non conclusion of fisheries agreements would cost the EU 1.7 billion Euro in the long term.

CFFA has urged DG XIV to incorporate criteria other than purely economic ones, in particular indicators which measure the environmental and social impact of these fisheries agreements on the coastal communities in ACP states. CFFA are shortly planning to publish a report entitled: « Who benefits from ACP Fish? »

Madagascar-EU:

Europeans above the law?

In 1976, per caput GNP in Madagascar was 480 US\$. Today, this has fallen to less than 200 US\$. Such stark figures may explain why increasingly Malagasies are leaving town to take up fishing as a way of feeding their families. A recent census counted more than 100 000 traditional fishers in Madagascar. For them and their families, access to coastal resources is vital.

Invited by the Programme Mer Madagascar, and supported by CCFD (the Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development) and CFFA, some 40 traditional fishworkers (both men and women) took part in a meeting to discuss the future of the traditional fishery. An issue of major concern is the way the industrial shrimp trawlers ignore the law concerning the 2 mile coastal zone, where their activities are forbidden. In addition to untold environmental damage, the activities of shrimp trawlers in this zone also destroy traditional fishing gears.

What is more, the Malagasy industrial shrimp fishery (dominated by French and Asian interests), most of whose catch is taken illegally from the 2 mile zone, is being supported financially by the EU! On the other hand the protection of the Malagasy traditional fisheries was taken into consideration during the negotiations of the 1998 fisheries agreement.

After this agreement was signed, another concern was raised by CFFA and CFDT (the French Maritime Workers Union affiliated to ITF): the issue of the status of the Malagasy crew members on board European (mainly French) tuna vessels. In the negotiations between crew members and boat owners resulting from the questions raised about the French tuna vessels, boat owners denied that they were the employers of the crew. However, as pointed out by CFDT: "*the employment contract is drawn up between the boat captain, who represents the owner, and the Malagasy crew members. That is quite clear.*"

CFDT and the Malagasy crew members are now proposing to bring together all parties concerned to clarify employment conditions, to draw up a collective bargaining agreement and to establish a code of good practice to be integrated into EU agreements with third countries.

Training is also important for improving the status of Malagasy crew members aboard foreign (particularly European) fishing vessels. However, obtaining internationally recognised qualifications is too expensive and therefore inaccessible for many. Crew training is provided for in the provisions of the fishery agreement, but with inadequate funding. This should be co-financed with EU funds for co-operation and development.

World Forum of Fishworkers

Halt the transfers

Following an exchange program organised by CFFA last June, representatives of the World Forum of Fishworkers (WFF) appealed to the EU to stop the subsidised transfer of industrial vessels to the waters of the South, and in particular that: *"new fisheries agreements should be drawn up to remove the overcapacity already transferred which is damaging the existing local fishery"*.

The World Forum, founded in New Delhi in 1997, will hold their Constitutional Assembly in Loctudy, Brittany (France), in October 2000.

EU-South Africa

ITQs enhance disparities

Spain and Portugal are being allowed to extend their bilateral fishery agreements with South Africa up to March and April 2000 respectively. In South Africa, a new Fisheries Minister, Mr Vallie Moosa, has been appointed. Members of the *Artisanal Fishers Association* are wondering if this will mean a change of policy towards their sector, particularly given the prospects of a fisheries agreement with the EU - something their government had always refused up to now.

If the negotiations lead to a conclusion of a fisheries agreement, it is probable that Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQs), put in place by the former South African Fisheries Minister will play a key role. ITQs have been allocated to communities who were discriminated against by the apartheid system, but without any controls. Anybody, even non-fishers, can receive an ITQ. As a result there has been a rapid buying and selling of paper quotas, which have generated a frantic market with quotas changing hands within minutes of being allocated. As in other places, ITQs are already concentrating into fewer hands, creating a kind of feudal system of sea lords.

The EU who have vessels but no access to South African waters would like to profit from this system through a fisheries agreement. In the short term, both buyers and sellers of ITQs will probably be satisfied. Some will gain valuable access to resources and others will gain financially. But in the long term, this influx of EU capacity to South African waters could put resources at risk and marginalise the artisanal fishing communities.

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EU-Argentine Agreement

A Euro-Confidence Trick

On May 24th the five-year EU-Argentine fisheries agreement came to an end. At the same time the Argentine Chamber of Deputies was voting on an emergency law to protect the hake stocks. Over the last 9 years, due to the uncontrolled increase in the freezer trawler fleet, the hake spawning stock had been reduced to less than 25% of its pristine biomass.

According to a local NGO, CeDePesca, the agreement with the EU has been a complete abuse of confidence. Vessels transferred from the EU have created a massive overcapacity in the Argentine fleet. As a result of the agreement the catching capacity of the Argentine hake fleet has increased by 137,000 tonnes. This has caused the near collapse of the hake stocks, put excessive pressures on in-shore stocks, and precipitated a socio-economic crisis in the local fishery.

However, the EU is turning a blind eye to the crisis it has precipitated and is applying intensive pressures on Argentina. Tariff concessions granted to the import of Argentine fish have been withdrawn, and are now said to be being used as incentives in the negotiations.

ACP-EU Joint Assembly

Call for a precautionary approach

At their last meeting in April 99, the EU-ACP Joint Assembly voted on a resolution on *"the impact of structural aid to the European fisheries sector on the sustainable development of fisheries sector in ACP countries"*.

This made particular note of *"the lack of information available (...) on the fishing activities of joint enterprises in ACP states, and on the impact of these joint enterprises on the development of the local fisheries sector"*.

The EU-ACP Joint assembly called for a precautionary approach given that *"a risk exists of encouraging, through subsidised joint enterprises in ACP countries, the overexploitation of ACP fishery resources and distorting competition for resources and markets with the existing local (catching and processing) sector, particularly in artisanal fisheries"*.

The resolution also demanded that: *"the overall access granted to European fleet should be based on a scientific evaluation of the resource, the local needs (particularly of the artisanal fishery), for access to the resources, for food security, employment and income, taking account of the existing access provided to other foreign fleets"*.