

CFFA Press release

Mismanagement of European Fishing in Mauritania:

NGO Complaint against the European Commission lodged with the European Ombudsman

(Brussels, May 14, 2002)

An official complaint against the European Commission has been lodged with the EU Ombudsman by a group of NGOs. This follows their 2001 “Coherence Campaign”, which highlighted the contradictions between the EU’s fishing practices and its policy objectives for development cooperation. The European NGO networks Eurostep and CFFA, together with Greenpeace International and ICSF accuse the European Commission of mismanagement, and assert that gross errors were committed both during the fishery agreement negotiations with Mauritania, and during its subsequent implementation. The agreement has been signed for 5 years and provides access to cephalopod stocks for 55 EU boats, and to small pelagic resources for a dozen super-trawlers.

First and foremost the NGOs challenge the scientific grounds on which the EU delegation made its demands for access to cephalopod stocks. Scientific data available prior to the negotiations showed clearly that these stocks were overexploited. But despite scientific recommendations, the EU demanded excessive levels of fishing access that were incompatible with the Mauritanian national policy for the sustainable development of its fisheries. Furthermore the EU demands contravene the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (*art 62-§2*), which states that foreign fishing access should only be to the stocks surplus to local requirements.

Consequently in March 2002, the Mauritanian National Fishermen’s Federation (FNP) and Mauritanian scientists confirmed that large numbers of Mauritanian vessels and a major part of the artisanal pirogue fleet fishing for cephalopods were laid up. This left the field clear for the EU fleet (heavily subsidised by the fisheries agreement and other EU subsidies) to increase its catch per effort unit.

The NGOs assert that the EU negotiators’ demands for access to Mauritanian cephalopod stocks could not have taken into account either the state of resources (though well known) or the EU’s policy objectives *viz à viz* local development.

The other issue addressed by the NGOs in their complaint concerns the deployment of new EU fishing capacity on small pelagic resources, based on the European Commission’s claim that “*new fishing possibilities have been identified in West Africa*”. Particular concern has been expressed about the addition of the *Atlantic Dawn* to the EU fleet fishing in West Africa. In a deal struck between the Irish Government and the European Commission, this super trawler is now also allowed to fish in EU waters causing a further outcry against the European Commission’s management competence.

According to the NGOs, the Commission’s claim is false, and flies in the face of the latest scientific reports (STECF 2000 and FAO 2001), which advocate a precautionary

approach. The FAO Report warns that “small pelagic catches should not be increased above those attained during the period 1995-1999”, i.e. prior to the entry of the Atlantic Dawn into Mauritanian waters.

Based on these 2 areas of complaint (about access to cephalopods and small pelagics), NGOs are demanding that EU fishing operations in Mauritanian waters be reviewed, taking into account both the state of stocks and the local development needs, particularly those of the artisanal fishing sector.

The European Ombudsman’s report is expected by the end of the year, after consultation with the relevant European Commission Directorates and after hearing the reactions of the NGOs.

Internationally, the NGOs are relaying the requests from local fishermen’s organisations in several coastal states, including Mauritania, not to grant total levels of fishing access greater than those recommended by the scientists.

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