

Speech by Struan Stevenson, MEP, Senior Vice President of the Fisheries Committee in the European Parliament.

Democracy and the role of the European Parliament within a reformed Common Fisheries Policy

Inter-RAC Conference on "Decision-making within a reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)"

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I am very proud and honoured to be here today and very grateful for this opportunity to be back in Scotland and talk to you about the role of the European Parliament within the CFP.

During the last fifty years, the European Parliament has moved from being a largely consultative forum, and up until 1979 - composed only of delegations appointed by each of the Member States' national parliaments, to being a full co-legislator in many areas.

The case of the European Parliament is unique. It is the world's most far reaching undertaking of transnational democracy and multilingual to a degree unknown elsewhere in the world (23 official languages are currently used in parliamentary work). It's like the tower of Babel!

Elected for the first time in 1979, it is still a young parliament, but has developed its role and powers considerably in the thirty years that have passed since then and expanded from 410 members from 9 countries, to 736 members from 27 Member States.

Unlike most national parliaments, the European Parliament has never regarded itself as a part of a fully developed constitutional system, but rather as part of one in a process of evolution and

requiring change. It has consistently argued that the Union should only perform tasks that can be carried out more effectively through common policies and not by Member States acting separately. As the only directly elected body of the European Union, Parliament has always insisted on better democratic control and accountability at a European level.

It is in the parliamentary committees that much of the detailed work of the Parliament is carried out and this also applies to the work of its Fisheries Committee.

Until now, the adoption of Community legislation on fisheries and aquaculture issues has been a task for the Council, following a legislative proposal by the European Commission. Except in a very few cases, the European Parliament has been merely consulted, in accordance with Article 37 of the EC Treaty.

Despite the limitations of this consultation procedure, a number of the Fisheries Committee proposals has been taken into account, in full or in part, by the Commission or the Council, or else contributed to the decisions taken. The Fisheries Committee has consistently provided a major platform for debate and political pressure, voicing the concerns of the sector's representatives on many occasions, through own initiative reports, resolutions, public hearings or with delegation visits to different regions establishing contacts with the sector and local authorities.

In times of crisis, the Committee has always been prepared to intervene in defence of the sector's interests, through oral questions to the Commission or motions for resolution in plenary. This has been a constant feature of the Committee's approach since its creation.

But all of this is going to change. The Lisbon Treaty, finally signed off yesterday, heralds for the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), a far-reaching change in the decision-making system, where Parliament will cease to be a mere consultative institution and

become a full legislative body with shared powers of decision on an equal footing with the Council. In this new scenario, Parliament *and* the Council will establish the necessary provisions to pursue the objectives of the CFP together.

With regard to international fisheries agreements, the main innovation is the procedure for their conclusion, since the new Treaty clearly states that such agreements will have to be approved by Parliament (new *consent* procedure) before they can be concluded by the Council. In practice, this right of veto will extend and improve, from Parliament's point of view, the scope of parliamentary assent, which is currently limited to agreements which have significant budgetary implications or involve the creation of a specific institutional framework.

By considerably extending the Parliament's co-decision powers, the Lisbon Treaty will contribute to strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the European Union and the democratic accountability of the CFP. This increased role for the European Parliament will mean more opportunities for participation and more accountability.

The CFP has been subject to strong criticism for being based on "micro-management" and a "one size fits all" approach that have not been conducive to compliance. The CFP has failed to protect fish stocks, over 88% of which are near collapse in EU waters. It has also failed to protect jobs, with thousands of fishermen, processors and land-based workers out of work. De-commissioning, tie-ups, catch restrictions, quota cuts, effort limitation, kilowatt-days, net sizes and a draconian punishment regime, have forced many of our fishermen out of business. Skippers and crew have to sail through a storm of red tape and bureaucracy, before they brave the dangers of our oceans.

The European Commission's Green Paper on CFP reform offers a glimmer of hope and points the way to radical initiatives that will

devolve control of fisheries management from Brussels, handing it over to the Member States and from there to the main stakeholders; the fishermen themselves. The input of other advisory bodies like the Advisory Committee for Fisheries and Aquaculture (ACFA), the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for Sea Fisheries (SSDC), the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee have also increased since the reform of 2002.

Positive experiences of this closer involvement are reflected in one particular project, pioneered by Scotland. The 'conservation credits' scheme rewards fishermen who use specific fishing gear to target certain species with credits for extra days at sea. It has been largely successful, although I have heard some grumbles from the sector. In addition, the voluntary agreement of Scottish fishermen to close areas where there is an abundance of juvenile cod has also been applauded. The Baltic Sea RAC has also introduced a similar project to improve selectivity, to address the problem of discards and the Pelagic RAC initiated the horse mackerel management plan.

However, the final legislative acts on CFP Reform will not be completed until 2012, so we need to survive the next three years if we wish to ensure that we have a modern and well-equipped fleet, ready to meet the demands for more healthy seafood in the future. Sustainable fishing, protecting our ecosystems, better science, financial stability and a better and safer working environment, are all key components for an improved fisheries policy. The reality at present is rampant over-fishing, inadequate science, massive discards, large-scale ecosystem damage, poor financial rewards and often dirty and dangerous working conditions - the hallmark of 50 years of the CFP.

But how do we improve governance and decentralisation in the CFP? Should we strengthen the role of the existing consultative bodies or create new regional bodies, involving stakeholders,

national administrations, scientists and representatives of the EU institutions? Whatever decision is taken; we need to remember that the challenges and opportunities also go further than just fisheries. Transport, energy, tourism and a host of new coastal developments are placing their own pressures on the marine ecosystem. Climate change and pollution have already had a huge impact on Europe's seas and coasts.

All of these issues mean that the CFP cannot be looked at in isolation. So the reform of the CFP means taking a fresh look at the broader maritime picture. Fisheries have been traditionally very important in coastal regions, which have a crucial role to play in the development of integrated policy-making in order to ensure a sustainable future for coastal communities. Improving research on marine knowledge and on the collection of socio-economic data on maritime sectors and coastal regions will help to shape future policies.

In the European Parliament's Fisheries Committee, we have started to prepare our position on the Commission's Green Paper on CFP reform. We are looking at various issues such as how to deal with the principle of relative stability and transferable fishing rights. There is a broad consensus on the need to address overcapacity, ensure long-term sustainability and to protect small-scale coastal fisheries, but the opinions vary on the different options and solutions for CFP reform and the debate will continue in the coming months.

A draft initiative report will be presented at the Fisheries Committee meeting of 30 November and a deadline for tabling amendments will be fixed. Our Committee is also preparing to host a public hearing on the Green Paper on 1st December this year, which you are warmly invited to attend. The vote in Committee on this initiative report will be held at the end of January 2010. There will then be a final vote in the plenary session in Strasbourg at the end of February 2010. We are looking forward to receiving your contributions to this wide and crucial debate.

As previously stressed, co-decision will bring new powers but also more responsibility to the Fisheries Committee. We will be very attentive to your valuable input regarding the shaping of Community legislation and ready to listen to your views and proposals regarding the possible delegation of decision-making. Opinions drawn up by relevant consultative bodies, namely the ACFA and the RACs, will be extremely useful to us before and during all the decision-making processes.

The new CFP must be devised in close cooperation with those working in the sector, who must be heard and taken into account if they are to be expected to cooperate in the proper application of the rules. If the CFP is to regain the confidence of the fishing industry, it needs to become more regionally sensitive. I believe that decentralised fisheries management must be strengthened to take account of the specific characteristics of resources, the geographical areas where they are located and the interests of the fleets concerned, ensuring that all those with fisheries related interests in the zone are properly represented and that decisions are taken at the lowest possible level.

In its resolution of April 2009 on "Governance within the CFP", the European Parliament called for closer links between Parliament and the different advisory bodies, like the RACs, ACFA, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee. It has also been stressed that the coexistence of the different advisory bodies helps compatibility with maritime and marine policy and integrated coastal zone management.

We also need to recapture Europe's place at the forefront of world aquaculture production. We need to lead the world in fish farming and yet we have allowed countries like Chile, China, Vietnam and Turkey to seize our market share. One reason for this is red tape. Our fish farmers complain that they have to comply with over 400 separate rules and regulations before they can sell a single fish. We have an ideal coastline, cutting-edge science and technology as well as innovative and hard-working fish farmers, ready to meet

the demands of a growing population for healthy fish products, so lets cut the red tape and start supporting our fish farmers instead of putting obstacles in their path.

Within the CFP reform we must also address the failed attempts at cod recovery. According to ICES, the Commission has failed to halt the massive collapse of cod stocks in the North Sea and West of Scotland. Despite the fact that 60% of the Scottish whitefish fleet has been scrapped over the years, the scientists claim that cod stocks are still low. But surely more red tape is simply not the answer.

The Commission partly blame nephrops (prawn) trawlers who use 70-99 mm nets and who, according to the Commission, account for up to half of all cod mortality due to by-catch. The cod recovery plan makes provision for an exemption for gears which catch less than 1.5% of cod but in practice this is proving impossible for the fishermen to achieve. I've dealt with dozens of complaints from angry prawn fishermen in the West of Scotland who catch no cod at all, but still have not qualified for this exemption!

In addition, any attempt at a cod recovery plan must take into account the rapidly increasing grey seal population in the North Sea, which is thought to be in excess of 200,000. Given that a grey seal will eat 2 tonnes of fish a year, that's 400,000 tonnes of fish, including a lot of cod! That is massively more than our fishermen are allowed to catch! We can't simply ignore this fact. If we are serious about fisheries conservation then we have to aim for a sustainable seal population.

I would like to finish with some specific words concerning the RACS, who are the co-organisers of this important conference. Let me reiterate that the reform of the CFP should consolidate the role of the RACs for an increased decentralisation of the CFP, so that when common measures are adopted, they may be applied to the different zones in line with the specific requirements of fisheries

and fishing conditions.

In its resolution of April 2009, the European Parliament called on the Commission to increase their visibility and encourage participation by a wider range of stakeholders, to improve the RACs' access to scientific evidence and data and the liaison with STECF, to involve them as early as possible in the consultation process and to provide benchmarks to allow an assessment of the consistency of their advice with CFP objectives. The European Parliament considered that RACS are currently under-financed for the level of work that they are undertaking and that alternatives to the current system should be explored.

The Committee on Fisheries was asked to take concrete decisions for achieving closer cooperation with the RACs, in particular through the appointment of specific "Liaison Members" of the Committee for each RAC, as well as ensuring greater participation of the RACs in the meetings of the Committee and regular contact between the secretariats of the Committee on Fisheries, the RACs, and the Inter-RAC Committee. I am happy to inform you that all these recommendations are being implemented by the newly elected Fisheries Committee and that we are deeply committed to enhancing our mutual co-operation.

There are challenging times ahead, but I am certain that working together, we can meet these challenges and overcome the difficulties that have beset our industry in the past.

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