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European Commission Delegation
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Fishing headed for troubled waters

At the present rate, 10 more years of intense fishing could spell disaster for global fishstocks, observers say, and unless immediate action is taken to curb over-fishing, there will simply be nothing left to fish.

Continuous over-fishing is upsetting nature's delicate balance, causing the biological indicators to dip into the red. Opinions are convergent on the matter: stocks are being depleted by the competitive onslaught of modern fishing methods. In the long run, this phenomenon may prove calamitous for the industry, as the Canadian experience has recently shown. It is clearly a case of sink or swim: cut back now or have nothing left later. The only realistic alternative is a reduction of the capacity of fishing fleets to land their hauls by means of reducing the overall effectiveness of their catching methods.

Naturally, the professionals of the trade will claim that reduced capacities will have an effect on employment and income in the sector. The effects would spread to include not only fishermen but also suppliers of services and equipment. Some operators may even be forced to abandon the sector, making way for future generations to sustain the trade, even should these new entrants not originate from their particular region.

Today fishing authorities are faced with an unprecedented challenge. How can fishing capacities be equitably reduced? What are the alternatives most likely to be accepted by those who will be most affected? How can the authorities convince the fisheries' trade of the benefits of a collective effort?

Economic interest groups, the Member States and the Commission are directly concerned by the issue. Against a background of talks and constructive dialogue, a blueprint for long-term adjustment objectives must be drawn up, in addition to social and economic accompanying measures. The PESCA initiative constitutes an integral part of the above, and other initiatives are likely to follow suit. Whatever the outcome, and the discomfort likely to be caused, it must be understood that such measures are as necessary as they are urgent.

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Region of the month

Aberdeen: Granite City port due for a facelift...

In terms of fishing activity, the port of Aberdeen is showing signs of ageing. What once provided the livelihood of many an Aberdonian has since been relegated to second place. Timeworn trawlers are having to yield before sophisticated and ultramodern ships tendering to offshore North-Sea oil operations.

Does this suggest that fishing activities in the Grampians are in decline? This region located in the east of Scotland east has certainly not been spared by the fisheries crisis and by quota restrictions. However, this has not prevented the recent development of related services in such towns as Fraserburgh and particularly Peterhead, the top-ranking British port in terms of tonnage, and therefore economic value.

Aberdeen has none the less inherited a long industrial tradition, remaining a significant market for fish products and maintaining its leading role in the region with regard to the processing of such foodstuffs. Owing to the degree of specialization in demersal species, Aberdeens industry is highly diversified. Companies with a payroll of several hundred employees stand side by side with workshops numbering but a few employees. Though even activities in this particular area are showing signs of weakness, Aberdeen is under threat from more modern industries in neighbouring Grampian ports, including the more modest of these in the Forth estuary (Macduff, Buckie). The latter may also vaunt the merits of a modern infrastructure in comparison with Aberdeens lagging efforts to conform to European standards.

In Aberdeen, catches are landed by locally based vessels, though vessels B from neighbouring ports and even foreign ships are known to put their catch into port. Most of the processed fish is none the less of British origin and the diminishing supplies have not yet given sufficient cause for concern. Many installations are becoming obsolete and, although many companies have undertaken to refurbish their premises, much still needs to be done in the area. Although priding itself on a thriving oil industry, Grampian Regional Council cannot afford to neglect its fisheries sector, which currently employs over 5 700, including almost 2 200 from Aberdeen. To give concrete expression to this concern, the council has appointed a coordinator to be responsible for the supply of information and general support for the fishing industry, thus contributing to the smooth implementation of the PESCA programme in the region.

Data sheet

Aberdeen

- *Location:* Grampians, Scotland, UK
- *Type of fishing:* whitefish trawling
- *Catches:*
 - haul: **31 100 tonnes** (Peterhead: 124 000 t, Fraserburgh: 41 200 t)
 - value: £ 23,7 million or approximately **28,2 million ecus** (Peterhead: £ 73,2 m, Fraserburgh: £ 31,3 m)
- *Species:*
 - demersal (more than three-quarters of catches): cod (*Gadus morhua*), haddock (*Melanogrammus* sp.), whiting (*Merlangus* sp.), monkfish (*Lophius* sp.), sole (*Solea* sp.) and plaice (*Pleuractones* sp.).

- pelagical: blue whiting (*Micromesistius Poutassou*), herring (*Clupea sp.*), mackerel (*Scomber sp.*)
- scallops
- *Number of fishermen (1995)* : Aberdeen: 144 (Peterhead: 1 223, Fraserburgh: 998) n
- *Number of buyers*: 120
- *Processing*:
 - number of companies: approximately 100
 - jobs: 2 200 in 1995 (Peterhead: 1 500; Fraserburgh: 1 400)

Representatives of the local industry are consciously aware of their shortcomings, as the interview below suggests.

Questions put to R. GRANT of AFCAMA (Aberdeen Fish Curers and Merchants Association)

Pesca Info: The PESCA programme has started off well in the Grampians. Of the projects to have been financed, which of these concerned Aberdeen?

R. GRANT: Among the most important of the ones to be mentioned was a project aimed at improving the quality of fish products in the region, and a project to fund the conversion of fishing vessels to supply vessels for the offshore oil-drilling installations.

Pesca Info: Are there any other projects being considered?

R. GRANT: Yes, we are currently submitting another two : on the one hand, the aim is to develop training courses for the processing of sea-food so that our traditional activities can be further diversified to include more elaborate forms. On the other hand, we intend to promote Aberdeen fish by means of brochures and videos.

Pesca Info: What about the longer term?

R. GRANT: The workforce is elderly and getting harder to replace. We are hoping to provide training for younger generations in an attempt to promote the trade within educational establishments.

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Common Fisheries Policy

The COM: Common Organization of the Markets

In Europe, international commerce in fish products is essentially divided into two principal fishing grounds:

- the European Economic Area, an enlarged region encompassing Western Europe, in particular the European Union, and within which the free movement of goods prevails;
- the rest of the world which, as a result of the successive GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) agreements, and, since 1 January 1995, the WTO (World Trade Organisation), which may be considered a free-trade area.

The COM must comply with the WTO

Trade in the European Union is governed by the COM (Common Organization of the Markets), which was set up in 1970 and which has since undergone a series of reforms, of which the latest highly significant one is dated 1 January 1995. It is indeed imperative that the COM comply with the international context of the WTO and thereby operate within the confines imposed by consolidation: a regime which establishes maximum customs duties and rules out any form of production subsidies likely to distort competition. The various mechanisms and instruments set up by the Common Organization of Markets are conceived as supply-demand regulators and not, as is the case with agriculture, as a guaranteed source of income for European producers.

Main instruments of the COM

The basic regulation, which has been in force since 1 January 1993, comprises four instruments:

- the application of common standards for marketing products. The standards should determine the quality and size of goods, both Community-produced and imported;
- the recognition of producers' organizations to which the organization and stabilization of markets has been entrusted. Their role is not strictly limited to a straightforward redistribution of support credits to their subscribers, but also extends to cover the tailoring of production to meet market requirements, both in terms of quantity and quality;
- the setting up of a price regime underpinned by various intervention mechanisms (withdrawals, carry-overs, support for private storage) or compensation (particularly in relation to the preservation of tuna);
- the establishment of trading arrangements with third countries. This arrangement would allow for a delicate balance to be set up for supplying the Community market (consumers and processing industries) without damaging producers' interests. The arrangement would also take account of other intangibles such as the general relations between the EU and the rest of the world, notably in terms of cooperation.





PESCA on the spot

The South West of Ireland: a region with project potential

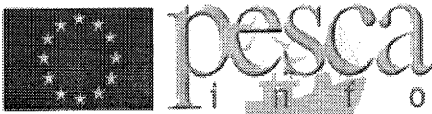
In Ireland, 67 projects have been approved to date, 20 of which are located in the South West of the country (the counties of Cork, Kerry and Limerick). By their very diversity, these projects provide an exemplary illustration of the variety of operations which are solicited under the PESCA programme.

In the South West, projects are mainly concerned with shellfish breeding (9 projects): under this scheme, 7 Kerry-based fishermen undertook to diversify their activities by the extensive breeding of mussels in enclosures. This operation is solidly taking shape, and is being overseen on location by a permanent adviser. Another project is aimed at breeding scallop spat until the species is sufficiently sizeable to allow for extensive rearing. Two other projects more closely associated with fishing involve two very different activities: lobster repopulation in Bantry Bay and the production of a video film on fish-manipulation techniques at sea in order to improve quality.

Moves in favour of greater diversification have also focused on tourism, such as the acquisition of a purpose-built boat for fishing excursions. This particular project was the result of a market study commissioned to evaluate the marketing potential for such activities.

Finally, a project has also taken shape for the construction of a new marina located on an island and designed to cater for some 50 pleasure boats.

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Interview of the month

Interview with Marco PEDOL, Director of GADOPESCA, a Milan-based import-export company

November 1996

Editor's note: intended as a medium for freely voiced opinions, the PESCA bulletin reflects the views held by professionals. Articles express the opinions of the authors alone. Latin names are used to identify fish species to improve recognition in various languages.

P.I. (Pesca Info): Could you give a brief account of your activities?

M.P. (Marco PEDOL): Our company specialize in supplying wholesale goods to the Milan market. We import various species from the Northern seas - salmon (*Salmo salar*), bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*), little spurdogs (*Lamna sp.*, *Squalus acanthias*), sole (*Solea sp.*), gurnards (*Triglia spp.*), cuttlefish (*Sepia sp.*), squid (*Loligo sp.*) - and from the Mediterranean - dentex (*Dentex sp.*), groupers (*Epinephelus sp.*), seabream (*Sparus pagrus*), red seabream (*Pagellus sp.*), red mullet (*Mullus surmuletus*), swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*).

P.I.: What are the obstacles you have encountered in relation to intra-Community trade?

M.P.: There are essentially three kinds of problem:

- quality-control standards: there is an absence of effective communication between quality-control structures and between the Member States' licensing authorities. These tasks are carried out via administrative and diplomatic channels, which can often give rise to serious difficulties when it comes to overseeing the rightful application of Community standards (labelling, for example).
- logistics : the heavy reliance on road haulage for which there is virtually no alternative. Also the railroad system lacks appropriate loading and unloading bays.
- marketing structures: these often fall short of the required standard. Infrastructures are illadapted and renovation work is often slow. Packaging and monitoring the goods is another area in need of improvement.

P.I.: What do you suggest with a view to improving the situation?

M.P.: Appropriate action could be taken with regard to the handling and shipment of the goods. This could be achieved through improving the coordination of qualitycontrol standards, and through investing in marketing structures situated away from portuary zones - such as the wholesale trade - similar to those of the fish-auction markets. It is also necessary to improve packaging, developing alternatives to road haulage, including improving the conditions of the latter. Overall, such measures should result in better-quality fish products and therefore contribute towards restoring the merits of such products which have tended to lose value on the wholesale market.





Newsflash

Casablanca 97 - Fishing Industry Partnership 25, 26 and 27 May 1997, Casablanca

First of a series of industrial partnership encounters between representatives of the European and Moroccan fisheries sectors with a view to establishing trading, technical and financial cooperation agreements. The meetings will be organized jointly by the European Commission and the Moroccan Fisheries Ministry. A catalogue containing a list of some 100 Moroccan projects for which partners are being sought will be published and circulated in January 1997. PESCA Info will provide further information on this initiative in its February issue. This column is available to you if you wish to announce various events or actions likely to interest the fishing world.

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