

Partnerships for healthy ecosystems & sustainable fisheries - Collaboration between environmental NGOs, the fishing industry and science driving sustainability

EP Intergroup on Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development & Xunta de Galicia | 15 June 2021

In a nutshell:

On 15 June 2021, MEP Francisco José Millán Mon hosted the webinar “Partnerships for healthy ecosystems & sustainable fisheries - Collaboration between environmental NGOs, the fishing industry and science driving sustainability”. The event was organized by the European Parliament Intergroup on ‘Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development’ in collaboration with Xunta de Galicia.

The aim of the event was to showcase cases of cooperation between environmental NGOs and the fishing industry. NGOs, industry and public administrations ultimately **pursue common goals**, to protect sea resources and peoples’ livelihoods. Hence, they should not be regarded as adversaries, but natural **allies**. Different case studies (Ireland, the United States, Portugal, Spain and South Africa) of current cooperation schemes between the fishing industry and environmental NGOs were presented, to outline how concrete, effective outcomes can be reached when **collaboration exists, and silos are broken**. Overall, it was agreed that the industry has **on the ground experience and real-time data**, while NGOs and governments can provide **technical support and capacity building**. **Open, participatory and constructive dialogue** spaces are key to incorporate all interests, balance tradeoffs and find win-win opportunities.

Discussion was moderated by **Ernesto Penas Lado** (IUCN/CEM/FEG). Welcome remarks were made by MEP **Francisco José Millán Mon**, followed by opening remarks by **Rosa Quintana Carballo** (Conselleira do Mar, Xunta de Galicia) and an intervention by **Maja Kirchner** (acting Director of Fisheries Policy Atlantic, North Sea, Baltic and Outermost Regions, DG MARE). Presentations of case studies included the participation of **Catherine Barrett** (Fisheries Development Officer, Ireland's Seafood Development Agency) **Doug Rader** (Chief Oceans Scientist and AVP, Environmental Defense Fund), **Colin Attwood** (Associate Professor on Marine ecology and fisheries, University of Cape Town), **Daniel Formoso** (President, Provincial Federation of Fishermen's Guilds of A Coruña), **Emilio Martinez Cadilla** (Director General, Espaderos del Atlántico S.A) & **Pedro Ferreiro Velasco** (Fisheries & Markets Director, Sustainable Fisheries Partnership), and **Rita Sá** (Head of the Oceans and Fisheries Program - Associação Natureza Portugal, WWF Portugal).

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Opening remarks:

Francisco José Millán Mon

Member of the European Parliament, EPP

MEP Francisco José Millán Mon stressed that fishermen are also victims of climate change; hence, they are **natural allies in the fight against it and the common quest towards sustainability**. Collaboration between environmental NGOs and fisheries is possible and a must in a context where ocean protection has gained renewed interest. It remains crucial to **disseminate examples of collaborations** across Europe, where both sectors cooperate together with public institutions. To conclude, Mr. Millán Mon underlined the need to incentivize dialogue between stakeholders, the importance of **having presence on the ground**, where the fishing industry can contribute, and identified several areas of collaboration such as the **provision of catch data, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) or marine litter**.

Rosa Quintana Carballo

Regional Minister of Fisheries(Conselleira do Mar), Xunta de Galicia

Ms. Rosa Quintana started by highlighting Galicia's role as one of the **leading fishing regions in Europe** and its commitment to properly manage the sea and its resources. Ocean management and the importance of "the blue" has never been as significant as today in the political agenda. Yet, **traditional maritime sectors**, fishermen and NGOs have always been aware of how important sea resources are. These two groups, which in the past were depicted as enemies and have worked in different areas, all represent the **same cause**. Now, awareness about the **need and possibility of collaborations** between stakeholders is growing, as it is the only path to effectively move forward. The success examples presented in this event will **lay foundations for tangible and long-lasting partnerships**, setting the right collaboration framework for the future. Ms. Quintana concluded by making a call for building constructive relations between fishermen, NGOs, science and administrations that fade the mistaken narrative about conflicting interests.

Maja Kirchner

Acting Director of Fisheries Policy Atlantic, North Sea, Baltic and Outermost Regions (DG MARE)

Maja Kirchner elaborated on the accomplishments at the European level towards sustainable fisheries. In terms of achievements, the European Union (EU) has succeeded in establishing **fisheries management plans** thanks to great cooperation between fishermen and NGOs and is leader in **international fisheries organizations**, with outstanding examples such as the EU leading the recovery of bluefin tuna in the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). Evidence from the NEAtlantic situation in 2020 was provided, which experienced a drastic recovery in European fisheries fished in line with MSY. Yet, it is still difficult to achieve consensus in coastal states beyond European waters and several other areas of improvement remain.

Moreover, the EU faces now a new regulatory context across the EU and different actors and sectors, with the 2030 agenda, the **European Green Deal**, the new impetus given to the **blue economy**, an essential part of the latter, and the envision **green post-COVID 19 recovery**. Under this new horizon, breaking silos and joining forces between stakeholders in addressing ocean challenges has been a priority, evidenced in multiple initiatives such as the brandnew Sustainable Blue Economy Forum for all users of the Sea.

Presentation of case studies:

Six different case studies were presented to demonstrate different **areas and modes of collaboration** between environmental NGOs and the fishing industry. These examples included multiple projects in **Ireland, the United States, Portugal, Spain and South Africa**, and touched upon diverse ocean areas like marine litter, bottom trawling, ecological risk assessment, eco-labels, fishery improvement modelling, IUU control and co-management initiatives.

Catherine Barrett introduced the “BIM Clean Ocean initiative of Ireland”. It is an initiative that pulls all ongoing processes together and is based on the pillars of circular economy, social trust, working on the ground and community engagement, ownership and leadership. To address the problem of **end of life gears**, the project aimed to galvanize how to manage impacts, bringing together expertise and industries to improve outcomes of the end of life of such equipment by providing implementation and technical support, and building capacities. The rationale for engaging and developing partnerships stems from the fact that both sectors, the industry and NGOs, aim for the same result and hence, there is a need to find common, non-divisive objectives. It is also relevant to acknowledge efforts made by the industry, which is the sector best placed to engage with local communities.

Doug Rader presented the Environmental Defense Fund project “Protecting deep water corals off the South Atlantic Coast”. The co-management initiative aims to **protect deep-water coral (lophelia) reefs** from bottom disturbing fishing gears of royal red shrimp, golden crabs and rock shrimps deep water fishing. To succeed in protecting these habitats and redesigning fisheries management plans, the involvement of fisher communities is key, so they are designed with the best interest of fishers in mind and with long-term effects. Moreover, finding win-win opportunities is possible. On one side, fishers can provide detailed real-time data about their activities, specific areas or gears, that can help to map areas with high profile coral without interfering with fishing activities. On the other, it is in fishers’ best interest not to put their gear in strong currents, where deep corals inhabit.

Colin Attwood gave a comprehensive overview of the existing cooperation strategies between industrial fishing and environmental interests in South Africa. These **interactions** included a multi-institutional research program on the ecological impacts of fishing, the implementation of an ecosystem approach to fisheries supported with an ecological risk assessment in all major fisheries by WWF South Africa, the expansion of protected areas within the country’s Exclusive Economic Zone or the Responsible fisheries Alliance – a forum for NGOs and industrial fishing companies. A notable example mentioned was the success in reducing seabirds’ mortality in longline and trawl fisheries. Thanks to NGO-industry cooperation, it was possible to reduce impacts and adopt mitigation measures. Reference

was also made to the South African Sustainable Seafood Initiative, which aims to reduce the ecological footprint of demersal trawling in cooperation with the industry. Overall, there prevails an atmosphere of cooperation and formal alliances exist between the industry, NGOs and public administrations. Fishing companies have expressed their commitment towards sustainable fisheries and can supply valuable data and hands on the ground, while NGOs provide technical support.

Daniel Formoso provided insights from the local industry represented by the Fishermen's Guilds of A Coruña and presented the “Plan Marlímpio” or Clean Sea project. It is an initiative from the Galician government funded by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) addressed to recover a clear and productive marine biodiversity and raise awareness on **marine litter** through educational conferences. Collaboration with the fishery sector is key, as they also have interest in preserving those resources, upon which local and future communities rely. Although fishermen are often criminalized, Mr. Formoso noted that the sector welcomed the new envisioned **waste collection** projects. Yet, it is important to generate incentives for fishermen to participate. Examples of daily activities that entailed broad fishermen participation and collaboration with NGOs, the public sector and civil society included a study of waste collection patterns, 6 projects of waste collection, training and conferences, waste collection by fishing vessels in their usual activities and periodical clean ups.

Emilio Martinez Cadilla and Pedro Ferreiro Velasco presented the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership’s (SFP) Fisheries Improvement Project on Swordfish and Blue Shark Fisheries (FIP Blues). SFP focuses on harnessing **market tools and incentives** to implement sustainability in fisheries and seafood supply chains. It is recognized by pioneering the Fishery Improvement Projects (FIP) model, a multi-stakeholder effort to address environmental and social challenges through the implementation of harvest strategies and management plans. The case of FIP Blues, a fisheries improvement project for swordfish and blue shark fisheries, is a clear example of what fisheries can do to achieve the market recognition. FIP Blues provides an action scheme to improve the sustainability of both species, working with producer organizations. It also cooperates with ANECTEAM, the National Association of Highly Migratory Species Marketing and Processing Companies, to bring surface longline fisheries to higher and internationally recognized sustainability standards, guarantee access to all markets and improve scientific knowledge.

Rita Sá introduced conservation priorities and ocean strategies in Portugal led by WWF and Associação Natureza Portugal. Two sustainable fisheries projects were presented: “Co-Pesca Project”, which focused on **barnacles** catches, and “ParticiPESCA Project”, which addressed IUU fishing issues related to **octopus** fisheries. The notion of co-management was introduced, a new paradigm for managing fisheries in the country that has been formally incorporated into the legal framework. This is based on a broad stakeholder representation, including fisheries, administration, science and environmental collectives. To conclude, Ms. Sá pointed out that while co-management is time-consuming and requires commitment, political will and transparency, it offers great opportunities for innovation, adaptation, co-responsibility, and a participatory culture.