

Who pays the piper?

This is a question that has been raised at a number of discussions I have had with various people about the Common Fisheries Policy. When I explain that we attend the NWWRAC as part of the “other interests” sector, many ask me who pays for these trips to meetings. As a registered charity we have to put aside a portion of our funding to attend the meetings, but I stress this covers expenses only. We attend as volunteers interested in a sustainable future for our Marine resources. I have to admit that I was surprised when I attended my first meeting of the NWWRAC to find that professional lobbyists represented the “Commercial interest” groups. Some represent only a fraction of actual fishermen. Mostly a small number of wealthy boat owners who have made fortunes from our seas. I wonder how many of the deckhands know the names of those who claim to represent them. I certainly do not claim to know where they get the funds to attend all the meetings, but they have a powerful influence.

On the television we hear about the proposed Green paper on the reform of the Common Fishery Policy. It seems over 80% of Europe’s fish stocks are overfished and in danger of collapse. One prominent lobbyist stated quite bluntly that it is time to get the chequebooks out if we want fishermen to reduce their catches. Clearly someone has overlooked some very important facts. The Marine resources of Europe belong to the people of Europe, not the fishermen. Fishermen have been allowed to exploit this resource for free with no input from them for so long now that they consider that they are the sole owners of the resource. Not only do they believe that they own the resource, but also that they know better than the independent scientists of ICES as to the state of stocks and how best to manage them. We have all seen ample evidence that their management plans do not include reduced catches. We have put forward several papers on sustainability each year since the RACs were established. Members of our group have

seen the actual catches made aboard trawlers in the Irish Sea. Not the sanitised version allowed to be shown on television. One of the biggest problems is the killing of juvenile fish before they have the opportunity to breed. We have called for the protection of spawning and nursery areas since we joined the RAC. While the Commission is to be commended for seeking stakeholder input into fishery management within European waters, and frequently applauds the input of the so-called “other interest groups”; there is clearly not a level playing field. In order to get a balanced opinion on the Management of our marine resources from all stakeholders including those not pursuing profit. I would ask that the Commission consider some funding to allow “other interest groups” to attend the fishery (RAC) meetings. We acknowledge that some groups are well funded international groups so suggest that funding could even be means tested to ensure that those deserving can continue to contribute to the management of our marine resources. We would like to attend and believe we could make a contribution to these meetings and we believe that money should not be the constraining factor in who attends these meetings, and therefore have input. We are not anti -fishing as our mission statement states, we “strive for sustainable use of our marine resources for all users (including fishermen), bearing in mind the socio-economic impact of any measures on coastal communities.”

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For the
Sea Fishery Advisory Group
Irish Seal Sanctuary