

From:

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Re: CFP review

Hello -

I have been a commercial fisherman in South West Ireland for thirty-two years. I have had a broad experience of both static fishing methods and bottom trawling during this time. I am now semi-retired and studying for a degree at University College Cork. I am sorry this submission has grown so long but it does represent a view from the deck. I will start with the core of my thinking and then respond to your questions in the call for contributions

- **Creation of a new policy has to start with a clean slate.** The practice of adding layers of new policy to existing layers of failed policy has compounded the original failings and discredited the legislators.
- **Experience from around the world must be utilized** to identify other successful management strategies, as well as to avoid those that have already failed elsewhere.
- **Quotas have proved useless because they never measured fish mortality**, but only the quantity of fish openly landed for sale. Most fishermen have approved of a quota based system because it has been so easy to subvert – unless extraordinary levels of surveillance are applied; and in most countries they are not.
- **A new CFP should be largely designed around enforcement by satellite surveillance**; i.e. where, when and for how long fishing activity occurs - plus the selectivity of the fishing gear.
- **Fisheries mortality has to be the target metric.**
- **Control of fishing effort, large no-take zones and larger mesh sizes** should be the main measures.
- **The “tragedy of the commons” must be avoided.** Some form of *ownership* will bring a cultural change: from a regulatory environment that encourages heedless exploitation to one that develops the nurturing view of husbandry. This is easily achievable in coastal waters by excluding large vessels. Only operators of vessels whose size restricts

them to local waters will nurture the stocks in those waters. Large vessels overfish, then move on.

- **Policy needs to make as much sense on the deck as it did at the desk** or it will be hindered and circumvented.

**4.1 – Capacity is much more complex than engine horse power, which is an only partially useful proxy.** It needs to be carefully defined before it can be measured and then regulated. A definition of capacity must represent a vessel's fish killing potential. For trawling, capacity is a function of bollard pull and the design and specification of the towed fishing gear. The switch to twin-rig trawling has increased capacity by approximately 50% and must be largely to blame for the current overcapacity; although the increase in fuel efficiency that it allows probably means the method should be welcomed. Advances in propeller or towing nozzle design, or hull design, or bigger gearbox reduction ratios would all produce more thrust (bollard pull) and further increase capacity.

All vessels would have to be measured for bollard pull and their capacity rated accordingly, because suppliers of engines continue to supply false documentation and power ratings for installed engines. A certificate of bollard pull would be a pre-requisite for participation in a system for trading of fishing days/ days at sea. A commitment to towing a single net could be rewarded with some extra fishing days: more than two nets would incur a reduction. The threat of random checks and suspension of fishing licence for significant periods should deter attempts to cheat. Fishing days should be tradeable (leased or sold) within national fleets on the basis of capacity units i.e. a vessel of 100 capacity units would need to buy two days from a 50 unit vessel to fish one day. For static methods there just needs to be restrictions on length/height of nets, numbers of pots, and again fishing days. Cross border sales of fishing rights is probably for the future but leasing should be permitted.

As the capacity of the average vessel increases the number of vessels (or the effort each applies) needs to decrease. This should not be left to market forces alone, but would require legislation and a scrapping fund. I doubt that the number of vessels (in the Irish fleet) needs to decrease much more, if we now adopt appropriate conservation measures. The surviving vessels could pay a portion of the cost because they would reap a benefit. This could be spread over time as an access fee. I can also conceive of payments to fishermen from public funds for resource custodianship similar to those received by farmers (REPS): a reward to

encourage the use of approved methods that are in harmony with marine ecosystems – probably not including trawling.

**An increase in cod-end mesh size is analogous to a reduction in capacity** and should be part of any suite of measures (see 5.2).

**Fishing effort of a vessel is capacity multiplied by duration of fishing operations.**

Modern boats, with their shelter decks and the evolutions of design and equipment, have broken free of the restrictions that weather conditions used to impose. In my opinion no vessel needs to fish for more than 220 days per year and for most 160 days would be enough (I refer to fishing days, excluding travel time). Generally, operators should be free to choose when they use their days, but spawning season/ ground closures should be imposed when necessary. If they are unprofitable with that fishing time their business model must be unviable or fish stocks are too low. Less traffic on trawling grounds would lead to a higher return per unit effort and probably more stable and higher prices from markets not exposed to temporary over-supply.

**Effort (= duration of fishing) is easily monitored by satellite based technology** and levels of effort could be temporarily varied according to the state of stocks – rather than destroying modern vessels which then need to be replaced when fishing opportunities return.

**Fishing effort is only a partial proxy for fisheries mortality:** a day spent fishing on fresh grounds will kill far more fish than a day on ground that has been regularly fished (see 5.2).

**4.2 –The preservation of ecosystems and the restriction of fisheries mortality within appropriate levels are the pre-conditions for attaining medium and long term social and economic benefits from marine resources.** All fishery management systems are subject to error. As a safeguard, as well as a core element of the management of breeding biomass, **large areas of the sea should become permanent no-take zones.** This should include estuaries, coastal bays and inshore and deep-sea areas. My opinion is that **20%** of each should be closed and fishermen should have the largest say in the design of the areas. We can be told to agree on the borders of closed areas or else have them imposed.

**Fishing with static gear and from smaller vessels creates more employment and transfers more revenue into the local economy.** Large trawlers kill large quantities of fish to pay fuel bills; most of the revenue leaving coastal areas (and the country) to pay for oil. Killing coastal fish stocks in order to buy oil doesn't make sense.

Policy should aim to sustainably exploit local resources to maximize local employment. Alternative employment is vulnerable to competition and replacement from lower cost providers elsewhere.

**4.3** - There should be decision making at the level of coastal state (for some regulations within 12 miles), as well as at marine region (by stakeholders only) and at EU levels.

**4.4 – “Wise use” will not develop without some form of ownership.** When there is common access to a resource the industry will be reluctant and slow to develop responsible management.

**4.5** – Regulations must be: 1 – relevant, and 2 – enforceable. See above on capacity, effort and closed areas. Satellite monitoring, on board observers and on board cameras should be the principal means of enforcement and sources of information. Where on board technology reduces the cost of enforcement some benefit should flow to the vessel operator. In mixed fisheries, especially bottom trawling, quotas are neither relevant nor enforceable.

**5.1** – Coastal fleets and communities. There should be restricted access to 3, 6, and/or 12 mile zones for larger sizes of vessel where appropriate (e.g. over 15 meter banned within 3 miles, over banned 18 within 6 miles, over 22 banned within 12 miles would probably suit the Irish coast). Regulations could vary by season and area and be the responsibility of the coastal state. There should be a presumption of no trawling within the base line or a greater area where appropriate (e.g. 3 miles). Coastal communities should have some regulatory competence inside 12 miles and within 20 miles of their home ports (or to a median line)

**5.2** – Management and discards. Fishing should be made a less destructive activity by the adoption of larger mesh sizes. All the trawlermen here on the South coast of Ireland know that we could accept (and soon thrive with) a 100mm mesh size. We already use it in some areas (unlike the Spanish vessels on the same ground who still cut away illegal nets when approached by the navy). This size of cod end mesh kills a fraction of the immature fish that is killed even by 90mm, which we all use in preference to the legal 80mm on our inshore grounds. **No cod end in the Atlantic or North Sea should be smaller than 100 mm for any bottom trawling method**, if we hope to achieve a sustained recovery of stocks. No twine heavier than double 4mm or single 6mm should be allowed. Using 55mm nets and 8mm twine is a sick joke. I speak as a prawn (nephrops) fisherman.

If 20% of the sea was then closed as permanent no-take zones/ marine reserves and effort elsewhere was restricted by limiting fishing time, plus temporary area closures when

spawning concentrations or the presence of many immature fish make this appropriate, quotas for mixed fisheries could be dispensed with. Management would become a process of adjusting capacity and/or fishing time. **All dead fish would be treated as marketable fish.**

Payment for withdrawn/ unsold fish must be abolished: it was only ever a bribe to facilitate acceptance of the original CFP. Modern communications technology makes the concept redundant – it has always been irresponsible and misguided.

With 100mm minimum mesh size, limited fishing time, closures where juveniles congregate and no withdrawal payments, there is possibly no need for minimum landing size regulations. Nothing is gained by dumping dead fish (and all trawled fish must be assumed dead).

**No-take zones have been proved to allow rapid regeneration of stocks. The argument that displaced effort will negate their effects is a fallacy.** In areas where the fish resource is already depleted continued trawling produces lower fish mortality per unit effort. If there is a higher density of fish in the no-take zone, for any total biomass increased effort in open areas will be subject to diminishing returns (lower mortality). With effort restricted by law and a better alignment of supply with demand, higher fish prices will partially compensate.

For the first year of such a policy there would probably need to be a subsidized tie-up scheme.

As a fisherman I know that what we seek more than anything else when we are at sea is a “closed area” – an area of sand or mud that hasn’t been fished because other skippers don’t know of it. Alternatively, to be the first to modify his trawl to be able to fish an area of rough seabed is a guarantee of big catches. Unfished patches are full of fish, large breeding fish, even when surrounded by heavily fished trawling ground. The one caveat concerns populations of nephrops: unfished areas of prawn habitat have a relatively low biomass of large, cannibalistic adults – moderately fished areas produce a higher sustainable yield.

**5.3** – See above; replace quotas with tradeable fishing days – the same number for all boats that operate within a fishery region – only one fishery region per boat. Fishing days leaseable across national boundaries.

**Yes coastal zones should be reserved for smaller-scale vessels: urgently.**

**5.4** – The restriction on fishing time will encourage the matching of production with market needs.

**5.6** – There needs to be a cultural change. Scientists should stop thinking of fishermen as the enemy – and fishermen must start behaving responsibly (encouraged by a fishery policy that makes sense). Scientists should do more research on board fishing vessels. **If fishermen used the nets that research vessels use they would soon be bankrupt.** I understand that research vessels have to use the same nets at different times and places in order to produce statistically significant results, but there needs to be a parallel system of stock sampling using fishermen's equipment and knowledge. A more accurate picture of stocks would emerge by combining the two.

If vessel operators were allowed to land what they catch, from a known level of effort, a lot of information would be readily available.

**5.6** – If it is properly managed the sea is like a gold mine in your back garden. There should be little need for financial support. Any support should be focussed on improving the ratio between damage done to ecosystems and the harvest of marketable fish.

Research should continue to be funded.

Employment opportunities in peripheral areas might require some support.

**5.8** – Large, highly mobile vessels will never fish responsibly and sustainably in third party waters. The location and duration of their activity will always have to be controlled. They should not be allowed near the coastal waters fished by artisanal fleets.

Local ownership and control of coastal resources, along with restricted access, is the only hope for small scale fisheries, and the ecological and social benefits they offer.

**5.9** – Harvesting from the sea the feedstock that is needed for aquaculture production can be detrimental to natural ecosystems. This needs to be carefully regulated.

Many of the most serious failings of current legislation seem to me to derive from a failure of desk-bound legislators to comprehend that for mixed-species bottom fisheries, fishermen are not in control of precisely what they catch or kill and never will be.

With 20% of the sea permanently closed, 160 days fishing per year and 100mm cod end mesh I could fish profitably on the South coast of Ireland even with current stock levels (but recent falls in prices make that calculation a bit marginal).

