



Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee on Sea Fisheries

Contribution of the Social Partners

to the European Commission Green Paper
Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy

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1. Introduction

Europêche-COGECA and ETF¹, as partners of their joint Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee on Sea Fisheries (called hereafter « the Committee »), want to lay great emphasis on the unique opportunity offered by the Commission's consultation on CFP Reform to initiate an in-depth reflection on fisheries' future in Europe and to urge the Commission to implement a consistent and long-term strategy which be aimed at ensuring the industry's economic, social and environmental sustainability. The reflection ought to match and respond to the challenges of the European fisheries, i.a.: safeguarding quality jobs, sustaining and/or improving the economic profitability of companies and the conservation of fisheries resources.

The Committee draws the attention to the need to carry out socioeconomic impact studies, even to provide for compensatory measures for the sector's social partners, whenever CFP is altered, at whatever level, in the light of their possible repercussions.

2. CFP renovation cannot overlook the adoption of a true social dimension

For the Committee, the reform promoted by the Commission is a unique opportunity to enrich the CFP with a real social dimension. The Committee greatly regrets that, in general, the Green Paper does not sufficiently take into account the CFP social aspects. The Commission hardly makes direct reference to, or altogether omits, subjects like training and professional qualifications, recruitment, improving working conditions, promoting a culture of safety.

Consequently, the Committee would like a horizontal, cross-cutting integration of social matters in all aspects of the CFP and an enhancement of the social dimension which is as fundamental as the economic and environmental dimensions.

¹ Europêche-Cogeca and ETF represent respectively the employers' and employees' European organisations of the catching sector.

2.1. Promotion of training, harmonization, mutual recognition of qualifications and professional redeployment

Even though each Member State has its own training system and exclusive powers for education and vocational training, the Committee would advise that be evaluated the appropriateness to promote harmonization of the training criteria as a previous step to the mutual recognition of qualifications. The Committee could try and implement in the future a common base for qualifications and diplomas. Along this line, the Commission's support would be desirable. To promote the highest possible standards should be the core idea in view of possibly increasing the worker mobility in the sector, solving the lack of labour that exists in certain specific segments of fisheries, and at the same time, strengthening prevention of accident risks. Such harmonization would only be meaningful if it contributes to upgrade the vocational training level. Every national system which would provide for higher training standards as part of this harmonization ought to be safeguarded.

To remedy the declining attractiveness of the fishermen's occupation, vocational training has an important role to play. Ongoing initiatives in Europe seem limited and fragmented (inadequacy of financial resources is the main reason) and tend to be disconnected from other vocational training sectors. Therefore the Committee wishes that vocational training courses for the industry be better integrated into training schemes for other seagoing occupations.

Furthermore, the sector has developed strategies to solve the problem. Short-term solutions could be hiring migrant workers though for the Committee to foster non-EU employment should remain one among a broad range of only short-term solutions which would need to go hand and hand with longer-term measures aimed at upgrading the workplace conditions, the fishing fleet modernization, the integration of fisheries training into training schemes for maritime clusters in order to maintain the link between our sector's workers and a broader marine environment, avoiding thereby to lose acquired skills.

2.2. Promotion of a culture for safety-at-sea

The Committee holds the view that it is urgent to implement measures to improve safety conditions, as announced in the action plan of the Commission for an Integrated Maritime Policy, although this has not been put into practice until now. Health and safety legal provisions should also be enhanced at national and EU level, and make sure that they be effectively enforced.

In order to develop a true culture of risk prevention, the Committee proposes to collect harmonized statistical data on accidents and their causes, which are currently lacking at EC level. This data base would lend support to an appropriate regulatory instrument, particularly for small vessels of less than 15 meters, not covered by international or European regulations, in spite of constituting the bulk of the EC fleet.

Furthermore, the Committee regrets that the Member States be not more emphatically encouraged to ratify the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel (STCW-F) personnel and the Torremolinos Protocol for the safety of fishing vessels. The Committee would prompt EU policy-

makers to clear this hurdle which hinders more smaller-scale fleets, representing most EU fishing vessels.

The Committee believes however that any serious health and safety improvement on board fishing vessels implies to invest significantly in the fishermen's training but it ought to be borne in mind that adequate financial means should be made available for an effective enforcement and sanction scheme.

2.3. Improving working and pay conditions, and giving a new impulse to the social dialogue in the sector

Improving living and working conditions in fisheries presupposes to enhance the social dialogue in the sector. The Committee wishes that the future CFP be an incentive to promote the creation by the Member States of the necessary conditions for this social dialogue. The aim must be to enable the social partners, both at national and/or at local level with a view to cope jointly with issues like social welfare management, social security coverage, vocational training, working time regulation and factors having an impact on fishermen's income.

Finally, ETF and Europêche-COGECA underline that the decision-making process must take the best advantage of the opinions set forth by the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for Sea Fisheries. It is indeed the only European body which has been assigned the task of dealing with the CFP cross-cutting socioeconomic dimension.

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