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REPORT

WEBINAR ON RECREATIONAL FISHERIES MONITORING AND CONTROL

VIRTUAL MEETING, 4 DECEMBER 2020

Welcome and Opening

In her opening speech **Ms Veronika Veits** (Director of Directorate B, DG MARE), on behalf of DG MARE Director General Ms Charlina Vicheva, welcomed the speakers and the over 170 participants. She underlined the important role that Recreational Fisheries (RF) plays in European waters from the biological, economic and social perspectives. She also pointed out that it is also well recognised that RF can have a significant impact on marine living resources. Ms Veits recalled that it is of utmost importance to ensure that RF activities comply with the rules of the common fisheries policy (CFP) where there are specific rules for RF (e.g. sea bass in the Atlantic, cod in the Baltic Sea, eels and Bluefin tuna) and are carried out in line with the objectives of the common fisheries policy (CFP). This requires reliable and uniform data recording and reporting to assess the impact and set appropriate measures. Within this context, the Commission proposal of the review of the EU Control Fisheries System includes enhanced rules for the control of RF. It foresees the introduction of a registration or licensing system for all recreational fishers and an obligation to collect reliable data on recreational catches, in particular for species or stocks that are subject to EU conservation measures.

Ms Veits called on the co-legislators (Council and European Parliament) to endorse the Commission proposal for a better monitoring and control of RF, in order to ensure fair and sustainable fisheries and be fully consistent with the European Green Deal objectives.

She congratulated the opportunity to hear first-hand about existing digital tools that are already in place in several Member States (Cyprus, Denmark and Spain) and to share the results of the pilot project, which was launched at the request of the European Parliament on reinforcing the control schemes of recreational catches of sea bass in the Atlantic. Besides sea bass, the pilot project covered other species in other sea basins and successfully developed an integrated EU catch reporting system for RF. During the project the tool was tested in real conditions and Ms Veits acknowledged the importance of angler's and recreational fisheries federations for the accomplishments of the project. To finalise, she underlined the importance of a regular dialogue with key stakeholders (anglers, decision-makers, national authorities, NGOs, commercial fishers, advisory councils, etc.).

She also hoped that the detailed information gathered in the study would contribute to the discussions on the revision of the Fisheries Control Regulation in the Council and in the European Parliament.

Session 1: Setting the scene

In the first session, **Ms Clara Aguilera** (Member of the European Parliament (EP) and Rapporteur in the PECHE Committee of the EP for the proposal on the revision of the “Fisheries control system”) set the scene at political level. She provided a first-hand presentation of the ongoing discussions on the EP regarding the provisions on recreational fisheries (RF). Ms Aguilera underlined the importance of RF in the EU and the need for more regulation. She noted that the CFP only refers to RF in Recital 3 but recognises that RF may have significant impacts. Ms Aguilera referred to the report in 2022 on the CFP and claimed that we should seize the opportunity offered by that occasion to introduce more regulation on RF.

Then, she presented the opinion of her political group (and of the majority of the PECH Committee members) on the RF provisions. Following the work done in 2018 with the approval of a report highlighting the need to have more data on RF and a better overview of the activity, she mentioned that the revision of the Fisheries Control is a new opportunity to define adequate instruments. She also indicated the timeline for the endorsement of the EP proposals in the PECH Committee (end of January) and by the EP Plenary (February/March). Ms Aguilera enumerated four important elements that should be included in the revised Control Regulation:

1. A national register or a licence scheme for RF. She defended that all Member States should have either a national register or a licence scheme.
2. Catch reporting system for RF to assess correctly the fish stocks. She underlined that is possible to implement this system (as it is already done for commercial fisheries) and noted that this measure will allow assessing the real impact of RF and fighting overfishing in EU waters. She mentioned the use of apps as a possible tool to report RF data. She advocated that RF and small-scale fisheries (SSF) could use a similar catch reporting system.
3. Geo-localization devices on board of RF chartered vessels and “*pesca-turismo*” vessels.
4. Marking of RF fishing gear. She highlighted that the marking of gears exists already in other recreational activities and, therefore, the process should be simple and proportional.

Ms Aguilera pointed out that compromises were not always easy to reach as the political groups have two main contrasting views on the topic: a) RF should continue to be left exclusively to Member States and b) RF should be better regulated at European level (she defended this view).

On her closing remarks, Ms Aguilera invited all participants to get involved in the ongoing discussions of the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy. She hopes RF will be part of these debates, as it plays an important role in a greener, more sustainable and better future.

Mr Harry Strehlow (Member of the ICES WGRFS and researcher in the Thuenen- Institute of Baltic Sea Fisheries of Germany) helped to set out the scene presenting facts about RF in Europe and explained the importance of RF from a biological, social and economic point of view. His main messages were:

- There are more recreational than commercial fishers. There are almost 9 million RF and anglers and they go fishing roughly 77 million days annually in Europe. They spend almost 6 billion euros annually and the economic welfare that is generated is over 10 billion euros annually, supporting almost 100000 jobs throughout Europe (Source: [Hyder et al. 2017](#)).
- There is really a paradigm shift necessary because RF in some countries is becoming more important than commercial fishing – it is a high value sector. The management and allocation of resources is a real issue in Europe because there is no legal framework stipulating how to

allocate resources between recreational and commercial sectors. This gap needs to be addressed in the future.

- Anglers do take a significant but variable amount of fish. If we compare recreational catches with commercial landings for some candidate stocks within Europe (e.g. seabass, cod, eel, mackerel, Pollack and salmon) it is possible to see that for some stocks these recreational removals are quite substantial. For seabass in the North Sea, the western Baltic cod and for Baltic salmon, recreational removals are included in the assessments since many years. For other stocks, like mackerel the recreational removals are very small and there is no real need to include this in the assessment process.
- What makes the sector so challenging is its diversity - RF is very diverse so the controls need to account for all platforms and individuals. There are anglers fishing from private boats, from charter boats but also anglers fishing from shore. They do not just use random lines for fishing, they also use nets and traps and some are spear fishers, targeting fish but also crustaceans and molluscs. The biggest diversity comes from the participant itself, i.e. the average angler does not exist. They also differ hugely in terms of their activity patterns, the different motivations, the way they are organised or not and, ultimately, the amount of impact they have. All this makes it difficult to manage, assess and enforce the sector.
- Anglers do not maximise catches but their satisfaction. For example, if we hand out a bag limit it does not mean that every angler is catching up to this bag limit. Some of them will release all of their catch and it does not matter what the bag limit.
- The Control Regulation focuses on vessels – what is not very useful for the RF sector where the individual is the legal entity. Vessels do not catch fish but people do so. Hopefully, the revision of the Control Regulation will deal with this issue.
- Understanding how anglers are affected by regulations is crucial to sustain the sector and ensure the continued economic benefit to coastal regions.
- To know how much fish is actually caught is important to harmonise data collection attempts in Europe (one size does not fit all). Multispecies surveys, a combination of on-site and off-site approaches and a licensing system would help tremendously.

Mr David Mitchell (Chairman of the subgroup “Sea”, European Anglers Alliance – EAA) and **Mr Olivier Portrat** (CEO of the European Fishing Tackle & Trade Association - EFTTA) have prepared a combined presentation on the social and economic impacts of RF.

Mr. David Mitchell started by providing some figures illustrating the magnitude of the impact of marine RF in Europe. Given the significant impact of RF, he considered that there is the need to develop a common and stable economic data collection programme. Mr David Mitchell also defended that RF needs to become a sector targeted for development under the CFP alongside commercial fishing and aquaculture. He added RF already supports the CFP, for example, through selective and sustainable fishing (e.g. catch and release of sea bass) but the activity is not yet receiving enough support back. Mr David Mitchell highlighted the role of RF in data collection and enumerated a number of policymaking initiatives where anglers are participating actively. According to Mr Mitchell RF is already somehow part of the CFP acquis (e.g. data collection for certain species, multiannual plans and under the control regulation) but it is not yet recognised as a full stakeholder and part of the catching sector in the CFP. He finalised his presentation with a provocative question: Can the EU afford not to include RF in the CFP?

Mr Olivier Portrat added that there are diverse activities under RF (e.g. netting, trapping, long line, spearfishing, etc.) but angling is by far the most common practice. He noted that anglers do not fish to generate income but seeking adventure in nature. He finalised his presentation urging the Commission, EP and Member States to take a proactive approach and together with EEA and EFTTA find funding

opportunities to conduct a recurrent pan-European survey (e.g. every 5 years), as is already done in the USA.

Session 2: Existing RF monitoring and control tools

The second session concerned the presentation of three monitoring and control tools for RF developed in Cyprus, Spain and Denmark.

Mr Yiannos Kyriacou (Head of the Fisheries Control Section of the Department of Fisheries and Marine Research of Cyprus) presented the [Cypriot CY-FIS app](#), explained its functionalities and shared the experience since the app was launched. CY-FIS is a recently developed RF data collection tool available for Android and iOS (is also a web-based application¹). Mr Kyriacou recalled that RF is a very important activity in Cyprus. A [recent study](#)² showed that RC has a major impact in Cyprus especially in coastal areas – for some species the impact could be of the same magnitude as commercial fisheries. Having this study in mind and the work of the last two years to improve the national catch reporting system, led the Cypriot authorities to look for alternative ways to collect accurate and reliable catch data. In 2020, the Cypriot authorities launched the CY-FIS app with the slogan “Sharing Information for Sustainable Management of Fisheries Resources”. This application was co-financed by the EMFF³. Mr Kyriacou did a live demonstration of the app. One of the features highlighted is an interactive map that shows the user position in real time and sends alarms if the user is not allowed to fish in a particular area. Mr Kyriacou shared some challenges and lesson learned. 4-5 months after the app had been launched, only few users are registered and most fishers are sceptical. According to Mr Yiannos Kyriacou, the main reasons for the scepticism is that fishers are worried to reveal their “secret fishing spot” and the app is not yet sufficiently user-friendly. Worth noticing are the GPS interferences felt in the area and that affected the accuracy of the geo-localisation. For now, the app is used on a voluntary basis. The fisheries authorities will further develop the tool and will invest in publicising the app. The authorities are considering making it mandatory for some groups of users.

Mr Matias Lozano (Researcher at the Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO) in Spain) presented the [Spanish app DPESCA](#) and explained its functionalities. DPESCA is a voluntary, self-reporting, RF data collection tool available for Android and iOS (and also as a web-based platform). The app has been launched in May 2020 and is managed by IEO. The application was co-funded by the EMFF⁴. Mr Matias Lozano explained that the developers invested considerable time developing “digital forms” (based on questions and answers) that facilitate the standardisation of data and the use by fishers. The forms were created following the specifications of the Handbook for the Recreational Fisheries Data Collection in the Mediterranean and in the Black Sea, of the ICES WGRFS⁵ and the support of the local fishers associations and federations. In December 2020, there were 756 registered users and more than 1200 valid fishing days. Mr Matias Lozano shared the main challenges encountered so far: fisher’s

¹ <https://dfmrapp.com.cy/>

² Michailidis et al. 2020. Recreational fisheries can be of the same magnitude as commercial fisheries: the case of Cyprus. Fisheries Research, 231, 105711 - <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fishres.2020.105711>

³ The total budget for the application was EUR 97 481. The application development, web application and 5 years maintenance correspond to 40% of the total value; 60% of the costs was the hardware (servers) and database licences)

⁴ The initial costs were EUR3 600 euros and the running costs are EUR 350 per year – two people of the project run the app

⁵ ICES Working Group on Recreational Fisheries Surveys
(<https://www.ices.dk/community/groups/Pages/WGRFS.aspx>)

engagement and retention. He underlined that to obtain the commitment from users it was essential to pass a clear message. It was necessary to explain how data was going to be used and build an atmosphere of collaboration and trust – only with these elements the fishers were motivated and started reporting their activities. Mr Lozano also stressed the importance of publicizing the app, having an active “chat” for clarification of doubts and the need of making information available to fishers and associations.

In his final remarks, Mr Lozano concluded that RF data collection using digital applications (off site surveys) are cheap, easy to use and allow obtaining fisheries data on a continuous basis. However, these data need to be verified with field trips and on-line or on-site interviews, even if it implies an increase monitoring effort, both personal and financial. He identified a major gap between fishers and managers and defended that the representatives of recreational fishers should participate in the development of management plans and other regulations.

Mr Christian Skov (Associate Professor at the “Section of Freshwater fisheries and ecology” at the Technical University of Denmark in Silkeborg) presented the Danish national electronic angling log book - [Fangstjournalen](#). The logbook targets capture reel and rod anglers only (capture of all types of fisheries, both inland and sea fisheries). DTU Aqua developed the tool with support from ministries and angling associations. Platform is smartphone app and computer platform, is voluntary, and was not developed for control purposes. Mr Christian Skov explained that it is citizens’ project to support existing data collection in Denmark and it is not only about catch, is more about trips. The first version was launched in 2016 and took three years to develop. The second version was launched in 2020. He explained that the app has a certain lifetime and has to be renewed. Currently there are 13000 participants in the platform and more than 50000 fishing trips reported. Mr Christian Skov indicated that the app collects data on species, length/weight and number of fish, target species and time effort that is spent. Geolocation is automatically registered and the whole system is built up as a fishing trip⁶. The app offers maps where the anglers can explore own fishing spots, catch positions and more. Anglers can also explore statistics from collected data. Besides these features, the app provides “services” that help the anglers (e.g. weather information) and in the app there is an easy access to information and knowledge that could be useful for the anglers (e.g. close areas, fish biology, etc.). In addition, anglers can have onsite information about fishing regulations (it facilitates compliance with regulations and avoids unintentional illegal fishing).

Mr Christian shared his thoughts about the importance of data evaluation and electronic logbooks as a future tool (opportunities and challenges). As a conclusion, he underlined the following aspects:

1. Denmark is one of the first countries that developed an electronic platform that aims to capture nationwide angling and collect research data for management.
2. Electronic platforms are a potential tool for collecting fisheries data, such as CPUE⁷, size distributions, release rates and trip effort, angler behaviour, etc.
3. Electronic tools have an enormous potential as communication vector between fishers and managers (e.g. information about regulations).
4. More research is needed - when can an electronic platform data stand alone? What is the spatial and temporal stability of data quality? What are the fisheries depended variations in quality?

⁶ fishing trips without catches have also to be reported

⁷ CPUE - catch per unit effort

Session 3: Towards an integrated EU catch reporting system for recreational fisheries

The third session focused on the results of the pilot project.

Mr Owen McIntyre (Consultant and chartered engineer, on behalf of the pilot project consortium Halieuticom-Seaneo-Scenent) presented the results of the pilot project “Control scheme of recreational catches of sea bass” (MARE 2019/006)⁸. Mr Owen McIntyre explained that the pilot project aimed to reinforce the control schemes for recreational catches of selected species in Europe (i.e. sea bass, salmon, cod and blackspot seabream). Based on a thorough bibliographic review and surveys to key stakeholders (e.g. >800 recreational fishers from eight countries and fisheries authorities), the pilot project developed recommendations for a target control scheme and provided concrete guidelines for its application. The stakeholders’ survey results showed that, in general, recreational fishers in Europe agree with catch reporting (60%) and prefer mobile application-based reporting tools. The implementation of an integrated monitoring and control information system is recommended to facilitate the sharing of fishery related data and promote cooperation of all stakeholders in the management of marine recreational fishing. He listed the needs to be met in order to build a successful solution:

- Compulsory registration (simple and free) allowing to have better framing data for the fisheries.
- Real-time catch data collection, which supports the use of a mobile data app. It is highly preferable to a periodic reporting or survey method where there is an important bias for recall.
- A phased approach: a first phase with voluntary reporting until certain criteria for participation level are met; a second phase where reporting would be compulsory for all fishers.
- Leveraging the trend of citizen science - the communication to fishers and the importance of fostering motivation by the fishers to contribute to this programme is very important for the success of the system.
- Using the data in a way to optimise field programmes, on the ground control activities and data surveys that could optimise the costs involved by being out to target seasons or geographical areas.
- Finally, a very important recommendation for the system is to have an open technical approach, which will allow much more evolution in the tool and help to remain future proof. As well as being able to be applied and adapted to different specificities in different areas, in different populations, different types of RF etc.

Then, Mr Owen McIntyre guided the participants through the integrated European catch reporting system - [RecFishing.eu](https://www.recfishing.eu), developed, tested and deployed by the pilot project. He indicated that the partner app that was used in the pilot project was [FishFriender](https://www.fishfriendr.com), which supported the development test and initial deployment phase of the RecFishing.eu system. He noted that in the future the system can be paired with other apps and other sources of data (as long as they meet the minimum criteria including the data set). This way, fishers are able to then chose the tool, use their usual fishing tool or be able to switch if there is advances in one way or another which addresses the point of the cost of maintaining the tool over time. Mr Owen McIntyre demonstrated that there are no major technical barriers to the implementation of such a programme at EU level and shared testimonials from fishers that have participated in the testing phase – at sea. According to Mr McIntyre, with the developments achieved by the project, the transition from the proof of concept phase to a fully operational system requires minimal tuning and can greatly improve the efficiency of monitoring and control of marine recreational fisheries in the European Union. The project also identified cultural, political and administrative barriers that still need to be overcome. Stakeholder engagement is a key element to implement successfully the

⁸ Pilot project final report: <https://op.europa.eu/fr/publication-detail/-/publication/01f3d94d-4019-11eb-b27b-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-180378385>

recommended control scheme. In his final remarks, Mr Owen McIntire invited everyone to join RecFishing.eu, have the experience and provide feedback on the experience.

Wrap-up and conclusions

In her concluding remarks, **Ms Francesca Arena** (Head of the fisheries control and inspections Unit of DG MARE) expressed her enthusiasm about the topics discussed and cherished the active participation during the webinar. She reassured the public that the Commission would consider the main messages during the upcoming negotiations on the Fisheries Control System and under the CFP assessment. She underlined the following messages:

1. There are catch reporting tools already in use in some MS (some of the tools were developed using EMFF funding) but most of the tools have been designed not for RF control purposes. Whatever the objective of these tools it is important that they consider the benefits for the main users, i.e. recreational fishers. That is fundamental to have the buy-in and motivation of the users.
2. It is important to ensure confidentiality of the data collected and reported, particularly regarding geo-localisation of the vessel or fishers location. Fishers hope scientists and managers use the data sensibly.
3. It is crucial to provide technical support to all users using apps, particularly when they start using the catch reporting tool.
4. To further engage and keep them motivated to report, recreational fishers want to be heard. For that, we need to fill the gap between fishers and managers.
5. The Commission does not see the need for competition among different apps and encourages all to use their apps and keep developing them.

Finally, Ms Francesca Arena noted that the Commission would continue to invest the necessary resources to have a fully functional integrated catch-reporting tool for RF - a tool that recognises that there is no such a thing as an “average angler” and a tool that is future proof.

She thanked all for their participation.

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The **webinar presentations** are published under the following link:

https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/press/webinar-recreational-fisheries-monitoring-and-control_en

The **final report of the pilot project** “Control scheme for recreational catches of sea bass” is published under the following link:

<https://op.europa.eu/fr/publication-detail/-/publication/01f3d94d-4019-11eb-b27b-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-180378385>

Thread posted on social media:

https://twitter.com/EU_MARE/status/1358814929470578688?s=20



Webinar: Recreational fisheries monitoring & control

Brussels, 4 December 2020

(Web streamed – Interactio platform)

AGENDA

Webinar chaired by [Francesca Arena](#), Head of Unit DG MARE Unit D4 - Fisheries Control and Inspections

10:00 – 10:15 (CET)	Welcome and Opening: Veronika Veits , Director Department B, DG MARE
10:15 – 11:00 (CET)	<p>SESSION 1: Setting the scene</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Recreational fisheries: what role and rules in future?</i> [15 min] – Clara Aguilera (Member of European Parliament) - <i>How many recreational fishers? How much fish? Where?</i> [10 min] – Harry Strehlow (Thuenen-Institute of Baltic Sea Fisheries, DE) - <i>Recreational fisheries is really worth talking about? The social and economic impacts of this activity</i> [10 min] – David Mitchell (European Anglers Alliance, EAA) & Olivier Portrat (European Fishing Tackle Trade Association, EFTTA) - <i>Questions & Answers</i> [10 min]
11:00 – 11:10 (CET)	Break
11:10 – 11:40 (CET)	<p>SESSION 2: Existing RF monitoring and control tools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Cyprus's Recreational Fisheries application: exploring new "control" waters</i> [10 min] – Yiannos Kyriacou (DFMR, CY) - <i>Dpesca: a new link between recreational fishers and stock management in Spain?</i> [10 min] – Matias Lozano (IEO, ES) - <i>Fangstjournalen: Denmark's experience using an IT catch reporting tool</i> [10 min] – Christian Skov (DTU Aqua, DK)
11:40 – 12:15 (CET)	<p>SESSION 3: Towards an integrated EU catch reporting system for recreational fisheries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Is it possible to have an integrated EU catch reporting system for recreational fisheries?</i> [20 min] – Owen McIntyre (EU Sea bass pilot project consortium) - <i>Questions & Answers</i> [15 min]
12:15 – 12:30 (CET)	Wrap-up and conclusions: Francesca Arena , Head of Unit DG MARE D4

Some of the points raised during the discussions by the participants and panellists

(both orally and written in the chat)

- The importance of assessing the real socio-economic impact of RF, including details on the values estimated
- Need to balance biological and economic objectives, i.e. find ways to keep the fishing opportunities without closing the sector, for example by reducing fishing mortality by using different management measures (e.g. stricter bag limits, high minimum sizes at landing, longer closure periods, etc.)
- How to create a level playing field in recreational fisheries controls across individual MS? (As this is already an ongoing issue in commercial fisheries inspection between individual MS).
- Assess the effects of commercial fishing on the recreational sector and vice-versa
- Need to consider how to adequately manage and control the recreational catches of migratory species (e.g. eels)
- Need for similar requirements on tracking and reporting for RF and SSF
- Need to fully included RF in the CFP and considering RF as a fishing sector
- Need for fairness across sectors to counterbalance regulation and administrative burden
- Improve the knowledge on catch and release practices and assess how the technical and control rules should take this practice into consideration
- Need to have compulsory licensing and catch declaration to improve the knowledge on RF
- Need to have more data on other recreational fisheries other than angling
- Need to have socio-economic data besides catch data
- Need to focus on fishing effort (not only catches but fishing trips)
- The use or prohibition of nets in RF
- All apps and electronic platform can be useful to support data collection but need to be complemented by sound fisheries monitoring programmes (e.g. onsite and off-site surveys)
- Need to understand the biases generated by data collection using electronic platforms and look at the data carefully
- Need to evaluate if the costs of an app development and maintenance justify the quality of data collected
- Need to continue with the data collection framework irrespectively of any app or any type of control tool which will be used in future
- Need to consider those recreational fishers that do not have so smartphones, internet and social media and find solutions fit for them too
- Consider to include three more aspects for RF: a) Prohibit effectively the commercialization of catches from RF fishing; b) prohibit the use of specific gears for professional fishing, and c) direct recreational fishing to fishing without death
- Explore the possibility to have country-specific apps and a common structure that allows the consolidation of data
- Support a mentality change and provide mandatory training for fishers, underlining aspects of sustainability and adequate rules for monitoring and control
- Need to better control illegal sales of recreational catches (e.g. more controls at restaurants)
- The possibility to use EMFF (and EMFAF) to further develop and sustain data collection efforts and control activities of RF
- Need to have better information and better data; once there are data on the catches then we can go a step further and regulate
- Desire to have the data, to empower scientists to give a better scientific advice and then fisheries managers to take the right decisions