

ANDREW GEORGE MP

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Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
MARE A
European Commission
99 rue Joseph II
B - 1049 Brussels

Our ref: 09/17.4/ag/bh

Dear Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries,

Please find below my submission for the consultation on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy.

As my Party's representative on fishing matters I have spoken in the European Standing Committee debate (November 2nd 2009) regarding the issues of reform for the Common Fisheries Policy. Furthermore, I have raised a number of points regarding possible reforms in the Annual Fisheries debate in the UK Parliament (December 1st 2009).

In addition to my remarks in these debates I would, however, like to take the opportunity presented by the consultation process to formally raise a number of points I feel are particularly pertinent.

I would like to call attention to issues around four main themes. I have tried to give a brief summary of the issues and suggest potential solutions where appropriate as follows;

Regional Management

It is commonly recognised within the fishing industry that the CFP as it currently stands is in urgent need of reform. Decision-making powers and responsibilities should be moved from the present centralised structure to regional bodies that are in a better position to address the local issues in the marine environment and to manage the sustainability of the fishing industry in their region.

The Minister has acknowledged the need for this reform on numerous occasions including stating in a Defra press release (22nd April 2009) 'We need a reformed CFP to...devolve powers and responsibilities.' In addition whilst visiting fishing communities around the country the Defra CFP team noted that fisherman have, 'been telling us [Defra] that technical decision-making should be decentralised from Europe, including those closest to the [individual] fishery.' (Defra Fishing Focus Newsletter Autumn 2009)

Proposals for the increased devolution of European fishing policy have been central to Liberal Democrat policy since 1994. In Parliamentary debates I have called for further devolution within a reformed CFP and the creation of Regional Management Councils. These regional councils would have substantial decision-making powers and responsibilities devolved from the Commission and the Council of Ministers in contrast to the regions current role 'advising' the European Commission. Any such regional council would be comprised of members representing fishing nations that have an interesting that region's stock as well as other "stakeholders", scientists,

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government departments, and enforcement authorities. This would guarantee an international element to the regional management of individual fisheries. Increased devolution would provide the twin benefits of giving greater responsibility for the welfare of regional industry to the local fishing industry itself whilst utilising local knowledge to maximum benefit.

Eliminating discard:

It clearly goes against the conservation purposes that underpin the CFP that the problem of large volumes of discard remains unsolved. The Minister has said that he believes it is possible to drastically reduce (even eliminate) discards using the Scottish model. However, there are substantial difficulties that would inhibit the success of the Scottish model in the Western Approaches and other ultra mixed fisheries in UK and European waters. Nevertheless the industry remains enthusiastic about finding an alternative. Indeed the UK fishing industry has proposed a move away from relying solely on quotas towards making more effort to utilise satellite surveillance technology and closed fishing grounds. The current quota system acknowledges that it is difficult to distinguish between intentional and unintentional by-catch, particularly in mixed fisheries. The closed fishing ground at Trevoise off of North Cornwall has resulted in noticeable anecdotal stock recovery after only 3 years of seasonal closure.

Crucial to the success of any efforts to eliminate discard will be the creation of structures and incentives that encourage fisherman and scientists to build closer working relationships with each another so that a balance can be better struck between the interests of a viable fishing industry and the conservation needs of a sustainable marine environment.

Inshore Management

It has been recognised in cross Party debate that there is a need to broaden the limits of the new Marine and Coastal Access Act out to 12 miles and, for enforcement purposes, out to the median line. During the debate for the Report Stage of the Bill I tabled an amendment (No. 42) that sought parity of enforcement between UK, European, and Non EU foreign vessels.

Enforcement

With regard to enforcement; I have earlier suggested that the anecdotal evidence of successful stock recovery at the closed Trevoise grounds indicates that it is a fitting model for the future management of fishing. This model would prove particularly useful where local circumstances (such as mixed fisheries) meant that employing the Scottish model previously mooted by the Minister was unsuitable. Working in conjunction with efforts to extend the use of satellite transponders down the fleet size, fishing ground (real time or seasonal) closures could provide a potent tool on the provision of a sustainable future for both the marine environment and the fishing industry. It is also important that a reformed CFP encourages the use of bi-lateral agreements between fishing nations to carry out 'spot checks' on each other. Further bi-lateral agreements could make provisions for European fishing nations to exchange information and learn from each other's enforcement regimes with the prospect of establishing best practice.

I would be more than happy to provide more information on any of the points I have raised.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew George MP