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European Network AKTEA: Response to the Green Paper “Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy”

“Behind each boat there is a woman, a family and a community”

The European network, AKTEA, a grouping of women’s organisations in fisheries and aquaculture, notes that the Green Paper, 2010-2020, prepared by the European Commission for discussion among European stakeholders, does not refer to the principle of equal treatment between men and women. According to the EC Treaty, (articles 2 and 3), this has to be taken into account in all European policies. In the previous Green Paper, (2002), the word “women” was mentioned just once, but in this new version it does not appear at all. We are surprised by this absence and wish to set out here the current contribution of women and their claims for the future.

Women in fisheries management organisations

Women are very much a part of the fishing and ancillary industries and their organisations actively participate in fisheries management at all levels. At the mid-term evaluation of the RACs, the Commission responded positively to the request of the AKTEA network for women’s groups to sit on the RACs. Today, they participate in all RACs, with the exceptions of the pelagic and long distance fisheries RACs. In some instances, they are part of the RAC executive. Following an invitation by the Commissioner, AKTEA is now planning to participate in the Advisory Committee for Fisheries and Aquaculture (ACFA). The desire of women to actively participate on such committees highlights the importance they accord to fisheries resource management. Their perspectives are a valuable addition to the process.

AKTEA supports the right of a fisher’s spouse or partner to be eligible for membership and election in fishers’ organisations at all levels in all Member States.

Women’s participation in fisheries harvesting

The Commission appears to ignore that, in 2003, women involved in sea fisheries harvesting, represented 4,1 % of the total recorded employment in the sector, according to Pavel Salz’s study (2006) on employment in fisheries and the report for the European Parliament (2008) on women in Fisheries¹. Overall, women represented 26, 4 % of employment in the seafood industry (capture, aquaculture and processing)².

¹ Frangoudes K., The role of women in the sustainable development of European fisheries areas, European Parliament, Policy department B, Structural and Cohesion Policies, PE 389.586, May 2008,.

² Salz P., and al., Employment in the fisheries sector: current situation, European Commission DG MARE, FISH/2004/4, 2006.

As a network, AKTEA, regrets that despite EU parliament recommendations and other EC texts, we still do not have gender based statistics on Fisheries at a European level other than old consultancy-based evaluations³. Many women working in fisheries, including shellfish gatherers, are not included in fisheries employment statistics and are not recognised as fishers, because their activity does not require the use of boat. However, these women, mainly in Galicia and Portugal, continue to demonstrate their ability to manage important shellfish stocks on the shore and their incomes contribute to fisher families' livelihoods and to community development. In addition, there are many women involved in inland fisheries for eel and other freshwater fish species. These women are not included in current fisheries statistics.

They have particular interests in: the protection of the environment, the eco-system and in reducing pollution in rivers and coastal waters. They recognise the need to work with the wider fisher community for sound fishery management plans. The involvement of women in support of a workable Eel Recovery Plan is but one example of this. Women also participate in shellfish farming and support these activities throughout the Member States because they are source of employment for the coastal communities and they improve the quality of the coastal environment.

Women's participation in fishing enterprises and communities

The Green Paper refers to fisheries dependent communities without making any reference to the role of women within these communities. Women have different roles within the communities: economic, social and cultural. Fishing and shell fishing family enterprises depend on women's participation for their economic survival. Women are fish or shellfish traders, net menders, administrators and accountants for their fishing and shell fishing enterprises. In addition they represent the business in many legal and professional matters when their husbands or partners are at sea. They often initiate diversification activities such as processing, tourism and restaurants. But their contributions are rarely paid or declared. Women throughout Europe want recognition of their role in these fishing enterprises in order that they may have access to social benefits and representation. The 'collaborative spouse' status (EU directive 86/613)⁴ was a major step forward. This status, when available, gives women access to social benefits, which in turn provide replacement for maternity leave, retirement pension, training and many other social benefits. But this status is not yet available to all qualifying women in the European Union.

Over and above their contributions to fishing and shell fishing enterprises, women are crucial in maintaining important social links within their communities and they contribute to the sustainability of most fishing communities. Without women's contributions, fisheries communities would collapse. It should not be forgotten that they have a major role in the social reproduction of fishers. In order for more young people to become fishers by 2020, as stated in the Green Paper, women will need to feel positive about the future of the industry, and this may prove to be more of an issue than the availability of the resource. If women are not proud of their fisheries, then they will not support their children in becoming fishers.

Small-scale fisheries, communities and individual rights

The Green Paper advocates further development of resource based individual rights (Individual Quotas). It has also a strong bias towards industrial fisheries which have not

³ Mc Allister E., 2002, The role of women in the fisheries sector, EC, DG Fisheries, Fish/2000/01.

⁴ Council Directive 86/613/EEC of 11 December 1986 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity, including agriculture, in a self-employed capacity, and on the protection of self-employed women during pregnancy and motherhood. OJ 359, 19.12.1986, p.56-58.

necessarily demonstrated the best practice in terms of economic and environmental sustainability. Stabilising the economy of small-scale fisheries should rather be a key priority. In this regard, the Green Paper should clarify both operationally and legally what is meant by industrial, artisanal, coastal and small scale fisheries in the EU.

It is well documented that the introduction of IQs rapidly leads to transferability and restructuring of the industry. In countries where these do not yet exist, the proposal to attribute IQs to the “industrial” fisheries is a threat to many fishing communities, and especially to those supporting small-scale fisheries. Small-scale fisheries represent a large proportion of the European fleet, specifically in Southern Europe and great source of employment within the communities. Women’s participation is the greatest in small scale fisheries. Small businesses are vulnerable to speculation by larger businesses. The introduction of IQs should not be taken lightly: possible impacts anticipated and proper measures adopted to prevent or compensate for any anticipated and acknowledged negative consequences. The Green Paper is not clear about the type of objectives and measures the Commission envisages in these instances. A clearer position is also needed on the allocation of quotas, in a way that guarantees small-scale fisheries a percentage of the TAC. The lack of clarity about fisheries segmentation in Europe makes it still more difficult to have a targeted policy in this regard.

Women and quota allocation

If an IQ system is implemented, the Commission should ensure that women are not excluded from the benefits of the rights attached to the IQ. Directly or indirectly, in most countries, women’s contribution to the enterprise is not recognised. As a consequence, spouses and partners often lose the rights to company property when divorced or widowed. If a quota is allocated to the fisherman, either directly or through a boat that is not under co-ownership of husband and wife (most cases), then women will never enjoy the benefits of **transfer, despite her contribution**. The Commission should clearly write in the legislation, the principle of co-ownership for husband and wife of the quota allocated to each enterprise.

Social impact assessment of IQ implementation

The implementation of IQ will have a social impact within fisheries communities, where such a system is not yet available. As a network we recommend that a social study at community level is undertaken before their implementation, and that this constitute the social baseline. A social evaluation of the system should then be undertaken between 2 and 4 years after the establishment of the baseline. Social indicators such as: education level, contribution of wives or partners, health, age of children, do mothers wish to see their child become fishers, the well being of the families and the communities should all be clearly defined and taken into account alongside employment levels. Such indicators are invaluable in helping to monitor social changes within the communities caused by new fishery management regulations. Social assessment should also be realised in Member States which have already implemented IQ’s because it will help understand the changes that may happen within the fishing communities in case of generalisation of IQ.