

Árainn Mhór Island Fishing Committee

European Commission Consultation on the Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)

Contribution from the Árainn Mhór Island Fishing Committee to the Reform of the CFP

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Introduction

The Árainn Mhór Fishing Committee is a body of men who were forced by legislation to organise themselves and fight for the right to survive in their natural environment. The group was founded in October 2006 and speaks on behalf of the fishermen of Árainn Mhór and the other islands off County Donegal, Ireland.

This submission is made on behalf of the fishermen of the Donegal islands but the issues contained within it are common to island fishermen throughout Ireland. For the purpose of brevity and clarity, the submission will deal with issues specific to Árainn Mhór Island.

We call for the fair treatment of small island communities, respect for fishermen as custodians of our fisheries and the sea. We ask for the responsibility and right to practice traditional livelihoods that are ecologically sustainable, socially just and culturally diverse and pass down our traditions, knowledge and skills to future generations.

Declaration 30, adopted by the Conference that adopted the Treaty of Amsterdam, “recognizes that island regions suffer from structural handicaps linked to their island status”, and that “Community legislation must take account of these handicaps and (...) specific measures may be taken, where justified, in favour of these reasons”. Nowhere are such specific measures needed more than for the Donegal island fisheries. The CFP takes no account of our islands and our special circumstances. We see this as a major failing, and one which undermines the very survival of our communities.

There are laws to protect birds and seals, but traditional fishing and small island communities are afforded little protection, with fishermen who are already an endangered species, now threatened with extinction. Our islands have characteristics that are intrinsically valuable and which play an important role in the mixture that forms Europe’s diverse coastal economy; islands should be maintained - not as museum pieces, but as vibrant and critical elements of modern Europe.

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However, the ecosystems associated with these islands are fragile; the way of life of the islanders is fragile; and the economy of these islands is fragile. Against the many pressures of a modern market economy that challenge the viability and sustainability of these islands, these islanders continue to act as custodians of this way of life.

Ireland is bound by international obligations such as the Convention on biological diversity 1992, including the duty to “..... *subject to its national legislation, respect preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application with the approval and involvement with the holders of such knowledge innovations and practices and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilisation of such knowledge, innovations and practices*”. (Article 8(j) CBD 1992).

If island communities are to survive and thrive, the CFP needs to recognise and celebrate their unique status and to defend their rights to life and livelihood. We therefore feel that there should be a special chapter of the reformed CFP that deals with island fishing communities.

For Árainn Mhór and the other Donegal islands we call on the commission to look at creating opportunities within:

- Easing the 2006 ban on salmon fishing
- Easing the regulations that restrict fishing in area V1 A
- Strengthening the derogation to principle of open and equal access to a common resource by restricting the 12-mile zone only to local island small-scale inshore fishermen, and managing the fishery on a days at sea basis.
- Providing a special derogation to the council regulations for fixing fishing opportunities (TACs and quotas), by making special provisions for island communities, and ring fencing island quotas.

As supported by the Árainn Mhór declaration of 14th December 2009 which was signed by all participants attending an international conference on Árainn Mhór on 12th – 13th December 2009 (attached)

The vision.

If the islands can gain consideration and return to their traditional way of life, we can look forward ten years to a situation where Árainn Mhór would be linked in solidarity with other European and International small islands, sharing experiences strategies and visions for resilient communities and ecosystems. We could look forward to a marine ecosystem that is healthy and abundant with people happily co-existing with the sea and shore, ensuring that the marine ecosystem is in balance and their activities are within the ecosystems regenerative capacity. The fishermen would remain the custodians of the sea passing on knowledge and skills to the next generation.

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We can foresee the return of the emigrant; the need for more schools the possibility of small businesses growing from the resurgence of the islands economy. Tourism on the upturn as our communities strengthen and return to the days of sea sports and regattas. A strong and successful lifeboat crew saving lives and bringing pride and prestige back to the people.

We would have a say in the policy making affecting the islands as our government recognizes the special status of island communities and the work they do as guardians of traditions, the ecosystem and the seafaring arts and skills. The islands return to self-sufficiency practicing traditional, small-scale fishing and supported by a diversity of livelihoods.

Context

Island inhabitants have always accepted a role within society, which set them apart from their mainland countrymen; they do so because of tradition, because of duty and responsibility and because of a love of the way of life. The island man has been given a task to keep the way of life alive. We are different, a breed apart, part of a whole yet at times undeniably alone and separate. Ireland has entrusted its islanders to keep the lights burning, to keep the traditions, to be at the forefront of the culture, the language, the skills the crafts. That we are recognised as a special class of people is amply demonstrated by the fact that Donegal islanders vote in all national elections two days before the rest of the country.

We on the islands learned from our fathers and passed our learning on, grateful for what we had and glad of the opportunity to share and continue it. We ask now for consideration, we ask for our way of life to be acknowledged respected and treated accordingly. Island fishermen will happily undertake the responsibilities involved in preserving the traditions held in high esteem throughout Europe and beyond, all we ask is the opportunity. We ask that our proposal be considered and that our lives be returned to us so that we can continue in our lifestyle and our livelihood.

All we ask is the opportunity.

“ The fishermen know that the sea is dangerous and the storm terrible, but they have never found these dangers sufficient reason for staying ashore”

- Vincent Van Gogh.

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Background

Legislation in 2006 effectively outlawed the tradition of fishing for wild salmon in Ireland. To compound matters area V1 A was then closed in November 2008 which directly affects Donegal fishermen. It effectively means that the only stock islanders can fish is lobster and brown crab, this fishery is coming under severe pressure as they are the only species available to fishermen.

We were offered a compensation package to stop fishing salmon - we refused. One of the conditions attached was that we would never again apply for a license to fish salmon. On our islands with our traditions, where our fathers and grandfathers relied upon fishing to physically feed their children the inclusion of that condition alone meant we could never accept the proposal. In 2006 we asked for special consideration, but none was given.

Impacts and trends

In 2006 we warned of the effects this legislation would have on the Islands of Donegal and elsewhere, we have been proven correct.

- Population has decreased as fishermen and their families leave the Islands. In recent years we have gone from 760 inhabitants to just 540.
- The Economy suffered as businesses closed. One Hotel, one bar and three shops have ceased to trade on Árainn Mhór alone. The fisherman's co-op in Burtonport has closed.
- Árainn Mhór lifeboat has lost 25% of its crewmembers.
- School numbers falling to a degree that one of the two Árainn Mhór primary schools is now faced with closure.
- Prices of allowed species such as lobster and crab have fallen dramatically as supply outstrips demand, making earning a living harder still.
- Árainn Mhór Island has lost 800,000 euro from its annual economy. Figures to substantiate this can be found in the excellent submission by Crick Carleton of Nautilus on behalf of Comhar na nOileán Teo. These figures do not include 150,000 euro income from the whitefish catch.
- The social structure of Árainn Mhór suffers as the experienced seamen are not available to assist in running of regattas, sailing races etc that are a big part of Summers on the island. This will affect tourism.
- There are no traditional skills being passed to the next generation.

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The Way Forward.

We propose that a pilot scheme be introduced along the following lines:

1. That those salmon fishing license holders on Árainn Mhór and Inis Bo Finne Islands that refused the compensation package be granted the right to fish salmon for 40 days per annum on a days at sea basis. This takes into consideration the changing availability of the fish and the safety of the men concerned (quotas and seasonal based arrangements often force fishermen out to sea in dangerous conditions).
2. That all Donegal Island fishermen be granted the right to fish spurdog and whitefish all year round within a 30 mile radius of their home port. This would pertain to all polyvalent licensed vessels within area 6a. (Appox.6 vessels under 15 metres in length)
3. All fishermen connected with the proposed pilot scheme would be committed open and available to assist fisheries personnel with issues of conservation, information and records.

Reference documents

2009, Submission on the review of the CFP prepared by Crick Carleton, Managing Director of Nautilus Consultants on behalf of Comhar na Oileán Teo.

2009, Fishing in Small Islands in Europe – information note for ACFA Working group 1, July 2, Agenda item 6, prepared by Brian O' Riordan, ICSEF.

2007, An assessment of fisheries on the Gaeltacht Islands of Ireland: Sustaining island traditions. March 2007, prepared for: Comhdhail Oilean na hEireann (The Irish Islands Federation) by: Nautilus Consultants in association with MERC Consultants.

Árainn Mhór Declaration of December 14 2009.