



European Parliament Forum on Recreational Fisheries and Aquatic Environment

REPORT

Marine Protected Areas and recreational fisheries: Sustainable management and benefits

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MEP Ricardo Serrão Santos welcomed the participants and shared his eagerness to hear all points of view. He stated that Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are a tool to protect biodiversity, help habitats recovery and maintenance of stocks, both for commercial and non-commercial species. He explained that these tools are used to restrict all or parts of human activities in an area, and that the IUCN classifies MPAs in six types, depending on the degree of protection they grant. Recalling that the concept of area management allowing for economic activity is a defining trait of MPAs, he mentioned that MPAs are considered as a major tool in international fora because of their impacts and spill over effects, but that policymakers' opinions on the globally needed percentage of marine surface protection varies greatly. Moreover, MEP Serrão Santos emphasized that recreational fishing is a popular activity with wide social and economic return, practiced by a large number of people. He added that, from a social point of view, the cultural aspects, relaxation and leisure provided by this activity are very important. Overall, he estimates that a reasonable balance needs to be struck between economic, recreation and conservation as each factor is important for the EU, and they are all dependent on the presence of fish. He evoked on that issue an agreement on tag-and-release of big game, and his experience on the Azores island of Corvu, where a total no-take zone would deprive the local elders of their last socially useful activity. In this case, professional fishing is forbidden in the area, but given the socio-economic factors, recreational fishing is allowed.

Alberto Arroyo (International Union for Conservation of Nature) highlighted that non-sustainable fishing should not happen, both inside and outside of MPAs. Mr Arroyo explained that in Europe roughly 400 000 m², the equivalent of 7% of all EU sea surface is part of the Natura 2000 network. There is much space to grow and reach the Aichi target by 2020 but things are moving fast lately. He declared that today, only 4% of all European coastal areas are protected by law and management remains an issue. In the EU, Natura2000 sites, including marine ones, have a legal obligation to establish management measures. Currently, only 50% of Natura 2000 areas meet this criterion. He mentioned that management plans would help to identify how economic activities in protected areas, including recreational fisheries, can



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move ahead. He also recalled that Natura2000 areas are not reserves and do not forbid per se any activity but they have to fulfil some denied conservation goals. Management decisions need to be taken by considering the conservation goals and in consultation with the stakeholders. He also recalled that the European Commission's Action Plan for Nature, People and Economy, is very much focused on enhancing the implementation of the Nature Directives and in particular for MPAs there are some specific actions mentioned such as completing the Natura 2000 network, establishing synergies with the Common Fisheries Policy and improving the use of the available funding.

The IUCN is working on a tool, the green list of MPAs to better promote good management of these sites. Moreover, Mr Arroyo explained that designation is only the beginning of the work as MPAs need planning, management, financing, stakeholders' participation and capacity building. As MPAs in the EU are numerous and their number is growing, it remains a long way to go in their implementation. He called for better financing through the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), and welcomed the declaration made by President Juncker in his State of the Union regarding the EU high social and environmental standards and the need to export them to other countries. Finally, he said that recreational fisheries as a socio-economic sector could benefit from a quick and effective moving ahead of the current management effort as it would ensure sustainability and achievement of conservation goals.

Caroline Hattam (Plymouth Marine Laboratory) presented a survey about the economic benefits of MPAs on which she and her team have been working on. She described how they tried to gather experiences and evidences of benefits, by surveying regional, national and international MPAs. She clarified that they looked at the market benefits of MPAs. She explained that tourism and recreation benefit most from no-take and multiple use MPAs. She added that direct benefits are increased incomes and jobs for recreational and tourism business while indirect business are increased housing prices, increased vibrancy of the local economies and supply chain effects. She made clear however that the results depended on the MPAs, how they were managed, their location, the activities performed there and their type.

Moreover, they analysed the mechanisms through which these benefits may emerge and they discovered that changes in biodiversity, wider environmental changes and opportunity for economic activities were the most important. Changes in biodiversity largely revolve around protection of nursery areas, spill-over effects and increases in biodiversity. All this would result in an improved experience for recreational users who would come more often to the MAP, stay longer thus helping local economies.

Regarding MPAs governance, she noted that conflict solving and synergies are crucial for the sustainable use of these areas as often the designation of MPAs causes conflict. Synergies are usually associated with multiple use MPAs and with tourism and recreation. Mrs Hattam



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summarised that there is so far no clear evidence of strong economic impact of MPAs, with the caveat that it might not present itself in term of direct local growth, but rather in non-market benefits. She suggested that in order to create economic benefits, more planning and MPAs management is needed. According to her study, good MPAs governance is marked by participation, awareness raising, knowledge sharing between stakeholders, public-private partnerships and the involvement of new technologies.

Jonas Geldmann (University of Cambridge) presented a study on the shortfalls in performance of marine protected areas. He declared that, when talking about MPAs effectiveness, there are two separate, equally important but independent aspects:

- Planning: on the impact and on the biodiversity value;
- Assessment: once the MPA is established, does it work? Does it have a good performance?

He stated that the conclusions of the study are that most of MPAs have an ineffective management capacity: they lack resources and staff, which drives their effectiveness down.

Mr Geldmann said that the study compares the trends in biodiversity before and after the MPA is created, and with similar non-protected areas to compare their evolution. It emerged that no-take zones were shown to perform twice better than multi-use MPAs with regards to fish biomass. Moreover, the study found out that MPAs management depends mostly on staff and funding: should either of these be inadequate, then the MPA will not perform well. Mr Geldmann called for further monitoring and assessment of MPAs and external zones, in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of their evolution.

Mimi d'Iorio (National Marine Protected Areas Center, NOAA) shared the US experience of MPAs management. She explained that the US NOAA definition of MPA, is wider than the IUCN one: *“any area of the marine environment that has been reserved by federal, state, territorial, tribal, or local laws or regulations to provide lasting protection for part or all of the natural and cultural resources therein”*. She stated that MPAs in the US are very varied, designed to protect cultural heritage, sustainable production, natural habitats, with the goal to balance conservation with sustainable use and recreational activities. MPAs cover 26% of U.S marine waters: 3% are No-Take MPAs that prohibit all forms of extraction while 23% are multiple use MPAs that allow a range of sustainable uses including fishing.

She explained that the multiple-use MPAs provide protection of marine resources while supporting a wide range of sustainable uses. While commercial extraction may be restricted or even prohibited, recreational fishing and harvest is usually allowed. Regulations are in place in order to prevent conflicts, on gear type and size for example. She said that NOAA is trying to balance conservation with connection to the sea, and considers education and awareness raising very important to attract people to the sea and make them enjoy it. She mentioned the large importance of recreational fishing, as in 2014 11 million Americans came to the sea for recreational fishing, which supported 500.000 jobs and 61 billion \$ revenue. She concluded by stating that the US regulation on recreational fishing vary based on purpose or intent of



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protected area: no-take MPAs or marine reserves are usually small, coastal protected areas, while multiple use MPAs are often larger and designed to protect resources through management of sustainable uses. Most of US MPAs allow sustainable recreational fishing as it is acknowledged that this activity helps foster ocean stewardship and supports healthy fisheries, communities and economies.

Adam Brown (Substance) presented the results of several researches carried out regarding the community and social value of recreational fishing. He declared that in the UK, angling is an important social activity, with many people enjoying it, sharing experiences, competing and teaching. He noted that, while many people think about angling as a sedentary activity, it actually gets people more active, with 41% people rating their activity as high-intensity or moderate. He added that youth angling education activities help with antisocial behaviour, personal development and to attain educational objectives. He explained that there are also environmental and societal benefits, as people go through a 3-stage process:

- 1) They access the natural environment through angling;
- 2) They gain environmental awareness;
- 3) They deliver environmental improvement, either personally or through their organisation (24% of anglers are involved in some form of activity for habitat conservation).

He noted that, on the economic aspect, when taking into account direct and indirect effects angling generates up to 2,5 billion £ per year and creates 23,500 jobs in the UK, which makes it a very significant economic sector. Moreover, angling creates important benefits to remote areas and coastal communities.

Les Gallagher (Oceanic® - Azores) spoke about his experience as a skipper in the Azores, an archipelago where sport fishing represents an important part of ecotourism in the region. He said that there is a strong awareness in terms of natural resources. He stated that his company was specialised in the catch-and-release of blue marlin. He explained that his vessels have little impact on the stock and almost no impact on the animals they catch. He described the awareness he creates by educating customers and involving them in catch-and-release activities.

Thorsten Wichmann (Deutscher Angelfischerverband - DAFV) explained that in Germany, six MPAs were created in 2007 but without establishing management plans. In 2016, the government proposed to designate strict Nature Conservation Areas where angling would be banned. The regulations entered into force in September 2017 along with the ban on angling. Mr Wichmann underlined that only angling is forbidden, while all traffic of ships, energy projects and professional fisheries are allowed to operate in these areas. The German government declared that the final goal is to foster conservation, to protect different marine species and to create a network of benthic zones. However, the German Anglers Association (DAFV) believes that the current system is not appropriate as it still allows projects which have an impact on the aquatic environment while angling, which is a low-impact activity with negligible effects on the established conservation targets, is forbidden. Moreover, angling was



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banned without performing an impact assessment beforehand and without providing a solid scientific justification. Mr Wichmann concluded that angling should be allowed also in Nature Conservation Areas as long as it does not violate the conservation objectives of these areas. He also stated that there has been a lot of pressure coming from different stakeholders to remove the total ban on angling, including a petition sent to the German Parliament. Unfortunately, the ban remains in place and the DAFV is prepared to legally challenge these discriminatory measures.

Kaare Manniche Ebert (Danmarks Sportfiskerforbund) said that there are around 97 designated marine Natura 2000 sites in Denmark. They cover 18% of Danish marine waters and 65 of them are reef structures, of which some are very fragile (bubbling reef). In 2016 the Danish government proposed to manage the fisheries in several areas in order to ensure the protection of the reef structures. He declared that, when the plan was brought up, the aim of the local anglers was to preserve both their fishing rights and the environment. The government held a consultation with different stakeholders that lasted several years. Mr Ebert mentioned that the final proposal was to prohibit bottom contacting mobile gear in all reef areas and to create no-take zones surrounded by buffer zones for bubbling reefs areas. All stakeholders agreed on the proposal and it was acknowledged that angling is not a limiting factor in achieving favourable conservation status. He concluded by stating that closing the Natura 2000 areas to anglers would not improve the possibility to achieve conservation goals. On the other side, allowing anglers in MPAs could improve the acceptance of conservation measures among the general public.

Oscar Sagué (International Forum for Sustainable Underwater Activities - IFSUA) explained that allowing small-scale fisheries in MPAs could generate conflicts, as happened in Spain with the creation of marine reserves of fisheries interests. He described these reserves as banning spearfishing and often also angling, while allowing small-scale fisheries. Mr Sagué stated that the demands from the commercial sector for this sort of conservation measures have increased dramatically, and several projects are under consideration. He noted that what should have been a conservation tool has become an undercover privatisation of the sea. Small-scale fisheries have found the perfect way to kick out large-scale and recreational fisheries and appropriating coastal waters. He noted that marine research often considers only the benefits of banning specific types of recreational fisheries (such as spearfishing), but rarely the benefits of their presence when regulated. He stated that the traditional method of spearfishing has strong arguments, notably that there is no discard, no bycatch, parsimonious catch, and that the informed fisherman will, depending on the quotas, catch or not the fish. In his opinion, the solution is based on several factors:

- Recreational fishing should be allowed in the MPAs;



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- Establishment of an active management plan for both types of fishing with special measures for each fishing modalities, for endangered and vulnerable species;
- Regular monitoring and assessment measures should be implemented.

He concluded by acknowledging that small-scale fishermen need the income for a living, but he also stated that the businesses living through recreational fishermen activities are also important.

Humberto Delgado Rosa (DG Environment, European Commission) declared that Natura 2000 is not the only source of marine protected areas in Europe, but also the largest network of protected areas in the world (including land). He stated that the Commission recently evaluated the Habitats Directive to see if it is still fit for purpose, which it is. However, he noted that there is space for improvement notably regarding implementation and designation of marine zones. He recalled that the objective of MPAs is not to create exclusion zones for nature, but to make conservation compatible with socio-economic activities. Mr Delgado Rosa also stated that, one of the focus of the EU Action Plan for Nature, People and the Economy is to complete the network of Natura 2000 areas. However, he noted that barely two-third of management plans for protected areas on land have been created, and even less at sea. The European Commission thinks that it is important to involve all stakeholders, those that make a living of the sea or use it. In this regard, Mr Delgado Rosa greeted the good practices presented by the Danish speaker. He stressed that both recreational and commercial fisheries need to be regulated in protected areas as, even if recreational fishermen have a low impact, it is not nil. Mr Delgado Rosa explained that in the Action Plan, the Commission will engage bilaterally and multilaterally with different actors, not only with ministries but also stakeholders. One of the lesson learnt from Natura 2000 is that the engagement of local actors improves implementation and provides the adequate level of flexibility.

In his view, anglers and recreational fishermen are key stakeholders: their awareness, engagement and pride in communicating what they do to preserve the environment they use are important. He added that first and foremost, the Commission wants to attain a favourable conservation status of the marine environment. On the Spanish aspect, he said that it makes more sense to prioritise the side of fisheries that provides livelihoods. He continued that when a local community gets assurance that at least a part of the resources that are there will be available for them, sustainability draws closer. To conclude, Mr Delgado Rosa reiterated the need to engage all stakeholders: the Commission will not impose MPAs to reluctant communities that do not like them and do not take care of them.



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Debate

Fred Bloot (European Anglers Alliance) agreed with the speakers who emphasised the need for dialogue and tailor-made solutions in Natura 2000 areas. However, he stressed that making a difference between recreational and commercial fisheries by placing the focus on commercial fisheries is outdated. The recreational sector is also a large economic actor and many jobs depend on it. He believes that one should first and foremost prioritise sustainability because when either fishery is mismanaged, stocks suffer.

Humberto Delgado Rosa replied that he did not mean that recreational fishing was not supporting the living of many people, but in his experience professional fishermen are also capable of well managing MPAs.

MEP Ricardo Serrão Santos declared that the growing importance of recreational fishing is more and more acknowledged. Some conflicts may arise with commercial fishers, who are constrained by TACs and quotas. He also took note of the repeated calls for additional data and researches to appropriately manage the common stocks.

Fred Bloot insisted on the fact that in recreational fishing there is no fish sale. He emphasized the importance of clearly define whether a fishery is commercial or recreational, notably regarding the case of semi-subsistence fisheries in the Mediterranean. He reminded that these catches are not counted as commercials but they are not recreational either, and should be counted separately in the stock assessments.

MEP Ricardo Serrão Santos considered those selling their catches as being commercial, and the others as recreational.

Fred Bloot mentioned that the same fish stocks are targeted by two differently regulated groups.