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Recreational fishing fosters thriving Marine Protected Areas

Balance conservation with recreational activities which engages people in the stewardship of the marine environment – that was one key message given at a conference where experts discussed what role anglers can play in the sustainable management of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and the benefits that allowing their activities in these zones can provide.

The event, entitled “**Marine Protected Areas and recreational fisheries: sustainable management and benefits**”, was held in the European Parliament by the *Forum on Recreational Fisheries and Aquatic Environment*, supported by the *European Anglers Alliance (EAA)* and the *European Fishing Tackle Trade Association (EFTTA)*.

Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Ricardo Serrão Santos chaired the event which began with a presentation on the differing objectives of MPAs; such as allowing fish stocks to recover, protecting nursery areas, improving water quality by limiting the emission of pollutants or protecting fragile seabed habitats. Authorities then must manage these MPAs in order to achieve these objectives. European anglers (recreational fishers using rod and line) believe that MPAs should not be treated as closed natural reserves from which all human activities need to be banned and that access rules should be proportionate and appropriate with the different MPA’s objectives. Such ‘no-go’ or ‘no-take’ MPAs are not very common. For example, only 1% of the USA marine waters are designated closed natural reserves. Allowing recreational fisheries and especially angling – a particularly selective and low-impact fishing method – in MPAs could provide ‘eyes and ears” in areas that are difficult to monitor, while delivering significant sustainable socio-economic benefits to coastal communities.

The aim of the first panel of the conference, composed of speakers from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Plymouth Marine Laboratory and from Cambridge University, was to give an assessment of the value of MPAs in the EU. Research shows that tourism, including recreational angling, increases incomes and jobs for recreational and tourism businesses and contributes to a greater engagement by the public. For example, increases in biodiversity based on the protection of nursery areas can generate positive spill-over effects benefiting the local communities by attracting more angling activities and economic activity. However, MPA performance is often undermined by the lack of governance and economic resources. It was also generally agreed that more research is needed to fully measure and understand the multiple benefits provided by MPAs.

Mimi d’lorio, from the US NOAA, the National Marine Protected Areas Center, spoke about the benefits of granting access to recreational fishers in MPAs. Ms D’lorio stated that, in the USA, the regulation on recreational fishing in MPAs depends on the purpose of the protected area. Multiple-use MPAs, which constitutes 88% of the US 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 designed to avoid use conflicts and protect sensitive marine resources. On top of bringing millions to the local economy and communities – as witnessed by the case of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary in which 400,000 recreational fishers bring over

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\$274 million/year – recreational fishers become ocean stewards, teach the public how to care about the oceans and take part in conservation initiatives.

Other impressive figures were showed by **Adam Brown**, Head of Research in the social research company Substance. Results of his research into the social, environmental and economic benefits of angling have shown that the level of angler spending (England), which contributes to the local economies of deprived coastal communities, varies much and can go from £36 to £167 per angling trip. The research also showed a higher level of spending in the areas where good infrastructures are present and the fish stocks are in good health.

A roundtable discussion followed involving case-studies of recreational fisheries in MPAs. In general, the speakers agreed that allowing angling in MPAs is compatible with conservation goals. Moreover, anglers could help raising awareness about nature and water conservation measures and increase their acceptance. **Thorsten Wichmann** from the German Anglers Association exposed how a recent arbitrary decision has created a situation for angling in MPAs, which is contradictory to the situation in the US and Denmark. Now the German legislation forbids angling in big parts of German Natura 2000 marine areas while allowing access for commercial fishing. **Kaare Manniche Ebert** from the Danish Anglers Association explained that the proposed for a Danish Natura 2000 marine implementation plan only prohibits angling in four very small, special, areas to protect fragile so-called 'bubble-reefs'. It is acknowledged by Government and stakeholders that angling is not a limiting factor in achieving favourable conservation status in Natura 2000 marine areas.

Umberto Delgado Rosa, from the Directorate General from Environment of the European Commission, summed up the meeting and stated that all stakeholders need to be involved in the definition of MPAs management plans. Recreational fisheries access should be regulated on a case by case basis and anglers should be considered as key stakeholders in MPAs, where they play a very valuable role.

For **MEP Ricardo Serrão Santos** it is important to recognise the growing importance of recreational fishing. More and more citizens are fishing recreationally for publicly-owned fish stocks. Tensions can arise with commercial fishers, especially when they are targeting the same stocks. "*To find the correct combination between protection of marine life and its sustainable use is a science that I really appreciate*", adding that data collection is therefore of key importance in order to take the right management decisions for both the commercial and recreational fisheries sectors.

Pictures below:



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From right to left: Les Gallagher, Jonas Geldmann, Jean-Claude Bel, Mimi D'lorio, Humberto Delgado Rosa, Fred Bloot, Kaare Manniche Ebert, MEP Ricardo Serrão Santos, Caroline Hattam, Alberto Arroyo and Thorsten Wichmann.



The presentations made during the event are available online here:

www.eaa-europe.org/european-parliament-forum/ep-recfishing-forum-events/

About EAA and EFTTA:

- ***EAA, the European Anglers Alliance*** comprises angling organisations from 14 European countries with about 3 million members.

www.eaa-europe.org

- ***EFTTA, the European Fishing Tackle Trade Association*** is the leading European trade association for manufacturers and wholesalers of sportfishing equipment. Membership is open to manufacturers, wholesalers, agents and press in the tackle industry.

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