



European Parliament Forum on Recreational Fisheries and Aquatic Environment

REPORT

Exploring the inclusion of marine recreational fisheries in the Common Fisheries Policy: *Opportunities and challenges*

Co-chaired by MEP Niclas Herbst and MEP Pierre Karleskind

23 March 2022

09:00 – 11:00

Videoconference

Introduction

MEP Pierre Karleskind (France, Renew Europe), Chair of the European Parliament Fisheries Committee, opened the meeting by thanking all the eminent panellists and guests joining the RecFishing Forum webinar on recreational fisheries and the [Common Fisheries Policy](#) (CFP). He explained that the last CFP reform took place in 2013 and that the Commission is currently working on a report on its functioning. He added that **the Fisheries Committee has been looking closely at the issue of recreational fisheries:**

“All fisheries – commercial and recreational – are at the heart of the CFP.” – MEP Pierre Karleskind

- in its [negotiating position](#) on the Fisheries Control Regulation revision to improve data collection and the control of recreational fisheries;
- in its [report on Article 17](#) of the CFP (‘Criteria for the allocation of fishing opportunities by Member States’), which scope does not exclude recreational fisheries, as the Commission previously underlined;
- in its [report on the implementation of the CFP](#), which will seek to understand whether changes or adaptations of the current CFP are needed; and
- during the [hearing on data collection for recreational fishing](#), which concluded that there is a need for better data on the environmental, social and economic impacts of the sector.

He concluded by stating that better data, better control and better monitoring are key steps in the way the CFP encompasses recreational fisheries.

Fred Bloot (EAA) shared his hope that the speakers will convince the audience of the importance of fully including recreational fisheries in the CFP. Going further, he challenged participants to find and give **one good reason *not* to include the sector.**



Olivier Portrat (EFTTA) recalled that recreational angling, *i.e.* rod and line fishing, is a **very sustainable and selective activity**, especially when practiced as catch-and-release. He underlined the following elements:

“The full inclusion in the CFP would secure a fair and equitable treatment between all sectors.” – Olivier Portrat

- Around 8.7 million persons practise marine recreational fisheries, triggering a total economic impact of €10.5 billion and supporting 100,000 full time equivalents;
- **Anglers are not motivated by profit** but rather by the opportunity to get away and relax, to spend times outdoors or to connect with family and friends;
- The **economic impact of the sector can be as important as the commercial fisheries’ one**, as is the case in Catalonia¹; and
- Angling tourism in particular can provide coastal and remote communities with **income diversification possibilities**.

Against this background, he deplored that the current CFP is not supportive of the recreational fisheries sector. He added that the sector is too big to be ignored by European policymakers.

MEP Niclas Herbst (Germany, EPP), Chair of the RecFishing Forum, recalled that the European Parliament adopted in 2018 a [resolution on the state of play of recreational fisheries in the European Union](#) (Nicolai report). It notably called on the Commission to “**evaluate the role of recreational fisheries in the future CFP**, so that both types of maritime fishing – commercial and recreational – can be **managed in a balanced, fair and sustainable manner** with a view to achieving the desired objectives.” This event can thus be seen a step forward in achieving this goal by exploring and discussing the sector’s inclusion in the CFP.

How the recreational fisheries’ inclusion will help achieve the most vital CFP goals,

Presentation by David Vertegaal, CFP Spokesperson, European Anglers Alliance

*“The year is 2030. Harbours all across the Union, down to the smallest ones, are bustling with activity. Hotels, pensions and camping sites are offering an exciting stay for anglers both domestic and foreign. Tackle shops are found everywhere to cater for huge demand. Fishing guides, boat rentals and charter boats flourish. Restaurants are catering for **all these tourists, attracted by the world class fishing they find here**. It’s a blue economy success story.*

*This spectacular turn of events **relied on the recovery of those fish stocks that inspire anglers to fish**. Stocks such as bluefin tuna, seabass, cod, salmon and dorade have rebounded to a state of abundance.*

¹ A [2020 study](#) by the Catalanian Directorate-General for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs estimates that the recreational fisheries catch around 5% of the total catches, but that it generates almost as much economic value as the commercial sector: €90 million per year, *i.e.* 86.8% of the commercial sector’s value.



*The groundwork was laid in 2023 when a bold vision of Parliamentarians, Member States and the European Commission **embraced the inclusion of recreational fisheries in the CFP and the full implementation of the article 17**. In doing so, fishing activities that combine a high economic and social performance with a low environmental impact were prioritised and small coastal communities have prospered. The rest, as they say, is history.”*

David Vertegaal (European Anglers Alliance) explained that the sector is currently managed in the CFP through **various policy instruments with a patchwork approach**, such as:

- The Data Collection Framework covers recreational fisheries but does **not distinguish between the different sub-sectors**;
- Some of the Multiannual Plans manage directly recreational fisheries, but **only if the environmental impact is significant**. By not taking into account the social and economic impacts, opportunities are missed to further develop the sector; and
- **Stock regulations** may apply to recreational fisheries, *e.g.* closed seasons for seabass or cod, minimum sizes, bag limits.

Zooming in on the Article 17 of the CFP, he recalled that the Commission confirmed that it applies to recreational fisheries.² He further stated that **the article prioritises social benefits, profits and low environmental impact**, which fits almost perfectly the recreational fisheries sector. The sector indeed supports coastal and remote communities including through angling tourism, has an important economic impact, while safeguarding the continued sustainable use of fish stocks. Article 17 is however not applied to the sector, amongst others because of the **lack of robust data on these different aspects**. He recalled that the European Parliament has called multiple times for the improvement of data collection.³ This lack of data explains why **the sector supports a registration or licensing system and catch reporting for some species** in the context of the Fisheries Control Regulation revision.

“Better data leads to better management decisions and better policy.” – David Vertegaal

These patchwork instruments are however **far from the full inclusion the sector is calling for**. He argued that the inclusion would **create a level-playing field and generate opportunities for the coastal and remote communities**. Referring to the Commission’s ongoing work on the functioning of the CFP, he said that this could be a good opportunity for the Commission to evaluate the sector’s role in the CFP, as requested by the European Parliament in the Nicolai report. He concluded by stating that the

² Answer given by Mr Vella on behalf of the Commission, Question for written answer E-014510-15 “Recreational fisheries and the CFP”, published on 5 February 2016: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-8-2015-014510-ASW_EN.html

³ For example, the European Parliament resolution of 21 January 2021 on ‘More fish in the seas? Measures to promote stock recovery above the maximum sustainable yield (MSY), including fish recovery areas and marine protected areas’ calls “on the Commission and the Member States to take the necessary steps in order to improve data collection on recreational fisheries, considering their environmental impact and socio-economic value.” The European Parliament resolution of 6 October 2021 on ‘Rebuilding fish stocks in the Mediterranean: assessment and next steps’ also calls “on the Commission to analyse the social, economic and environmental impact, as well as the effects on fish stocks in the recreational fishing sector.”



sector is not alone in this demand, as **the Baltic Sea Advisory Council (BSAC) unanimously supported the sector's CFP inclusion** in its [White Paper on the CFP](#).

Discussion

MEP Ladislav Ilčić (Croatia, ECR) praised the **many benefits of recreational fishing**, such as spending time outdoor, eating healthy food and promoting the protection of the aquatic environment. He further **recognised the economic importance of the sector** for coastal communities, including in terms of angling tourism. That is why he expressed his support for the inclusion of recreational fisheries in the CFP.

Hauke Hoffmann, on behalf of **MEP Annie Schreijer-Pierik (Netherlands, EPP)**, underlined the increasing popularity of recreational fishing in the Netherlands and in the European Union. He recognised the anglers' interest in protecting and restoring the marine ecosystem. He called **for the sector to be included in the CFP** and the Fisheries Control Regulation, pointing out that special attention should be paid to **guarantee a level-playing field between commercial and recreational fisheries** on the allocation of fishing opportunities and control.

MEP Niclas Herbst (Germany, EPP) asked whether the **national associations are engaging with individual anglers** to make sure that they would be ready to be included in the CFP, with the resulting increased control on their activities. **David Vertegaal (EAA)** responded that **anglers' involvement in stock management is key** for them to effectively participate and understand the different rules applied to recreational fishing. In addition, he argued that if the rules are perceived as fair by anglers (in comparison with commercial fishermen), the acceptance level will be greater. Finally, **pilot projects can be a good opportunity to involve recreational fishermen** and test different solutions, such as a monthly bag limits.

Competitors or co-users of the seas: the commercial fisheries perspective

Presentation by Esben Sverdrup-Jensen, President, European Association of Fish Producers Organisations

After briefly presenting the European Association of Fish Producers Organisations, **Esben Sverdrup-Jensen (EAPO)** argued **in favour of a CFP reform** at the earliest possible time. He highlighted three main reasons: management needs to be **science-based to ensure predictability**, sustainability and profitability; rules need to be **transparent to ensure that they can be fully understood** by all fishermen and thus easily followed; and **legislation and ocean management need to be coherent**, *i.e.* the current CFP is too detailed with contradictory provisions, derogations and exemptions, which makes its implementation unworkable.

He then discussed the inclusion of recreational fisheries in the CFP, starting by highlighting that commercial and recreational fishers actually share a **common set of values**, such as the protection of the oceans and seas, the thrill of hooking a fish and the use of port facilities.



Commenting on the growing interest in recreational fishing over the past years, he pleaded for the **improvement of the Data Collection Framework to ensure the better understanding** of the environmental impacts of the activity, as well as of its socio-economic impacts on coastal communities. He explained that this would help to better understand the activity, the impact on fish stocks and the contributions to the blue economy.

“EAPO suggests that recreational fishing be covered and managed by common EU policy.” – Esben Sverdrup-Jensen

Echoing the conclusions of the BSAC White Paper on the CFP, he concluded that:

- **Recreational fishing should be part of the CFP;**
- Recreational fishing sectors shall be clearly defined within the CFP; and
- **EMFAF funding should be made available for certain aspects of recreational fishing.**

Does the EU need to include recreational fisheries in the CFP? A scientific perspective

Presentation by Dr. Harry Strehlow, Leader Marine Recreational Fishery Research Group Thünen Institute

After briefly presenting the current legal framework (CFP and Data Collection Framework), **Harry Strehlow (Thünen Institute)** explained that the **allocation of fishing opportunities is solely driven by management decisions** that completely **ignore the socio-economic principles** and is independent of the historical catches. Furthermore, in some cases, it is the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and not policymakers that makes the allocation decisions. In the case of seabass, he detailed that the forecast for the upcoming recreational catches is calculated by using a fixed splitting factor of past commercial and recreational catches without looking at the socio-economic aspects of recreational fisheries. **End-users are using this as a management tool, while it should not be the case.** He further pointed out that this does not lead to relative stability for the recreational sector. In addition, as there is no assessment of the impacts of these management measures, the current *ad hoc* management is leading to a massive decline in welfare.

“We cannot discuss blue economy and blue growth while ignoring the recreational fisheries sector.” – Harry Strehlow

He then explained some of the **weaknesses of the current CFP**, explaining that this policy does not set relevant goals and development objectives for the recreational fisheries sector, nor does it provide a **legal framework to base allocation** decisions on balancing societal benefits. The CFP should better take into consideration recreational fisheries, as this would **contribute to the sector’s development in the blue economy** and balance societal benefits when allocating fishing opportunities.

He then highlighted the example of the U.S. Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (2007), which **fully recognises the sector, sets relevant management goals (including recreational fishing opportunities), includes it in the steering of fishery regulations** and provides an explicit allocation framework.



He concluded by referring to the research by Robert Arlinghaus outlining the five needed steps to **improve the governance of recreational fisheries**:⁴

- Acknowledge that recreational fisheries are a multifaceted leisure experience, *i.e.* many catch and non-catch motivations drive anglers, meaning that MSY is not a suitable goal for managing the sector;
- **Involvement of anglers' organisations in management** to better promote conservation – however capacity building is required given that the sector is poorly organised in many Member States;
- Incorporate recreational fisheries' heterogeneity in management, *e.g.* different preferences, different impacts on stocks, different gears;
- Better explain the **finite nature of the resource** to safeguard the sustainability of a shared common good; and
- **Ensure data collection and monitoring**, not only on the environmental impacts but also the socio-economic ones.

Discussion

MEP Pierre Karleskind (France, Renew Europe) asked the panelists whether the recreational fisheries sector would be **better managed at the EU level or at the Member State level**. **Harry Strehlow (Thünen Institute)** responded that the EU level was the most appropriate level or *a minima* at the regional level, given that it concerns a shared resource. **Esben Sverdrup-Jensen (EAPO)** added that the **harmonisation of the rules at the EU level between commercial and recreational fisheries would help preventing conflicts**, as the two fisheries may target the same stocks, while being subject to different regulations (*e.g.* on the type of gear allowed, on the closing seasons).

Reacting to previous presentations and remarks, **Valérie Tankink (DG MARE)** stated that **recreational fisheries are already part of the CFP, notably through the Control Regulation and the Data Collection Framework**. Echoing the responses to MEP Karleskind's question, she explained that the Commission's approach is to regulate recreational fisheries at the EU level when there is enough data to take a sound decision and if there is an issue for a particular stock. She then **confirmed that the Article 17 of the CFP does apply to recreational fisheries** and that it is up to Member States to decide whether to allocate fishing opportunities to the recreational fisheries sector, which is not the case today. This may be reflected in the report on the functioning of the CFP, alongside with the development of a **more prominent role for the sector in the CFP**.

Commenting on Harry Strehlow's presentation, **David Vertegeal (EAA)** asked the Commission if there were any **EMFAF funding available for capacity building** of national angling organisations in Europe. He also asked how the Commission intended to fulfill its commitment in response to the Nicolai report to **"further assess the role of recreational fisheries in the context of the evaluation of the CFP."**

⁴ Arlinghaus, R., Abbott, J.K., Fenichel, E.P., Carpenter, S.R., Hunt, L.M., Alós, J., Klefoth, T., Cooke, S.J., Hilborn, R., Jensen, O.P., Wilberg, M.J., Post, J.R., Manfredo, M.J. (2019). Governing the recreational dimension of global fisheries. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 2019; 16 (12) 5209-5213.



Valérie Tankink (DG MARE) responded that **EMFAF funding is available for recreational fisheries** and that Member States are currently working on their national programmes. On the report on the functioning of the CFP, she clarified that the report was not a full CFP evaluation and that the Commission is still conducting consultations to determine which aspects to take into account in its report.

Conclusion

“The outcome of today’s discussion is very clear: the recreational fisheries sector belongs in the CFP.” – Fred Bloot

Fred Bloot (EAA) echoed his opening statement by saying that he did not hear a single good reason *not* to include recreational fisheries in the CFP. He added that the sector could not wait another ten years until the next CFP revision. He asked for the discussion held in this Forum to be reflected both in the PECH Committee report on the future perspectives of the CFP and in the Commission’s report on the functioning of the CFP to **fairly manage commercial and recreational fisheries, fish stocks and the overall marine environment.**