



European Parliament Forum on Recreational Fisheries and Aquatic Environment

REPORT

How can angling contribute to the recovery of the EU tourism sector?

Co-chaired by MEP Niclas Herbst and MEP Grace O'Sullivan

16th of July 2020

10:30 – 12:30

Videoconference

MEP Niclas Herbst (EPP, Germany), Chair of the RecFishing Forum, welcomed the participants to the third event of the Forum since its relaunch after the European elections. He recalled some of the key messages from the [previous event](#), such as the importance to **recognise the socio-economic value of recreational fisheries**, in the Common Fisheries Policy and beyond, in order **to ensure a fair and sound management of fisheries**. Referring to the new format of the event, he mentioned that the COVID-19 crisis showed how important angling can be, as it provides a sense of nature and allow people to go outside. In addition, he highlighted the importance of the tourism sector in Europe and informed participants that the European Commission plans to organise a European tourism convention to discuss with all stakeholders the European tourism of tomorrow, indicating that the outcome of the convention would help draft a 2050 roadmap towards a “sustainable, innovative and resilient European tourism ecosystem.”

MEP Grace O'Sullivan (Greens/EFA, Ireland) acknowledged the **huge contribution anglers make in their communities**. Based on her experience, she recognised that in her own region, **angling helped forge some life-long friendships and is being taught through generations**. She further recognised the importance of gears for anglers, and the time, skills and care they dedicate to it. To ultimately illustrate the social and economic impact anglers have on their communities, she quoted a study¹ that estimates that, in Ireland, 406,000 individuals participated in recreational angling in 2012, with a direct spending of 555 million euros, of which 125 million euros were generated by overseas tourists.

She added that around **83% of young people in schools wanted to go fishing**². As such, she believed that angling could be a huge opportunity in terms of education related to nature and fish stocks conservation objectives. To introduce the discussion, she welcomed the Webinar on this topic and mentioned that the European Parliament's Transport and Tourism Committee is preparing a report on “Establishing an EU Strategy for Sustainable Tourism,” and

“Anglers are guardians of the waterways. They work and educate themselves to contribute positively to the environment and the community.”

MEP Grace O'Sullivan

¹ Inland Fisheries Ireland, *Socio-Economic Study of Recreational Angling in Ireland*, July 2013.

² Derek Evans, “Angling Notes: Welcome investment in young anglers announced, *The Irish Times*, 30 July 2018: <https://www.irishtimes.com/sport/other-sports/angling-notes-welcome-investment-in-young-anglers-announced-1.3580235>



hoped that the discussions could feed into this work and also in the European Commission's work on the subject.

Dr. Stefan Spahn, European Anglers Alliance (EAA) Board Member, explained that during the COVID-19 crisis, anglers were able to continue their hobby in most European countries, in compliance with all restrictions and measures in place. He believed that this was beneficial to all, as **spending 30 minutes outside lowers levels of stress**³. He further mentioned different benefits of angling, such as those related to health, culture, and youth. Illustrating this renewed interest in nature during the COVID-19 crisis, he gave some examples of important **increase in interest in angling** in various European countries, such as:

- Denmark: +20% in licence purchase in March and April compared to previous year;
- Netherlands: more than 100,000 fishing licences sold in the first five months of 2020, while it would normally take a year to reach that number;
- Sweden: +160% in licence purchase in May, compared to previous months; and
- Finland: +50% in licence purchase in March compared to the previous year.

He then argued that **angling tourism could be seen as a solution for the recovery of the tourism sector**, especially considering 'weekend anglers' whose trips have a positive impact at a more local level, and given that people would tend to travel locally rather than abroad during the COVID-19 crisis. He underlined that angling has shown that it can be a **low-risk activity**, in comparison to others.

To conclude his presentation, he recalled the importance of the sector in Europe:

- 25 million recreational anglers in Europe, including 8 to 10 million sea anglers;
- €20 billion annual socio-economic value (equipment, fees, lodging, travel, etc.);
- Sea angling alone supports more than 100,000 jobs; and
- In some European countries, **recreational angling delivers more economic output than commercial fishing, with much less fish caught.**

That is why, he called for **an overview of the sector and underlined that more data are necessary to show the importance of the sector**. These data should not only focus on catches, but also on the socio-economic impact of *all* forms of angling.

Roundtable

Frank Brodrecht, CEO of Kingfisher Angeltreisen, introduced his company as a highly specialised angling tour operator, which helps around 8,000 guests per year. He stated that **angling tourism is only a small part of total tourism, but it is quite unique and interesting**, as angling is a passion. That is why he thought anglers really want to travel and to fish, and witnessed that there are very limited reasons for anglers to cancel their trips, in comparison with regular travellers. He exemplified this by stating that, **during the 2008 crisis, his company did not suffer from a visible decline in guest numbers while other tourism segments were clearly impacted**. Even now during the COVID-19 crisis, his customers were asking when they would be able to go abroad to fish. According to him, **the recovery of the sector could be very fast, if the travel infrastructure is functioning**.

³ Hunter MR, Gillespie BW and Chen SY-P, "Urban Nature Experiences Reduce Stress in the Context of Daily Life Based on Salivary Biomarkers", *Front. Psychol.*, 2019



Furthermore, he pointed out that angling tourism can help develop new geographic areas. He said that some areas only have minor touristic attractions, and **angling tourism is the only real tourism in those areas and is often the main source of income of the local population**. He added that the travel season for anglers often starts in April and ends in the middle of October: **anglers help stretching the touristic season**.

He concluded by stating that angling tourism is not *per se* greener than other forms of tourism: it does have some environmental impact due to people travelling and consuming, and it should not be denied that angling tourism does have an impact on fish stocks. However, for him, **angling tourism is not mass tourism**.

He explained that angling tourism agencies and anglers were creating programmes and tools to make such tourism even more sustainable, for example by investing in cleaner four-stroke engines for charter boats, by encouraging catch and release for restricted and endangered species, by creating minimum length and bag limits for some fish not covered by national or local regulations, and by supporting the introduction of a register for anglers and catches.

“We support the registration of anglers to better control their impacts.”

Frank Brodrecht,
Kingfisher Angelreisen

Igor Miličić, Secretary General of the Fishing Association of Slovenia, presented the different angling activities in Slovenia. He informed participants that foreign anglers stay in average 5.4 days in the upper Soca valley region and spend at least €300 per day, *ie.* €1.6 million per year. He underlined that the Fishing Association of Slovenia and fishing clubs, are involved in **many conservation actions in the region**, such as the rehabilitation project of the indigenous marble trout. They also have a good cooperation with the Slovenian Tourism Board, which is an **active actor in the promotion of angling tourism in Slovenia**, through actions such as [leaflets](#) specifically dedicated to that kind of tourism.

He pointed out the negative impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on tourism in general, but noted that the government was taking steps to mitigate these through measures such as easing the financial burden on angling clubs. He highlighted that his Association was cooperating with the Fisheries Research Institute within a **taskforce on angling guides**, which seeks to develop a curriculum and to certify guides, to ensure quality in angling tourism.

Martin Porsborg Hemrich, Project coordinator for Sea Trout Funen, recalled the history of the project, which started in 1990. Since the beginning of the project, there has been on average one river restoration project per month: thanks to the work of volunteers from fishing clubs, rivers were restored, so that sea trout could spawn there again. He mentioned **education activities undertaken in schools, so that young people are engaged in and keen on participating to those restoration projects**. He explained that, in 2019, the project put 365,000 sea trout back in the rivers to help creating a ‘natural’ population. One of the aims of the project is to decrease that number each year.

He detailed the budget of the project:

- 41% goes to the restoration of rivers;
- 45% goes to breeding and releasing sea trout; and
- 14% goes to marketing and business.



He said that the goal would be eventually to reduce the part dedicated to breeding and releasing sea trout, because of increasing natural spawning of the species. It would allow the project to invest more in marketing and improve the visibility and angling tourism in the area.

Regarding the socio-economic impact of the project, he showed that in 2012, sea trout anglers alone spent more than 55,000 nights in the region. Furthermore, **the project helped create the equivalent of 38 new full-time jobs**, and has a yearly turnover of at least €6.7 million. Echoing Frank Brodrecht's comments, he confirmed the fact that **anglers were stretching the touristic season in Denmark**.

In terms of obstacles and difficulties of the project, he mentioned **growing predation problems** due to otters, seals and cormorants as well as **eutrophication** of some areas, due to commercial fishing and aquaculture activities, which have an impact on the ecosystem and fish stocks.

"The project is a unique link between tourism development and environmental improvements. It is an asset to present Fyn as a green island and a fascinating tourist destination."

Martin Porsborg Hemrich, Sea Trout Funen

Janne Posti, Senior Fisheries Expert for the FARNET Support Unit, presented FARNET as a technical assistance team established by the European Commission, which **provides assistance for fisheries local action groups** (FLAGS) and Member States in the **implementation of community-led local development** (CLLDs) under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). He explained that CLLDs provide an alternative to traditional funding approaches: FLAGS act as a partner in the development of local strategies, and as such give a bigger role for communities and local decision-making. He mentioned that there are currently 349 FLAGS in Europe, in 19 Member States, with an average budget of €2 million per FLAG.

He presented examples of FLAGS in Europe and their impacts on the local economy:

- The Seatrout Fyn project (Denmark) is supported by FLAG in order to promote recreational sea trout fishing, through the creation of a part-time web editor position and the creation of an interactive website to help attract tourists to the area;
- In the region of the Lake Vättern (Sweden), several FLAG projects aim at improving harbour facilities for recreational fishing and leisure activities, such as a building for recreational fishers, a restaurant and the development of diving activities;
- In the Roztocze region (Poland), the FLAG project supported the transformation of a fish farm into a thriving tourism and recreation centre, which aims to become the regional centre of angling and aquaculture education;
- In Opole (Poland), FLAG provides support to increase social inclusion through angling competition, *eg.* for young people with disabilities, elderly people, *etc.*; and
- In East Finland, projects are supported by FLAGS to increase cooperation between fishing tourism entrepreneurs, through the improvement of quality of services and of the joint marketing of products and services.

He concluded by saying that **FLAGS support recreational fishing, because it can diversify the activities of a fishing area and provide additional sources of income for the local communities**, if new companies are established. He mentioned the conflicts between recreational fishers and commercial



fishers, especially when they operate in the same area. He claimed that **FLAGs also aim at mitigating these conflicts and enhancing the collaboration between the two sectors.**

Evelien Ranshuysen, Policy Officer at the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, reacted to the roundtable. She introduced her remarks by stating that **the Commission appreciates the active stance of the Forum on Recreational Fisheries and Aquatic Environment and is conscious of the important role of recreational fisheries,** including during the COVID-19 crisis. She claimed that the webinar thus helped stimulating the dialogue between policymakers, decision-makers, scientists and all stakeholders involved.

“To assess the impact of recreational fisheries on certain stocks, robust data are of crucial importance. Without this data, it is very difficult for the Commission to manage and balance fish stocks and fishing activities sustainably. Financing for this data collection is available through the EMFF. So, the resources and the framework are there. And the Commission believes that the European Parliament can play an important role in raising the awareness in the importance of good quality data collection when it comes to recreational fisheries.”

Evelien Ranshuysen, DG MARE

She recognised the **important role of recreational fisheries for an efficient management of fish stocks,** emphasising that anglers can represent a significant proportion of total catches for some species, thus affecting sustainability of those stocks. She said that the main challenge, according to the scientists working with the European Commission, is having an **accurate estimation of the biological impact, as well as the total economic impact of recreational fisheries.** She mentioned that the existing data collection framework, on which EU fisheries management is based, encompasses the **obligation for Member States to include estimates of the number of recreational catches and releases of specific species in their data collection.** She noted the difference in terms of availability of data, with better information in the North and Baltic Seas than in the Mediterranean and Black Seas or the Atlantic.

She then referred to the latest **Blue Economy report,** stating that it recognises the role recreational fisheries can play in the use of marine resources, as well as the role of recreational fishers as experts who share back their knowledge with society, who can contribute to an ecological, social and economic sustainability. She notably mentioned the case study on the recreational boating industry, which is characterised by a variety of sectors, such as the manufacturing (of boats and equipment), and tourism services (charters and marinas).

To better understand the contribution of recreational fisheries to the recovery of the tourism sector, she reiterated that reliable and more data was necessary, combined with the known case studies discussed during the webinar. It would help understand not only the status of the stock, but also the social and economic impacts and aspects of recreational fisheries.

On the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy, she mentioned the ongoing revision of the Control Regulation: the Commission’s proposal foresees the **introduction of a registration or licensing system, which would allow for a better tracking of the number of anglers, as well as of catches and**

“The Commission intends to further expand intelligence on the recreational fisheries in the Blue Economy report, but this depends on the availability of reliable data”

Evelien Ranshuysen, DG MARE



practices. This would provide a better understanding of the situation at EU level and better evaluation of the impact of recreational fisheries, which is necessary for a better management of fish stocks. She for example highlighted the **pilot project aiming at reinforcing the control schemes**, specifically for recreational catches of sea bass in the Atlantic.

She concluded by reiterating the importance of exchange and dialogue between policymakers and stakeholders, and the need for it to continue in order to ensure the full implementation of the CFP. In this regard, she informed the participants that the Commission is organising a workshop in December 2020, with a focus on the control and enforcement aspects.

Q&A session

Fred Bloot, EAA President echoed MEP O’Sullivan’s comments that COVID-19 brings people back to the nature, because nature gives something for people to hold on. For him, that showed that it is important to have healthy nature, and healthy fish stocks. He further mentioned the importance for anglers to have access to watersides. As such, **he called for angling to be more sustainable, and to be in an integrated approach with all the forms of tourism.**

“To make good policy, we need European data about our sector. Without data, there can be no policy.”

Fred Bloot, EAA President

To better inform policymaking, he thus hoped that together with the European Commission and the European Parliament, a good overview of the sector could be created.

Kieran Hyder, Chair of the ICES Working Group on Recreational Fisheries Surveys pointed out two key aspects to feed in the debate.

He claimed that there is a **downturn trend, especially amongst the younger generations**, in their interest in angling. He said, however, that this trend was not specific to angling, but rather that all sports were experiencing it. He thus questioned the upward trend in angling during the COVID-19 crisis and wondered whether this was due to new people being interested in angling, or just people who stopped angling and were coming back to it.

He referred back to the conversation on data, and the necessity for policymakers to have access to quantitative and qualitative data to ensure the full design and implementation of policies. **He called for data to not only cover catches of endangered species, but also to look at economic and social specificities and impacts of recreational fisheries.**

Jose Cabrera, Alianza de Pesca Española Recreativa Sostenible (APERS) said that data on recreational fisheries was lacking in Spain, notably due to the administrative division and governance of fisheries. He committed to help the European Commission in improving data collection.

“We, as policymakers, can give better support to the sector. There is a massive potential in a huge number of areas.”

MEP Grace O’Sullivan

MEP Grace O’Sullivan (Greens/EFA, Ireland) echoed the comments made by participants on the need for different types of data. She highlighted the importance of collaboration across different departments of governments, as well as across the European Parliament’s Committees. She said that it was important to keep the waterways in healthy conditions.

As such, **she supported EAA and EFTTA’s call to collect more data. She believed that such data should be made easily available to all anglers, so that they can be aware of the status of the rivers and ensure that what they fish is in good health condition.**



Evelien Ranshuysen, DG MARE said that Member States have the obligation to collect certain data when it comes to recreational fisheries and certain species. She underlined that Member States have the obligation to launch pilot projects with regards to collecting data on recreational fisheries, including in Spain. She recognised however that Spain represented a challenge, as it collects a lot of data, through different methods according to the different provinces.

Stefan Spahn (EAA) explained the concerns and the objections of some anglers when it comes to data collection, giving the example of Germany. He underlined that collecting data only on anglers' catches does not help to build confidence and support. He called for a new approach to show the benefits data collection can have, and avoid the perception that the European Union wants to control everybody.

Kieran Hyder (CEFAS) agreed with the further need to engage with the angling community. He mentioned that one of the keys to have a successful governance is to have a clear policy:

- To have a sense of the goal of the policy: what do we want to achieve?;
- To engage with the recreational fisheries community to secure their understanding of the proposals and secure their support for them;
- To work towards a common goal.

He furthermore called for a clear definition for a fair and equitable allocation across sectors considering the social and economic benefits, following the example of the US and the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

Conclusion

Olivier Portrat, CEO of EFTTA recognised that those were challenging times, affecting a lot of economic sectors, especially tourism; but also, that **angling is social distancing at its best**. He added that angling is a sustainable form of tourism and very conservation minded one: once a fish is caught, anglers are free to decide whether to release it or kill it. He underlined that the supposed importance of recreational fisheries on some fish stocks should not prevent the EU from proposing a policy vision and support for this sector that represents a genuine opportunity for Europe, including in the field of tourism. In his opinion, there is always a way to manage the impact of recreational fisheries on fish stocks, through bag limits, minimum reference sizes, fishing seasons, *etc.* and this should be only a part of the EU's approach to recreational fisheries.

“Without data, it is difficult to efficiently manage fish stocks, as it fails to take into account the role of recreational angling.”

Olivier Portrat, EFTTA

On data, he recognised that key numbers are quite limited, except for marine recreational angling featured in a 2017 European Parliament study, which failed to take into account the importance of the sector in other areas, notably in freshwaters. That is why **he called for a pan-European study, which would give a general overview of the sector**: turnover, social and economic impacts, and cultural importance of the sector, at sea *and* in freshwater.



He underlined that angling and angling tourism are part of the Blue Economy and **should be part of the strategic vision of the European Union**. He presented the example of the 2030 Maritime Strategy of Catalonia, which rightly identified recreational fishing as an activity commonly practiced all year round, creating a relevant and sustainable economic activity, estimating that the sector has provided a turnover of €89 million in 2016. He further added that recreational fisheries were an integral part of the Strategic plan for the region, including actions related to the “sustainable, integrated and harmonious development of the blue economy that respects the human uses of the sea.”

“Our sector is largely underestimated, and it deserves more attention in the future.”

Olivier Portrat, EFTTA

He concluded his remarks by recalling the **potential of angling tourism in the context of health, economic and environmental crisis**, which ultimately illustrates the need for the European Union to fully integrate recreational fisheries into its tourism strategy, its blue economy strategy, as well as in the CFP for stock conservation.

MEP Niclas Herbst (EPP, Germany) agreed with the points raised, and ensured of his support and his political Group’s support in this regard.

MEP Grace O’Sullivan (Greens/EFA, Ireland) recognised that comprehensive data across the EU would show the potential of the sector to deliver in a number of areas (eg. inclusion, economy). She highlighted again the contribution of anglers to the economy, which is substantial and probably greater than the estimates. She agreed that any study should cover both the seas and freshwaters. She reaffirmed her support to continue working with the Forum, other MEPs and the European Commission to better understand the greater potential of angling. Circling back to the topic of the webinar, she concluded that all panellists proved that angling could help building resilience in the tourism sector.

“What I love about angling? Angling goes into the rural, coastal, and urban areas. It has a great reach in terms of geography.”

MEP Grace O’Sullivan