



European Parliament Forum on Recreational Fisheries and Aquatic Environment

REPORT

Recreational fisheries in the EU: state of play, governance, perspectives

Co-chaired by MEP Niclas Herbst and MEP Michal Wiezik

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08:00 – 09:30

European Parliament

MEP Niclas Herbst (EPP, Germany), Chair of the RecFishing Forum, welcomed the participants and acknowledged the importance of relaunching the Forum. He mentioned the **importance of maintaining a regular dialogue with stakeholders and ensuring that EU policies are fit for purpose and operable**. He then introduced the objective of the event, to **provide a state of play of the recreational fisheries sector** and to **explore possibilities of improvement** notably in the field of governance.

Fred Bloot, President of the European Anglers Alliance (EAA) addressed a few welcoming words to the audience on behalf of the European Anglers Alliance (EAA) and the European Fishing Tackle Trade Association (EFTTA). He listed **some of the benefits that recreational fisheries provide to society**: socioeconomic contribution, public wellbeing, living rivers and healthy fish stocks. He also highlighted some of the topics that the Forum plans to cover in the next five years: Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), living rivers, Water Framework Directive, data collection, socio-economic research and angling and society.

“Recreational fishing brings socioeconomic, contributes to people wellbeing, living rivers and healthy fish stocks.”

Fred Bloot, EAA President

Olivier Portrat, CEO of the European Fishing Tackle Trade Association (EFTTA) explained that the EFTTA represents the **recreational fisheries** tackle sector which is **usually underestimated**. He then recalled the difference between commercial and recreational fisheries and specified that angling is a sub-segment of recreational fisheries, the others being spearfishing, fishing via the use of nets, pots and traps. Nevertheless, angling is very dominant in the number of practitioners and value. He pointed out that it is forbidden to recreational fishers to sell their catches and that **recreational fishing is not**



about generating income. In this respect, the practice of **'catch and release'** is **more and more common** among anglers worldwide. Fishes that anglers decide to keep for their own consumption do not relate in any way to the expenses that anglers have made to practice their hobby.

Mr. Portrat underlined that the **available data about the socio-economic importance of this popular activity is largely insufficient.** To give some ideas about the importance of the recreational fisheries sector, he quoted a study which concluded that in 2002 approximately 3,3 million German anglers fished at least once in Germany and abroad. The sector generated an economic gain of 6.4 billion Euros and about 52.000 jobs were directly or indirectly dependent on it. He also quoted a study done by the Spanish Ministry for Fisheries and Agriculture which states that the socio-economic value of recreational angling in the Spanish Mediterranean significantly exceeds the added value generated by commercial fishing. Recreational fishing represents between 550 and 650 million € per year compared to 380 million € representing commercial fishing.

"Angling tourism is often the only form of tourism possible for a lot of rural and remote areas."

Olivier Portrat, CEO of EFTTA

Although he recognized that it is difficult to express the social value of angling, Mr. Portrat explained that **recreational fishing is often an important way for many people to develop their social networks** as well as a close **relationship to nature.** He also noted that **angling is a very diverse sector that plays an important role for tourism in rural and remote areas** as it often is the only form of tourism possible. He provided the example of the Rio Ebro in Aragon (Spain) where around 40.000 anglers travel each year to fish along the Ebro River supporting the local economy with their expenses.

"A pan-European study about the recreational fisheries sector which should also cover its socio-economic impact is needed."

Olivier Portrat, CEO of EFTTA

He concluded by stressing that the **lack of data on the sector undermines the establishment of effective and fair management measures.** He called for a pan-European study about the recreational fisheries sector which should also cover its socio-economic impact. Figures need to be scientifically improved and should be updated regularly.

David Vertegaal, Sportvisserij Nederland, EAA made a presentation on the contribution that the recreational fisheries sector gives to the EU green agenda, focussing on the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and marine recreational fisheries.

He pointed out that **currently marine recreational fisheries are not recognized as a separate sector in the CFP though more and more EU regulations are applicable to the sector** such as the control regulation and the Multiannual Management Plans.



“Recreational fishing offers a high socio-economic value to society but comes with a low environmental impact.”

David Vertegaal, Sportvisserij
Nederland, EAA

He insisted on **anglers’ commitment to sustainable fisheries and to the protection of fish stocks**. The angling experience depends on a healthy environment and rich fish stocks and thus anglers are devoted to their conservation. He provided a concrete example from the Netherlands, where anglers are involved in an ongoing project to enhance river connectivity and fish migration. He explained that recreational fishing offers a high socio-economic value to society but comes with a low environmental impact.

Anglers practice both “catch & cook” as well as “catch & release” with a high survival rate. **Anglers practice targeted fishing** and as a whole, **the sector does not have an influence on the ocean floor ecosystems**.

He also drew attention to anglers’ advocacy work for sustainable stock management. **On seabass, anglers have been vocal supporters for stock conservation, protection of breeding grounds and nursery areas, but also of a higher minimum reference size to allow the fish to spawn**. He noted that it is regretful that the stock had to almost crash before conservation measures were taken and that those same conservation measures have hit the sector and suppressed its business.

Mr. Vertegaal then presented some concrete examples of how **anglers support science and engage with the scientific community** to collect more data and information on important stocks and species. Notably, several EAA member associations have been involved in projects to tag sharks and bluefin tuna to collect more information about the state of the stocks, their life cycle and their migration patterns. He also mentioned the development of a fish recognition smartphone app that feeds into a national ecological database and will help to shape better policies.

Despite this important contribution of anglers to society and their commitment to sustainable stock management, he regretted the absence of **an integrated policy for angling** and the focus only on limiting the catches from recreational fisheries. He says that this represents **a big lost opportunity**, especially in light of the high economic value of this activity: 10,5 billion euros of annual added-value supporting 100.000 full-time jobs in Europe.

“Our sector welcomes better control but wants fairness.”

David Vertegaal, Sportvisserij
Nederland, EAA

Mr. Vertegaal concluded with few remarks on the Control Regulation which is currently being revised. He stated that **the EAA supports the Commission’s proposals for angler registration or licensing and catch reporting for the stocks that are generally in need of regulation and where anglers have a significant impact**. He stressed that the sector welcomes better control but wants fairness. Commercial fisheries must also become more transparent and accountable.



“It is important to look also at the socio-economic and cultural importance of the sector.”

David Vertegaal, Sportvisserij
Nederland, EAA

Finally, he underlined **the need for a holistic management approach** for the marine recreational fisheries sector to be able to thrive. He called for **full recognition of recreational fisheries in the CFP**, as a distinct sector. He said that this would support a better management of the access to fish, which is a public resource. He stressed the importance to **not only look at the impact of the sector but also at its socio-economic and cultural importance**.

Kieran Hyder, Principal Scientist at the Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) and Chair of the ICES Working Group on Recreational Fisheries Surveys presented the results of a comprehensive review of 200 countries on what constitutes an effective governance of recreational fisheries.

This study led to the conclusions that the following elements are crucial for effective governance:

- A **very clear legal definition**;
- A **visionary policy statement**;
- **Co-management** in a transparent fashion including both sides (commercial and recreational fisheries);
- **Data to underpin the policy** and management plans, including on the biological, economic and social dimensions of recreational fisheries;
- Some sort of **cost recovery**;
- **Balance the needs of all users** in the management of marine resources.

“Recreational fishing is an important activity in Europe with vast variations in terms of participation levels across countries.”

Kieran Hyder, CEFAS

He described **recreational fishing as an important activity in Europe with vast variations in terms of participation levels**

across countries. Recreational fishing can have an impact on the resource as catches range between 2% and 43% of total removals, depending on the considered stock. The incidental release of non-native species, the potential use of live baits and potential lead lost in the environment are some other aspects of the possible environmental impact of recreational fisheries.

He underlined the existence of a **management paradox**:

- **Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY)**: catch a maximum amount of fish in a sustainable and consistent quantity with commercial fisheries being the main beneficiary.
- **Maximum total satisfaction (MTS)**: which values the experience of catching more and larger fish for the recreational sector.



“This management challenge must be addressed by bringing both sides together.”

Kieran Hyder, CEFAS

This management challenge must be addressed by bringing both sides together, taking into account their divergent management objectives and views and ensuring a fair and equitable allocation.

Mr. Hyder then underlined the **various benefits that effective governance brings: sustainable management** that takes into account all sources of mortality, **engaged community, increased income** from expenditure in the industry but also in the angling tourism sector. **He stressed the need for a more holistic approach** through various changes in the European governance:

- **A full integration of marine recreational fisheries in the CFP** which translates into clearer policy.
- **Science and evidence needed** with a more holistic approach on which data to collect.
- **Co-management that accounts for social and economic benefits** and adapts to changes (such as climate change). The implementation of measures taken under co-management should be subject to regular enforcement through social processes, social norms or through a more regulated enforcement.
- Some means for **cost recovery**. Discussions are ongoing within the Control Regulation.
- **A sustainable and responsible recreational fishing angling community** that understands and appreciates control
- **World-class angling opportunities** require world class stock management.

“A full integration of marine recreational fisheries in the CFP translates into clearer policy.”

Kieran Hyder, CEFAS

Finally, he also stated that **new science is needed**, especially about people’s behaviour, governance and co-management as well as the survival rate of released fish.

Maja Kirchner, Head of Unit Fisheries Management Atlantic, North Sea and Baltic Sea (MARE.C.1), DG for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, European Commission welcomed the organisation of the event as it is important to bring people from different sectors together for dialogue.

She looked back at 2014 when the **EU was facing the collapse or the almost collapse of seabass**. There were various problems at that time:

- No or very little rules at European level;
- Different rules among Member States;



- Opposition between commercial and recreational fisheries;
- Lack of data.

“Much progress has been made on seabass, in which anglers have played a key role.”

Maja Kirchner, DG MARE

She stressed that since then, much progress has been made, in which anglers have played a key role. **Communication and dialogue between sectors as well as with scientists have improved.** For instance, a tradition to organise a meeting twice a year with representatives of anglers and commercial sectors has been established. More data is available now. **A real management system for**

seabass has been implemented. She congratulated the angling sector for the very intense but also successful lobbying to allow a higher bag limit which is now implemented for the first time.

However, Mrs. Kirchner underlined that **pollock could be now the next ‘seabass’**, the next species at risk, for which there is also a lack of clear data on recreational catches.

Finally, she announced the organisation of a workshop on recreational fisheries by the European Commission in December 2020.

“Pollock could be the next species at risk.”

Maja Kirchner, DG MARE

Questions from the audience

Fred Blot, EAA asked Maja Kirchner on the European Commission’s position on including the recreational fisheries sector in the CFP.

Thomas Verleye, Flanders Marine Institute and Mr. Fiocchi pointed out that alternatives to lead are still missing or very limited. Mr. Fiocchi wondered about the consequences of an EU-wide ban on lead while Mr. Verleye stressed the need to push for more innovation as part of an EU-wide initiative.

Mr. Verleye also described cod, notably the North Sea stock, which is little impacted by angling, as a generally endangered species for which urgent actions are needed.

Philip Easthill, European Boating Industry underlined the special relationship between the boating industry and angling. He then questioned panellists on how to develop sustainable tourism.

MEP Pietro Fiocchi (ECR, Italy) wondered about the impact of invasive alien species such as catfish on European rivers. He questioned panellists on how to engage with youth.

MEP Franc Bogovič (EPP, Slovenia), Mr. Fiocchi and Katrin Vilhelm Poulsen, WWF raised the issue of dams and their negative impacts on river connectivity, fish migration, the aquatic environment and thus on angling opportunities.

Nikos Zampoukas, DG RTD asked a personal question about the existence of data on spearfishing.



Kékkői Zoltán, Energofish/EFTTA outlined EFTTA's contribution in engaging with youths as well as on lead alternatives. He pointed out that unlike most countries, Hungary sees its number of anglers growing thanks to educational programs with kids as well as a ban on industrial fisheries three years ago.

“Anglers are already fully part of the process to find alternatives to lead.”

David Vertegaal, EAA

Answers

David Vertegaal (EAA) acknowledged that **controlling invasive alien species is very difficult**. He underlined that anglers are already fully part of the process to find alternatives to lead. He acknowledged that it is **challenging to engage youth in recreational fishing** while they have access to so many activities. Nevertheless, **the sector is fully engaged to talk to them** through various programs and activities inside and outside schools. Finally, he **linked the state of fishing resources and the growth perspectives of fishing tourism**. When the former is up, the latter follows the same direction.

Olivier Portrat (EFTTA), answering the question on invasive alien species, stressed that there is **no reason to be afraid of catfish** which is often a way to create more balance between river species. He criticized the lack of data on angling tourism and asked for a pan-EU study on the topic.

Fred Bloot (EAA) announced the organisation of a dedicated event of the RecFish Forum on hydropower in the future. He stressed again **the importance of recognizing angling in the CFP**. Thanks to anglers, much progress has been made and much more can be achieved with the inclusion of the sector.

“Much more can be achieved with the inclusion of the sector in the Common Fisheries Policy.”

Fred Bloot, EAA

Maja Kirchner, (DG MARE, EC) stressed that anglers are involved in the CFP through various meetings regularly organised with the European Commission. She said that **anglers are already being heard through these channels and commended their ability to have a real impact on fisheries management**. She gave some examples such as the request for higher minimum size for seabass and the reservation of seabass to anglers and artisanal fisheries. She also noted that anglers advocated for a ban on pelagic trawling as it can take out whole schools of seabass. The Commission eventually supported that idea as well.

“The Commission has moved from a top-down to a bottom-up approach.”

Maja Kirchner, DG MARE

She then acknowledged that **cod is in danger**. After a recent rebuilt, new measures limiting catches had to be taken. She stressed **the need for stakeholders to be fully part of stock management** while explaining that the Commission has moved from a top-down to a bottom-up approach notably with the CFP Advisory Councils to which the recreational fisheries sector participates.



Finally, she pointed out the lack of data which can sometimes be explained by a lack of scientists in national research institutes.

Kieran Hyder, Principal Scientist at the Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) and Chair of the ICES Working Group on Recreational Fisheries Surveys pointed out the absence of representatives of the commercial sector in the audience. He pushed for **more dialogue between the sectors**.

He also mentioned some studies focus on spearfishing although they are very local.

MEP Michal Wiezik (EPP, Slovakia) and moderator of the Q&A session underlined **sustainable tourism as a valuable alternative for many regions**, especially in eastern Europe but pointed out that the word 'sustainable' is used by all kind of actors, including those who want to continue with business as usual. He concluded by pointing out how much angling is one of the best ways to change the public's attitude towards nature.

“Angling is one of the best ways to change the public’s attitude towards nature.”

MEP Michal Wiezik (EPP, Slovakia)