

## The Cedeira Charter

**Inshore fishermen from the Cantabrian sea off Spain seek to unite under the banner of a new charter**

**T**he Spanish fishing sector, generally portrayed as the 'bad boy of Europe', wears another face. Statistics show that one in four fishermen in Europe are Spanish. There are some 71,000 registered fishermen in Spain, out of a European total of 280,000. These fishermen are said to be highly dependent on fishing in other nation's waters—be it in other European countries' waters or off the coasts of Africa, Argentina, Chile, etc.

The Spanish fishing companies who employ them also have a bad reputation for disregarding regulations, such as quota and size limits, and territorial boundaries, and for ravaging distant-water fishing grounds. Last but not least, the Spanish are big consumers of fish, with a high demand for small (immature) fish for many traditional dishes. Their market exerts strong pressures on the fishing sector to both overfish and target undersized fish.

However, looked at in another way, the same statistics paint a rather different picture of Spain. They also show that one in six European fishermen are from the Spanish small-scale inshore sector, operating small craft and fishing within 12 miles of the Spanish coast. For these fishermen and the communities where they live, how to manage fishery resources in a sustainable way has become a major concern.

The area around the Bay of Biscay, one of the most important fishing areas in Europe, is the mainstay of the inshore artisanal fisheries in both Spain and France. However, overfishing caused by overinvestment, surplus capacity and environmentally destructive fishing methods is affecting the prospects of present and future coastal populations in France and Spain.

To discuss these issues, in March this year, in the small Coruñan port of Cedeira, representatives of some of the most important *cofradías* (traditional fishermen's organizations) in Cantabro (Saint Jean de Luz, Hondarribia, Lastres, Cedeira and Ares) met with representatives from the local, national and EU authorities, and with the environmental organization, Greenpeace. The 'First Meeting of Inshore Fishermen from the North-West Cantabrian Fishing Grounds' was, in many ways, a watershed, and raised a number of highly important issues.

To begin with, it highlighted the fact that, from all aspects, the situation on the fishing grounds is extremely serious—"the worst in its history"—and that drastic measures must be taken to guarantee resource recovery and to establish sustainable levels of fishing.

In the second place, there is the no less urgent task of defining, once and for all, a fisheries policy with clear lines of responsibility, which includes:

- support directed to the artisanal fishery—the most important sector from a social and economic perspective—using the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIG—see Box 2), specifically redirected for this purpose. (In the past, only a relatively small part of this was earmarked for inshore artisanal fisheries); and
- a debate on which fishing gear are appropriate for the narrow shelf area and multispecies fishery.

### **Doubts expressed**

Antonio López Cribeiro, a biologist from the Cedeira *cofradía*, wondered whether

## Small-scale fisheries in Galicia

In Galicia the fishers of the *Xunta* (autonomous government of Galicia) are classified into three main groups:

- bivalve shellfishers (*marisqueos*), gathering in the inter-tidal zone or by boat;
- inshore fishers (*pesca de bajura*); and
- offshore fishers (in EEZ and distant waters).

According to the 1994 census, there are 8,811 legally registered vessels and 28,014 fishers in Galicia. In practice, there are many engaged in fishing on a part-time basis. For example, there

are over 8,000 women shellfish gatherers (*mariscadoras*), and many (unregistered) people who supplement their incomes seasonally (retired persons, taxi drivers, shopkeepers, unemployed persons, etc.). There are also many people who fish illegally.

In Galicia, the inshore sector employs about 70 per cent of the full-time fishers (i.e. some 5,600 people), operating around 4,300 vessels less than 9 metres in length. The inshore sector comprises a fleet that fishes on the continental shelf (demersal and pelagic fisheries), and a fleet that operates in the coastal embayments (*rías*), shallow oceanic areas.

—by Juan Friere and Antonio Garcia-Allut 2000

fisheries activities should be undertaken by “a few large efficient units, or based on a model of fishing which allows for the fair distribution of resource wealth amongst the coastal populations, and which is environmentally sustainable.” Esteban Olaizola, president of the Hondarribia *cofradia*, put it more graphically: “There are no clear policies, we are like sailing boats having to take whatever wind blows our way”.

**T**he Cedeira Charter, adopted and signed by all those present at the meeting, has subsequently received the backing of 50 *cofradias* and the Galician Environmental Federation. The document (summarized in Box 3) brings together a number of key issues.

First and foremost, it has brought together a large number and wide variety of geographically dispersed *cofradias*, who recognize that they share a common problem caused by excessive fishing effort, increasing efficiency in fishing gear and vessel technology, poor gear selectivity, and the environmental impact caused by their activities. Historically, one of the greatest problems that has afflicted the sector has been the lack of unity and organization. This meeting was thus seen as an important first step in addressing this issue.

From this perspective, the proposal made by Robert Alvarez from the Basque NGO, Itsas Geroa (‘The Future of the Sea’), to

establish a permanent Cedeira Charter Round Table, is highly important. Such a Round Table should be capable of taking forward the negotiation and implementation of the issues raised by the Charter. It should also represent the group of *cofradias* with the administration and with regard to the international dimensions that must be taken into account when dealing with these issues.

Secondly, the fishermen themselves proposed, and agreed on, measures to restrict their own activities, including a revision of mesh size and minimal landing sizes according to biological criteria, the establishment of seasonally closed areas, and the need for strict vigilance and control on the landings of all of the fleets. “The philosophy of the current document is based exclusively on the urgent need to adopt appropriate measures to allow the sea to recover, for all of us in the different sectors and in the fisheries administration to assume our share of the blame, and to be ready to work together in this new millennium to transform our predatory approach into a more responsible attitude towards the sea, with its resource wealth, and the marine ecosystem with its rich biodiversity,” states a letter to the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries.

### Ecological lesson

In this regard, a lesson in ecological economics was given to the whole meeting during the intervention made by Esteban Olaizola: “We do not believe that

## Financial instrument for fisheries guidance

Many aspects of the European Common Fisheries Policy, which provides the framework for all aspects of European fisheries both within and outside European waters, are currently under review. Two aspects are particularly important for the European inshore fisheries:

- the decision on how fisheries will be managed and regulated in the 6-12 mile zone after 2002, and
- the decision on how European structural funds (through the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance—FIFG) will be used to restructure the European fishing sector.

Since the early 1980s, a series of Multi-Annual Guidance Programmes (MAGPs) have been the main tools used for managing the structural aspects of the European fishing fleet. In essence, the main, but rather conflicting, objectives of these MAGPs are to maintain a modern, efficient fishing fleet, while keeping the fleet capacity in line with the stocks available.

The FIFG is derived from the European Structural Funds, which were originally intended for supporting economic development

in Europe's remote, less well-developed regions.

Over the last two decades, the lion's share of FIFG has been allocated mainly to a fleet modernization programme based on a 'scrap and build' policy, which has represented more than half the budget of the Common Fisheries Policy. The misuse of these FIFG subsidies has been one of the main factors contributing to the alarming situation today, where the European fishing fleet shows at least 40 per cent overcapacity for the stocks available. It has also led a situation of smaller-sized fleets and lower employment, but a greater catching capacity and a greater concentration of wealth in the sector.

Only a very small proportion has been allocated to the small-scale sector (about 10 per cent), mainly through the PESCA initiative (which has now ended). PESCA was adopted in 1994 to solve the socio-economic problems of restructuring. Monies were made available for such measures as improving the professional qualifications of fishermen, diversification of activities in coastal areas (tourism, aquaculture, etc.), providing medical assistance vessels for the deep-sea fleet, etc.

it is the fishermen who are the producers, it is not like that at all... it is the fishes themselves. We may or may not have a future, depending on how we harvest this production”.

**I**n this, as in so many other areas, conventional economics, let alone fisheries economics, has not been able to address this relationship between production and the ecosystem. It is on this vision that the artisanal fishery must build its credibility, “although, in all probability, our grandfathers did not know about ecology... they were as much fishermen as us,” Esteban added.

The interventions received the agreement of all those present. Fernando Braña, representing the *cofradia* of Lastres (Asturias), called attention to the need to phase out destructive gear like bobbin (rock-hopper) trawls, and the issue of modernization of other gear. Citing the case of the increasing size of trawl doors, he observed that “with such high vertical

openings, these gear could almost be considered as pelagic”. He further stated that “we are not against modernization in areas such as safety, but very much against such innovations in gear design,” adding that “before, we used to live with traditional trawls”.

On the subject of bobbin trawls, which allow trawlers to work in rocky areas, Braña showed his anger: “We no longer haul up live coral as before, we only haul it up dead. How is dead ground supposed to produce?”

### Fleet modernization

Félix Cudillero, representing the *cofradia* of Ares, another small Coruñan town, highlighted fleet modernization as a key issue: “We can't think why FIFG monies have been used to renew the trawler fleet in such a fundamental way, when they were created for entirely different purposes.” He went on to add that “although the number of trawlers has decreased, the catching capacity of the

## The Cedeira Charter in brief

### 1. Proposals for demersal fishing:

Three main issues were highlighted:

- the need for an immediate halt on the capture of juveniles;
- the need to regulate the capture of adults; and
- the need to conserve the ecosystem.

To address these issues, we demand:

1.1. An immediate halt to the use of 'rock-hopper bobbin trawls' and semi-pelagic pair trawling. The inshore fishery has no problems with the use of traditional trawling methods, such as those which have been used for over three centuries, and which have always shared in the fishery and complied with the rules.

1.2. The immediate implementation of the regulation which alters the closed season for bottom-trawling on the northwest Cantabrian fishing grounds.

1.3. Review of the minimum size restrictions for target species. It defies logic for species such as hake to have the minimum size restrictions

set below the size at maturity. We demand that biological criteria be applied when setting these limits.

1.4. Review of mesh size regulations. We demand that mesh sizes below 70 mm be banned in bottom trawls fishing in waters less than 200 metres deep, and are permanently banned from use in the 12-mile zone (territorial sea).

1.5. Standardization of weekly rest periods. A rest period of 48-hour duration should be applied which, as a general rule, corresponds to the weekend. This will promote better fisheries management and the well-being of the fishing families. Under special conditions, fishery plans which fulfil the required proportion of two days rest for every seven may be considered.

1.6. Monitoring and control of all the fleets. We demand a permanent increase in the monitoring and control of fish landings, and at all stages in the marketing chain.

### 2. Proposals for pelagic fishing:

Although there is an alarming reduction in profitability in the fisheries of the Bay of Biscay, Cantabrica and Galicia, the use of pelagic trawls

fleet is much greater. But we must all take our share of the blame and be ready to work to change things.”

**T**he charter also emphasizes the need to develop sustainable fisheries through systems of management that are not based only on the quantitative aspects of the resource. As a basic prerequisite for restoring stocks, there is also a need to conserve a healthy ecosystem.

From this arises the need for a clearly defined fisheries policy, which deals with the artisanal sector from the perspective of its structural characteristics: “The proposals have been formulated by the inshore fishery which, from a social and economic perspective, represents no less than the most important sector of the national fleet, comprising an activity essential to the economy of all small fishing ports. Consisting of fisheries limited in size by our narrow continental

shelf, it is the very antithesis of industrial fishing, and is organized through a structure of family businesses, which is the reason why we are motivated to involve ourselves in the prosecution of a sustainable model of fishing for the sake of both the fishermen of today and for generations to come.”

It is important to place the Cedeira Charter in context. Last summer, the specialized press reported the Fisheries Minister's intention, for the coming season, to modify the areas seasonally closed to trawling “as a measure aimed at improving the protection of juvenile hake, given the highly precarious state of stocks, and the dangers of fishery collapse.”

#### Seasonal closure

The measures, which entered into force on 1 January 2000, were supposed to widen the seasonally closed fishing area around La Coruña—the main recruitment area—and to create a new area around

and Naveran (high vertical opening) trawls continues to destroy such important species as anchovy, sardine and Northern bonito.

We, therefore, demand:

- the total ban on drift nets in EU waters;
- the adoption of a moratorium on the use of pelagic and high vertical opening (Naveran) trawls in the community waters of the Bay of Biscay and South of the 46th parallel;
- the control of discards made in these zones by independent observers; and
- the adoption of measures which specifically avoid the capture of immature fish.

3. Other proposals:

3.1. Closed seasons (biological rest periods) subsidized by the authorities. No component of the fisheries sector should have to bear the costs created by decades of acquiescence and inertia, and vessels affected by protection measures such as biological and seasonal closures should be able to access compensation from public funds.

3.2. The new FIGG 2000-2006 should be used to strengthen the inshore fishery. Although

thousands of millions of pesetas (hundreds of millions of dollars) have been spent, the crisis has worsened and the Spanish Atlantic fishery is now in the most critical phase in its history.

We, therefore, demand that the new FIGG be used to rehabilitate the sea, and be directed towards specific objectives:

- halt overexploitation of fishery populations by subsidizing fishery closures (biological rests and other closures) that the scientists consider necessary;
- bring the capacity of the fleet into line with the resources available, with the priority of removing permanently those vessels which are most destructive;
- renew and strengthen the fleet practising selective fishing, which is environmentally sensitive and avoids catching immature fish; and
- elaborate the measures and services necessary to guarantee the strict compliance with the protection measures adopted.

Agreed in the port of Cedeira, La Coruña, March 4th 2000.

Cedeira, along with the removal of the closed area around Muros, where the concentration of juveniles is not so high and where the closure has not been very effective. The seasonal closure of this area was to be extended from three to six months, from 1 September to 31 March.

**T**he response of the trawler sector was twofold: (a) a basic call for any closure to be applied equally to everyone. "The impact of this fishery regulation could be classified as persecution against this fishing method (trawling) which, it seems, is being made a scapegoat for all that is wrong," was a typical response; and (b) a call for more scientific research.

As regards the latter demand, scientific opinion is unanimous. The same recommendations have been made for over 20 years. Given that recruitment is relatively independent of the size of the breeding stock and given the habits of

juvenile hake to accumulate in groups in muddy, trawlable areas, "this situation can only be improved through reductions in fishing effort and through technical conservation measures, like the increase in mesh size, and the establishment of closures in those areas and seasons where there are the greatest concentrations of juveniles."

The trawl is the main gear catching juvenile hake and, if any fishery closures are made to protect the breeding stock that will affect all the other gear, it seems that this would have to involve defining distinct zones during distinct periods. There are other measures, such as increasing mesh size (one of the points raised in the Cedeira Charter), which could also be used for this goal.

#### **Multi-species catch**

In the case of trawling, increases in mesh size would not take into account the multi-species nature of the catch and the

fact that hake is not the main species caught. (Mackerel, scad, blue whiting, monkfish and ray are also caught.) Above all, we are faced with the need to define, once and for all, the kinds of fishing gear that are compatible with our fishing opportunities, under what conditions and under what levels of fishing.

**O**nce this is decided—and we are talking about a political decision of some magnitude, where it will be difficult to reach an agreement that will keep both sides happy—it will be necessary to find ways of achieving the objectives of sustainability proposed. The new FIG 2000-2006 should play a major role in solving these problems, created by so many years of irresponsible fisheries policies.

The Greenpeace representative, Arnau Mateu, proposed several criteria that could be used to guide the process of eliminating the excess capacity (fishing effort) and that would help to transform the use of fishing gear towards achieving sustainable fishing that respects the ecosystem. More important than the need to reduce global fishing effort, the priority of the hour must be to eliminate those fishing gear which cause the greatest damage to the marine environment as well as those which cause the greatest social impact. This would involve applying criteria such as:

- the levels of bycatch and discards of non-commercial species. (The Spanish Oceanographic Institute warns in their report that discards of hake in the size range 8-25 cm could be more than 30 million individuals per trawl.)
- the damage caused to the marine ecosystem—for example, alterations produced in the benthos (which has reached extreme levels with the introduction of new fishing gear like the bobbin trawl).
- the impact on key species in the food chain (an aspect which has hardly been studied).
- the quality of the product which arrives on the market (Fernando Gonzalez Laxe, president of the Fisheries Committee of the EU, placed particular emphasis on this aspect. As well as mentioning the need to establish protected areas from fishing activities, he highlighted the possibilities for ecolabelling and the need to influence outlets not to sell immature fish).
- employment generated (one of the characteristics of the artisanal sector, which, in Galicia, has more than 8,000).

**D**espite continued calls from the inshore sector, the fisheries closure proposed by the Ministry of Fisheries has never been implemented. It remains to be seen whether it will be implemented in September. The organizations party to the Cedeira Charter are particularly concerned that the lack of political will to deal with this chronic fisheries problem will mean the continued demise of the fishery.

The Ministry of Fisheries, for its part, has continued to promise that it would apply the restrictive regulations needed to ensure the recovery of stocks in the Cantabrian Sea. It has also been trying to get the trawler and artisanal fleets to agree on the new measures to be adopted. According to the ministry, they should submit their own proposals once its scientific report has been made available. But what about the precautionary principle, which places burden of proof on the authorities and the fishing industry to show that fishing activities are not damaging the resource? And why must we wait for new reports before acting, when, for so many years, all the reports have been saying exactly the same things?

These issues were discussed at a meeting organized by the Ministry of Fisheries with representatives of the inshore and trawling sectors. In a subsequent statement, Samuel Juarez, General Secretary of Fisheries, announced: "There is general agreement that measures must be taken to allow the fishery to recover. But not that some areas should be reserved only for certain fleets or that some gear should be banned from the fishing grounds, because the fishing grounds are unique and belong to everybody."

This outcome was not unexpected, and was the main reason why the cofradia of Cedeira, which called for the Charter, boycotted the meeting. The closing remarks of the Fisheries Chancellor of the Galician *Xunta* certainly came as no surprise, when he announced that "there are neither good nor bad fishing gear; it depends on how they are used" and that "we must be prepared to tighten our belts."

Finally, at least we have the opportunity to continue working on the Charter which provides an opportunity for the artisanal sector to push their demands forward on a joint platform. We are waiting expectantly to see how this conflict evolves.

Spain

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