

How blue will my Europe be?

The grand dream of a 'Blue Europe' may mean that fisher people will be forced to relocate to shore-based activities

The European Fishery Commission, headed by Emma Bonino, waged a two-day charm offensive in Brittany to gain acceptance for its development policy for the 'Blue Europe of the Future.' Meeting in Quimper, France, on 13 and 14 May 1996, the Directorate General for Fisheries (DG XIV) of the European Union (EU), hosted a two-day seminar on 'Fisheries Agreements and the Organization of the European Market.'

Hosting the seminar in Brittany was a particularly brave and significant gesture - brave because, in 1994, rioting French fishworkers in Brittany laid waste to the Brittany Parliament as they vented their anger against what they regarded as oppressive rules from Brussels.

It was doubly brave because, under the EU's latest Multi-Annual Guidance Programme (MAGP IV), the French fishing sector is required to reduce its capacity by 20 per cent. There is, therefore, no love lost between the fish-catching sector and the Brussels 'fishocrats.'

The venue of Brittany was also significant because Brittany produces 40 per cent of the national fish catch, has a fishing population of around 7,000 fishermen and their families, and a sector which directly employs 30,000 fishworkers.

The topics chosen for the seminar were central elements of a fisheries policy geared towards securing future fish supplies for Europe's processing industries and consumers. In Europe's fishery, fisheries agreements and fish marketing are increasingly important. Between 1987 and 1992, the total costs of fisheries agreements rose from ECU 88 million to ECU 208 million, amounting to over half the budget of the Common

Fisheries Policy (CFP). In this five-year period, the total amount came close to 940 million ECU.

The current CFP budget is for around ECU 822 million. About ECU 290 million have been allocated to nearly 30 fisheries agreements. Most of this amount is spent on three agreements: ECU 38.7 million on an agreement with Greenland, ECU 32.5 million on Argentina and ECU 125 million on Morocco.

While 40 per cent of Europe's fish supplies come from its own waters, 60 per cent are imported. Almost a quarter of fish supplies are obtained through fisheries agreements.

However, the logic of fisheries agreements is essentially flawed. Their cost effectiveness is questionable, with European taxpayers paying hundreds of millions of ECUs annually. Thus, the agreement with Morocco, which allows access to 600 Spanish boats employing 8,000 fishermen, works out to a cost of around ECU 210,000 per boat and ECU 15,500 per fisherman.

The negotiations for fisheries agreements are far from transparent, come under no serious scrutiny and get virtually no media attention. According to EU procedure, all fisheries agreements need to be approved by the European Parliament (EP). The EP is generally consulted only after the agreements are signed.

No coherence

There is a complete lack between the practice agreements co-operation agreements development of coherence of fisheries and development policy. Examples of contradicting the EU's co-operation policy include those with

'My goal is not the death of the fishery'

Emma Bonino described her vision for the future of Blue Europe in an interview with the French Paper Le Telegramme. The following is a translation:

Why is the Commission adopting such draconian measures for resource conservation, yet being so liberal about regulating the market?

Sixty per cent of today's market is based on imports, while 40 per cent is fish caught in our own waters. If we take no action to reduce catches to allow the fish to reproduce, this amount will become even less. Also, quite simply, I don not know how to make more fish. This is not blind liberalism, this is the reality. Although I try to stop abuses, (on its own) our commercial policy is not an effective screen. I have a team of only 18 fishery inspectors for the entire Blue Europe. It is up to the Member States and the customs services to look out for fraud.

Apart from imports from third countries, our fishermen have to suffer unfair competition

from the British, who do not respect the withdrawal price. Why does the Commission do nothing to stop this?

Because I have no legal basis to do so. The Council of European Fisheries Ministers agreed on a non-binding withdrawal price system. Every time the Commission, my predecessor or I, asked them to take action on it, a majority of Ministers rejected our proposal.

The Multi-Annual Guidance Programme (MAGP-IV) that you are preparing will further reduce the number of fishing boats. What do you have to say to the professional Brittany fishermen who do not want this to happen?

I can very well understand how a region such as yours, which implemented MAGP III very well, is unhappy with a plan for further fleet reductions. I am very much in favour of a regional approach to MAGP IV, and I am going to propose a modification of the rules to this end. But for the moment, it is not up to me to decide. It is easy to say that Brussels is all-powerful,

Madagascar and Senegal.. The raw material for fish *processing* obtained through fisheries agreements can undermine the price of fish caught in Europe, and adversely affect European fishermen.

A policy which accords greater priority to extraction of fish from the waters of developing countries than supporting the development of the local fish processing sector, undermines the social and economic development of the local fishery. The considerable amounts spent on fisheries agreements would be better spent on rationalizing the management and restructuring of the EU's own fisheries.

It was clear from the start that this so-called decentralized seminar—the third organized on the same subject—was more about winning hearts and minds, and informing and influencing, than about negotiation and debate. The first day set the tone, with most of the morning session given over to presentations from DG XIV on fisheries

agreements. The time allotted for questions and discussions was barely sufficient for the industry representatives to pose their queries, let alone enter into any exchange of views.

Another clue to the seminar's purpose was an invited 'audience' composed almost entirely of fishing industry interests, with very few fishworker representatives.

Commissioner Bonino's riposte to fishworker delegates barred from the proceedings was: "The exclusion of fishworkers from this meeting has nothing to do with me. You have your enemies, go and find them! On the contrary, I have accepted to come Le Guilvinec to meet you."

She also denied any responsibility for deciding fishing policy: "I don't get up every morning, thinking that I am going to decide on this or that. You must understand that every decision and directive that arrives from Brussels is agreed by the European Fishery Ministers. I am responsible for certain proposals, but

but the French government must own up to its responsibilities for a priority targeting to reduce areas that are over capacity, and reallocate new efforts to other areas, including Brittany.

In Le Guilvinec and in Concarneau, the fishing sector sees Europe as a machine which contributes nothing to the upkeep of the fishery, but only to the desertification of the coastal zone. What is your view?

My goal is not the death of the fishery, but the restructuring of the fishery sector, which can no longer rely on fishing. This will be achieved by adding value to fish, that is, through the manufacture of frozen, canned, cooked and all manner of processed products.

Le Guilvinec provided us with this perspective through their most interesting PESCA proposal, a proposal which Paris turned down. However, with the PESCA budget, and above all, with the Structural Funds of IFOP, there is the means available to undertake a fundamental restructuring of the industry-with the understanding that every job lost at sea will become a job on land, on the docks and on the quays.

This region established a precedent with the Common Agricultural Policy. Today, the Breton agrofood industry is high competitive.

To assure a future for its fishery, Brittany must undertake a painful structural adjustment. However, I am certain that Brittany can establish itself as a leader in the processing industry, where consumer demand is the most important factor.

Blue Europe is therefore only a Europe of processors?

I am fully aware that there must be a cultural revolution for fishermen to accept that their future is onshore. They can refuse, saying that the Eurocrats in Brussels are mad, and continue as they are, without changing. In this case, the processing sector will move elsewhere, and Brittany will eventually lose its seas-based work, without having first prepared jobs ashore. There is one country in Europe, Norway, where fishing is a vibrant, traditional activity, based on fish catching. Today the Norwegian fleet is considerably reduced, but even in Tibet, one can eat fish processed in Norway by Norwegians.

the Council of Ministers amends, rejects or accepts them. It is easy to find scapegoats: they will give you some satisfaction, but they will not lead you far. Do not forget who your enemies are!"

The afternoon session was almost a complete farce, as the sumptuous lunch hosted by DG XIV lasted for nearly three hours. This left delegates with only an hour to discuss the second topic on the agenda: the organization of fish marketing in Europe.

Despite being billed as a 'European Parliament Fisheries Seminar,' the role of the European Parliamentarians was also interesting. Invited at the last minute, they were kept in the dark about the complete agenda.

In a speech following a dinner given in her honour by the fishing community of Le Guilvinec, Commissioner Emma Bonino outlined her vision for the 'Blue Europe' of the future. It is a future where both fisheries agreements and the artisanal fisheries sector have roles to play. The so-called first-generation agreements

(cash for access) will become obsolete. Instead, Europe will access its fish supplies and deploy its distant-water fishing fleets through joint venture arrangements, negotiated through second or third generation fisheries agreements.

The fisheries sector in Europe will continue to be cut back and modernized. This means fewer but more efficient fishing vessels. People formerly employed in the artisanal fishing sector (namely, the owner-operators) will be redeployed ashore, working in the shore-based processing and marketing sectors.

Although she denies being a decision maker, and lays the blame for the current policy muddle on the Council of Fisheries Ministers, it is clear that Commissioner Bonino is laying down two very fundamental policy objectives, which will provide the main planks to support the new Blue Europe:

- conservation of resources to be achieved by ruthlessly reducing fishing fleet capacity; and,

- liberalization of fish marketing, and securing fish supplies for Europe's fish processing industry and consumers.

According to Commissioner Bonino's vision, if these two objectives are fulfilled, and fishermen are not intent on merely protecting the harvesting aspect of the industry, there is a future for the entire fisheries sector.

For all her considerable fervour, charm and rhetoric, Emma Bonino's vision of a future Blue Europe is inherently flawed. It is a future in which the people whose livelihoods depend on the fishery are disempowered, and where Blue Europe will be dominated by a few large processing companies.

Under the guise of decommissioning and conservation, the Commission is undertaking a programme of social engineering, where fishing communities will become the shore-based workforce for vertically integrated fishing industries.

It is a process geared towards the centralization of ownership and management of fishery resources, and the elimination of small-scale inshore fisheries and associated fishing communities.

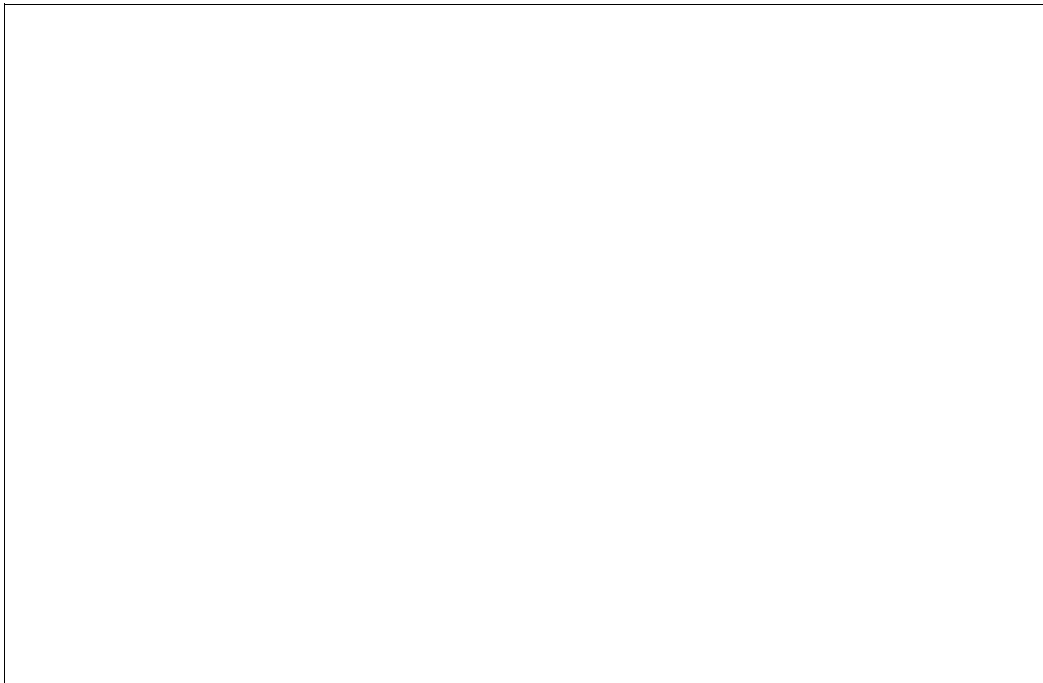
It is also a policy aimed at making the European fisheries easier to manage for the Commission. A sector dominated by a few multinational companies, deploying an essentially distant-water fleet, will eliminate the difficulties of having to control many small fishing units.

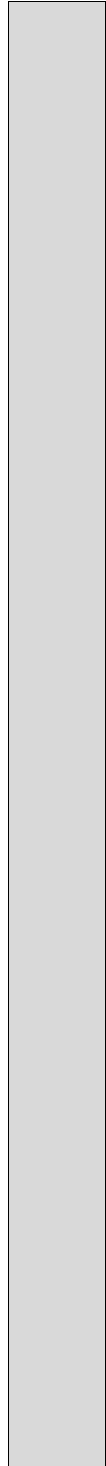
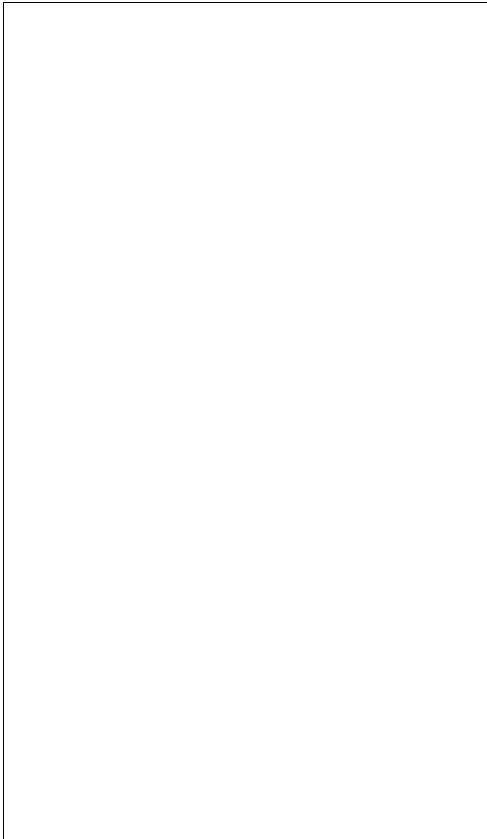
A French group, called 'Peche et Developpement' (Fisheries and Development), which represents both local Brittany fishworkers and development NGO interests, met in Quimper, just prior to Emma Bonino's visit. This was an open meeting, in which around 70 people participated, including representatives from industry, the fishworker sector, NGOs and the media. The meeting focused on the links between fishworkers and issues of mutual concern in the North and South.

There are some issues of particular concern to fisheries agreements and the organization of fish markets in Europe. Fisheries agreements amount to huge subsidies, which benefit a relatively few large fishing companies, to the disadvantage of many artisanal fishworkers.

Low-cost access

Rather than promoting progressive social and economic development of the fisheries sectors in Europe and partner countries, the issue is actually about





accessing low-cost raw material for the European processing industry.

In this way, the EU's fishery agreements are actually a substitute for social policies in European fisheries, and counteract the EU's development co-operation policy objectives. The globalization of the fish market is effectively undermining the position of small-scale producers World wide.

The alternative vision proposed by the meeting was of a process which prioritizes the development of fishworkers and their communities.

It is a vision based on an understanding of fisheries from a community perspective, where social and humanistic considerations are held to be as important as technical and economic ones.

It is a vision which holds that the local knowledge and customary practices of fishing communities are needed to ensure the sustainability of fishery resources. Unless such alternative visions are translated into development actions, Commissioner Bonino's rose-tinted vision of the future will become the bleakly stark reality of tomorrow. 3

This report has been prepared by Brian O'Riordan of the Intermediate Technology Development Group, Rugby, UK