

# Blue Europe Turns Green

**The reform process for Europe's Common Fisheries Policy proposes stringent cuts but offers differentiated approaches to small-scale fishing**

**T**he Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) of the European Union (EU) is up for review and reform again. This once-in-ten-year event is the third such review and reform process in the history of the CFP. Created in 1983, the CFP was previously reviewed and reformed in 1992 and again in 2002. According to sources inside the Fisheries Directorate (DG Mar) of the European Commission (EC), while there is a legal obligation for such a review to be carried out, policy reform is vital given the failure of previous reform processes to establish sustainable fisheries in the EU.

Many consider the CFP to be dysfunctional. In its Green Paper on CFP Reform, DG Mar points to five main structural failings of the CFP: the inability to tackle the problems of fleet overcapacity; imprecise policy objectives; short-term decision-making focus; insufficient responsibility given to industry for the policy framework; and a lack of political will to enforce compliance.

DG Mar kicked off a public debate on the review of the CFP on 22 April with the publication of its Green Paper. The public consultation will end on 31 December 2009, by which time "all interested parties" should have commented on the questions set out in the Green Paper, along with any additional comments on the reform process.

The EC will sum up the debate by the first half of 2010 and produce conclusions on the direction of the CFP reform. An impact assessment will then be conducted and after further consultations with stakeholders, the EC will draft a proposal for a new basic regulation, which will be presented

to the Council and the European Parliament together with all other legal base proposals in the context of the new Financial Framework after 2013.

The reform process will address all aspects of the CFP, including conservation, fleet structure, markets, aquaculture, and external policy. The reform process has implications for the EU's small-scale coastal fisheries, which represent the overwhelming majority of fishermen in all EU Member States—81 per cent of the EU-25 (see box, page 26) fishing fleet is made up of vessels less than 12 m in length and 87 per cent less than 15 m. Approximately 100,000 fishers are employed as crew in such fisheries in the EU.

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The reform process comes at a time of several crises in the EU's fisheries sector. Eighty per cent of fish stocks in EC waters are deemed overfished, and the fishing capacity of EU fleets exceeds the resources available by two to three times.

## **Diminishing opportunities**

Consequently, there are ever-diminishing returns to fishing, and ever-diminishing fishing opportunities, as well as a fuel crisis since most fishing operations are highly dependent on fuel, and fuel costs are escalating and there is uncertainty over future supplies, which undermines the economic basis of fishing. Additionally, the ongoing

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## John O'Brien's Misfortunes

The story of John O'Brien, a fisherman from the west of Ireland, epitomizes many of the problems faced by small-scale fishers in the European Union (EU). His story shows how the implementation of the CFP at the Member State level, and the influence of powerful lobby groups on policy processes and decisionmaking can completely undermine the fishing-based economies of small island communities, and ruin the livelihoods of fishing families.

For generations, John's family lived on the island of Inis Bo Finne (Inishbofin), a small Gaeltacht island (some 120 ha or 300 acres in area), two miles off the north coast of Donegal, with a population of around 100 islanders, many of whom spend the winter months on the mainland. The island has little year-round economic activity, and lacks good infrastructure. It was only in 2002 that running water and electricity were supplied to the island. It has no wharf or other fish-landing facility.

Over the last decade, like many others in remote coastal communities, John's fortunes have taken a turn for the worse. He is now struggling to make a living in a fishery where alternative options are being closed.

John and his predecessors, like small-scale and artisanal fishers all over the world, have respected the changing seasons and the variations that they impose on the fishery. For two summer months of the year, in June and July, the coastal salmon fishery was by far the most important source of family income for the islanders.

During the autumn and start of the winter months, a reasonable lobster fishery existed, and for the rest of the year, there was a mixed finfish fishery, including for herring and mackerel. However, the fishery for small pelagic species became non-viable for small operators like John with the advent of producer organizations and the controversial 'withdrawal pricing' schemes. These allowed bumper catches to be made irrespective of the capacity to process and market them. Fish prices collapsed; fish caught were paid for, but not used; and catches were sprayed with dye to stop them being landed and

paid for twice. Vast quantities of fish were dumped at sea, and plenty went for fishmeal production.

In 2007, the coastal salmon fishery was closed. According to John, this was due to pressure from the anglers' associations, which wanted the fishery to be managed as an inland fishery. Pressure was put on the Irish government to close the fishery, which was said to be a mixed-stock fishery, that is, fish caught off the coast of Inishbofin were destined for various rivers in Ireland, England, Wales and elsewhere. It was also argued that "the balance of national economic interest is overwhelmingly with salmon angling and not salmon netting".

Salmon fishers like John were offered compensation payments, or buyouts, which, if accepted, meant that they could never fish for salmon again. John has persistently refused to accept such compensation payments, insisting on his right to fish.

Once the salmon fishery was closed, the lobster fishery was extended year-round, and very soon became non-viable. John was then encouraged to take up crab fishing, whose main market—for live crabs—was in France. The crabs could not be kept alive and in good condition in John's vessel. What was needed was a vessel of at least 12 m (a 'crabber') to accommodate a 'vivier' system for keeping the crabs alive; an investment for such a new vessel would cost over one million Euros. John eventually decided to invest in a secondhand 12-m vivier crabber from Scotland, which pushed him beyond the 10-m threshold at which various EU regulations come into play, severely restricting his flexibility for fishing.

John and his family are now struggling to make a living from crab fishing for the French market, amidst competition from others from Ireland, Scotland, England and France. The costs of transporting live crabs to France are huge, representing about 75 per cent of gross earnings. John also has to buy bait for his crab pots.

Ironically, on a recent visit to the Isle of Houat in France, news arrived that that day's local crab catches had gone unsold.

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global economic crisis, which is creating a scarcity of credit and other funds for investment, and is eroding consumer purchasing power, is also leading to a food-security crisis. There is a rapidly increasing gap between supply and demand for fisheries products, in a situation where over 60 per cent of EU demand for fisheries products must be met by imports. The socioeconomic crisis in fishery-dependent coastal

communities arises from the combined impact of all these other crises.

In its Green Paper, the DG Mar points out that "economic and social sustainability requires productive fish stocks and healthy marine ecosystems" and that "the economic and social viability of fisheries can only result from restoring the productivity of fish stocks". DG Mar concludes that: "ecological sustainability is, therefore,

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"That's why I want to continue catching salmon", joked John, "At least that way, you will be able to sell your crabs!"

Based as he is in Area 6, a cod recovery zone, John is not even allowed to carry any nets on his boat, or to landline caught fish, because he has no track record of catching cod. This means that he is not allowed to catch his own bait, or even to experiment with other gear for different species that may be commercial.

Like many others, John now finds himself caught in a vicious circle of ever-decreasing options. The implementation of EU policies at the national level has ruined multi-species, multi-gear fishing, based on seasonal conditions. In its place has come single-species, single-gear, year-round fishing, with consequent oversupply of markets and reduced catch per unit effort. This has shrunk earnings from fishing, and rendered largely unfeasible, fishing as a way of life and source of livelihood.

The current review of the CFP could provide an opportunity to safeguard fishing-based economies in remote communities, and help sustain and defend the livelihoods of fishers like John. In particular, the possibility of applying a "differentiated fishing regime to protect small-scale fleets", of regulating fishing activities within the 6- and 12-mile zones to favour small-scale, environmentally sustainable, and socially and economically equitable fishing practices could provide important opportunities for fishers like John.

But for this to happen, small-island and other small-scale fishery-dependent communities must organize themselves to make their voices heard collectively. This will not be easy. At the EU level, small-scale fisheries have become incorporated into monolithic professional structures, including Europeche (the association of EU fishery



LOIC JOURDAIN

John O'Brien, a fisherman from the the island of Inis Bo Finne (Inishbofin) in the west of Ireland. Small-scale fishers like O'Brien are caught in a vicious circle of ever-decreasing options

enterprises, representing shipowners) and Cogeca (agricultural co-operatives, and fisheries producer organizations, which receive the lion's share of fishing quotas), among others. In such monolithic associations, the voices of the small-scale sector are drowned by those who shout the loudest, namely, the larger-scale interests.

The European Small Island Federation (ESIN) could play an important role in this regard. ESIN is a federation of associations for small islands and archipelagos in Europe, and a forum for co-operation between member associations who work in these islands and archipelagos. There are about 1,200 small islands in ESIN, with about 343,000 inhabitants. Most have populations of fewer than 1,000, well below the threshold (4,000 to 5,000) deemed necessary to sustain the social and economic structures to support community life on islands. According to research by Eurostat, the EC's statistical agency, any island with a population of under 4,000 is likely to experience net emigration, an ageing population and inadequate provision of facilities. This makes island life highly fragile and vulnerable to changing circumstances.

a basic premise for the economic and social future of European fisheries". This will involve de-coupling social and economic objectives from the overall goal of achieving ecological sustainability.

To achieve the goal of ecological sustainability, the EC proposes that a rights- and results-based approach to fisheries management should

be adopted; an approach that will push fishing companies "to use their investments more efficiently and to eliminate their surplus capacity." It is further proposed that access to fish stocks should be linked to performance. "Rights, responsibility and accountability should, of course, go hand in hand: those who exercise responsibility in a proper and effective

## The EU by Numbers

The European Union (EU) is an economic and political union, currently comprising 27 Member States (EU-27). The EU evolved from the European Coal and Steel Community formed in 1951 by six countries. Then, in 1957, following the Treaty of Rome, the European Economic Community (EEC) was established. The EEC was subsequently enlarged to 12 Member States between 1973 and 1986, and in 1993, the EU was established by the Maastricht Treaty (EU-12).

In 1995, three new Member States joined the EU, forming the EU-15. In 2004, the EU was enlarged to 25 Member States (EU-25), and in 2007, to the current 27 Member States (EU 27).

manner should be the ones to enjoy the access to fish stocks,” notes the Green Paper.

Further, DG Mar is considering “the use of market instruments such as transferable rights in fishing” as a potentially more efficient and less expensive way to reduce overcapacity. It also notes that “such systems can be complemented with proper safeguard clauses to avoid excessive concentration of ownership or negative effects on smaller-scale fisheries and coastal communities”.

## Small-scale fisheries could play a vital role in placing EU fisheries on a more sustainable footing.

Such an approach has far-reaching implications for small-scale fisheries, where adopting a rights-based approach to fisheries management, and the use of market-based allocation mechanisms, as proposed by the EC, may lead to concentration of ownership of access rights, and put small-scale fisheries at a disadvantage. Such a free market in fishers’ rights has many implications for the equitable sharing of benefits from the fishery, particularly when the rights are leased.

The question also arises as to whose rights will be given priority when push comes to shove: Will the transferable rights of the big companies be given precedence over the rights of the small-scale sector?

Since capacity reduction became an objective of the CFP in the 1990s, the number of vessels in the EU-15 was reduced by 24 per cent (from 95,000 in 1998 to around 83,000 in 2005). But, over the same period, the fishing capacity—in kilowatt (kW) and gross tonnage (GT)—reduced by only 10-15 per cent. This implies that it was mainly the relatively smaller vessels that left the fleet.

As the small-scale fleet contributes more to employment on board, fleet reduction alone has accounted for about 40 per cent of the loss of employment on board fishing vessels. Over the period 1998 to 2003, employment on board fishing vessels in the EU-15 decreased from about 240,000 to about 190,000, that is, by 21 per cent, with the small-scale sector bearing the brunt. Planned fleet capacity reductions through CFP reform in 2012 have serious implications for employment in the sector, and steps must be taken to ensure that these cuts do not fall disproportionately on the small-scale sector. In this regard, the Green Paper highlights the need to adapt fisheries management to the requirements of the small-scale sector through “differentiated management regimes”: one for large-scale fleets, and one for “small-scale fleets in coastal communities with a focus on social objectives”.

Small-scale fisheries could play a vital role in placing EU fisheries on a more sustainable footing, and cushioning fishery-dependent communities from the economic and social consequences of the capacity reduction cuts proposed.

### Employment opportunities

If developed in the right way, this sector does have greater capacity for employment, more equitable distribution of benefits from fishing, less requirements for fuel and other inputs (with potentially less impact on the environment), and greater capacity

to adapt seasonally, annually and multi-annually to changing circumstances, economically, ecologically and socially.

But just being small does not necessarily make fishing activities more sustainable or socially equitable. As noted in the Green Paper, “many vessels are small-scale and have a limited environmental impact, but small-scale fishing can also be harmful to sensitive coastal habitats and its aggregated impact can be significant, with real consequences on the state of the stocks”. Thanks to modernization and “technological creep”, many small-scale activities should now be classified as “semi-industrial”. These operations may exert significant impacts on the environment and contribute to fish stock depletion.

Adapting fisheries management to the requirements of the small-scale sector implies that there is consensus on how small-scale fisheries are defined, or at least that there is some common understanding on the scope and scale of small-scale fishing activities. Currently, no such understanding exists at the EU level; only that vessels under 10 m in length are small in scale and, as such, are afforded special treatment and derogations to some regulations.

### CFP Policy Pillars

The CFP is founded on four policy pillars that relate to: conservation of fish stocks (including conservation measures, total allowable catches and quotas, and technical measures); structure of the fishing fleet; organization of markets; and the external dimension of EU fisheries (fishing in distant waters and international dimensions of fisheries governance, including RFMOs, etc.).

In 2002, for the first time ever, the EU adopted a strategy for the sustainable development of EU aquaculture. Increasingly, aquaculture is becoming a fifth dimension in the policy framework of the CFP. All these aspects of the CFP are included in the current review and reform process leading up to a ‘new’ reformed CFP in 2013.



A punt fisherman in Árainn Mhór, the second largest island in Ireland. Small-scale fisheries can cushion fishery-dependent communities from economic and social hardships

It is, therefore, vital that small-scale fishing interests engage in the CFP review and reform processes to ensure that the criteria used to define small-scale fishing are based on appropriate logic. Such logic should transcend physical size and fishing capacity, and should explicitly incorporate the economic and social linkages that make small-scale fishing so vital to the economies, social fabric and cultural traditions of coastal communities.

In this regard, it is crucial that the review and reform process also considers the role of women in fisheries, and in the wider social and economic contexts of the EU’s fishery-dependent coastal communities. Women play a vital, though often hidden or invisible, role in the fishery production and post-harvest processes in European fisheries. At one level, they may be wives and mothers of fishermen, but they are also physically, economically and socially engaged in providing inputs for fishing, fish processing and fish vending and marketing, and in the administration of small fishery enterprises. Currently, no explicit attention has been given to the role of women in the Green Paper process. This absence needs to be addressed. The consultation process also needs to listen to, and heed, their voices.

Representatives from small-island and other communities should stress the sustainability of their operations (in terms of gear selectivity, fuel efficiency,

CORNELIE QUIST



Traditional women shellfish collectors in Cambados, Galicia, Spain.  
Small-scale fishing is vital to the economies, social fabric and cultural traditions of coastal communities

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low impact on the environment, and so on), and equity (in terms of distributon of economic benefits, employment and food to small-island and remote communities). The sector needs to demonstrate that it is the most appropriate model for sustaining the economies, food supplies and social fabric of coastal communities.

Policymakers must take note of the special characteristics that make the small-scale sector the most appropriate for sustaining the economies, food supplies and social fabric of coastal communities.

Long experience with “fisheries management from Brussels” has left many small-scale fishers cynical about the possibilities for change, or that they will be given a fair hearing in the CFP reform process. 3

#### For more



[http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp_en.htm)

#### About the CFP

[http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/2002\\_reform\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/2002_reform_en.htm)

#### The 2002 Review of the CFP

[http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/review\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/review_en.htm)

#### The Current Review of the CFP

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0163:FIN:EN:PDF>

#### The Green Paper on the Reform of the CFP

[www.fif.ie/news.htm](http://www.fif.ie/news.htm)

**Federation of Irish Fishermen**