

Fair, Sustainable?

The new protocol to the EU-Mauritania Fisheries Partnership Agreement has been welcomed by Mauritanian artisanal octopus fishers, but spurned by the European fishing industry

Recent months have seen heated debate over the European Union (EU) and Mauritania's Fisheries Partnership Agreement protocol. This was initiated on 26 July 2012 by EU and Mauritanian negotiators. The protocol, already approved by the Council of European Fisheries Ministers, will come into effect once it has been approved by the European Parliament; hence the discussions.

The European fishing industry has expressed disappointment in the new agreement, which they say is unprofitable. The main objections have

mackerel and horse mackerel. In addition, the trawlers have been restricted to areas further away from the coast in order to reduce their impact on the environment and to protect the artisanal fisheries of Mauritania.

The main bone of contention is that the octopus fishery has been made out of bounds for EU fishing fleets. This fishery is reserved for the local fleet, particularly the artisanal fishers of Mauritania. Spain is particularly unhappy about this as it affects 24 Spanish boats, booted out of Mauritanian waters since July 2012. The fishing industry says this will adversely affect the livelihoods of Spanish fishers and that recent scientific data indicate that the octopus stock is recovering from a state of severe overexploitation. However, the artisanal fishers of Mauritania are still concerned about sustainable use of the resource, stocks of which are below sustainable levels.

On 19 and 20 February, the EU-Mauritania joint committee met and agreed to constitute a joint scientific committee to update the status of all fish stocks as well as look at other technical measures for various fisheries. Earlier, in January 2013, the European Parliament's Fisheries Committee held a meeting where the protocol was discussed.

Fisheries agreement

At this hearing on the EU-Mauritania fisheries agreement protocol, experts were invited to address the Committee, including Sid'Ahmed Abeid, President of the artisanal section of the Mauritania National Federation of Fisheries.

been that the octopus fishery is off limits for the EU fishing fleet, the licence fees have increased substantially, and the fishing zones open to the EU trawlers targeting sardinellas and shrimps have been reduced and are further off the coast.

The new agreement protocol is for two years with an option of extending it for another four years. However, the new protocol has some crucial changes such as the ban on EU octopus fishing, and the increased potential financial contribution by the EU of Euro 110 mn annually, of which Euro 70 mn would come directly from EU tax payers and the rest from licence fees (if all the licences are taken). The EU fleet will gain a quota of 307,400 tonnes of fish, mostly

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Fish catches being landed by fishermen in Nnouadhibou harbour, Mauritania. Artisanal fishers in Mauritania have taken steps to ensure resource sustainability

Describing how the artisanal fisheries sector has developed over the last three decades, he noted that traditionally artisanal fishers in Mauritania did not target octopus. But from the late 1970s, this has gradually changed.

Starting with using polyvinyl chloride (PVC) water bottles to catch octopus, and just 17 artisanal boats focusing on a few species, he said the octopus fishery has now grown to 36,000 artisanal fishers using 7,500 boats.

The artisanal octopus fishery provides over 60 per cent of the country's octopus production in quantity and 70 per cent in value.

Mauritania's artisanal fisheries provide 90 per cent of the employment in the fisheries sector, with employment generated by 50 freezing plants, 12 boat-building workshops, as well as in hundreds of stores for the sale of equipment, for fish selling, transporting, and so on. The added value of the artisanal fisheries sector is eight times greater than for the industrial fisheries sector, noted Abeid.

The artisanal fishers have also taken steps towards ensuring resource sustainability, such as releasing juvenile octopus back into the ocean, fixing a minimum weight for catches (500 gm gutted), and a biological rest period of four months. They are also

developing a management plan to control fishing capacity.

The next step, Abeid said, was to develop the artisanal fishery for sardinella. But the management of this resource, he cautioned, would have to be done along with neighbouring west African countries as this is a common resource. However, Europe, he said, will continue to be Mauritania's first partner in fisheries, but this partnership has to be fair. Towards this, he emphasized that what can be caught by Mauritanian fishers must be reserved for them. This was non-negotiable since it is a matter of livelihood for Mauritanians. He also pointed out that limiting trawlers to areas further away from the coast will reduce competition between the Mauritanian *pirogues* and the trawlers as well as reduce by-catch. He concluded by saying that the amount of financial compensation had no meaning unless it is well spent on development and this should be done in a transparent manner. He also welcomed the fact that the current agreement requires that 60 per cent of the crew on EU fishing vessels be Mauritanian. 3

For more



ec.europa.eu/fisheries/news_and_events/press_releases/2012/20120727/index_en.htm

European Commission press release on the new protocol to the EU-Mauritania Fisheries Partnership Agreement

ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/international/agreements/mauritania/index_en.htm

European Commission webpage on the EU-Mauritania Fisheries Partnership Agreement

cape-cffa.org/spip.php?article309
CFFA press release