

Good, Clean, Fair Fish

Slow Fish is a multifaceted, evolving network of networks seeking sustainable, fair and wholesome alternatives in sustainable and responsible fisheries

Slow Fish describes itself as Slow Food's campaign on responsible fisheries, and, as evidenced by discussions at the seventh biennial Slow Fish event, which took place in Genoa, Italy, during 14-17 May 2015, the evolving Slow Fish movement is not shy of courting controversy. In fact, Slow Fish seems to welcome it. It challenges basic assumptions and promotes ethical values, and rejects privatization of the seas while reclaiming the commons for all citizens. It encourages discussion around conservation and environmental protection, all in the cause of creating open and honest, if often emotional and heated, exchanges in the search for viable, healthy and fair community-based alternatives.

The seventh Slow Fish event in Genoa was dedicated to the world of fish and marine ecosystems, and included a variety of activities, including tasting and cooking workshops, and with an extensive programme of "water workshops". Over four days, 14 workshops were organized to discuss the challenges facing the world's fisheries, with a focus on small-scale fisheries, fishing communities, sustainability, and the search for common solutions and strategies to global problems. Youth and the future prospects for fisheries and fishing communities were a key theme, with a large contingent of young people participating both from Europe and from countries in the Maghreb region of North Africa.

As many as 100 people from 26 countries took part in the event, both in their individual capacities and as representatives of organizations and communities. They included workers and entrepreneurs from the small-

scale fishery sector, politicians, cooks, students, artists and academics, environmental and social activists, and concerned citizens. Thousands of visitors also thronged the sunny quayside of Genoa's tourist "Ancient Port" over the four days, providing a colourful and convivial backdrop.

Slow Fish promotes "Good, Clean and Fair Fish", by bringing together individuals and organizations whose interests and professions all relate to fish, fishing, fisheries, and fishing communities. It is a dynamic and evolving group of people, a kind of

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network of networks, comprising people whose interests may be economic, academic, cultural and political. As such, Slow Fish provides a multifaceted vision of the fisheries world, including the perspectives of producers and consumers, workers and entrepreneurs, scientists and journalists, teachers and students, and many others besides.

Alternatives

The Slow Fish vision is "centred on resilient coastal communities, where local jobs, and control of the resources are key elements", seeking alternatives to "an increasingly industrialized model of fisheries designed to feed international commodity markets". In short, it asks people to think and act "to change the way fish lands on their plate."

*This article is by **Brian O' Riordan** (briano138531@gmail.com), ICSF Belgium Office Secretary*

This provides a big challenge towards developing a single clear message. Rather, Slow Fish “aims to bring some clarity to the issues surrounding fish and fishing.” Though it does not claim to have all the answers, the movement is committed to finding them. In an environment where it is increasingly difficult to know what you are eating and consuming responsibly, Slow Fish asks that you think and engage with your food, and remain inspired.

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Organized along geographic lines, but with a strong communications centre based in Milan, Slow Fish members in Europe are broadly organized into ‘Northern Seas’ and ‘Mediterranean’ Groups. Supported by the Lighthouse Foundation, and with co-finance from the European Commission, the Northern Seas group has produced a 20-point ‘manifesto’. This was written by a poet who interacted with the group, creating metaphors to articulate messages constructed to communicate the essence of what Slow Fish is about.

Participating in the Slow Fish event in Genoa was a strong contingent of European fishermen from the Mediterranean coasts of France and Spain, while from the Northern seas were delegates from the United Kingdom (UK), Netherlands, Ireland and Denmark. There was also a group from the Maghreb region of North Africa—from Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia—who, with the help of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), have recently established a platform to represent the common regional interests of small-scale fishermen and their communities.

A parallel initiative is under way in Europe, launched by a group of fishermen under the banner of Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE),

which took shape in Santiago in 2012, initiated by around 100 fishermen and fisherwomen from eight countries. Participating in Slow Fish was the Executive Director of LIFE, Jeremy Percy from the UK, who is optimistic that with a voice in Europe, small-scale fishermen will have a good chance to have a say in the decisions that affect them. In Percy’s view, “the policy door is ajar, although a little more co-ordination is needed for it to be fully opened.”

One of the positive threads to emerge from the Slow Fish event was a commitment amongst the European fishers to establish more formal ties between the Northern Seas and the Mediterranean groups. There were also stronger solidarity links forged between the fishermen from North Africa and Europe, and a commitment to develop a Web-based tool to share information and co-ordinate campaigns through the creation of an interactive map. A small group of European and African fishermen also drafted a ‘statement of intent’, which they asked the Slow Fish event to endorse, “if not with their heads, at least with their hearts”.

However, various caveats were raised, including the observation that the sum of the Slow Fish parts was much greater than the cause of small-scale fishermen, and that it was not appropriate for Slow Fish to endorse such a declaration based on the interests of one small group within the network. It was also observed that there are already several declarations and manifestos which have been issued recently, including by LIFE and by the Maghreb platform, which could be used instead.

Round table

Small-scale fishermen also had the chance to interact with European Commission and European Parliament representatives at a round table on how the European Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) impacts on small-scale fisheries. Participating were Franco Biagi, Special Adviser on the Mediterranean; Sra Renata Briano, Vice Chair of the Fisheries Committee



Jeremy Percy, Executive Director (LIFE), Franco Biagii, European Commission Fisheries Service (DG Mare), Brian O'Riordan (ICSF), Renata Briano, Member of the European Parliament and Christian Decugis, representing the French Prud'hommie platform at the Slow Fish event

of the European Parliament and rapporteur on drift-nets; Christian Decugis, representing the platform of French fishing Prud'hommies, traditional fishing guilds that are highly relevant today; and Jeremy Percy, the Executive Director of LIFE.

After a round of introductions and opening statements, the discussion ranged over various issues, namely, whether or not all small-scale fishing is good; the impact of European policies and fishery activities in North Africa; how fishermen in the Mediterranean are being criminalised for catching tuna; and the need to stop all forms of illegal fishery and fish-marketing activities, including by some recreational fishers. Renata Briano said that she was against a total ban on drift-nets.

Enda Conneely from Ireland made an impassioned plea for small-scale fishermen not to become divided over the issue of recreational fishing, which he felt, under the right conditions, did no harm and was compatible with small-scale interests. Jack Clarke from the Catch Box

community-supported fishery in the UK slated the Producer Organizations established under the CFP for having “done nothing but consolidate quota in the hands of a few trawler barons, marginalizing small-scale producers”. A fisherman from France compared small-scale fishermen to small-scale farmers of the sea, highlighting the dangers of quota, and how the rising price of real estate along the coast means that young fishing families will not be able to afford to live on the coast. He advocated subsidies on land purchase for fishers, in the way that there had been subsidies for land purchase for farming.

Jeremy Percy of LIFE summed up by stating that small-scale fisheries should be seen not as a problem, but as a solution, “offering, as they do, more jobs, and more fish”.

For more



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