

Socio-Economic Protocol for NSRAC

Prepared by the Socio-Economic Focus Group

This Socio-Economic Protocol establishes a process by which NSRAC can give sufficient consideration to the socio-economic implications of its policy advice on communities, offshore and coastal fisheries and fisheries-related sectors.

This will be achieved by NSRAC members and invited experts sharing their considerable knowledge about the likely positive and negative impacts of NSRAC policy proposals or advice, on the socio-economic climate of North Sea fisheries.

The Protocol will increase the confidence of NSRAC, its members, and those they represent, in the policy proposals and advice advanced to the European Commission.

Rationale:

The North Sea's commercial and recreational fisheries and associated onshore sectors including auctions, processors, transport companies, equipment manufacturers and retailers, are vital to the economy of the North Sea nations. The concentration of these activities in often remote geographical areas means that fisheries policies also have a social dimension, impacting on specific communities as well as on specific economic sectors.

As a result, it is inevitable that all fisheries management policies – whether quotas, effort restrictions, spatial measures or technical regulations – have both social and economic implications at both sectoral and community levels. NSRAC members, with their diverse and rich experience, are well placed to share and discuss their knowledge of such implications, and to employ it to produce advice that is well informed in a socio-economic context for the Commission.

Objective:

The objective of the NSRAC Socio-Economic Protocol is to provide a framework through which NSRAC and its working groups can take social and economic considerations into account when discussing and preparing advice on fisheries policy.

The purpose of this protocol is not to conduct any form of socio-economic impact assessment (SIA) of European Commission policy proposals. The European Union, in its reform of the CFP, has made clear its commitment to:

...provide for sustainable exploitation of living aquatic resources and of aquaculture in the context of sustainable development, taking account of the environmental, economic and social aspects in a balanced manner. (Council Regulation 2371/2002)

As such, responsibility for conducting any such impact assessments lies with the European Commission and with Member States. The RAC is not in a position, either practically in terms of time, or financially, to conduct any such impact assessments and should continue to put pressure on the Commission to ensure that they fulfil – perhaps

through the DG Fisheries and Maritime Affairs Economic Analysis Unit – this commitment to the consideration of economic and social aspects of fisheries policy.

Instead, the role of NSRAC is to provide advice to the Commission and it is vital that all advice produced by NSRAC is informed by an awareness of the likely socio-economic implications of that advice being adopted. The consideration of such implications will both strengthen the advice of NSRAC, as advice will be more comprehensive and considered, and strengthen the confidence of its members, who have both social and economic interests at stake.

Definitions:

‘Socio-Economic Impacts’ include any potential social (for example, educational, cultural, recreational, demographic) and economic (for example, financial, employment) impacts of NSRAC’s fisheries policy advice.

Many of the social and cultural structures around the coast of the North Sea have developed around economic fishing activities over hundreds of years. The modernisation of these fishing activities has created a gap in some areas between the economic and social aspects of fishing. However, this does not alter the fact that fishing activities have an intrinsic economic and social value at both community and sectoral levels.

The economic situation of fishing and fishing-related industries and the wider social context in which they operate should be considered within the deliberations of NSRAC.

More specifically, this definition of ‘socio-economic impacts’ means that the probable impacts of NSRAC’s policy recommendations to the European Commission on North Sea fishing vessels, fleets, onshore sectors and the recreational fishing industry, as well as associated fisheries-dependent communities, should be taken into account by NSRAC and its working groups with regard to both short and longer term policy scenarios.

The Protocol

The NSRAC Socio-Economic Protocol entails working groups and the Executive Committee taking a short time to consider **four key issues** as part of the process of deliberation over policy proposals and advice, before making recommendations to the European Commission. These four issues are:

1. What positive socio-economic implications does NSRAC’s policy proposal/advice have for any sector of the fisheries industry or for associated fishing communities?
2. What negative socio-economic implications does NSRAC’s policy proposal/advice have for any sector of the fisheries industry or for associated fishing communities?
3. Are these positive and negative implications acceptable and how can they best be managed? For example, by the introduction of social or economic fisheries management instruments, such as short-term compensatory schemes, infrastructural subsidies and incentive schemes relating to sustainable fisheries practices.

4. Where appropriate, how do the likely socio-economic impacts of NSRAC's recommendation differ from those of the Commission's proposal?

A necessary part of this Protocol is that NSRAC commits to communicating to the Commission, the resultant discussions about the socio-economic implications of policy proposals/advice and any agreed recommendations.

NB: The picture we currently have of economic and social aspects of North Sea fisheries is incomplete. Studies have tended to be piecemeal and are difficult to compare. The Socio-Economic Protocol represents a starting point from which NSRAC can work towards a more comprehensive and long-term socio-economic agenda by immediately mobilising the knowledge held within NSRAC. This Socio-Economic Protocol should be revised once the proposed Study of Social and Economic Aspects of North Sea fisheries has been completed and the knowledge base updated.