



Future governance within a reformed Common Fisheries Policy

- 1 All participants within the North Sea RAC agree that there is a compelling case for reform of the Common Fisheries Policy. A key feature of that reform must be the devolution of fisheries management to a regional seas level. Management of the fisheries must be tailored to local conditions in the regional seas and in the specific fisheries.
- 2 The NSRAC is also seeking changes which allow stakeholders to play a more active role in managing the North Sea fisheries through the RACs. Greater participation by the fishing industry and other wider interests will bring benefits.
- 3 The NSRAC accepts that the Commission, Council and Parliament wish to continue to take responsibility for overarching policy, setting the overall framework and defining the wider objectives of the CFP. However, responsibility for the burden of detailed management should not be undertaken centrally. Responsibility for the development and implementation of fisheries management measures is better undertaken through the RACs and Member States working together.
- 4 The NSRAC has no preconceptions about the precise legal arrangements which should accompany reform of the CFP. The key features which the NSRAC would like to see in a system of regional governance include:
 - Full delegated powers to take management initiatives and decisions at a regional level, through agreement between participating Member States.
 - A more comprehensive role for the RACs in decision-taking, ensuring that management decisions are sound, tailored to local circumstances and able to be implemented.
 - Direct and immediate access to advice from experts from various backgrounds including, natural scientists, social scientists and economists.
 - An ability to react quickly, in an adaptive way, to changing circumstances.
 - Efficiency in the use of scarce financial and human resources.
- 5 Member States, working with the RACs, should be able to:
 - Develop and recommend regional technical conservation measures.

- Contribute to the setting of TACs, quotas and other limits to inputs or outputs.
 - Prepare long term management plans for the fisheries.
 - Participate in negotiations by the Commission with third countries, including Norway, on joint stock issues.
- 6 The NSRAC believes strongly that future management should be based on the development and implementation of long term management plans for fisheries. Conformity with those plans should free participants from prescriptive regulations and from the annual setting of TACs and other management measures. The plans should be broad in scope, based on ecologically, economically and socially meaningful fishery management units (the ‘fisheries’). They should take full account of multi-species interactions, adopt an ecosystem-based approach to management and reflect social requirements. The plans would require a change from the current management approach, based on single stocks, towards a multi-species approach, with full use of ecosystem modelling. The plans might include new options for fisheries management where circumstances allow; for example the setting of multi-species TACs.
- 7 A particular feature which the NSRAC would like to see as part of a move to regional management is the full development of the NSRAC as a forum for bringing fishers, scientists, fishery managers and other interests together to discuss North Sea issues. The development of broadly based fisheries management plans is a complex task which will benefit from dialogue and consensus between participating parties. The RAC is the right place for achieving that consensus. The RACs have already demonstrated their effectiveness in this role. RACs must, however, have increased access to scientific, economic and social expertise to facilitate their activities. The NSRAC needs to be able to task scientific experts (biological, economic or social) with carrying out pilot studies that are of specific value for the management of North Sea fisheries. Special expertise is also required to translate advice into the format required by the Commission. The RACs have a unique contribution to make in validating and supplementing advice with the knowledge of fishers and other stakeholders.
- 8 The NSRAC is functioning effectively within its present organisational set-up. Its constitution allows all interested EU stakeholders to become members and to play an active role in RAC discussions. The major stakeholder groups are represented on the Executive Committee and the various Working Groups allow participation by wider constituents. There are, however, a number of challenges which the RACs currently face and which must now be addressed:
- Enhancement of the quality of the advice and its presentation
 - Direct access to expert advice for discussion of policy options
 - More direct relationships with Member States in setting out the work programme
 - Improvement in funding and finance to provide greater flexibility

- Review of stakeholder balance to include more representatives of small-scale coastal fisheries
- 9 The RACs have a key role to play in delivery of the Integrated Maritime Policy and ensuring that regional delivery of the Common Fisheries Policy is compliant with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. The NSRAC is already acting as a focal point for discussions on maritime spatial planning. It is already integrating stakeholders engaged in reconciling fishing activity with, respectively, the Natura 2000 network and wind farm developments in the North Sea, and it is already providing an efficient platform for the development of long term management plans for the fisheries. The NSRAC has been a pioneer in proactively incorporating an ecosystem-based approach into the fisheries plans currently under development, e.g. the plan for North Sea *Nephrops*.
- 10 The establishment of the RACs represented a major step forward. Not all the RACs have been equally effective in their early years but they have been able to learn from one another's experience and have huge potential for further development. They offer the opportunity for introducing new, more participatory and much more effective forms of fisheries management and, as such, merit a pivotal role in the framework being considered in the ongoing reform of the CFP .This is not to say that all the RACs should develop along the same lines. There must be a willingness to allow the CFP to evolve at different rates in the different regional seas; bound by common principles and standards but with the common objective of making fisheries sustainable.



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