REPORT

Meeting: **Rethinking the allocation of fisheries catches for fairer and more sustainable decisions**
Parties: **MEPs, stakeholders**
Date: **11 October 2023**
Location: **Brüssels and online**
Chair: **MEP Niclas Herbst and MEP Ska Keller**
Rapporteur: **Kateryna Urbanovych**

1. Welcome and introduction

MEP Niclas Herbst, Chair of the Forum on Recreational Fisheries and Aquatic Environment, extended a warm welcome to both in-person and online attendees, emphasizing the event's central theme: **exploring more economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable approaches to managing angling species**. The event's primary goal was to initiate a constructive dialogue among EU decision-makers, scientific experts, and representatives of the angling community regarding innovative fisheries management strategies for angling species.

MEP Ska Keller, Member of the PECH Committee, delivered her opening remark, emphasizing the ongoing importance of discussing quota allocations to promote the sustainable utilization of marine resources. She underlined that both recreational and commercial fishers share responsibility for resource conservation. Keller noted the recent positive shift in the Commission's recognition of recreational fishers in the Marine Action Plan and the revision of the control regulation. This recognition reflects the growing need for improved data collection related to recreational fishing.

Keller stressed the necessity of reevaluating allocation methods due to existing challenges. On one hand, the lack of transparency in decision-making within the European Council has led to decisions that may not always align with the best available scientific advice. On the other hand, once quotas are established, Member States often favour historical distribution patterns, which tend to benefit larger fishing industries over small-scale, low-impact fishing operations.

This issue must be addressed, given that small-scale and recreational fisheries contribute significantly to employment. She also emphasized the potential for recreational fishers to contribute valuable knowledge to inform Member States' decisions in this context.

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2 International examples of including recreational fishing in catch allocations

David Mitchell (European Anglers Alliance) took the floor presenting overseas examples of integrating recreational fishing into catch allocations.

In the **European Union** (EU), recreational fishing is currently addressed within the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) only through the control regulation. If recreational fishing is deemed to have a negative impact on the CFP's objectives, a Member State is required to implement control measures for it.

Under these circumstances, in 2015, specific regulations were introduced for **Seabass** and **Baltic cod** due to dangerously low stock biomass levels. Notably, in both cases, the EU Council assessed the biomass mainly by considering the fishing mortality resulting from recreational fishing. However, the data on recreational fishing mortality was inconsistent, and there were no standardized metrics for determining catch locations. At that time, the CFP did not provide the EU with the means to fully consider the existing benefits of recreational fishing and leverage this knowledge to enhance the understanding of EU fisheries.

Mitchell provided detailed examples of how recreational fishing is incorporated into catch allocation systems in four countries: the **United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia**, all of which are illustrated in detail below.

In the **United States**, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has implemented a Marine Catch Share policy. Eight regional councils are tasked with the management of fisheries and providing expert insights to NOAA fisheries. NOAA has actively sought input from these councils in the development of the Marine Catch Share policy. These councils comprise representatives from commercial, charter, and recreational fisheries, as well as scientists and academics. NOAA Fisheries has established several guiding principles concerning the allocation of resources between commercial and recreational sectors. For instance, these principles call for periodic reassessment of the total allocation, the consideration of a wide range of participation criteria to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of catch shares in each context, and the endorsement of mandatory data submission, including social and economic data, in exchange for the use of public fishery resources.

In **Canada**, the implementation of recreational fisheries policies, programs, and initiatives is guided by five fundamental principles. These principles underscore the social and economic significance of recreational fisheries, as well as the role of Fisheries and Oceans Canada in providing sustainable harvesting opportunities for recreational fishers. They also emphasize the importance of fostering collaboration among various stakeholders and providing effective leadership in the management and development of recreational fishing. Furthermore, the principles highlight the shared responsibility within the recreational fisheries sector, with managing agencies actively involved in the stewardship and conservation of recreational fishery resources. Allocations have been established for species such as Pacific herring, salmon, and halibut in Canadian waters. These allocations were determined on a case-by-case basis, with the approaches employed for each species varying in complexity. Some

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allocations were based on historical catches, while others utilized more sophisticated methods, including market-based mechanisms and other applications.

In **New Zealand**, fisheries are regulated under the New Zealand Fisheries Act of 1996, which stipulates that when establishing or modifying the total allowable commercial catch or any quota management stock, the Ministry is required to consider the total allowable catch for that stock and accommodate customary non-commercial fishing and recreational interests. The Ministry of Primary Industries in New Zealand possesses significant discretion when it comes to making allocation decisions between recreational and commercial fishing interests. These decisions are made on an individual fishery level and are influenced by a variety of factors with the primary goal of maximizing the benefits of the fishery. The central challenge lies in determining how to assess and compare the benefits of recreational fishing in relation to commercial fishing. The Ministry of Fisheries establishes a TAC for each fishery based on scientific advice and allocates shares to the recreational, customary, and commercial sectors in a manner deemed reasonable. Throughout this process, the Ministry conducts consultations and public sessions to ensure a well-informed and inclusive approach to allocation decisions.

In 2019, the **Australian government** embarked on the development of a framework for sharing Commonwealth fisheries resources, recognizing them as a shared asset with diverse benefits for the Australian community. Fair resource sharing has long been a top priority for the Australian government. The fisheries resource sharing framework delineates the government's strategy for distributing fisheries resources among commercial, recreational, and indigenous fishing sectors. Its primary objectives are to provide greater predictability to fishers regarding their access to shared resources and to establish a transparent method for the allocation of Commonwealth resources across various fishing sectors. When negotiating resource sharing arrangements with international sectors, as well as with state and territory governments within Australia, the following key principles will guide decision-making:

- Sustainable management of fisheries
- Consideration of benefits derived from all fishing sectors within the Australian community
- Transparent, participatory, and evidence-based decision-making
- Acknowledgment of the existing rights of fishing sectors
- Enhanced certainty for users
- Efficient and cost-effective arrangements
- Equitable sharing of management costs
- Acknowledgment and protection of fishing rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

To apply these principles effectively, specific criteria are required. These criteria encompass factors such as the contribution to the gross state product, employment opportunities, support for regional communities, sport and recreational opportunities, the unique needs and aspirations of each sector, cultural significance, costs related to structural adjustment assistance, and a comprehensive assessment of benefits and drawbacks, including ecological, social, and cultural aspects. Similar principles and criteria are considered in the

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United States, Canada, and New Zealand to ensure that resource allocations yield the greatest overall benefit for the country.

The key takeaways from these examples can be summarized as follows:

- To achieve efficient resource allocation among different user sectors, it is essential to assess the net benefits associated with each sector's access. Ideally, **allocation decisions should be guided by the changes in net economic value** experienced by each sector **as allocation shares are adjusted**.
- For a reallocation of resources to be justified, there must be a demonstrable increase in the overall net economic benefit generated across all sectors. The primary objective in these instances is to **identify allocations that yield the maximum overall benefit for the country**.
- In all these examples, recreational fishing is **formally recognized in policy** and plays a significant role in delivering these collective benefits.

3 Alternative management measures in recreational fishing

Kevin Haase (Thünen Institute) discussed examples of alternative management measures in recreational fishing.

When it comes to managing recreational fisheries, there are two primary types of regulations in place: input and output regulations. **Input regulations**, such as seasonal closures or restrictions on the number of licenses, boats, rods, or hooks, aim to reduce fishing efforts. **Output regulations**, on the other hand, are designed to limit the fishing harvest and include measures like minimum landing sizes (MLS), slot limits, bag limits, and harvest tags.

It's crucial to note that the effectiveness of each regulation can vary depending on the country, specific fish species, and fishing methods. For instance, the success of MLS depends on post-release mortality, which can differ significantly based on the fish species and the methods used for fishing. As for bag limits, the outcomes can also vary: in Denmark, reaching the bag limit results in a catch-and-release fishery, while in Germany, fishing must cease due to animal welfare concerns.

During his presentation, Haase used the example of **Western Baltic cod** (WBC) to underscore the unforeseen outcomes of new regulations. Western Baltic cod, once a primary target for both commercial and recreational fishing, experienced a significant stock collapse in recent years. In response to this crisis, a bag limit was introduced in 2017. The bag limit was initially anticipated to reduce German catches by 900 tonnes, however, in practice, it resulted in a substantial reduction of 1910 tonnes. The bag limit determined both expected and unexpected changes in the German WBC recreational fishery. The expected changes included a decrease in harvest rates and an increase in the release rate for sea-based fishing. Unexpected changes in the fishery involved an increase in zero-catch days (linked to the stock's status) and shifts in angler behaviour. Overall, participation in the fishery declined, particularly in the charter boat sector, where both the number of charter boats and travel

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distances decreased. Non-resident and tourist anglers no longer frequented the coast for cod fishing, which had evident economic consequences.

The explanation for these behavioural changes lay in the perception of the bag limit as a less favourable regulation within the angler community, in comparison to other regulations like spawning closure and MLS. From a management perspective, it's crucial to balance the regulation's role in stock protection with its impact on key social and economic values. Based on the precise values obtained from angler choice experiments conducted in 2020/21, it appeared that anglers indeed desire stricter regulations to safeguard fish stocks but are currently accepting of the bag limit.

To achieve a balance between protecting the fish stock and preserving the social and economic values of fishers, an analysis was conducted to assess the potential reduction achieved by various regulations. Among these regulations, the bag limit emerged as having the highest reduction potential, yet it also had the most pronounced impact on fishing opportunities and garnered less acceptance within the angler community. On the contrary, regulations such as MLS, slot limits, and spawning closures showed a lower reduction potential. However, they brought about positive side effects on the stock, like strengthening stock recruitment, and were generally well-accepted by anglers.

The deduction drawn from this analysis was that a combination of measures would be the most suitable approach for this fishery. This multifaceted strategy would encompass a 10-cod-per-day bag limit for all fishing methods to prevent overly high catch rates. Additionally, it would entail different regulations contingent on the fishing method employed. For sea fishing, it was deemed ideal to implement a spawning closure and higher MLS, as per the angler's preferences. In contrast, land-based bass fishing, which generally determines lower catch rates and doesn't reach spawning sites, would not necessitate a spawning closure or an increased MLS.

Collectively, this combined approach would result in a 900-tonne reduction in removals, aligning with the goal of safeguarding the cod stock. This highlights the notion that a **blend of regulations can often yield more favourable results than a single regulation in complex fisheries management scenarios**.

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