

Focus Group Workshop and World Café event on: Competitiveness and Sustainable Sourcing in Europe for Fish and Seafood

SUCCESS Co-Creation platform, May 18-19th, FAO, Rome.

Session 4: Ensuring the sustainable dimensions of European seafood products: Myths, realities and opportunities. Panel chair: Sigurdur G. Bogason

Barrie Deas, NFFO, National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations <http://nffo.org.uk/>

Reflected on the story of the catching sector, different types of vessels and gears and the place for small/medium, and large fisheries. The context of quota holding issues being discussed must reflect differentiation between demersal and pelagic fisheries. If these are mixed together while comparing quotas of small and large scale fisheries the discussions aren't reflecting the real issue any more. The following points were highlighted:

- In the 1980s booming fisheries, and tremendous expansion of capacity
- In the 1990s issue of "busts" caused by fleet overcapacity and failed remedial measures
- The 2000's proved a turning point with capacity reduction and consequent decrease in fishing pressure and stock recovery. ICES science shows that a marked reduction in fishing mortality for all of the main species groups in the NE Atlantic – pelagic, demersal and benthic N-Sea plaice is an example of meteoric increase in biomass and the spawning stock biomass of NS cod is rebuilding recovering. However, the media is still stuck in a catastrophe narrative despite all the evidence to the contrary.
 - What does work or what not? Reaching a balance between fishing capacity and available resources is central. If that balance isn't there other measures like quota management and technical measures won't work. This is the single most important feature of effective fisheries management.
 - Western hake another striking example of a rapidly rebuilding biomass
 - In the EU, 80% of stocks are at MSY 80% if measured in tonnage, rather than individual stocks
- Whilst it is possible to understand retailers' interest in certification scheme from a reputational defence perspective, it is much less clear whether certification schemes have brought about any significant change at the fisheries level, except perhaps at the margins.
 - Certification schemes have only reached for the "low hanging fruits" e.g. those fisheries that are rather simple and data on stock assessment is available.
 - Consumer interest in sustainability is not main driver, when selecting food basket – rather price / quality ratio
- Good fisheries management is linked to stock assessment and fleet capacity.
 - Fishing capacity and availability of natural resources are the prerequisites to ensure profitability.
- The question was whether certification did help the recovery of the cod stock?
 - Multiple intermeshed measures have been applied
 - Capacity reduction has been central. Denmark, the UK, France, Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland have all applied major publically-funded decommissioning schemes.

- Or was it because of the recovery plan? Lots of mistakes were made resulting in one cod being discarded for every one landed at one point
 - Certification (or lack of certification) played no role because every tonne of cod landed was bought at some price.
 - NS cod has never contributed a fraction of the cod consumed in the UK – most is imported from Barents Sea and Iceland (and this has always been the case)

The core message from the experience of stock depletion and stock recovery over the last 30 years is that effective fisheries management is the route to reaching and maintain high yield fisheries. Managing fleet capacity is the single most important component within the array of management tools in the toolbox. It is difficult to see much relevance for certification as an agent of change. They are however likely to continue for reputational and market access reasons.