



European anglers to decision-makers: “Environmental law must be implemented when managing commercial fisheries too”

MEP Caroline Roose and **MEP Isabel Carvalhais** co-chaired a European Parliament Forum on Recreational Fisheries and Aquatic Environment event on 25 April 2023. MEP Roose, as the European Parliament’s rapporteur on “MSY: more fish in the sea” welcomed this opportunity to discuss new ways of guaranteeing the long-term sustainability of EU fish stocks.

The conference shed light on the limits of a commercial fisheries management solely based on the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) management tool. A focus on tonnage targets, without consideration for the preservation of fish stocks’ structures, has led to a progressive reduction in fish size. This in turn poses a threat to the long-term sustainability of both commercial and recreational fisheries.

“The MSY-centered management of stocks has driven to a weakening of fish species, where smaller and more juvenile fish stocks are weakened to face growing challenges: diseases, ocean warming, eutrophication and intensive fisheries” said **Markus Lundgren**, Regional manager at Sportfiskarna, a member-association of the European Anglers Alliance (EAA).

Dr. Christopher Griffiths from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences presented his work on a new age-based indicator for commercial stocks (called ABI_{MSY}). He showed that many stocks currently lack older fish, with past levels of exploitation (often above MSY) resulting in a truncation in age structure, and a loss of the most productive part of the fish population. He applied his indicator to 72 fish stocks in the Northeast Atlantic, clearly demonstrating that it represents a readymade-tool for stock assessment and advice that can complement the MSY approach. According to him, alternative management objectives could lead to more desirable outcomes in terms of spawning stock biomass (SSB) and age structure of fish populations, with little overall costs to long-term catch.

The Anglers request that these findings are taken into consideration, the solution to the problem being as simple as a proper implementation of the existing EU environmental law by the EU institutions. Indeed, the ABI_{MSY} indicator was primarily built to address the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)’s assessment of the age and size distribution of individuals in the populations of commercially-exploited species (commonly referred to as D3C3) – an indicator of a healthy fish population and of Good Environmental Status.

The European Commission, represented by officials from the Directorate-General for Fisheries (MARE) and the Directorate-General for the Environment (ENVI) welcomed these new age criteria, a timely input to their ongoing evaluation of the MSFD. They informed about their ongoing work with the ICES to look further into these additional considerations as a basis of their management decisions.

“MSY is a valuable tool for sustainable marine fisheries management, but it must be adapted to take into account the long run changing needs of our ecosystems.” said **MEP Isabel Carvalhais**.

EU politicians can count on the European anglers to support any initiatives in this sense.

The RecFishing Forum Secretariat is provided by [EAA](#) and [EFTTA](#)

Contact: Julie Aleksandrova, +32 (0) 4 90 44 18 33 – julie.aleksandrova@alienor.eu