



REPORT

Fishing for the Future! Rethinking the allocation of fisheries catches for fairer and more sustainable decisions

Co-chaired by MEP Niclas Herbst and MEP Ska Keller

11 October 2023

12:30 – 14:00

MEP Salon, European Parliament, Brussels

Introduction

MEP Niclas Herbst (Germany, EPP), Chair of the Forum on Recreational Fisheries and Aquatic Environment, opened the meeting by thanking all panelists and guests attending the conference and also those following online. MEP Herbst drew the attention of the participants that this event was the last RecFishing Forum of the 9th European Parliamentary mandate and that it was organised in the light of the annual Council of the EU's decisions on TACs & quotas. He stated that the Council of the EU needs to consider the interests of millions of EU anglers when taking those decisions. He recalled that the 2017 [PECH Research report concluded](#) that the EU recreational fisheries sector — generates 10.5 billion euros annually and more than 100.000 FTE jobs in the Union. MEP Herbst welcomed the possibility to learn more about how other countries and/or regions consider the socio-economic benefits of the recreational fisheries sector in their decision-making processes.

MEP Ska Keller (Germany, Greens/EFA) stated that the TACs and quota allocations should be managed in a more responsible way because EU marine resources are limited. She reminded that anglers care about protecting biodiversity, nature and the overall environment. She underlined that it is important that environmental protection should be considered together with fisheries, as part of the same narrative. Ms. Keller added that the European Commission is finally recognising the role of the recreational fisheries sector under the Marine Action Plan and under the earlier approved Control Regulation, which include data collection about recreational fisheries.

However, there is still a general lack of transparency in deciding on TACs & quotas. The AGRIFISH Council meets behind closed doors and bases its decisions mostly on historical decisions instead of science. In this light, she added that “historical rights” tend to benefit the bigger fishing industries and ignore the low-impact & recreational fisheries sectors’ socio-economic benefits. MEP Keller argued that Article 17¹ of Regulation No 1380/2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) should be taken more into consideration.

¹ Article 17 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 on the common fisheries policy stipulates the following: ‘When allocating the fishing opportunities available to them, as referred to in Article 16, Member States shall use transparent and objective criteria including those of an environmental, social and economic nature. The criteria to be used may include, inter alia, the impact of fishing on the environment, the history of compliance, the contribution to the local economy and historic catch levels. Within the fishing opportunities allocated to them, Member States shall endeavour to provide incentives to fishing vessels deploying selective fishing gear or using fishing techniques with reduced environmental impact, such as reduced energy consumption or habitat damage’.



Presentations

International examples of including recreational fishing in catch allocations

Presentation² by **David Mitchell**, Editor of Sea Angler magazine (independent board member of EAA).

David Mitchell provided international examples on how the recreational fisheries sector can be included in catch allocations: **United States of America (USA), Canada, New Zealand and Australia.**

David Mitchell reminded that at the EU level recreational fisheries are only tackled via fishing restrictions. He argued that there is a **structural problem with the CFP** as it does not recognise recreational fisheries as a stakeholder, on an equal footing with commercial fisheries. The EU fisheries policy should consider the interest of the millions of EU angling citizens' and thousands of businesses depending on the sustainability of their activities.

"The CFP should recognise recreational fisheries as a fisheries management stakeholder." – David Mitchell (EAA)

He gave the example of Sea Bass and the Baltic cod management measures. In both cases, only fish mortality was considered when allocating TACs & quotas opportunities. Moreover, the **data on mortality of recreational fisheries was considered inconsistent**. David Mitchell argued that the EU – without proper data on the socio-economic implications of the decisions relative to recreational fisheries - is unprepared and unable to consider restricting recreational fisheries fishing rights.



In the **USA**, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) implements a **Marine Catch Share Policy**. Eight regional councils are responsible for managing US fisheries. The members of these regional councils consist of commercial and recreational fisheries sector representatives, as well as scientists and academics who are included in the stakeholder dialogue. The national policy is driven by certain guiding principles, among which this one:

*"the country should revisit the total allocation to each sector on regular basis; consider broad range participation criteria to ensure the **most fair and equitable catch distribution**; and also, to consider and endorsing the **socio-economic data**."*

² [Link to the presentation by David Mitchell](#)



Five principles guide the **Canadian** governmental policy in the implementation of its recreational fishery policy programmes. These principles highlight the socio-economic importance of recreational fisheries and the importance of providing sustainable opportunities for anglers. **David Mitchell** explained that **salmon, herring, and halibut** TACs are decided by taking into consideration the benefits of the recreational fisheries sector. The decisions of these TACs are made on a **case-by-case basis**, with the **standard historical based approach** maintained together with a more **sophisticated approach** involving market-based mechanisms.

In **New Zealand**, fisheries are managed under the **1996 New Zealand Fisheries Act**. Based on scientific advice, the Ministry sets a TAC for each fishery and allocates the share **between the recreational and commercial fisheries sector**. This decision is based on a “*reasonable share*” principle. Decisions are made at fishery level and based on a broad range of different factors, with stakeholders being widely consulted.

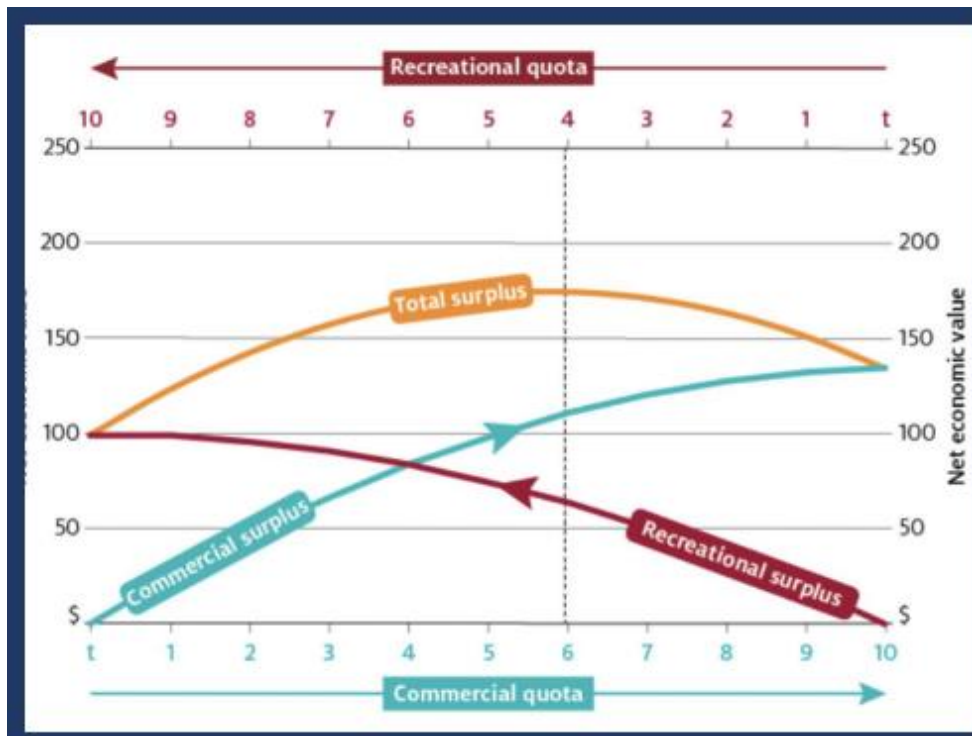
The most interesting case according to **Mitchell** is **Australia**. Here, the federal Australian government committed itself in **2019** to develop the “**Commonwealth³ fisheries resource sharing framework**”. It is an approach for the sharing of fisheries resources across commercial, recreational and the indigenous sector. Many groups – including the recreational fisheries sector – can access this framework and their interventions are taken into consideration.

The guiding principles of the Australian framework of quota management include: the sustainable management of fisheries, the consideration of benefits from all fishing sectors, transparency, participation and best available knowledge-based decision-making. It acknowledges the existing commercial fisheries sector rights, increases security for users and ensures that the decisions are efficient and cost-effective, sharing management costs and maximising social benefits. Recreational fisheries are included in the Australian quota system.

To conclude, **David Mitchell** explained that when governing by principles well-defined criteria are needed. Some of the criteria used in Australia are the contribution to gross state product and employment, maintenance and growth of regional communities, sport and recreational opportunities, socio-ecological and cultural costs and benefits, etc. Similar criteria and principles are considered in the other countries (USA, Canada, New-Zealand) to allocate fisheries catches and provide the greatest overall benefit to the country.

David Mitchell showed how a **hypothetical allocated TAC** (below) over a period of 10 years could be shared between the commercial and recreational fisheries in a way they maximize the net socio-economic benefits. In this case, a **higher overall economic outcome** (higher than the one reachable by each of the sectors separately) could be reached for the same amount of catches. Rethinking the allocation of fisheries catches by including the recreational sector can also benefit the commercial fisheries industry.

³ The term Commonwealth does not have reference to the Commonwealth of Nations which is a voluntary association of 56 independent and equal countries. Here, the term refers to the Commonwealth of Australia.



To conclude his presentation, **David Mitchell** stated that to efficiently allocate fisheries, the net benefit of the opportunities allocated to each sector should be compared. **This will require more data on socio-economics of the recreational fisheries sector and data-collection efforts.**

“When allocating fishing opportunities, the greater overall benefit to the country should be seen as a *leitmotiv*” – **David Mitchell (EAA)**

When allocating fishing opportunities, the greater overall benefit to the country should be seen as a *leitmotiv*.

Recreational fishing – alternative management measures

Presentation⁴ by **Kevin Haase**, PhD researcher at the Thünen Institute of Baltic Sea Fisheries (Germany).

Kevin Haase started his presentation with a short overview of the different regulations affecting recreational fishing. There are **two types of regulations**: the ones aiming at **reducing fisheries efforts** such as seasonal closures, number restrictions of licences, boats, rods and/or hooks (**input regulations**) and the ones set up with the ambition to **reduce fishing harvests**, which include for instance Minimum landing sizes (MLS), slot and bag limits (**output regulations**).

⁴ [Link to the presentation by Kevin Haase](#)



However, as **Kevin Haase** explained, some regulations have different implications and goals depending on **country, fish species** and **fishing methods**. He presented the case of MLS and the bag limit. MLS leads to an increase of fish releases, but its success relies on post-release mortalities which varies depending on fish species and fishing methods. Bag limits, on the other hand, lead to catch-and-release practices. For instance, in Denmark, anglers can continue fishing without further restrictions. In other countries, such as Germany, anglers need to stop fishing or switch the target species once the bag limit is reached because catch & release is forbidden due to animal welfare laws. Same regulations – even concerning the same species – can have different implications depending on the EU country in which you are fishing.

“The same EU Regulations can have different implications depending on the Member State implementing it.” – **Kevin Haase (Thünen Institute of Baltic Fisheries)**



Kevin Haase used the example of the **Western Baltic Cod** for further clarification of his point. **Cod** is a main target for commercial and recreational fisheries in the Baltic Sea. However, in recent years the stock has collapsed significantly. In response to the stock’s collapse, a new regulation – **bag limits for the recreational fisheries sector** – was introduced to split the burden of stock rebuilding between commercial and recreational sector. The first bag limit was introduced in 2017, aiming at reducing German catches by 900 tonnes. In reality, this regulation reduced the catches by 1910 tonnes, much more than expected.



WBC recreational fishing regulation

Bag limit introduction to split the burden of stock rebuilding

Year	Bag limit (cod per angler & day)	
	February & March	Remaining year
2017	3	5
2018	3	5
2019	7	7
2020	2	5
2021	2	5
2022	0	1
2023	0	1

Haase et. al 2022

- Estimated German reduction = 900 t
- Real German reduction = 1910 t

Slide 4
11.10.2023

Kevin Haase
RecFishing Forum



During his research on the consequences of the introduction of this bag limit for recreational fisheries in Germany, **Kevin Haase** and his peers found changes in the angler behaviour. The overall participation in the German recreational fisheries sector decreased, which can especially be seen in the charter boat fisheries, characterized by **high catch rates and many non-resident/tourist anglers**. Not only the number of charter boat anglers reduced but also the travel distance decreased significantly. To sum up, many non-resident/tourist anglers didn't travel anymore to the Baltic coast areas for fishing on cod – which had severe **economic consequences** for those areas.

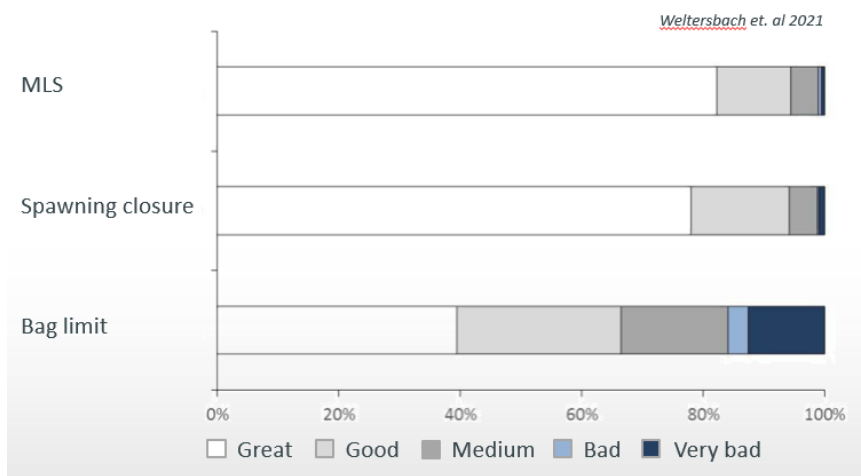
An explanation can be that **bag limits strongly disincentive anglers** due to the loss of fishing opportunities. Especially compared to Minimum landing sizes and seasonal closures, as explained in the graphic below. There is thus a loss of fishing opportunities for the angling community due to the bag limit.

Spawning closures, on the other hand, also reduce fishing opportunities in certain months when the effort is lower but can be well communicated beforehand. For cod, this reduction occurs additionally in the winter month when the fishing effort is lower anyway. **Minimum Landing Sizes** allow that anglers – who conduct a very selective fishery - can continue fishing. These fisheries management tools can pursue stock protection while ensuring the continuity of angling activities.

Kevin Haase explained that a balance need to be found between **protecting the fish stocks** and the **socio-economic benefits** from a management perspective. **Kevin Haase** added that choice experiments have shown that anglers are willing to accept regulations that make it possible to achieve both goals at the same time. Anglers want higher MLS, catch limits and longer seasonal closures. **In other words, anglers want stricter regulation than those that are currently in place, to protect fish stocks if fishing opportunities are upheld.** But do not want stricter bag limits in return, as these restrict fishing opportunities.



Fisheries management - Anglers opinion



Slide 6
11.10.2023

Kevin Haase
RecFishing Forum

THÜNEN

Kevin Haase calculated the reduction potential of different regulations when they would have been applied in 2015-16, with the assumption that the angler behaviour stayed the same (no changes in fishing effort and other).

Some key points are important to remember following this calculation. First, **bag limits** have the highest reduction potential, but affect most fishing days and the acceptance by the angler community is low. On the other hand, **MLS, slot limits and spawning closures** have lower reduction potential, but have positive effects on stock recruitment and are accepted by the angling community. Therefore, **a combination of measures would be the best fit for these fisheries**, including a 10 cod/day bag limit preventing high catch days.

For **sea-based methods**, a spawning closure would be useful, as this method can reach the spawning grounds. An increased MLS to 45 cm – wanted by the angler community – would be possible as the survival chances of released cod are high with nearly 90%.

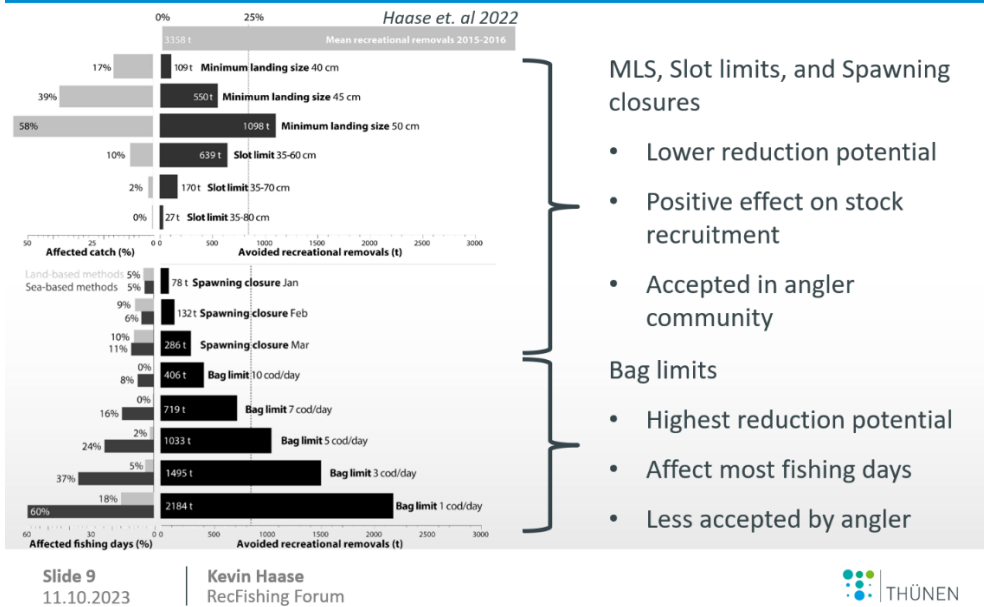
For **land-based fishing**, the catch rates are in general low. They don't reach spawning sites, therefore a spawning closure is not needed. Survival chances are probably smaller as anglers mainly use live baits.

In total, this combination of regulations has nearly the same reduction potential (906t) as the introduced bag limit in 2017 but with **positive effects on the cod stock and less negative effects on angler welfare and the wider recreational fisheries sector**.

“Reducing fish mortality is key, but it must go hand in hand with keeping fishing opportunities to sustain the socio-economic benefits of the recreational fisheries sector” – **Kevin Haase (Thünen Institute of Baltic Fisheries)**



Reduction potential of regulations



MLS, Slot limits, and Spawning closures

- Lower reduction potential
- Positive effect on stock recruitment
- Accepted in angler community

Bag limits

- Highest reduction potential
- Affect most fishing days
- Less accepted by angler

Kevin Haase concluded that different regulations have different implications, depending on the **country context, fish species and fishing methods**. Besides, fishing opportunities are important for anglers and therefore to keep the socio-economic benefits of the recreational fisheries sector. A combination of regulations can have better outcomes than one single regulation. Very similar policy results can be achieved by more recreational- friendly management measures, he added.

“Very similar policy results can be achieved by more recreational- friendly management measures.” – Kevin Haase (Thünen Institute of Baltic Fisheries)

Discussion

Discussion on the possibilities to consider alternative ways of allocating fisheries catches in a more sustainable way

Moderated by MEP Niclas Herbst (Germany, EPP)

MEP Niclas Herbst (Germany, EPP) thanked both speakers for their interesting presentations. He added that it is highly appreciated to learn that other measures, regulations and combinations of both can have positive impacts.

Brian O’Riordan (Low Impact Fishers of Europe – LIFE) thanked both speakers for mentioning the historical ‘right to fish’. He added that the **right for all citizens to hunt and/or fish** for food has been recognized historically but must be regulated. However, commercial fishing rights have always been regulated differently. The way commercial rights are regulated can have significant impacts on stocks, both positive and negative. In particular, the way regulators interpret scientific advice and manage



fishery access can be a game changer. For example, in the Baltic, in 2018 the ICES advice on the 2016 Western Cod year class was ambiguous, and over generous quotas and poor management resulted in the total disappearance of this strong year class. Today, Western Baltic Cod may only be caught as bycatch, with very high rates of bycatch in the trawl fishery, and low rates in passive gear fishery. In the plaice fishery (quota over 20.000 tonnes), Cod bycatch comprises 50% of the overall catch in the trawl fishery. If the trawl fishery was closed, and a passive gear only fishery was allowed, thousands of tonnes of Cod would not have to be discarded and destroyed, reducing the impact on Cod stocks. A differentiated approach for larger mobile gear fleets and for smaller scale passive gear fleets, as LIFE (Low Impact Fishers of Europe) has been calling for, could solve this problem.

Brian added that **Article 17 is stuck in time** due to partial implementation and is the cause of huge but unrealised expectations. Article 17 gives just as much importance **to catch** history as **socio-economic and environmental criteria** for the allocation of TACs and quotas. Invariably, Member States use catch history as the basis to allocate quota, rewarding those who fish the most, rather than those who fish the most sustainably.

“Art. 17 is stuck in time due to partial implementation”
– Brian O’Riordan (LIFE)

Another issue is that most fishing rights are allocated by Member States through Producer Organisations (POs), which are dominated by larger scale interests. We also need Pos for smaller scale fleets, which are mainly absent from POs. Thank to freedom of movement for enterprises, and an informal unregulated market for quotas, there has been a concentration of fishing rights (quotas) by a few large companies, that wield huge economic power and political influence. Along with other perverse aspects of the CFP, this has created a distorted sea that discriminates against low impact commercial and recreational fishing. How do we create a level-playing field? **Political will is needed to shift the status quo.**

David Mitchell (EAA) reacted to Brian’s intervention stating that the problems linked to the poor implementation of Article 17 need to be investigated further. The time really has come to change things, to revolutionize the CFP.

The EU recreational fisheries sector had high hopes for a (r)evolution due to article 17. However, the recreational fisheries sector is not even considered as a stakeholder in the CFP and was excluded from all the discussions with the EU institutions on this matter. In the countries that he mentioned in his presentation, recreational fisheries are not just controlled like in the CFP, but the right to fish is enshrined in their legislations. The recreational fisheries sector must be recognised on an equal footing with commercial fisheries sectors, as an important stakeholder. He added that some sub-sectors like the low impact fisheries sector isn’t recognised either.

Kevin Haase (Thünen Institute of Baltic Fisheries) added to this that scientific knowledge is key for the further development of an inclusive EU fisheries policy.

David Vertegaal (Sportvisserij Nederland - EAA) agreed with Brian O’Riordan about the fact that Article 17 is not delivering at all. **More socio-economic information is needed** for this. When analysing the conclusions on the Control Regulations, anglers were expecting new angling registration obligations and to some extent a catch registration system. However, it is dangerous to request this without any counterpart – a recognition of their value by also collecting socio-economic data. Knowing what your management measures will result in is very important. He urged for more work do be done on how to better predict the impact of taken measures (bag limits/ fisheries closures/ changes in maximum sizes / etc.) so that the decision-makers wanting to propose sustainable measures are informed about the impacts of their foreseen decisions.



Peter Lengyel (Permanent Representation of Hungary to the EU) explained that, although not a being a marine country, **Hungary has a strong recreational fisheries sector**: out of a population of 10 million the country has more than 850 000 registered anglers. In this light, Hungary has recently introduced **strict regulations on fisheries and fish protection**. He underlined that all Hungarian anglers are registered, and recreational catches go in **national databases**. He totally agreed with the conclusions of Mr. Haase’s presentation that complex measures do make a difference. The **angling community must remain an ally** and if measures need to be accepted by the angling community, their involvement is key.



Olivier Portrat (EFTA – CEO) emphasised that this discussion is crucial for the recreational fisheries tackle trade industry. Recreational fisheries must officially be recognized as an important stakeholder in the EU fisheries policies. We lack this recognition here in Europe.

Conclusion

MEP Niclas Herbst (Germany, EPP) thanked everyone for attending and taking part in the discussion, **the problem is loud & clear** he argued. The debate on the allocation of fishing opportunities must continue as the **recreational fisheries sector has important direct and indirect socio-economic impacts**⁵.

MEP Herbst reminded that some members of the PECH Committee are still working hard in the final stretch before the June 2024 elections. He expressed his hope that the scientific insights will be followed when discussing the EU’s fisheries policies and in particular for the allocation of fisheries opportunities.

“We need to keep the debate open about the allocation of fishing opportunities because the recreational fisheries sector has an important direct & indirect socio-economic impact.” – **MEP Niclas Herbst (Germany, EPP)**

⁵ [Socio-economics of Recreational Fisheries sector](#)