



BIG GAME ITALIA

Extract

Recreational fishing

Rimini, (Italy), 21 February 2011

Meeting of the Regional Advisory Council for the Mediterranean (RAC MED)

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SUBJECT OF THE CONTRIBUTION: Harmonised legislation for recreational and sport fishing.

Recreational sea fishing is a non-commercial activity practised by millions of citizens throughout the European Union. Their passion for the sport is the basis for an industry of major economic importance, fostering the employment and business of thousands of workers and companies. Following this brief introduction, let me immediately turn to the subject of my contribution. I would like to present to the RAC MED, and through it to the EC, a few lines of thought and a few suggestions to be taken into account and possibly included in the reform of the European regulations governing recreational sea fishing, especially in the Mediterranean. At the RAC MED meeting on 13 - 14 October 2009 in Brussels, our association, together with other European RAC MED delegates, presented and submitted a joint document calling for European regulation of recreational fishing, some points of which are listed below in their entirety. To allow a common regulation, if possible included in the imminent reform of the CFP, to be implemented in the short term in EU Member States, or at least the Mediterranean countries, we ask for the following considerations to be taken into account:

- **definition of recreational sea fishing:**

"non-commercial fishing activities exploiting living aquatic resources for recreation" (part of the definition found in Art. 2 (c) of EC Regulation 199/2008/EC)

- **Recreational sea fishing is divided into:**

1. **Leisure fishing** (in the sense of a pastime or pleasure);
2. **Sport fishing** (seen as a sport activity practiced in a framework of sporting events or competitions);
3. **charter fishing** - designating recreational fishing activities organised by companies (fishing charter companies), practiced aboard pleasure craft chartered with crew (at least the skipper) for one or more fishing trips (not to be confused with **fishing tourism** ("pesca-turismo") which is practiced on fishing vessels, and remains untouched by these considerations).

- **Recreational sea fishing can be practiced:**

- **aboard a pleasure craft** (referring to any vessel used for pleasure fishing).
- **from the waterside** (in the sense of beaches, rocks, reefs, harbours, canals, etc).

Issuance of a permit and/or licence to practice recreational fishing

- the **permit and/or licence** refers to the entitlement issued to an amateur fisherman or pleasure craft (in the sense of a vessel) by the Member State, authorising him or it to engage in recreational sea fishing.
- As regards recreational fishing practised from aboard a pleasure craft, we consider that a licensing and/or permit regime needs to be introduced in all EU Member States, and especially in the Mediterranean. In consideration of the fact that the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and the system of total allowable catches (TACs) are regulated at European level, we believe that the rules concerning the issuance, monitoring, sanctions and the administration of such recreational fishing permits and/or licences should be determined and governed by the EU; with the latter leaving it up to individual Member States to transpose the Community regulation, to apply it in its territory and to monitor the required controls. This will ensure the homogeneity of European regulations on recreational fishing, an activity at the root of a major European business sector in terms of GDP. The issuance of such permits and/or licences must not however be restricted to fishing *"targeting a single specific stock"*. On the contrary, it needs to apply to all recreational sea fisheries practiced on board a pleasure craft with all fishing equipment licensed and for all marine species.
- A temporary licence could be issued in cases where the sport/recreational fisherman would like to fish for a specific "stock" (for example bluefin tuna); such a temporary licence would be limited to the international regulations governing the *"stock"* in question. This solution would permit the EU and the Member States to acknowledge once and for all the true importance of recreational fishermen and their numbers. In doing so, we would finally be able to quantify the size of recreational fishing catches compared to TACs - which we believe to be minimal and of negligible proportions - and take account of the importance of the relationship between these catches and the share of GDP generated by recreational fishing and its sub-categories.
- The sale or trade of catches made in the context of recreational fishing (and its subcategories) must be prohibited, with no exemptions allowed.
- In order to prevent any illegal actions (the sale of fish by fishermen *"claiming to be recreational fishermen"*, a system will need to be introduced allowing catches to be identified, especially those species of greatest commercial value (bluefin tuna, amberjack, common dentex, grouper, etc.), for example by cutting the ventral fin or tail, or by any other suitable system.
- Fish caught during fishing events (sport fishing) and subject to a recovery plan (e.g.: bluefin tuna) must be thrown back into the sea alive. No exemption to this absolute prohibition of "killing" (*no-kill policy*) may be granted for fish subject to stock recovery plans.
- There is also a need to regulate the number of catches that any recreational sea fishermen or pleasure craft can make in any one day in the EU. Each Member State should be given the opportunity of maintaining or raising such limits pursuant to its own policies and interests, taking into account scientific studies and the state of the biomass. Such regulations must be established in an overall manner for all marine species and not just for those species subject to a stock recovery plan.
- To introduce an identical system of sanctions (minimum/maximum) for all EU citizens infringing regulations on recreational fishing. Each Member State should also have the right to complement such a system by a regime of additional sanctions, while respecting the principle of all EU citizens being equal.
- There is a need to clearly and unequivocally state which regulations and/or articles apply to recreational fishing, thereby avoiding situations where provisions applying to commercial fishing are wrongly applied by certain Member States to recreational fishing.
- To install a European system of resources and contributions to the economic and financial development of recreational fishing and its related industries, following the example of tourism or seaside resorts. A very large number of professional fishermen engaged in coastal or traditional fishing could be provided with suitable incentives to become "recreational fishing charterers" or offered other activities related to recreational fishing in the broad sense, such as "tourist fishing guides". This is a system that has already been implemented in

various regions of the world where one prefers to develop marine tourism merging the experience and traditions of local professional fisheries with recreational fishing activities.

- To install fishing zones reserved for the exclusive use of recreational fishing by installing protection barriers against coastal erosion and against illegal coastal fishing or even by partially opening certain zones reserved for stock recovery to recreational fishing by means of limits on equipment and catches. Such activities could be operated by means of concessions given to cooperatives or groups of professional coastal fishermen or to mixed groups consisting of professional fishermen and recreational fishing associations. This solution would be a cost-effective way of managing resources and creating new employment opportunities while at the same time protecting the ecosystem and habitat for the recovery of marine species.
- Another option would be to allow mussel breeders and fish farmers to use, on a temporary and/or daily basis and on payment of a concession fee, zones clearly identified and demarcated for use in recreational fishing. Such a solution, already tested for a limited period in the Adriatic, could contribute to the development of marine fish farms and would certainly offset the exploitation difficulties inherent to the system.
- The conversion of offshore platforms and gas wells in recovery areas. These could be given in concession to industry associations and could be used for sport/recreational fishing and free diving activities (*snorkelling*).

By way of conclusion, I want to say first that all the suggestions and proposals I have just outlined have no impact on fishery resources and are motivated solely by a desire to improve the management of resources. That said, I think it is appropriate and desirable for the RAC MED, or the EC itself, to set up as soon as possible a working group composed of recreational fishing experts in the Mediterranean to study and prepare a new regulation. This would also be an opportunity to assess the socio-economic impact of recreational fishing on EU GDP, along with its impact on fishery resources, bearing in mind all the benefits and opportunities for generating jobs the "world" of recreational fishing can bring to professional fishing and tourism.

I would like to thank the Commission and all of you, my dear colleagues, for being here and listening.

Yours sincerely

Rimini,(Italy), 21 February 2011

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P.S: In support of this contribution, we attach a copy of the recommendations and actions decided during the workshop on monitoring recreational fishing held by the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean in Palma da Majorca on 20 - 22 October 2010

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