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Wanted from the EU: More and better data on recreational fisheries for a sustainable and prosper recreational fisheries sector

Some recent EU fisheries management decisions stressed the need for more and better data on the impact and value of recreational fisheries in Europe. A seminar organised in the European Parliament by the Recreational Fisheries Forum brought examples and solutions to fill this gap.

The focus at this seminar called “**Sustainable fisheries management and recreational sea fisheries: socio-economic value, data collection and data use in EU and US management**” and chaired by **MEPs Werner Kuhn and Marco Affronte** in the European Parliament on the 8th of March focussed mainly on recreational sea angling - the biggest of the recreational segments measured in number of participants and economic impact. Europe’s eight to ten million recreational sea anglers spend on average about 1,000 EUR annually per person on their activity, an estimated total of 8-10 billion EUR.

For years, the EU institutions have only considered recreational angling, and the other recreational fisheries, of interest if they were affecting a ‘shared stock’ (fished by both commercial and recreational fishers). Only recently the EU legislators have shown more interest in the recreational fisheries sector’s needs, its huge value, the tens of thousands of jobs it supports and its development potential.

In the current Common Fisheries Policy, the recreational sector is not recognised or managed in its own right or on an equal footing with commercial fisheries and aquaculture. This is to the detriment of recreational angling and the multi-billion EUR businesses and livelihoods, which depend fully or partly on the anglers’ spending such as the tackle trade sector whose concerns have been voiced by the **European Fishing Tackle Trade Association’s CEO Jean-Claude Bel**.

“This has to change”, Mr. Bel said. “Recreational angling is a sustainable activity of immense importance to European citizens and businesses. The recreational fisheries sector wants, and deserves, full recognition in the Common Fisheries Policy when it is up for revision, if not before”.

The co-chairs of the event, **MEP Werner Kuhn** and **MEP Marco Affronte**, were in charge of the revision of the EU’s Fisheries ‘Data Collection Framework’ (DCF) on behalf of the European Parliament. The DCF obliges the Member States to collect catch data for certain fish species exploited by commercial and recreational fishermen. However, socio-economic data collection is only required for commercial fisheries, which puts the recreational sector at a disadvantage in EU’s fisheries management and policy making. Without socio-economic knowledge about the recreational sector, EU’s fisheries management will not be treating all fisheries sectors in a fair and equitable way or make sound decisions about the ‘best use’ of the fish stocks. **MEP Affronte** advocated that the socio-economic side of recreational fishing should be measured and taken into account in fisheries management. Unfortunately, the Council of Ministers opposed the proposal as they found it would create an unnecessary additional burden for the Member State administrations.

The RecFishing Forum Secretariat is provided by [EAA](#) and [EFTTA](#)
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In her presentation **Mrs. Sandrine Devos**, Secretary General of the **European Boating Industry** emphasised the lack of data also is a problem for the recreational boating industry. In the US, it is estimated that over 50% of all boat outings involve some type of recreational fishing but such figures are unknown for Europe. They would be very welcome for investment decisions.

Mrs. Sabrina Lovell, recreational economist from NOAA (US National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration), gave an eye-opening and inspirational presentation about how seriously and carefully recreational sea fisheries are dealt with in the U.S. This country has managed recreational fisheries on an equal footing with commercial fisheries for decades, supported by solid catch- and economic data.

In 2014, approximately 11 million recreational sea anglers across the U.S. spent \$4.9 billion on fishing trips and \$28 billion on durable fishing-related equipment. These expenditures contributed \$60.6 billion in sales impacts to the U.S. economy and supported approximately 439,000 jobs.

No such detailed study has ever been produced at an EU scale. However, the European Parliament has recently requested a study on “Recreational and semi-subsistence fishing - its value and its impact on fish stocks and the environment”, The study will be conducted by a team headed by **Mr. Kieran Hyder** of **CEFAS** (Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science) who was one of the panel speakers at the event. The budget allocated to this study is limited and its final outcome will be less than what is needed in future. But it is an important pioneer study, which expectedly will set the direction for future studies and the terms and methodology of which to make use.

To illustrate how easily and cost-efficiently catch and socio-economic data can be collected, **Mr. Christian Skov** from **DTU Aqua** (National Institute of Aquatic Resources) gave a presentation on a Danish user-friendly log book scheme with an app for cell phones, which he is in charge of. Nowadays, a number of similar schemes have been developed and put in place in various countries, which all can be modified to serve a single species scheme which could be recreational bass fisheries.

The EU can benefit much more from recreational fisheries than it does today but to do so a change in our Ministers’ perception about recreational fisheries is needed. Recreational fishing is much more than ‘for fun fishing’: it is also big money and jobs through a sustainable use of fish stocks with little to no harm on the environment.

“We need political will, economic means and an instrument to collect such data”, said MEP Affronte. “The DCF was a missed opportunity but recreational fishing associations are getting themselves heard and the European Parliament is backing them”, he concluded.

Pictures:



The meeting room in the European Parliament was fully packed.



The EU Commission has the floor, represented by Mr. Alexander Stein, DG MARE. On his right, Mrs. Sabrina Lovell, Recreational Economist, US, NOAA and Mr. Kieran Hyder, UK, CEFAS.



From left to right: Fred Bloot, President of the EAA, Werner Kuhn, MEP, Jean Claude Bel, CEO of EFTTA, Marco Affronte, MEP

The presentations made during the event are available online here:

<http://www.eaa-europe.org/european-parliament-forum/ep-recfishing-forum-events/>

About EAA and EFTTA:

- **EAA, the European Anglers Alliance** comprises angling organisations from 16 European countries with about 3 million members.

<http://www.eaa-europe.org/>

- **EFTTA, the European Fishing Tackle Trade Association** is the leading European trade association for manufacturers and wholesalers of sportfishing equipment. Membership is open to manufacturers, wholesalers, agents and press in the tackle industry.

<http://www.eftta.co.uk/>