

DINNER/DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Scotland and the Common Fisheries Policy

Held at The Royal Society of Edinburgh on Thursday 23rd October 2003

Sponsored by
Fishmongers' Company
The Royal Society of Edinburgh

In the Chair: **The Rt Hon the Lord Jenkin of Roding**
Chairman, The Foundation for Science and Technology

Speakers: **The Earl of Selborne KBE DL FRS**
House of Lords
Sir David Smith FRS FRSE
Chair, RSE Inquiry into the crisis in the Scottish fishing Industry
Ms Maja Kirchner
Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Fischler, European Commission, Brussels

Workshop

The Foundation held an afternoon workshop on the same theme as the dinner/discussion, 25 representatives from the fishing industry, government officials and scientists attended. The main points arising from the workshop were:

- A successful Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) requires a long-term strategy to align catching capacity with fisheries resources. The present centralised management arrangements have failed, partly because of lack of trust among politicians, managers, scientists and fishermen.
- The present control mechanism of Total Allowable Catches (TACs) and Quotas imposes unsustainable requirements on scientists. Systems of effort management control are worth considering further as an alternative, though it is recognised that there are operational and transitional problems which would need to be resolved.
- A decentralised management system is needed and the EU's proposals for Regional Advisory Councils are a start. Their success depends on the extent to which they can promote consensus among the various stakeholders and on the extent to which the Council of Ministers is prepared to act on their advice.

Dinner/Discussion

In the opening presentations it was argued that, despite some successes, overall the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) was failing to achieve a stable balance between the capacity of the fishing fleet of Members of the European Union (EU) and the

available fish resources. The need to reduce harvesting activities in relation to some species was widely accepted but the instruments of control in use, notably the total allowable catch (TAC) and quota arrangements, were bureaucratic and ineffective. Any remedial action which was necessary to deal with emerging situations was too slow and the perceived unreasonableness of some measures from the point of view of the commercial interests of the fishermen led to illegal fishing activities.

A number of other factors were also relevant: a lack of willingness on the part of some members of the EU Council of Ministers to embrace more radical long-term approaches; a lack of any sense of ownership of the situation on the part of the fishing industry; and patchy enforcement of the rules by Member States. More devolved management of the CFP was required involving the fishermen and other stakeholders. Proposals by the European Commission for the establishment of Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) were a step in the right direction but the detail surrounding the proposals needed to be clarified. The aim should be to establish long-term management and recovery programmes.

It was also argued that the science relevant to assessment of fish resources was arcane, the catch and landing data unreliable and the dynamics of marine eco-systems poorly understood. Research did not attract the necessary funding. More generally, the scientific resources available to those managing the CFP were inadequate. Moreover, scientists were seen to be too close to governments and were distrusted by the industry.

The socio-economic implications of the CFP were insufficiently studied and their importance was not recognised. For some communities the fishing industry provided a very significant percentage of local employment. In Scotland it was estimated that 48,000 jobs depended on the fishing industry.

As regards RACs, a main objective must be to involve fishermen in decisions. The initiative for establishing the RAC lay with the industry and relevant Member States. The RAC would be invited to provide advice to the Commission but would also be able to submit advice on its own initiative. It was envisaged that scientific experts and observers would be able to attend. It would also be possible to create sub groups if it were felt that the area covered by the RAC (for example, there would be one for the whole North Sea) was too large.

In general discussion the need for improved and better funded scientific research was endorsed. Multi-disciplinary research was needed and in particular closer links with marine science researchers were desirable. It was noted that the available resources within the EU for relevant research were very limited. Because research was expensive better co-ordination of current efforts was needed.

The "advisory" role of RACs was questioned. The proposed Councils were a welcome first step but they needed to develop a management role. It was hoped that, if Councils showed they could act responsibly, the EU Council of Ministers would, over time, be prepared to decentralise management responsibility, while retaining responsibility for long-term strategy. It would certainly be desirable to move to a situation where RAC advice would normally be accepted by the Commission and by the Council of Ministers, save in exceptional circumstances. The aim should be to move towards the de-politicisation of fisheries policy.

Reference was made to the cod recovery programme recently proposed by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and its implications for local communities. It was argued that if it were approved at the Council of Ministers in December and if it led to a recovery of stocks, the industry would be in a stronger position. On the other hand, the scientific evidence regarding recovery was lacking and it seemed that the recovery of stocks on the Canadian Grand Banks was proving to be a slow process. In the meantime, serious socio-economic problems would arise for local communities and the EU resources available to deal with them were insufficient.

Fishermen saw the ICES Report as very negative and the cod crisis had further damaged relations between fishermen and scientists. For example, in Scotland recently skippers had become reluctant to accept scientists as observers on their boats. It was

recognised, however, that better dialogue between scientists and fishermen was essential to progress.

It was argued that the key to the effective management of endangered fish stocks was through ownership rights. In Iceland there is a broadly effective system of Individual Tradeable Quotas (ITCs) which has evolved over thirty years. Its successful operation also required good science and good inspection systems. Such a system, however, was more easily operated within a single country than within the CFP. The RAS proposals might however provide a way forward for the EU if the RACs developed a clear management role. Property rights would be an essential element of the EU's approach but these need not necessarily be based on ITQs.

Before the dinner/discussion a workshop with 25 guests was held on the same theme. See www.foundation.org.uk for the report on this meeting.

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