

Sustainability and enhancement: two synergic approaches for developing the fishery sector

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Despite the breakthrough since the 2002 reform and the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing issued by the FAO and adopted by all the member states, the fishery sector in the EU is still far from achieving satisfactory objectives in terms of environmental, economic and social sustainability; it shows several criticalities and structural deficiencies.

The fleet overcapacity and overfishing are the main factors which may jeopardize the sustainability of various types of fishing and the preservation of biodiversity in several areas. This may reduce food availability and compromise the life of million people who earn their living by exploiting sea resources.

The depletion of fish stocks and of ecosystems affects, in a different way, both the Northern Sea and the Mediterranean basin where reduced resources are mirrored by the social and economic decline of coastal communities. For them, fish is a resource to preserve and fishing is not only a job but also a way of living the sea, the regions and an extraordinary element of tradition and identity.

Small pelagic fish is one of the most significant resources of the Mediterranean area for its peculiar nutritional characteristics and integral part of the local culture. Fishing is an important element of economic and labour development although the sector is weak and experiencing a phase of stagnation. In the last years, catches have dropped, due to the overexploitation of resources and market difficulties which call for new management strategies and specific

measures for enhancing products and areas in the framework of multifunctionality.

The current elaboration of a new Common Fishery Policy (CFP), which focuses on new forms of fish resources management, must emphasize the preservation of marine ecosystem, planning and development of the coastal areas. It is therefore expedient to define a track passing from the obsolete and inefficient management of resources to a broader and integrated strategy of spatial and territorial management of the sea that envisages the environmental, economic and social dimension of the fisheries.

A long-term management approach shall fall within the framework of multiannual programmes, of an appropriate regional governance and shall guarantee the efficiency and consistency of technical measures. To this end, the measures for the preservation of fish resources must be a preliminary step towards an ecosystem-based fishery management (EBFM) in which the rationalization of the fishing effort and the improvement of techniques and fishing gears are backed up by a constant monitoring of the status of fish stocks and of eco-systems.

It is therefore crucial to introduce time and space limits over fishing activities so as to combat the bycatch phenomenon and the overexploitation of fish stocks. The establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPA) goes along this direction; it is a tool for the protection of the territory and marine ecosystem in a context of integrated management of coastal areas and of Fishing Protected Areas with a view to preserving biological resources which may contribute to satisfying the objectives of sustainability of the CFP by cre-

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ating a system of flexible management adjustable not only to the Mediterranean basin but also to the EU areas.

In this context, research may play an essential role. Any successful fishing management policy is based on strong scientific pillars and managed following a bottom up approach. The lack of data on fish stocks, catches, bycatch phenomena and ecosystem interactions must be filled by improving collection of data and research with the involvement of all the stakeholders.

The market may be supported by relaunching the consumption of local products, especially the poor ones, and their enhancement in terms of food safety, traceability, environment and consumers' protection. As for Small pelagic fish, apart from promoting the most common species, it is necessary to kick off campaigns for the recovery of highly nutritive species. Product enhancement and promotion shall fall in a context that aggregates all the stakeholders also through the adoption of brands of origin and quality. This is the context in which the papers of the present issue fall also with the support of the Italian Ministry of Agricul-

ture. For the purposes of sustainable fishing, it is also important to define partnership agreements and collaboration initiatives across the Mediterranean basin designed to preserve resources and promote the integrated enhancement of coastal areas and communities.

The campaign titled "Fish common good" intends to inform the public opinion worldwide on the depletion of fish resources so as to start a process that can stop the impoverishment of the marine ecosystem. It is therefore important to ensure access to fish resources by the future generations; the EU must start a political process leading to establishing system of international relations based on the concept that the future of fishermen and of human nutrition depends on the future of fish resources. We are all aware that a serious food crisis could strike us in the near future. For this reason, a new governance is needed dealing with the preservation of all the resources of the planet that can revive the concept of common asset as catalyst of new and more efficient decision-making policies for the benefit of communities.