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The Editor
Nature

11 July 2011

Sir

Fishery Reform is an Economic Problem

Rainer Froese (World View, 7 July 2011) attributes the lack of success of Europe's Common Fisheries Policy to collusion between fisheries advisors and the industry. I disagree. In my experience⁴ this is rarely a significant problem, and anyway merely exacerbates the fundamental problem, which is economic.

The only way to rebuild depleted fish stocks is to kill fewer fish. That means catching and landing fewer fish, until the stocks have recovered, and that means reduced earnings for fishermen, at least in the short term.¹ Thus, any conservation measure that is likely to work is going to hurt, and is almost certain to be opposed. The deal on offer in Europe and elsewhere is a trade-off between short-term losses, and long-term gains (via larger stocks in a few years time, leading to higher stability, catch-rates and profits, and a recovery of landings).² That deal is hard to accept (especially for anyone in debt), and hard to sell. Without some mechanism to make the deal more attractive, it is always going to be an uphill struggle to achieve sustainable levels of fishing. Such a mechanism is conceivable: for example, through an up-front investment in a buy-back of fishing rights, to be paid for by substantial future license charges or resource rental taxes (which are also necessary to prevent future upward pressure on conservation measures once fishing becomes more profitable again)².

All conservation measures (such as quotas, gear restrictions, effort controls, and closed areas and seasons) encounter these same problems. Closed/protected areas (or no-take zones) are currently widely promoted, but are not exempt. They must be large to be effective, and must not permit relocation of fishing effort beyond their boundaries. Direct controls on fishing effort, such as limits on days-at-sea, are therefore also likely to be needed, and in any case have many advantages, especially for the (regrettably common) situation of inadequate stock assessments, and for reducing discarding in mixed fisheries.³

This economic deadlock has bedevilled fisheries management for over half a century, now. It is not easy to solve, but in my opinion it needs to be addressed directly by fiscal interventions, for any progress to be made in the future.

Professor John Shepherd⁴ FRS

¹ Shepherd, JG: [Aide Memoire on Scientific Advice on Fisheries Management](#) (MAFF Fisheries Laboratory, Lowestoft, Laboratory Leaflet No. 70, 1992)

² Shepherd, JG: [Fisheries Management: Breaking the Deadlock](#) (pp 233-235 in "Seapower at the Millennium" G. Till (editor), Sutton Publishing, 2001, for Royal Naval Museum Publications)

³ Shepherd, JG: [Fishing Effort Control: Could it be made to work under the CFP?](#), Fisheries Research, 63, (2), 149-153, 2003

⁴ The author was the principal scientific adviser to the UK government on fisheries management from 1989 to 1994. All publications cited are available from <http://jgshepherd.com/science-topics/fisheries>