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*Fédération Nationale des Pêches
de Mauritanie*

The proposed protocol to the EU-Mauritania fisheries agreement: towards sustainable fisheries?

Report and Recommendations

*Mauritanian civil society Round table discussion
14 - 15 October 2012, Nouakchott*

*With the support of Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements (CFFA)
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1. Summary of the meeting

On October 14th and 15th 2012, the Mauritanian NGO Pêchecops and the National Fisheries Federation (FNP) invited representatives from the local fishing sector and from Mauritanian civil society to debate on the content of the proposed protocol to the EU-Mauritania fisheries agreement, and to give their recommendations regarding its implementation, in order to promote sustainable fisheries. 43 participants and 7 observers attended this meeting (*see list of participants*).

On the 14th of October, participants were welcomed by the Executive Secretary of Pêchecops, Yousra Cherif. The meeting started with a welcome speech from Mr. Sid'Ahmed Ould Abeid, President of the small scale fisheries section of the FNP, followed by a brief introduction of the topics to be debated by Béatrice Gorez, Coordinator of the Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements, CFFA.

Debates were held in French and in Hassanyah and were facilitated by Jedna Deida, President of the West African journalist network for sustainable fisheries - REJOPRAO. The discussions focused on the following themes: the access to resources, the partnership dimension and the participation of stakeholders. These themes were introduced by presentations prepared by Dr. Ahmed Mahmoud Cherif (President of Pêchecops) for the issues related to resources access and partnership, and by Carlos Aldereguia (Executive Secretary of the long distance regional advisory committee – LDRAC) which detailed the example of the participation of European stakeholders through the LDRAC.

After the presentations and a general debate, recommendations were elaborated in working groups (one group on resources access, one group on partnership/participation of stakeholders) and adopted in plenary session on the 15th of October.

The meeting ended by a visit, for the interested participants, of the Nouakchott fishermen's landing site.



2. Echoes of the presentations and debates

The debates focused on the changes introduced in the new proposed protocol and the impacts this could have for the development of Mauritanian fisheries, especially coastal communities and small scale fisheries.

The exclusion of the cephalopod fleet was considered to be an important step forward, not only because this species is overexploited but also because it was felt that there is a sufficient local fleet capacity, in the small scale and coastal fisheries, to catch these resources in a sustainable way. Several participants were critical of the fact that some Chinese trawlers, - operating in the framework of a private agreement between Mauritania and the Chinese company Poly Hondone-, have integrated the octopus fishing fleet, flying the Mauritanian flag. They argued that this will not contribute to the sustainable exploitation of this resource.

The new fishing zones are pushing trawlers further away from the coastline: in particular, pelagic trawlers are pushed beyond the 20 miles from the baseline (100 meters isobaths). An important benefit for local fishery is that this will reduce the by catches, which are estimated to be much superior to the legal ratio of 3% of the catches, and are made of a variety of species, including thousands of tons of high value demersal species, targeted by local fishermen. It was underlined that the Mauritanian authorities have already adopted a decree obliging all similar trawler fleets targeting small pelagic to respect these same conditions.

Issues were raised concerning the problems encountered by an estimated 3000 seamen who were working on board these vessels, and who are today unemployed. Representatives of the local small scale fisheries sector argued that labor force was lacking in their sector and that, with appropriate training, it would be possible to absorb this unemployed labor force in the local fisheries sector.

The development of a local market for small pelagic was also discussed: these small pelagic are often the only fish accessible for the local population, due to its lower price. Given such development, it was proposed to examine the possibility to develop a local small scale seiner fleet fishing with ice for fresh fish, to supply this local market. The proposed clause introduced in the protocol for landing 2% of the catches of small pelagic for local population was positively appreciated. However, people underlined the need to study the impacts that these landings will have on the price of the fish caught by local fishermen.

The distancing of the shrimp fleet from the coast, as proposed in the protocol, will also have a positive impact on other coastal resources, since some of these trawlers make more than 80% by-catches.

Regarding the financial compensation, participants insisted on the fact that there were two parts:

- ❖ One part which is variable, to be paid by the boat owners and proportional to the catches made and which at maximum, i.e. if all the vessels use the fishing possibilities negotiated-, is estimated at 43 million euro. This sum represents an important rise of ship owner's costs.
- ❖ A fixed part (paid by EU public funds) of 67 million euro (instead of 70 million previously), to which 3 million euro are added for sectoral support (instead of 20 million previously).

There is therefore an erosion of the sectoral support.

If there is a reason for such an erosion, - the limited absorption capacity, due to the poor capacity of the Mauritanian administration to manage these funds -, the consequence is that none of the essential large-scale projects (landing facilities for example) can be realized solely with this amount.

Some participants commented on the support granted to the Banc d'Arguin marine protected area (MPA), pleading for a greater consideration, through this support, for the development of local coastal populations who live inside this MPA.

Risks for the non-implementation of the protocol were highlighted. On the Mauritanian side, the greater risk is that the precaution principle may not be respected; there may be, for example, the reintroduction of fishing overcapacities in the octopus fisheries, under a variety of pretexts including the renewal of the national industrial fleet, the (uncontrolled) development of artisanal and coastal fishing, etc.

On the EU side, the main risk would be the non-adoption of the proposed protocol by the EU Parliament and the Council. Regarding the Parliament, the participants recalled that this protocol answers demands repeated for years by Mauritanian professionals and local NGOs and also goes in the direction suggested by the resolution voted in 2011 by the EU Parliament on the future EU-Mauritania FPA.

The debate on stakeholders' participation was introduced by a presentation made about the LDRAC (<http://www.ldrac.eu/en/>), a forum gathering, since 2007, representatives of the EU sector (catching and processing sectors, trade union organizations, etc.) and NGOs (environment, development, etc.). This Council was created by the EU Council of Ministers and is financed by public funds and members contributions. It aims at a greater involvement of civil society and industry stakeholders in the fisheries policies decision making processes.

This advisory council, composed of 64 member organizations from 12 EU members States, gives advices to the EU Commission, including on elements related to FPAs with third

3. Recommendations

We, the representatives of Mauritanian professionals and civil society, support the rapid implementation of the protocol signed on the 26th of July 2012 by the Mauritanian and European Union negotiators. We suggest that the following recommendations be taken into account for the promotion of sustainable and fair fisheries in the implementation of this protocol.

1. The negotiations on the protocol signed on the 26th of July 2012 should not be reopened and it should be approved as is by the responsible authorities from both parties.
2. Access to octopus should be exclusively reserved for national operators, in particular coastal and small scale fisheries.
3. As it is required in the protocol, the landing of all products resulting from the fishing operations in the Mauritanian EEZ should be mandatory, immediately for demersal fleets. For the other fleets, the State should rapidly put into place the necessary landing facilities, as some vessels cannot land with the existing facilities.
4. Industrial fisheries should be maintained outside the zone of 30 meters depth.
5. The principle of non-discrimination of treatment between all foreign fleets should be applied.
6. The involvement of all the stakeholders should be guaranteed before, during and after the negotiations of fisheries agreements for the access of long distance fleets to Mauritanian waters: representatives of the fishing sector and civil society are legitimates stakeholders in this case.
7. An advisory council should be established, involving all stakeholders, with representatives from the entire coastal area. Since the existing advisory council for the planning and development of fisheries never functioned, there is an institutional void to address.
8. This Council should be entirely independent and there should be an obligation made on the authorities to consult and take into account the recommendations of stakeholders expressed by this body.
9. It is important for stakeholders to carry out an assessment of fishing agreements since 1986 to 2012 and to evaluate the results of negotiations of all the agreements with partners countries operating in Mauritanian waters.
10. In order to evaluate the results of negotiations with the European Union, in particular regarding the non-discrimination clause, the information on the contents of other agreements and conventions with foreign countries should be made publically available.
11. The support to the Banc d'Arguin through the agreement, in the future, will be considered as

a payment for a service to the ecosystem. It is important to take into account the fact that the Banc d'Arguin is a Marine Protected Area where coastal populations live. Hence, the opinion of coastal populations regarding the management of this marine protected area should be listened to. It is also important that the monies from the agreement allocated to the Banc d'Arguin are directed primarily to support human development and coastal communities;

12. Stakeholders' participation requires a full transparency. Authorities should make all the information related to the access to fish resources publically available. The introduction of fisheries in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, proposed by Mauritania to the IMF, should help to improve this transparency.
13. One of the priorities in the framework of a partnership is the development of a local seiner fleet for small pelagics, in order to create jobs and to provide the local processing sector supplying local and external market;
14. The processing of fish to enhance its value and create jobs is also one of the priorities for a partnership. As part of it, support should be given to the promotion of products processed in a traditional way, including through support for the transmission of traditional knowledge;
15. The sectoral support of the European Union should be first directed to the funding of infrastructures (in particular for drinking water and landing sites) and for the promotion of entrepreneurship for women in fisheries;
16. Civil society should raise awareness with the administrations to develop the use of renewable energies at the level of coastal communities, which could create numerous jobs for young people;
17. Civil society organisations working with coastal communities and fishing professionals should use their networking capacity with stakeholders of the sub-region and of the EU to elaborate propositions aimed at establishing partnerships, and also to promote a concerted management of migratory and shared resources, in particular at the level of the Sub regional Fisheries Committee.

Done in Nouakchott, 15th of October 2012

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