

Series on Mauritania #4

EU-Mauritania SFPA: The requests of the Mauritanian artisanal fisheries and civil society

Brussels, 28 February 2022

By Joëlle Philippe

In this fourth article in the series on fisheries in Mauritania, the author reviews the first draft by the rapporteur Izaskun Bilbao of the Partnership Agreement for Sustainable Fisheries between the European Union and Mauritania, the most important of all fisheries agreements between the EU and third countries, and compiles the demands of Mauritanian civil society and artisanal fisheries.

1. Overview

In July 2021, the European Commission signed a new Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement (SFPA) with Mauritania after two years of long negotiations and two protocol extensions.¹ This agreement, which replaces the 2006 agreement, covers a period of 6 years and is tacitly renewable. A 5-year protocol covering technical aspects was also signed. The European Parliament is discussing a first draft² report by MEP Izaskun Bilbao. She points out that the Commission's ex-ante

¹ EUROPEAN UNION, "Partnership Agreement on sustainable fisheries between the European Union and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania", Official Journal of the European Union, L 439/3, 8 December 2021. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2021.439.01.0003.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AL%3A2021%3A439%3ATOC

² EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, "Draft recommendation on the draft Council decision on the conclusion of the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and the Implementing Protocol thereto", 12208/2021 – C9-0419/2021 – 2021/0300(NLE), 9 February 2022. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/PECH-PR-704886_EN.pdf

evaluation³ “concluded that the EU fisheries sector has a strong interest in fishing in Mauritania and that the renewal of the agreement would allow for enhanced monitoring, control and surveillance and contribute to better fisheries governance in the region.”⁴

The new protocol allows European fleets to fish in Mauritanian waters a total of 290,000 tonnes per year, including 225,000 tonnes of small pelagics. For this, the EU will pay financial compensation of €57.7 million per year as well as €16.5 million in sectoral support over five years, in addition to the shipowners' fees. According to the 2019 evaluation, EU public funds cover 77% of the access costs. It should be noted that in this protocol, fees have been slightly increased for certain species, which should increase revenues for Mauritania, in proportion to the use of fishing possibilities for these species.

In view of the discussion of the agreement and its protocol by the European Parliament, CFFA recently organised an exchange with stakeholders from the artisanal fisheries sector and Mauritanian civil society to discuss the content of these new texts.

2. Access to resources

A) OCTOPUS: RESERVING THE RESOURCE TO GUARANTEE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LOCAL SECTOR

In 2012, after a fifteen-year campaign, Mauritanian artisanal fishermen achieved a major victory: the SFPA protocol no longer allowed European cephalopod vessels to fish in Mauritania. From then on, local octopus fishing developed even better, bringing the country an added value 8 times higher than that of industrial fishing. The withdrawal of the European fleet has also allowed this overexploited stock to be a little less so.

Artisanal fishermen have been asking their government for years to enshrine in law that octopus is reserved for them. The octopus fishery is currently managed by quotas that are collective for artisanal fisheries and individual and transferable for industrial fisheries. Since 2012, the sheet for access to octopus remains in the EU SFPA protocol, but access is still set at 0.

However, according to sources from artisanal fisheries organisations, six Spanish and one Portuguese vessel have since re-flagged to Mauritania to gain access to this commercially valuable resource. However, it is difficult to confirm this information, as the recent list of licensed vessels⁵ published under FiTI does not contain the names of the vessels.

³ Defaux Vincent (ed.), « Évaluation rétrospective et prospective du Protocole à l'accord de partenariat dans le domaine de la pêche durable entre l'Union européenne et la République islamique de Mauritanie : rapport final », European Commission, Directorate General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, 25 March 2019. Available in French at: <https://op.europa.eu/fr/publication-detail/-/publication/08e725d1-5a8f-11e9-9151-01aa75ed71a1>

⁴ EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, “Draft report containing a motion for a non-legislative resolution on the draft Council decision on the conclusion of the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and the Implementing Protocol thereto”, 12208/2021 – C9-0419/2021 – 2021/0300M(NLE), 9 February 2022. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/PECH-PR-704887_EN.pdf

⁵ See « Nouakchott : Liste des Licences Pêche Côtière et Pêche Hauturière du 2ème semestre 2020 » : https://www.peches.gov.mr/IMG/pdf/licence_pc_ph_2eme_semestre_2020.pdf

B) SHRIMPS: LOW FEES FOR A SPECIES OF HIGH COMMERCIAL VALUE

European trawlers target deep-water and coastal shrimp, with a total allowable catch (TAC) of 5000 tonnes per year. Many stakeholders say that this fishery is destroying the environment and producing a lot of by-catch of high commercial value: 15% fish, 10% crab, 8% cephalopods. The shipowners' fee, even if it is increased from €400 to €450/tonne, remains derisory, whereas the primary sale value of shrimp is around €15/kilo, not counting the value of by-catches.

C) SMALL PELAGICS: SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT IS ESSENTIAL

In a recent article⁶ in our series on Mauritania, we analysed the change in zoning of the small pelagic fishery, which has been set beyond 20 miles (nm) since 2012 in order to protect sardinella stocks. Since April 2020, it has been reduced to 15 nm, which could lead to greater pressure from foreign trawlers on overfished sardinella. However, the new agreement takes a precautionary approach and the EU fleet will continue to fish at 20nm and will only be able to fish at 15nm if and when “*Mauritania adopts a plan for the sustainable management of small pelagics.*”

Mauritanian artisanal fishing organisations are concerned that the approach of foreign fleets could also have an impact on the route of schools of curlew and mullet, important species for traditional fisheries.

In her report, Ms Bilbao notes the lack of data on stocks in Mauritania and “*believes that sectoral support should be used to improve scientific data.*” In this respect, the protocol provides for support for research through sectoral support and also sets out more precise modalities for taking on board scientific observers and for sampling catches. This is very welcome because some European vessels systematically refused to take observers on board,⁷ which led the artisanal fisheries sector to ask that the renewal of licences be made conditional on the taking on board of an observer.⁸

Ms Bilbao's report also recalls that the Commission's evaluation of the last protocol “*called for the establishment of a regional management framework for the exploitation of shared stocks of small pelagics.*” Artisanal fisheries representatives and civil society in the region, such as CAOPA, but also stakeholders like the European Long-Distance fisheries Advisory Council (LDAC),⁹ have been calling for the creation of a Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (RFMO) for small pelagics for years. The EU's continued efforts towards the creation of this RFMO should be a trigger for truly sustainable fisheries in the region. Scientific cooperation with

⁶ GOREZ, Béatrice, “The new EU-Mauritania agreement: towards a sustainable management of small pelagics in West Africa?”, A series on Mauritania, website CFFA-CAPE, 18 January 2022. Available at: <https://www.cffacape.org/publications-blog/the-new-eu-mauritania-agreement-towards-a-sustainable-management-of-small-pelagics-in-west-africa>

⁷ CFFA-CAPE, “Improving scientific observer coverage in mixed Fisheries Agreements in West Africa”, joint position with BirdLife Europe & Central Asia and WWF, website of CFFA-CAPE, 8 December 2020. Available at: <https://www.cffacape.org/publications-blog/improving-scientific-observer-coverage-and-data-collection-in-mixed-sustainable-fisheries-partnership-agreements-in-west-africa>

⁸ CFFA-CAPE, “Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement negotiations between the EU and Mauritania: staying on course”, website CFFA-CAPE, 27 October 2020. Available at: <https://www.cffacape.org/publications-blog/sustainable-fisheries-partnership-agreement-negotiations-between-the-eu-and-mauritania-staying-on-course>

⁹ LDAC, “OPINION: Promoting regional sustainable fisheries management for shared fisheries resources in West Africa”, Long Distance Advisory Council, R-04-21/WG4, May 2021. Available at: https://www.ldac.eu/images/EN_LDAC_Opinion_Regional_Fisheries_Management_West_Africa_20May2021.pdf

Mauritania's neighbours Senegal and Gambia, with whom these resources are shared, should also be encouraged.

D) FEES IN KIND: LANDINGS OF SMALL PELAGICS FOR FOOD SECURITY

Shipowners will continue to land 2% of their catches, which will be remitted to the Société nationale de distribution de poisson de la Mauritanie. Thanks to the landings under the old protocol, local fish consumption has increased from 4 to 12 kg/person/year. Despite this, today fish is not widely available on the local market, and several stakeholders report that the majority of landings of small pelagics are made in non-refrigerated trucks bound for fishmeal plants. According to information from the Société mauritanienne de commercialisation de produits (SMCP), 33% of small pelagics are exported to other African countries.¹⁰ Others denounce the fact that the remaining foreign fleets do not land fish for human consumption.¹¹

Civil society in Mauritania has been denouncing for years the fact that there are too many meal factories (more than 25 in operation) and that they absorb fish that could be destined for human consumption.^{12,13} Although there is no specific legislation, the specifications of the factories detail that they can only use waste. The recent requirement for vessels to have a refrigeration system on board to encourage its use for human consumption has had no effect. Artisanal fishermen are asking that the number of factories be limited to 2 or 3 to absorb only waste and non-consumable species and, at the same time, that capacity for processing and preserving products for human consumption be developed.

3. Transparency

A) THE TRANSPARENCY CLAUSE

The publication of data on total fishing effort is essential to identify a surplus and for the DPSA to be truly sustainable.¹⁴ The 2019 evaluation noted that Mauritania “*has not fully respected the transparency clause.*”¹⁵ Ms Bilbao's report echoes this criticism and “*requires Mauritania to inform the Commission of any public or private agreements with foreign vessels,*” and that the country provides “*information on all vessels fishing in its waters in an accessible format that allows observers to get a comprehensive picture of total fishing effort.*”

¹⁰ See the SMCP Report of 16 January 2022. Available in French on the online version of this article: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d402069d36563000151fa5b/t/621cea9a7268040bcd686b43/1646062239361/Note+de+conjoncture+2021.pdf>

¹¹ GOREZ, Béatrice, “Mauritania: A 40-metre seiner authorised to fish on the borders of the Banc d'Arguin”, CFFA-CAPE website, 13 September 2021. Available at: <https://www.cffacape.org/publications-blog/mauritania-a-40-metre-seiner-authorized-to-fish-at-the-gates-of-the-banc-darguin>

¹² GOREZ, Béatrice, “When people are starving, footage of fresh fish used for fishmeal is disturbing”, website CFFA-CAPE, 22 February 2022. Available at: <https://www.cffacape.org/news-blog/when-people-are-starving-footage-of-fresh-fish-used-for-fishmeal-is-disturbing>

¹³ PHILIPPE, Joëlle, “Fishmeal and fish oil production in West Africa destroys the region's resources to the benefit of foreign countries”, website CFFA-CAPE, 26 January 2022. Available at: <https://www.cffacape.org/news-blog/fishmeal-and-fish-oil-production-in-west-africa-destroys-the-regions-resources-to-the-benefit-of-foreign-countries>

¹⁴ PHILIPPE, Joëlle, “Transparency: Mauritania improves its score, but is still far from the goal”, CFFA-CAPE website, 13 October 2021. Available at: <https://www.cffacape.org/publications-blog/transparency-mauritania-improves-its-score-but-is-still-far-from-the-goal>

¹⁵ DEFAUX, Vincent (Ed). *Op. cit.*

Given Mauritania's commitments¹⁶ to the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI), it is essential that it meets its obligations in this matter.

B) SECTORAL SUPPORT

Mauritania and the EU have identified several major areas of intervention for sectoral support. These include support for artisanal fishing and coastal communities, and strengthening scientific research and monitoring, control and surveillance capacities.

The EP rapporteur asks that the Commission “*strengthen Mauritania's administrative capacity, particularly for the new coordination body.*” The new protocol clarifies the role of this “implementation unit” “*responsible for coordinating implementation in collaboration with the beneficiaries*” and seeks to improve the monitoring of funds. This is welcome because, according to local actors, the cell was simply set up but did not work.

Ms Bilbao's text calls for greater participation of women “in the presentation and programming of support actions.” In general, artisanal fisheries organisations continue to ask to be better informed and involved in the negotiation and implementation of the protocol, including sectoral support. Artisanal fisheries also see little evidence of benefits from the fisheries agreement for their sector.

“*The general problem with sectoral support,*” insists Bilbao, “*is its lack of visibility*” and calls for the “*publication of activities [...] allowing its impact to be fully visible.*” It is imperative to highlight how funds have been spent. This would also allow for more rigorous monitoring and better coherence¹⁷ with other funds for local fisheries development.

C) SUSTAINABLE INVESTMENTS?

In the new SFPA, Article 10.4 refers to the establishment of joint ventures, noting that the parties encourage “*the promotion of investments for mutual benefit.*” Caution should be exercised, especially when such investments are proposed for the catching sector, such as the transfer of vessels via re-flagging. More generally, the EU should establish a more transparent framework¹⁸ with its partners to ensure that investments are environmentally and socially sustainable.

Mauritanian artisanal fisheries organisations are calling for more onshore investment, and for sectoral support, coupled with other actions, to become a catalyst for land-based investments aimed at improving the use of catches for human consumption, which is essential to avoid the massive processing of fish into meal and oil.¹⁹

Brussels, 28 February 2022

¹⁶ “Mauritania's First Report to the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI) - Year: 2018”, prepared by the Mauritania FiTI National Multi-Stakeholder Group (GMN) FiTI of Mauritania, 18 May 2021. Only available in French at:

https://www.peches.gov.mr/IMG/pdf/gmn_vfrapport_fiti_mauritanie_2018_20210518.pdf

¹⁷ PANOSSIAN, Anaïd, “Towards greater coherence and budgetary efficiency in future EU sustainable fisheries partnerships”, CFFA-CAPE website, 31 August 2020. Available at: <https://www.cffacape.org/publications-blog/towards-greater-coherence-and-budgetary-efficiency-in-future-eu-sustainable-fisheries-partnerships>

¹⁸ CFFA-CAPE, “Investment and transparency in EU-Africa fisheries relations: what about joint ventures?”, joint position with CAOPA, CFFA-CAPE website, 28 July 2020. Available at: <https://www.cffacape.org/publications-blog/q2nriapbiy782wqmauibprt43x1ku>

¹⁹ GOREZ, Béatrice, ““When people are starving, footage of fresh fish used for fishmeal is disturbing”, *Op. cit.*