

## Europe/ Belgium

### Empowering Fishing Communities

*'Issues of Concern for Women in European Fisheries', an intervention at the Fisheries Committee Meeting in the European Parliament on 20 November 2001, made on behalf of women participants from several European countries by Danièle le Sauce, Femmes du Littoral de Bretagne, France.*

At the end of 2002 the European Union (EU) will have a new 'Common Fisheries Policy' (CFP). In the Green Paper on the future of the common fisheries policy that prepares for this reform, the European Commission has noted that: "*the substantial role played by women in the fisheries sector should be recognized and enhanced*". But what does this mean in a context where European fisheries are in crisis and where communities, men and women, are having to face up to ever more serious difficulties in their daily lives?

A few women from fishing communities in several European countries, including France, Spain, Norway, and Holland, invited to Brussels by the ICSF—the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers, yesterday (19 November) had a chance to exchange their points of view. In all cases, the role and place of women is indisputable. They reflected on the space provided and the possibilities existing for them in the CFP. Some of them—the French and the Dutch—have already responded to the Green Paper process by sending their contributions to the European Community.

Today, in this parliamentary hearing, they would like the following issues to be taken up:

1. The role and work of women in communities (preparation of fishing gears, shellfish harvesting, trade, business management, relations with the banks and suppliers etc) should be recognized;
2. Access to professionally recognized training (labour law, trade union law, the environment, management of resources and businesses, languages etc) should be provided;
3. Women should be integrated into official and professional organizations;
4. Exchanges and meeting between women from different countries in Europe should be facilitated;
5. The need for renewing the artisanal fleet to sustain the sector in the longer term should be promoted;
6. The means necessary for assuring optimal on-board safety standards should be allocated;
7. Resources should be managed through promoting scientifically and professionally tested selective fishing gears. Every initiative undertaken in this area should be recognized, and implementing and authorizing their use should be facilitated;
8. A more effective European system for fishing vessel control and surveillance should be established. A programme of harmonization should be launched simultaneously in all countries, leaving no space for different interpretations. Clear and very precise texts should be produced;
9. The fishing way of life should be valorized by investing all the necessary means and by providing part time or full time training;
10. An effective partnership should be established between scientists and fishermen that takes full account of the experiences and initiatives of professionals;
11. All the means necessary should be invested so that never again do we have to suffer pollution from a shipwreck, such as the Erika. Fishermen are more the victims rather than the cause. They suffer as well from land-based pollution: nitrates, industrial and urban pollution—all highly damaging;
12. Fishermen should be involved in environmental projects and their implementation, as the primary guardians and guarantors of the coast.

In conclusion, current fishery management systems and associated practices do not place any importance on the particular problems or interests of women. But the time is now ripe to reconsider the role of coastal communities and the people (men and women) who depend on each other and who mutually support each other to defend their interests. A community-based approach should be adopted that recognizes the importance of each and every actor (man and woman) in order to empower communities in the negotiations with political and economic powers.

The place of women and their modes of organizing are highly diverse country-wise, but recognizing their role will contribute to the establishment of fisheries policies that are less aggressive and more sustainable. The sea should be reserved for artisanal fishing activities (taking into account their rightful place) to enable coastal and maritime populations to live there.

The European women, representing their communities, who have prepared this intervention, would like to express their solidarity with communities in other

countries around the world who also suffer from the impact of government policies that favour the interests of industrial fisheries.

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