

**SPANISH INSHORE FISHERIES: INSHORE FISHERMEN FROM THE
CANTABRICAN SEA UNITE UNDER THE BANNER OF THE CEDEIRA CHARTER**

By Sebastian Losada, La Coruña, Galicia, Spain.
Translation and embellishments – Brian O'Riordan

**The sardines would return, if the governments so desired
Alfonso R. Castelao**

The Spanish fishing sector, generally portrayed as the "bad boy of Europe", has another face. Statistics show that one in four fishermen in Europe are Spanish (there are some 71,000 registered fishermen in Spain, out of a European total of 280,000). These fishermen are generally portrayed as being highly dependent on fishing in other nation's waters – be it in other European countries' waters or off the coasts of Africa, Argentina, Chile etc. The Spanish fishing companies who employ them also have a bad reputation for disregarding regulations, such as quota and size limits, and territorial boundaries, and for ravaging distant water fishing grounds. Last but not least, the Spanish are big consumers of fish, with a high demand for small (immature) fish for many traditional dishes. Their market exerts strong pressures on the fishing sector to both overfish and to target undersized fish.

However, looked at in another way, the same statistics paint a rather different picture of Spain. They also show that one in six European fishermen are from the Spanish small-scale inshore sector, operating small craft and fishing within 12 miles of the Spanish coast. For these fishermen and the communities where they live, how to manage fishery resources in a sustainable way has become a major concern.

Box 1: Small-Scale Fisheries in Galicia

In Galicia the Xunta (Autonomous Government of Galicia) fishers are classified into 3 main groups:

- Bivalve shellfishers (marisqueos), gathering in the inter-tidal zone or by boat;
- Inshore fishers (pesca de bajura); and
- Offshore fishers (in EEZ and distant waters).

According to the 1994 census, there are 8,811 legally registered vessels and 28,014 fishers in Galicia. In practice there is a much larger number of people engaged in fishing on a part time basis. For example, there are over 8000 women shellfish gatherers (mariscadoras), and many (unregistered) people who supplement their incomes seasonally (retired persons, taxi drivers, shopkeepers, unemployed persons etc). There are also many people who fish illegally.

In Galicia the inshore sector employs about 70% of the full time fishers (i.e. some 5,600 people), operating some 4,300 vessels less than 9 metres in length. The inshore sector comprises a fleet that fishes on the continental shelf (demersal and pelagic fisheries), and a fleet that operates in the coastal embayments (rías) shallow oceanic areas.

From Juan Friere and Antonio Garcia-Allut 2000

The area around the Bay of Biscay in general provides one of the most important fishing areas in Europe. The fishing grounds here provide the mainstay for inshore artisanal fisheries in both Spain and France. However, overfishing caused by over-investment, surplus capacity and environmentally destructive fishing methods is having a major impact on the prospects of present and future coastal populations in France and Spain.

This article describes the issues behind what could be a ground breaking meeting in North Spain on one of the most important fishing areas in the Southern part of the Bay of Biscay: the North-West Cantabrian Banks.

In March this year, in the small Coruñan port of Cedeira, representatives of some of the most important Cofradias (traditional fishermen's organisations) in Cantabro (Saint Jean de Luz, Hondarribia, Lastres, Cedeira and Ares) met with representatives from the local (regional), national and EU authorities, and with the environmental organisation Greenpeace. The "*First Meeting of Inshore Fishermen from the North-West Cantabrian Fishing Grounds*" was in many ways a water-shed, and raised a number of highly important issues.

1) To begin with it highlighted that, from all aspects, the situation on the fishing grounds is extremely serious – "*the worst in its history*" – and that drastic measures must be taken to guarantee resource recovery and to establish sustainable levels of fishing.

2) In the second place, there is the no less urgent task of defining once and for all a fisheries policy with clear lines of responsibility, which includes:

- support directed to the artisanal fishery – the most important sector from a social and economic perspective – using the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG – see Box 2), specifically redirected for this purpose (in the past only a relatively small part of this has been earmarked for inshore artisanal fisheries); and
- a debate on which fishing gears are appropriate for the narrow shelf area and multispecies fishery.

According to Antonio López Cribeiro, biologist from the Cedeira Cofradia, we are faced with the task of deciding whether fisheries activities should be undertaken by "a few large efficient units, or based on a model of fishing which allows for the fair distribution of resource wealth amongst the coastal populations, and which is environmentally sustainable". Esteban Olaizola, President of the Hondarribia Cofradia, put it more graphically: "***There are no clear policies, we are like sailing boats having to take whatever wind blows our way***".

BOX: 2

Many aspects of the European Common Fisheries Policy, which provides the framework for all aspects of European fisheries both within and outside European

waters, are currently under review. 2 aspects are particularly important for the European inshore fisheries:

- the decision on how fisheries will be managed and regulated in the 6 to 12 mile zone after 2002, and
- the decision on how European structural funds (through the "Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance" - FIFG) will be used to restructure the European fishing sector.

Since the early 1980s a series of "Multi-Annual Guidance Programmes (MAGPs) have been the main tools used for managing the structural aspects of the European fishing fleet. In essence the main, but rather conflicting, objectives of these MAGPs are to maintain a modern, efficient fishing fleet, whilst keeping the fleet capacity in line with the stocks available. The FIFG is derived from the European Structural Funds, which were originally intended for supporting economic development in Europe's remote less well developed regions.

Over the last 2 decades the lion's share of FIFG has been allocated mainly to a fleet modernisation programme based on a "scrap and build" policy, which has represented more than 50% of the Common Fisheries Policy budget. The misuse of these FIFG subsidies has been one of the main factors contributing to the alarming situation today where the European fishing fleet is at least 40% overcapacity for the stocks available. It has also led a situation of smaller sized fleets, lower employment but a greater catching capacity and a greater concentration of wealth in the sector.

Only a very small proportion has been allocated to the small-scale sector (about 10%), and this mainly through the PESCA initiative (which has now come to an end). PESCA was adopted in 1994 to provide solutions to the socio-economic problems resulting from restructuring. Monies were made available for such measures as improving the professional qualifications of fishermen, diversification of activities in coastal areas (tourism, aquaculture etc.), providing medical assistance vessels for the deep sea fleet, etc.

THE CEDEIRA CHARTER: A WATER-SHED AGREEMENT?

The Cedeira Charter, adopted and signed by all those present in the meeting, has subsequently received the backing of 50 Cofradias and the Galician Environmental Federation. The document, a summary of which is provided in Box 3, brings together a number of key issues:

1. First and foremost it has brought together a large number and wide variety of geographically dispersed Cofradias, who recognise that they share a common problem caused by excessive fishing effort, increasing efficiency in fishing gear and vessel technology, poor gear selectivity, and the environmental impact caused by their activities. Historically one of the greatest problems that has afflicted the sector has been the lack of unity and organisation, and this meeting could be an important first step in addressing this.

From this perspective, the proposal made by Robert Alvarez from the Basque NGO "Itsas Geroa" (The Future of the Sea) to establish a permanent "Cedeira Charter

Round Table", is highly important. Such a Round Table should be capable of taking forward the negotiation and implementation of the issues raised by the Charter. It should also represent the group of Cofradías with the Administration and with regard to the international dimensions that must be taken into account when dealing with these issues.

2. Secondly, and as regards the content of the declaration, it was the fishermen themselves who proposed and agreed measures to restrict their own activities, including a revision of mesh size and minimal landing sizes according to biological criteria, the establishment of seasonally closed areas, and the need for strict vigilance and control on the landings of all of the fleets. "The philosophy of the current document is based exclusively on the urgent need to adopt appropriate measures to allow the sea to recover, for all of us in the different sectors and in the fisheries Administration to assume our share of the blame, and to be ready to work together in this new millennium to transform our predatory approach into a more responsible attitude towards the sea, with its resource wealth, and the marine ecosystem with its rich biodiversity" (Letter to the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries - *Proposals for immediate action on the North-West Cantabrian Banks*).

In this regard, a lesson in ecological economics was given to the whole meeting during the intervention made by Esteban Olaizola: "*We do not believe that it is the fishermen who are the producers, it is not like that at all... it is the fishes themselves. We may or may not have a future depending on how we harvest this production*". In this, as in so many other areas, conventional economics, let alone fisheries economics, has not been able to address this relationship between production and the ecosystem. It is on this vision that the artisanal fishery must build up its credibility: "*...although in all probability our grandfathers did not know about ecology... they were as much fishermen as us*", Esteban added.

The interventions received the agreement of all those present. Fernando Braña representing the Cofradía of Lastres (Asturias) called attention to the need to phase out destructive gears like "bobbin (rock-hopper) trawls", and the issue of modernisation of other gears. Citing the case of the increasing size of trawl doors, he observed that "*with such high vertical openings, these gears could almost be considered as pelagic*". He further stated that "*we are not against modernisation in areas such as safety, but very much against such innovations in gear design*" adding that "*before, we used to live with traditional trawls*". On the subject of "bobbin trawls" which allow trawlers to work in rocky areas, Braña showed his anger: "*we no longer haul up live coral as before, we only haul it up dead. How is dead ground supposed to produce?*"

Félix Cudillero representing the Cofradía of Ares, another small Coruñan town, highlighted fleet modernisation as a key issue: "*We cant think why FIG monies have been used to renew the trawler fleet in such a fundamental way, when they were created for entirely different purposes*", pointing out that "*although the number of trawlers has decreased, the catching capacity of the fleet is much greater... although we must all take our share of the blame and be ready to work to change things*".

3. The document also emphasises the need to develop sustainable fisheries through systems of management that are not only based on the quantitative aspects of the resource. As a basic prerequisite for restoring stocks, there is also a need to conserve a healthy ecosystem. From this arises the need for a clearly defined

fisheries policy, which deals with the artisanal sector from the perspective of its structural characteristics: *"the proposals have been formulated by the inshore fishery which, from a social and economic perspective, represents no less than the most important sector of the national fleet, comprising an activity essential to the economy of all small fishing ports. Consisting of fisheries limited in size by our narrow continental shelf it is the very antithesis of industrial fishing, and is organised through a structure of family businesses, which is the reason why we are motivated to involve ourselves in the prosecution of a sustainable model of fishing for the sake of both the fishermen of today and for generations to come"*

BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT WITH TRAWLERS

It is important to place the Cedeira Charter in context. Last summer the specialised press reported the intention of the Fisheries Minister for the coming season to modify the areas seasonally closed to trawling *"as a measure aimed at improving the protection of juvenile hake, given the highly precarious state of stocks, and the dangers of fishery collapse"*. The measures which entered into force on January 1 2000 were supposed to widen the seasonally closed fishing area around La Coruña – the main recruitment area – and to create a new area around Cedeira, along with the removal of the closed area around Muros, where the concentration of juveniles is not so high and where the closure has not been very effective. The seasonal closure of this area was to be extended from 3 to 6 months, from 1 September to 31 March.

The response of the trawler sector was 2 fold:

- 1) ***A basic call for any closure to be applied equally to everyone. "The impact of this fishery regulation could be classified as persecution against this fishing method (trawling) which, it seems, is being made a scape-goat for all that is wrong"***.

2) A call for more scientific research

As regards the latter demand, scientific opinion is unanimous. The same recommendations have been made for over 20 years: given that recruitment is relatively independent of the size of the breeding stock and given the habits of juvenile hake to accumulate in groups in muddy trawlable areas *"this situation can only be improved if through reductions in fishing effort and through technical conservation measures like the increase in mesh size and the establishment of closures in those areas and seasons where there are the greatest concentrations of juveniles"*. The trawl is the main gear catching juvenile hake and, if any fishery closures are made to protect the breeding stock that will affect all the other gears, it seems that this would have to involve defining distinct zones during distinct periods. There are other measures, such as increasing mesh size (one of the points raised in the Cedeira Charter), which could also be used to achieve this goal. In the case of trawling, increases in mesh size would not take into account the multi-species nature of the catch and that hake is not the main species caught (Mackerel, Scad, Blue Whiting, Monkfish and ray are also caught).

Above all we are faced with the need to define once and for all the kinds of fishing gears that are compatible with our fishing opportunities, under what conditions and under what levels of fishing. Once this is decided, and we are talking about a political decision of some magnitude where it will be difficult to reach an agreement that will keep both sides happy, it will be necessary to find ways of achieving the objectives

of sustainability proposed. The new FIGG 2000-2006 should be used to play a major role in achieving a solution to these problems, created by so many years of irresponsible fisheries policies.

The Greenpeace representative, Arnau Mateu, proposed several criteria that could be used to guide the process of eliminating the excess capacity (fishing effort) and which would help to transform the use of fishing gears towards achieving sustainable fishing and which respect the ecosystem. "More important than the need to reduce global fishing effort, the priority of the hour must be to eliminate those fishing gears which cause the greatest damage to the marine environment as well as those which cause the greatest social impact, applying criteria such as:

1. the levels of by-catch and discards of non commercial species (the Spanish Oceanographic Institute warns in their report that discards of hake in the size range 8 to 25 cm could be more than 30 million individuals per trawl).
2. The damage caused to the marine ecosystem, for example alterations produced in the benthos (which has reached extreme levels with the introduction of new fishing gears like the bobbin trawl)
3. The impact on key species in the food chain (an aspect which has hardly been studied)
4. The quality of the product which arrives on the market (Fernando Gonzalez Laxe, President of the Fisheries Committee of the EU placed particular emphasis on this aspect. As well as mentioning the need to establish protected areas from fishing activities, he highlighted the possibilities for eco-labelling and the need to influence outlets where fish is sold not to sell immature fish).
5. Employment generated (one of the characteristics of the artisanal sector, where in Galicia more than 8000 vessels are recorded).

FOLLOW-UP TO THE CEDEIRA DECLARATION

Despite continued calls from the inshore sector, the fisheries closure proposed by the Ministry of Fisheries has never been implemented. It remains to be seen whether it will be implemented in September. The organisations party to the Cedeira Charter are particularly concerned that the lack of political will to deal with this chronic fisheries problem will mean the continued demise of the fishery.

For their part, the Ministry of Fisheries has continued to promise that it would apply the restrictive regulations needed to ensure the recovery of stocks in the Cantabrian Sea. They have also been trying to get agreement of the trawler and artisanal fleets on the new measures to be adopted. According to the Ministry they should submit their own proposals once its scientific report has been made available. But what about the precautionary principle, which places a burden of proof on the authorities and the fishing industry to show that fishing activities are not damaging to the resource? And why must we wait for new reports before acting, when for so many years all the reports have all been saying exactly the same things?

These issues were discussed at a meeting organised by the Ministry of Fisheries with representatives of the inshore and trawling sectors. In a subsequent statement Samuel Juarez, General Secretary of Fisheries announced that: "There is general agreement that measures must be taken to allow the fishery to recover. But not that some areas should be reserved only for certain fleets or that some gears should be banned from the fishing grounds, because the fishing grounds are unique and belong

to everybody". This outcome was not unexpected, and was the main reason why the Cofradia of Cedeira which called together the Charter, boycotted the meeting.

And the closing remarks of the Fisheries Chancellor of the Galician Xunta certainly came as no surprise, when he announced that "**there are neither good or bad fishing gears, it depends on how they are used" and that "we must be prepared to tighten our belts"**.

Finally, at least we have the opportunity to continue working on the Charter which provides an opportunity for the artisanal sector to push their demands forward on a joint platform. We are waiting expectantly to see how this conflict evolves.

As a separate box:

BOX 3

The Ceidera Charter in Summary:

1. Proposals for bottom fishing:

Three main issues were highlighted:

- The need for an immediate halt on the capture of juveniles;
- The need to regulate the capture of adults; and
- The need to conserve the ecosystem.

To address these issues, WE DEMAND:

- 1.1. An immediate halt to the use of "rock-hopper bobbin trawls" and semi-pelagic pair trawling. The inshore fishery has no problems with the use of traditional trawling methods, such as those which have been used for over 3 centuries, and which have always shared in the fishery and complied with the rules.
- 1.2. The immediate implementation of the regulation which alters the closed season for bottom trawling on the North-West Cantabrian fishing grounds.
- 1.3. Review of the minimum size restrictions for target species. It defies logic for species such as hake to have the minimum size restrictions set below the size at maturity. We demand that biological criteria be applied when setting these limits.
- 1.4. Review of mesh size regulations. We demand that mesh sizes below 70mm be banned in bottom trawls fishing in waters less than 200 metres deep, and are permanently banned from use in the 12 mile zone (territorial sea).
- 1.5. Standardisation of weekly rest periods. A rest period of 48 hour duration should be applied which as a general rule corresponds to the weekend. This will promote better fisheries management and the well-being of the fishing families. Under special conditions fishery plans which fulfil the required proportion of 2 days rest in every 7 may be considered.
- 1.6. Monitoring and control in all the fleets. We demand a permanent increase in the monitoring and control of fish landings, and at all stages in the marketing chain.

2. Proposals for surface fishing: although there is an alarming reduction in the profitability in the fisheries of the Bay of Biscay, Cantabrica and Galicia, the use of pelagic trawls and Naveran (high vertical opening) trawls continues to destroy such important species as anchovy, sardine and Northern bonito.

We therefore demand:

- a) the total ban on drift nets in EU waters.
- b) the adoption of a moratorium on the use of pelagic and high vertical opening (Naveran) trawls in the community waters of the Bay of Biscay and South of the 46th parallel.
- c) The control of discards made in these zones by independent observers.
- d) The adoption of measures which specifically avoid the capture immature fish.

3. Other Proposals:

- 3.1. Closed seasons (biological rest periods) subsidised by the Authorities. No component of the fisheries sector should have to bear the costs created by decades of acquiescence and inertia, and vessels affected by protection measures such as biological and seasonal closures should be able to access compensation from public funds.
- 3.2. The new FIG, 2000-2006 should be used to strengthen the inshore fishery. Although thousands of millions of pesetas (hundreds of millions of dollars) have been spent, the crisis has worsened and the Spanish Atlantic fishery is now in the most critical phase in its history. We therefore demand that the new FIG be used to rehabilitate the sea, and be directed towards specific objectives:
 - a) Halting over-exploitation of fishery populations by subsidising fishery closures (biological rests and other closures) that the scientists consider necessary.
 - b) Bring the capacity of the fleet into line with the resources available, with the priority of removing permanently those vessels which are most destructive.
 - c) Renew and strengthen the fleet practising selective fishing, which is environmentally sensitive and avoids catching immature fish.
 - d) Elaborate the measures and services necessary to guarantee the strict compliance with the protection measures adopted.

Agreed in the port of Ceidera, La Coruña, March 4th 2000.

