Dear Ms. O'Neill,

Having seen your advertisement in "Inshore Ireland" inviting submissions, I submit the following. I arrived at these conclusions as a result of Human Ecological comparative study of fishing communities which I carried out in Ireland and The Netherlands based in the Anthropology Department of Leiden University in The Netherlands during 1995-1997. The full report of this study can be accessed on <http://homepage.eircom.net/~eufisheries/>.

After initially being encouraged to take out loans and invest in boats, Irish fishermen have been stumbling from one crisis to the next for close to two decades. Quota were reduced on an annual basis, fish prices fluctuated in the absence of public auctions, and the bureaucracy of national and EU fishing regulations became overwhelming.

Yes, bigger and better fishing boats with stronger engines catch more fish; yes, we have to fish sustainably in order to have a fishing industry in the medium and long term; and yes, we do need fishing regulations.

But, what is happening now is that a combination of rising fuel prices, low and unpredictable fish prices, and regulations that seem to be  aimed more at criminalizing the average fisherman rather than helping him to sustain his business, are all forcing fishermen out of fishing and into accepting decommissioning. This is not creating a diverse and sustainable fishing industry, this is creating a dying industry where only a few of the very biggest players will be able to survive. All of this is in the context of fishermen from other EU member states that have quota as big as, or bigger, than Irish fishermen.

To achieve a sustainable fishing industry we need: sustainable fish stocks, dependable fish prices, and an economic environment that allows fishermen to plan ahead. We do not have these at the moment.

My suggestion is that fishermen should be given back control over their fisheries, with back up support from both fish biologists as well as fishery economists. This could be achieved with systems of Sea Tenure.

Sea Tenure has historically existed in a number of different forms, but it all comes down to one concept. Which is, that a group of fishermen and no one else, has the right to fish certain fishing grounds in the longterm. How they treat these fishing grounds will determine their own longterm success, as they are not allowed to fish anywhere else. This creates a self regulating culture amongst the fishermen, as well as a feeling of control over their own destiny. It avoids the “make hay while the sun shines” approach as results from uncertainty about quota cuts, which also contributes to unreliable fish prices. With Sea Tenure, fishermen need not be forced into such wasteful practices as the current much hated dumping of discards, they can control fish prices better, and they can afford to fish sustainably.

Yours sincerelyBrendan Connolly

Clonfane

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