



European Parliament Forum on Recreational Fisheries and Aquatic Environment

REPORT

Biodiversity protection and restoration: The contribution of the recreational fisheries sector

Co-chaired by MEP Niclas Herbst and MEP Soraya Rodríguez Ramos

30 November 2022

16:00 – 18:00

Room JAN 6Q1, European Parliament, Brussels

Introduction

MEP Niclas Herbst (Germany, EPP), Chair of the Forum on Recreational Fisheries and Aquatic Environment, opened the meeting by thanking all the eminent panellists and guests attending the conference. He warmly thanked MEP Soraya Rodriguez Ramos, Shadow Rapporteur on the Nature Restoration Law in the ENVI Committee.

“We, the EU Anglers will have a big role to play in contributing to this Nature Restoration policy” – MEP Niclas Herbst

He said that the Biodiversity Strategy introduced some very much needed objectives **for the restoration of at least 25,000 km of rivers** that will greatly contribute:

- To halt the loss of biodiversity and,
- reverse the trend towards its steady recovery by 2030.

However, the objectives included in the Biodiversity Strategy are not compulsory. He explained that **the Nature Restoration Law presented by the European Commission on June 30 is a chance to turn these objectives into real targets, and hopefully, also into achievable targets.** He warmly hailed the involvement of anglers **“already on the ground, day after day, night after night”** and ready to multiply the efforts to achieve the targets and save aquatic biodiversity. He added that this role must be recognised and valued.

He then passed the floor to MEP Soraya Rodriguez Ramos to let her share her perspective on the contribution of the recreational fisheries sector to biodiversity protection and restoration.



MEP Soraya Rodríguez Ramos (Spain, Renew), Shadow Rapporteur on the Nature Restoration Law, thanked all participants, the European Anglers Alliance (EAA) and the European Fishing Tackle Trade Association (EFTTA). She stressed the importance of implementing the Nature Restoration Law and the necessity to talk about the contribution of the recreational fisheries sector and of anglers in the context of the restoration and protection of biodiversity.

She also expressed her support for the implementation of efficient biodiversity policy monitoring tools, enhanced cooperation between member states and an improvement of public consultations.

“Rules, obligations, and large-scale actions are needed now at EU level for EU maritime environment and freshwater ecosystems.

– MEP Soraya Rodriguez Ramos

A tour of Europe’s angler-led nature protection and restoration projects,

Presentation by Kaare Manniche Ebert, Fisheries Biologist, Danish Sportfishing Association

Kaare Manniche Ebert praised the positive impact of anglers who contribute to society through various actions:

- **Anglers are on the field and working with scientists to contribute to the restoration and protection of biodiversity.**

Kaare Manniche Ebert shared the example of a successful [project led in Slovenia](#) where scientists got anglers to send pictures of their catches from all over the country to provide data and enhance the knowledge about biodiversity in rivers and river beds. He also shared examples of projects in [Germany](#), [Finland](#), [Denmark](#), and [the Netherlands](#) where anglers gather to restore, protect and improve biodiversity in rivers and seas, with undeniable positive effects on restored destinations.

“When we talk about biodiversity, anglers did not create the problems, anglers are not part of the problems, and I believe that anglers are on the contrary part of the solution.”

– Kaare Manniche Ebert.

A survey conducted among 1200 anglers showed that:

- ◆ 90% of anglers would like to be active in projects that creates more biodiversity in the water they fish
- ◆ 88% would like to be active in projects that creates more biodiversity in waters or areas close (dry habitats) where they don’t fish

Source: Preliminary results of Danmarks Sportfiskerforbund’s [survey](#) 2022

- **Most angling associations in Europe have education programmes destined to raise awareness among children**

Kaare Manniche Ebert also highlighted that virtually all angling associations in Europe are committed to teach mainly children, how to act in nature, how to treat fish well, how to take care of biodiversity. In Sweden, for instance, more than 670 classes took part in such programme in 2022.



The tackle trade's support to nature protection and fight against climate change,

Presentation by **Olivier Portrat**, CEO, European Fishing Tackle Trade Association (EFTTA) and **Ross Honey**, Managing Director, Angling Spirit, EFTTA Board member

Olivier Portrat (EFTTA) underlined the engagement of EFTTA to fully support and promote the protection and restoration activities of anglers and other stakeholders.

As angling businesses rely on the nature-friendly activities that nature offers, they must take responsibility for taking care of the environment. Olivier Portrat gave the example of one of the main players in the sector, **Rapala VMC** which has undertaken to make its products, packaging, and production more ecological.

Anglers want to have healthy habitats for healthy fish stock"

– Olivier Portrat

Ross Honey (Angling Spirit) presented several industry-led campaigns to raise awareness about the protection and restoration of the environment among anglers. All over Europe, educational events are organised by the tackle industry nearby rivers, lakes, canals, in cities and by the sea, covering all different areas of fishing. In these events, anglers are encouraged to collect litter and to train for best-practice angling while, respecting the environment and fish welfare.

Those activities target more than just anglers: children and families are also involved, thus introducing them to healthy outdoor leisure.

Presentation of the Grusbanden project in Denmark: biodiversity restoration and wider benefits for the society,

Presentation by **Rune Hylby**, Project Leader

Rune Hylby introduced the point of view of practitioners who undertake concrete nature restoration projects. As the Gravel Gang project leader, he undertakes water streams restoration projects by rehabilitating the natural sedimentation of Danish rivers. This project has shown encouraging results with a trout population rising again. Such projects involve families, young people, companies, schools, and local communities.

Discussion

MEP Niclas Herbst asked the panellists how important the access to marine protected areas to anglers is, considering that the European Biodiversity Strategy requires that member states designate 10% of protected habitats as strictly protected areas by 2030.

Olivier Portrat (EFTTA) answered that if recreational angling were to be banned, it would be difficult for local communities to generate the same level of income, thus making their acceptance of new rules questionable. He added that anglers contribute in many ways to the control and monitoring of species' status.



Recreational anglers as protectors and restorers of biodiversity,

Presentation by **Prof. Robert Britton**, Bournemouth University, UK

Prof. Robert Britton focused his presentation on how recreational anglers contribute to the protection and restoration of biodiversity:

- When implemented “catch and release” often becomes a social norm among anglers, where good angling practices maximises survival rates thus catch and release angling should cause fish mortalities.
- As prominent citizen scientists, anglers make strong contributions to knowledge creation for data-lacking species.
- Anglers’ monitoring initiatives can contribute strongly to protecting and restoring aquatic biodiversity
- Angler activities can contribute directly to the implementation of the Water Framework Directive, the Invasive Alien Species Regulations, the Common Fisheries Policy

Professor Britton highlighted the worrying figures of threatened and already extinct aquatic species in Europe and worldwide, but with 10% of the global population exploit fish recreationally, representing 24 million participants in Europe alone. These citizen’s participation to nature conservation has immense implications. **Anglers are contributing to the promotion of human well-being and mental health through connecting people with the nature, while being strong contributor to rural economies.**

Reaction by the European Commission, by **Bettina Doeser**, Head of Unit Natural Capital and Ecosystem Health, DG Environment

Bettina Doeser described the panellists’ presentations as very helpful to understand how the recreational fisheries sector can help restore and protect biodiversity. She made clear that the Nature Restoration Law is trying to achieve the **introduction in Europe of a tangible legislative tool to face the biodiversity crisis and to take concrete compulsory actions.**

She highlighted that the restoration of habitats is in fact fully aligned with the objectives of the Biodiversity Strategy. What is needed is not only protection but rather also restoration targets.

The projects that the panellists have presented are exactly what the Nature Restoration Law is trying to achieve, she continued, in terms of restoration of habitats, economic activity, reconnection with nature, communication, and education.

She concluded by saying that she is convinced that anglers can help in implementing the law and communicate about it.



Key take aways and recommendations for the implementation of the EU Biodiversity strategy, Presentation by **Mark Owen**, European Anglers Alliance, Board member, Angling Trust, Head of Fisheries

Mark Owen (EAA)

Mark Owen estimated that the value of the voluntary activities that anglers undertake out of passion and commitment was inestimable.

Restricting their access to certain areas could prove to be a cost to Member States who would have to cover the costs for the missing riverbanks clean-up, habitat restoration, nature education and data collection activities that are essential if they were to meet the objectives of the European Biodiversity Strategy.

Discussion

Thomas Johansson (Baltic Salmon Fund) presented the objective of his organisation, working for the restoration of Baltic salmon stock in rivers. He stressed the importance of educating and informing fishers on how to handle the fish and how to avoid the adverse effects of “catch-and-release”.

Kaare Manniche Ebert commented on the “catch and-release” mortality rate and the will among fishermen to keep it as low as possible. He added a comment about a restoration project in Denmark that restored the population of salmon in several rivers.

Prof. Robert Britton added, from a scientific perspective, that a lot of work has been done in Europe and North America on “catch-and-release” by keeping fish in water as long as possible and minimising stress responses among other things. He acknowledged the importance of good and responsible angling, using appropriate “catch-and-release” techniques.

Conclusion

MEP Niclas Herbst (Germany, EPP), Chair of the Forum thanked all attendees for their presence and the panellists for their presentations that made obvious that the contribution of anglers is to protect and restore biodiversity. The best thing that decision makers can do is to help them urge the Member States to achieve the European Biodiversity Strategy objectives, he concluded.