



Slow Food®

**Slow Food's position
paper on fisheries**



Founded 25 years ago as an association of gastronomists Slow Food, has evolved by gradually becoming interested in several issues related to the original topic – food – and has now become a true environmentalist association, which focuses on the connections between eating habits and lifestyles and their environmental, social and economic consequences.

In this context, the sea and fishing are one of the issues that Slow Food has begun to tackle in its “mature” phase. Since consumption, production and fishing, the state of resources and the role of institutions are intrinsically intertwined, the association could only start dealing with these issues once it was strong enough – even in intellectual terms – to look at all their complex implications.

Today, Slow Food follows two lines of thought and action on the topics of fishing and the sea: policies and practices for management and administrative harmonization on the one hand, and consumer education and awareness-raising policies on the other.

The following paragraphs will attempt to briefly illustrate Slow Food’s positions on these two core points, based on the report on the situation of fishing in the Mediterranean published by Slow Food in 2007 as a first position paper:

A) POLICIES AND PRACTICES FOR MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE HARMONIZATION IN TERMS OF ENVIRONMENT, ECONOMY, AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

a1) Environmental policies and resource management.

Slow Food believes it is urgent and unavoidable that:

- **The management of resources is coordinated and cooperatively managed by states**, so as to turn the current trend of continuously increasing pressure on natural resources (including sea organisms but also on the health of coastal environments).
- CFGM member countries **agree on fishing quotas**, and that such agreements have sanctioning power.
- **Research is more substantially and consistently funded**, in order to obtain constantly updated data on the situation of stocks and resources, and thus review the **evaluation of the total “green demand”** (i.e. the relationship between human individuals and consumed resources) on the basis of new statistical and demographic studies.
- The **true value of natural resources** is taken into account, beyond their mere economic value. This applies to all processing and uses of natural resources in addition to fishing. This factor should be taken into account when looking for alternative methods to measure the per capita wealth of a country.

- The **precautionary principle** prevails in **all anthropogenic activities involving marine resources**. The Mediterranean should apply the paradigm of the community policy agreed by the EU with the states of the North Sea basin in 1997, defining a common method to identify risks to the marine environment and adopting an approach based on the precautionary principle to prevent pollution. Thanks to these agreements, studies to monitor the populations of all species – not only those that are relevant for commercial purposes – have been set up.

- **Measures to reduce the ecological footprint** of each country are implemented. The figures of the world ecological footprint and of the earth's biocapacity should cancel each other, so as to obtain a guarantee of sustainability. The United States is the country with the highest per capita deficit. Unfortunately, Europe follows.

- Effective **marine protected areas** are created. A marine protected area is the most viable multilateral tool for an effective governance of marine ecosystems. Not only does it hinder overfishing and allow to profit from fishing-tourism practices, but according to studies carried out in the US and in Europe, protected marine areas have several conservation effects: the reserve-effect (full preservation and reduction of outside interferences to ecosystem); the refuge-effect (they ensure the health and the natural cycles of species, with the intervention of man for quantity and measurement controls on marine individuals); the cascade-effect (domino effect which rebuilds the natural relationships among species on different levels). Governments should therefore invest in the creation of marine protected areas.

- **New regulations are passed and existing ones are improved on the management of interconnected activities in rural areas, coastal areas and waters, with the goal of achieving an integrated management of coastal zones**. European regulations must take into account the consequences of farming, zootechnical activities and coastal exploitation on sea ecosystems. The partnership agreement on fishing signed by the European Community and the Kingdom of Morocco on May 29, 2006 could be used as a reference and replicated. The same type of agreement could be extended to other non-European Mediterranean countries, so as to move towards a shared use of resources. In this context, the **directives which regulate tillage near water catchment areas should be reviewed**, and a dialogue should be started with companies and industries to reach an agreement on the use of farmland. Given the repercussions on aquatic environments of waste production, fertilizing and tillage, governments should encourage farms to use sustainable, organic fertilizers. At the same time, the treatment of urban and agricultural wastewaters should be continued – as it has been done with the Nitrates Directive. It is therefore necessary to strengthen existing legislation on nitrates (starting from European legislation), introduce composting and improve anaerobic digestion systems (for instance for the production of biogas) to solve the problem of biodegradable waste.

- The **sustainable disposal of waste must be promoted and the production of waste reduced as much as possible**, both – of course – environmentally dangerous waste and recyclable waste. A massive intervention to improve the quality of water from waterworks – an effort pursued by some European countries – would reduce the consumption of bottled water.

- **The production of particularly worrying toxic chemicals is discouraged**. The objective must be the gradual elimination of all production and use of high-risk chemicals in consumer products by 2012 (as established in some parts of the world, such as Quebec and California), and of high-risk chemicals released in the environment.

- **A better production and management of energy must be promoted** through: the installation of micro-disseminated instruments for alternative energy production; the creation of community tanks to use as alternative resources for thermal energy and electric power; the construction of eco-efficient plants in terms of urban and architectural development – such as water tourism centers with solar panels, or catalysts for the engines of water vehicles.

- **Obsolete and low-efficiency models for the management of resources involved in industrial and agricultural/zootechnical production activities (not only along the coasts) must be changed**. The step needed shall go beyond collaborative planning with companies. The time has come to implement a supplementary monitoring of coasts by the Public Prosecutor. It is important that both legislators and citizens understand that the problems caused by such productions do not only depend on activities carried out along the coasts. Production activities in the Pianura Padana pollute the Adriatic Sea, just to mention one example. The problem is therefore more general and calls for the implementation of a new production model – in farming, animal breeding and industrial production.

- **Aquaculture and high-density fish farming activities must be balanced by the safeguard of wild stocks.** We do not believe that the problem of overfishing can be solved by fish farms. What is needed is a legal transformation of the concept of “free access” to natural resources, which foresees the delegation of resource management to clearly established bodies.

- **The development and improvement of technologies and machinery through updates and possible amendments to laws should be reconsidered.** It is necessary to review and update international regulations which allow some manufacturers of fishing machinery and tools to sell their products without full and clear compliance with existing laws. We need zero tolerance for illegal fishing, both on a small and on an industrial level.

a2) Economic policies

Environmental provisions mentioned in point a1) must be necessarily accompanied by a series of economic measures, aimed both at safeguarding those who work in the fishing industry and at promoting virtuous behaviors. In particular, it is deemed necessary to:

- **Promote fishing districts**, with the aim of emphasizing the multifunctional role of fishers. They are not only users of resources, but they should fully take on the role of guardians of the environment, and raise awareness among consumers on the key issues related to the sea and, more generally, to the environment.

- **Consider the creation of exclusive economic zones (EEZ)**, namely areas located 12 nautical miles from the coast and whose use is limited to specific identified users, after evaluating costs and benefits. EEZs can ensure the sovereignty of countries allowed to manage the resources of these waters, which can control fishing and other marine activities. Also, they allow governance bodies to have direct control over the numbers – for instance – of boats, authorized catches, financial returns, specific actions, and license fees paid by ship owners. In order to be effective, an EEZ must be acknowledged and respected by all adjacent countries and governing bodies.

- **Consider the international “capitalization” of the Mediterranean**, based on a multilateral management system. The benefit of this management options lies in the possibility to give more monitoring responsibility to the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean, so as to differentiate Mediterranean policies from strictly European policies.

- **Promote alternatives to fishing.** In order to reduce the fishing pressure, it is necessary to identify and promote alternative and complementary professional activities which can ensure economic profits. The problem cannot be solved by simply resorting to compensations. It is necessary to support diversification processes. This approach is more effective because it takes into account the distinctive features of the fisher, it preserves his connection with the sea, and promotes his culture and tradition – also for educational purposes. What is needed is a legal effort, as well as further steps to integrate the multifunctional role of fishery in a more comprehensive strategy for regional promotion, based on gastronomic, cultural, historical, archaeological and sociological aspects related to the culture of the sea and fishing. In the Mediterranean, where small-scale fishery is more widespread, it is possible to rediscover its wide-ranging sociological and cultural appeal: from languages to music, from traditional technologies to anthropology and gastronomy.

- **Promote a global market linked to the origin of resources.** In compliance with socio-economic and ethical principles, it is essential to promote local fisheries. However, in case of large-scale fishing it is necessary to ensure that the local population can participate in such economic activity, both by being present and working onboard, and in the processing or transport phases - or in any of the other production steps.

- **Encourage the consumption of local products** to support and re-launch local micro-businesses, such as small-scale fisheries, traditional restaurants and eco-gastronomy. Increased consumption of locally produced food also decreases greenhouse emissions by significantly lowering fossil fuel use for transportation.



- **Regulate the high sea:** it is necessary to reach a consistent regulation of EEZs and their harmonization with the so-called Zone di Tutela Ecologica (Environmental Safeguard Zones, as defined by Italian law). The management of the high sea, where national laws do not apply, cannot be left to goodwill agreements among two sovereign states – especially if we think how incredibly easy it is for ships to acquire the flag of another country. Work is needed to make sure that the sea is controlled by coastal states and to achieve harmonization between the EU and Mediterranean non-member states.

- **Agree on a series of special economic-financial conditions for small-scale fisheries,** which allow the reduction of private participation in on-board investments. Governments should also provide financial guarantees to small-scale fisheries at times of closed seasons for reasons of biological recovery. An easier access to micro credit could be very useful, both from an economic and social perspective. Similarly – and with the same economic and social effects – the migratory flows of bankrupt fishers should be discouraged. It is fundamental to arrange an inflow of monetary aid to the poorer areas of weaker Mediterranean countries.

a3) Social policies

In addition to the economic value they have for coastal regions, small-scale fisheries and the related activities – which are particularly widespread in the Mediterranean – can play a key role in the social fabric of local communities. They are also a significant part of Mediterranean culture and contribute to making this area an attractive tourist destination. Among the problems faced by small-scale fishers, these are the most relevant:

- The increase of the average age: less and less young people choose this profession and institutions show no interest in encouraging them to do so;
- The coastal nature of fishing activities means that their operators are the first to be hit by the negative consequences of the increasing anthropization of coasts;
- Closed seasons for purposes of biological recovery are often ineffective because they are defined without the support of adequate scientific research, and with no consultation with fishery operators;
- The European Community has so far followed an Atlantic-centric policy, based on the two concepts of production-economy. In contrast, decisions should be based on the combination of culture-labor (a perspective which is more strongly rooted in Mediterranean countries), taking of course into account the obvious orographic, oceanographic and fish stocks differences in the Atlantic and in the Mediterranean;
- To date, no experience of integrated coastal zone management has been made. The involved stakeholders and economic interests are many and do not coincide. It is therefore needed to strengthen a community policy that foresees – in the context of the *coastal zone management* instrument – supranational plans based on criteria related to a whole water basin rather than on regional ones. We believe this can be the best instrument to safeguard marine biodiversity;
- Tourism (which is not always sustainable) has developed as a competition to small-scale fishing. Recreational fishing – where controls on minimum fish sizes, methods used and varieties fished should be improved – is sometimes a competitive activity.

In line with the above-mentioned measures, we call for the implementation of actions aimed at:

- **Preserving small-scale fishing through social policies.** Small-scale fishing has a high socio-economic value, can strengthen the relationship with the local region and improve traceability. Workers in small-scale fisheries represent 80% of the total fishing sector and account for 20% of the total catches.

- **Promoting participatory processes and decentralization.** Local operators who understand the peculiarities and opportunities of the areas they work in have an important role to play as leaders, participating in decision-making processes and assisting implementation of the best development strategy for their region. Partnerships between local operators and public and private partners, as well as representatives of civil society and volunteer associations, should play a key role.

- **Fighting illegal fishing in a more effective and accurate way.** Governments of Mediterranean countries must consistently enforce sanctions and strict penalties in the case of illegal fishing. Furthermore, the code on legal fishing should be integrated with side notes covering cases of less serious illegal actions and ambiguous circumstances. Provisions on legal and illegal actions at sea can be finalized and fine-tuned by implementing the FAO code of conduct consistently. Governments must also make further efforts to ensure that both large-scale and small-scale operators are more and more involved in control and monitoring tasks. It is essential that those who are in close contact with a natural area are responsible – to the widest possible extent – of the legal, executive and judicial management of that area. This deeper involvement would facilitate stronger relationships between the coastguard and professional associations, as well as prevent tolerant behaviors towards non-compliant fellow workers and the “code of silence”.

- **Greater focus on workers’ rights and the rights of coastal communities, also for industrial fishing.** The pressure inflicted on marine ecosystems by transnational corporations extends to small-scale coastal communities reliant on fishing activities. This is reflected in the work structure of such corporations; just as multinationals operate at sea in a questionable way, their methods often compromise workers’ rights. Governments must safeguard the rights of their citizens working for multinational fleets with the same commitment expected for the protection of small-scale fisheries.

B) EDUCATION AND AWARENESS-RAISING POLICIES THROUGH INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS AND DIRECT DEMOCRACY PRACTICES.

Institutional and economic initiatives must be accompanied by activities to increase the general awareness and knowledge level of the public/consumers. Only an aware and informed society can effectively influence the market and producers’ practices – not only in the fishing sector, but in all production activities with an environmental impact. Educational activities must be targeted specifically at different social and economic groups: not only consumers in general, but also schools of all types and levels, restaurants, and fishermen themselves.

Promotion and support of concrete actions are therefore hoped for in the following fields:

b1) Educating and informing civil society

- **Promotion of lifestyle changes to citizens.** Governments must promote practices for the individual reduction of environmentally dangerous anthropogenic effects: from the use/production of energy from renewable sources to adopting a daily diet with less environmental impact.

- **Educating trainers.** The promotion of environmental education is a fundamental step to ensure the sustainability of marine ecosystems. It is essential to fund courses to train new professionals, such as environment-specialized school staff and “public advisors”. All possible instruments should be taken into account: from the creation of education professionals at the municipal, regional and national level to the training of environment teachers both inside and outside the school structure.

- **Dissemination of information concerning fish stocks and fishing regulations on seasonality and minimum sizes.** Respect for the Mediterranean environment starts with consumers, the ultimate manipulators of the demand for fishery products. If consumers were aware of and paid attention to the regulations that forbid certain illegal (ethical and economic) behaviors, the basis for the safeguarding of ecosystems would be ensured. Consumers armed with information such as the best species to choose and the minimum catch sizes can contribute greatly to regional sustainability. The role of organized civil society and NGOs is key. In this context, campaigns such as “Mangiamoli giusti” (Fare’s Fair) – promoted

by Slow Food Italia, WWF, LegaPesca, AGCI Pesca and ICEA – and the role played by Fairtrade Labeling Organization are exemplary.

- **Promotion of fish species that – due to commercial reasons – are not as heavily exploited and are recommended for consumption.** Eating lesser-known yet commonly found local fish should be promoted for several reasons: they provide variety and availability through the seasons; they are often fished using traditional methods and thus support local regions and the cultural diversity of communities; they often have very good nutritional characteristics; eating a wider variety of fish means decreasing pressure on better-known species; and discovering local fish strengthens the link between consumers and the environment they live in.

- **Promotion of consumer behavior based upon an awareness that wild fishing takes resources from the sea** and is therefore irregular, in contrast to consistent production activities. As a consequence, consumers should be willing to assess daily availability in the fish market prior to making their choice, rather than arriving with a predetermined choice. Adopting a new consumer approach also provides an opportunity to generate general debate on the environmental and energy costs of protein foods, and on the need to reverse the trend towards an increased consumption of proteins in the modern diets of Western societies.

b2) Training of sea operators

- **Specialized training of people who live and work in traditional coastal contexts that need safeguarding**, in an attempt to combine their approaches to resource management with new techniques.

- **More involvement of experts and researchers in the fields of training, research and development related to industrial fishing activities.** Governments should promote closer cooperation between the research sector and the fishing industry, with the goal of promoting refresher training in companies. More economic resources must be devoted to academic research, and to promote the organization of more conferences and forums for the sector. Such activities should be organized all over, and not only in the more developed areas.

b3) Practices of direct democracy

- **Promotion and strengthening of civil society associations** to ensure their political participation, with the aim of implementing political practices managed by groups of conscious individuals. The role of associations is essential for the creation of connections and partnerships between consumers and operators of the sector. In this manner, professional associations could free some resources (absorbed today by this type of functions) and be relieved of the legal pressure they currently complain about. This means that they could, for instance, work on the improvement of relationships with port authorities to ensure the traceability of sold products (to the advantage of consumers and of the added value of products) and the transparency of operators' activities.



Conclusions and Perspectives

If, as illustrated so far, proper management of coastal zones plays a key role for the protection of marine biodiversity, this must be tied to a clear and strong position on safeguarding small-scale fisheries. Slow Food, as an association and through the activities implemented by the Terra Madre network, works predominately with small-scale fishing operations and coastal communities. We hope that European policies on fishing can also look with more and more interest and effectiveness at small-scale fishing.

Slow Food considers the European Commission proposal (cfr. the document “*Slow Food comments on the Common Fisheries Policy reform*”) to be based on two models: first, the system of quotas and their transferability – that we feel takes into account the interests of large companies at the expense of small-scale fisheries – and second the requirement that all catches, including discards, is counted in quotas – an approach that we agree with completely. Further to this, we are in favor of a gradual and necessary reduction of discards by improving the effectiveness of fishing methods. To this purpose, it is necessary to intensify and finance research to develop more selective fishing practices.

For many reasons, the issue of the sea and fishing - as well as farming - is one of the key topics when it comes to the future of the planet and the well being of its inhabitants.

For too long, and for complex reasons, policies have not placed this topic at the core of planning activities in the fields of education, the environment, health, economy, and justice.

The current situation is very critical: it is easy to observe the state of impoverishment and frailty of the marine environment and of the populations whose survival directly depends on it. But at the same time the current situation also shows some very positive signs: society is becoming increasingly aware of environmental and food issues and sensitive to the ethics of consumption.

We need to seize this opportunity and emergency, and implement new governance methods and new approaches to as soon as possible.

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