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## NGOs recognise efforts of the tuna sector in improving fisheries management

Today Europêche, the European body representing the fishing sector met with various NGOs in the European Parliament to discuss the use of fish aggregating devices (FADs) and how to improve tuna fisheries management. The meeting, hosted by Ulrike Rodust MEP and attended by Socialist and Democrat MEPs, allowed the tuna sector to convey its initiatives for better FAD management and explain how the sector is committed to a sustainable exploitation of the species.

FADs are floating objects that have been employed for hundreds of years in both commercial and recreational fisheries to improve methods when catching ocean going pelagic species including tuna. FADs typically consist of bamboo rafts with buoys attached for its location that could be drifting in the ocean or anchored at the sea floor to improve fish catching methods.

The sector explained that after more than 20 years of intense FAD use, tropical tuna stocks are still in good shape in most of the world's oceans. The industry mentioned that a removal of all FADs, as has been suggested by some NGOs, would shift existing effort from skipjack tuna to yellow fin tuna, leading to the latter's certain overexploitation.

During the discussion, two main issues were identified by the NGOs as being problematic to the use of FADs; the catching of juveniles and the catching turtles or sharks as by catch. The sector explained that natural juvenile tuna mortality is normally higher than its fishing mortality which is the basic reason why tuna is so resilient to fishing pressure. The EU purse seine fleet have very little in the way of by-catch and all fishermen are trained to safely release sharks, rays and turtles live. For example, in 2013 only 12 turtles in the Eastern Pacific were inadvertently caught out of a total of 280 purse seine vessels.

The industry representatives highlighted that they have voluntarily adopted a series of their own management measures, at their own expense, to ensure the best standards for sustainable tuna exploitation. They have 100% observer coverage onboard, fully documented catches, a total replacement of FADs by non-entangling ones and they have adopted a code of best practice. The EU fleet were also the first to introduce FAD management plans at national and RFMO level and have a self-imposed limitation on their use; 500 FADs per vessel per year in the Atlantic ocean and 550 per vessel per year in the Indian ocean.

Additionally, the sector has proposed a fishing effort cap and seasonal closures for the use of FADs in different RFMOs.



It was agreed by both the sector and the NGOs that limiting the number of FADs per vessel is just another component of fishing mortality since the real issue is fishing capacity. If there is a certain level of regulation on the number of vessels, a reasonable limit on FADs per vessel could be found. However, if the system allows for the unregulated increase of vessels, a FAD limitation will have no effect. In only five years, there has been an increase in the number of purse seine vessels by 22%. The problem of vessel overcapacity in tuna fisheries must be addressed at a global scale.

President of Européche, Javier Garat said: *"NGOs such as Greenpeace has for some time been campaigning against FAD use without any scientific evidence that FAD use could lead to tuna overexploitation. What is not usually mentioned is that the actual threat for tuna stocks around the world is over capacity. I am pleased that the NGOs have today recognised this fact and the impressive work and effort that the sector has gone to in order to make this fishing practice sustainable. FADs are used for the vast majority of the tuna purse seine fleet and support thousands of livelihoods of coastal communities all over the world. In fact, the majority of the recent tropical tuna catch came from healthy stocks and a high proportion of that came from fisheries using FADs."*

Both NGOs and the sector concluded that there is a real need for more scientific data. The sector have contributed masses of data to the European Commission project, CECOFAD, but this data must be analysed which takes considerable time. The sector also urged the EU to recognise the role played by the EU tuna fleet, which comply with the highest social standards in the world yet operate under unfair conditions on an unlevel playing field.

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**Europêche** represents the fisheries sector in Europe. Currently, the Association comprises 14 national organisations of fishing enterprises from the following 9 EU Member States: DE, DK, ES, FR, IT, MT, NL, PL, UK.

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