

Fishing for fairness in Africa

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The reformed Common Fisheries Policy (which came into force in January 2014) established a legal framework for EU vessels to fish outside European waters. Sustainable Fishing Partnership Agreements (SFPAs) allow EU fleets to fish in foreign waters in accordance with scientific advice for surplus stocks that would otherwise go uncaught while providing a raft of benefits to that country. The European Union fleet operating off the coast of Africa consists of around 400 vessels. This is less than one per cent of the EU fleet.

Through SFPAs the EU provides financial assistance to partner countries to boost local fishing sectors and fishing governance, scientific research and contribute in the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) in exchange for access rights. SFPAs are widely regarded as one of the most transparent agreements in the world.

In 2014, the budget for SFPAs was €68 million, of which 35 per cent was used to reinforce the governance of the fishery sector in the partner country. In addition, Europêche members operating within SFPAs guarantee local fishermen a salary at an International Labour Organisation (ILO) approved level. To ensure these benefits are felt, SFPAs also require EU ship-owners to employ local fishermen (up to 60 per cent of the crew in some agreements).

Further protection as part of an SFPA agreement comes in the form of rules preventing EU vessels from fishing within 12 miles of shore to avoid competition with local artisanal fishers. SFPA agreements also incentivise EU vessels to land their catch for processing in the partner country, thereby contributing to employment and the economic wellbeing of the country.

Kathryn Stack, Managing Director of Europêche, which represents 80,000 fishermen and 45,000 vessels within the EU fleet, said: “Europêche members have good relationships with our partners in Africa. By entering into SFPAs we can ensure that both partner countries and their citizens get a fair deal as part of our fishing in Africa.

“There have been disturbing reports about IUU fishing off the coast of Africa in recent weeks, which is something our organisation and members stand against. SFPAs are important in raising our standards in terms of fishing and thereby helping promote higher standards for all fishing off the coast of Africa, thereby protecting both the environment and African fishermen.”

The fishing industry is a major employer in Africa, with 12.3 million people directly employed in the sector – two per cent of the population between 15 and 64 years old. In 2011, the fishing trade accounted for 1.26 per cent of the GDP of all African countries.

Ends

Europêche represents the fisheries sector in Europe. Currently, the Association comprises 13 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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