

Behind every boat, a woman, a family, a community...!¹

The European network of women's organisations in fisheries and aquaculture, AKTEA, challenges the unacceptable omission of women's contributions to fisheries in a crucial European Commission policy consultation paper

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Source: *Yemaya*, ICSF'S Newsletter on gender and fisheries No. 34, June 2010

Should the Green Paper on Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), developed by the European Commission (EC), contain the word 'women'? Yes, it must, says AKTEA, the European network of women's organisations in fisheries and aquaculture.

The treaty establishing the European Union states that the principle of gender equality must inform every European policy. Its absence in the CFP Green Paper is, therefore, a glaring gap. Despite this, AKTEA's contribution to the public consultation on the CFP reform process was a reminder of how rapidly women's organisations are gaining ground in EU fisheries.

AKTEA notes that women are integral to the fisheries, and they participate in fisheries management at all levels. Women's groups and members of AKTEA have made their presence felt in Regional Advisory Councils (RACs). AKTEA itself plans to participate in the Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture (ACFA). It strongly supports the right of a fisher's partner or spouse to participate in fishers' organisations at every level.

According to AKTEA, women understand the importance of protecting the environment and reducing pollution in rivers and coastal waters. They recognise the need to work with the wider fisher community for sound fisheries management. Women are increasingly engaging in active fishing at sea. Their presence in shore-based harvesting is significant in many European countries, particularly as mariscadoras (shellfish gatherers) in Spain and Portugal. According to statistics, women comprise around 26 per cent of the workforce in the seafood industry, representing 4.1 per cent of employment in the harvesting sector. However, there are no gender disaggregated fishery statistics available in the EU, which means that women's contributions remain under-represented or invisible.

The CFP Green Paper contains references to small-scale fisheries, fishing communities and small- and medium-sized enterprises, yet it ignores the crucial part that women play in these. Indeed, family fishing enterprises would not survive without women but their contributions are rarely remunerated or reported. The 'collaborative spouse' status, recognised in EU directive 86/613, has been a major step forward in this regard, but is not uniformly applied throughout Europe.

Further, AKTEA is highly critical of the EC proposal in favour of a regime of individual transferable rights in the industrial fisheries. Such a move would run counter to the principles of economic and environmental sustainability. Stabilising the economy of small-scale fisheries should be the key priority.

In a regime of individual transferable rights or quotas, speculative activities by big companies and interests outside the fishery sector would harm the small-scale fisheries, undermine small enterprises and discriminate against women. Even in its present form, the existing quota system is discriminatory to women, particularly in the event of divorce or widowhood, because neither their contribution to the quota-based fishery nor their claim to the quota is recognised. AKTEA, therefore, urges the EC to ensure legal co-ownership for both members of couples (married or unmarried), of both quota and enterprise.

Finally, AKTEA calls on the EC to undertake a social impact analysis of the individual quota system and to define indicators for monitoring social changes within the communities caused by new fishery management regulations.

Women's roles and contributions are vital for sustaining fishery activities and enterprises, and in maintaining the social and cultural fabric that keeps small-scale fishing communities together. Their absence in the CFP Green Paper is simply not acceptable.

1 Summary of AKTEA's Response to the Green Paper on 'Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy' (http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/reform/docs/aktea_en.pdf)

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