

Fisheries must be included in international marine biodiversity agreement

Written by Norica Nicolai on 26 May 2016 in Opinion
Opinion

It is crucial that fisheries in areas beyond national jurisdictions are included in any negotiations on the international agreement on marine biodiversity, argues Norica Nicolai.



As Parliament's rapporteur on fisheries aspects within the international agreement on marine biodiversity in area beyond national jurisdiction, in relation to the United Nations convention on the law of the sea (UNCLOS), my main work has consisted in finding a set of objectives that would express the position of our House on the negotiations that are taking place and give the Commission strong and clear support.

Parliament's message is clear, and is in line with the Commission's perspective. There can be no functional international agreement for areas beyond national jurisdiction, hoping to achieve good and healthy management of marine biodiversity, without the inclusion of fisheries.

Meanwhile, renegotiating the 1995 UN fish stocks agreement (UNFSA) would be counterproductive at

best, if not harmful. This agreement, while it has its faults and limitations, is a good document that established, among other things, the role and functions of regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs).

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Another important aspect of the report is the use and the logic behind marine protected areas (MPAs). Establishing MPAs in areas beyond national jurisdiction has to be coordinated and integrated within a system and a network, securing the protection of species on a wider area and therefore achieving the expected results.

It would be hugely unlikely to yield good results for two neighbouring MPAs, for example, if the area between them is highly exploited. As we know, marine biodiversity represents a whole system and should be protected and managed as such.

The third key aspect is the one which, in my opinion, brings the whole system together: the creation of a structure, an institution that has the mandate to coordinate the work done within the framework of the new agreement.

This is crucial, because the new agreement's most important objective should be the coordination and integration of the existing agreements on different types of activities taking place in areas beyond national jurisdiction, while covering the ones that are not yet under any agreement.

The first steps and negotiations on the possibility of developing this new agreement started in 2004 and progress up until now has been slow.

The UN General Assembly has now decided to open official negotiations for this agreement. Throughout these talks, has always been the strongest voice in promoting and supporting this new agreement.

It is very important that the work the EU does in managing and protecting marine biodiversity in its own waters, through regulations on different activities, the CFP, and the cooperation and the coordination with the RFMOs, be integrated into an international system that secures a level playing field for our industries and assures our member states that their work is not being cancelled out by the activities of third countries.

I have to say, the EU does not have the answers to all that marine biodiversity protection entails. There is a lot more work to be done in finding the right balance between our needs, our industry's needs and protecting the ecosystems.

Nevertheless, we have been doing more than most countries, and we have reached a point where our work is being counterbalanced by others, because we are talking about a whole, integrated system of marine life, and unfair competition for our industries, that have to respect standards that other

countries don't have.

About the author

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