POLICY BRIEF

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The future of inshore fishing in Cornwall

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The inshore fishing sector in Cornwall is integral to the county's cultural and social fabric, with many smaller rural communities dependent on its continuation. It is also critical to the tourist industry, which generates 25% of the county's GDP, whereby the presence of an active fishing industry is an important part of the tourism appeal of Cornish coastal towns. Almost 90% of the more than 600 fishing vessels registered in Cornwall can be classified as being part of the inshore sector. However, the future of the inshore sector is under threat in a number of ways, including: access to quota; access to fishing grounds; access to markets; rising costs; stagnant market prices; and a rising average age of fishers coupled with problems of generational succession.

This brief has been developed from research conducted as part of the H2020-funded project, Sufisa. Its main focus has been to access the perspectives of the fishers themselves, together with a range of stakeholders which have a direct interest in the inshore fishing sector in Cornwall. To that end a series of interviews, focus groups and workshops were conducted between March 2016 and May 2018. Further details are available from http://www.ccri.ac.uk/, as well as the main project website: http://www.sufisa.eu/.

This research is based on work done in Cornwall, but is likely to resonate in other areas of the UK that have an inshore fishing sector. It comes at a crucial time in relation to the ongoing Brexit negotiations. The following key messages are intended to draw attention to the main issues that have arisen from the research and which have potential policy implications for the future viability of the inshore fishing sector in Cornwall.

Key messages

- The 'voice' of inshore fishers is insufficiently heard, not least because neither *Fishing for Leave* nor the *Cornwall Fish Producers Organisation* do this sufficiently well. In this respect, there is hope that the recently formed Coastal Producers Organisation will help.
- The definition of an 'inshore fishing sector' is insufficiently precise and in need of refinement if policy is to be better targeted to the needs of this sector. 'One size does not fit all' and there is a need for more appropriate, locally developed bottom-up policy and regulation. Any redefinition should encompass geographical distance travelled by the boats, the size of the boat and the types of gear used.

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SUFISA

This policy brief is the result of research conducted as part of the EC-funded SUFISA project (Sustainable finance for sustainable agriculture and fisheries), H2020 Grant Agreement 635577. Responsibility for the information and views set out in this report lies entirely with the authors.

- It is important in policy terms to be clear as to the purpose of the inshore sector (howsoever defined). Is it about catching fish or preserving a way of life; making a meaningful contribution to food and nutrition security, or simply providing a luxury product; or is it primarily in terms of its socio-economic contribution to rural communities, including directly preserving / creating jobs in the fishing industry or in supporting the tourist offer?
- The inshore fishing sector is marginal in economic terms, but critical to the wider economy in Cornwall, especially tourism, as well as to the social fabric of many of the communities involved. It is worth considering a 'Social Return on Investment' analysis of the inshore fishing sector in Cornwall. This would provide a clearer idea as to the wider benefits of the sector, expressed in monetary terms.
- The inshore sector is desperate for more quota and there are concerns about the introduction of licence capping. The fishers are hoping that more quota will be available post-Brexit, and that they will end up getting more quota allocated to them.
- A key policy challenge is how to deal with the monetisation of quota. One option is for the UK Government to buy back quota and to allocate it to fishers as they see fit. This would allow for a more policy-targeted approach to be taken to quota allocation.
- The fisheries sector as a whole is very small in terms of its contribution to the overall GDP of the UK, with the inshore sector only contributing a very small percentage of that. As such, there are concerns that it may be used as a bargaining chip in the wider Brexit negotiations and effectively become marginalised.
- Concern about the potential loss of EU markets following Brexit. Related to this, there is recognition that fishers need to become more entrepreneurial in terms of how they market their catch, and that perhaps there is a need to support this through both policy and monetary support. It is no longer sufficient for fishers to simply catch fish and sell it harbour-side, they need to develop ways to add value to their catch if they are to remain economically viable.
- The timescale involved for completing the negotiations resulting from Brexit could be as long as 10 years. Due to the ever-increasing average age of inshore fishers, it is important to consider how best to manage this transition period to help ensure intergenerational succession and the long-term viability of the U10m sector.
- If change / support along the lines articulated above is not addressed, the research suggests that the future of the inshore fishing sector in Cornwall looks challenging, especially after the current generation of fishers die off or retire. Although existing fishers are inherently highly resilient, fishing as a vocation / job has much less appeal these days, as well as providing fewer opportunities than it did a generation ago for anyone wanting to enter the sector.

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