



Brussels, 21 June 2017

“Pulse fishing provides clear environmental benefits but must also ensure the safeguarding of biodiversity”

- Ricardo Serrão Santos, Member of the European Parliament

“Pulse gear is an innovative technique that the EU must drive forward”

- Peter van Dalen, Member of the European Parliament

The pulse trawl is a fishing gear that uses low electrical pulses to help catch target species such as sole and shrimp. This technique is considered by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) to be a more sustainable alternative to the traditional beam trawl. From the start the pulse gear has been subject to research. This has increased since its commercial application, research efforts on pulse, spurred by concerns among other fishermen, NGOs and EU Member States about the impact of the gear. EU decision-makers and stakeholders gathered in the European Parliament to explore the potential of this new fishing technique and to discuss recent scientific findings supporting its implementation as well as touch upon the gaps that remain.

On 21 June 2017, **Ricardo Serrão Santos MEP**, Vice-Chair of EP Intergroup on “*Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development*” together with **Peter van Dalen MEP**, gathered policy-makers and stakeholders in the European Parliament to discuss if pulse gear could be a more sustainable alternative for traditional beam trawling.

Harmen Klein Wolthuis from HFK Engineering BV introduced participants to the topic, showing a visual example of a pulse gear and explaining three major benefits of pulse fisheries: fuel and CO2 reduction, discard reduction as well as diminution of seabed disturbance. Following this **Hans Polet** from the Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research of Flanders presented the recent findings of the concluded BENTHIS research project, which aimed to study the impacts of fishing on the seabed in the North Sea and provide the science base to assess the impact of current fishing practices. The results highlighted that seafloor disturbance is higher with beam trawl compared to pulse trawl, and the impact of pulse trawling in the North Sea is lower compared to beam trawling. It was also stressed that the project provides further scientific knowledge to feed the discussion, also underlining that there are still knowledge gaps. **Kees Verbogt**, National Expert, Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, outlined another research project commissioned by the Dutch government, ongoing since the 1990s gathering research on pulse fisheries. The project has undergone 4 stages examining different aspects of pulse with the final stage ending in 2020, which aims to provide research on long term effects, create a monitoring



programme, and feed into revising and improving the legal framework, control and enforcement.

The European Commission represented by **Elisa Roller, DG Mare**, pointed out that the EU faces a major challenge with the implementation of the landing obligation, underlining that pulse fisheries can play an important role here. It was outlined that the Commission is satisfied with the scientific evidence on pulse although there are still some reservations regarding control. However, the Commission welcomes the ongoing efforts to improve control provisions and the strengthening of scientific scrutiny.

Michel Kaiser, Chair of the International Science Advisory Council (ISAC) for Pulse Research outlined the independent and facilitating role of the ISAC. The ISAC had engaged with the stakeholder community for Pulse research in order to prioritise the important research questions. The response from the stakeholder community indicated that the main issues were the mortality of seabed animals, by-catch reduction, ecosystem effects of pulse, and a consideration of the social and economic consequences of introduction of this new gear. Many of these issues were being addressed by the research programme. Moving forward, social and economic consequences warrant further examination regarding potential long term effects as well. Ethical issues in relation to the use of pulse trawling were also considered important points for consultation.

Brian O'Riordan, Deputy Director, Low Impact Fishers of Europe agreed that innovation was needed to replace beam trawls due to their many negative effects. However, pulse trawling had led to the displacement of beam trawl effort, increasing effort and catch rates significantly on other grounds to the detriment of small scale fixed gear fisheries, and essential but fragile habitats, he said. The lethal and sub-lethal effects of electrical pulses on fish species and the long-term effects on their reproduction still need to be researched. He emphasized it is necessary to address these issues and to establish an adequate research, regulatory and control framework in order to be considered a sustainable alternative.

Björn Stockhausen, Fisheries Policy Officer, Seas at Risk reiterated the need to take caution as the long term effects are still unknown. It was also pointed out that ICES¹ considers the existing regulatory framework insufficient. Further, the studies conducted are limited to certain areas of the North Sea and a certain type of seafloor stressing the need for additional projects and research in other ecosystems prior to allowing expanding the scope of the gear. It was urged that the licenses for pulse be limited until such questions have been addressed and answered, and existing licences to be subject to re-assessments by international independent scientific entities.

¹ The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea



The vivid debate was enriched by statements and questions from the audience further highlighting the importance of exchanging on this issue. Overall the debate reiterated the benefits of pulse also drawing attention to some of the questions that will need to be considered when evaluating the long term effects of the technique in order to ensure consensus on its implementation.

The meeting was co-hosted by Ricardo Serrão Santos, Member of the European Parliament Committee on Fisheries, Intergroup Chair for “Biodiversity & Ecosystem Services” and Peter van Dalen, Member of the European Parliament Committee on Fisheries and supported by the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats and the European Conservatives and Reformists Group in the European Parliament.

Pictures of the event can be found [here](#).

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