



# THE LDAC, MORE THAN A CHIMERA



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**When the Advisory Councils of the European Union** were set up some 10 years ago, many thought them a futile idea that would not bring any positive outcomes. In earnest, I was one of the sceptics, never thinking that a body comprised of Industry, NGOs and other Civil Society agents, sitting together to jointly and unanimously decide on advice to the EU institutions seemed as another chimera.

If the task seemed difficult in the different ACs with responsibility for parts of the EU waters, with more homogeneity in the composition of the participating fleets and stakeholders, it seemed truly impossible in the Long Distance AC, where the array of fleets covered almost all variants, pelagic, long liners, purse seiners, trawlers... operating in all the oceans of the world and with all EU fishing flags present. The diversity also extended to the other stakeholders, with presence of NGOs very different in background and objectives ranging from the social aspects of agreements to the conservation or preservation of the ecosystem. Yet the ACs have proved successful and the Long Distance AC has also risen to the task. The articulation of the work in coherent working groups has allowed to frame the debates and to move forward the agendas, and by so doing



Photo: Nor-Fishing

the initial wariness of the different actors in composing the Council. As a result, the LDAC has produced advice on many thorny issues, and even established some stable recommendations that have been issued every year for particular meetings, such as COFI or NAFO, an advice that has gained influence as the basis for the EU's position at those annual meetings. Another important aspect of the workings of the LDAC is the continuous interaction and collaboration with the officials of the different institutions, especially the EU's Commission, although all the members would like to see increased participation from the Member States and the Parliament, as well as being able to bring more scientists and have them present their advice openly in the sessions. More importantly it would be even more interesting that they participate at the same time at the meetings, allowing for an even richer debate and more balanced and informed decisions.

But the LDAC also has also been active outside of its EU advisory role, expanding it to countries partner of the

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EU in fisheries agreements such as those forming the COMAFAT, a large body including most of the Atlantic African States. Through an established and regular meeting, this states have been able to present in a less formal but more effective manner their problems and views, while learning from our experiences to improve their fisheries legal frameworks and practices. The success of this venture will hopefully soon be continued in the East and in Asia and Oceania where similar dialogues are much needed.

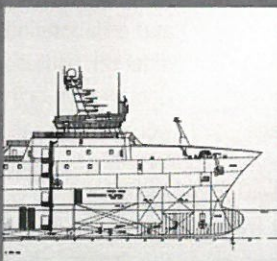
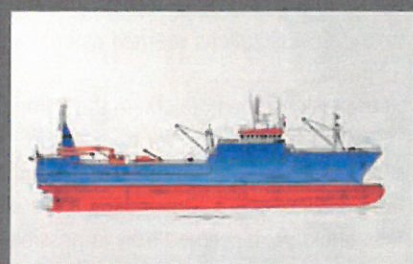
The LDAC must also use these vehicles to promote exiting EU legislation and practices that have proofed to work well in favour of the environment, but also to promote other practices that are just landing on the international agenda and that cannot wait for the usual 10-year process to become standards. Rather we must push to ensure that issues such as labour conditions in the Fishing industry become an important paramount of the industry, just like the ecological aspects, and without which access to the EU markets cannot happen.

It is simply not tolerable to hear the stories reported from countries where the fishing industry is fuelled by modern slavery and child labour, the EU must step up its game and be prompt to forbid those origins to enter our markets. We no longer can hide behind the WTO and its rulings, neither behind the divisions and Chinese walls inside the EU institutions used as an excuse or lame motive for inaction. The EU must lead in this as well, and the LDAC is the best forum to discuss and debate possible solutions and actions as all parties involved can find there a common ground. The only certain thing is that stern and committed action is needed, because we cannot preach our many virtues on the protection of the ecosystems and stocks to these countries if we do not address such a fundamental breach of human decency first, we simply would lose all our legitimacy. ●

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