FROM PROTEST TO PARTICIPATION? ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS AND THE MANAGEMENT OF MARINE FISHERIES.

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INTRODUCTION

International fisheries have been making headlines for some time - and with good reason. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) about 70% of the world's fish stocks are either fully fished or in need of recovery due to overexploitation - threatening not only the livelihood of millions of people, but biological diversity and the integrity of marine ecosystems as well (FAO, 1997). International fisheries, in other words, have come to represent a formidable political challenge that is catching the attention of national governments, international organizations and public interest groups alike. Headlines such as the rape of the oceans, Twilight of the cod and senseless killing in the seas are not uncommon. They convey a sense of environmental urgency and drama that should provide excellent grounds for political mobilization on several fronts: against the industry (for being greedy and oversized), against scientists (for incompetence) and governments (for doing too little too late). It should, therefore, come as no surprise that environmental groups have turned their attention to international fisheries and made overfishing an issue of major environmental campaigns.

Issues of marine policy and management are, of course, not new to the environmental movement. Campaigns against whaling and sealing brought fame and fortune to several environmental organizations, but also put a stamp on them as extremist, militant, confrontational and highly ideological. Their crusades, however, proved effective in that they managed to put a stop to the commercial harvesting of sea mammals.

The success of these campaigns, one would assume, would entice environmental organizations to bring highly visible, activist and confrontational strategies to bear on the issue of overfishing as well. This assumption, however, needs to be tested by examining what environmental groups and organizations are actually doing in relation to what is widely perceived as a crisis in marine fisheries. What are their chief concerns and dominant strategies, how are these articulated, justified and implemented - and what has been the response from government and industry? Have changes in the discourse on fisheries management, by the introduction of concepts such as sustainability, biodiversity, stewardship and transparency, brought environmental NGOs to the table as it were - in successful pursuit of greater acceptance within the fisheries policy community?

The paper addresses these questions by examining three cases of environmental action on issues of fisheries management; actions that point to cooperation and dialogue as emerging
strategies of environmental groups. There is, as far as the fisheries are concerned, a trend towards working with rather than against established management institutions, and a greater emphasis on institutional approaches than on strategies of mobilization and confrontation (cf. Hjelmar, 1996). Before turning to the cases, however, we need to ask whether marine fisheries have, in fact, become an environmental issue. What evidence is there to support such a conclusion?

THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT OF FISHERIES CAMPAIGNS

The fisheries campaigns being organized by environmental NGOs have been accompanied by initiatives of a more official stripe - in the form of intergovernmental conferences and international agreements on fishing activities. Examples that come to mind are the UN Conference on Environment and Development and the Agenda 21 document, the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea, the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the UN declaration of 1998 as the Year of the Ocean, and the North Sea Conferences. Even the British House of Lords has started to take a keen interest in marine conservation and management - and the environmental challenges posed by modern fisheries. ¹ These initiatives and organizations have all, one way or another, started to address the overexploitation of fish and other marine species - and the ensuing threat to biological diversity. As such they challenge traditional decision-making structures in fisheries management. In most countries management decisions have been the result of close cooperation between government and industry, with few opportunities for broader participation and effective public scrutiny. The industry has long enjoyed joint responsibility with government in managing the fisheries, a privilege that in many cases are recognized by law and exercised through representation on statutory committees for management policy-making. It is against this background that calls for broader participation and greater transparency must be understood.

FAO=s Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries

Through its Committee on Fisheries, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN has been one of the most active proponents of sustainable fishing. In a 1991 session the Committee called for the development of new concepts and strategies that would strengthen the sustainability

of the fisheries. The initiative was taken up at an international conference on responsible fishing held in Cancun (Mexico) in 1992 - which requested that FAO prepare a code of conduct to address the issues of overfishing, conservation and (mis-)management. Against a backdrop of conferences and agreements - the Conference on Straddling and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks and the ensuing AHigh Seas Fishing Agreement in particular - a Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries was worked out through a series of consultations within the UN system as well as with other international and non-governmental organizations. The code was formally adopted by FAO in October 1995.

The code is global in scope, directed at A...fishing entities, subregional, regional and global organizations, whether governmental or non-governmental, and all persons concerned with the conservation of fishery resources... Its purpose goes to the core of our topic in that it aims at providing principles and standards for the conservation and management of all fisheries - with due respect, as it reads, Afor biodiversity and ecosystem characteristics. The code itself reads like a laundry list of principles, requirements, measures and good intentions. Certain elements, however, loom larger than others in that they seem to constitute the core of the concept of Aresponsible fishing: There is, to begin with, the adoption of the precautionary principle which states that the absence of adequate scientific information should not be a reason for postponing or failing to take conservation and management measures. If one should err, it is better to do so on the side of the resource. Second, there is the emphasis on Aenvironmentally safe fishing, on using gear and adopting fishing practices that do not destroy biodiversity and endanger ecosystems. Last, but not least, governments are encouraged to increase participation and transparency in management decision-making. This is really a call for extending the constituency of fisheries management, opting for a definition of Astakeholder that includes A...all those who depend on fisheries for food, employment and their well being.

The code is essentially a set of principles and criteria for the formation and implementation of national management policies, and its significance is ultimately a question of whether national governments will redesign management programs and institutions in line with the provisions of the code. According to the FAO itself, initiatives to that effect have been taken in the US and 2 The concept of Aresponsible fishing, as defined in the code, A...encompasses the sustainable utilization of fisheries resources in harmony with the environment; the use of capture and aquaculture practices which are not harmful to ecosystems... (p. 24). The code, in other words, leaves no doubt about the fisheries as an environmental issue.
Canada. A more immediate impact of the code, however, has probably been on how we talk rather than on how we act; on the ways in which we debate management issues and perceive of management problems. In the short run the significance of the code lies in the fact that it acknowledges the relevance of ecological concepts and perspectives, strengthens the impact of environmentalism on the fisheries agenda and recognizes environmental organizations as legitimate players in fisheries management.

The North Sea Conferences

The North Sea Conferences originated from a German report on pollution in the North Sea in 1983 - and a subsequent invitation from the German government to the North Sea coastal states to a ministerial meeting to discuss the environmental problems caused by pollution. To make a long story short, the conferences have since been held about every third year, and attended by the Environment Ministers of the countries involved. Fisheries issues, however, were not addressed until the third conference in 1990 when there was agreement on the need for adequate regimes to protect coastal areas and marine resources - and on the importance of improving management measures in the fisheries. Nothing much happened, however, until the fourth conference in 1995 where Britain's fisheries minister John Gummer proposed that Norway should organize a special meeting of Fisheries and Environment Ministers to discuss the problem of overfishing in the North Sea. The proposal was adopted on the grounds that it is necessary (...) to seek to deepen and broaden support for sustainable and effectively applied fisheries policies from the public and the fishing industry (The Esbjerg Declaration, Article 15).

A joint meeting of Fisheries and Environment Ministers took place in Bergen two years later, dedicated to the integration of fisheries and environmental issues in the North Sea. In attendance as observers were representatives of non governmental organizations - with Greenpeace as perhaps the most prominent. The meeting was a success in that it signified a strong political will to tackle the environmental implications of North Sea fishing. One indication was the commitment to a better integration of environmental objectives into fisheries policy. On this point, however, the conclusions of the meeting were long on principles but short on specifics. The use of

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3 This delay reflects the fact that both governments and industry were late in recognizing North Sea fisheries as an important environmental issue, and that there may have been a certain unwillingness among Fisheries Ministers to admit that Environmental Ministers had any place in fisheries management (Gray et al., forthcoming).
familiar concepts such as Aprecautionary principleÅ, Aecosystem approachÅ and AsustainabilityÅ is nevertheless an indication that the language and perspectives of environmentalists were having an impact on fisheries issues. Another interesting aspect - which ties in with FAO’s code of conduct - is the emphasis on co-management; on extending participation in management decision-making to include not only fishers, but also Acitizens and stakeholdersÅ - environmental groups included. In both respects the meeting seemed to have fulfilled some of the expectations on the environmental side - in spite of the obvious lack of concrete measures and deadlines in the official Statement of Conclusions. What is perhaps more important from our perspective, is that the North Sea Conferences, and the Bergen meeting in particular, represent a growing recognition of fisheries management as (also) an environmental issue, and a recognition of environmental organizations as legitimate players in the field. 4

The Nordic Council of Ministers: The AGreen WaveÅ initiative

What can be done to promote sustainable fishing? This is the core question behind a Nordic initiative aimed at improving the scope and quality of information about the environmental challenges facing the fisheries. It was initiated as a Scandinavian contribution to the UN 1998 program AThe Year of the OceansÅ, and kicked off by a so-called Aconsensus conferenceÅ (AFish for the FutureÅ) in March 1998. The conference counted representatives from the fisheries and environmental bureaucracies of the Nordic countries, from industry, environmental NGOS and science - addressing the question of how to strengthen the sustainability of the fisheries. An executive board with broad representation was appointed, a report of proceedings from the conference published and research on the knowledge and attitudes of European consumers to fisheries, ecology and sustainability commissioned. Thus far the project has mainly been about bringing government, industry and environmental groups and institutions together around the issue of sustainability - and about gathering and disseminating information pertaining to sustainable

4 That said, it must be pointed out that several countries seem to have resisted the attempts at integration. According to a Greenpeace briefing at the Bergen meeting France, Spain and Portugal in particular, were concerned that Environment Ministers and environmental groups were sticking their noses into affairs that did not concern them. There are, in other words, conflicts over turf, over the question of who should have a say in fisheries management. Not all on the fisheries side may yet be willing to recognize Environment Ministers and environmental groups as legitimate participants.
The fate of the project is yet unclear due to internal wrangles over its scope and content. The fisheries side, in Norway in particular, may have seen the project as a strategy to counter the largely negative picture of the fisheries being painted in the news media, and as a way of improving its image among environmentalists as well as the public. This is not surprising considering the fact that a central assumption behind the initiative was the need to inform the media, environmental groups and the public about the basics of marine ecology and the elementary principles of fisheries management. Other participants - the environmental side in particular - have put greater emphasis on sustainability, democratic decision-making and co-management. Within the fishing industry and the management bureaucracy this is seen as a possible invasion of turf - nurturing fears that the project would allow environmental interests to make significant inroads into the political process of fisheries management. Whatever the ultimate fate of the project, it indicates a growing recognition by the management bureaucracy and the fishing industry of the need to tackle the challenges posed by demands for sustainability and caution in fisheries management. Besides, the initiative signifies the penetration of environmental values and concerns into debates on fisheries policy - and perhaps an increasing willingness to acknowledge the public interest nature of management issues.

Given the initiatives described above, it seems reasonable to conclude that the fisheries have indeed become part of the official environmental agenda. There is, among national governments and international organizations, a quest for sustainable fisheries that translates into political backing and official recognition of the efforts by environmental NGOs to stop destructive fishing practices and the mismanagement of fish stocks. The initiatives do vary in both scope and content: The FAOs code of conduct is an ambitious attempt at formalizing an environmental perspective on fisheries management, at constructing a set of universal principles and guidelines for management policy-making. The North Sea Conferences are more of an ongoing political process where the integration between fisheries policy and environmental concerns is but one of several issues on the agenda. The Green Wave is largely about information and civic education - and about the need to change the public image of the fishing industry. Despite these differences, there is a common core in that they all emphasize fisheries management as part of a wider environmental agenda.

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE FISHING: THREE CASES OF
ENVIRONMENTALISM IN THE FISHERIES.

The political commitment to sustainable fishing and resource conservation is, as we have demonstrated, widely shared. As a consequence, there seems to be a growing perception, even in parts of the industry, of environmental NGOs as possible partners rather than adversaries in marine management. There is also a growing recognition in industry and in government of the public interest nature of fisheries issues. Add to this the new language, or discourse, of fisheries management that defines it in environmental rather than purely economic or technical terms, and you have a political environment increasingly benign to the values and concerns that environmental groups seek to promote in fisheries management. This is a state of affairs that has partly been brought about by the actions of these groups, but it is also, as we shall see, one of which they are trying to take advantage in furthering their agenda.

Radical pragmatism: Greenpeace’s fisheries campaign

Greenpeace is well-known for its spectacular stunts and radical strategies. Its well orchestrated campaigns against whaling and sealing have created an image of the organization, among fishers and fisheries managers in particular, as a militant and devoted environmental activist sadly biassed in its understanding of marine issues. The image is still there to some extent, but it is gradually becoming less accurate given the ways in which Greenpeace currently seeks to influence the management of international fisheries. Their fisheries campaign is not, as we shall see, totally void of action on the high seas. It is, however, as typically characterized by lobbying, research and collaboration as it is by militant confrontations and direct action.

The campaign is fairly wide in scope, and it is based on a rich repertoire of strategies - with industrial fishing as one of the main targets. The tone of the campaign is neatly captured in its slogan Achallenging the global grab for declining fish stocks‡, which again is based on a conception of overfishing as the biggest single threat to marine biodiversity. In its analysis and diagnosis, Greenpeace is in agreement with the more Aofficial‡ version described earlier. Referring to findings reported by FAO among others, Greenpeace concludes that there is a global fisheries crisis which A...is primarily a result of over harvesting‡ (Greenpeace: AThe Global Fisheries Crisis‡, p.1). There is according to Greenpeace, a Apolitics of overfishing‡ (p.2) nurtured by government policies (state subsidies), political expediency (ignoring scientific advice)
and destructive fishing practices (driftnets, bottom trawling), all of which are targets of the campaign. Its principles, aims and intellectual footing are laid out in the organization’s *Principles for Ecologically Responsible, Low-Impact Fisheries* (Greenpeace, May 1998). This document contains both a detailed description of the principles that ecologically responsible fisheries must adhere to, proposals for improving current management practices and an outline of a precautionary approach to fisheries management. Pointing to our poor understanding of the marine environment and reiterating the facts about overfishing and the threats to marine biodiversity, the document calls for an approach to management that *shifts the burden of proof onto those that seek to exploit marine ecosystems and onto those institutions responsible for fisheries management, to demonstrate that there will be minimal risk of serious or reversible harm.* In this respect, the current fisheries campaign should probably be seen as part of a long term strategy to change, in fairly fundamental ways, the ways in which management decisions are made and justified.

One of the main targets of Greenpeace’s campaign is industrial fishing, defined as fisheries that *catch fish not for human consumption but for making industrial fish meal and oil.* These fisheries have been targeted through an interesting mixture of activities on land and at sea as a few examples from Greenpeace’s activities, particularly in Britain, and in North Sea fisheries will show. In Britain the campaign has included regular contacts with Government Ministers and Members of Parliament on the need to improve management practices in the North Sea, and to strengthen the Common Fisheries Policy of the European Union on industrial fisheries. There has been a string of correspondence from Greenpeace UK to Ministers and Secretaries of Agriculture and Fisheries on fishing practices and management measures in North Sea fisheries - some of which contains detailed proposals for improvement. The responses from government ministers have all been polite and matter of factly - and, not surprisingly, in defence of the government’s record on the issue. The tone has, however, been somewhat strained on occasions as when the Minister closed one of his letters by pointing out that *I do not think that the apparent reluctance of Greenpeace to acknowledge that the Government is doing anything is helpful, any more than throwing fish around Whitehall is helpful.* In Parliament, Greenpeace has mustered support from a handful of MPs who have either publicly supported the campaign or pressed for government action on the issue. There have also been appeals to companies to refrain from purchasing the products of industrial fishing from particular, so-called sensitive areas in the North Sea, and contacts with scientists - many of whom have come out in support of the campaign.
Perhaps the most original initiative - strengthening the growing image of the organization as moderate and responsible - has been the commissioning of a legal opinion from an established legal firm showing that the UK government actually has the power to close industrial fishing in sensitive areas. There has also been collaboration with other environmental groups, and even with fishermen, on a joint statement calling for action from the British Fisheries Minister.

In the US Greenpeace has been running a campaign against factory trawlers in the North Pacific and on the east coast - on the ground that these can have a devastating effect on fish stocks and the marine environment in general. Large quantities of by catch and the discarding of unwanted fish, overfishing and a growing harvesting capacity far in excess of the resource base are problems fuelling the campaign. On this particular issue there has been attempts at educating and mobilizing the public, for example through a Save our Seas bus tour during the summer of 1998. Lobbying efforts in Congress led to a moratorium on factory trawlers and other large vessels in the Atlantic herring and mackerel fisheries. The organization was also called to testify before the Senate subcommittee on Oceans and Fisheries in March 1998 - on a bill that would have closed US fisheries to new factory trawlers. Even though lobbying efforts by the industry all but killed the bill, the opportunity to testify is a sign that Greenpeace has been acquiring some sort of insider status and official recognition. The organization's role as a serious player in fisheries issues is also confirmed by its successful lobbying of Congress on the strengthening of the Magnuson Act in 1996, and in its effective opposition to efforts by the factory trawler companies to privatize US fisheries by introducing individual transferable quotas (ITQs).

While lobbying ministers and politicians and appealing publicly for government action are important strategies in this campaign, Greenpeace has also exerted direct pressure on the industry itself. As part of its campaign against industrial fishing, it has monitored some 10 000 square miles of the North Sea in order to keep industrial fishing out of areas defined as sensitive, it has met the industrial fleet directly at sea - delivering leaflets, and boarding vessels to explain the reasons for the campaign, and it has taken direct action against Danish trawlers fishing for sandeels off the Scottish coast - preventing them from fishing by attaching buoys to their nets (Greenpeace, 1996; Gray et al., 1999). It has engaged in a number of direct actions against factory trawlers - in the US by wrapping chains around five factory trawlers in Seattle, and by forming a human barricade preventing all trawlers to leave the harbour. In Norway Greenpeace activists took direct action against the launch of the trawler American Monarch by speeding towards the shipyard in their well-known inflatables, displaying a large banner that read American Monster - Plunderer of the
Seasons on the dry dock. Other strategies include efforts to document the overfishing of particular stocks (Southern bluefin tuna for example) and the disastrous effects of particular harvesting methods (driftnets). Documentation and the collection of information (on stocks, fishing practices and the marine environment) are, to be sure, important ingredients of the fisheries campaign as are efforts at civic education. On this point Greenpeace gives an impression of taking its "homework" seriously by engaging in fact finding and organizing and publishing the facts in reports, leaflets and press releases.

This fairly superficial analysis of the Greenpeace fisheries campaign indicates that the organization is practising a strategy of political diversification, fighting - as it were - on several fronts simultaneously. There is, perhaps, nothing new in this as the dual strategy approach has long been a trademark of environmental groups and organizations. There may, however, be a subtle change of emphasis in the case of Greenpeace. The fisheries campaign is not just about mobilizing public opinion and pressuring politicians - setting the agenda by performing highly publicized stunts and evoking powerful symbols. There is also the ambition, albeit somewhat muted, to participate in the regular political process and to wield influence by working with the political establishment to find solutions to specific problems. Protest and confrontation certainly remain important strategies, but there is a greater willingness to cooperate with government, science and industry - and a considerable emphasis on research and documentation.

**In partnership with industry: WWF and the Marine Stewardship Council**

The World Wide Fund for Nature is a relatively old organization with a fairly recent engagement in the fisheries. Its work, however, is of considerable interest as it has taken a new and original approach to the issue of sustainable fishing. The framework of this novel approach is the WWF's "Endangered Seas Campaign" which was initiated in 1995, and to which the organization vowed to commit more than 1 mill. US dollars a year for three years. As is the case with most, if not all, fisheries campaigns, the ultimate justification for action is the global crisis in the fisheries: falling catches, the near extinction of certain stocks, destruction of ecosystems and lost livelihoods. The overall aim of the campaign has been to build the political will necessary to end overfishing and improve management regimes - putting pressure on government and industry by mobilizing public opinion. *If we are to save marine fisheries - both as an important source of food and a vital component of oceans ecosystems - we must somehow bring to bear the same*
worldwide public concern that banned the trade in elephant ivory and outlawed commercial whaling (WWF, 1996). Of special interest here, however, is the organization’s plan or strategy of promoting sustainable fisheries through the use of economic, or market, incentives.

At the centre of the strategy is the AMarine Stewardship Council (MSC) - initiated as a partnership between WWF and Unilever, one of the world’s largest buyers of seafood, in February, 1996. The Council was established a year later as an independent, non-profit, non-governmental group whose initial task has been one of establishing principles and criteria for sustainable fishing - and setting standards of sustainability for particular fisheries. Eventually, the Council will be responsible for enforcing those standards by issuing accreditation certificates to the fisheries that meet them - permitting the products from these fisheries to display an on-pack logo indicating that they originate from sustainable, well-managed fish stocks. What then, is to be certified and who will do the certifying? According to MSC, assessments will comprise the status of the stock being exploited, the impact of fishing on the broader ecosystem, non-targeted species included, and the robustness and strength of the management framework in place (MSC, 1998). As such, assessments are not just a matter of evaluating the behaviour of private producers, but as much about passing judgment on government policies and management institutions. The fisheries which conform to the principles and criteria set, will be eligible for certification - on a voluntary basis - by independent MSC-accredited certifiers. As of June 1998, five major certification companies had shown an interest in the scheme. The bottom line of this strategy is to encourage seafood companies to purchase fish products only from certified sources and convince consumers that by choosing such products they contribute to more sustainable fisheries. The basic idea, then, is to mobilize the power of consumers and the interest of the public to improve management practices, and to force fishers, processors and managers to restrict harvesting and production to fisheries defined as sustainable by MSC standards. The arrangement, it is argued, will give the motivated citizen the opportunity to wield political influence by using their sovereignty as consumers.

Thus far, the efforts of the Council have mostly gone into working out the principles and standards for sustainable fishing - mainly through a series of consultations, organized as relatively small workshops, with several groups of stakeholders throughout the world. Workshops were held in Bagshot (UK), Boston and Bremen throughout 1996, in Vancouver, Canberra, Aberdeen, Wellington, Cape Town and Bergen during 1997. Apart from elaborating principles and standards, the workshops brought together various stakeholder groups such as fishers, processors,
environmentalists and consumers around a goal presumably shared by all: a more sustainable fishery. They also, of course, provided the opportunity to sound out, and convince these groups on the merits of the initiative. Representatives of WWF and Unilever have travelled extensively to brief government officials, representatives of the fishing industry, academics and environmentalists on the issue, and to mobilize support for the initiative. There have been presentations in governmental institutions such as the British House of Lords, in international organizations like the FAO and at international conferences such as the Second World Fisheries Congress - and attempts at mobilizing stakeholders to publicly endorse the initiative by signing a letter of support. According to a MSC Newsletter, the reaction has been extremely encouraging. The National Audubon Society, which has its own Living Oceans Programme has signed up. So have several Australian seafood producers and British supermarket chains among others (see WWF Arctic Bulletin, no. 2, 1997). Several steps toward an institutionalization of the initiative have also been taken: A project manager with some experience of fisheries issues from OECD has been appointed, the organization (if that is the right word) now has a chairman, former British Environment Secretary John Gummer, and the principles of sustainable fishing are in place.

That said, the success of the strategy is still uncertain. Tests that have been conducted in several fisheries worldwide indicate that the principles and criteria have very limited applicability and that current standards are difficult to enforce. As certification is voluntary, the impact of the scheme will depend on demand; so far few, if any, demands for certification have been reported - and the task of persuading industry or governments to sign up for accreditation of their fisheries and/or management schemes may prove a formidable one. In addition, the initiative has been met with considerable scepticism and, in some cases with outright hostility - from environmental organizations such as Friends of the Earth, from the fishing industry and from government officials such as the Fisheries Ministers of the Nordic countries.

Whatever its impact, the Marine Stewardship Council initiative represents a fairly unconventional alliance between big business and big environmentalism - and a novel approach to the problem of overfishing. As a strategy of promoting sustainable fisheries, it signifies a strong belief in market forces as opposed to direct action or traditional lobbying, and a willingness to join forces with industry for the sake of a good cause. As such, the initiative could be seen as a way of bypassing conventional politics and government action by appealing directly to the informed citizen or customer. However, as Gray et al. (forthcoming) have observed, the
organizers of MSC probably see it as a parallel force, or even as an indirect way of playing pressure politics, rather than a substitute for government intervention. According to representatives of both WWF and Unilever, the initiative is designed to complement regulation by making *the environmentally necessary politically feasible through the use of economic incentives* (Sutton, 1996:11). On this point, the organizers certainly see themselves as a force to be reckoned with. In the words of a WWF spokesman: *One thing is certain: Where industry and the market lead, governments will likely follow* (Sutton, 1996:12). The truth of the matter is probably that in order to achieve its ultimate aim - sustainable fisheries - the Council may indeed have to play politics. Fisheries are usually managed by governments, governments need to be persuaded that certification by MSC is the way to achieve sustainability, and they must be willing (and able) to adjust management practices and institutions accordingly.

**In partnership with government? Friends of the Earth as insiders**

In January, 1988 the Norwegian Society for Conservation of Nature (Friends of the Earth, Norway), made a request that became a catalyst for a heated debate on the institutional structure of fisheries management: the organization demanded representation on the Management Board, an advisory body to the government on matters of fisheries management. The issue, initially about environmental participation on the Board, quickly became part of a more general debate on corporatism and on the pros and cons of including a wider range of interests in management policy-making.

Before the request for participation was made, in a letter to the Director General of Fisheries, fisheries management had not loomed large on the agenda of Friends of the Earth (FoE). The organization, like other environmental groups in Norway, did not in fact regard the fisheries as an environmental issue proper until the Barents Sea cod stock took a serious down-turn in the late 1980s. From then on, however, the organization started to devote attention and resources to fisheries issues, by establishing two special units - the Barents Sea and the North Sea secretariats - and by requesting, on behalf of these units, a seat on the Management Board. The request was made after a comprehensive debate, and the idea of formal representation met with little internal

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5 The board is the centerpiece of the management policy community, a corporatist body counting representatives from industry (fishers as well as processors), government and marine science. Its role is advisory, but its recommendations on management goals and practices are important premises for regulatory policy-making.
opposition. The fishing industry, as we shall see, was less enthusiastic.

Questioning the wisdom of exclusive participation and user-group influence in fisheries management, FoE, Norway concluded that present arrangements favoured the short-term interests of industry (for higher quotas and fewer restrictions) at the expense of long-term effects (on the resource) and the public interest (of conservation and sustainability). According to the organization, environmental representation was required to counter the strong position of industry in management, and to make sure that resource conservation and sustainable use became important parameters of decision-making. As a challenge to the existing order of things, the claim was justified by pointing to the 1987 report of the Brundtland Commission (AOur Common FutureB). In this report Gro Harlem Brundtland - from 1988 the Prime Minister of Norway - argued that the participation of non-governmental organizations was essential in decisions affecting the environment. In principle, at least, FoE had support for its demand at the very top of government.

In practice, however, there was little official support at first. Questioned on the issue in Parliament, the Minister of Fisheries and the Minister of the Environment both answered that it merited further discussion. When a new Board was appointed at the end of 1988, the Fisheries Minister decided that the environment was best represented by the state as it were, and identified the Directorate for the Management of Natural Resources, an agency under the Ministry of the Environment, as the new and AgreenB member of the board. Official resistance, however, was soon overtaken by events as the cod fisheries underwent a major crisis in 1989/90. Dwindling stocks led to considerable cuts in quotas, and fuelled a vigorous debate on the quality of the current management regime. There were protests from municipal authorities along the coast, and fisheries management and policy were the subject of forceful proclamations from the three northernmost county councils. There were demonstrations in coastal communities, and even the church got involved. Responsibility was placed where most people felt it belonged: with the AcosyB, corporatist alliance of government and industry. There were proposals for ending industry representation on the Management Board and for shifting management tasks from the Ministry of Fisheries to the Ministry of Environment. Events, in other words, played into the hands of Friends of the Earth. The organizationBs request for representation on the Board was eventually met (half way so to speak) in November 1990 when it was allowed to send an observer to board meetings. The observer can take the floor, put forward proposals and Asound outB government officials and industry representatives on specific issues. He or she can not take part in the final voting.
The decision to grant observer status to Friends of the Earth, Norway met with vociferous opposition from individual members of the Board as well as from the Norwegian Fishermen’s Association. *We have had enough. The Association should now reconsider its participation on the Board*, said a spokesman for one local branch. Others voiced concerns about *participation from organizations and groups based on irrational sentiments.* There were, at the time, fears that public interest groups with little understanding of fishing and fisheries science would come to dominate management policy-making. Several local and regional branches of the Fishermen’s Association tried to put pressure on government by passing resolutions to the effect that this had to be stopped.  

For FoE this step into *officialdom* was hardly dramatic. The organization has never been the most militant of environmental groups, and it seems to have adapted fairly quickly to the *culture* and working methods of the Management Board. Its presence is now generally accepted, and there is broad consensus among other representatives that the new *member* has made a useful and *responsible* contribution. The exact nature of this contribution, however, is a little unclear. What is evident is that participation is more of an opportunity for *eavesdropping*, for acquiring information rather than a source of influence over management policies. Given that the chief concern of an organization such as FoE is the relationship between stock assessments, scientific recommendations and the TAC (Total Allowable Catch) finally agreed upon, participation on the board must be close to irrelevant from an environmental perspective. The issues and decisions that most directly affect the ecological dimensions of fisheries management are the domain of another body - the Norwegian-Russian Fisheries Commission - whose deliberations are far less transparent than those of the board. That said, we must hasten to add that some of the issues debated by the board - such as the design and implementation of quota restrictions and the need for additional management measures - will be of obvious interest to environmentalists. On this point, participation provides an opportunity to learn the tricks of the trade and to confront *industry representatives and government officials on the environmental implications of particular management practices.* Representation has not made FoE an influential player in fisheries policy making. The decision to make the organization a *partial insider* so to speak is still significant in that it reflects a growing perception of fisheries

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6 See for instance *Fiskaren* (a fishermen’s weekly), November 30, 1990 and *Sunnmørsposten* (a daily newspaper), December 5, 1990.
management as too important to be left to industry and government alone, and a recognition of environmental concerns as relevant parameters of policy-making.

CONCLUSION

Generalizing from a few cases is, of course, a serious violation of scientific etiquette. Still, we risk the tentative conclusion that, with regard to the fisheries sector, the dominant strategies of environmental groups are cooperative, pragmatic, instrumental and democratic. There is a willingness to work with and even within established institutions to influence management policies. Current institutions are not rejected outright, but perceived as arrangements in need of reform - to be achieved by cooperation rather than confrontation. Teaming up with industry (WWF), collaborating with government (Friends of the Earth, Norway) and comprehensive lobbying (Greenpeace) are essentially institutional approaches adopted to influence management policy and practice rather than strategies aimed at mobilizing the attentive public for fundamental change. This does not mean, as illustrated by the case of Greenpeace in particular, that direct action is necessarily a thing of the past. Most groups will seek to combine confrontation and collaboration (Hjelmar, 1996). With regard to fisheries issues, however, the former may be more of a back-up strategy than a defining mode of operation. There is, in other words, less emphasis on mobilizing the public, and more efforts to be politically effective through participation and consultation. As such, we are looking at strategies that fit into a general trend towards compromise and pragmatism observed in a study of the environmental movement in the US where groups have adapted their perspectives and tactics to seek greater acceptance among policy makers and to meet the changing nature of the policy game itself (Bosso, 1991:165).

The choice of strategy is probably contextual in that it has to do with factors and events that have made it easier to accommodate the values and concerns of environmental organizations in the management policy process: the inescapable fact of overcapacity and overfishing and the destruction of ecosystems - developments that have caused grave concern about the future of the fisheries in international organizations and among national governments. The outcome has been a gradual penetration of environmental values and concepts into the discourse on fisheries management, signified by a tangible shift of emphasis from issues of economics and technology to problems of sustainability, stewardship, biodiversity and transparency. This, in turn, has created a better fit between the values and agendas of environmental organizations on the one hand and
those of government officials and industry representatives on the other - providing new opportunities for access. There is also the question of whether minds can really be converted by direct action and overblown rhetoric since fish hardly have the same public appeal as seals and whales, thus offering fewer prospects for success by performing spectacular stunts on the high seas. Besides, the conversion of minds may actually be a less pressing task since international organizations and national governments have gradually adopted much of the green fisheries agenda. The challenge, perhaps, is not how to pressure policy-makers by mobilizing public opinion, but how to gain acceptance and make oneself useful in solving management problems. In that case, the choice of cooperative strategies may well be interpreted as a calculated response to changing circumstances and to fundamental characteristics of the issue area itself.

Cooperation, however, poses a dilemma for any organization based on ideas and issues rather than interests, and whose ultimate justification rests with its capacity to oppose, criticize and resist state policies: confrontation (and publicity) or collaboration (and influence)? How far can environmental organizations go in accepting the rules of the game without losing political credibility and support among their traditional constituencies - and with it their financial footing? There may, in other words, be a trade-off to be made between effectiveness and visibility, between the ambition to influence public policy through compromise and logrolling and the need to maintain public attention and support by engaging in direct action. With regard to environmental action in the fisheries, the balance has tilted towards efficiency, probably for reasons already alluded to. Assuming that current strategies are rational adaptations to prevailing circumstances, one would expect the former to change if and when, say, the official and political backing of sustainable fisheries falter or prove ineffective. Environmental organizations have proved flexible in the past, and their recent (?) willingness to cooperate should be interpreted as a situational and issue-specific response rather than a permanent change of strategy.

At the core of the environmental strategy is an attempt at demonstrating the public interest nature of fisheries issues. As such it challenges conventional definitions of what fisheries management is about - questioning customary practices as well as institutional frameworks. Fishers and fisheries managers have, of course, always paid lip service to conservation and stewardship, but there have been few serious attempts at underpinning these concerns institutionally. However timely and legitimate the pressures for institutional adjustment and policy change, the bigger issue of who should have a say about what in fisheries management remains unsolved.

There is, for example, the question of how demands for environmental participation can be
justified. In as much as there is universal agreement that stocks are overfished, biological diversity threatened and the survival of the resource itself is at stake, there will be requests for reaching beyond user groups when making management decisions. To what extent then, will the inclusion of environmental groups strengthen democracy in management decision-making? It will certainly provide for more openness and transparency - which may be a good thing in itself. Its contribution to democracy, however, is also a question of the representative base of these groups. Who do they claim to represent, and what are the grounds for such claims? These are questions that need to be asked simply because some of these organizations do not have members in the conventional sense of the term. They have supporters rather than a stable membership base, and they represent ideas, values and issues rather than a particular category of people (Jordan and Maloney, 1997). We call them Apublic interest groupsÂ¿, but we cannot take for granted that all of them in fact speak on behalf of the public. The assumption, made within the fishing industry in particular, that these groups may have hidden agendas, have tended to undermine their claim of acting in the public interest.

The case of environmental action in the fisheries indicate that the perception of the issue at hand may be decisive when it comes to defining the group of legitimate stakeholders. The evidence of overfishing and ecological waste is rarely disputed. It has generated a political commitment to AsustainableÂ¿ and AresponsibleÂ¿ fishing (whatever the precise meaning of these terms) that inevitably links fisheries policy to the environmental agenda and extends the potential constituency of fisheries policy dramatically. Who then - within this new order of things - should be considered legitimate stakeholders and be given the opportunity to influence management decisions? Given that some form of extended co-management is both likely and necessary, how should the community of interests be defined? Is it sufficient to be AconcernedÂ¿ about and/or AinterestedÂ¿ in the issue at hand to be considered a legitimate participant? Or does one have to be AaffectedÂ¿ by decisions in a more immediate and direct way? How do we strike a balance between the legitimate and vested interests of user groups, whose livelihoods depend on management decisions, and the genuine concerns of other stakeholders?

The environmental initiatives and campaigns described above are a challenge to the privileged position of industry (and government) in management decision-making. The demands for a more open and transparent process have long been an integral part of the environmental agenda regardless of the issue area in question (Paehlke, 1988; Barry, 1996). Directed at fisheries management regimes, they are also emphatic statements of distrust whose long-term effects could
be a breaking up of the established policy community of user-groups, scientists and government officials; a development that may not necessarily be resisted by national governments. Policy making, as Maloney et al. (1994:21) have reminded us, is not a case of groups begging government to let them in, but of government trying to make use of what exists in the group society. If environmental groups are perceived as resourceful, knowledgeable and cooperative, there will be opportunities for access and (perhaps) influence. The industry, on its part, may be less forthcoming due to the uncertainty created by new actors and demands - as indicated by the Norwegian case. Considering the growing international support for sustainable fishing, and the actual provisions for more openness and transparency in international fisheries agreements (Hoel, 1998), the industry will resist broader participation at its peril - risking its political credibility in the process.
References


