

CAPE

*Coalition pour des Accords
de Pêche Équitables*

CFFA

*Coalition for Fair Fisheries
Arrangements*

Commentary:

West African octopus better protected by the EU?

In order to prevent the marketing of young (undersized) octopus caught in eastern central Atlantic waters, particularly in West Africa, the European Commission put forward a proposal on October 12th 2005 to increase the minimum weight of gutted octopus caught in this area to 500 grams. This is in response to scientific advice from the Fishery Committee for the eastern central Atlantic (CECAF) indicating that octopus are being over-fished throughout the area.

The proposed regulation¹ stipulates that it will be forbidden “*for octopus under the minimum size of 500g (gutted) to be retained on board or be transhipped, landed, transported, stored, sold, displayed or offered for sale, but shall be returned immediately to the sea*”. This measure will apply to both EU and non-EU vessels and includes the marketing, including imports, of octopus from this area.

CAPE believes that adopting this measure is a positive step forward for the regeneration of octopus stocks in West African waters. In terms of marketing, it will serve to support the region’s artisanal octopus fishing sector that through selective fishing methods (e.g. pot fishing) and in compliance with the new measure, is able to select larger sized individuals while at the same time releasing live undersized octopus back into the sea.

It is also significant that this regulation is being implemented shortly after a partnership agreement has been signed with Morocco, and at a time when the agreements with Mauritania and Senegal are being negotiated. Against a background of dialogue with actors from the third countries concerned, the measure should see promotion and support for the assistance measures required by third countries, notably through financial compensation.

In fact, certain illegal practices used in the region to fish octopus, e.g. placing a small mesh lining inside a trawler, or non-respect for fishing zones, are today resulting in large quantities of young octopus being caught. If adequate control is not put in place, the adoption of this measure could lead to larger discard quantities by trawlers. In the case of trawlers, the octopus discarded will in most cases not survive.

It should also be noted that in countries like Spain, there is a large market today for such undersized octopus. Controls at landing ports like Las Palmas (Canary Islands) and Vigo (Spain) should also be strengthened. If this is not the case, then the measure will have the negative effect of giving a boost to the illegal marketing of undersized octopus.

¹ http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2005/com2005_0478en01.pdf

For more information

CFFA details
