

What is Excessive Environmentalism and its Impact on Fisheries?

“Radical-excessive environmentalism” is not only unnecessary but harmful to the health and the wealth of the world. The best description of radical or excessive environmentalism is by comparing it to cholesterol. Cholesterol in reasonable portion (medically known as the “good cholesterol”) is absolutely necessary to maintain a healthy human body. But the same substance, in excess (medically known as the “bad cholesterol”), can lead to a heart attacks with serious consequences for the human body, including death.

The same concept applies to the way we should care for our Planet. We need to practice “good environmentalism” to maintain our Planet healthy for current and future generations. However the practice of excessive “bad” environmentalism can lead to considerable damages for the Earth and its inhabitants.

As we headed towards the end of the twentieth century, politicians were guided by and struggled with the twin imperatives of expanding economic activity and reducing poverty. Politicians have found it difficult to balance these with the new third imperative of protecting the environment. Today, the emphasis has shifted away from people and towards intangible and ill-defined environmental goals. The influence and impact of radical environmentalists, concentrating solely on the protection of the environment, and articulated through emotive arguments, is now of huge concern. The disregard or lack of concern for communities and socio/economic factors has already caused disastrous results for human and wild species.

There are many expressions of radical environmentalism, each of which has the potential to harm our global environment. Taken together, the various facets of radical environmentalism have the capability of annihilating any hope of providing sustainable sources of food and decent livelihoods to human beings. Over the past two decades, radical environmentalism has led several governments (EU, USA) to place the importance of environmental considerations way above the production of food and/or above the economic activities that generate greater prosperity.

Several sources can produce excessive environmentalism. It can be the result of ill-fated decisions by international institutions (the rejection by IWC of Greenland’s request for the harvesting of seven Humpback whales), of politically-motivated regional decisions (the discriminatory ban by EU on seals products) or financially-driven initiatives by wealthy NGOs (eco/labelling programmes).

Sometimes the excessive environmentalism results from the amalgamation of several obviously legitimate and justifiable measures which, combined together, can create excessive and unacceptable conditions counter-productive to the contemplated objectives. This is precisely what is happening to Fisheries.

“Too much of it” is as damageable as “not enough of it”.

Fisheries and Excessive Environmentalism

In 1995, Japan in cooperation with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), conveyed the International Conference for the Sustainable Contribution of Fisheries to Food Security. Ninety-five countries attended the conference in Kyoto, which confirmed the prime importance of Fisheries in the global food production. A year later, in 1996, the World Food Summit held in Rome, reaffirmed the essential role of Fisheries in global food production.

In the final Declaration of the Rome Summit, the 185 states represented agreed to the following: “*We pledge our political will and our common and national commitment to achieving food security for all and to an ongoing effort to eradicate hunger in all countries, with an immediate view to reducing the number of undernourished people to half their present level no later than 2015.*”

2015 is next year... and what is the situation almost 20 years later? The number of people currently suffering from hunger and malnourishment remains practically unchanged. Has the international community fulfilled its objectives established 20 years ago? Definitely not. Were Fisheries capable of fulfilling its part of the mission? Absolutely not. Are Fisheries responsible for this situation? Certainly not. The fault lies elsewhere.

Of all human activities involving the production of food, fisheries have been, over the last two decades, the main target of excessive/radical environmentalism. As environmentalism has become an increasing source of financial gains for NGOs and of electoral gains for politicians, it has surpassed in importance the production of food and/or economic activities that generate greater prosperity. Taken individually, some of the environmental considerations - such as quotas - are not only valid, but even necessary to ensure the sustainability of fisheries. But the problem resides in the multiplication and overlapping of so many restrictions, regulations and prohibitions.

In the Western world, the influence of excessive environmentalism over fisheries has been disastrous and, unfortunately, this trend seems to spread globally: commercial and traditional fishers are forced out of business or simply forced into illegality in order to survive; developing countries are unable to meet the conditions required for exportation of their catches to developed countries; fishers are not considered any more as those brave human beings risking their life to feed the World and their families, they are categorized as “destroyers of nature” thus discouraging entire generations of potential young fishers...

In such a climate, how fisheries are expected to play its role and fulfill its obligations? Fisheries are going through difficult times and actions should be applied to correct the situation. However, we cannot accept that financial and political interests take advantage of the situation to create useless environmental considerations that will, in turn, counter our efforts and responsibilities to feed people and improve their standards of living.

Being directed at (against) people, excessive environmentalism, as applied to fisheries, will bring the loss of livelihoods and only increase hunger, malnutrition and poverty.

However, there are hopes as we shall look at the five Strategic Objectives adopted by the FAO in 2013, to restructure our obligations towards the elimination of hunger and malnourishment. Again the role of fisheries will be a determining factor in the success or failure of these objectives.