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## **Environmental stewardship as a new form of fisheries governance**

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Environmental stewardship is a form of governance that reflects the rising tide of influence on fisheries management exerted by environmental principles such as marine protected areas, the ecosystem-based approach and the precautionary approach. Our first aim is to assess the extent to which environmental stewardship has moved beyond the level of rhetoric, whereby lip service is paid to such principles by regulators, and has reached the level of power, whereby environmental priorities hold sway over the decision-making process. In other words, we consider how far environmental stewardship has infiltrated the political system by constructing a powerful network of governance – including what is known in the international environmental politics literature as an 'epistemic community'. Our second aim is to establish the foundational conception on which this environmental stewardship rests: is it nature conservation or sustainable development? We find elements of both conceptions in most of the sources of the environmental stewardship mode of fisheries governance (though in differing proportions), but we foresee a threat to the fishing industry if the nature conservation conception becomes dominant. Our conclusion is that the best strategy for the industry is to embrace the sustainable development conception of environmental stewardship, and to demonstrate that the objectives of the nature conservation conception can, and must, be accommodated within the over-arching conception of sustainable development. Otherwise, the industry could find itself increasingly marginalised in fisheries decision-making by a top-down imposition of nature conservationist-environmental stewardship imperatives.

**Keywords:** environmental stewardship; epistemic community; fisheries; governance; influence; participation; power; sustainability

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### **Introduction**

Our study focuses on two issues. One issue is the claim that fisheries management is increasingly driven by an environmental imperative to the point that we can now talk of a new form of governance: environmental stewardship. This claim rests on the assertion that decision-makers are so influenced by the green agenda that environmentalism now exerts hegemonic power over the fishing industry and fisheries policy. The other issue is whether this environmental stewardship is inherently top-down, reflecting the views of an 'epistemic community' composed of leading scientists and environmental non-governmental organisations (ENGO) who espousing nature conservationism; or whether it can become a bottom-up form of governance, by being voluntarily embraced, and thereby influenced in the direction of sustainable development, by the fishing industry itself. In exploring these issues, we set out the case for and against the claim that there has been a power shift in fisheries governance away from the traditional focus on fish stocks to a new environmental agenda. Then we discuss the implications for the fishing industry of such a shift – in particular, the danger that it faces marginalisation from an environmental decision-making process informed by nature conservationism, if it does not itself adopt an environmentally friendly strategy in terms of sustainable development. However, to contextualise this discussion, we first explain our theoretical and conceptual framework.

### **Theoretical and conceptual framework**

There are three elements within our treatise that need explaining: epistemic community; environmental stewardship; and governance.

Haas (1990: 349) coined the term 'epistemic community' to denote "transnational networks of knowledge based communities that are both politically empowered through their claims to exercise authoritative knowledge and motivated by shared causal and principled beliefs". In his words, epistemic communities are populated by ecologists who "share a common belief in the need for a holistic analysis", and are "focused on the need for environmental protection as an absolute end; they do not view environmental policies in terms of opportunity costs" (Haas, 1990: 351). A celebrated example of the power of epistemic communities is the ozone-layer issue, where the views of scientists and environmentalists eventually succeeded in persuading the politicians in the USA and Europe to take action (Haas, 1990: 354-358). The question is whether there is an epistemic community in the fisheries-crisis issue, and if so, what is its defining objective, how powerful is it, and what is the role, if any, of fishers in it?

Two conceptions of 'environmental stewardship' may be distinguished: the nature-conservation conception and the sustainable-development conception. The nature-conservation conception views the restoration and preservation of habitats and ecosystems as ends-in-themselves, irrespective of the economic and social consequences. In relation to fisheries, this conception is exemplified in the (draft) report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP, 2004: para 10.78) on the environmental impact of fishing in the UK: "We recommend that the principal objective of UK fisheries policy should be to protect marine ecosystems ... The policy should have the secondary socio-economic objective of promoting a thriving fishing industry and communities. Where there is conflict between the primary and socio-economic objectives the protection of the ecosystems should take precedence".

By contrast, the sustainable-development conception views the protection of habitats and ecosystems as a means towards the fulfilment of economic and social objectives laid down by society. In relation to fisheries, this conception is exemplified in the recommendations of PMSU (2004: 11): "The overarching aim of fisheries management should be *to maximise the return to the UK of the sustainable use of fisheries resources and protection of the marine environment*" (emphasis in the original).

The issue of marine protected areas (MPA) illustrates these two conceptions. Proponents of environmental stewardship agree that MPA are an important part of this mode of fisheries governance, but there is profound disagreement on what their purpose is. As Huggett (2005: 272) points out, for fishers, their purpose is to establish spatial planning (sustainable development); for greens, their purpose is to establish no-take-zones (nature conservationism): "On the one hand, marine protected areas are seen as a tool to resolve all the conflicting interests and uses of specific marine areas in order to achieve some level of 'sustainability'. On the other, protected areas are seen as no-go zones representing both the best and last examples of what it is we value in the natural marine environment: areas that must be protected at all costs at the exclusion of all other interests". Defra (2006: 16) expresses the sustainable-development view: "we do not believe that a blanket approach to banning activities in all sensitive areas would be consistent with our sustainable development objectives". The RCEP (2004a: 206) expresses the nature-conservation view: "We ... view a network of MPAs and reserves as a key tool for bringing about a significant improvement in ecosystem protection".

It is similar with the other principles that are central to the environmental stewardship agenda, such as the ecosystem-based approach (EBA) and the precautionary approach (PA). Like MPA, the notions of EBA and PA are 'essentially contested', i.e. they can be given legitimately different interpretations. EBA may be interpreted as either an exclusively biological notion (nature conservationism), or as one in which humans are included as part of the ecosystem (sustainable development), while PA can be interpreted as either independent of economic considerations (nature conservationism), or as conditional upon cost effectiveness (sustainable development).

In all three cases, the alternative interpretations given are each legitimate applications of the concept of environmental stewardship. However, we argue that the nature-conservationist interpretation is rapidly becoming de rigueur, and that if fishers want to prevent its domination, they must emphasise their own environmental stewardship credentials by embracing more systematically the notion of sustainable development. What is at stake is whether environmental stewardship will come to mean a top-down imposition of nature conservationism, or a bottom-up enunciation of sustainable development.

The term 'governance' (which is about "where society is steered from"; Jordan *et al.*, 2005: 206), refers to all forces driving forward a public agenda, including government regulations, economic incentives, and social pressures. The extent to which government has given way to governance, as traditional dominance by the state is being replaced by economic and social forces, is much debated in political science (Jordan *et al.*, 2005). Our assumption is that governance includes both governmental and non-governmental forces. In the case of fisheries, this means that a range of actors, often referred to as 'stakeholders' (including fishers, environmentalists, regulators, scientists, community representatives and the onshore market chain) exert influence over policy and practice.

## **The case for a power shift in governance**

The nub of the case for arguing that environmental stewardship is the newly dominant form of fisheries governance lies in the observation that the focus of management has shifted drastically over the last 20 years, from maximising “long-term commercial catches” to “protecting marine ecosystems” (Dunn, 2005: 209). Hoel (1998: 239) states that “Fisheries has become an environmental issue – the management of living marine resources is increasingly regarded as a subset of environmental politics”. Evidence supporting the argument that this shift is real, rather than rhetorical, comes from six quarters: scientific consensus; international regimes; government policies; nature conservation agencies’ (NCA) interventions; ENGO pressure; and public opinion and the media.

### **Scientific consensus**

The argument here is that there is now a scientific consensus in favour of environmentalism in fisheries management. For over two decades, scientists have been warning of the crises in fish stocks in the North Atlantic, stressing the importance of using the precautionary approach. During the last ten years, the attention of many of them has shifted from fisheries protection to environmental protection, as they propose an EBA to fisheries management. The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) exemplifies Haas’ notion of an epistemic community of scientists, in that it gathers and shares data on marine fish stocks and their environment, acting “as a meeting point for a community of more than 1600 marine scientists from 19 countries around the North Atlantic”, together with affiliate members from elsewhere in the world, and observers from two ENGO (Birdlife International and the Worldwide Fund for Nature - WWF). ICES provides advice to the EU and other marine management authorities “based on the Precautionary Approach ... Marine management should take an integrative view and ... use an Ecosystem Approach. ICES is implementing an Ecosystem Approach in its advisory work” (ICES website).

Another scientific institution that forms part of the environmental stewardship epistemic community is the RCEP, whose recent report on fisheries expresses an uncompromising commitment to environmental stewardship (RCEP, 2004). Further evidence of such a scientific consensus is the letter signed by 1007 scientists from 97 countries (as well as 281 NGO from 62 countries; Fishing News, 10/6/05: 5) requesting that the UN impose a moratorium on long-line fishing in the Pacific Ocean to protect the vulnerable leatherback sea turtle. Gianni (2004: 11) describes a similar scientific consensus regarding the protection of cold-water coral reefs from deep-water bottom trawling.

### **International regimes**

During the last 20 years, the number of international regimes designed to regulate fishery activity for environmental reasons has increased (USCOP, 2004: 357-371). Of those that issue legally binding regulations, the most important is UNCLOS, ratified in 1993, which provides a comprehensive legal basis for the protection of the marine environment. The Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), ratified in 1982, aims to protect several vulnerable species from fishing activity. RAMSAR, ratified in 1975, protects wading birds from fishery disturbance in nearly 1400 wetland sites across the world. The Bonn Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals, ratified in 1983, protects species like the basking shark from by-catch taken by fishers. And the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), ratified in 1993, imposes a duty on states to conserve marine biodiversity.

In addition, several non-legally binding, but still influential, regimes exist (Hoel, 1998). The Jakarta Mandate is a programme to implement the CBD in marine areas. The FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, drafted in 1995 by FAO and 170 countries, commits its signatories to protect ocean systems (the code has been translated into 40 languages, and 52 states have been reported to have brought their fishing industries into line with elements of it (Fishing News International, July 2004: 1, 4). And the International Coral Reef Initiative is a partnership among states and ENGO to implement commitments made to protect coral reefs and related ecosystems.

### **Government policies**

We can find ample evidence of political commitment to environmental stewardship in the plethora of governmental policies designed to protect the marine ecosystem, both at UK and EU levels. In a speech to the Coastal Futures 2003 Conference, the Fisheries Minister, Eliot Morley (2003), refers to the UK “leading role” at the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in securing “a package of challenging international commitments, including a significant reduction in the rate of decline of biodiversity and the application of the ecosystem approach by 2010”.

The UK devolved administrations of the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly Government have also demonstrated their marine environmental credentials, by, respectively, preparing

the ground for a Scottish Marine Park, and protecting 70% of the Welsh coastline. In addition, the Sea Fisheries Committees (SFC) in England and Wales have used their nature conservation powers (conferred in 1995 by the Environment Act) to close several inshore areas to ecologically harmful forms of fishing activity (Fishing News, 22/10/04:20; 14/1/05:5; 21/1/05:3). SFC have also played a major role in obtaining environmental accreditation, including Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification, for local fisheries (ASFC, 2004).

The Commission of the European Communities (CEC) has repeatedly committed itself to protect the marine environment from harmful fishing activity, especially following the 2002 reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Recent commitments include: 1) a communication (CEC, 2002a) declaring that the CFP is “based on the principles of precaution, prevention, rectification at source and the polluter pays”, and “aims at a progressive implementation of an ecosystem-based approach”, entailing a variety of fisheries-environment management measures and fulfilment of obligations under the Habitat and Birds Directives and the Biodiversity Action Plan; and 2) a communication (CEC, 2002b) promising to replace the current “patchwork” of policies with a comprehensive and strategic approach to marine environmental conservation - by 2004, this promise had been partially delivered by a document (CEC, 2004), pledging to “implement an ecosystem approach” by 2010, “halt the decline of biodiversity” by 2010, and, by 2012, to “establish an effective system of representative networks of marine and coastal protected areas covering also the high seas”.

In addition to these declarations of intent, there is evidence of actions to prioritise environmental objectives over commercial interests. For example, CEC (1997) established a ban on drift-net fishing to end cetacean by-catch. In January 2006, infringement proceedings were launched against eight Member States for failing to adequately monitor how well their cetacean populations (whales, dolphins and porpoises) are being protected (Fishing News, 13/1/06: 14). In August 2004, the CEC persuaded the Council to adopt measures to protect deep-sea coral from the impact of bottom trawling around the Azores, Madeira and the Canary Islands.

In September 2004, the European Court of Justice added its considerable weight to the environmental stewardship mode of fisheries governance, with an important ruling on the Wadden Sea cockle fishery that requires a precautionary environmental impact assessment to be carried out on the fishery before its annual licence could be renewed (Fishing News 16/6/06: 7; ECJ, 2004). This ruling has sent shock waves throughout the EU fisheries sector, because it could mean that every existing fishery must be environmentally assessed before it can be allowed to carry on fishing.

### **Nature conservation agency interventions**

Statutory NCA are playing an important role in environmental stewardship within fisheries governance (Eno and Gray, 2005: 193). In the UK, these are publicly funded bodies, which give advice to governments but enjoy a high degree of independence from governmental control. These NCA can recommend the designation of marine nature reserves, and have done so on three occasions. They can and do also recommend the designation of no-take zones, Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives, respectively, and they can and do request Ministerial Orders to prohibit inshore fishing activity in European Marine Sites (EMS). Examples of the impact of their use of these powers include the prohibition of shell-fishing in the Solent EMS in 2004 to protect eelgrass beds, and the prohibition of hydraulic dredging for bivalve molluscs in Camarthen Bay in 2003 (Eno and Gray, 2005: 196). The NCA also claim credit for protecting conservation sites offshore, such as the Darwin Mounds located 185km northwest of Scotland, which were identified by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee in 2002 as an exceptional collection of cold-water coral habitat. The Darwin Mounds became the first candidate SAC notified in UK offshore waters and they were given special protection from fishing activity by the EU in 2003 (Eno and Gray, 2005: 197). At a more strategic level, NCA “advise government on how the EBA can be applied to fisheries ... and when and where the precautionary principle should be applied” (Eno and Gray, 2005: 202). For instance, Scottish Natural Heritage recently gave advice to the Scottish Executive on the best locations for Scotland’s first Coastal and Marine National Park.

### **• ENGO pressure**

Arguably, one of the most powerful forces within the environmental stewardship mode of fisheries governance lies in ENGO pressure. We can see this pressure being applied in four different ways: confrontation, litigation, negotiation, and collaboration (Gray *et al.*, 1999).

- Confrontation: Greenpeace has long been associated with confrontational environmental campaigns against fishing activity. A recent campaign targeted the Channel bass pair-trawl fishery because of its dolphin by-catch - activists “intimidated” bass pair trawlers (Fishing News, 4/3/05:2), and deposited dead dolphins that they claimed had been caught in their nets, in the entrance to Defra’s offices and on the

doorstep of the French Embassy in London (Fishing News, 1/4/05: 2; 23/3/05: 20). Greenpeace also targeted the deep-water bottom-trawl fishery because of its damage to coral reefs on seamounts and to vulnerable fish species – pressure was put on the UN to establish a moratorium on all such fisheries, via a series of disruptive interventions with bottom trawlers, both at sea and in port (Fishing News, 19/11/04: 1, 26/8/05: 5; Fishing News International 01/05: 1). As a result of these well-publicised and repeated actions, Greenpeace is helping to wear down the resistance of fisheries regulators to measures that will curb the activities of deep-water bottom trawlers.

- Litigation: In February 2005, in addition to its confrontational tactics, Greenpeace started a legal case against the UK government for failure to carry out its duties under the EU Habitat Directive to protect dolphins from being caught in bass pair trawling. Greenpeace argued that the ministerial decision to ban pair trawling within the UK 12nm limit would actually increase dolphin deaths, by driving more fishing effort outside this limit, where the rate of fatalities is even higher (Fishing News, 26/8/05:3), and that the ban should be extended out to the EEZ (200nm) limit. However, the UK argued that only the EU could ban fishing outside its 12nm limits, and that its own ban was designed to put pressure on the French government to end the far more lethal French bass pair-trawl fishery. Although Greenpeace lost the case in both the High Court and the Appeal Court (Fishing News, 4/11/05: 5), it did succeed in focusing public attention on the dolphin by-catch problem.

- Negotiation: During the build up to the 2002 CFP reform process, several organisations served as a “bridgehead” for the CEC to put “controversial and ambitious [environmental] proposals” (Dunn, 2005: 213) to the fishing industry in the form of the 2001 Green Paper, and so played their part in the shaping of that reform. Moreover, Todd and Ritchie (2000: 143) claim that ENGO helped to build a coalition in the Council to produce a sufficient majority of Member States to vote in 1998 for a complete ban on drift-net fishing in EU waters to come into effect by 1 January 2002. Thus, ENGO are now routinely included in European consultative bodies, including the CEC Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture and the newly-established Regional Advisory Councils (RAC). As Dunn (2005: 217) remarks, “having sought for years to influence the management of fisheries, the door has swung open”.

Similarly, in the UK, ENGO are constantly being engaged by central government and the devolved administrations, generating “an almost exponential demand on ENGO for expertise, consultation and direct participation on Government ... committees and steering groups” (Dunn, 2005: 217). An example is the advisory group set up by the Scottish Executive in 2005 to give advice on implementing the Sustainable Framework for Scottish Sea Fisheries, within which the fishing industry is outnumbered by representatives from environmental organisations and other bodies. ENGO have also been represented on SFC in England and Wales since 1995, when SFC were given environmental duties.

- Collaboration: The main form of collaboration, and becoming increasingly fashionable in recent years, between ENGO and the fishing industry is eco-labelling. The first eco-labelling scheme was the dolphin-safe tuna fishery (Constance, 2001), which began with the US Marine Mammal Protection Act (1972), a consumer boycott of ‘dolphin-death’ tuna organised by an American environmental coalition, and the Dolphin Protection Consumer Information Act (1990). As a result, nearly all tuna sales across the world now carry dolphin-safe logos. The power wielded by Earth Island, an organisation awarding such logos, is graphically characterised by Struan Stevenson (MEP and one-time President of the European Parliament’s Fisheries Committee): Earth Island “has become the all-powerful, *de-facto* regulator of the \$2 billion international tuna industry” (Fishing News International, 11/03: 6).

The most publicised European-based eco-labelling scheme is that of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), founded in 1997 by WWF in collaboration with Unilever, buyer of a quarter of Europe’s frozen fish supplies. The aim of MSC is to invite fisheries to apply for its eco-label, which guarantees that the fishery meets specific tests, including minimal damage to the marine ecosystem. As WWF’s Mike Sutton says, “By working together with progressive seafood companies, we can harness consumer power in support of conservation” (quoted in Bendell and Murphy, 1997). By May 2006, MSC had certified 17 fisheries world-wide as qualified to use its eco-label logo, and more than 300 seafood products now carry the logo in retail chains across 26 countries (Fishing News, 5/5/06: 3).

The cumulative effect, direct and indirect, of eco-labelling schemes on high-street retail outlets is considerable. During the last ten years, virtually every major UK supermarket chain has announced its withdrawal of some fish products deemed unsustainably captured. While there is much scepticism in the fishing industry about the criteria used for eco-labelling, supermarket stock and supply decisions exert considerable power, as they control 80% of the UK retail fresh-fish trade.

### **Public opinion and the media**

This brings us to the final source of environmental stewardship, the power of public opinion in conjunction with the media. A recent European consumer poll revealed that 79% of those questioned agree that the environmental impact of seafood is an important consideration when they buy fish

products, and that 87% of consumers prefer to buy seafood that is eco-labelled (Fishing News, 6/1/06: 6). Public opinion is felt not only in the supermarket aisles, but also in the corridors of power. An editorial in Fishing News (29/8/03: 2) claims that “politicians ... respond only to pressure groups that have serious political clout because of the votes that they can command. They ignore fishing because there are no votes in it, even in Scotland, relative to the environmental lobby”.

Voters, for their part, are heavily influenced by the media. According to Tim Oliver (editor of Fishing News), the media play an important role in environmental stewardship. Oliver (2005: 219-220) chronicles a major shift in the public’s perception of fishers over the last 20 or 30 years, from “heroic figures, who braved the elements ... to put high-protein food on people’s tables”, to “greedy, self interested pirates who plunder the oceans ... without a thought for the marine environment or for future generations of fishermen”. He claims that this shift “has occurred largely because of the environmental movement’s relentless portrayal of the world’s oceans as barren deserts due to over-fishing.” As Oliver (2005: 220) points out, the fishing industry is a tiny player in the national economy – generating only 0.03% of GDP (gross domestic product) in the UK, with only 12 000 fishers and a further 22 000 employed in the processing industry, compared with more than 2 million ENGO members.

### **The case against a power shift in governance**

In the previous section, a strong case has been made for the proposition that environmental stewardship has become the dominant mode of fisheries governance. Indeed, wherever the fishing industry turns, it seems to be faced by environmental imperatives that curb its activities. However, there are strong arguments that challenge that case, contending that environmental stewardship may be only skin deep, consisting more of rhetoric than reality.

The charge of rhetoric is made by critics who maintain that the environmental consensus is often ignored by governments when it suits their political purposes. Also, the critics point out that international regimes are often ratified by states for political reasons, with little intention of implementing them. Even if intentions are good, little action may be taken. For instance, practical progress towards the EBA is painfully slow, as is evident from the 2006 inter-ministerial meeting of the North Sea Conference, where a new target milestone of 2010 has been laid down to begin its implementation (Fishing News 5/5/06: 20), even though the issue has been discussed by the ministers for a decade.

With regard to the reformed CFP, Symes and Boyes (2005: vii) write that “although committed in principle to environmental integration and the development of an ecosystem based approach to management, there is little concrete evidence so far of the application of these concepts. The CFP remains a strongly sectoral policy”. Symes and Boyes (2005: 9) do not deny that the CEC has produced Action Plans on environmentalism in the CFP, but “Action Plans, while they may signal the general intent of the Commission, tend to lack specificity of direction and do not have the force of law”. Lack of specificity is also a criticism made of the proposed Marine Strategy Directive: it does not provide criteria for the “good environmental status”, which it sought to achieve for EU waters by 2021, and its “deadlines for delivering environmental outcomes are ... so flexible as to be of questionable value” (El Anzuelo, 2005, 15: 9).

Thus, for Symes and Boyes (2005: 40), in the EU, DG Fisheries is still in the ascendancy over DG Environment. They note that neither of the two EU Directives relating to Strategic Impact Assessments and Environmental Assessments has been “extensively used in relation to fishing activities” (Symes and Boyes, 2005: vii), though this may change as a result of the Wadden Sea judgment (ECJ, 2004). The RCEP (2004a: 4) takes a similar view: “At EU level, fisheries effectively take precedence over environmental legislation ... environmental declarations have not had much impact”. Dunn (2005: 213) observes that the ENGO “high-water mark” of influence over the reformed CFP came with the Green Paper in 2001. After that, opposition to the environmental agenda hardened in the Council, because the ENGO influence within southern Member States (the self-styled ‘Friends of Fishing’ countries) is too weak. With regard to the UK, Symes and Boyes (2005: 39) do not deny that the fishing industry is heavily regulated, but they claim that this strict regulation is still designed for fisheries protection, not for environmental protection (cf. Coffey, 1996: 289).

Moreover, even when environmental legislation is in place to curb fisheries, there is often little attempt to enforce it. For example, Richartz (2005: 7) reports extensive backsliding by France and Italy in evading the 1998 EU drift-net ban: “gaping holes in compliance with the EU drift net ban established by Regulation 1239/98 ... call into question the Member States’ commitment to sustainable fisheries in the Mediterranean”.

### **Which conception of environmental stewardship?**

In our view, the case for environmental stewardship as a new form of fisheries governance is stronger than the case against: on balance, there does seem to have been a shift from fisheries protection to environmental protection. However, is this newly emergent environmental stewardship founded upon the

conception of nature conservationism or the conception of sustainable development? We can find elements of both conceptions embedded in five of the six sources of environmental stewardship identified above.

Similarly, while most international regimes adopt the nature conservation perspective, at least one, the FAO, strongly endorses the sustainable development perspective, as outlined by Pope *et al.* (2006: 3): “Long-term management of fisheries is linked closely with the concept of sustainable development ... The modern concept of sustainability is seen as having at least four components: bio-ecological; social; economic; and institutional”.

Government policies also reveal ambiguity, repeatedly qualifying their commitments to nature conservation by adding socio-economic riders. For instance, in its discussion document on the EMS, CEC (2004: 1) states that this “thematic strategy for the protection and conservation of the European marine environment” has the “overall aim ‘to promote sustainable use of the seas and conserve marine ecosystems’” (emphasis in the original). Similarly with UK government rhetoric: in his address to the Coastal Futures Conference, Morley (2005) says that: “We wish to protect and enhance what we have whilst at the same time deriving sustainable economic and social benefit”.

Even ENGO, in their collaborative mode, support sustainable-development objectives, by assisting sustainable fisheries, while the media extols the place of fish protein in a healthy diet, and public opinion sympathises with the plight of beleaguered fisheries-dependent communities. Only the nature-conservation agencies seem to enunciate an exclusively nature-conservationist conception of environmental stewardship, and that’s their job!

The implication of our analysis is that the fishing industry can build upon this platform of already existing endorsements of the sustainable-development conception of environmental stewardship, in order to resist the pressure from the nature-conservation conception. It has already begun to do so, as we have seen, by co-operating with eco-labelling initiatives. Moreover, a recent workshop run by the European Bureau for Conservation and Development reported many examples in Europe of fishers working independently or with scientists to develop innovative gear adaptations and inventions to counter negative environmental impacts such as discards of juveniles and non-target species: “Fishers are only too aware of when they are fishing unsustainably. They often wish to take measures of their own to improve the sustainability of their fisheries” (EBCD, 2006: 1).

In the UK, examples of fishers’ commitment to sustainable development include a voluntary code of conduct within the Loch Torridon *Nephrops* creel fishery to increase the size, and improve the quality, of the individuals caught and a recent agreement by scallop dredgers in Lyme Bay to close 25% of the area to towed gear, in order to protect sea fans and rose corals. Indeed, Symes and Boyes (2005: 38) claim that “To date, examples of good practice integrating objectives for sustainable fisheries and healthy marine ecosystems are derived mainly from voluntary arrangements”.

There are signs, therefore, that top-down nature-conservationist environmental stewardship may be patchy, and that bottom-up sustainable-development environmental stewardship may be challenging it in practical terms. We suggest that it may also be challenged in theoretical terms: by demonstrating that sustainable development is the primary or sovereign conception of environmental stewardship, while nature conservation is the secondary or satellite conception. In other words, sustainable development includes within it the notion that nature should be conserved, duly balanced by socio-economic factors. So there are not two conceptions of environmental stewardship after all, but only one – sustainable development.

## Conclusion

In our view, there is little doubt that environmental stewardship is becoming the newly-dominant mode of fisheries governance. Even critics who deny that environmentalism is currently dominant, predict that it is only a matter of time before it will become so. For instance, Symes and Ridgway (2003: 9) state that “There is no escaping the inevitability of environmental integration; the question is not whether, but how to do it. This should be seen as providing a challenge and opportunity rather than as posing a threat”. The real question is what conception of environmental stewardship will prevail.

The answer to this question critically depends on the way in which the fishing industry responds to the challenge that environmental stewardship poses to it. If it responds negatively, treating environmentalism as a threat to be faced down, it will experience the relentless advance of the nature-conservationist agenda as an alien imposition from above. If, however, the industry responds positively, as the examples in the previous section indicate it has already started to do, by embracing environmentalism as an opportunity to demonstrate its own commitment, it will be able to influence the way in which environmental integration is shaped, thereby averting the imposition of a top-down nature conservationism. In this way, a bottom-up sustainable-development form of fisheries governance should prevail, in which reasoned nature-conservation objectives are balanced against reasoned socio-economic objectives. Embracing a

sustainable-development approach that encompasses nature conservation objectives offers the best chance for the environmental stewardship mode to become a constructive force within fisheries governance.

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