

Reversing from a Dead End

The Iroise marine park in Brittany, France, could serve as a model for fishermen who wish to move towards sustainable fisheries while retaining their sources of livelihood

36

On 2 October 2007, the Journal officiel published the decree establishing the Parc naturel marin d'Iroise (the Iroise marine park), which covers an area of 3,500 sq km at the western tip of Brittany in France. The project, which was first mooted in 1989, took more than 17 years to materialize. Surprisingly, while in Europe and elsewhere in the world, fishermen are generally cautious or outright hostile towards such initiatives, in this particular case, the professional organizations of fishermen soon showed a

on that particular objective in the beginning. The area also has colonies of marine mammals as well as the largest seaweed beds in Europe, which have been exploited for the past 150 years to provide ingredients for the food and chemical industries. The area offers, on a grand scale, natural sceneries (sundrenched or rain- and wind-swept, in turn) that attract large crowds of tourists: Pointe du Raz, Cap de la Chèvre, Ile d'Ouessant, Ile de Sein... On the mainland, Douarnenez and Camaret were, until the end of the 19th century, among the main fishing harbours in the country. In those days, there were 5,000 fishermen in Douarnenez, making a living by targeting the rich sardine stocks of the bay. The Baie de Douarnenez is still an important spawning habitat for bass and bream. Camaret used to harbour the most important lobster fleet in Europe. Things have taken a downturn, and fishermen are now few in these localities.

For many years now, fishermen have been painstakingly trying to rehabilitate a scallop stock in the roadstead.

supportive attitude. There were intense debates within the *comités locaux*, but the leaders were able to convince the majority of fishermen that the project could have favourable impacts on the fisheries. The idea of creating a park was first promoted by a number of scientists. Way back in the 1950s, several natural sanctuaries were established on deserted islands and on the coast. Later, a biosphere reserve was created and included in Man and Biosphere (MAB) Programme of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

This remarkable environment is endowed with a rich marine and terrestrial biodiversity. One can find here major seabirds reserves, as scientists focused

The Iroise Sea has suffered several large-scale oil spills. In the late 1970s, a nuclear plant was to be built in Plougoff, near the Point du Raz. This led to prolonged demonstrations by local folks and anti-nuclear activists, in general. Elements of the French nuclear strategic force are based in the Rade de Brest.

Painstaking rehabilitation

There are threats of pollution from various sources : industrial activities, urban effluents, intensive agriculture... For many years now, fishermen have been painstakingly trying to rehabilitate a scallop stock in the roadstead. There

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are about 900 professional fishermen (including part-timers) in the Iroise Sea. Annual fish production is about 12,000 tonnes, and 40,000 tonnes of seaweeds are also extracted. There are only 350 fishing units, but 10,000 recreational boats and 26,000 sailors, who, therefore, wield significant influence in the economic sphere.

After the creation of the natural reserves in the 1950s, the scientists who were part of SEPNE/Bretagne Vivante, an influential non-governmental organization (NGO), carried the action further. The Parc naturel régional d'Armorique (including the main islands of the Iroise Sea) was established in 1969. Breton scientists played an important role in defining the framework, rules and agendas of that type of institutions. The aim was to couple protection of the environment with development of ecofriendly economic activities, and to base economic development on the wealth and quality of natural spaces. Faced with the repeated catastrophes of large-scale oil spills, politicians, fishermen and the population in general realized that the marine environment needed protection. These adverse circumstances favoured a degree of concertation, but the government was determined to retain full control of the sea, all the more so as this area includes major components of national defence. In 1989, when the government picked up from scientists the idea of creating a national marine park, many stakeholders remained cautious, in particular fishermen who feared the imposition of no-take areas.

In the early 1990s, the fisheries in Brittany were in deep crisis. In 1993 and 1994, there were violent demonstrations. In those hectic days, the fishermen viewed the park project as a credible tool for mitigating the decline of their fisheries and leading to a better future. Before participating for good in the project, they, however, put forward some conditions. In November 2000, the regional fisheries committee and the local committees affected by the project (Nord-Finistère, Audierne, Douarnenez, Le Guilvinec) declared that they were in favour of the marine park. "Since September 2000, our Regional Committee has favourably and



The fishing port of Audierne, one of the areas affected by the creation of the Iroise marine park

responsibly responded to the idea of creating a marine park, which could be an important tool for shaping the development of the area.

At the same time, we express a few reservations: we are against planning beforehand no-take zones; and we insist on proper representation of fishermen, with full respect for our right to participate in fisheries management in accordance with current legislation", they said. Fishermen are keen to participate in the "sustainable management of an exceptionally rich environment/heritage".

Fishermen realize that the coastal area is increasingly threatened by pollution from various sources, that the inshore zone is getting more and more crowded, and that their fishing enterprises are destabilized because of high competition for the resource.

Appropriate tool

"We are convinced that, in order to improve the management of our marine territory, there is need for an appropriate tool that is acceptable to all stakeholders. In our view, the proposed marine park could develop into a pilot scheme to ensure a sustainable joint management of the coastal area, taking into account the interests of all users," they say. Fishermen have called on local council leaders to support the project. With this in mind, they became the most ardent supporters of the park. To move things forward, legislation on natural parks—which focused essentially on

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"Marine park: Enough is enough! Definitely No to Iroise! 17 years of study and Euro 3.7 mn wasted. A scandal!"

38

terrestrial areas and conservation of spaces and species —had to be amended. The Act creating marine parks as such is based on an integrated approach that cares for the twin objectives of conservation and sustainable development of human activities. This new legal framework guarantees that power remains in the hands of local actors (elected leaders, professional organizations and associations).

While financing the structure, the State will, however, have a minority representation within the management committee.

Through their involvement in the process, fishermen were able to shape

to retain their place and rights within the park, the fishermen, though few in number, were able to assert themselves as major actors in the management of the coastal area. This may explain, in part, the aggressiveness and resistance of recreational fishers, who fear the introduction of more constraining rules. These users were adamantly opposed to the project, and were able to influence a number of mayors who wavered in their attitude to the project.

Finally, after many mishaps, thanks to the political will at the top level, and the determination of the fishermen and other activists, the Iroise marine national park came into being. Even before its official establishment, in order to demonstrate the interest and objectives of the new management tool, the fishermen asked for the implementation of four projects: (1) A study of the impact of seaweed extraction was conducted. (2) On one island, support was given to an abalone diving project, to prove that rehabilitation of insular activities is also a priority. (3) There is also a rehabilitation project on the fishery for lobster, a resource that used to be in abundance in the area. (4) An action plan is being implemented, in concert with farmers, to reduce the occurrence of green seaweed bloom. These project agendas will form the outline for the future master plan for the marine park project and its specific targets. There is need to control certain practices, and to limit conflicts between types of boats/fishing techniques (métiers). These ideas are not new, but the park can provide financing and offer a forum for consultation and scientific advice. It is also possible to envisage a label for products originating in the park.

Fishing is only one of the many and varied activities included in the integrated management plan for the park. From an economic point of view, it is well behind tourism and recreational boating, for instance. But it is the first sector to suffer the impacts of land-based pollution (from agriculture, industry, tourism, urban development), and the one particularly sensitive to the quality of the marine ecosystem. In the past, lobster and sardine stocks supported brisk economic activities in Iroise, but have now dwindled due to

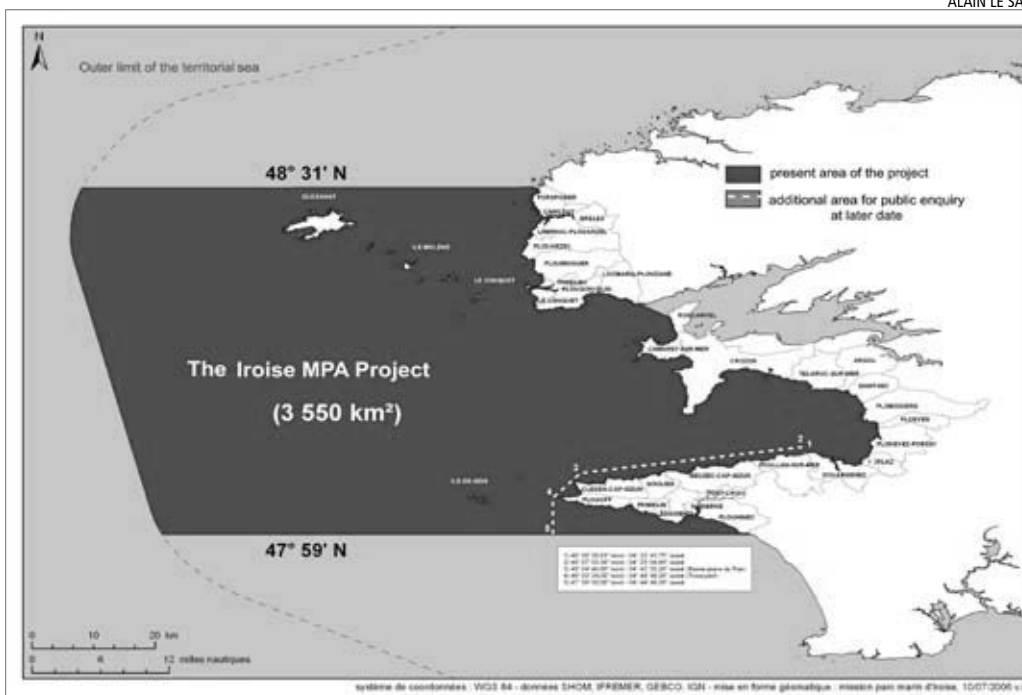
By fighting to retain their place and rights within the park, the fishermen, though few in number, were able to assert themselves as major actors in the management of the coastal area.

the project and turn it into a potentially effective instrument for maintaining and even developing ecofriendly fisheries. The park will also facilitate cooperation with other stakeholders and a better control at source of the various types of pollution that threaten the quality of inshore waters. By fighting

ALAIN LE SANN

overexploitation. Within the park's framework, fishermen are determined to rehabilitate these resources and to be at the heart of the conservation and rehabilitation process of the inshore ecosystem. In the beginning, the park was the brainchild of a few scientists and political leaders. The fishermen have now converted it into a new tool for moving towards sustainable fisheries. Without their assent, the project could not have been carried forward; with their participation, the integrated management approach takes its full meaning.

"The professional organizations of fishermen and seaweed gatherers (*goémoniers*) were instrumental in getting the project out of a dead end, supporting it against all odds in critical situations", Van Tilbeurgh Véronique writes in *La mer d'Iroise, négociations sur le principe de protection* (PUR, 2007, pg. 200). They are the most vocal to ask for a mitigation of the negative impacts of certain land-based and coastal activities. In so doing, they put forward the notion of *pays maritime*, where terrestrial operators have to discipline themselves to preserve the marine environment. The *Parc naturel marin d'Iroise* may serve as a model for other initiatives of the same type. 📍



Official map showing the geographical extent of the Iroise Marine Park (Mission Parc Marin d'Iroise)

For more

http://www.mpaglobal.org/index.php?search_text=&txt_site_name=on&txt_designation_type=on&country_id=250&geo_type=Select+a+Geographical+Region+Type&geo_id=&conv_code=&adv=0&action=searchResults&submit=Search&des_nat=on&des_des=on&des_informal=on&marinec=&no_take=

MPA's for the country France: MPA Global

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iroise_Sea
Wikipedia entry

<http://www.parc-marin-iroise.gouv.fr/index.php>
Official Site of Iroise Park