

## Open letter

There are moments in life where one must make difficult decisions. There are principles in life that one should not breach. One of these principles is to abide the rectitude and independence of scientific opinions. Polish Baltic fishery is going through one of the toughest moments in history. That is why those responsible for fishery should obtain a full spectrum of knowledge concerning the cause of this crisis, in order to be able to use this knowledge as a base to consider different ways to resolve this situation and make responsible decisions. The Sea Fisheries Institute (MIR) in Gdynia is the sole scientific institution [*att. trans.* in Poland] which collects data for the use of the Common Fisheries Policy of the European Union and carries out research necessary to manage Baltic fishery. MIR research concerns fishery resources and the economics of fishery. The statutory obligation of MIR is to report information to the fishery administration in coherence with the best scientific knowledge, based on facts and fully documented data. As vice-director of MIR responsible for scientific research my duty was to follow this principle.

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, I received from the minister of the Maritime Economy Ministry (MGM) Marek Grobarczyk a fax requesting answers to the following questions:

1. What repercussions will the Polish fish branch face after stopping cod fishery in accordance with European Commission regulation 804/2007?
2. What negative consequences for Poland may arise due to violating the ban on cod fishery?

This fax was not addressed to the director of MIR but directly to me. On September 12<sup>th</sup>, I sent via fax a response based on my best knowledge to minister M. Grobarczyk, ending with the following conclusions:

- In light of the above I believe that breaching the CE Regulation 804/2007 will have decisively negative consequences for Polish Baltic fishery and also a wider negative effect for Poland as a member of the European Union.
- Instead of igniting a dispute with the European Commission I believe that it is necessary to begin a dialogue with the fishery branch on how to lessen the negative impact of the current situation both today and – especially - in the following years.
- It is also necessary to negotiate with the European Commission in order to establish the volume of over-fishing the cod quota by our fishermen and minimize the sanctions for the current situation in the following years. The minimization of further, negative steps taken by the European Commission may only be possible on the basis of well-documented activities led by the State and aimed at limiting unreported fishing, both in the current year and in the following years.

Two days later minister M. Grobarczyk sent to the director of MIR a fax containing the following content:

*Dear Sir,*

*I would like to inform you that MIR is obtaining signals, coming from different communities, regarding the inadequate consideration of comments and postulates of these communities in*

*the process of preparing position papers and opinions by MIR's employees. This phenomenon seems to be especially urgent in the context of research on the Baltic cod resources, which – for obvious reasons – is the object of particular interest of the government and public opinion in Poland.*

*In connection with the above I would like to express my deep disquiet with this state of the matter especially since these remarks mostly apply to the attitude of director Zbigniew Karnicki. Taking into consideration the great sensitivity of the issue at stake I cannot remain oblivious to this type of signals, I therefore ask you to consider the possibility of recalling director Karnicki from his duties and calling in his place a person which guarantees adequate objectivity in the future activities of MIR.*

*Signed: Marek Grobarczyk*

From the content above it is obvious that the minister believes that MIR, and its science director in particular should, when formulating his opinions, take into consideration the position of the fishery community. In summary, MIR scientists, often prominent experts with international reputation, should present the opinion that “there is plenty of cod in the sea” and not publicize the results of independent cod resource research carried out in cooperation with all Baltic countries, which show just the opposite. Apart from this, we should assure that breaching the basic principles of the common fisheries policy of the European Union will not have negative consequences for Polish fishery, which definitely has little to do with the truth.

I believe that this is an unacceptable threat to independence of scientific opinion in general and MIR in particular. It also shows that the Ministry is not interested in finding out the details of the scientific basis for the cod resource assessment and the causes of the current crisis, but only expects MIR to give opinions serving the demands of a part of the fishery community or political interest. Minister M. Grobarczyk to this day has not found the time to meet with MIR representatives in order to have presented to him the opinion about the economic situation of Polish fishery based on data obtained by MIR directly from ship owners.

In light of the facts listed above I came to the conclusion that the only solution in this situation is to facilitate MIR's director decision and resign from the post myself, at the same time passing my decision to the public opinion as a protest against the fisheries policy led by the Maritime Economy Ministry.

I would like to underline that, in coherence with my best knowledge as a man concerned with fishery for the past 50 years, including 15 years of engagement in Polish, European and world fishery problems on the post of fishery policy director at FAO/United Nations in Rome, that the highest price for the current politics of the Minister will be paid by Polish fishermen. I fully sustain my opinion, based on my knowledge of European Union law, that the European Commission will sustain in force the regulation 804/2007 - enforcing a ban on cod fishery for Poland up to the end of this year, will demand that Poland, and *de facto* Polish fishermen, return the cod quota excess in the following year, and that Polish cod fishery, due to the current activities of the Ministry, will be under the special surveillance of EU inspectors. This will lead to the continuation of the liquidation process of Polish fishery caused by irresponsible political decisions.

That is why I hereby call upon minister M. Grobarczyk to immediately begin talks with fishery organizations on the possibilities and methods of limiting the effects of the current crisis in the fishery sector.

Telling fishermen “we are not encouraging you to fish, but if you decide to do so you will not be punished” is unacceptable. It leads to a further fragmentation of the community and reinforcement of the position of the European Commission by showing that the Polish fishery administration does not have a clear policy towards fishery and is not controlling the situation.

Sincerely,

PhD Zbigniew Karnicki