



The double dealing of an impartial scientist

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Exactly 90 days after being appointed for a three year-term in the most influential scientific body advising the European Commission on fisheries, a researcher at the French Research Institute for Exploitation of the Sea (Ifremer) switched loyalties to work for the deep-sea fleet of French supermarket chain Intermarché. He thus entered into a **blatant conflict of interest** with his function. Such is the revelation made today by BLOOM, a French non-profit organization working to preserve deep-sea biodiversity.

On October 27 2010, when François Théret was appointed as a member of the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF), the body responsible for advising the European Commission in the field of fisheries policy and in particular for giving a "crucial opinion" informing the annual setting of total allowable catches (TACs) and quotas,¹ he was merely a researcher at the Lorient Ifremer station. But three months later to the day, on January 24 2011, Brittany's newspapers announced that he had just joined Scapêche, Intermarché's fleet based in Lorient. From that day, the STECF Committee, which provides scientific advice to the European Commission, contained a direct representative of the principal stakeholder in French deep-sea fisheries. **Mr. Théret's new position is in direct conflict with the act that established the Committee,² which requires STECF members to act "independently of Member States or stakeholders" and to work in the "public interest", on the basis of "independence, impartiality and transparency."**

"STECF appointments are made following an open call for expressions of interest, so I doubt that the timing of Mr. Théret's appointment to the STECF in relation to his position in Scapêche is serendipitous, especially since he took his new position exactly three months after the publication of the STECF's list of members: the length of departure notice typically required by French law..." commented Claire Nouvian, founder of BLOOM.

This precise timing is not a coincidence: quotas for deepwater species are fixed every two years, and the meeting of the European Council of Ministers to establish the total allowable catches (TACs) takes place today in Brussels. The most influential piece of advice in this process is the Commission proposal on TACs and quotas, released on October 9, 2012 and largely based on the STECF's recommendations. *"In short, in order to influence this important document, it was necessary to become a STECF member as early as 2010, bearing in mind that members are appointed for three years"* explains Claire Nouvian.

What's in it for Scapêche? Scientific advice recommending a substantial increase in quotas for deepwater species targeted by French vessels, including black scabbardfish and roundnose grenadier.

Two Ifremer researchers, publicly questioned by French NGOs in 2010 due to their lack of impartiality with respect to deep-sea bottom trawl fisheries,³ are already part of the European scientific consortium,⁴ and are strategically placed to provide advice on deep-water species.

"All that Intermarché needed to ensure that scientific advice favoring French fleets reached the Council through the EU Commission was a link; Mr. Théret provided it. At the Council, Scapêche knows it can count on the support of the French Minister of Fisheries, Mr. Frédéric Cuvillier. In a veritable tour de force, the industry lobby has managed to encircle the quota decision process. This brings to mind the hunting technique used by hyenas" Claire Nouvian adds.

¹http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/maritime_affairs_and_fisheries/fisheries_sector_organisation_and_financing/c11127_en.htm

² COMMISSION DECISION of 26 August 2005 establishing a Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (2005/629/EC)

³ See the NGOs' letter of November 2, 2010 To French Minister of Ecology Jean-Louis Borloo following the Grenelle de la Mer :

http://www.bloomassociation.org/download/2010_Sept_29_MPP%20BORLOO_ENGLISH_2.pdf and the appendices to this letter (in French only for the moment): http://www.bloomassociation.org/download/2010_Oct_29_MPP_Annexes_courrier_Borloo-V3.pdf

⁴ The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) gives advice on fish stocks of the North Atlantic.



An increase in quotas would allow Intermarché's fleet to claim that deep-sea bottom trawl fishing is "sustainable" and that the reform of the European management regime for these extremely problematic fisheries does not need to be ambitious. "Intermarché has given NGOs an important lesson in strategic planning. I bow to their talent, but certainly not to their objectives" said BLOOM's founder, emphasizing that Intermarché's fleet simultaneously received buy-back subsidies for its old vessels targeting deep-sea species and construction subsidies to renew this same fleet segment, thereby increasing fishing effort on these sensitive species, in blatant contradiction with the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy.

Claire Nouvian said that only now does she understand how far the Grenelle de la Mer (French multi stakeholder consultation) created a golden opportunity for representatives of the fishing industry to formulate their strategic agenda. *"While we truly believed that this was a chance to cooperate with them, they were already plotting the next steps. In particular, they understood that scientific advice was the weak link in their attempts to defend deep-sea fishing. They have skillfully addressed this weakness."*

Claire Nouvian concludes: *"I regret that the complexity of European processes excludes the general public from the strategic play of influences in Brussels"*. **She calls upon the French Minister of Ecology Delphine Batho and President François Hollande not to let a French retail giant dictate the government's position on deep-sea fisheries.**

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About BLOOM: www.bloomassociation.org

BLOOM is a non-profit organization founded in 2005, which works to protect the oceans by raising awareness and explaining environmental problems through scientific mediation, by producing relevant and independent scientific studies, and by participating in public consultations and institutional processes. Our actions target the general public, as well as political and economic decision-makers.