

Finelco Group owner, Mr Hazan, replies to anglers complaints with regards to Mr Planet campaigning against recreational fishing. In his 3 page letter to FIPO he confirms Mr Planet's opinion on recreational anglers.

A meaningful short cut of the letter is copied below:

[...] in recreational fishing, the fisherman cause pain and suffering to the fish as a sentient subject. As has been reported recently by scientific studies of high-profile (Chandross and others, 2004; Huntingford and others, 2006; Sneddon, 2006, 2009; Braithwaite, 2010), the " nociception " (reception, transmission and processing at the central level of a noxious stimulus), coupled to an advanced level of consciousness and therefore of pain perception and the ability to suffer, it may be a concept applicable to the fish. If then the fish have awareness of pain, recreational fisheries can be defined as "cruel" and become morally unacceptable if you add another perspective of ethical value: you should not intentionally cause pain to fish without a necessity for survival but for the sheer pleasure. **This makes you feel like the fisherman "cruel" and "sadistic", and remains so, even if it contributes to the protection of the aquatic environment.** [...]

FIPO and APR reply to Hazan (10 January 2014)

Object: Mr Planet campaigning on Recreational Fishing – Finelco's letter to FIPO dated 14 October 2013

Dear Dr. Hazan,

with regard to the object (your letter attached to this one), the authors observe that your group has been very one-sided when choosing documentation to make your case. Your group only refers to publications written by "fish can feel pain" believers. Their critics¹ are not mentioned, which is a gross neglect by your group.

Indeed, and that's one of the sad things about the Mr. Planet campaign. The campaign doesn't care about the real threats to our fish stocks. Recreational fishermen are not the problem in that regard but part of the solution. And as such your campaign may be counter-productive with regard to fish stocks and habitat conservation as well as causing less fish welfare. Ms Braithwaite - one of the pain believing scientists you refer to – is quoted as follows:

- Asking the question, "What would be the consequences of banning angling?", the author concludes "It may not improve fish welfare."²

- Braithwaite, who points out that she eats fish, emphasizes that she is not against sport fishing. "I recognize how valuable the efforts of anglers have been historically for conservation –

- many fishermen are staunch stewards of the aquatic environment, guarding our waterways against pollution and degradation. We would not want to be without them or their efforts."³

Let's see now your assumptions:

1) in the recreational fishing catching fish do not need to provide food, it is then directed to a necessity of survival;

Most things humans do in the Western world are not done as "a necessity of survival" but we don't ban all these things. The 'necessity argument' is an "invention" by animal rights philosophers. We would like to warn strongly against using "necessity of survival" as an argument against recreational fishing. It is a moral argument, which makes no sense in the real world – only in the heads of people who would like to turn us all into vegans. Indeed, Switzerland, as the only country in the world, has legislated against fishing 'with the intention of release'. But this is not the law in Italy or other countries – and hopefully never will be.

Ps. The Swiss law is a strange law in many respects. E.g. for proper control and enforcement a mind-reader would be required as no sane recreational fisherman in a Country which bans 'the intention of release' would ever admit he/she goes fishing with the sole intention of releasing the fish. By the way, Swiss people find, like we do, that the animal rights agenda in Switzerland has gone too far⁴.

¹ "Can fish really feel pain?", J D Rose, R Arlinghaus, S J Cooke, B K Diggles, W Sawynok, E D Stevens & C D L Wynne
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/faf.12010/pdf>

²Book Review: Do Fish Feel Pain – Victoria Braithwaite; By Paul Goulborn 03/06/2010
www.theflyfishingforum.com/index.php?news=3123

³http://www.underwatertimes.com/news.php?article_id=91074683215

⁴The lawyer who defends animals; www.theguardian.com/world/2010/mar/05/lawyer-who-defends-animals

2) in recreational fishing, the fisherman cause pain and suffering to the fish as a subject sentient. As has been reported recently by scientific studies of high-profile (Chandroo and others, 2004; Huntingford and others, 2006; Sneddon, 2006, 2009; Braithwaite , 2010) , the " nociception " (reception , transmission and processing at the central level of a noxious stimulus), coupled to an advanced level of consciousness and therefore of pain perception and the ability to suffer, it may be a concept applicable to the fish.

None of those scientists mentioned have ever provided solid scientific evidence, only beliefs, that some fish species might be able to feel pain. They believe – based on bizarre experiments with a few fish – that there are indications that some fish species might have consciousness, which could make these fish able to feel pain. Consciousness is a very tricky concept. We don't have a good scientific theory of human consciousness, let alone animal consciousness. Pain is a very complex sensation, experienced differently by humans. Fish lacks the neo-cortex, where human pain is 'manufactured'.

There is no solid scientific evidence for pain or suffering when a fish is hooked and reeled in. Therefore recreational fishers cannot be cruel. To claim that recreational fishers are "cruel" or even "sadistic" are horrendous allegations. It means that millions of recreational fishers should take pleasure in inflicting pain on animals (fish)!? We can assure you this is definitely not the case. If these fishers believed they were cruel to fish they would not fishing. Recreational fishing is a legal activity and anglers are certainly not 'cruel' or 'sadistic'. You owe recreational fishers an excuse for these unfounded allegations.

And going on in your letter we can say no, pain in fish is not scientific proven or recognized by all scientists!⁵ A small group of scientists have made it their niche to seek indications or evidence that (some) fish can feel pain. They haven't provided scientific proof for pain so far. But they have proved other interesting facts about fish, which deserve to be better known e.g. that the investigated fish showed to be extremely robust creatures, which can survive a substantial dose of poison which would kill a human instantly if a comparable size of dose was injected into the human body. They also found that the C nerve fibres, which transmit 'deep', longer lasting pain signals are much fewer in fish than other vertebrates (and sharks have zero of them)⁶ :

Comparing the sizes of both types of fibre we found that they were similar to those found in birds and mammals, but one thing that struck us immediately was that there were many fewer of the smaller C fibres than in other vertebrates. Normally one can expect nearly fifty to sixty per cent of the fibres to be C fibres, but in the trout we found they represented only four percent of all the fibre types. This difference was consistent in all three branches of the trigeminal nerve. The significance of the smaller number of C fibres remains a mystery.

"A mystery" but Ms Braithwaite doesn't even try to give an explanation for that mystery, which we find very important. We see this low level of C fibres as a very strong indication that pain is not of great importance for a fish's survival. Arguably, to be bothered by pain in a fish's environment seems to be disadvantageous and counter-productive for survival. Fishes' survival seems far more reliant on their ability to react very fast to escape and to catch prey than to be able to feel pain. The nerve signals which support quick reactions are carried by other nerve fibres than the 'slow' C fibres. These fast signals most often are not processed by the brain – like reflexes in humans.

About Catch&Release

Most, if not all, countries operate with minimum sizes for a number of fish species to protect the juvenile fish against overfishing. Undersized fish have to be released by recreational fishers as well as commercial fishers (ps. from 2015 commercial fisheries in Europe shall bring unwanted dead/dying fish to land due to EU's discard ban. This concerns fish of all sizes but not fish with a high probability of survival when released). This is all well and good. But it is "a kind of strange" (ambiguous) that Switzerland and Germany don't allow the recreational fishers themselves also to decide when a non-wanted fish should be released. The laws in these two countries result in more fish being killed than would be the case without these strange ethical laws. Such kind of ethics does nothing good for fish stocks but work perversely against healthy fish stocks. We find that Switzerland and Germany are no good examples for other countries to follow. You obviously disagree with us on this point and that is your right to do so. Ethics differ from one country to another, from one religion to another and from one individual to another. You have your ethics but it is not shared by the majority of Italians, and it is not law in Italy. To catch a fish recreationally on rod and line is legal in Italy, and so is the release of unwanted fish, too. You have no reason or right to say that Italian recreational fishermen are cruel. You have no scientific facts to back up this postulate, only speculation and personal beliefs and therefore we would like you to excuse for that insult to anglers.

⁵A Primer on Anti-Angling Philosophy and Its Relevance for Recreational Fisheries in Urbanized Societies
Robert Arlinghaus , Alexander Schwab, Carsten Riepe

⁶"Do Fish Feel Pain?" Victoria Braithwaite, 2010

As said already, most things humans do should be banned if everything should be “as a necessity of survival”. A vast amount of fish dies in home aquariums. And by far the most of fish killed by humans are killed in commercial fisheries. Humans (in the Western world) don’t need to eat fish for survival and they don’t need fish in tanks in their homes to survive. “As a necessity of survival” is a cleverly thought out but an impractical, empty political manifesto phrase like “freedom”, which all can agree on in principle but not when the term shall be given content. From what you have said and argued, logically to be consistent you should want to see both commercial fishing and fish aquariums being banned. Surely, this is what the most ardent animal rights campaigners and vegans would like to see happen. But is it also Finelco’s wish? If this is not the case we would like to take this opportunity to warn you against falling victim to animal rights and vegan philosophy and their “ethics” (ideology), which has as its end goal to ban all human exploitation and use of animals including drinking milk, eating butter, cheese and honey and keeping pets.

There is no solid evidence that fish are able to feel pain but it is recognized that in addition to harvest, all forms of recreational fishing exert some degree of stress and injury to fishes. Therefore recreational anglers are always encouraged to care and treat the fish they catch in a way that minimize injuries and maximise the possibility of survival after eventual release. There are codes and instructions published about how to handle fish carefully for almost any fish species, which are caught by recreational fishermen. Most of these codes are worked out by the recreational fishermen and their organisations nationally or locally and/or by Government agencies. Also international institutions have produced codes with good information about recreational fishing and advices on its management and other issues. We strongly suggest you to read, e.g.:

- “European Charter on Recreational Fishing and Biodiversity”; Council of Europe⁷
- “EIFAC Code of Practice for Recreational Fisheries”; FAO European Inland Fisheries Advisory Commission⁸
- “Recreational Fisheries– FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries”;⁹

Signed by the Italian APR and FIPO

⁷<https://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstranetImage=1979230&SecMode=1&DocId=1617470&Usage=2>

⁸<http://www.fao.org/docrep/012/i0363e/i0363e00.htm>

⁹<http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/i2708e/i2708e00.pdf>