Capitulate, dodge, protest...

State intervention in the fisheries of the Netherlands has forced fishers to adopt some interesting coping strategies

Less than five years ago, on 1 March 2001, newspaper headlines in the Netherlands screamed: "Angry fishermen block sea ports". That morning, some 50 cutters had moved to obstruct entry into the main port of Rotterdam. Large numbers of cutter fishermen also barricaded IJmuiden and Delfzijl, paralyzing shipping from Amsterdam port and the Eems channel. According to the newspapers of that and the following days, the atmosphere in Hook of Holland was especially vicious. A fisher spokesman threatened to drop a World War II bomb into the waterway, saying that other ships too were carrying explosives. One of the skippers participating in the blockade warned, "We will not stop at anything".

Port authorities pre-emptively halted all sea traffic and simultaneously filed for damages. The Dutch government, meanwhile, mobilized Navy, Coast Guard and police contingents to break the blockades by force if necessary. The Minister of State for fisheries quickly contacted the fisher unions to find out what could be done. One day later, faced by a threat of stiff court penalties and by financial concessions of the Minister of State, the fishermen decided to conclude their agitations. The sea battle that some observers had feared was thereby averted, and public life went back to normal.

The direct reason for the dramatic incident described above was the imposition by the European Commission of a 10-week moratorium on cod fishing in the North Sea that would also affect Dutch fishermen, albeit indirectly. It reflects some of the trends and tensions that have affected Dutch fisheries at least since the 1970s. These relate, in large measure, to changing entitlements and greater State interference.

In this article, we explore the current state of Dutch marine fisheries and inquire about the constraints by which it is affected. Finally, we consider some of the strategies employed by Dutch fishermen to cope with the present situation.

Fisheries are commonly categorized according to the product, the technology employed (horsepower, vessel type) or the characteristics of the fishing zone. We use geographical criteria to distinguish inshore (within 12 nautical miles), offshore (12-200 nautical miles) and distant-water fisheries (over 200 nautical miles). These coincide, to a large extent, with a typology of fishing craft, as presented in Table 1 below.

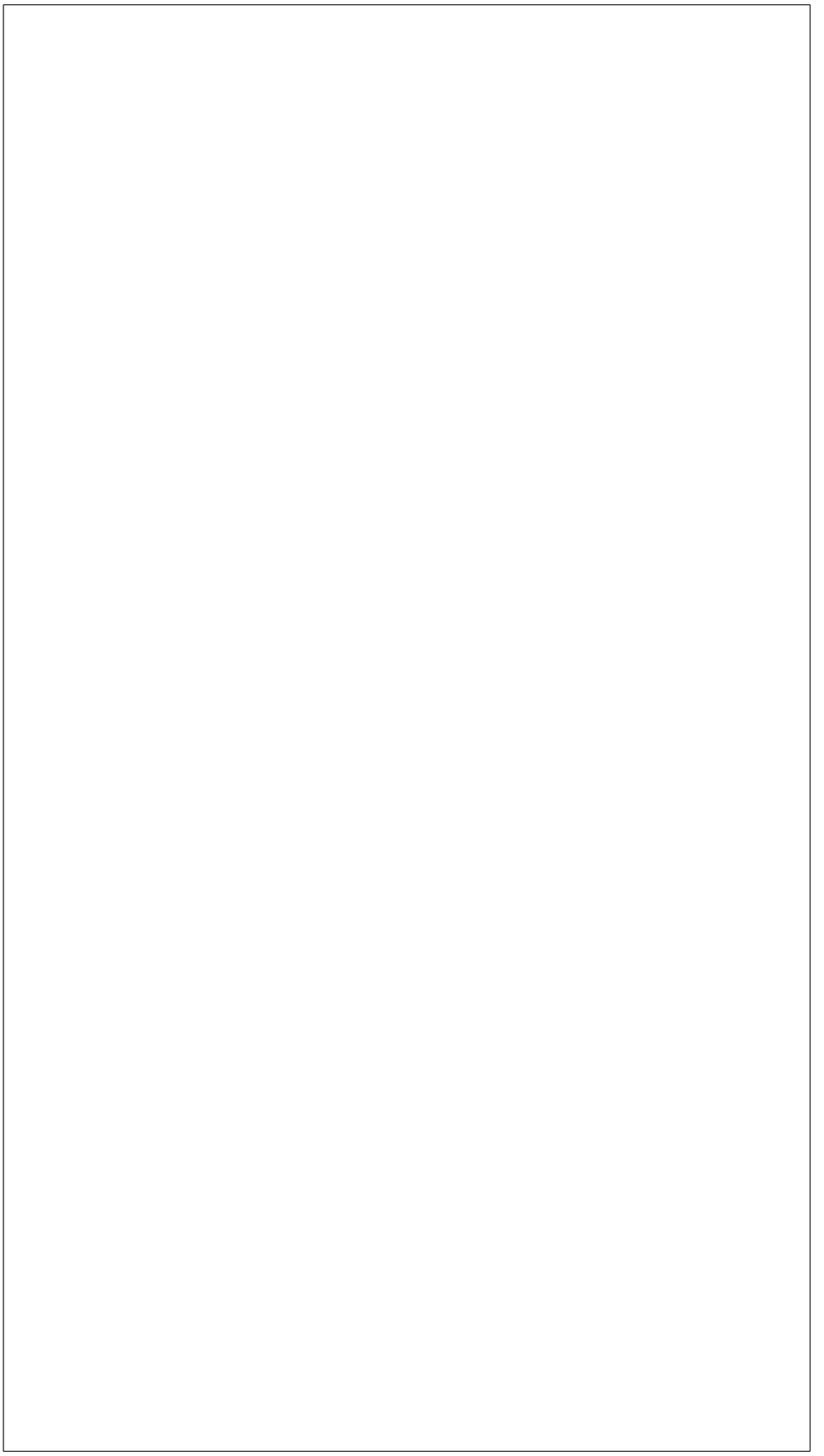
The small Dutch fleet operates from a limited number of harbours spread along the coastline. It employs no more than 2,650 people. The table indicates a decline in the number of fishing vessels in the period 1993-2002, with the exception of distant-water trawlers that have recently increased in number. It also points out that the inshore, offshore and distant-water fisheries of the Netherlands do not differ overly in terms of the value of their landings.

As distant-water fisheries largely take place outside the North Sea, we leave that sector aside in this paper. The inshore fisheries of the Netherlands are dominated by mussel cultivation, oyster farming, cockle fishing and shrimping, but also include other small fisheries.

Spawning grounds

The most important spawning and nursery grounds lie in the littoral and sublittoral areas of the Wadden Sea, and of the Western and Eastern Scheldt in Zeeland. These are also the areas where fishing and fish cultivation are

Netherlands



concentrated, while along the coast other fishing like shrimping occurs. All fisheries are now carried out on the basis of licences or rental agreements issued by government. In many cases, regulation is carried out in close collaboration with producer organizations in forms of co-management.

From the late 19th century onwards, oyster farming has been an extremely lucrative business in Zeeland's coastal waters. Following the outbreak of a paralytic disease, *Bonamia ostreae*, however, most oyster farms, with the exception of those in Grevelingen Lake, were forced to close down. At present, there are only 27 leaseholds of oysters in the latter location, with 34 operators possessing permits for the common area.

Mussel cultivation is a semi-culture, depending on seed that is caught in the wild and then transferred to leased plots for maturation. The Dutch government has made a total of 5,500 hectares available for cultivation, two-thirds of which are located in the Wadden Sea (460 plots), and the remainder in Zeeland (380 plots).

Each firm rents a number of plots in each of the two areas. Just as in the case of oyster production, access- and use-rights are exclusive. Processing and marketing are almost entirely concentrated in the old mussel town of Yerseke, in Zeeland.

Cockle fishing is currently the most contested of the inshore fisheries of the Netherlands, cocklemen regularly crossing swords with environmental activists. The latter argue that mechanical cockle fishing brings hardship to bird populations that depend on the same stock, and also affects the ecology of the seabed.

As a result of political upheaval, the mechanical cockle fisheries in the Eastern Scheldt have now been completely shut down, and significant parts of the Wadden Sea closed for mechanical cockle fisheries. The public discussion that arose both in response to the conservationist movement and as a trade-off for gas drilling in the Wadden Sea, has recently resulted in buying out the remaining mechanical cockle fishermen.

Within the shrimp fishery of today (220 vessels) one can distinguish specialized shrimp fishermen and mixed fishery enterprises. Fewer than half the shrimp vessels are allowed to exploit the Wadden Sea. All fishers are licensed, with Wadden Sea licences being transferable and those for the Eastern Scheldt not. As resources are believed to be abundant, no quotas have been imposed for shrimp fishing although no more vessels are allowed to be added. Recently, Dutch, German and Danish shrimp fishermen of the German Bight agreed voluntarily on catch restrictions. To their disappointment, however, the Netherlands Anti-Trust Authority (NMA) disallowed the agreement, as it was regarded as price-fixing.

The offshore fisheries of the Netherlands are carried out by a fleet of large cutters mainly beam trawlers—that operate in the European exclusive economic zone and are expected to follow European Common Fisheries Policy guidelines. Map 2 indicates the geographical distribution of Dutch fishing effort in horsepower / days. One conclusion is that fishing effort is concentrated in adjacent North Sea fishing areas all along the Dutch coastline, and hardly covers the areas further north or south.

The European system for the allocation of national fishing rights is an important factor structuring the spatial distribution of fishing effort. According to this system, the European Commission determines total allowable catches (TACs) for various fish species, following the quadrant system of the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES). These TACs are distributed among the member countries, the governments of which decide on allocation among 'their' fishermen. The establishment of TACs and national quotas is a highly politicized process, and fisher organizations base their judgement of the Dutch Minister of Agriculture, Nature Conservation and Food Safety on his or her performance in the annual deliberations in Brussels.

Species quota

At present Dutch offshore fishermen enjoy quotas for 22 species. The majority of the Dutch fleet is, however, specialized in high-value flat fish, such as sole and

Table 1: The Dutch Fishing Fleet

Fishery	Vessel Type	No. of vessels, 1993	No. of vessels, 2002	Landings Value (mn Euro)
Inshore	Mussel boats Cutter (1-300 hp)	77 244	69 235	83 26
Offshore	Cutter (>300 hp)	230	158	74
Distant-water	Trawlers	12	17	126

Sources: Taal et al, 2002; Van Ginkel, 2001

plaice. Table 2 indicates the quotas for Dutch offshore fishermen, as they have been set per ICES quadrant for these two species.

If they were to be mapped, the geographical distribution of quotas correlates in large measure with the distribution of offshore fishing effort.

Nowadays Dutch offshore fishermen consider their portion of the national quota for a certain species as their private property. Initially, however, the quota system was met with hard resistance. This included the operation of grey and black markets, as well as confrontations with the General Inspection Service and police forces.

After this period of trial and error, the Dutch government decided, in 1993, to delegate responsibility for the regulation of offshore fisheries to so-called Biesheuvel Groups—Biesheuvel was the chairman of the committee that drafted the management proposal—small groups of cutter fishermen carrying out similar fisheries. This co-management system is considered to be very successful in quota management.

In his study on the fisheries of Texel in the period 1813 to 1932, Van Ginkel describes fishermen as being caught between the Scylla of a fickle natural environment and the Charybdis of an equally fickle market. He describes in detail how fishermen in this period adapted themselves to these varying uncertainties and strove to exert control. Taking his image as point of departure for an analysis of present-day fisheries, one is tempted to add one equally perilous rock to the Strait of Messina. The State is a factor that now cannot be discounted. In all Dutch fisheries, the national government and the European Commission have attained a shaping presence. State policies now co-determine much of the how, where and what of fisheries, whether it is in inshore, offshore or distant-water.

Fishermen do not readily accept State interference. This may partly be caused by the fact that fishing is a form of hunting and gathering. Hunting societies place a premium on skill and luck, and emphasize egalitarianism. This is not to say that fisher communities disagree with the allocation of fishing rights. A plethora of studies carried out since the 1970s demonstrate that fishermen the world over have developed systems of sea tenure that are continuously refined. The issue is more whether interferences by outside agencies, such as the State, are tolerated. The rapidly increasing level of State intervention in Dutch fisheries has regularly provoked obstruction and protest. The report of the 2001 harbour blockades, provided at the beginning of this chapter, constitutes an example of such resistance.

Excessive capacity

Increased State interference in marine fisheries has, in Europe and elsewhere, been partly triggered by the trouble that fisheries itself has got into. Excessive fishing capacities and efforts have resulted in gross overfishing of stocks and led to ecological crises. That the State has contributed to this course of affairs,

through subsidies and other untoward policies is noteworthy.

The crisis enveloping fisheries is now widely recognized. The Dutch government and the European Commission have addressed the crisis through a finer mesh of measures, whose complexity has been illustrated in the preceding sections. One pervasive problem is that fishermen often do not trust the assessments of crisis on which State action is based, and also lack faith in the effectiveness of the measures taken.

State interference in fisheries also has another cause, however, external to the fisheries. Coastal and offshore areas are under pressure from a blossoming group of new users, such as tourism, the oil and gas industry, and the interests of environmental conservation. The multiple-use conflicts that result with fisheries are frequently mediated and decided by the State. This often leads to a further limitation—spatially or otherwise—of fisheries. The North Sea at present counts many spots and regions that, for one reason or another, have become no-go areas for fishermen.

Dutch fishermen have displayed varying reactions to the problems sketched above. These can be alternatively labelled as, capitulation, dodging, protest and co-operation. In view of the resource crunch and the ever-tightening regulatory system, one would expect that many Dutch fishermen would consider leaving the fisheries.

However, Dutch fisheries are dominated by family enterprises and most sons indicate a desire to continue the tradition. The fishermen who do leave the fisheries largely belong to families that lack male successors. Alternatively, the deserters are quota-hoppers, trading in their Dutch fishing rights for those in another country.

Dutch fishermen dodge regulations in at least two ways. The first method is termed 'quota hopping'. European regulations are such that fishing licences and quotas are only transferable between fishermen of the same country. International transfer of licences and quotas is not allowed. In reality, however, Dutch and Spanish fishermen are frequently known to switch operations to other country quotas by procuring vessels there. Such vessels continue to fly their flags of origin, but are now Dutch-owned and operated. In this way, Dutch fishermen have greatly expanded their fishing rights in European waters. Needless to say, the catches of quota-hoppers are not reflected in the Dutch national quota even though they market their landings via Dutch auctions. Quota hopping was very popular in the 1980s and 1990s, but has reduced since.

A second method of dodging is through what has become known as illicit, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing. With the tightening of State regulations, illegal fishing has taken flight all over the world. The catches are channelled not via the regular auctions, but directly to buyers. In the Netherlands, observers estimate that the co-management system has caused this practice to decline to not more than three per cent of the total volume of landings.

Riots, demonstrations and other expressions of fisher protest were common in the 1970s and 1980s, but rescinded in the 1990s. Recently, however, protests have again increased, particularly in connection with new restrictions on cockle and mussel seed fishing in the Wadden Sea. The 2001 harbour blockade mentioned at the beginning of this paper was a response to the 10-week cod fishing moratorium announced by the European Commission.

Table 2: Dutch Quotas: Sole and Plaice per ICES Quadrant, 2002 (tonnes)

	Plaice	Sole
Quadrant no. (tonnes)	Skagerrak (423), IIa-1 (22), IV (650), VII (10), VIIhjk (117)	II (12), IV (790), IIa (42), III (42), VIIa (125), VIIhjk (52), VIIIab (247)
Total tonnes	1,222	1,268

Source: Taal et al, 2003

An interesting aspect of that incident is that there were hardly any specialized cod fishermen involved, as this field of activity has nearly died out in the Netherlands. Instead, sole and plaice fishermen led the protest. Their motive for taking part was that cod is an involuntary bycatch of sole

and plaice. The cod fishing moratorium would, therefore, also have very real consequences for their major fishing activity.

The style of protest in the harbour blockade was aimed at maximizing political impact. It has not been emulated since, however, probably because of negative side effects, such as the attempts by port authorities to recoup damages from all participants. More generally, the polder model of decisionmaking prevailing in the Netherlands generally discourages wildcat strikes and pressure politics.

We mentioned above that the Dutch government appointed a steering committee in the early 1990s to investigate the adverse relations between government and fishermen, particularly in the offshore sector. The co-management arrangements recommended by the committee were based on (a) distribution of responsibilities between government and fishing industry and (b) co-operation between fishermen. The resulting Biesheuvel Groups have proved to be highly effective. Fishermen no longer overfish their quota, and tensions have died down.

One reason is that, with their investments in quotas, fishermen have gained an important stake in fisheries management. They have a sense of belonging to the group and, not to be ignored, the groups also function as a quota market.

Inshore fisheries now also enjoy varying forms of co-management. The main characteristic is that producer groups, within the context of a framework agreed upon with government, have been put in charge of regulation and enforcement.

The Dutch fisheries in the North Sea has gone through a process of fundamental change since 1970, the main feature of which is the imposition of a cordon of external restrictions.

Of course, the Dutch fisheries was never wholly free of interference; moreover, some sections such as the semi-cultures practised in the inshore zone have suffered more than others. The general trend, however, is clear: Dutch marine fishing has transformed from a relatively free vocation into one that is almost impossibly curtailed.

Several dimensions

Curtailment has a variety of dimensions, including a geographical one. We thus pointed out how, as a consequence of other users, the various inshore fisheries have been pressed into smaller spatial zones. We also noted that offshore fisheries now possess fish quotas that are linked to circumscribed quadrants of the North Sea. Dutch fisheries is, therefore,

not only curtailed, but also pinned down. For many fishermen, this process has not been easy to handle.

State intervention in North Sea fisheries has provoked at least four coping strategies among fishermen, two of which—protest and dodging—were particularly prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s. Since 1990, however, fishermen appear to have adopted a strategy of co-operation. This move was partially reactive, as the State had adjusted its policies and introduced a co-management model. But fishermen too have changed their attitudes toward the State. Their motto seems to be: "If you can't beat them, join them".

This paper is by Maarten Bavinck (J.M.Bavinck@uva.nl) of the Centre for Maritime Research (MARE), Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and Ellen Hoefnagel (Ellen.Hoefnagel@wur.nl) of the Agricultural Economics Research Institute LEI, the Hague, the Netherlands. An earlier version was published in T. Dietz, P. Hoekstra and F. Thissen (eds) 2004. *The Netherlands and the North Sea, Dutch Geography 2000-2004*.