



Presentation from the National Inshore Fisheries forum to the Joint Committee on Jobs, Enterprise, and Innovation

Thursday 21st September 2017

On behalf of the National Inshore Fishery Forum, I would like to thank the Committee for the invitation to today's meeting. The fishing vessels that come under the remit of the NIFF are trawlers, lobster and crab boats, whelks, razor, scallopers, gillnetters, and small pelagic's. The very nature of this meeting, the A typical work permit scheme and the situation of the non-EEA crew on Irish fishing vessels, does not have any direct involvement for us, as under our TOR we represent fishing vessels under 12 meters, and the scheme is designed for vessels over 15 meters.

With respect to the Atypical Work Permit Scheme, the NIFF has no formal position on this complex issue at present. To explain this, I will reiterate our Chairman's explanation to another Committee meeting:

"On policy and legislative issues such as this, the National Inshore Fisheries Forum (NIFF) takes direction from the six regional forums or RIFF's. The NIFF tries to form consensus based on the views expressed from each individual regional forum".

Following from this, no formal issues have been identified or raised by any of our RIFFS in relation to the Scheme, as it stands. Notwithstanding this, however, we would like to point out that the issues with lack of crew that our colleagues in the white fish and prawn sector face, now also poses a big issue for fishing vessels in the under 12 meter sector.

Whether or not this is a direct result of skilled inshore crew men heading into positions that may have been occupied by our non-EEA co-workers remains to be seen. But the fact of this matter is, we are finding it more difficult to crew our vessels with skilled, trained, and competent people that understand what their jobs will entail. Life at sea is tough regardless of the vessel you fish on. Every fishery comes with its own challenges, and more so for the inshore sector as our jobs are more weather dependent than the larger vessels. Our size often leaves us without income for weeks on end. Being a self-employed fisherman on any boat, you understand that when the boat isn't fishing you don't get paid. You understand you can haul your nets or pots, for a couple of boxes of fish or crabs, that don't earn enough to cover the expenses that enable the boat to go fishing that day or for that trip, and come home with little or no money. One thing we are guaranteed is, there are no guarantees.

Considering these challenges we would like to see the Atypical Permit Scheme extended to the under 12 meter sector (which was mentioned as an option "under consideration by the government" in Prime Time's segment on the 6th of April of this year, pertaining to the non-EEA fishermen in the Irish fishing industry). Here, we are calling for a scheme that can be adapted to include the inshore sector in a manner that is fair to all. We acknowledge the complex issues around the scheme, but we are willing to come to the table to see what can be done in this respect.

As a further point, I would like to take this opportunity to relay a few observations, from my own personal experience, outside of the NIFF, with respect to some of the circumstances surrounding the scheme. We have enough people here today speaking about the facts and issues surrounding why we are here, so here I would like to tell you a bit about the other side of this awful story; one that has garnered much less attention, and acknowledgement.



I am a proud member of the Irish fishing industry and take my participation in this industry very seriously. I take great offence in the recent attacks on the Irish fishing industry and the corresponding effort to paint us all with the vile brush, from individuals that know little or nothing about what it takes to be a fisherman or be involved in the fishing community!

In Ireland everyone is so quick to believe what is printed, you are guilty until proven innocent - having to prove your innocence, at a huge financial and personal cost. The losses incurred are felt by all those involved in the business be it ashore or on the boat. What it also does is break you. It causes mental anguish, it attacks your character, makes you paranoid about what is going on around you and who you can trust. The ripple effect that extends to your family - to see them cry and being hurt at the accusations being made against you - is one of the hardest things that you will ever go through. I know this because my dad Lenny Hyde and his business partner Pat O Mahony have been living this for well over 15 months, and even today when hearing anything to do with this issue, they relive the nightmare.

To quote another proud member of the fishing community, Lia ní Aodha, in her open letter to the editor of the Guardian in relation to the article published on the 2nd Nov 2015, she quite rightly states that:

1. It unfairly and unnecessarily damages a small industry on the edge of Europe.
2. It harms the livelihoods of good, honest people not only Irish skippers and crews, but also the non-Irish.
3. It defames countless hardworking people, their families, and their colleagues.
4. It causes insurmountable hurt to individuals, their families, and their communities.

“These instances are isolated and the exception rather than the Norm.”

The people that may be guilty of the mistreatment of others, you will find, do not differentiate between Egyptians, Filipinos, Irish, or with respect to skin colour. They treat everyone the same. This is a reflection of their person, perhaps; not knowing any different, carrying out their duties oblivious to their ignorance and their moral duties. These very people who have been spoken about in many interviews by the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) have still not been brought to justice despite the “reams and reams” of evidence allegedly gathered against them. I am curious to know if this “evidence” and information has been handed over to the Garda Síochana and investigated?

At the 4th of July’s Committee meeting, the Chair asked the question “is this a racist issue?” Mr. Ken Flemming of ITF answered, “It is, Yes!” – as per my above statement, I absolutely disagree with that answer. Across all levels of society, you will find individuals in positions of power that mistreat people in pay grades below them. If the owner of a restaurant mistreats one of his employees, does that mean every restaurant owner is guilty of the same? I put it to you this way; just because one or two individuals within the fishing sector, of over 2000 fishing vessels, may be guilty of mistreatment, why is the whole industry on trial?

I came across a presentation by ITF, Siptu, and Ken Fleming to Seafish in Scotland http://www.seafish.org/media/1675875/seclg_jan2017_itf.pdf. The last two points of that presentation got me really thinking. They are as follows:



*** As the internationally recognised premier organisation involved in looking after the welfare of seafarers the ITF is willing to inspect all Irish vessels and certify whether or not they comply with the ETI ¹**

***ETI firms should only purchase produce from ITF certified vessels**

If ITF, Ken Flemming, and SIPTU are that concerned with bringing justice to the alleged mistreated fishermen, why has this been drawn out? Why haven't they handed over the information as it comes in? The dozens of "fishermen" that ITF has holed up in safe houses - would they not prefer to be at home with their families? In Irish law is it not illegal to knowingly assist an illegal immigrant to stay in the country? Withholding information from the Gardaí is a criminal offence, an offence not tolerated in the fishing industry but it seems to be acceptable for ITF to do?

Discrimination comes in many forms and can be interpreted by individuals as a personal attack, well I, as an Irish citizen and a member of the Irish fishing community, feel that we are being discriminated against by organisations, and persons with an ulterior motive.

¹ ETI is the Ethical Trading Initiative.