# Fish Barrel Politics? Self-selection into and inside the European Parliament's fisheries committee[•]

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This paper investigates the division of labour inside the European Parliament in the light of contending theories, using evidence from its fisheries committee. The aim of the paper is to find out the causes of specialisation and whether the committee is representative of the full chamber, using socio-economic variables such as the fisheries sector share of employment or production as proxies for MEPs' preferences. The paper starts by analysing nominal committee membership. Then, it goes deeper to investigate participation inside committee, by analysing the allocation of rapporteurships, which are used by the EP to organise its work inside committees. Finally, the conclusions summarise the main findings on the causes of specialisation and the representativeness of committees, and introduce some normative considerations about the efficiency of self-selection.

It is in parliamentary committees that most of the work of the EP is made. Whereas the traditional parliamentary month reserves just one week each for both the political groups and the plenaries, committee meetings are assigned two weeks. Committees have important prerogatives in parliament, such as the right to prepare parliament's opinion to be voted in plenary. But the question here is not to what extent there is a sort of 'government by committee' in the EU. Rather, the aim of this paper is to investigate what determines participation at committee level, and whether committees are representative of their parent chamber. These are questions that go beyond the EP and

that raise issues of democracy and efficiency, which have proven controversial, and have been extensively treated in the academic literature.

There is a wide literature on the legislative organisation of Congress and, in particular, its committee system. This literature is divided in two main camps. On the one hand, *distributive theories* emphasise the self-selection of committee members (e.g. Shepsley, 1978). These theories predict that committees will predominantly attract members from constituencies that have a lot to gain or lose from the committees' output, the so-called 'interesteds'. Thus, these theories predict, for instance, that the agriculture committee will be packed with members representing agricultural constituencies. Committees are therefore predicted to be, issue by issue, unrepresentative of the chamber. The committee system represents, from this perspective, an institutionalised logroll. Finally, from the normative point of view, these theories argue that such institutionalised logroll is not inherently bad, since it can take into account the intensity of preferences of members over different issue areas (Weingast and Marshall, 1988). *Informational theories*, on the other hand, stress two different aspects of legislative politics (e.g. Krehbiel, 1991). First, decisions in an assembly require a majority. Second, legislative politics is characterised by uncertainty about how policies relate to outcomes. Based on these two postulates, informational theories predict heterogeneous committees which are representative of the whole chamber (only in exceptional cases do these theories allow for the preponderance of preference outliers within a committee, for informational reasons, when these represent low-cost specialists). The purpose of the whole committee system is, for informational theories, to facilitate the acquisition through specialisation of the information necessary to reduce the uncertainty about how policies relate to outcomes. Finally, other theories have emphasised other aspects of legislative politics, such as the role of political parties (e.g. Cox and McCubbins, 1993),

and yet other theories have tried to combine the different contributions of all the former theories (e.g. Maltzman, 1997).

This debate about the nature and the causes of the committee system has crossed the boundaries of the American congress and reached the study of the European Parliament. Shaun Bowler and David Farrell (1995) have conducted a study on the committee system of the European Parliament, arguing that 'the EP's committees are formed with a view to heterogeneity –rather than homogeneous high demanders-' and that 'the composition of committees generally reflects the ideological composition of the chamber. It is not the case that specific committees are dominated by either national or ideological voting blocks.' However, they argue that the pattern is less clear when they look at narrower, more personal interests. For instance, they show that MEPs related to agricultural interests and those from peripheral regions are significantly more likely than other members to serve on the agriculture and regional affairs committees, respectively. For Bowler and Farrell, this evidence can be said to support both Shepsley's ('high demanders') and Krehbiel's ('low costs of specialisation') accounts. All in all they conclude that, at least in the case of the EP, specialisation is a good thing.

This study of the EP fisheries committee will also look at the organisation of the European parliament. However, the focus on a particular case will allow this paper to improve on Bowler and Farrell's in two main respects. Firstly, this paper will, inspired by Richard Hall's work on *Participation in Congress,* go beyond the analysis of nominal committee membership and look also at actual participation inside committee. In particular, this study will focus on the figure of the *rapporteur*, which is key to understanding the workings of the EP. Secondly, this study will investigate the issue of representativeness more in depth and try to gather evidence to choose among contending theories. Of course, the substantial results of the paper apply to the fisheries

committee and cannot be directly transposed to other committees. However, those results provide interesting hypotheses on the motors of participation in and the representativeness of parliamentary committees and, what is more important, a methodology to test those hypotheses for other EP committees.

The rest of this paper will be divided in three sections. The first section analyses the allocation of committee seats and the representativeness of committees. The second section analyses the reasons behind the allocation of rapporteurships, as well as their the representativeness of rapporteurs. Finally, the concluding section addresses three main issues: the causes of that specialisation, the representativeness of committees and the potential benefits of the system.

## 1. NOMINAL COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Nominal committee membership is the first step for any MEP wanting to have an impact in the work of a given committee, and should also be the first step in any analysis of participation in committee. The composition of committees, which is negotiated among political groups, distinguishes two types of members: full members and substitutes. Substitutes can participate in committee discussions and for them to have full voting rights it is sufficient that a full member of the same political group is absent. Because it is not infrequent for some full committee members to be unable to attend a given committee meeting, and because substitutes need not be of the same nationality as the fellow political group members they substitute, substitutes deserve to be included in any analysis of the national composition and representativeness of committees. This said, let us now examine some preliminary evidence on the composition of the EP fisheries committee which can give us some insights.

| Table 1. Distribution of fisheries committee membership by member state | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Committee members | % | MEPs | % | Disproportion |
| Ireland | 7 | 15 | 7,22 | 2,40 | 3,01 |
| Portugal | 7 | 25 | 7,22 | 3,99 | 1,81 |
| Spain | 15 | 64 | 15,46 | 10,22 | 1,51 |
| UK | 17 | 87 | 17,53 | 13,90 | 1,26 |
| Netherlands | 6 | 31 | 6,19 | 4,95 | 1,25 |
| France | 15 | 87 | 15,46 | 13,90 | 1,11 |
| Italy | 13 | 87 | 13,40 | 13,90 | 0,96 |
| Denmark | 2 | 16 | 2,06 | 2,56 | 0,81 |
| Finland | 2 | 16 | 2,06 | 2,56 | 0,81 |
| Greece | 3 | 25 | 3,09 | 3,99 | 0,77 |
| Sweden | 2 | 22 | 2,06 | 3,51 | 0,59 |
| Germany | 7 | 99 | 7,22 | 15,81 | 0,46 |
| Belgium | 1 | 25 | 1,03 | 3,99 | 0,26 |
| Austria | 0 | 21 | 0,00 | 3,35 | 0,00 |
| Luxembourg | 0 | 6 | 0,00 | 0,96 | 0,00 |
| | 97 | 626 | 100,00 | 100,00 | 1,00 |

Elaborated from data on EP's website as of 15 March 2003

Table 1 shows the composition of the fisheries committee by member state in the fourth and fifth legislative terms (1994-1999 and 1999-2004, respectively). The first aspect to note is that there appears to be some kind of disproportion for some member states when the share of committee assignments is compared to that of seats in the EP. For instance, Ireland's share of fisheries committee members is three times greater than its share of MEPs, whereas Austria or Luxembourg have no committee members at all. The second characteristic is that the ordering of member states shown on the table might be related to some factor linked to the importance of fisheries for the member state. But this result could also very well be random. In any case, it seems interesting to analyse what drives the allocation of committee seats, and the consequences of this allocation for the representativeness of EP committees.

## 1.1. The allocation of committee seats

The allocation of committee seats, as virtually everything that happens in parliament, is done by majority. So if committee seats are positions of power, it is to be expected that

the number of seats in the EP will be a constraint in determining the national allocation of seats in the fisheries committee. However, this does not mean that the national allocation of seats inside a given committee will have to be strictly linked to voting power on the floor. The reason is that there a more committees in the EP besides the fisheries committee and that MEPs from a given member state may choose to concentrate their voting power to participate on a given committee at the expense of other committees. As distributive theories claim, what this system would represent is a kind of institutionalised logroll driven by self-selection. The preferences of MEPs are usually assumed to depend from the socio-economic conditions of the constituency they represent, so there should be some relationship between the willingness of an MEP to serve in the fisheries committee and the socio-economic importance of fisheries in her member state. All in all we should expect the national allocation of seats inside the fisheries committee to depend both on the number of seats of that member state in the EP and on the socio-economic importance of fisheries in the member state in question.

| Table 2. Estimation of the national allocation of fisheries committee seats (Poisson) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Intercept | 0.789*** | 0.637*** | 0.572** | 0.570** |
| | (0.224) | (0.242) | (0.249) | (0.250) |
| EP seats | 0.020*** | 0.016*** | 0.014*** | 0.015*** |
| | (0.003) | (0.004) | (0.004) | (0.004) |
| Fishery employment | | 0.008*** | | 0.004 |
| (thousands) | | (0.002) | | (0.004) |
| Fishery contribution to GDP | | | 0.314*** | 0.210 |
| (billion €) | | | (0.090) | (0.140) |
| N | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 |
| $R^2$ | 0.549 | 0.727 | 0.770 | 0.783 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.514 | 0.682 | 0.732 | 0.724 |

* $\alpha < .10$    ** $\alpha < .05$    *** $\alpha < .01$ Method: ML/QML - Poisson Count

Table 2 estimates the national allocation of fisheries committee seats as a function of the national allocation of seats in the EP and MEPs' preferences given by the socio-economic importance of fisheries in their member state. Model 1 explains national

committee membership as a function of the national allocation of seats inside the parliament, which turns out to be a very significant variable ($p < 0.01$). Model 2 adds the proportion of the population employed in the fisheries sector as a proxy for the socio-economic importance of the sector. The result is that both the number of seats and fisheries employment are very significant ($p < 0.01$). Model 3 uses fisheries' production as a proxy of the economic importance of the sector. Also in this case, both the national allocation of seats and fisheries production are very significant ($p < 0.01$), and the goodness of fit seems to improve somehow with respect to the second model. Finally, model 4 includes both employment and production as proxies of the socio-economic importance of the sector. The national allocation of MEPs remains very significant. However, the natural correlation between employment and production makes the estimated coefficients for the employment and fisheries variables not significant individually, due to multicollinearity.

In summary, the prediction that the allocation of committee seats will be characterised by self-selection based on national interests, constrained by the national share of seats in the EP, seems to be confirmed by evidence. What remains to be seen now is the effect of this constrained self-selection on the representativeness of committees, which will be analysed next.

## 1.2. Is the EP fisheries committee representative of the chamber?

A common way to approximate legislators' preferences is to look at the socio-economic characteristics of the constituencies they represent. Assuming that legislators' preferences are induced by their wish to get re-elected, the socio-economic conditions of their constituencies are good indicators of the policies legislators will favour. Different constituencies will have different socio-economic conditions and thus induce

different preferences upon their representatives. Starting from this assumption, it may be interesting to investigate two main questions: (1) do committee members represent the heterogeneity of constituencies (and therefore of preferences) of MEPs or else are committees more homogeneous? and (2) are committee members preference outliers, biased towards the interests of the fishing sector, i.e. 'high demanders' of fisheries policy?

| Table 3. Difference of preferences between the committee and the floor based on national social conditions (fisheries employment per thousand inhabitants) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | median | p-value (Wilcoxon test) | std deviation | p-value (F test) | N |
| Committee | 1.53 | | 1.50 | | 46 |
| Floor | 1.15 | | 1.40 | | 626 |
| Difference | 0.38 | 0.012 | | 0.579 | |

Elaborated from data on EP website, European Commission (2001) and Eurostat

Table 3 compares the preferences of fisheries committee members with those of parliament as a whole. The first result is that there is not a significant difference between the variance in fisheries employment share between MEPs in general, on the one side, and fisheries committee members, on the other side. So the fisheries committee appears not to be composed of homogeneous members, but it is not significantly more heterogeneous than the parent chamber either. So far, so good. But in addition to looking at the heterogeneity of committees, it would be interesting to know whether the outcome of their decisions will correspond to the preferred policy by their parent chamber. We know that both on the floor and in committee decisions are taken by majority and assuming unidimensionality of preferences as well as single-peaked preferences, it results that the median voter is who decides the policy outcome, both on the floor and in committee. So it would be interesting to compare the preferences of the median voter in committee with those of the median voter on the floor. Table 3 shows a

Wilcoxon test for equality of medians between the floor and the fisheries committee. The result is that the median committee member comes from a member state where the proportion of fisheries employment is greater than for the median MEP (1.53 and 1.15 workers per thousand inhabitants, respectively). This difference of 0.38 workers per thousand inhabitants is quite significant (p = 0.01). As a result, the policy favoured by committees is likely to be more prone to fishing interests than the policy favoured by the EP as a whole.

Table 4. Difference of preferences between the committee and the floor based on national economic conditions (fisheries production per thousand euros of GDP)

| | median | p-value (Wilcoxon test) | std deviation | p-value (F test) | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Committee | 2.19 | | 3.21 | | 46 |
| Floor | 1.51 | | 2.98 | | 626 |
| Difference | 0.68 | 0.009 | | 0.544 | |

Elaborated from data on EP website, European Commission (2001) and Eurostat

Table 4 undertakes similar tests, this time using a measure of fisheries production relative to GDP as the proxy for MEP's preferences towards fisheries policy. The results go exactly in the same direction as in the previous case. First, committees are neither significantly more homogeneous nor more heterogeneous than the parent chamber. Second, the table shows that the median committee member comes from a member state where fisheries production is more important than in the member state of the median MEP. The committee median comes from a member state where fisheries production represents 2.19 euros per thousand euros of GDP, as compared to the EP median, who comes from a member state where fisheries production is 1.51 euros per thousand euros of GDP. The difference of 68 cents between both figures is very significant (p < 0.01). As a result, the fisheries committee median is likely to be more prone to fishing interests than the median MEP.

All in all, what we see in that the fisheries committee is as heterogeneous as the chamber but the median fisheries committee member is likely to hold more extreme preferences than the median MEP. The consequences for democracy and efficiency will be discussed in the conclusion, but let us move before to the next section, which analyses a further means of specialisation in the EP, namely the allocation of rapporteurships.

## 2. INSIDE COMMITTEE: THE DISTRIBUTION OF RAPPORTEURSHIPS

The study of participation inside committee turns out to be extremely important for the understanding of the European Parliament. What Richard Hall has pointed out about the American Congress, also applies to the European Parliament: 'the serious actors in the legislative process tend to be members of the committee with jurisdiction. But the converse is not true. Committee members need not be –on most bills, tend not to be– serious actors' (Hall, 1996: 11). The division of labour does not only take place among committees, but also inside them. Whereas in congressional committees most of the work is done in subcommittees, inside EP committees the division of labour occurs more through the figure of the rapporteur. For each legislative procedure, a *rapporteur* is usually appointed from among the members of the committee responsible. Her function is to prepare initial discussion, to present a draft text and to amend it in order to take into account the views of the committee. She must also present and defend the proposal in plenary. Finally, the *rapporteur* of the bill has a place guaranteed in the conciliation committee (Corbett et al, 2000: 117). All in all, the agenda-setting functions of the *rapporteur* make her the most influential individual in Parliament on the particular bill.

The study of rapporteurships is particularly interesting precisely because such assignments are not evenly distributed among all members of the fisheries committee. For instance, from the start of the fifth parliamentary term on 1 July 1999 to 15 March 2003 there have been 84 rapporteurships for 46 committee members. From these, whereas Daniel Varela (EPP, E) has been rapporteur 16 times during the period, there are as much as 17 fisheries committee members who have never been appointed rapporteurs during the same period. In fact, far from being evenly distributed, rapporteurships seem to be pretty concentrated in the hands of a number of very active committee members.

Figure 1. Concentration of rapporteurships
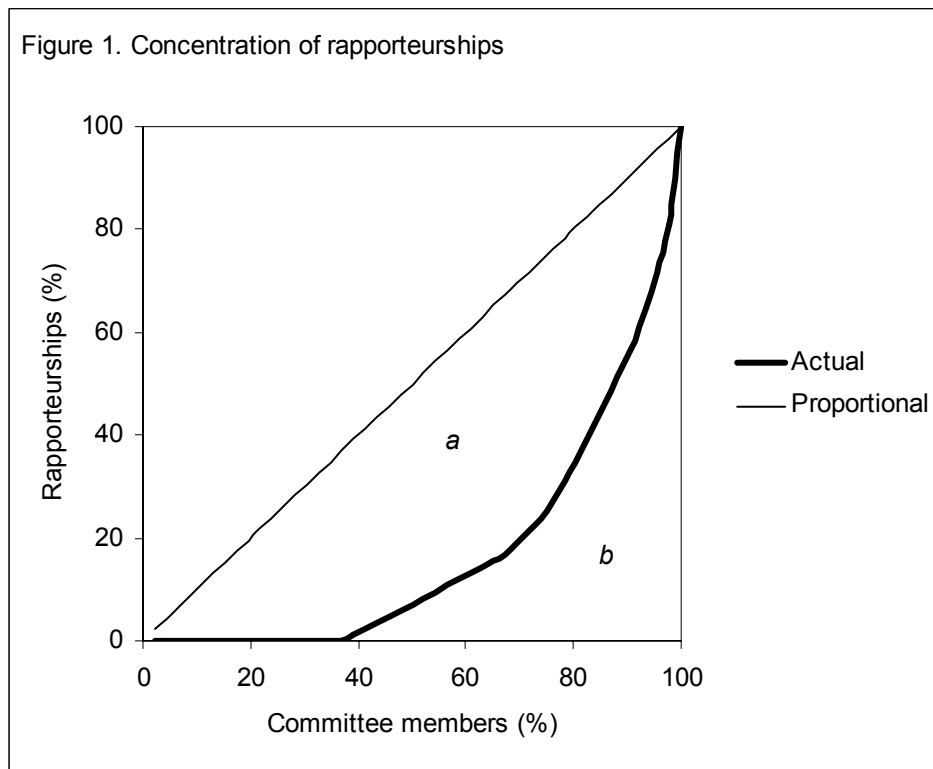


Elaborated from data in OEIL

Figure 1 depicts the contribution of committee members to the total number of rapporteurships from the beginning of the fifth parliamentary term to 15 March 2003. Committee members have been ordered along the horizontal axis from less to more active. One can appreciate how the less active rapporteurs fail to contribute their

proportional share of rapporteurships (almost 40 % of them do not contribute at all) and how this gap is caught up by more active rapporteurs. The Gini concentration index of 65.53 % represents the ratio between area *a* and area *a + b* (the index can vary between 0, for an even distribution, to 1 for total concentration). But, without knowing the preferences of rapporteurs, finding high levels of concentration is not enough to infer that rapporteurs are unrepresentative of the chamber. In fact, without further evidence, it could be possible that such concentration merely represents an example of healthy specialisation inside the EP fisheries committee.

As we saw in the previous section, a common way to approximate legislators' preferences is to look at the socio-economic characteristics of the constituencies they represent. Starting from this assumption, it may be interesting to investigate two main questions related to representativeness: first, whether rapporteurs represent the heterogeneity of preferences inside the parliament as a whole and, second, whether they are on average preference outliers.

Table 5. National distribution of fisheries committee rapporteurships

| | Rapporteurs | % | Committee members | % | Disproportion |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Spain | 56 | 27,72 | 15 | 15,96 | 1,74 |
| Denmark | 7 | 3,32 | 2 | 2,06 | 1,61 |
| Ireland | 23 | 10,90 | 7 | 7,22 | 1,51 |
| Portugal | 22 | 10,89 | 7 | 7,45 | 1,46 |
| UK | 45 | 21,33 | 17 | 17,53 | 1,22 |
| Germany | 17 | 8,06 | 7 | 7,22 | 1,12 |
| Greece | 5 | 2,37 | 3 | 3,09 | 0,77 |
| France | 20 | 9,48 | 15 | 15,46 | 0,61 |
| Netherlands | 7 | 3,32 | 6 | 6,19 | 0,54 |
| Italy | 8 | 3,96 | 13 | 13,83 | 0,29 |
| Sweden | 1 | 0,47 | 2 | 2,06 | 0,23 |
| Finland | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2,06 | 0 |
| Belgium | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1,03 | 0 |
| Austria | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| Luxembourg | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| EU | 211 | 100 | 97 | 100 | 1 |

Elaborated from data on EP's website as of 15 March 2003

Table 5 shows the share of fisheries rapporteurships enjoyed by each nationality and compares it with its share of fisheries committee seats. One can note two main patterns. First, there is a general disproportion between the number of rapporteurships and the number of committee seats held by each nationality. For instance, Spain, Denmark and Ireland each have a share of rapporteurships more than 50 % greater than their respective share of committee seats. Secondly, there appears to be some intuitive hypothetical relationship between the socio-economic importance of fisheries in a member state and the disproportion of rapporteurships to committee seats held by MEPs of that nationality. This is a hypothetical pattern which deserves further investigation, to which I now turn.

## 2.1. The national allocations of rapporteurships

The system for allocating rapporteurships is a system of constrained self-selection. Rapporteurships are distributed following an auction-like system which favours the self-selection of MEPs according to their preferences. The preferences of MEPs, as noted above, can be approximated by the socio-economic characteristics of the member state in which they where elected. Prominently among these characteristics are the share of the population working in the fisheries sector and the weight of fisheries production in relation to GDP. Employment relates to the economic importance of the sector, but even more to the number of voters that are likely to see their vote affected by the behaviour of their MEPs in committee. In other words, the social importance of the sector. The production variable, however, is more purely related to economic power and its influence on MEP behaviour can be more directly linked to the financial capability of interests. Self-selection is constrained in the sense that rapporteurships are limited and bidders have limited wealth in terms of points for bidding and in terms of fixed time and

resources to draft reports. The points for bidding are proportional to the number of seats in the committee. The fixed time and resources of MEPs of a given nationality to draft reports can also be assumed to be proportional, in a sense, to the number of committee members of that nationality. All in all, the number of rapporteurships held by a given nationality within the EP fisheries committee should depend positively on the relative socio-economic importance of fishing (in terms of employment and production) and the number of seats of that member state in the committee.

| Table 6. Estimation of the national allocation of fisheries committee rapporteurships (Poisson) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Intercept | 1.167*** | 1.148*** | 1.115*** | 1.108*** |
| | (0.168) | (0.171) | (0.171) | (0.170) |
| Committee seats | 0.160*** | 0.150*** | 0.124*** | 0.123*** |
| (4th & 5th parliaments) | (0.013) | (0.016) | (0.019) | (0.018) |
| Fishery employment | | 0.002 | | -0.004 |
| (thousands) | | (0.002) | | (0.003) |
| Fishery production | | | 0.215*** | 0.332*** |
| (billion €) | | | (0.077) | (0.117) |
| N | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 |
| $R^2$ | 0.649 | 0.673 | 0.726 | 0.716 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.622 | 0.619 | 0.680 | 0.638 |

* $\alpha < .10$ ** $\alpha < .05$ *** $\alpha < .01$ Method: ML/QML - Poisson Count

Table 6 estimates the national allocation of rapporteurships as a function of the national allocation of committee seats and the socio-economic importance of fisheries in the member state. Model 1 explains the national allocation of rapporteurships as a function of the national allocation of committee seats. The result, as expected, is that the influence of the number of committee members on the national allocation of rapporteurships is positive and very significant ($p < 0.01$). Model 2 adds the proportion of the population employed in the fisheries sector as a proxy of the social importance of the sector, which turns out not to be significant at conventional levels. Model 3 drops the employment variable and introduces fisheries' production (including fishing, aquaculture and the fish processing industry) as a proxy for the economic importance of the sector. In this case, both the national allocation of committee seats and fisheries

production are very significant (p < .01), and the goodness of fit improves with respect to model one. Finally, model 4 includes both employment and production as proxies of the socio-economic importance of the sector. The result is that the employment variable remains not significant at conventional levels, whereas fisheries production remains very significant (p < 0.01).

In conclusion, the prediction that the national allocation of rapporteurships will be characterised by self-selection based on national interests, constrained by the national share of seats in the committee, seems to be confirmed by evidence. However, unlike self-selection *into* the fisheries committee which could be explained by either social or economic factors, self-selection *inside* the committee is driven exclusively by economic factors. This difference could be explained by the fact that work inside committee is less visible to EU citizens and therefore less affected by votes than nominal committee membership. But the main reason is probably that, whereas nominal committee membership is relatively cheap in terms of workload, rapporteurships may require a considerable amount of time, which lobbies can buy (Hall and Wayman, 1990). Interest groups will find it easier to lobby though their own MEPs because, among other things, it is more likely that they have similar preferences. Therefore, the economic weight of the fisheries sector in a member state will be directly related to the sector's ability to buy time and to the willingness of committee members of that member state to participate inside committee.

What remains to be seen now is the effect of this constrained self-selection on the representativeness of rapporteurs, which I will analyse next.

## 2.2. Are rapporteurs representative of the chamber?

Recall from the introduction that informational theories predicted that committees would be unbiased and represent the heterogeneity of preferences of the chamber, whereas distributive theories predicted that self-selection would lead to homogeneous committees of high-demanders. We have just seen in the previous subsection that the allocation of rapporteurships in the EP is characterised by constrained self-selection in which the socio-economic characteristics of the member states play a role in their allocations of rapporteurships. The question is whether this self-selection leads to biased rapporteurs with respect to the chamber or whether the political constraints given by the exogenously limited number of legislative procedures and the distribution of seats in parliament are strong enough to prevent this from happening.

The representativeness of rapporteurs will be assessed by comparing their preferences with those of the chamber as a whole. Following the line of the previous section, the socio-economic characteristics of the member state of origin will be used as proxies of MEPs' preferences. For each proxy, two types of tests will be undertaken: first, the heterogeneity of preferences among rapporteurs will be compared with the heterogeneity of preferences inside the chamber as a whole. Subsequently, I will address the question of bias.

Table 7. Difference of preferences between rapporteurs and the floor based on national social conditions (fisheries employment per thousand inhabitants)

|  | mean | p-value (t test) | std deviation | p-value (F test) | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rapporteurs | 2.43 |  | 1.57 |  | 211 |
| Floor | 1.57 |  | 1.40 |  | 626 |
| Difference | 0.86 | 0.000 |  | 0.055 |  |

Elaborated from data on EP website, European Commission (2001) and Eurostat

Table 7 compares the preferences of rapporteurs with those of the chamber, as measured by the share of fisheries employment within the population of the member state of origin. First, one should pay attention to the equality of variances test, with the result that the preferences of rapporteurs turn out to be more heterogeneous than those of the chamber as a whole, the results being fairly significant ($0.5 < p < .10$). Second, the table also presents an equality of means test between the preferences of rapporteurs and those of the chamber. Unlike in the previous section, where the representativeness of committee members was analysed, in this section bias is measured by the difference in means not medians. The reason is simple: whereas committee members decide by majority over a given issue, each rapporteur is responsible for different issue, so the median voter theorem is not applicable to them. The mean of 2.43 fishermen per thousand inhabitants among rapporteurs is very significantly greater than that of 1.57 per thousand among MEP's in general ($p < .001$). This result is not strange even if, as we saw in the previous subsection, participation inside committee is driven exclusively by economic factors. The reason is that, as we know from section one, social factors do influence nominal committee membership and this in turn, as we saw in the previous subsection, influences the allocation of rapporteurships among committee members.

Table 8. Difference of preferences between rapporteurs and the floor based on national economic conditions (fisheries production per thousand euros of GDP)

|  | mean | p-value (t test) | std deviation | p-value (F test) | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rapporteurs | 4.751 |  | 3.574 |  | 211 |
| Floor | 2.836 |  | 2.976 |  | 626 |
| Difference | 1.915 | 0.000 |  | 0.002 |  |

Elaborated from data on EP website, European Commission (2001) and Eurostat

Table 8 compares rapporteurs' preferences with those of the chamber, in this case using the contribution of fisheries to the GDP of member states as a proxy for MEPs' preferences. The table undertakes similar tests of equality of variances and means, with

the following results: first, as far as the equality of variances test is concerned, the disparity is very significant ($p < .01$), allowing us to confidently conclude that the preferences of rapporteurs are more heterogeneous than those of the chamber as a whole. Second, as far as the question of bias is concerned, the result is that the mean contribution of fisheries to the GDP is very significantly greater among rapporteurs than among MEPs in general. This result was not unexpected, given the bias of committee members (see section one) and role of economic factors on the self-selection of committee members into rapporteur assignments (previous subsection).

So, in conclusion, both looking at social (employment) and economic (value of fisheries sector production) indicators in their member states of origin, rapporteurs tend to be more heterogeneous than MEPs in general, but the average rapporteur tends also to be more inclined towards fishing interests than the average MEP.


## 3. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has investigated membership of and participation inside the fisheries committee of the European Parliament. The conclusions address three main issues: representativeness, the causes of specialisation and whether such specialisation is a good thing.


*The causes of specialisation: constrained self-selection*

Specialisation in the EP is not caused by the purposeful design of a central planner picking specialists for committee positions based on their CVs. Rather, this paper has shown that, at least for the fisheries committee, it is the result of a system of constrained self-selection. As far as the national membership of the fisheries committee is concerned, the first section has shown that it is influenced both by the size of national

delegations in the EP and the socio-economic importance of the fisheries sector in terms of either employment or production. Section two has also shown the allocation of rapporteurships to be characterised by constrained self-selection. But in this case the results were, if anything, more interesting. The national allocation of rapporteurships was, as expected, constrained by the size of the national delegation in the committee. But, unlike for the allocation of committee seats, the self-selection of rapporteurs was driven exclusively by economic not social variables. This interesting finding could be the result of the fact that committee work is less visible to voters and, more importantly, the fact that powerful lobbies in economic terms could finance better the work of their MEPs in the committee. All in all, specialisation in the EP fisheries committee is brought about by constrained self-selection among MEPs according to their constituency interests in an institutionalised auction-like logroll. But what holds this apparent logroll together, both at the moment of the allocation of committee positions and once these positions have been distributed?

When committee positions are being distributed, self-selection is constrained not only by voting power, but also by the fact there are formal limitations on the number of committees a given MEP can serve in but even when the limitation is not formal, the scarcity of MEPs' time would make them concentrate on their first preferences. Once committees are set up, they enjoy certain procedural prerogatives, such as being able to table amendments to a legislative proposal on the floor. But this can also be done by political groups or by 32 members and if there seems to be some deference towards the committee responsible, this is not so much because of a difficult-to-enforce logroll is taking place, but because MEPs in other committees simply lack time to engage in issues which are not so important to them (if they were, they would have pressed for a

seat in the committee in the first place). The scarcity of MEP's time encourages specialisation through the committee system.

The effects of the scarcity of MEPs' time and resources on specialisation are if anything clearer on the distribution of rapporteurships. At the moment of the distribution of rapporteurships, nation-based self-selection of rapporteurs is not only constrained by the political power of the different member states inside the committee, but also by the scarcity of MEPs' time and administrative resources. Being a rapporteur is a responsibility that consumes time and resources, which makes it possible that some member states hold more rapporteurships than their proportionate share. This is so because MEPs from member states with a greater interest in fisheries are more willing to pay these transaction costs than other members. Transaction costs are also, following Richard Hall (1996), what holds the logroll together. In other words, what makes that MEPs from member states with little fishing interests will not bid for rapporteurships when they are auctioned is not their deference towards MEPs from fishing regions, but the fact they are simply not willing to spend the time and effort necessary to be rapporteur on an issue they are not interested in, relative to other issues. Finally, once rapporteurs are appointed, the logroll is not enforced through deference form other MEPs towards rapporteurs but by the institutional prerogatives of the rapporteur, enshrined in the EP's rules of procedure.

*The question of representativeness: heterogeneous high-demanders*

As we saw in the first section, committee members' preferences are heterogeneous but biased towards fishing interests. The same was shown in the second section to apply to rapporteurs. Whereas distributive theories predict that committees will be composed of homogeneous high-demanders, informational theories predict that, as a matter of

practice, committees will consist of heterogeneous members who will not be predominantly high-demanders or preference outliers. So, at first sight, none of the theories would seem to perfectly fit the evidence in this paper.

As far as the question of bias is concerned, although it is distributive theories predict biased committees as a matter of practice, Krehbiel's theory also allows for the existence of committees which are exceptional preference outliers provided they comply with what he defines as 'a strong, necessary condition'. Such committees 'will involve members with extreme preferences that can specialise at lower cost than moderates and, therefore, may be comparatively informative in spite of their preference extremity' (Krehbiel, 1991: 96). The question is how such 'strong, necessary condition' can be operationalised. Although it is not clearly stated in Krehbiel's theory, it is hinted that occupation variables rather than constituency variables should be more related to costs of specialisation (Krehbiel, 1991: 136-37). The question is that the variables that explain the allocation of committee seats or rapporteurships are constituency variables rather than occupation variables (I doubt that many committee members or rapporteurs have ever been fishermen). So the type of bias predicted seems to correspond more to the predictions of distributive theories than to a case of Krehbiel's exceptional low-cost specialists.

As far as the heterogeneity of committees is concerned, the evidence on committee membership and the allocation of rapporteurships offers no support on distributive theories. Whereas these theories predict homogeneous committees, evidence in this paper shows that the preferences of both committee members and rapporteurs are as heterogeneous as those of MEP's in general. Indeed, at first sight, the greater heterogeneity of rapporteurs' preferences in the fisheries committee might even throw support in favour of informational theories vis-à-vis distributive theories. However,

after closer inspection, one can appreciate that heterogeneity among rapporteurs does not mean the same as heterogeneity among committee members. The reason is that heterogeneity among the members of a committee ensures that the outcome of committee decision making will not be extreme. However, different rapporteurs work on different bills, so their actions cannot be balanced to obtain a non extreme bill. The outcome of the committee will be many extreme bills, in different directions. In other words, rapporteurs are homogeneous for a given bill (because there is only one rapporteur for a given bill). So the heterogeneity of rapporteurs in the fisheries committee cannot be said to contradict the predictions of distributive theories. Rather, it could even extend the applicability of these theories beyond the assignments of committee seats toward the assignment of other positions inside committee.

*Normative issues: the benefits from the division of labour*

Self-selection into and inside the parliamentary committees as the one we saw in the case of the EP brings about both costs and benefits. The costs of self-selection are related to the risk of unrepresentativeness of committees resulting from some sort of systematic bias. For instance, if self-selection in the fisheries committee leads to an over-representation of the fishing industry at the expense of taxpayers or consumers. In this sense, one possible way to avoid the democratic costs of bias would be to allocate committee assignments randomly. However, allocation is seldom done at random, and the reason is that there are also benefits from self-selection. Those benefits are of two main types: distributive and informational. Distributive benefits are those associated to gains from a system that allows to take into account the intensity of preferences of MEPs (Weingast and Marshall, 1988). Informational gains are also realised, although not in the way predicted by Krehbiel. Biased rapporteurs are not the type of low-cost

specialists Krehbiel predicts. Similarly, the heterogeneity of rapporteurs' preferences does not lead to the sort of confirmatory signalling predicted by Gilligan and Krehbiel, since rapporteurs act on different issues (there is only one rapporteur for a given issue). However, informational gains are still possible.

Informational gains from constituency based specialisation are related to lower cost of information transmission from lobbyists to legislators. Interests will try to advocate their pet projects before those MEPs most involve in the agenda setting inside the EP, such as rapporteurs. If these rapporteurs are from the same nationality as the interests, interests will see the transaction costs of information transmission reduced, for two main reasons:

- Transportation costs. The physical proximity between the interests and the MEP, who usually visit their constituencies often, where they usually hold the so-called surgeries, reduces the cost of meeting with an MEP.

- Translation costs. The fact that both interests and MEP speak the same language reduces the cost of information transmission from lobbyists to legislators.

These costs are not negligible and gain special relevance in the case of a multinational and multilingual parliament such as the EP. Specialisation through the distribution of committee seats and rapporteurships reduces these costs.

All in all, this paper has presented several substantial findings about specialisation in the EP fisheries committee. But, what is more important, it has also generated an array of interesting hypothesis on specialisation in committees, and a methodology to test them in other committees. The paper has been an example of how the scarcity of MEPs time and resources, together with the transaction costs associated with normal parliamentary work, are important factors in explaining the nature of specialisation in the EP and, therefore, the outcome of EC legislation. To conclude, the

issues raised by the paper, ranging from the representativeness of committees to the distributional and informational gains from specialisation, are not to be disregarded when discussing the so-called democratic deficit of the EU, whatever this means.

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