

PledgeTimes

Giant trawlers. The Game of tons



by [Bhavi Mandalia](#) — September 24, 2020 in World



Don't speak of baptism, that's not the way to say it. The ceremony, which must be held today in the port of Concarneau, in Finistère, is a blessing in due form. A clergyman will lead the service, to which all the gratin of French fishing is invited. Annick Girardin, Minister of the Sea, and Julien Denormandie, that of Agriculture, will be there, alongside Gérard Romiti, the president of the National Fisheries Committee and 300 other guests. It is that the event is of size, there are no other words, when it aims at the consecration of a colossus of the sea: *the Scombrus*, last born of this family of giant trawlers which cross the oceans, will have been very officially anointed on September 25th.

Fairies, however, won't be the only ones leaning over its cradle. This Friday is also declared the day of the burial of a small artisanal fishery ready to blow out gusts of anger. Guarded since Wednesday by the police, the port was preparing for a stir, while the players in the sector planned to demonstrate this morning (1) against this new offspring of an industrial fishing that never ends. roll the craft.

"In thirty years, the French fleet has been reduced by half", sums up Ken Kawahara, secretary of the Small-Scale Artisanal Fisheries Platform. The concentration of armaments is in question, which sees, since 1990, the small ones being swallowed by the big ones. Owned by France Pélagique, one of the main shipowners in France although a subsidiary of the Dutch group Cornelis Vrolijk, *the Scombrus* CC-919999 (that's its official name) presents, in fact, as a perfect sample of the genre.

81 meters long, equipped with a deep-freezing unit which occupies three quarters of its volume, the boat is capable, in one night, of catching up to 200 tonnes of fish. This is " *the equivalent of what the Lorient auction, the largest French auction, can handle* », Underlines Thibault Josse, project manager for the Pleine mer association which brings together artisanal fishermen and environmental defenders. The equivalent, too, of what ten boats of about ten meters fish in one year. For comparison, in 2018, there were nearly 3,500 of these in mainland France, compared with only 37 over 40 meters (2). The more than 70 meters, them, do not exceed, even today, ten.

It is they, however, who, year after year, tend to accumulate quotas. The figures are not all in the public square, some are circulating nonetheless. " *We have the example of Margiris, 142-meter Dutch factory ship which alone has the equivalent of 75% of UK quotas*», Notes Thibault Josse. All the kept proportions, *the Scombrus* should not be less greedy.

Contacted by *Humanity*, France Pélagique did not wish to answer our questions directly. Its press kit, which details the environmental qualities of its new equipment at length, remains very vague as to its fishing capacity.

The whole story of the *Normandy label* tells about these barterings. Built in Spain in 1995 under the name of *Wiron 1* on behalf of the Dutch company Jaczon, subsequently acquired by Cornelis Vrolijk and renamed *Atlantic Lady*, in 2017, the ship became the property of the Fécampois Spes Armement ... a company in which France Pélagique, which already operated *the Sandettié* and *Prins Bernhard*, two units of more than 80 meters registered in Fécamp, took, that same year, "*Substantial parts*", reported at the time the weekly *the sailor*.

The genesis of the boat, however, offers an idea of what it has. Because, to be able to put *the Scombrus* afloat, France Pélagique made sacrifices. It's the *Normandy label* and fourteen of its crew members who paid the price. Small fishermen and environmental organizations assure us: sold not long ago, the 51-meter trawler was liquidated in order to obtain the funds, but also the tonnage authorizations that would benefit today. *the Scombrus.* " *It is a strategy that dates back to the creation of the European Fisheries Policy in 1982* », Explains Ken Kawahara. " *To accumulate fishing rights, shipowners must take them from others, and for that, they sell and they buy back.* "

Anyway, continues Ken Kawahara, "As soon as a vessel with such an absorption capacity is in the area, it literally empties it of its fish". The impact is terrible for small fishermen who, at the same time, see quotas withdrawn. " *This happened recently to one of our colleagues, who was denied the right to go out fishing even though a large pelagic trawler was operating further offshore.* " The impact is heavy, too, for the fishery resource and marine biodiversity.

The icing on the cake: nothing in this business will support the local economy. Built and afloat in Poland, the hull of the *Scombrus*CC-919999 was fitted in Norway. The fruit of his fishing should end up in the port of IJmuiden, in the Netherlands.

(2) Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.