

Fleet overcapacity is driving overfishing

SUMMARY:

We call on MEPs to:

- set a deadline for Member States to achieve an effective balance between their fishing capacity and fishing opportunities that effectively supports the 2015 MSY stock recovery target;
- strengthen the mechanisms that govern fishing capacity management; and
- ensure that the allocation of fleet-related subsidies under the new Maritime and Fisheries Fund is made conditional upon Member States' progress in achieving an effective balance between fishing capacity and available fishing opportunities.

Why is overcapacity a problem?

The size and capacity of the EU fleet is estimated to be 2 to 3 times above the sustainable level in a number of fisheries, according to European Commission figures.¹ This overcapacity drives overfishing, making the fleet economically unviable. Too many, powerful and destructive boats are chasing too few fish.

Maintaining a fleet that is too large and powerful in relation to the available resources is uneconomic and often the cause of overfishing. The Commission's Green Paper identified overcapacity as a fundamental problem of the CFP. Fleet overcapacity leads to:

- **intense competition for limited resources**, which leads to a low profitability of fishing operations and may motivate fishers to take high risks and/or engage in illegal fishing;
- **increased political pressure to set quotas above scientifically recommended levels and to maintain perverse subsidies**; and
- **excessive impacts on marine ecosystems and fisheries resources.**

¹ European Commission non paper (2008) Reflections on further reform of the Common Fisheries Policy.



In 2009, the fishing sector operated at a loss of almost 5%, according to figures presented by the European Commission.² This is a symptom of too many fishers competing for limited resources. Subsidies received by the sector compensate for some of these losses and create the illusion that fishing is still a viable business.

How is fishing capacity measured?

Fishing capacity essentially describes the ability of a vessel or fleet of vessels to catch fish. The main factors affecting fishing capacity are the size, equipment and operational characteristics of vessels, including engine power, overall holding and freezing capacity, gear specificities, available fish-finding technology (e.g. sonar), the distance travelled to fishing grounds and the experience of the captain and crew. To simplify matters, gross tonnage and engine power are often used as a rough indicator of fishing capacity. Regrettably, this is overly simplistic and consequently an insufficient measure of capacity, which has resulted in inadequate management responses. In reality, the type of gear, equipment and other operational characteristics are significant factors in determining the vessel's ability to catch fish.

Where and how should fleet capacity be reduced?

The vast majority of European fish stocks are being fished unsustainably.³ Fleet overcapacity is one of the main drivers behind overfishing of most or all of these stocks.

To effectively reduce overcapacity, it is essential to:

- i) assess fishing capacity in relation to available resources;
- ii) aim measures at segments of the fleet that contribute most to stock depletion and damage to the wider marine environment, and least to the social, economic and cultural fabric that sustains coastal communities; and
- iii) establish a detailed capacity reduction strategy with clear targets and timelines, ideally within multiannual plans.

² The Commission's Joint Research Centre has reported that EU fleet made estimated overall loss of -4.6% of total income in 2009, when direct income subsidies were not taken into account.

http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/news_and_events/events/080911/anderson_en.pdf

³ Of the assessed stocks, 63% in the Atlantic are overfished, 82% in the Mediterranean and 4 out of the 6 stocks for which scientific advice is available in the Baltic. See Communication from the Commission concerning a consultation on Fishing Opportunities (COM(2011)298)



How can job losses be limited?

Nobody benefits from the current state of affairs in fisheries management: employment in the EU catching sector has fallen by 31% since 2002 and the profitability of the sector has steadily declined.⁴ While a reduction in fleet capacity to sustainable levels is likely to further reduce the number of jobs, the prospect is one of growing revenues and better pay and investment opportunities as stocks recover.

Moreover, by targeting segments of the fleet that contribute most to stock depletion and environmental destruction, yet least to job creation, it is possible to achieve significant reductions while minimising job losses.

What has the Commission proposed?

The Commission proposal contains three types of provisions:

- i) a binding obligation on Member States to adjust the fishing capacity of their fleets in order to achieve an effective balance between such fishing capacity and their fishing opportunities. (Art. 34);
- ii) national caps on fleet capacity, so-called fishing capacity ceilings (Art. 35 and Annex II) – although Member States may choose to exclude vessels that are part of a system of transferable fishing concessions (TFCs) (Art. 35.2); and
- iii) the mandatory introduction of TFCs for all vessels above 12m and all vessels using active gear independent of size (Art. 27) that, through trading (Art. 31), are meant to result in reductions in vessel numbers until profitability is regained.

“Thus an ideal state would be a 30% [fleet] reduction from 2007 levels in the short term (by 2017 at the latest). We would expect a further reduction to be required after 2017, with the ideal state seeing fleet size reduced by 40% in 2022, to compensate for some technological improvement.”

Impact Assessment study commissioned by the European Commission. (March 2010)

⁴ European Commission (2011) Staff Working paper: Impact Assessment Accompanying Commission proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Common Fisheries Policy (SEC(2011)891)





Our recommendations in response to COM proposal:

Fleet management provisions should be integrated into the core of the Regulation and multiannual plans. Therefore, we call on you to amend the Commission proposal to ensure that:

- a mechanism for the measurement of fishing capacity is established, which can provide precise estimates and constitute the basis for fishing capacity management measures;
- a deadline is set for Member States (in Art. 34) to achieve an effective balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities that effectively supports the 2015 MSY stock recovery target;
- multiannual plans (Art. 11) contain an assessment of the types, numbers, fishing capacity and spatial and temporal fishing behaviour of vessels covered by the plan and a detailed capacity reduction strategy with clear targets and timelines in order to guide capacity reductions required by Article 34;
- allocation of access to fishing resources is understood as a privilege with clear obligations, and ensure that the current proposal for transferable fishing concessions (TFCs) is rejected as a mandatory, single-option solution;
- criteria are introduced that rank and distribute access to fisheries resources, by favouring those who have the least impact on the marine environment, who can demonstrate strong legal compliance with the rules and regulations and who operate within and contribute to local coastal communities;
- all vessels are subject to fishing capacity ceilings as set out in Annex II of the proposed regulation, without exception; and
- fleet-related subsidies under the new EU Maritime and Fisheries Fund is made conditional upon the progress of Member State to achieve an effective balance between fishing capacity and available fishing opportunities.

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