

Briefing: Revision of the Data Collection Framework (DCF)

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Background

The European Commission has proposed a revision (known as a recast) of the Data Collection Regulation (DCF) (EC 199/2008). The implementation of Regulation 199/2008 was intended to improve the amount and quality of data available to researchers and European institutions, enabling these and other end-users¹ to enhance their evaluation for policy and research purposes. A number of elements have improved legislative proposals and management measures for European fisheries. Furthermore, compared to its predecessor (Regulation 1543/2000), Regulation 199/2008 represented a significant step in the right direction with regards to the collection and management of data concerning the fisheries sector while introducing some important elements for the collection of ecosystem-wide data.

However, it nowadays falls short of delivering adequate and reliable data necessary for an effective and ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management in the EU as required by the Common Fisheries Policy. In particular, we believe that the following should be important environmental data that needs to be collected: bycatch rates of non-fish species, impacts of different types of gear on marine habitats (particularly those protected under the Habitats Directive and in other MPAs, e.g. under the regional seas conventions), and impacts of fisheries on marine food webs.

BirdLife and Seas At Risk are both working on fisheries and wider marine policy. We hereby submit our views with regards to the proposed recast regarding the obligations for Member States to collect data as per the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy.

Priority Points

1. **Public access to data:** Collected data must be accessible and the data collection process must be transparent. All Member States must implement a system that moves from a bureaucratic and burdensome data request system to having freely available and easily accessible data for public use.
2. **Scope of the data:** Data on the impact of fisheries and aquaculture on the wider ecosystem should be collected to better inform fisheries management, including the development of synergies with delivering Good Environmental Status under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.
3. **Stakeholder engagement:** End-users should include Advisory Councils and NGOs. They must form part of the bodies providing recommendations to decision makers such as the Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs).
4. **Data harmonisation:** Methodologies for data collection must be guided at an EU level and set at a regional level to ensure coherence between national data sets and deliver regional level cooperation.

¹ According to the CFP, an end-user of scientific data means “a body with a research or management interest in the scientific analysis of data in the fisheries sector”.

Public access to data

To ensure the quality and usability of data, there is an urgent need for accessible and transparent data collection. It is not only important that data which has been funded by public money be made available to the public, it is also important for increasing innovation and to reduce costs for data users. The impact assessment² of the Marine Knowledge 2020 Green Paper by the European Commission estimated that existing users would save € 300 million a year if the data were properly integrated and managed.

The current format that has been proposed by the European Commission fails not only to ensure that data will be easily accessible to the public but also fails to simplify the existing cumbersome system. At the moment, data need to be requested from the Member States. This can become extremely burdensome for Member States and also creates data bottlenecks.

We recommend that all Member States make detailed data and aggregated data available for the public domain within 2 months of receipt of data. If detailed data are foreseen to be used for scientific publications, they can be withheld by the data collectors for up to 3 years. These data need to be made available in an easy to access format, and therefore Member States need to implement appropriate technologies (e.g. an online platform) to support public access to data.

Scope of the data collection

The EU has an obligation to collect data, including for example recording information on the fishing gear, area, and time for bycaught fish and non-fish species, to manage mixed fisheries more efficiently and to move towards an ecosystem-based management of fisheries. Despite these environmental ambitions already being in place in the current data collection regime, data have so far been limited to cataloguing specified fish, shellfish, sharks and cephalopods. Other than these, there has been no mention of any specific element of the wider marine environment (e.g. bycatch of seabirds, marine turtles, seals or cetaceans), nor of any particular threat to or impacts on the marine environment (e.g. impacts on habitat, monitoring of waste pollution by fisheries). Therefore, the revision of the framework to regulate data collection needs to address the collection and reporting of data on the impact of fishing not just on target species but also on non-fish taxa. With respect to monitoring of bycatch, data collection programmes should include both baseline surveillance in low-risk fisheries and a dedicated observer monitoring programme for those fisheries which pose a medium-to-high risk of protected, endangered and threatened (PET) species bycatch.

Furthermore, in order to achieve and maintain Good Environmental Status (GES), the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) applies throughout different EU legislation including for data collection. This is particularly important for the achievement of the MSY objectives in regard to fishing mortality (F) and spawning stock biomass (SSB). The revision of the framework to regulate data collection needs to therefore make explicit linkage to the MSFD, and existing data collection programmes under other European legislation (e.g. Habitats Directive, Council Regulation 812/2004) in order to elicit an appropriate and effective response from the Member States.

Data collection of the aquaculture sector has also failed to address the environmental impacts of that activity. Specifically, data collection on the management of aquaculture also has to incorporate environmentally relevant indicators. This is necessary not only to assess the sustainability of the

² European Marine Observation and Data Network. Impact Assessment. COM(2010) 461. SEC(2010) 999

aquaculture sector but also to collect data on the different management efforts of aquaculture and their impact on the environment.

Stakeholder engagement

The term 'end-user' as defined by the Common Fisheries Policy is ambiguous and can potentially be used to exclude certain types of end-users. As proposed more clearly by STECF³, end-users can be grouped into three categories that include: Type (1) European Commission, national governments, RFMOs, ICES, STECF; Type (2) Advisory Councils; Type (3) NGOs and universities. Each category is important to advise the decision-making process of data collection. Advisory Councils are established entities in which all stakeholders come together and in most cases provide mutual recommendations that provide highly valuable input to Member States, the Commission and the Parliament. NGOs can be data collectors and host a tremendous amount of CFP-related data. Therefore, in the setup for the revised Data Collection Regulation, we support the STECF interpretation such that NGOs (type 3) must be included as end-users together with type 1 and type 2 end-users, and should also become a member of the RCGs from the start of the new regulation.

Data harmonisation

There is a lack of coherence between the approach of Member States and between sea basins. Regional cooperation also accords with the need for coordination with other databases, notably those of the regional seas conventions.

Only when data are collected and stored in a consistent way across regions and ideally across the EU, can comparability be assured to enable end-users and data users to conduct evaluations and assessments on an EU level.

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³ Review of DC MAP – Part 1 (STECF-13-06) - Page 20.
http://stecf.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/43805/506417/2013-04_STECF+13-06+-+DC-MAP+review+part+1_JRC81593.pdf