



Common Fisheries Policy reform

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Background

Despite several improvements after the 2002 overhaul of the common fisheries policy (CFP), there was a general consensus that the CFP urgently needed further reform, because it had failed to make fishing sustainable, as EU member states' fleets still catch far more than marine ecosystems can replace.

Today, 88% of Mediterranean stocks and 39% of Atlantic are overfished, due to surplus fleet capacity, excessive catches and patchy compliance with EU rules. It was also considered that "discards" (unwanted fish thrown back, often dead or dying, at sea) remain unacceptably high.

In 2011, the European Commission proposed a new fisheries law in the EU, and MEPs played a crucial role in shaping reforms based on this proposal, as the Parliament was, for the first time, on an equal footing as co-legislator with the Council, following the entry into force of the Lisbon treaty.

On 30 May 2013, measures to stop overfishing and ban discards, Parliament's key common fisheries policy (CFP) reform aims, were safeguarded in a deal struck by Parliament and Council negotiators. The deal should allow a more sustainable common fisheries policy to take effect on time, at the start of 2014. The final (second reading) vote on the text of this agreement takes place on 10 December 2013.

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Background

Key aspects of the new CFP

Fishing sustainably

Given that 88% of Mediterranean fish stocks and 39% of Atlantic ones are overfished in the EU, strict rules are needed to restore fish stocks in the coming years.

Member states will have to set sustainable fishing quotas from 2014, and only in clearly defined, exceptional cases, by 2020. Fishermen will have to respect the "maximum sustainable yield" (MSY), i.e. catch no more than a given stock can reproduce in a given year. The aim is to restore and maintain fish stocks above levels that can produce the MSY.

MEPs therefore sought to ensure that stocks recover by 2020 to above MSY levels and sustain them thereafter. Ultimately this should mean more fish, better catches and hence more jobs in the fishing industry.

Background

Banning discards

Discards - fish thrown back, usually because they are of an unwanted species or size - account for almost a quarter of total EU catches. Most of the discarded species die.

To end this wasteful practice, which is currently not prohibited, fishing vessels will have to land at least 95% (from 2019) of all catches in accordance with a schedule of specific dates for different fisheries, starting gradually from 2015 until 2019. The European Parliament fought to keep this figure as high as possible, just short of a total ban. It rejected the Council's demand for a 7% exception (i.e. to allow vessels to land only 93% of their catches).

Landed catches of fish that are undersized, for example, would be restricted to uses other than human consumption. Member states must ensure that fishing vessels comply with the discard ban.

Background

Multiannual plans: long-term planning to replace yearly quota-haggling

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The reform will rely on multiannual fish stock management plans to ensure that fishing stays sustainable. Taking a longer-term approach should improve market predictability, which in turn should help the industry to invest better and plan ahead. Multiannual plans will be based on more reliable and accurate scientific data, which EU member states will be obliged to collect and make available.

Background

Sanctions against oversized fleets

The capacity of fleets throughout Europe has to be adjusted to match the fishing opportunities allocated to them, as a further measure to prevent overfishing.

Parliament inserted a provision stipulating that member states must examine their fleets' catch capacities every year in accordance with criteria set by the Commission. If this examination shows that the fleet is too large, the member state in question will have to table a plan to reduce overcapacities and take the necessary measures.

If member states fail to assess and eliminate surplus capacity, EU subsidies may be suspended or even withheld.

Background

Regionalisation

Regionalisation

The new CFP allows fisheries management decisions to be taken closer to the fisheries themselves, by regional authorities (e.g. in EU countries with access to the Baltic Sea), rather than by EU institutions in Brussels.

The aim is to ensure that where detailed technical rules (such as fishing net mesh sizes) have to be set for the individual sea areas, this is done closer to those directly affected, and not in a centralised way by EU institutions. These institutions will nonetheless continue to assess whether targets reflecting the principles of the EU fisheries policy are being met.

In the context of this regionalisation, advisory councils (consultation bodies created by the previous reform) will play a greater role, as an important forum for building consensus within a region.

Advisory councils will also have a more balanced membership in future, with 40% of their members being representatives from outside the fisheries sector (e.g. from NGOs). This was one of Parliament's demands.

Background

Quota criteria

Quota criteria

Parliament also ensured that when member states allocate fishing quotas, they must take account of environmental, social and economic criteria, and may give incentives to fishing vessels that fish sustainably with selective fishing gear or use fishing techniques with reduced environmental impact.

Background

New rules on fishing outside the EU

The text also stipulates that the EU must avoid contributing to overfishing in foreign waters. It should only catch surpluses that a third country is unable to use, as provided in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Fisheries agreements with third countries will in future contain a human rights clause, i.e. agreements may be suspended if human rights are violated. Furthermore, in future, fisheries agreements with third countries will have to contain an exclusivity clause (i.e. the agreement cannot be circumvented by private contracts between fishermen and third country governments).

New measures will help to prevent "flag hopping" in line with the European Parliament's November 2012 resolution on the external dimension of the common fisheries policy. Parliament also ensured that new control measures will be overseen by a new compliance committee.