

Parliament's response to the fisheries package

During its January plenary session, Parliament will debate and vote on three own-initiative reports on the common fisheries policy (CFP), taking stock 10 years after the last fisheries policy reform and responding to the Commission's evaluation of the policy. The reports will help shape the debate on the future of the CFP.

Background

The **common fisheries policy (CFP)**, and more specifically the basic [CFP Regulation](#), underwent [ambitious reform](#) in 2013. The main objective was to achieve sustainable exploitation of fish stocks according to the **maximum sustainable yield (MSY)**, the maximum amount of fish that fishers can take out of the sea without jeopardising the reproduction of the stock). Several policy instruments were introduced to support this objective. One was the introduction of the **landing obligation**, to end the wasteful practice of discarding unwanted catches, usually dead fish, at sea. The reform also introduced **regionalisation of decision-making**. This allows conservation measures to be adopted in specific sea basins, based on joint recommendations from the Member States concerned. The [Common Market Organisation \(CMO\) Regulation](#) for fisheries and aquaculture products was also [revised in 2013](#). Market intervention measures were abolished and industry was given greater responsibility. Recognised producer organisations (POs) are now required to submit **production and marketing plans**, enabling them to match their production to market demand more effectively. Extended **product labelling** to help consumers make better choices when buying fish was another key objective of the reformed CMO.

Fisheries policy package

On 21 February 2023, the Commission published a new [fisheries policy package](#), including **implementation reports** on both the CFP Regulation and the CMO Regulation. Presentation of these reports was a legal obligation under both regulations. In addition to these reports, the package included two communications: one on the **energy transition** in EU fisheries and aquaculture, and another on reconciling marine protection and fisheries (referred to as the **marine action plan**).

The [CFP implementation report](#) highlights its positive results and does not propose further reform, arguing that the CFP provides all the tools needed for sustainable fisheries management. It does, however, highlight areas for **improvement**, such as the need to adopt a broader ecosystem approach, attract young people and introduce more innovation. On the latter two points, on 21 November 2023 the Commission launched an EU-wide project – [Fishers of the Future](#) – to explore how the profession is likely to evolve up to 2050. On total allowable catches (TACs), the report proposes moving away from annual single-species TACs towards a much **broader, ecosystem-based approach**. As a result, the [Council](#) has recently adopted **multiannual TACs** for some stocks previously subject to annual TACs, in line with the Commission's [proposal](#) and broader [scientific advice](#). The Commission is also working with Member States to improve [the distribution of national quotas](#) within Member States (Article 17 of the CFP Regulation requires Member States to allocate quotas according to transparent and objective criteria, including environmental, social and economic criteria). On the **landing obligation**, the Commission is planning an evaluation in 2024.

In the [CMO implementation report](#), the Commission highlights the shift that the reform has brought from an intervention-based policy to a 'market-oriented' role for the [200 or so POs](#). However, the Commission notes that implementation could be improved, for instance by **setting up more POs** in the small-scale fisheries and aquaculture sectors. The Commission also raises the need for product **sustainability labelling**. This may be addressed by a forthcoming [legislative initiative on sustainable food systems](#).

With the [action plan on the energy transition](#), the Commission aims to lower the carbon-intensity of the sector. To steer the process, the Commission launched an [energy transition partnership](#), involving all stakeholders, in [June 2023](#). A recurring issue in the CFP is [fleet capacity ceilings](#). New technologies typically



require more weight than conventional engines, which increases the capacity of a vessel (defined in kilowatts and gross tonnage) and could lead to ceilings being exceeded. As a [solution](#), the Commission proposes to redistribute the available (inactive) capacity in Member States' fleets.

With its [marine action plan](#), the Commission seeks to achieve more coherent implementation of environmental and fisheries policies. It therefore lists actions to make fishing more sustainable by improving fishing gear selectivity, reducing catches of vulnerable species and lessening seabed impacts. In line with the concept of **regionalisation** in the CFP, it urges Member States to make recommendations (through national [roadmaps](#)) for new conservation measures in their sea basins. Most controversially, the Commission is calling on Member States to **ban mobile bottom fishing** in marine protected areas by 2030.

Position of the European Parliament

In recent years, Parliament has adopted resolutions on various aspects of EU fisheries policy, such as on the need for an ecosystem-based approach ([resolution of January 2021](#)), for more flexibility with regard to the landing obligation ([May 2021](#)), for generational renewal ([September 2021](#)), and on the implementation of Article 17 of the CFP Regulation ([June 2022](#)) and on the situation of small-scale fisheries ([January 2023](#)).

Ahead of the Commission's CFP evaluation, the Committee on Fisheries ([PECH](#)) launched an [own-initiative report](#) entitled '**State of play in the implementation of the CFP and future perspectives**'. A [public hearing](#) was held in March 2022 and the rapporteur presented his [draft report](#) in [January 2023](#). The consideration of amendments (more than [450](#)) and the vote took place on [24 May](#) and [24 October 2023](#) (after the publication of the Commission's fisheries package). In its [report](#), the PECH committee argues that the CFP must, where needed, be reformed and adapted. On the **landing obligation**, it reiterates the Parliament's previous position that it should be applied in a pragmatic way and by considering alternatives that could minimise unwanted catches (e.g. through more selective fishing gear). On **TACs**, the report supports setting them for longer than annual periods, and calls for more transparency on their distribution within Member States. With regard to the **energy transition**, the PECH committee highlights the problem of **capacity limits** and calls for measures that may include a redefinition of fishing capacity. Among many other things, the report argues that the CFP should also include a definition of **small-scale fisheries** and calls for their better involvement in fisheries management.

Following the Commission's implementation report, the PECH committee prepared an [own-initiative report](#) on the **CMO Regulation**. The [draft report](#) was presented to the PECH committee in [July 2023](#) and the committee vote took place on [29 November 2023](#). The [report](#) calls on the Commission to adapt the CMO to recognise **fishers' guilds** as POs. On labelling, the report states that an accurate description of food products is needed, in particular where substitute products are used. MEPs are particularly concerned about **misleading labelling** (e.g. of plant-based imitations; this was the subject of a recent [PECH hearing](#)).

The PECH committee also prepared an [own-initiative report](#) on the **marine action plan**. Already during the Commission's presentation of the plan on [1 March 2023](#), MEPs questioned the legal basis for the proposed actions. At the PECH meeting of [26 April 2023](#), the EU Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries clarified that the proposed measures would not be legally binding, but would offer guidance for national plans to be drawn up by Member States. The [draft report](#) was presented on [9 October](#) and the committee vote took place on [7 December 2023](#). A majority of the PECH committee expressed its [dissatisfaction](#) with the proposed action plan, regretting that it was not accompanied by a socio-economic study. In particular, the [report](#) criticises the 'simplistic' blanket ban on bottom trawling in all marine protected areas.

The European Parliament will debate and vote on the three reports during its January 2024 plenary session.

Own-initiative reports; committee responsible: PECH:

- [2021/2169\(INI\)](#); The state of play in the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy and future perspectives, Rapporteur: Gabriel Mato (EPP, Spain). For more information, see the [EPRS briefing](#).
- [2023/2049\(INI\)](#); Implementation of the Common Market Organisation (CMO) Regulation in fisheries and aquaculture, Rapporteur: Izaskun Bilbao Barandica (Renew, Spain). For more, see the [EPRS 'at a glance' note](#).
- [2023/2124\(INI\)](#); EU Action Plan: protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries, Rapporteur: Nidas Herbst (EPP, Germany). For more, see the [EPRS briefing](#).

[Outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe](#): This proposal is relevant for measures 1(1), (9); 2(1), (7).