



Stop subsidising over-exploitation of fisheries

NGOs call on governments to oppose the use of public funds for fleet modernisation, even if this means rejecting the Council deal on the EFF in its entirety

At its next meeting on 22 May, the EU Council of Fisheries Ministers is poised to adopt a deal on the new European Fisheries Fund (EFF) that will allow countries to invest billions of Euro of public funds into the modernisation of the EU fishing fleet. This decision will mark an alarming step back on commitments made under the 2002 Common Fisheries Reform (CFR). Despite of a significant over-capacity in the EU fishing fleet, a number of Member States, including Estonia, France, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Spain, want to reintroduce provisions for the use of EU public aid for fleet modernisation. The protectionist sentiment with which ministers arrange deals over what are the public goods of fisheries, dependent sea life and the marine environment is unacceptable. WWF, Greenpeace, BirdLife International, Oceana, North Sea Foundation, Seas at Risk and the Fisheries Secretariat strongly oppose the use of public funds for fleet modernisation, for the following reasons:

- Most fish stocks in Community waters are outside safe biological limits and will have no opportunity to recover unless the capacity of the European fleet is drastically reduced. Yet, current levels of capacity are reported to be 40 % above the level needed to ensure a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable exploitation of the European fisheries. The high fishing effort also has detrimental effects on the wider marine ecosystem. Reducing fleet capacity thus is crucial to achieving the goals and objectives of the reformed CFR; investing in the modernisation of the EU fleet is contradictory to these objectives.
- A key commitment made by the 2002 CFR reform was to end the use of public funds in support of capacity increases and maintenance in Europe's fishing fleet. Funding is restricted to the financing of equipment above deck that improve "the safety on board, working conditions, hygiene and product quality [...] provided that such modernisation does not increase the ability of the vessel to catch fish" and available only to vessels of 5 years or older (Article 11(5) of Regulation (EC) No 2371/2002). Reintroducing funding for engines will therefore be a major reversal of the reforms agreed just over three years ago.
- Competition for funding under the EFF implies that money spent to modernise the EU fishing fleet will not be available for measures contributing to the sustainable development of the EU fisheries sector. The EFF should be used to promote alternative low impact fisheries, to protect and enhance the aquatic environment or support alternative sustainable coastal livelihoods.
- The current WTO negotiations aim to clarify and improve WTO disciplines on fisheries subsidies. Agreeing to make EFF funds available for modernisation has strong implications for ongoing negotiations and threatens to pre-empt the outcome of the discussions on fisheries subsidies within the WTO.

We strongly urge Member States to oppose the use of public funds for fleet modernisation, even if this means rejecting the Council deal on the EFF in its entirety. Increasing the pressure on already over-fished stocks will have detrimental effects on the conservation of stocks, the environment and the long term profitability of the fishing industry.

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