

Adopted resolution

Fisheries Policy

Background

The sea is a commonly owned resource, to which the fishing industry has had free and often even subsidized access. With increasing scale and efficiency in the industry, the ecological and environmental impact of fishing has become more and more apparent. Since the 1950's, when industrial fishing in the world's seas began to increase substantially, the amount of commercially attractive large predatory fish has decreased by 70 to 90 per cent. The ecosystems are radically changed by the removal of sharks and predatory fish like salmon, tuna and cod, or when the sea-bottom is damaged by trawling in sensitive areas. At the same time, the fisheries debate has often got stuck in deep suspicion and lack of understanding between marine biologists and commercial fishermen.

The EU is a rich and well-off region. The EU must aim to set a good example to the rest of the world in management of the marine environment (including fishing) – and not, as it is today, be an example of bad marine management.

Advantages for sustainable fishing

Today, fishing rights (so-called Total Allowable Catch, TAC) in the EU are distributed among countries on the basis of historical catch. That means that those who fished more in the past automatically get the right to fish more now. This system was established in 1982, and has contributed greatly to the critical situation of European fish stocks, as it has given each country an incentive to keep up the TAC, in order to get as large a quota as possible for their national fishing industry. In the reform of the CFP, catch opportunities should instead be distributed on the basis of criteria for sustainable fishing, such as good selectivity, non-disruptive fishing methods, low energy consumption, safe working environment and compliance with regulations. The country and the fishermen who get the highest points according to these criteria should get a larger share of fishing rights than others. A history of illegal fishing and use of non-selective methods should result in lower or no fishing opportunities for the country concerned.

Phase out subsidies

Overcapacity in the fishing fleet is a major problem. It must be reduced. Direct and indirect subsidies should be phased out. Exemption from fuel taxation is an example of an indirect subsidy which makes trawling economically viable despite declining stocks.

Ban discards

Several fishing practices should be stopped altogether. In some areas, bottom trawling can have a devastating effect. Poor selectivity also leads to the catch of large amounts of unwanted fish in the trawls. This so-called bycatch is currently thrown overboard, killing at least 90 per cent of the fish discarded. This practice must be banned. If fishermen land all their catches, scientist will have more accurate data, and it would be possible to close down temporarily areas where there are a lot of immature fish.

Aquaculture has to be fully sustainable

The new EU Commission Aquacultures Strategy, adopted in June 2009, aims at more growth and competitiveness of fish-production from aquacultures. While there has been strong growth in some other parts of the world - aquaculture already provides the planet with about half of all the fish we eat – the production in the EU has stagnated. The strategy underlines that EU's high environmental and health protection standards make it more difficult to compete price-wise with third-country producers (e.g. in Asia and in South America). Greens oppose any weakening of the high environmental and health protection standards for aquaculture production. In fact, aquaculture can be even more environmentally damaging than exploiting wild fisheries. Concerns include waste handling, side-effects of antibiotics, and especially using other fish to feed consumer-desired carnivorous fish. Aquacultures e.g. consume up to 20 times more fish (as feed) than they produce

and thus push TACs even higher. Hence, they are not automatically a solution to the problem of overfishing the oceans.

Extra measures for coastal fishermen

All across Europe, there is support for small-scale, coastal fisheries, which give life and atmosphere to coastal communities. To increase the ability of coastal fishermen to support themselves despite declining stocks, they should be provided with opportunities for further training in management of small businesses, processing of fish, thus adding value to their products, and fishing tourism.

Labelling of the place of origin for fish and fish products

Mandatory labelling of place of origin of the fish should be expanded. The consumer should be informed of where, when, how and preferably by whom the fish has been caught. And know if the stock is sustainably harvested or not.

Promote eco-labelling of fish

Voluntary systems for eco-labelling of fish, which give added-value to the consumer and fishermen better prices as a reward for greater care, should be supported by, inter alia, public procurement and by EU financing for the development and cost of certification bodies.

Costs of controls

Commercial fishermen exploit a common resource, while necessary administration and regulation of the industry are financed by tax revenue. As for other industries, such as agriculture, the costs of controlling compliance should be paid by the industry. Larger companies should pay a fee for the fish caught and this should be used to finance the costs of estimating size of stock, control, fleet reduction, further education for fishermen, development of gear, and other necessary measures for fishing.

A "Green certificate" for commercial fishermen

Given this situation, it is reasonable that commercial fishermen should get a basic training in marine ecology – whereby they should have to get a "green certificate" to obtain or retain a commercial fishing license. The EU should set aside appropriate funds to be able to offer training for both licensed commercial fishermen and crew.

This would have a number of positive effects in the long and short run. A better understanding between biologists and commercial fishermen is decisive for the possibility of creating a future fisheries management based on the best scientific assessments of the ecosystems. It would give the fishing industry an opportunity to participate in a more constructive way. It would doubtlessly also contribute to an increase of professional pride and a more positive image for commercial fishing. Many more commercial fishermen would probably also be interested in obtaining ecological certification for their fishing after having completed such a basic education. And this is just what consumers today are looking for – certified, sustainably harvested fish.

Establish marine reserves

Less than one per cent of the world's oceans are protected from fishing. Marine reserves with no-fish areas are just as important to protect biodiversity as nature reserves on land. "International scientific opinion strongly favours establishing a global network of highly protected marine reserves as an important tool for the management and restoration of marine ecosystems, their biodiversity and economic benefit. Therefore the EU should have an extensive network of marine reserves with no-fish zones. When located in coastal areas, the reserves should also be used as marine information centres targeted at the general public. The goal is to increase awareness and understanding of the sea, fish and ecosystems among the public, and thereby also increase respect for, and the will to protect, our marine environments and coastal areas. This is necessary when tourism increases and the pressure on our coastal communities and the sea increase. It also gives added value to coastal communities.

Protect the eel and other threatened species

Threatened marine species should get the same protection, for example under the EU Habitats Directive, as other threatened species. That should include both commercial and non-commercial species.

Review the EU fisheries agreements with third countries

EU's fishing agreements with third world countries have so far not been sustainable from a social or ecological perspective; the EU has a responsibility to help these countries develop their own local fisheries. Therefore, the EU should renegotiate all so called "Fisheries Partnerships Agreements" (FPAs)

and make them real partnerships agreements – with a broad regional support to the African fishing sector, thus contributing to food security. If EU-fleets can have access to third world waters, it should only be possible if there is a scientifically proven surplus of fish to be fished, and if the EU uses selective gear, and lands part of the catches in the coastal states. The costs of the licenses should be recovered from the fishing industry itself.

Offensive against IUU

The EU should take a strong initiative for global cooperation to stop the substantial illegal fishing that occurs the world over, not least in the waters off Africa. There is a technical potential, for example with the use of satellites. But the political will to influence “flag-of-convenience” countries, which offer flags and uncontrolled harbours for landing, is also needed. The EU should also put more pressure on member states to revoke licenses and subsidies from fishermen who fish illegally. The EGP should contribute to the Green Paper consultation on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy on the lines of these recommendations (Deadline: December 2009). The EGP should also forward its recommendations to the OSPAR secretariat as a contribution to the Ministerial meeting in September 2010.