



THREE MONTHS TO PHASE-OUT OVERFISHING

Media briefing on upcoming decisions on 2015/2016 fishing limits

Brussels, 10 October 2014 - As usual for this time of year, EU fisheries ministers are about to start haggling over fishing limits. Starting next week, the Fisheries Council will be deciding on the total allowable catches for most fish stocks in European waters for 2015/2016. This year’s decisions will be more important than ever before.

For the first time, the decision on total allowable catches will fall under the new Common Fisheries Policy [1]. This means that fisheries ministers must end overfishing by 2015. Any exceptions must be justified on the basis that meeting this deadline “would seriously jeopardise the social and economic sustainability of the fleets involved” [2]. Appropriate evidence must be provided in support of all justification.

The scheduled timeline for the adoption of the 2015 fishing opportunities by the Fisheries Council is:

- **13-14 October:** decision on fishing opportunities for fish stocks in the **Baltic Sea**, including e.g. cod, sprat and salmon;
- **10-11 November:** decision on fishing opportunities for 2015 and 2016 for **deep-sea fish** stocks which are particularly vulnerable to overfishing;
- **15-16 December:** decision on fishing opportunities for fish stocks in the **Atlantic and the North Sea**, including those stocks shared with non-EU countries.

According to the European Commission’s recent statement on the status of stocks [4], the number of stocks that are known to be overfished in the North-East Atlantic and adjacent waters has increased from 16 of 41 assessed stocks in 2013 to 19 of 46 in 2014 (i.e. from 39 to 41 percent). The rate of overfishing also rose: in 2012, ministers set fishing limits an average of 11 percent above the scientific advice; in 2014 the average increase above recommended level was 35 percent.

Our organisations are united in calling for an end to overfishing. We have repeatedly criticised EU fisheries ministers’ uncontrolled haggling for excessive fishing quotas and resulting perpetuation of overfishing. If ministers continue to set quotas above the so-called F_{MSY} mortality rate [2], the Council risks breaching EU legislation [3].

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Notes to editors:

- 1) A new basic set of rules governing European fisheries entered into force in January 2014. This reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) requires that fish stocks be restored and maintained above levels that will allow long-term sustainable catches by decreasing the fishing pressure on stocks. It also requires the landing of most catches and the reduction of fleet capacity in line with fishing opportunities. It further foresees that adverse impacts of fishing be minimised and that a shift towards low-impact fishing be incentivised, e.g. by allocating proportionally more quota to fishermen practicing low-impact fishing.
- 2) The new CFP requires the EU to lower its fishing pressure by the start of next year (2015) to levels below the so-called F_{MSY} mortality rate – i.e. a fishing mortality rate below the Maximum Sustainable Yield. This deadline may only be deferred in exceptional cases. Recital 7 of the new CFP Regulation states that: “The exploitation rates should be achieved by 2015. Achieving those exploitation rates by a later date should be allowed only if achieving them by 2015 would seriously jeopardise the social and economic sustainability of the fishing fleets involved. After 2015, those rates should be achieved as soon as possible and in any event no later than 2020. Where scientific information is insufficient to determine those levels, approximative parameters may be considered.”
- 3) If, during the course of the December negotiations, the Council of Ministers appears ready to set catches above the agreed fishing mortality rate (F_{MSY}) or equivalent rates advised by science, the Commission should pre-empt a breach of the CFP Regulation by withdrawing its proposal for fishing opportunities. This would mean that negotiations are halted until a new proposal is tabled or the Commission takes action under its own powers to close the fishery. However, if the Council takes a decision in conflict with the stock recovery objective, and the Commission does not intervene, this decision should be challenged before the European Court of Justice by the European Parliament.
- 4) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council concerning a consultation on fishing opportunities for 2015 under the Common Fisheries Policy (COM(2014) 388) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014DC0388&from=LV>