

# Sustainable EU Fisheries: Facing the Environmental Challenges

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS • IEEP / FISH CONFERENCE  
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On 8–9 November 2004, a high-level conference was held at the European Parliament, under the patronage of the Dutch Presidency of the EU Council. The event was organised by the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) and the Fisheries Secretariat (FISH). It was attended by more than 100 representatives from the EU institutions, national fisheries and environment ministries and authorities, inter-governmental organisations, fisheries, environmental and consumer organisations, and academia.

The high-level conference sought to re-examine the challenges facing sustainable development of the EU fisheries sector. It took a long-term, environmental perspective, placing issues within the pan-European and global contexts, in particular the WSSD targets on fisheries, oceans and biodiversity. The aim was to propose new approaches to ensure the transition of the EU fisheries sector to a sustainable industry.

Recognising the complex and challenging nature of sustainable development of the capture fisheries and aquaculture sector, and the need for new approaches to tackle the issues, the conference was organised around four themes: production, consumption and trade, instruments and governance. The following summarises the conference deliberations, with a view to support strong progress in implementing the CFP reform and meeting international targets.



## PRODUCTION

Production methods and processing of fish and fish products can have serious impacts on the environment and, consequently, also on people and livelihoods. Yet fish is a food source of high nutritional value. The challenge is to maximise the positive contribution of fisheries, whilst reducing negative impacts to acceptable levels. Improvements in this area will generate potential benefits for the sector in terms of its sustainability, but also its profitability and competitiveness. Future priorities are as follows.

- Improve the environmental performance and resource efficiency of production, using targeted, complementary and coherent policies and measures. The EU can stimulate innovation through research, funding, regulation and voluntary agreements.
- Re-examine ways of addressing unnecessary bycatch and subsequent discarding associated with fisheries, including minimum landing sizes. There is particular scope to work with the catching sector to develop and implement a sectoral plan of action in this area.
- Apply measures to protect stocks, such as time and area closures, equally to all resource users. Improved information on the recreational sector, particularly in the Mediterranean, is needed. The use of industrial-scale gear could be restricted to licensed fishing activities; and particularly destructive fishing methods such as night-time spear fishing with light could be prohibited.
- Decrease the aquaculture sector's dependence on wild-caught fish for feed by developing high-protein vegetable alternatives. Greater efforts are needed to address escaping specimens. The use of wild juveniles, such as young bluefin tuna or elvers, to stock farms needs to be properly identified and recorded within existing wild catch reporting systems.



## GOVERNANCE

The State's role in governance is to develop the policy and regulatory frameworks, fix the overriding objectives, legitimate and balance stakeholders' interactions, and carry out enforcement. Improvements are underway but more substantial changes are needed in areas of policy coherence, accountability of actors, information requirements, and the distribution of responsibilities. Key areas for improvement are as follows.

- The conference welcomed the decision to establish a Commissioner for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs as a sign of more coherent inter-institutional workings. However, interactions between different DGs, and DG Environment and DG Fisheries and Maritime Affairs in particular, should be strengthened to facilitate further coherence in policy making.
- Consideration should be given to devolving more responsibility, with the Commission responsible for setting principles and objectives and elaborating the legislative framework for fisheries and environmental management, whilst making regional institutions progressively more responsible for adapting and 'fine tuning' management to the local realities.
- The need for reinforced stakeholder participation, transparency and accountability is reflected in the development of Regional Advisory Councils (RACs), which the conference welcomed. A number of roles that RACs could usefully play were identified. In the short term, attention needs to be given to the composition of RACs and the extent of communication between RACs, stakeholders they represent and institutions they advise. Additional human and financial resources need to be dedicated to RACs to ensure their effective functioning.
- With the application of an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries, there is a need for the collection and exchange of more comprehensive, accurate and verifiable information. This may be achieved through wider use of Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) and on-board observer schemes.





## POLICY INSTRUMENTS

The CFP has predominantly relied upon 'command and control' type instruments to regulate fisheries, as well as financial aid to the sector. Limited use has been made of other types of instruments. There is a need for a more effective application of the instruments already in use, but greater consideration can and should also be given to strengthening and broadening the range of instruments used. Progress could be made in the following areas.

- Further use should be made of spatial instruments, particularly by establishing a scientifically robust programme for an effective system of Marine Protected Areas as a fisheries management tool, recognising that these can provide multiple ecosystem benefits.
- Improved control and enforcement of effort is necessary. This may require the more widespread use of days-at-sea restrictions and real time closures of fishing grounds. A higher involvement of fishermen in developing and improving technical measures is required.
- There is considerable support for generating greater ownership of the resources. A range of potential instruments that can be applied at different levels of geographical scale may achieve this. In inshore fisheries, community-based cooperative management arrangements may be a more appropriate mechanism, while internationally traded ITQs may be an option for offshore fisheries. Lessons from the application of rights-based management in EU and other countries should help to demonstrate the potential benefits to fishermen and wider communities.
- The new European Fisheries Fund (EFF) should be targeted at helping the sector become more sustainable and competitive in the long term. There should be a reduction in the overall level of subsidies to the sector; an increase in the conditions attached to their use, cross-compliance with other EU policies, better targeting of subsidies, a prohibition of subsidies likely to promote unsustainable practices, and environmental impact assessment of subsidies. Continued commitment to the EU decision to halt subsidies for fleet renewal is important. National funding schemes could be coordinated to support shared fisheries management on a regional level.



## CONSUMPTION AND TRADE

Consumption is central to the sustainability debate, not just in terms of how much but also what is being consumed, how it is produced, and the product form and origin. The current levels and patterns of consumption have led to increasing trade in fish products. Trade itself is associated with a number of environmental issues, including the generation of greenhouse gases and chemical pollution. Conversely, the highly traded nature of fish products means that trade-based measures are potentially a powerful tool for securing effective fisheries management. Opportunities for improvement include the following.

- There is a major opportunity to harness EU consumer power in support of sustainable trade and consumption patterns. There is scope to learn from ongoing efforts in this area, potentially initiating an EU-wide project to identify and exchange good practice.
- The provision of clear and targeted information is the basis for consumer choice. The EU's efforts in relation to traceability and standards for product labelling need to be strengthened. There is scope to work with the production and processing sector, NGOs and consumer organisations, potentially using voluntary agreements backed up by the threat of legal measures.
- There is a need for EU level action on product labelling, and particularly eco- or organic labels. Organic labels for fish farming are currently unsatisfactory, as labels vary widely. There is a good deal of support for developing EU standards for labelling schemes; an EU 'ecolabel' has some support.
- EU third country fishing access agreements present a number of environmental challenges. The environmental impacts arising from fishing under access agreements are likely to be at least equal to those that occur in EU waters. In developing agreements, the principle of the user pays should be applied, resulting in a significant increase in access fees for vessel owners.



There are important opportunities – as well as challenges – ahead for the EU in its drive for sustainable fisheries. In most cases, the opportunities are of a ‘win-win’ nature, offering potential benefits for the environment as well as the EU fisheries sector; the health of the sector will depend on the successful transition towards sustainable and more efficient practices. The challenge is for policy makers to deliver a coherent and coordinated programme to support this transition.





The Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) is an independent institute with its own research programmes. Based in London and Brussels, the Institute's major focus is the development, implementation and evaluation of EU policies of environmental significance, including agriculture, fisheries, regional development and transport.

The Fisheries Secretariat (FISH) is a non-profit organisation dedicated to work towards more sustainable fisheries at an international level, with a focus on the European Union. The Stockholm-based Secretariat was set up in 2003 by the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, WWF Sweden and the Swedish Angler's Association.

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