



Global Marine Programme

Restoring the balance

Restoring Europe's Fisheries A New WWF Initiative

Background

Europe's seas are in a bad shape. More than two thirds of fish stocks are over-exploited, fragile habitats are being destroyed by intensive fishing practices, and juvenile fish, sharks, rays, cetaceans, dolphins, turtles and seabirds are being caught as bycatch in huge numbers. On top of depleting resources in its own waters, the European fleet also has dire effects far from home: many EU vessels now catch fish in distant waters of developing countries - exporting the problem of excess capacity, not solving it.

Prior to the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), European fisheries were managed on a short-term basis, with one-species focussed solutions. But to restore the balance of the oceans, we need a holistic approach. WWF is working to ensure that the European fisheries policy is long-sighted, precautionary, and based on the best available scientific advice. All to secure the future for both fish and the communities that depend on living marine resources.

WWF and the New Common Fisheries Policy

In 2002, the CFP was reformed to include principles of ecological sustainability. The revised CFP states that the European fishing industry shall reduce the impact of fishing on the wider marine environment and promote the protection of vulnerable species. The CFP is to be guided by the ecosystem-based management approach (EBM), that secures the long-term viability of marine biodiversity and of the communities depending on it.

WWF played a lead role in advocating for an extensive reform of the CFP through a high-profile, EU-wide campaign that secured the inclusion of several key commitments into the CFP, to:



As coastal fisheries have been depleted, deep-sea fish stocks are being exploited at an alarming rate. Deep-sea species such as orange roughy are slow-growing and late-maturing, and industrial fishing methods quickly reduce their populations below safe biological levels.

- Eliminate over-capacity of the EU fleet as a whole to match fleet capacity to marine resources.
- Reform subsidies through changes in spending to support the transition to a more environmentally and economically sustainable fishing sector.
- Reduce the footprint of the EU in distant waters through fair and sustainable fisheries partnership agreements.
- Protect the marine environment through an ecosystem-based management approach to fisheries.

Work Has Only Begun

European leaders must act urgently to ensure these bold commitments are fully delivered. To ensure the full implementation of the new CFP, WWF will work through combining policy with targeted communications.

WWF will lobby those Member States with the most influence on fisheries issues and further develop high-level policy expertise in Brussels.

Our work will rest upon three principal pillars:

1. Integrating and implementing the ecosystem-based approach in all aspects of fisheries management.
2. Reshaping subsidies frameworks to provide incentives for investment in environmentally sustainable fishing practices.
3. Negotiating and implementing improved fisheries partnership agreements.



Local Senegalese artisanal fishers watch a Spanish trawler in Dakar harbour. Access agreements between the EU and West African countries contribute to the depletion of fish stocks far from European waters.

Putting Environment at the Heart of Fisheries Policy

The EU must address the ecosystem impacts of its fisheries sector. The reformed CFP aims at a “progressive implementation of an ecosystem-based approach (EBM) to fisheries management”.

To boost the implementation of reforms and ensure the integration of EBM in all rules and regulations, WWF will work on a range of activities. These include the design of species recovery plans, multi-annual management plans and areas closed to fishing. WWF will also continue working with partners to develop less damaging fishing gears that reduce bycatch and habitat damage.

To conserve key habitats and manage fisheries resources within those, WWF will pursue the establishment of representative networks of MPAs under the Habitats Directive’s Natura 2000 and in regional fisheries management organizations.

Additionally, WWF currently takes part in four of seven planned Regional Fisheries Councils (RAC) to ensure they develop into effective fisheries management bodies. RACs are a key component in the new CFP, intended to improve governance and enhance transparency and dialogue in the EU fisheries policy.

Darwin Mounds Protected From Trawling

The first real EU commitment to reduce fisheries impacts on the wider marine environment came in August 2003, when the European Commission made use of an emergency measure within the revised CFP. This clause provides for emergency fisheries closures to reduce severe impacts of fisheries on the marine environment and/or species.

The Darwin Mounds, a large area with fragile cold-water corals off Scotland, had been damaged by bottom trawling, displaying crushed corals and a scarred seabed. Ever since its discovery in 1999, WWF has been lobbying the UK Government to ban bottom trawling in this sensitive area.

Following pressure from WWF and other NGOs, the EU permanently banned bottom trawling at the Darwin Mounds in March 2004.



Fishing boat at sea surrounded by seagulls, Wadden Sea Netherlands.

Eliminating Harmful Subsidies

To ensure the future of the European fishing fleet, it is critical to shift subsidies from underpinning overcapacity to supporting a sustainable fishing sector. Therefore, influencing the financial mechanisms that guide how subsidies are spent is a crucial part of WWF’s CFP initiative.

WWF will push for the allocation of funds towards less environmentally damaging fishing practices, and develop a blueprint for reducing capacity, providing a model of the number of boats, gear size and types, etc., that EU fisheries resources can sustainably support.



© WWF-Canon / Edward PARKER

Influencing consumers to advocate for change is one way WWF puts pressure on policy makers. The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) gives consumers a choice of sustainable seafood. Here, langoustines caught by the MSC-certified Loch Torridon Nephrops Creel Fishery, Scotland.

WWF is also developing a toolkit to be used to engage partner countries in the development of improved fisheries partnership agreements and to lobby for a sustainable EU policy.

Decreasing European Footprint Overseas

The EU fishing fleets now operate in all oceans, often exploiting marine resources in developing countries. In some cases, EU fleets operate under so-called fisheries partnership agreements. In others, European ships are re-flagged or assigned to joint ventures with a company in a third country.

Exporting overcapacity goes against the EU rhetoric on sustainable development and poverty eradication. Securing fair and sustainable partnership agreements will be essential to ensure the survival of fisheries resources – and the food security – of these countries.

WWF believes such agreements should:

- promote responsible fishing practices and minimize the impact on other species and the marine environment
- account for environmental costs
- protect local fishers
- include cooperation on fisheries management, research and monitoring
- ensure adequate enforcement capacity

Creating Partnerships for Success

One organization alone will not be able to ensure the successful implementation of the CFP reform. WWF hopes to engage with other NGOs, political think-tanks, advocacy groups, industry associations and other potential partners in our efforts to ensure a sustainable fishing sector in Europe.

Contacts

Charlotte MOGENSEN, WWF European Policy Office
+32 2 743 8807, cmogensen@wwfepo.org

Sarah BLADEN, WWF International
+41 22 364 9019, sbladen@wwfint.org