

# **A FISHERIES POLICY FOR THE FUTURE**

Despite concern about overfishing and the decline in Europe's fish stocks, an opportunity to make significant changes to the Common Fisheries Policy arises only every 10 years. A new Regulation has been proposed by the European Commission, and for the first time the European Parliament has co-decision powers in shaping the outcome. The Fisheries Committee will vote in July, with a plenary vote perhaps in September.

Last year, MEPs from all political groups came together to form the 'Fish for the Future' group. It aims to secure the adoption of sustainable policies that can protect fish stocks and ensure a better future for the fishing industry.

Firm decisions about voting intentions can be made by MEPs only when they have before them both the Commission's proposals and the draft amendments. However, the 'Fish for the Future' group endorses the following approach to issues that are central to the debate:

## ***LONG TERM MANAGEMENT***

The setting of long term plans for fisheries, based on best scientific advice and the avoidance of short-term decisions, is fundamental to a sustainable policy. Each fishery plan should be agreed with Parliament as a co-legislator and take into account special regional circumstances. Member States must provide the necessary scientific data; too many have so far failed to do this, and sanctions should be applied if they do not meet the requirements. We support an eco-system based approach, and, in the absence of data, the use of the precautionary principle in determining how catch quotas will be set.

## ***ACHIEVING MAXIMUM SUSTAINABLE YIELD***

We endorse the Commission's objective of achieving maximum sustainable yield (MSY) of fisheries by 2015, and define this as a curb on overfishing to reduce fish mortality to levels below those necessary to achieve MSY (technically known as FMSY). Longer term policy should be directed towards the full restoration of fish stocks and biomass to levels above those capable of producing MSY (BMSY). In many fisheries this could be achieved by 2020; in others, for biological reasons, it may not be possible until later.

## ***DISCARD BAN***

In European waters every year some 1.7 million tonnes of perfectly good fish are thrown overboard - dead. This is an unsustainable and unethical practice. We support the Commission's proposed ban on the discard of commercial species, recognising that this can promote the adoption of better fishing practices and the use of more selective gear. When management plans have been agreed this requirement could be adjusted on a fishery-by-fishery basis, with emphasis put on strategies to avoid by-catch in the first place. In time we wish to see a discard ban extended to all fish, and other species, except those that may be expected to survive if returned to the sea. Measures that provide payment for all species caught should have the sole aim of ensuring that unavoidable by-catch is landed, and not of creating new markets for fish that would be better left to swim and grow in the sea.

## ***REGIONALISATION***

As far as possible, decisions relating to the means of achieving the goals set by long term management plans should be taken at an appropriate regional level involving those in the fisheries concerned, scientists, and other stakeholders. To this end we support the maximum degree of regionalisation, recognising that the arrangements may differ from one area or fishery to another and should be based on a bottom-up approach.

## ***REDUCING OVERCAPACITY***

Too many boats are chasing too few fish, and too much fishing is uneconomic in consequence. We recognise the need to reduce the overcapacity of many of Europe's fishing fleets, and to ensure that fishing can be commercially viable without the need for subsidies. We want the Commission to propose a definition of overcapacity that takes account of regional variations, and to monitor and adjust capacity ceilings to reflect changing stock levels, improvements in scientific data, and technical advances. Transferable Fishing Concessions (TFCs) are controversial but have a proven record in reducing overcapacity. Member States can design them to take account of their particular concerns, such as the wish to avoid excessive concentration of fishing rights, ensure that only active fishermen have rights, or protect small scale fishing and coastal communities. Whatever means they choose, where overcapacity is demonstrated Member States must be required to adopt a strategy to reduce it, and the Commission should have the authority to apply sanctions if it is not achieved.

## ***EXTERNAL DIMENSION***

As a matter of principle, EU vessels fishing in waters elsewhere should be expected to meet the same standards that they would be subject to if fishing in our own seas. This relates to such matters as the use of sustainable practices and respect for the law on working conditions and human rights. The principle of transparency should apply to payments, catches and other documents relating to agreements between the EU and third countries. Misuse of reflagging must be curbed.

## ***FINANCIAL REGULATION***

We support moves to ensure that financial assistance is directed towards meeting the goals of a reformed Common Fisheries Policy. This includes giving increased financial support for scientific studies, regionalisation and measures to reduce by-catch; helping coastal communities adapt to changed circumstances, and promoting the marketing of more varied products provided this does not increase pressure on fish stocks. We oppose the use of EU funds for scrapping, 'modernising', or building new vessels, and endorse the criticism of the European Court of Auditors regarding the misuse of public money that has occurred in this respect.

## ***OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY***

The working of the Common Fisheries Policy has too often been kept hidden from public scrutiny. We stress that our seas are a public asset, and the rights to fish them exist to serve the public good. We insist that an open and transparent approach be adopted towards all matters relating to the use of public money to support fishing activities.

### **Signed:**

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**Christofer Fjellner (EPP)**  
**Mikael Gustafsson (GUE/NGL)**  
**Carl Haglund (ALDE)**  
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