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Reforming the Common Fisheries Policy

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Summary

- After a year of debate and negotiations, the Council of Fisheries Ministers agreed in June a General Approach (GA) to the CFP Basic Regulation. The groundwork has been laid; however the GA failed to deliver crucial details needed to achieve sustainable fisheries. Unresolved questions surround stock recovery, timelines for multi-annual plans, minimising fishing impact on the sea, addressing discards, and maximising the economic returns of fisheries.
- Healthy seas and productive fish stocks are a prerequisite for a profitable fishing sector and thriving fishing communities. The CFP Reform is now in sight but a crucial voice is still to be heard – that of the European Parliament. MEPs must be bolder than ministers, making alliances with those most likely to help deliver the necessary elements in the text of the Basic Regulations of the CFP.

Action

WWF call on all to support an ambitious and progressive reform package. The principles of sustainability must be enshrined and mainstreamed throughout the CFP's Basic Regulation - fisheries can no longer be viewed in isolation from other environmental commitments. This must herald a new era of European fisheries where fishing limits are set within scientific advice, stocks are restored and marine ecosystems protected, and which rewards those who fish in the most sustainable and responsible way.

This briefing raises three key elements in particular:

- **Regionalisation & Multi-Annual Plans**
- **Restoring Fish stocks & Protecting the Marine Environment**
- **Ending Discards**

Regionalisation & Multi-Annual Plans

Regionalisation is a key pillar of the CFP reform. Under a regionalised system, the EU would set out objectives, targets and timeframes. Then Member States and stakeholders would design **Multi-Annual Plans** setting out the management measures best adapted to the fishery in question to deliver on these targets. Fisheries managers, scientists, industry, NGOs and other stakeholders

would work together ('co-management') to ensure the proper implementation and review of the measures agreed collectively.

Here in UK under the Scottish Conservation Credit Scheme, we have evidence that the best path to more sustainable fisheries is through this type of co-management system. MEPs and Ministers must now ensure that the CFP legislation has clear commitments for this model to be exported across Europe. MEPs must ensure the inclusion of text to have Member States work together with their stakeholders to develop Multi-Annual Plans, and for the EU to provide the legal basis for these plans, including a timeline for agreement, to ensure a level-playing field.

Restoring Fish Stocks & Protecting the Marine Environment

EU fisheries need to implement an ecosystem approach with a clear commitment to restore and maintain i) populations of exploited species above levels which can produce **Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY)** by 2015 and ii) the effective implementation of other environmental commitments such as the attainment of Good Environmental Status (GES) under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).

On MSY, the current GA targets fall short of the commitments needed to restore or maintain fish stocks at robust and sustainable levels as it refers to fishing mortality rather than biomass levels being achieved by 2015/20.

Truly sustainable fishing will fail to be delivered unless the negative impacts of fishing activities on the wider marine environment are addressed. A clear commitment to assisting in the delivery of GES, as required under MSFD, is vital to help meet the EU commitment to deliver marine protected areas.

These targets and timelines are vital elements for the delivery of long term management plans under a process of regional decision-making. It is crucial that MEPs ensure these targets are set and effective timelines are established so as to ensure the best outcome for both the health of our seas and the long-term sustainability of our coastal communities.

Ending Discards

Discarding is a wasteful practice that undermines the sustainability of fish stocks and the health of marine ecosystems. WWF welcomes the commitments in the basic text to tackle this issue. There is general agreement that the first step is to fish as selectively as possible to avoid the removal of unwanted catch in the first instance. This would mean avoiding undersized and unmarketable commercial and non-commercial fish and other marine by-catch such as sea birds and marine mammals. There should be no financial incentives to land would-be discards to avoid the risk of creating new markets, however low the returns, or, worse, fraudulent activity.

Action must be taken to end discards. This can be varied and include more selective gear, time, area or gear restrictions or avoidance for certain periods and species. This is where regionalisation will help – working at the level of the fishery with stakeholders devising measures and regulations tailored to that fishery. Scotland is just one of the countries progressing on this path as more selective gear is becoming mandatory for more fleets to reduce discards and protect cod and other whitefish. However, urgent action is needed across all EU fisheries to ensure that they are as fishing as selectively as possible.

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