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PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING

Scottish Government debate - Common Fisheries Policy Reform

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WWF Scotland welcomes the opportunity to brief MSPs about its position on the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) reform proposals. Fisheries make up a considerable part of the Scottish coastal economy. It is therefore vital for Scotland to ensure that the reform improves the health of Scottish seas and the long-term profitability of the fishing industry. WWF Scotland urges MSPs to commit to supporting the difficult political decisions that need to be made to deliver a reform that is ambitious and progressive.

Summary

- The failures of the CFP have been well documented in the Commission's 2009 Green Paper and reflected in the many fisheries debates in the Scottish Parliament. Its over-centralised, top down, complex and short-term approach to fisheries management has led to over-investment in the fleet, over-fishing, discarding and poor compliance. The result is an imbalanced marine environment, depleted fish stocks and alienated stakeholders.
- The Commission's proposals, published on 13 July, make some progress towards sustainability – such as spelling out clear conservation objectives and multi-annual plans – but too much has been left to chance. Much work needs to be done by the Ministers and MEPs over the next 18 months to secure progressive reform.
- Crucial delivery mechanisms, time-frames and responsibilities for developing multi-annual plans are lacking from the Commission's proposals.
- Much more work needs to be done to ensure fisheries management is decentralised to harness the expertise of local stakeholders who are best placed to draw up and implement plans for their fisheries to deliver high-level EU objectives.
- Discarding is a wasteful practice, so WWF Scotland welcomes the Commission's intention to find a solution to the issue. However, we believe the proposed discard ban is not the right solution to a highly complex problem. We need to catch less, and make better use of what is caught.



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The Scottish fishing industry lands about 70% of total UK landings, and the main species targeted by the demersal whitefish fleet are cod, haddock and whiting, caught in a mixed fishery. Scotland has made considerable steps forward in conservation, particularly with the introduction of the Scottish Conservation Credits Scheme. However, the need for change in the Scottish fishing industry to fish less and fish better is clear in a recent report by the Inquiry into the Future of Fisheries Management (IFFM)¹. WWF Scotland is working with elected representatives and stakeholders to ensure that this CFP reform delivers a new management system to replace the centralised micro-management that has been so detrimental to Scottish fisheries.

WWF’s priorities – and our reaction to the Commission’s proposals

WWF welcomes the clear commitment to restore and maintain populations of exploited species above levels which can produce Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) and to apply an ecosystem approach. This is a welcome focus on conservation at the heart of the policy. However, WWF Scotland calls on MSPs to ensure that the Scottish Government plays its full part in ensuring the gaps in the proposals are filled in to benefit Scotland.

1. Long-Term Management

Crucial delivery mechanisms, time-frames and responsibilities for developing multi-annual plans are still missing from the proposals. WWF wants clear and binding targets to be met through Long-Term Management Plans designed specifically for each fishery. These should be in place by 2015 and co-managed by stakeholder groups at the fishery level. WWF also has concerns that there is little vision on aligning fleet capacity with available resources. Transferable Fishing Concessions (TFCs) – a very specific form of rights-based management - are proposed as the main stand-alone tool to deal with overcapacity, yet are likely to be a blunt tool at best, lacking the safeguards needed to prevent a concentration of rights or to address failure to meet conservation goals. TFCs should be one of many elements in a rights-based management ‘toolbox’ to be selected by regional stakeholders according to the plan for that particular fishery.

2. Effective Regionalisation

Long-term management through multi-annual plans must go hand in hand with regionalisation. However, worryingly, a clear co-management mechanism is absent from the Commission’s proposals. A genuine decentralisation of fisheries management and the full involvement of stakeholders at a regional level (e.g. Member State decision makers, scientists, industry representatives, NGOs) is essential to achieving sustainable, and regional management system, moving Europe away from the politically motivated annual centralised quota negotiations.

3. Eliminating discards

Discarding is a wasteful practice abhorred by all, so WWF Scotland welcomes the intention to find a solution to the issue. However, the proposed option of commercialising would-be discards is not the right solution to a complex problem. The emphasis should be on not catching unwanted fish in the first place – through more selective fishing practices. The solution should lie in better regulation and incentives for fishermen - such as closures, gear specifications, observers, use of on-board CCTV - as demonstrated in the Scottish Conservation Credits Scheme.

4. Fair fishing abroad

WWF Scotland welcomes the inclusion of the external dimension in the Commission’s basic regulation, however, is disappointed to see so little detail on taking the lead in global fisheries governance. We believe all EU vessels - wherever they fish - should fish to the same high standards. Clear targets, measures and mechanisms are needed to ensure this occurs.

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¹ Report of an Independent Panel, Inquiry into the Future Fisheries Management, Edinburgh 2010