



PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING

THE DECEMBER FISHERIES COUNCIL & REFORMING THE COMMON FISHERIES POLICY

Westminster Hall, 6th December 2012

Summary

- We are at a critical point for fisheries management. In July 2011 the European Commission published its much awaited proposal for reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). In July this year, after a year of debate and negotiations, the Council of Fisheries Ministers agreed a General Approach (GA) to the CFP Basic Regulation. However the GA failed to deliver crucial details needed to achieve sustainable fisheries. Unresolved questions surround stock recovery, timelines for multi-annual fisheries management 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 which for the first time has co-decision on CFP reform. MEPs must be bolder than Ministers and deliver a sustainable package for CFP reform which will mean sustainable fishing practices wherever the EU fleet operates
- The December Council presents an opportunity for decisions to be coherent with what the UK Government has been calling for under the reform of the CFP. This includes the transition towards sustainable fisheries that will provide a steady source of food for society, an economically viable fishing industry, thriving coastal communities and healthy marine ecosystems. It is crucial that we support decisions that have immediate impacts on the industry to be in line with our joint long-term objective and the journey to achieving that goal. This can only be delivered if Defra and the Minister's positions are firmly based on science, consistent with the current move to rebuilding and maintaining stocks at sustainable levels and leading to the minimisation of unwanted catches and discards.

Necessary Steps:

Allow fish stocks to recover:

Council must follow scientific advice and, where cuts in fishing possibilities are recommended, accept that smaller catches today will pay dividends in terms of stock abundance and a healthier marine environment in the future. This approach will strengthen the current move towards the



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application of the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) aimed at recovering fish populations to sustainable levels in line with the EU and Member States' commitment on delivering MSY by 2015¹. We are already seeing the economic benefits accruing from healthier fish stocks, particularly in the North Sea, allowing for higher quotas which increase fishermen's income while still allowing the stocks to renew themselves to more abundant levels. This is why, where the Government pushes for a departure from scientific advice, MPs must demand evidence that the counter proposal will deliver better or, at the very least, no-worse outcomes than if the scientific advice was followed.

Reaching MSY will also help the UK deliver on its "good environmental status" targets by 2020 under the EU Marine Strategic Framework Directive and other environmental legislation.

Change the way we fish:

We must build on the record of UK fleet's success in avoiding cod, so as to hasten the recovery of this stock which has been determining the fishing patterns for so many other species for which the fleets have quotas. Some fleets have undeniably made substantial changes in their fishing gear to reduce by-catch of cod and other species. However, as scientific data show, by-catch is still too high in some fisheries and will have to be reduced further. Priority must also be given to minimising and wherever possible eliminating by-catch of non-target fish species and other incidental catches such as seabirds as required by the EU's new Seabird Plan of Action. This is also essential to the health of the marine environment which is key to the fortunes of our industry and coastal communities. Any measures should build on the current efforts to align economic incentives with conservation objectives.

A 20% cut in next year's North Sea cod quota is on the cards because of the provisions under the cod recovery plan. MPs must call on the Government to ensure that if there is a roll-over of this year's quota, as called for by the industry, additional measures are taken to ensure that fishing mortality of cod continues to decrease to meet the plan's target. RSPB and WWF are aware of work being done by managers, scientists and the industry on finding ways to protect cod further and support such initiatives that seek solutions that are ecologically, economically and socially positive.

Change the way we manage how we fish:

We need to break the top-down model of management in favour of a regionalised approach which is much more participative and adaptive, enabling government, industry, NGOs and other stakeholders to identify tailored measures for their regional seas, albeit within strict EU legislation. All of us must use this management model to promote the benefits of better governance and ensure that the CFP reform effectively deliver meaningful regionalisation. In short, we need to see words being turned into solid legislation alongside sufficient resourcing.

Multi-annual plans will be the vehicles to deliver regionalisation. The objectives and targets will still be set at EU level but the implementing plans to deliver on these targets will be devised at the local level. This is why MPs must be prudent and not support calls for undermining the legal provisions under the current cod recovery plan. Its weaknesses have been acknowledged and the Commission has proposed amendments to the articles that pose most problems. It is now for the EU Council and Parliament to work together to adopt these amendments early in the new year.

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¹ Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, 2002.