



**WWF** *for a living planet*

**WWF-UK**

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## Parliamentary briefing

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# General fisheries debate – 20 November 2008

### SUMMARY

- In December, the UK Government will negotiate within the EU Council to ensure sustainable management of fish stocks in EU waters. The Government must heed ICES advice and take a lead in Council negotiations to deliver sustainable fishing quotas to ensure long-term recovery of fish stocks.
- Overcapacity is still a problem in European fisheries. A 2007 Court of Auditors report stated that over-capacity in fishing fleets provides a "structural" incentive to over-fishing. Unless this problem is tackled, overfishing will remain a serious barrier to sustainability.
- The practice of discarding has recently attracted considerable attention, as discard levels remain high in many European fisheries. Increasing TAC levels alone is not enough to reduce discards. WWF believes that improvements in fisheries management, implementation of a package of technical measures is needed to avoid catching untargeted species as 'bycatch'
- Technical measures could include improved gear selectivity, real-time closures, seasonal or permanent closures and the deployment of independent on-board observers, complemented by video surveillance. The Government should also consider the introduction of bycatch quotas in UK fisheries.
- After tentative signs of recovery of some species such as North Sea cod in 2007, WWF warned that any increase in cod quotas must carry with it a health warning - that *mandatory* measures needed to be included to reduce the level of discards and mortality. However, discarding remains very high and the uptake of effective bycatch reduction measures has not been high enough.
- Only by making such measures mandatory will we be able to implement truly ecosystem-based management, a central requirement of the CFP.

### ➤ **2009 TACS AND QUOTAS – 18-20 DECEMBER**

WWF believes that a serious change in fisheries management is urgently needed to deliver sustainable exploitation of our marine environment. **Disappointingly**, it is estimated that Member States have consistently overshot scientific advice by over 30%, and in recent years this figure has risen in some cases to between 42-57% over advised catch levels. WWF urges application of the scientific advice as presented by ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Seas), the EU's prime source of scientific advice on the marine ecosystem.



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## ➤ **REDUCING DISCARDS OF COD**

WWF's focus area is on cod and associated fisheries, as the recovery of cod is crucial for the long term benefit of the UK's fishing industry. However, discard levels of cod are still high in some fisheries and increasing fishing quotas alone is not the answer. The most recent ICES advice is testament to this and has advised a zero catch. WWF is particularly concerned about the future of North Sea cod. In 2007, 84% of the international landings consisted of juvenile cod between the age of 1 and 3. This means that only 12% of 2-year old cod of the 2005 year class will survive to maturity. Because the North Sea cod stock is highly dependent on the juveniles reaching maturity and contributing to spawning stock to reach recovery, current discarding trends are hindering the recovery potential of this stock. It is vital to reduce mortality especially on younger ages of cod, to allow more fish to reach maturity and increase the probability of good recruitment.

WWF believes that voluntary measures are not enough to ensure the necessary change in fishing practices. Management and technical solutions do exist - we simply need to demonstrate the political will to implement them on a mandatory basis. WWF believes stocks can only recover through a package of measures to avoid catching untargeted species in the first place, and to avoid areas with large concentrations of juvenile fish.

This package of **MANAGEMENT AND TECHNICAL MEASURES** for cod should include:

- **Improved gear selectivity and technology.** WWF is calling for the use of large square mesh panels or sorting grids to be standard in all nephrops (e.g. langoustines, Dublin Bay prawns or Norwegian lobsters) fisheries and separator trawls to be used by whitefish vessels. Other adaptations are available to reduce other environmental impacts, such as benthic release panels, and where practicable, these should be made mandatory. ICES has recommended measures such as the Eliminator Trawl (a WWF *Smart Gear Award* winner) and as a means to improve long-term sustainability.
- **Real-time closures.** WWF supports the use of effective real-time closures as a means of cod avoidance. These can be used to temporarily reduce fishing activity in areas where high levels of either juvenile and/or spawning cod are found.
- **Seasonal or permanent closures.** These closures should be undertaken as part of a commitment to ecosystem-based management. Trial marine reserves should be implemented in order to assess their role in mitigating human impacts, including fisheries.
- **Independent on-board observers.** WWF recommends the use of onboard observers as a standard tool in fisheries management. Their deployment onboard a representative number of vessels across all fleet segments would help resolve a number of issues including data deficiencies and verification of total catch levels and levels of discards, all of which would improve the confidence of scientific advice. Observer schemes could be supplemented with video surveillance which could be integrated with existing satellite monitoring systems to improve overall effectiveness.





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➤ **BYCATCH QUOTAS**, or Total Allowable Bycatch (TAB) Quotas

For certain species, such as cod, WWF believes there is merit in exploring the use of Total Allowable Bycatch (TAB) quotas, which *replace* landings quotas. All fish, including those below minimum landing size, subject to the measure would be recorded against the quota. Once the TAB quota is reached the fishery is closed.

Bycatch quotas allow fishermen to fish for other more plentiful species using all means at their disposal, including their detailed knowledge of the sea and improved selectivity. This is a key way to promote the recovery of certain species, while allowing profitable mixed fisheries to continue. On-board observers, and electronic observations, would be crucial to the implementation, monitoring and enforcement of these bycatch quotas. WWF call on the UK Government to pilot the use of bycatch quotas.

➤ **COMMON FISHERIES POLICY**

The process of reviewing the CFP is already underway. In October 2007, WWF published our own mid-term review, which examined the EU's progress in implementing the CFP since its reform in 2002. The report concluded that five years from its next reform, the EU Common Fisheries Policy is still failing to achieve sustainable management of European fish stocks, mainly because the way fisheries quotas are set fails to address the chronic over capacity that still exists in the European fleet.

There is also little evidence that an ecosystem-based management, a key commitment made by Member States under the reformed Common Fisheries Policy, is being implemented effectively. Harvesting of our valuable fisheries must be conducted with minimal impact on juvenile and spawning fish, non-target species, and marine habitats. Only by achieving sustainable management of Europe's fish stocks will we guarantee a secure future for the marine environment and the fishing industry.

WWF would also welcome a more rights-based approach to fisheries management, using market-based mechanisms to bring fleet capacity in line with resources available. Some of the most successful fisheries around the world such as Australia, Iceland and New Zealand operate under these mechanisms.

**REFERENCES:**

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