



**WWF** *for a living planet*

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## PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING

# Annual fisheries debate – 1 December 2009

### SUMMARY

- WWF welcomes the UK's involvement in the Aalborg Declaration to introduce a flexible system to reward fishermen in exchange for significant discard cuts and the use of CCTV coverage. This is a welcome step towards sustainable fisheries, but there is still a great deal of work to be done.
- At the December Council negotiations, WWF urges Ministers to heed scientific advice. Scientific advice is not a starting point to be negotiated down; it is there to inform decision-making. While fish stocks remain in a critical state, with many species still outside safe biological limits, it is crucial that final decisions are credible.
- Any quota increase decided by Council, particularly for North Sea cod, must be accompanied by management measures to tackle discards and reduce mortality.
- Atlantic Bluefin tuna has become a case study for the mismanagement of a fishery. After the failure of ICCAT to deal effectively with the decline of the species, it is now essential that all CITES parties support Appendix I listing in March 2010.
- The forthcoming reform of the Common Fisheries Policy is an opportunity to bring about the necessary radical change in EU fisheries management. Member States must push for radical change to move towards more sustainable fisheries.

This debate is a crucial opportunity for MPs to influence the fisheries negotiations on 2010 fishing opportunities and beyond. WWF welcomes the work achieved to date to improve the sustainability of UK fleets but urges the UK Government to continue to aim for a better deal for the future of our fish stocks. For example, the **Scottish Conservation Credit Scheme**, established after the 2008 quota negotiations, is already delivering tangible reductions in discards and has a strong conservation focus while supporting fishing communities.

### The Aalborg Declaration - reducing discards, and introducing catch quotas

WWF welcomes the proposal from Denmark, strongly backed by the UK, Scotland and Germany puts forward a flexible system that will reward fishermen in exchange for discard cuts and the use of CCTV. It also seeks a new way of attributing quotas to vessels, focussing on catch quotas instead of landings quotas. WWF welcomes this, as quotas are currently only measured by *landed* catch, paying little attention to the levels of fish actually caught and the fraction discarded.

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Page 1 of 1

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## Ministers must heed scientific advice

Each year the Fisheries Council negotiates quotas for *UK fleets*. We sometimes forget that it must also negotiate these quotas for the *fish stocks* themselves. Scientific advice is not a starting point to be negotiated down; it is there to inform decision-making. Setting quotas, on average, 48% higher than advised cannot be considered sustainable. The aims of ecological sustainability and socio-economic sustainability are not mutually exclusive; ecological sustainability is a pre-condition for economic and social sustainability.

## Bluefin tuna – a case study for mismanagement

The outcome of the recent ICCAT meeting on Atlantic Bluefin tuna was a great disappointment, with the Commission disregarding scientific advice and failing to take the necessary action to enable recovery of this iconic species. In the absence of appropriate management measures by ICCAT, WWF believes that only a temporary suspension of these fisheries and a ban on the international trade can allow this iconic species to recover. WWF welcomes the UK Government's support for Appendix I listing under CITES, and urges Ministers to lobby other Governments to support a strong outcome at the next Conference of the Parties in March 2010.

## North Sea cod

In recent years, WWF has been particularly concerned about the state of North Sea cod and has advocated more precautionary quota setting. Although the recent ICES advice recommends an increase in the North Sea cod quota (from 28 798t to 33 552t) after initial signs of recovery, WWF still believes that any quota increase must be accompanied by measures to reduce mortality and discards. Such measures might include spatial and temporal closures, technical conservation measures or independent on-board observers / CCTV coverage.

The recovery of North Sea cod is based on the growth of a single strong year class (2005), rather than a greater abundance of fish. We must maintain precautionary exploitation levels over the longer-term, to ensure this year class can mature, spawn and contribute to the future of the stock. A recent study by WWF<sup>1</sup> shows that if cod stocks are allowed to recover, there are both longer-term economic benefits and reduced economic uncertainty. It is therefore essential to temper harvesting at the first sign of recovery in favour of longer term targets.

## Common Fisheries Policy Reform

The reform of the CFP has been high on the agenda in 2009. This reform is timely, not only because the 2002 reform has done little to alleviate overfishing and its wider ecological footprint. WWF has three priorities for CFP reform, and a separate briefing is also available:

- Eliminating overcapacity - It is vital that a balance is achieved between fisheries resources and fleet capacity. Achieving this balance should form one of the mandatory targets in a formal Long Term Management Plan (LTMP).
- Ecosystem-based management - Application of the precautionary principle and the need for an ecosystem-based approach to be at the core of the CFP must be strengthened. The reformed CFP must require all fishing activity to follow such an approach.
- Improved governance - Decision making at the Council level must concentrate on setting overarching policy rather than micro-management. Decisions must be consistent with scientific advice, with priority given to assuring ecosystem health.

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