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PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING

Backbench Debate: Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy

15 March 2012

WWF welcomes the EFRA Committee's Report "EU Proposals for reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)," and shares its concern that CFP reform is endangered by a lack of clarity in the Commission's proposals on the steps to be taken to deliver essential goals such as regionalisation, multi-annual plans and discard minimisation.

The failures of the CFP have been well documented and reflected in the many fisheries debates in Parliament. The EU's top-down, centralised, micro-management approach **has led to over-investment in the fleet, over-fishing, ill-fitted rules, discarding and poor compliance. The results are a degraded marine environment, depleted fish stocks, struggling fleets and alienated stakeholders. WWF therefore calls on the UK Parliament to help deliver the radical reform so needed to deliver sustainable fisheries both in EU and non-EU waters.**

Solutions:

WWF fully shares the Committee's view that "the essential first step is to improve the CFP's governance through a more ambitious programme of decentralisation". We cannot delay the delivery of greater participative management any longer if the CFP is to be in a position to achieve sustainable fisheries and ensure the long-term economic and ecological prosperity of our fisheries and the maintenance of our coastal communities.

WWF's vision is one where fisheries are managed at a fishery level within an ecosystem approach, based on multi-annual plans (MAPs) designed to meet management objectives **and targets** set centrally by the European Union and delivered jointly by the relevant Member States with the full involvement **of fishermen** and other key **stakeholders**.

1 Multi-Annual Plans

Crucial delivery mechanisms, time-frames and responsibilities should be introduced in the CFP Basic Regulation. **WWF believes clear and binding targets need to be met through multi-annual plans designed specifically for each fishery.** These should be in place by 2015 and co-managed by stakeholder groups at the fishery level so as to allow the best adapted management decisions to be made at the right level. MAPs should be:



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- a) the main vehicle for effective regionalisation and to achieve the reform's objectives by tapping into regional expertise and allowing for greater management flexibility in policy design, review and adaptation;
- b) the framework for delivering the objectives of the key building blocks of the Basic Regulation such as discard elimination, balancing fleet capacity with fishing opportunities, adoption of rights-based management tools, and minimising fishing impact on the marine environment;
- c) a means of providing coherence within the CFP Regulation.

2 Regionalisation

MAPs must go hand in hand with regionalisation. Given that a clear co-management mechanism is absent from the Commission's proposals, WWF has been working with all relevant players including UK and devolved Parliaments and Administrations along with the EU institutions and northern RACs to provide realistic and feasible regionalisation models to encourage the process. 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 Fishing at MSY

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 much-needed focus on conservation at the heart of the policy.** This is why WWF calls on MPs to ensure that the UK Government play its full part in ensuring that we move towards this goal in line with our international commitments.

4 Discards

Discarding is a wasteful practice abhorred by all. WWF welcomes the determination to tackle this complex issue and unacceptable waste. However, the proposed option of commercialising would-be discards is not the right solution to a complex problem. It merely shifts the problem from sea to land. **The emphasis should therefore be on not catching unwanted fish in the first place** – through encouraging more selective fishing practices (as trialled in Cefas' 'Project 50%'). The solution should lie in better, regulation and incentives for fishermen as demonstrated in the Scottish Conservation Credits Scheme or the UK catch quota scheme which allow for fully documented fisheries. Political will and stakeholders' full commitment and determination are essential to minimising by-catch and discards which are increasingly becoming unacceptable for society.

5 Fair Fishing Abroad

WWF welcomes EFRA's recommendations on "maintaining sustainable fish stocks around the UK and in external waters" and the inclusion of external fisheries in the Commission's Basic regulation proposal. However, we need to fill in the missing details in this proposal on the EU taking the lead in global fisheries governance. **We believe all EU vessels – wherever they fish – should apply the same high standards.** Clear targets, measures and mechanisms are needed to ensure this occurs.

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