



**WWF** *for a living planet*

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## Parliamentary briefing: Fisheries

**November 2008**

### Introduction

In the parliamentary debate in November 2007 the Scottish Parliament agreed that “the precautionary principle should prevail in setting levels of permissible fishing activity; acknowledged that much more work needed to be done to create a truly sustainable fishery in the North Sea, including measures to reduce dramatically if not eliminate discards, recognised that one good year class does not of itself create a sustainable fishery stock, and further agreed that there needs to be dialogue between the fishing industry, scientists and conservation interests to ensure continuous improvement in stocks and a long-term sustainable future for the industry.”

Considerable work has been carried out in this direction with the setting up of the Conservation Credits Scheme, but many of Scotland’s fish stocks continue to be over-fished. For example, cod stocks in both the North Sea and West of Scotland have decreased significantly over the past two decades, and are still well below the minimum stock size advised by scientists as being sustainable. Despite a slight sign of recovery in the North Sea following a strong year class in 2005, there is still a long way to go. 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

**The priority objective to ensure cod stocks will recover is the reduction of discards.** The Scottish Government is already addressing this issue within the context of the Conservation Credits Scheme, but discards in 2008 were even higher than the previous years<sup>1</sup>. The problem of discards must be addressed by a package of measures, including spatial closures, technical conservation measures, onboard observers and effort control.

### Conservation Policies

- Spatial and temporal closures - WWF recognises the work done by the Scottish government on real time and seasonal closures, and believes this experience should now be extended to other species (in particular haddock and whiting on the West Coast of Scotland) and to further afield, including collaboration with Norway and the UK.
- Technical conservation measures - In Scottish waters the *Nephrops* fleet is now using square mesh panels and considerable work has been done trialling selective gears for the mixed/whitefish fishery. We need to move from trials towards the mandatory adoption of a suite of locally suitable selective gears in all boats which catch cod (as a target or bycatch species).
- Independent on-board observers - WWF recommends the use of onboard observers as an important tool in fisheries management. Their deployment onboard a representative number of vessels across all fleet segments helps combat data deficiency and provides records of total catch and levels of discards, all of which contribute to improved scientific advice. In Scotland observer coverage should be increased to provide information on all segments of the fleet.

<sup>1</sup> Annex F – Conservation Credits Scheme meeting November 2008 - Monitoring of Scottish catches and discard rates in 2008. Nick Bailey and Paul Fernandes, FRS Marine Laboratory, Aberdeen.



- **Effort control** - Overcapacity is still a major problem in European fisheries. A 2007 Court of Auditors report stated that over-capacity in fishing fleets provides a "structural" incentive to over-fishing<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, according to a recent report by the World Bank, "a reduction in fishing effort would increase productivity, profitability and net economic benefits"<sup>3</sup>. Unless the problem of effort is tackled overfishing will remain a serious barrier to sustainability. WWF hopes that the move to measuring effort as KW-days will be a step in the right direction.

### **Bycatch quotas**

WWF believes there is merit in exploring the use of Total Allowable Bycatch (TAB) quotas, rather than landings quotas. Indirect capture as bycatch (in multispecies fisheries) represents a significant portion of all fishing mortality for many species. Under a system of TABs all fish subject to a TAB quota caught, are recorded against the quota. Once the TAB quota is exhausted the fishery must close. Currently, ICES estimates discard levels when setting quotas, but under a TAB system, they could set the quota based on science and monitor actual discarding.

Bycatch quotas allow fishermen to decide how to meet their targets, using all means at their disposal, including their experience and technical measures such as selective gear. This is a key way to promote the recovery of certain species, such as cod, while allowing profitable mixed fisheries to continue. WWF urge the Scottish Government to consider the application of bycatch quotas.

### **Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)**

The process of reviewing the CFP is already underway. In October 2007, WWF published a 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 CFP 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 CFP, is being implemented effectively. Harvesting of valuable marketable fish 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.

### **Conclusion**

Whilst the Scottish Government has already taken significant steps, working with industry and other stakeholders, to address the problems of sustainability in their fisheries discarding remains high. Increased effort must be made to overcome this problem, most particularly with fleet-wide adoption of selective gears for all fisheries. Furthermore the issue of effort management needs to be addressed. The Scottish Government should use their influence in negotiations for the reform of the CFP, pushing for new management structures such as TAB quotas, and better ecosystem based fisheries management in the future.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/press\\_corner/press\\_releases/com07\\_92\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/press_corner/press_releases/com07_92_en.htm)

<sup>3</sup> World Bank 2008. The Sunken Billions. The economic justification for fisheries reform. The World Bank, Washington DC. Available from [www.worldbank.org/SunkenBillions](http://www.worldbank.org/SunkenBillions)