



PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING – CFP REFORM DEBATE

7 June 2012

RSPB Scotland and WWF Scotland are committed to working towards sustainable fisheries. Healthy seas and productive fish stocks are a prerequisite for a profitable fishing sector and thriving fishing communities. The Reform of the EU Common Fisheries Policy is now well underway, with the Commission's proposals being considered and amended by Ministers and MEPs. WWF and RSPB Scotland welcome the efforts by the Scottish and UK Ministers to ensure that long-term sustainability is at the heart of this reform process. However, we must be bolder, making alliances with those Member States committed to real change to tackle the lack of firm commitment from those around the Council table who are content with the status quo.

In his opening speech to the World Fisheries Congress, held in Edinburgh last month, the Cabinet Secretary stated that 'if we are to sustain the communities whose main source of income comes from fishing we must conserve the raw material on which they depend.' The principle of sustainability must be enshrined and mainstreamed throughout the CFP's Basic Regulation - fisheries can no longer be viewed in isolation from other environmental commitments. WWF and RSPB Scotland call on the Scottish Parliament to support an ambitious and progressive reform package. This must herald a new era of European fisheries where fishing limits are set within scientific advice, stocks are restored and marine ecosystems protected, and which rewards those who fish in the most sustainable and responsible way. The reformed CFP must contribute to Scotland meeting its many responsibilities under EU legislation, including Good Environmental Status as required by the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

This briefing raises three key elements in particular:

- Regionalisation and Multi-Annual Plans
- Maximum Sustainable Yield
- Discards

Regionalisation and Multi-Annual Plans

In their consideration of the CFP reform, the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee (RACCE) rightly recommended that 'all of those involved in the negotiations [...] apply maximum pressure to try and ensure the proposals for regionalisation are realised.'¹ Regionalisation is indeed a key pillar of the CFP reform. Under a regionalised system, the EU would set out objectives, targets and timeframes while Member States and stakeholders would design 'Multi-Annual Plans' setting out the measures best adapted to the fishery in question to deliver them. Fisheries managers, scientists, industry, environmental NGOs and other stakeholders would work together ('co-management') to ensure the proper implementation and review of the measures agreed collectively.

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http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_RuralAffairsClimateChangeandEnvironmentCommittee/General%20Documents/CFP_letter.pdf

Here in Scotland under the Conservation Credit Scheme, we have evidence that the best path to more sustainable fisheries is through this type of co-management system. Ministers must now ensure that the CFP legislation has clear commitments for this model to be exported across Europe. Ministers negotiating the CFP must ensure that Member States can work together with their stakeholders to develop Multi-Annual Plans, and that the EU will provide the legal basis for these plans to ensure a level-playing field for all.

We welcome the efforts by key Ministers in tabling a Declaration in last month's EU Council meeting recognising the integral role that regionalisation can play in a reformed CFP and urge MSPs to support these efforts.

Maximum Sustainable Yield

RSPB Scotland and WWF Scotland strongly support the objective to implement an ecosystem approach to fisheries and a clear commitment to restore and maintain populations of exploited species above levels which can produce Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) by 2015. The EU and its Member States have been committed to this deadline since the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit. WWF and RSPB believe that it is important to maintain a strong commitment to conservation, with specified urgent timeframes for achieving MSY targets. These targets and timelines are a crucial element of the delivery of long term management plans under a process of regional decision-making. We seek firm commitment from the Scottish and UK Ministers at Council to push forward this ambition in the CFP legislation.

It is crucial that Scotland and the UK take a strong lead in maintaining these longstanding commitments and ensure the best outcome for both the health of our seas and the long-term sustainability of our coastal communities.

Discards

Discarding is a wasteful practice that also undermines the sustainability of fish stocks and the health of marine ecosystems. RSPB Scotland and WWF Scotland therefore welcome the commitment expressed by the Scottish and UK Ministers to tackling this issue. There is general agreement that the first step is to fish as selectively as possible to avoid unwanted catches of commercial and non-commercial fish, and other organisms such as sea birds. We believe there should be no financial incentives to land what would otherwise be discarded so as to avoid the risk of creating new markets however low the returns would be or, worse, fraudulent activity.

Action must be taken to ensure that measures that lead to discards are tackled, with fishing gear, techniques and practices designed to be as selective as possible. This is where regionalisation will help – with stakeholders devising measures and regulations better tailored to the fisheries concerned. Scotland is progressing on this path as more selective gear is becoming mandatory for the langoustine fleet to protect cod and other whitefish. However, urgent action is needed across all fisheries in which EU vessels are engaged.

Scotland must continue to lead by example in tackling the drivers of by-catch, be they regulatory or technical. The Cabinet Secretary must be encouraged in his endeavours to ensure that we catch less, land more and account for all that is taken from the sea.

Conclusion

We believe that Scotland and the UK can and must lead on ensuring a sound environmental commitment within the CFP reform process. 'Business as usual' is simply not an option. WWF and RSPB Scotland call on the Scottish Parliament to commit to supporting the difficult political decisions that need to be made to deliver a reform package that is ambitious and progressive.

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