

# Parliamentary Briefing

## Annual EU Fisheries Negotiations and the on-going Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy



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RSPB and WWF are committed to working towards ecologically sustainable fisheries for the benefit of the wider marine environment and economically viable livelihoods for fishermen and their communities.

At a recent event, Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead told his audience that Scotland had a choice: “We can look backwards and ask ourselves the question: ‘How can we make all this go away and bring back the old days?’ Or we can look forward and ask: ‘How do I want my industry to look in 5 or 10 years’ time and how can I help bring about the positive change to deliver that vision?’” RSPB and WWF believe that by planning for the future and looking beyond short term gains we can reap the benefits of current efforts by the Scottish fleets to fish more selectively. We support MSPs in calling for the best possible outcome for Scotland at this month’s EU Council of Fisheries Ministers, but this must not be at the expense of past measures or, worse, of reversing their beneficial effects on fish stocks and marine ecosystems.

The Council’s decisions must be coherent with what Parliament has been calling for under the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP): The transition towards sustainable fisheries that will provide a steady source of food for society, an economically viable fishing industry, thriving coastal communities and healthy marine ecosystems. It is crucial that Scotland leads the UK in supporting decisions that have immediate impacts on the industry to come into line with our joint long-term objectives. Ministers must promote consistency with scientific advice, rebuilding and maintenance of stocks at sustainable levels and the minimisation of discards.

### Participative management and regionalisation

WWF and RSPB believe the Scottish model of participative and adaptive management needs to be strengthened. This model has resulted in the government, industry and other stakeholders identifying tailored measures within strict EU legislative confines that are delivering substantial cuts in discards of cod and other species. Together, we must use this management model to promote the benefits of better governance and ensure that the CFP reform delivers meaningful and effective regionalisation. In short, throughout the CFP reform process, we need to see warm words being turned into solid legislation.

### Multi-annual plans

Multi-annual plans will be the vehicles to deliver regionalisation. The objectives and targets will still be set at EU level but the implementing plans to deliver on these targets will be devised at the local level. This is why MSPs must be prudent and not support calls that undermine the legal provisions under the current Cod Recovery Plan; its weaknesses have been acknowledged and the Commission has proposed amendments to the articles that pose most problems. It is now for the Council and Parliament to work together to adopt these amendments early in the New Year.

## December Council on fisheries opportunities for 2013

What the Scottish Parliament must defend:

Scientific Advice: The Council must follow scientific advice and, where cuts in fishing possibilities are recommended, to accept that smaller catches will pay dividends in terms of stock abundance and a healthier marine environment. This approach will strengthen the move towards Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) aimed at recovering fish populations to sustainable levels in line with the EU and Member States' commitment on delivering MSY by 2015<sup>1</sup>. We are already seeing the economic benefits accruing from healthier fish stocks, particularly in the North Sea, allowing for higher quotas which increase fishermen's income while still allowing the stocks to renew themselves to more abundant levels.

Reaching MSY will also help Scottish waters attain 'Good Environmental Status' by 2020, under the EU Marine Strategic Framework Directive and other environmental legislation.

Reduction of discards: The Scottish fleet must step up efforts to avoid cod so as to hasten the recovery of this stock. Cod recovery is vital, as it determines the fishing patterns for so many other species for which the fleets have quotas. Scottish fleets have made substantial changes in their fishing gear to reduce by-catch of cod and other species. However, as scientific data shows, by-catch is still too high in some of our fisheries and will have to be reduced further. Priority must also be given to minimising and, wherever possible, eliminating by-catch of non-target fish species and incidental catches of other species including endangered seabirds.

North Sea Cod: A 20% cut in next year's North Sea cod quota is on the cards because of the legal provisions under the Cod Recovery Plan. MSPs must call on the Government to ensure that if there is a roll-over of this year's quota, as called for by the industry, additional measures are taken to ensure that fishing mortality in cod continues to decrease. RSPB and WWF are aware of work being done by managers, scientists and the industry on finding ways to protect cod further and we support such initiatives that seek solutions that are ecologically, economically and socially positive. Indeed, where the Government pushes for a departure from legal provisions under the Plan, MSPs must demand evidence that the counter proposal will deliver better or, at the very least, no worse outcomes than if the legal provisions were followed.

Now more than ever we need to be clear about where we want Scotland's fisheries and the industries dependent on them to be in ten years' time. We must make sure that the right steps are taken now to deliver healthy, biologically diverse and profitable seas in years to come.

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*The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC03765. WWF-UK is a charity registered in England and Wales no. 1081247, in Scotland no. SC0395934*

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<sup>1</sup> Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, 2002