

Common fisheries policy: conservation and sustainable exploitation (repeal. Regulations (EEC) No 3760/92 and (EEC) No 101/76)

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This Communication is a summary of reports sent to the Commission by the Member States on efforts to achieve a sustainable balance between fleet capacity and available fishing opportunities. The report sums up Member States' descriptions of their fishing fleets, the impact of the existing schemes to reduce fishing efforts, Member States' compliance with the entry/exit scheme and the weaknesses and strengths of their fleet management systems.

Description of the fleets in relation to fisheries: Many Member States reported that their small-scale coastal fishing fleet, which makes up more than 80% of the fishing fleet, has a significant socio-economic bearing on coastal communities and, as a result, deserves extra attention. The general impression drawn from the Member States' report is rather optimistic. According to these reports the Community fleet seems to be in balance - other than in particular cases. The Commission does not share this view.

Impact of effort reduction schemes on capacity: Generally speaking, the reports failed to indicate whether fishing effort schemes have been, or will be, an effective tool to achieve a sustainable balance between capacity and resources. The Commission believes the overall results, in terms of fleet size, are poor and much greater effort is required.

Compliance with the entry/exit scheme and with reference levels: According to available data, almost every Member State was within its maximum fleet capacity ceiling by the end of 2006. The overall trend in fleet capacity shows a steady decrease. All of the Member States concerned complied with the reference levels for the mainland fleet.

Strengths and weakness of fleet management systems: The main strength has been adherence to the entry/exit scheme and adherence to maximum fleet capacity ceilings. By the end of 2006 most Member States had comprehensive integrated IT systems for fisheries management - such as fleet register, capacity management, licences, log-books, landings, sales notes, catch reporting etc.

Overall Results: According to the CFR, during the four-year period 2003–2006, the overall capacity of the Community fleet was reduced by 217 000 GT and 773 000 kW, giving a net reduction of approximately 10%. The contribution by the “EU-15 fleet” to this reduction was 167 000 GT and 645 000 kW, compared with 51 000 GT and 128 000 kW withdrawn by the “EU-10 fleet”. In relative terms, the reduction of the “EU-10 fleet” since the date of accession has been stronger than the reduction of the “EU-15 fleet” over the period 2003-2006 (23% compared with 9%, in both tonnage and engine power). Over the four-year period 2003-2006 approximately 173 000 GT and 560 000 kW were withdrawn from the EU fleet (except for the outermost regions) with public aid, of which 40 000 GT and 127 000 kW were withdrawn in 2006.

Results for fleets registered in the outermost regions: The capacity of the fleets registered in the outermost regions and its variation between 1 January 2003 and 31 December 2006 show that the fleet registered in the outermost regions of Spain and Portugal has been significantly reduced, in terms of both tonnage and power. In the French overseas departments there has been a slight decrease in the total

number of vessels, a decrease in tonnage and an increase in engine power. At the end of 2006, as in previous years, three out of the 17 segments for the outermost regions were exceeding their reference level.

Conclusions: The quality of reports has steadily improved since the first report was presented – although, as in previous years, the majority did not describe their fleets in relation to fisheries and in a manner allowing the Commission to analyse efforts made to achieve a balance between capacity and available resources. During 2006, the fishing capacity of the EU fleet continues its slow but steady reduction at an annual rate of between 2% and 3%. This reduction appears too modest when compared with the big reductions in effort required for some major fish stocks, the steady technological creep and the poor economic performance of large parts of the fleet. This means that the approach adopted during the CFP reform, i.e. to use effort management as the main driving force for fleet adjustment, has not yet yielded the kind of results hoped for and there is ample room for improvement. A further point that the Commission wishes to underline is that the Member States should provide better incentives for capacity adjustment. The operational programmes (2007-2013) in the context of the European Fisheries Fund offer an opportunity to ease the transition towards a more efficient Community fleet.