

Green Paper on reform of the common fisheries policy

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PURPOSE: to launch a debate on the future of the European Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

CONTENT: the European Commission adopted a **Green Paper** on the future of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy. The paper analyses the shortcomings of the current Policy and launches a broad public consultation on how these shortcomings should be tackled. The consultation is the first step of the process which should bring about a radical reform of the Common Fisheries Policy.

The purpose of the Green Paper is twofold: (i) to raise awareness of the challenges faced by the sector in recent years; and (ii) to elicit a public response which can grow into a new, innovative and more consensual approach to fisheries regulation. It raises questions such as:

- How can we ensure the long-term sustainability and the viability of fisheries?
- How can overall fleet capacity be adapted while addressing the social concerns faced by coastal communities?
- How can a culture of compliance be further developed?
- How best can the CFP contribute to fisheries sustainability beyond EU waters?

The Green Paper recalls that the main changes made to the CFP in 2002 included: (i) moving towards a longer-term perspective on fisheries management by introducing recovery and management plans; (ii) increased commitment to ensure the integration of environmental concerns into fisheries management; (iii) increased stakeholder involvement by establishing the Regional Advisory Councils (RACs); (iv) a new fleet policy, doing away with compulsory targets for capacity reduction and replacing them with national ceilings under which Member States are free to choose how they conduct their fleet policy; (v) introducing fishing effort, such as limiting the days a vessel can operate at sea, as a fundamental tool in fisheries management, notably in the context of multiannual recovery plans; (vi) a more selective use of public funds to support the development of the sector by discontinuing the use of public aid to construct new vessels, by a structural policy more coherent with CFP objectives and with more emphasis on diversification in coastal communities; (vii) new bilateral fisheries agreements aimed at developing partnerships with the third countries concerned.

The Paper analyses all the facets of fisheries policy today and explains why some problems persist despite the progress made since the reform of 2002.

On the whole, the Paper states that **the objectives agreed in 2002 to achieve sustainable fisheries have not been met overall.**

One of the main problems is the **depleted state of European fish stocks:** 88% of stocks are overfished (against a global average of 25%) and 30% are "outside safe biological limits", i.e. they cannot reproduce at normal rate because the parenting population is too depleted. Yet in many fisheries we keep fishing 2 or 3 times more than what fish stocks can sustain. This is mostly as a result of fleet overcapacity. Such overcapacity is in fact economically inefficient because not only does it deplete stocks but it also constantly drives the industry's profits down. Solutions need to be found to restore the worst-off stocks and at the same time guarantee that fish can continue to be a reliable source of revenue for fishermen.

Above and beyond overcapacity, the Paper identifies **four other structural shortcomings of the present approach**:

- the lack of precise policy objectives, especially with regard to ecological responsibility and integration with general maritime issues;
- a decision-making system that is too centralised and focused on short-term solutions which more often than not undermine long-term sustainability;
- a framework that does not give sufficient responsibility to the industry;
- the absence of political will towards compliance with the fishing limitations.

These issues have to be considered in a context where Europe imports two-thirds of its demand in fisheries products.

As regards the **main structural failings**, the Commission considers the following:

- a deep-rooted problem of fleet overcapacity;
- imprecise policy objectives resulting in insufficient guidance for decisions and implementation;
- a decision-making system that encourages a short-term focus;
- a framework that does not give sufficient responsibility to the industry;
- lack of political will to ensure compliance and poor compliance by the industry.

With an aim to **further improving the management of the EU fisheries**, the Paper focuses on the following:

- the introduction of a differentiated fishing regime to protect small-scale coastal fleets;
- making the most of our fisheries;
- relative stability and access to coastal fisheries;
- reserve access to the 12 nm zone for small-scale fishing vessels;
- ensure that Europe's fishing industry (whether fisheries or aquaculture) receives a larger share of the price the consumer pays for the fish at the counter;
- integrate the Common Fisheries Policy in the broader maritime policy context;
- improve the knowledge base and scientific data to support the policy;
- redefine the external dimension of the CFP;
- discuss the role of aquaculture in a reformed CFP.

Work on the reform will not stop work on making the CFP more effective within its existing framework. Much can and will be done during the time leading up to the implementation of the reform. This includes:

- **reforming the control policy** to ensure that decisions are properly implemented and that there is a level playing field across Member States;
- continued drive to **combat illegal, unregulated and unreported fisheries**, in order to combat such fisheries in European waters and the importation of any products originating from such fisheries;
- new initiatives to **eliminate discards** and protect sensitive species and habitats;
- **continued integration of the CFP within the IMP**, including support to implement the Marine Strategy to ensure environmental protection of marine ecosystems;
- a **new strategy on aquaculture** addressing the bottlenecks that prevent this sector from developing;
- establishing and implementing additional long-term management plans to **reduce the fishing pressure on overexploited stocks** and restore them to MSY;
- **enhanced transparency for consumers** and further improvements to the traceability of production along the market chain.

These initiatives will aim at fixing urgent short and medium term problems while the reflection on the longer term review of the policy framework takes place. To the extent possible, they will be developed in line with the emerging orientations for this reform of the Common Fisheries Policy.

An impact assessment will then be conducted and after further consultations with stakeholders, the Commission will **draft a proposal for a new basic regulation** which will be presented to Council and the European Parliament together with all other legal base proposals in the context of the new Financial Framework after 2013.