

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

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The Commission presents its annual report on Member States' efforts during 2008 to achieve a sustainable balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities. Member States are required¹ to submit to the Commission, before 1 May each year, a report on their efforts during the previous year to achieve a sustainable balance between fleet capacity and available fishing opportunities.

On the basis of these reports and the data in the EU fishing fleet register, the Commission produced a summary for 2008, and presented it to the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) and to the Committee for Fisheries and Aquaculture. This year, only nine Member States submitted their reports on time, while the other reports were between one and twelve weeks late. Despite these delays, the Commission presented the summary report to the above-mentioned committees. This report sums up Member States' descriptions of their fishing fleets, the impact of the existing schemes to reduce fishing effort and Member States' compliance with the entry/exit scheme.

Results for the mainland fleet except for vessels registered in the outermost regions: according to the CFR, during the six-year period from 2003 to 2008:

- the overall capacity of the EU fleet was reduced by approximately 331 000 GT and 1 123 000 kW, leading to a net reduction of approximately 16% in terms of tonnage and 15% in terms of power. The total number of vessels was reduced by approximately 12 400, i.e. 13.3%;
- the capacity of the 'EU-15 fleet' was reduced by 260 486 GT and 989 984 kW, and the capacity of the 'EU-10 fleet'⁵ was reduced by 70 354 GT and 132 980 kW in relation to its capacity on accession (1 May 2004). In relative terms, the reduction of the 'EU-10 fleet' since the date of accession has been greater than the reduction of the 'EU-15 fleet' over the period 2003-2008 (24% compared with 14%, in terms of engine power). Romania and Bulgaria have withdrawn around 5% of capacity in terms of GT and less than approximately 224 590 GT and 733 119 kW were withdrawn from the EU fleet (except for the outermost regions) with public aid, of which 25 657 GT and 89 024 kW were withdrawn in 2008;
- generally speaking, the net reductions in the EU fleet still appear insufficient, considering the steady technological improvements that neutralise the effects of capacity reduction and given the poor state of most EU fisheries.

Results for the fleets registered in the outermost regions: the capacity of the fleet registered in the outermost regions of Spain and Portugal has been significantly reduced, in terms of both tonnage and power. In the same period the capacity of the fleet in the French overseas departments has increased, with 343 new vessels entering the fleet. At the end of 2008, the reference levels in the case of demersal and pelagic segments under 12m were very slightly exceeded in Réunion and in French Guyana.

The main conclusions of the report are as follows :

- the quality of Member States' reports in 2008 showed an improvement relative to those for 2007. However, the majority of the reports did not describe the Member States' fleets in relation to fisheries in a manner that enabled the Commission to analyse the efforts made to achieve a balance between the capacity of the fishing fleet and the available fishing opportunities. Further reports of

this kind are likely to be more conclusive about the Member States' endeavours to strike a better balance between fleet capacity and fishing opportunities if all Member States make use of the indicators proposed in the guidelines;

- it is hard to establish clear links between effort management measures and fleet capacity adjustments, or to obtain a critical analysis of the trends in terms of real effort deployed. Generally speaking, the impact of fishing effort adjustment measures on fleet capacity seems to be limited. As in previous years, the main driver of fleet capacity reduction appears to be a combination of poor economic performance of the fleet and the availability of EU or national funds. This may be due, in part, to the absence of effort management systems for several fisheries, but also to the limited effect of the existing schemes. It appears that the use of individual transferable rights has contributed to reducing capacity in some countries;
- in response to the fuel crisis of 2008, the Council adopted temporary and specific measures for the restructuring of the EU fishing fleet in July 2008, thus providing an opportunity to achieve the necessary restructuring of the fleet. The effect of those measures has so far been very limited, since - at the time of drafting of this report - the Fleet Adjustment Plans laid down in the Regulation had not yet been implemented. Exits from the fleet with public support in 2008 were below those of 2007;
- during 2008 the fishing capacity of the EU fleet fell at an average annual rate of 2.6% in terms of tonnage and 2.3% in terms of power. This has been the overall trend for the last 17 years, although it is not a trend in all Member States;
- the scientific assessment tells us that 30% of the stocks for which data are available are fished outside safe biological limits, and 80% are fished at levels above the Maximum Sustainable Yield. At the same time, for large parts of the fleet, capacity is under-utilised, i.e. the number of fishing days is less than the maximum possible.

In the light of these considerations, the capacity reductions achieved appear to be insufficient to strike a sustainable balance between capacity and fishing opportunities in the short term, especially if technological progress, which is deemed to be of the same order of magnitude as the observed capacity reductions, is taken into account.

As the Green Paper on the Reform of the CFP points out, fleet overcapacity remains one of the fundamental problems of the CFP. European fleets continue to be too large for the resources available and this imbalance is at the root of many problems related to poor economic performance, weak enforcement and overexploited resources.