

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

2002/0114(CNS) - 06/07/2012 - Follow-up document

The Commission presents a report giving a summary of Member States' efforts during the previous year to achieve a sustainable balance between fleet capacity and available fishing opportunities. The report also contains a technical annex and the opinions of the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) and the Committee for Fisheries and Aquaculture.

The report gives a summary of the reports of the 22 Member States concerned. It notes that all Member States have complied with fishing capacity management rules but that the capacity ceilings were not restrictive anymore. Overall, the fishing capacity of the EU fleet was 12% below the capacity ceilings for tonnage and 9% below the power ceilings, with these margins varying from 2% to 63%.

The report states that **fleet capacity remains one of the main obstacles to achieve sustainable fisheries** and is one of the elements that the Commission proposes to address with the proposed reform of the Common Fisheries Policy.

The data from 2010 indicate that capacity reductions during 2010, 3.6% in tonnage and 2% in power are in line with those of previous years although they seemed to indicate a slight acceleration of the capacity adjustment in terms to tonnage.

The amount of capacity decommissioned with public aid in 2010 was reduced in relation to 2009 and was concentrated in a few Member States. Spain, Italy and France accounted for approximately 80% of the total tonnage. This tonnage decommissioned with public aid represented approximately 50% of the net tonnage reduction during the year.

A weakness in the management system, mentioned in the Danish report, is the difficulty of verifying whether the engine power is stated correctly. This is not a specific Danish problem, but concerns other Member States as well.

Once more, the data on nominal fleet reduction tells us very little regarding the real question of overcapacity: the inability of fixed parameters (such as GT and kW) to capture technical progress, together with the difficulties related to the measurement of engine power in practice, makes the **formal compliance with capacity limits almost meaningless**.

The 2009 Annual Economic Report revealed that a significant number of fishing vessels, most of them of small size, had no fishing activity. Although inactivity of vessels can be due to a variety of technical, economical and social reasons, a combination of low activity levels, excessive fishing pressure in some stocks and poor economic performance indicate that excess of capacity remains one of the main obstacles in the way to sustainable fishing. A consistent approach on how to apply the capacity of inactive vessels in the assessment of overcapacity is necessary, as it might lead to a different conclusion on the existence of overcapacity. As many inactive vessels are more or less 'ready to fish', they should be taken into account in order to have a complete view on overcapacity.

Some fleet segments depend on the availability of subsidies in order to survive. A high dependency of subsidies in order to be able to deliver good economic and social results is another indication of possible economic overcapacity.

Several Member States have concluded in their reports that a reduced capacity would contribute to improve the biological and economic sustainability of certain fishing activities. The reduction in fishing capacity, with or without the use of public funds, in order to achieve a balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities is a responsibility of the Member States concerned. Capacity adjustments depend not only on the measures taken by Member States' administrations but also on the sector's willingness to reduce fishing capacity. **At the current rate of capacity reductions, which are at least partly compensated by technological progress, it will be difficult to eliminate overcapacity in the short term if no changes are made to the current policy.** These observations put into question the need and effectiveness of publicly financed capacity reductions. Also the Court of Auditors concluded in their report that current measures have failed and that either a new approach to tackling the problem needs to be adopted and, or existing measures have to be better enforced.

Despite the use of better-defined indicators, the current capacity limitations turned out to be not effective in dealing with the overcapacity. The Commission is addressing the shortcomings of the current system in its Reform proposals for a new Common Fisheries Policy.