

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 a report on Member States' efforts during 2011 to achieve a sustainable balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities, providing an overview of the EU fishing fleets.

It notes that sustainable management of fisheries implies an economically viable fleet exploiting natural resources below maximum sustainable yield (MSY) levels, one of the key principles of the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy proposed by the Commission.

Capacity too high: the review of Member States' efforts shows that the capacity of Europe's fishing fleet is still too high. Despite reductions in the size of many European fishing fleets over the last decade, many vessels across a range of Member States did not break even financially and were underutilised. In addition, the revenues of many vessels were too slight for investments needed for modernisation of vessels and gears. The report adds that too many fleets were dependent on overfished stocks with respect to MSY. **The current fleet management policy has failed to bring fleets into balance with the resources they exploit.**

Capacity indicators: it is not sufficient to rely on compliance with national capacity ceilings (expressed in vessel size (GT) or power (kW)) only. The report notes that the European Court of Auditors' Special Report of 2011 on the management of fleet capacity in the EU states that the **existing definitions of capacity were not considered reliable indicators** of the ability of vessels to catch fish. The Commission indicates that it is aware of the inadequacy of parameters such as GT and kW to capture technical progress, in addition to the practical difficulties in measuring engine power.

Decommissioning has been the most-used management tool to reduce capacity. The Commission estimates that close to EUR 1.3 billion of EU funds will be used for decommissioning in the period 2000-2015. In analysing aid for decommissioning the European Court of Auditors concluded that **decommissioning schemes that used public funding were not well targeted**, and lacked clear eligibility and selection criterions, and that scrapping fishing vessels had little if any impact on targeted fish stocks.

The report considers that significant improvement is needed over the next years in the way Member States evaluate the balance and manage their fleets. As fisheries management develops to include the MSY objective, it is no longer satisfactory to rely on ceilings expressed in static parameters. Economic viability and broader sustainability indicators are needed to manage the EU fleets to attain an economically viable fleet exploiting a resource at its full biological potential. Improvements in stock assessment are crucial, as well as in data collection and provision, analysis and methodology.