Fisheries policy: integration of environmental protection, Cardiff process

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This document responds to the invitation to the Commission, made by the Fisheries Council in the context of its conclusions of 25 April 2001 on the integration of environmental concerns and sustainable development into the Common Fisheries Policy, to present concrete proposals on environmental integration within the framework of reform of the CFP. On the basis of an analysis of the existing situation and the international debate on responsible fishing, the Commission has already set out its ideas on environmental integration in a number of policy documents. The purpose of this document is to translate such ideas into an Action Plan comprising objectives and principles, means, targets and timetables to enable the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) to address environmental challenges efficiently. In elaborating this Action Plan, the Commission has taken into account the conclusions of the Council and of the European Parliament and also the opinion of the Advisory Committee on Fisheries Management and the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee on Fisheries on the above-mentioned policy documents. The objective of this Action Plan is to integrate environmental protection requirements into the CFP by defining guiding principles, management measures and a work programme with a view to promoting sustainable development. Environmental integration in the CFP is based on the following principles: - the CFP contributes to the achievement of the environmental objectives set out in Article 174 of the EC Treaty, without prejudice to its economic and social objectives; - the CFP is based on the principles of precaution, prevention, rectification at source and the polluter pays; - the CFP aims at a progressive implementation of an ecosystem-based approach, to the extent permitted by scientific knowledge; - the Community maintains the same level of commitment to these principles in its own fisheries management decisions and at the international level. Management action within the CFP aimed at the integration of environmental protection requirements should give the highest priority to: - within the framework of multi-annual management plans, a reduction in fishing pressure on fishing grounds to sustainable levels; - an improvement of fishing methods with a view to reducing discards, incidental bycatch and impact on habitats. In the coming months, the Commission shall devise an Action Plan on discards and appropriate proposals to protect sharks, cetaceans and sea birds from adverse effects of fishing. - the elimination of public aid for the modernisation or renewal of the fishing fleet except for aid to improve safety or product quality not likely to increase fishing capacity. In addition, the CFP should address the following issues: the measures set out in the Biodiversity Action Plan for Fisheries and not specifically mentioned in this communication; special attention should be given to the setting up of long-term management plans for the most important and the most vulnerable fish stocks, the identification of key habitats and biotopes, the setting up of temporal and spatial closures including "no takezones" and the development of guidelines for Best Fishing Practice; measures to stimulate fishing practices adding value to environmental integration, structural assistance in the fisheries sector. To achieve this, Member States and the Commission should collaborate in the framework of the partnership envisaged in Article 8 of Regulation 1260/99/EC laying down general provisions on the Structural Funds; the improvement of scientific assessment of the state of fish stocks, both in Community and non-Community waters; the integration of environmental policy concerns into the aquaculture sector; the adoption of a Community strategy for distant water fisheries to contribute to sustainable fishing outside Community waters through global and bilateral partnership at national and/or regional level. As a complement to the above-mentioned priority management actions within the CFP, Member States should endeavour to fulfil, within the shortest deadlines, their obligations concerning the nature protection Directives, especially those regarding the designation and management of marine areas forming part of the Nature 2000 framework. The process of integration of environmental protection requirements within the CFP should be monitored by means of a system based on indicators. In order to implement such a system, the Commission will consult the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries on the possibility to define, on an experimental basis, and taking into account the progress achieved by relevant bodies, preliminary

indicators of the environmental performance of fisheries management. On the basis of STECF advice, the Commission will design an experimental monitoring system based on such indicators, to become operational during 2003. On the basis of that experimental monitoring system, the Commission will submit to the Council and the European Parliament before 31 December 2005 a report on the environmental performance of the CFP. Lastly, within the sixth research framework programme, and in close collaboration with research bodies and environmental agencies, Member States are invited to stimulate the study of the performance of the above-mentioned monitoring system to deliver relevant information for the CFP.