Biological impact of fisheries

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Following the Commission and Council declaration at the Council of EU fisheries ministers in December 1993, the Commission set up a working group of marine ecology experts and instructed it to find ways of improving the data used to manage fisheries activities, especially data on by-catches and discards and the description of the effects of various types of fishing gear on individual juveniles, non-commercial species, biota on the sea bed, marine birds and small cetaceans. The working group was also instructed to draw up a list of priority subjects. This communication summarizes the working group's scientific report and indicates the potential for future development. In the light of this report, the Commission feels that work in the immediate future needs to be geared towards a quantitative investigation of the following questions in order to decide on suitable methods for controlling and monitoring the biological impact of fisheries: - the effects of fisheries on cetaceans, seals, reptiles and birds; - the direct and indirect effects of industrial fisheries on birds and the first predatory fish in the food chain; - the direct and indirect effects of fisheries on benthic communities. According to the 23 recommendations by the working group, work in these areas will focus on collecting and standardizing data on the fate of the various species, the size of their population and mortality rates, test methods and evaluation tools and the integration of these elements in existing or new models. These work programmes need to be coordinated at international level and suitably financed and the Commission will therefore ask the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) for aid. As this work progresses, the Commission will submit proposals with a view to incorporating operational measures and objectives into Community fisheries legislation. Finally, the Commission will call on the Member States and third countries to contribute to the budget needed to finance the research and will examine the possibility of EU aid.