

Common fisheries policy: protection of resources, the environment and consumers. Green Paper

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This document describes the state of fisheries resources and their expected development. The ICES provide yearly assessments of the four basic biological factors (recruitment, growth, natural mortality and fishing mortality) and its assessments of the landings for a large number of stocks. The mature part of the stock is labelled spawning biomass (SSB). This is a measure of the cumulative biomass of all the fish that will spawn in a given year. The report prefaces its analysis by stating that the largest uncertainties in assessment are associated with the most recent estimates of SSB and fishing mortality. It goes on to give stock development by areas. The species-by species review clearly indicates a drastically declining trend in SSB and landings over several years for almost all cod stocks. The development for hake is also a matter of concern. Similar trends can also be seen for the cumulated SSB and landings of major roundfish species in the North Sea, west of Scotland and the Irish Sea. The global assessment since the early 1970s summarises the situation as follows: -almost all roundfish stocks have declined and the current harvest is in most cases not sustainable. -several flatfish stocks are harvested at excessively high levels but some are close to sustainable levels. -pelagic species and species subject to fishing for industrial purposes are in better condition but harvest rates need to be maintained at current levels or reduced to secure sustainability -several deep sea species show signs of over-exploitation and some might have reached critical levels. - generally speaking, economical and biological benefits would accrue from lower exploitation of most stocks.