

## Reform of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy

### Commission Green Paper on the Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (21 April 2009)

The EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), which sets the rules for the European fishing industry, is about to undergo a fundamental review. By 2013, the CFP's central piece of legislation – the so-called Basic Regulation (2371/2002) – will be replaced, resulting in new objectives for EU fisheries management, along with revised management principles, targets and governance standards.[1]

On Tuesday 21 April, the European Commission will issue a Green Paper that proposes to prioritise the recovery and long-term health of fish stocks over short-term economic targets and recommends the transition to a smaller and more efficient fishing fleet.

Since its conception in 1983, and by the EU's own admission (see last section), the CFP has become an example of mismanagement and bad decision-making. Greenpeace views the reform of the CFP as a crucial opportunity to address its current failings and to ensure compliance with the EU's goal to achieve healthy seas, as defined by the 2008 Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

**Saskia Richartz, Greenpeace EU oceans policy director, said:**

*"This is the last chance we have to reform a rotten policy and save our seas. Ministers and the Commission are responsible for making European fisheries one of the most unsustainable and least profitable fisheries in the world."*

*"A seaworthy policy would drastically reduce the number of fish that are being taken from the sea and set up a network of marine reserves."*

#### What the Commission Green Paper will say

The Green Paper paints a picture of a future where rampant overfishing has become a thing of the past and Europe's commercial fishing fleets are efficient and independent from public financial support. The Commission identifies "five structural failings" of the CFP and concludes that changes must be made to achieve the following:

- i) a reduction in the size of the fishing fleets to match available fisheries resources;
- ii) healthy marine ecosystems as a pre-requisite for economically viable fisheries;
- iii) clear and binding management principles and objectives at EU level, leading to more delegation of implementing powers from the Council to the Commission, member states and/or regional management bodies;
- iv) a shift of responsibilities to fishermen, rewarding those who limit their impact and follow the rules.

The Commission also suggests that it may be necessary to introduce two differentiated fleet management regimes, distinguishing between small-scale, coastal fisheries and large-scale, industrial operations. The paper also calls into question the future of the 'relative stability principle', which awards access to fisheries according to historical catch levels for each Member State and is championed by the largest EU fishing nations. According to the Commission, this principle has aggravated overfishing.

#### Greenpeace demands for the CFP reform:

Greenpeace believes that the primary objectives of a reformed EU fisheries policy should be the recovery and sustainability of marine ecosystems, to allow the sea to continue supplying resources and to help the marine environment withstand the impacts of climate change. The following changes are paramount:

1. Total Allowable Catches must be legally set at or below scientifically recommended levels;

2. The size of the fleet and time spent fishing must be reduced in line with the best available information on fishing resources and fish populations, setting binding European and national fleet reduction targets;
3. Fishing activities must be restricted or banned in areas of special conservation interest, such as spawning and nursery grounds, feeding areas and other sensitive marine habitats;
4. Fishing activities should only be licensed subject to a prior assessment of their environmental impact;
5. All fisheries activities, seafood products and fisheries decision-making must obey strict data transparency and traceability rules.

The excessive overuse of Europe's fishing grounds, wasteful fishing practices and fish consumption have a dramatic effect on food security. This is particularly the case for coastal populations in the developing world who rely on fish as one of their primary sources of protein. Instead of promoting an increase in fish consumption, the EU should promote healthy, high-quality, locally-caught, low-impact seafood. The best way to support Europe's catch and processing industries would be to support their transformation into efficient businesses, which neither discard fish nor employ fuel-intensive fishing practices such as trawling.

### **Background: EU fisheries policy – failing on all fronts**

The EU itself has frequently highlighted the failings of the CFP. The European Commission recently said that “an excessive fishing pressure has eroded away the present and future productivity of the fish stocks” and that “the result is poor economic efficiency, high environmental impact, high fuel burn and low contribution of European fisheries to food supply.”[2]

In 2007, a study commissioned by the European Commission described the CFP as “an archaic form of governance” that has “presided over an unparalleled period of decline for Europe's fishing industries” and that is “in denial of the basic principles of sustainable development.” The study pointed out that “it will no longer be enough to simply tinker with existing structures, rewrite the language of regulation make relatively minor concessions to notions of good governance. Radical action may well be needed.” The study further concluded that “in terms of conservation of fish stocks, [the CFP] is doing worse than the US and the rest of the world.”[3]

Also in 2007, the European Court of Auditors published a damning report on the control, inspection and sanction systems of the CFP. The long list of failings include the following:

- Catch data are neither complete nor reliable, and the real level of catches is therefore unknown;
- Inspection systems do not ensure that infringements of fisheries rules are effectively prevented;
- The overcapacity of the EU's fishing fleet is an incitement to illegal fishing.

The Court of Auditors concluded that “an over-flexible framework decided by the Council” was to blame for the CFP's failings.[4]

### **Expected timeline:**

- 18-21 May 2009:** CFP reform workshop; European Commission Maritime conference; Rome.  
**Autumn 2009:** Council debate and public consultation; Swedish EU Presidency (tentative)  
**Spring 2010:** Commission White Paper under Spanish EU Presidency (date to be confirmed).  
**End of 2012:** Adoption of the new CFP Basic Regulation.

### **Notes for the editor:**

[1] If and when the Lisbon Treaty enters into force, the European Parliament will obtain co-decision rights on most fisheries issues, including the revision of the CFP. However, decision-making on quotas would remain with the Council.

[2] Commission working document: Reflections on further reform of the Common Fisheries Policy: [ec.europa.eu/fisheries/publications/factsheets/legal\\_texts/reflection\\_cfp\\_08\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/publications/factsheets/legal_texts/reflection_cfp_08_en.pdf).

[3] Reflections on the Common Fisheries Policy, Report to DG Mare, prepared by M. Sissenwine and D. Symes. [www.greenpeace.org/raw/content/denmark/press/rappporter-og-dokumenter/reflections-on-the-common-fish.pdf](http://www.greenpeace.org/raw/content/denmark/press/rappporter-og-dokumenter/reflections-on-the-common-fish.pdf). Pages 63, 49, 74 and 23.

[4] Special Report No 7/2007 on the control, inspection and sanction system relating to the rules on conservation of Community fisheries resources: [eca.europa.eu/portal/pls/portal/docs/1/673627.PDF](http://eca.europa.eu/portal/pls/portal/docs/1/673627.PDF).

### **Contact:**

**Saskia Richartz** – Greenpeace EU oceans policy director:  
 +32 495 290028 (mobile), [saskia.richartz@greenpeace.org](mailto:saskia.richartz@greenpeace.org)

[www.greenpeace.eu](http://www.greenpeace.eu)