



European Commission

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# FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE IN EUROPE



 **Stock management:  
success stories**

 **Maritime affairs:** European Maritime Day in Gijón

 **Environment:** an action plan to protect seabirds

 **FEP:** FARNET backs territorial projects

## Shows and exhibitions

**Maritima, Paris (France), 8-11 December 2010**

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E-mail: [info@neafc.org](mailto:info@neafc.org)

**ICCAT, extraordinary meeting of the Commission,  
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> For more information:

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**WCPFC, regular session, Honolulu  
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## Institutional agenda

**Committee on Fisheries, European Parliament,  
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• 8-9 November 2010

• 30 November-1 December 2010

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**Agriculture and Fisheries Council of the European Union**

• 29-30 November 2010, Brussels (Belgium)

• 13-14 December 2010, Brussels (Belgium)

> For more information:

Website: [www.consilium.europa.eu](http://www.consilium.europa.eu)

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### Note to readers

We welcome your comments or suggestions at the following address:  
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Fisheries – Information, communication, inter-institutional relations,  
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- Website of Maria Damanaki, Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries  
> [http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_2010-2014/damanaki/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/damanaki/index_en.htm)
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## On the right track

Scientists have been sounding the alarm for quite a long time: numerous fish stocks are endangered in European waters, especially due to overfishing. Yet piles of alarming figures and the reality of smaller catches have still not stopped the criticism and scepticism over European and national conservation measures to combat dwindling stocks. This is all the more so because measures like annual fishing quotas, which are meant to adapt catch rates to the situation of stocks, have not always proved effective over the longer term. In general the overall state of stocks continues to deteriorate.

That is why in 2002 the Commission began a revision of its common fisheries policy in which it emphasized multi-annual management of stocks. Multi-annual plans set targets for sustainable stock management and spell out how to achieve them. They make it possible to maintain exploitation of resources at a level that assures optimal long-term yield (maximum sustainable yield) and the recovery of overexploited stocks. Each multi-annual plan sets catch limits and maximum fishing effort for the coming years, based on figures provided by scientists.

Thanks to this long-term approach, annual variations in total allowable catches normally will not exceed a given percentage, unless the stocks are particularly endangered. This measure is a guarantee of stability for the fisheries sector and enables operators to plan their activities.

So are the multi-annual plans effective? The examples detailed in this issue point to yes. When the technique of multi-annual management and maximum sustainable yield is applied over several years, stock recovery is real and sometimes even spectacular.

Of course, the measures imposed by such plans are drastic. They are not limited to setting fishing quotas, but sometimes involve restrictions on the number of fishing days, inspections and meticulous checks. However, it is interesting to see how a few years of effort can bring real results for certain stocks. To take just one example, stocks of Baltic cod are rising again. If cautious management principles are maintained, it is now possible to foresee a sustainable and profitable future for the fisheries concerned.

Unfortunately though, these successes are not universal. Lately the Commission has made no secret of its concern about application of the plans for cod and hake in Atlantic waters off the coasts of Spain and Portugal.

The Editor





## Stock management: success stories



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**There are stocks in European waters that are exploited optimally, provide mature specimens and are covered by sufficiently large quotas.**

**Although the state of fish stocks in the European Union give cause for concern, exceptions do exist. Some stocks provide plentiful catches of good sized specimens. What most of these abundant stocks have in common is that they are under management measures that have helped to restore or maintain an optimal and sustainable level of exploitation.**

Management plans are applied today to a number of the most important stocks exploited by fishermen in the European Union. Such measures are not always popular in the sector because they often rhyme with lower catches, closed periods and a reduction in fishing days. What has to be kept in mind, however, is that these plans have a long-term objective: to restore abundant resources and ensure sustainable fishing.

There are stocks in European waters that are exploited optimally, provide mature specimens and are covered by sufficiently large quotas. They demonstrate that adapted fishing methods can guarantee economic and environmental sustainability. A closer look at these stocks shows that they have either always been exploited sustainably, for various reasons, or were covered by recovery plans at a relatively early date, which checked the consequences of overfishing.

### The EU-Norway management plans

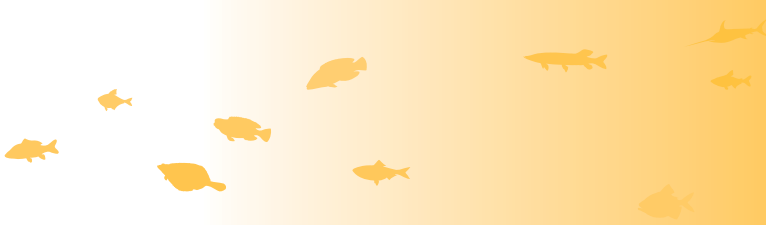
In European waters, fish stock problems really came to the fore during the 1990s. Catches of the main stocks started to drop at an alarming rate, the sign of a pronounced decline in available fish resources. The European Union responded to these signs of depletion by reducing total allowable catches (TACs) based on scientific advice coordinated and summed up by the International Council for Exploration of the Sea (ICES), at least for Atlantic shoreline stocks.

The cuts were decided from one year to the next in terms of the fluctuation in the number of mature fish (adult biomass) and the presence of young individuals in the stock (recruitment). They proved inadequate to turn the situation around, however. More systematic measures had to be taken, decided on the basis of a long-term stock recovery objective. The European Union therefore decided to set up 'management plans' or 'multi-annual plans'.

The first stocks covered by the multi-annual plans were those shared with Norway. The European Union has had a fisheries agreement with this country since 1981 – i.e. from the earliest days of the common fisheries policy. The agreement aims on the one hand to set up a quota swap so that Member State fishermen can exploit certain species in Norwegian waters and vice versa. On the other, it organises the allocation of quotas for North Sea shared stocks. The two parties jointly manage seven of these shared stocks: cod, haddock, saithe, whiting, plaice, mackerel and herring.

In 1996, to prevent a second collapse of the North Sea herring stock, the European Union decided to change its management method. In consensus with Norway, it introduced a herring management plan aimed at restoring maximum sustainable yield over the longer term. In 1999, cod and haddock were placed under a management plan, followed by saithe in 2004. In 2008, the States exploiting mackerel accepted the principle of a long-term management plan, but it was never implemented due to a lack of agreement on the division of quotas among Iceland, the Faeroe Islands, Norway and the European Union.

It is no accident that three of the four success stories presented in the following pages result from these common management plans with Norway. The reason is that those were the earliest plans of this type. The first, for herring, dates back to 1996, long before the first intra-European multi-annual plans – for cod and Northern hake – launched in 2004. These examples are proof that it takes time for a recovery plan to produce effects, but they also offer hope that an equally positive evolution will result for other stocks under a multi-annual plan.



## HERRING



**Species:** *Clupea harengus*

**Stock:** North Sea, Skagerrak and Channel

### A historic stock in several respects

Herring has long been the fish served most widely on European tables. It is eaten in a variety of forms: cooked, raw, dried, smoked, marinated, pickled, as a spread and so on. Its availability in large quantities and affordability made herring very popular early on. It was the first stock to be exploited on a large scale. From the 15th century, trade in barrels of herring fostered the development of North Sea herring fisheries, long before the discoveries of food canning and refrigeration. The largest consumers of herring today are in Poland and other Eastern European countries. Consumption of this fish has declined sharply in France and the United Kingdom.

Herring is targeted expressly by pelagic trawlers and seining vessels; it is also a by-catch of industrial fishing. These intensive fisheries were the cause of the first collapse of a stock in European waters, in the mid-1970s. Exploitation continued intensively despite a constantly shrinking biomass. Landings dropped from more than a million tonnes in 1965 to just 175 000 tonnes in 1976. The fishery was closed in 1977. It was gradually reopened and by the mid-1980s, catches had stabilised at around 700 000 tonnes. So all was well.

In 1996, however, the stock was again on the verge of depletion. Biomass had been decreasing for a number of years and fishing pressure continued. As soon as the first alerts had been issued, quotas were reduced by 50% in the course of the year. The European Union and Norway, which share the stock, then decided to draw up a multi-annual management plan.

The plan entered into force in 1997, becoming the first to be applied in EU waters. It was re-appraised and renewed in 2004. The effort focused on catch restrictions calculated in terms of the mortality rate due to fishing, which varies depending on the situation of the stock. The precautionary level is situated at 1.5 million tonnes of adult biomass and the biologically safe level is 800 000 tonnes. Total allowable catches (TACs) may not vary by more than 15% from one year to the next, to guarantee fishermen a certain degree of stability. In just a few years, this plan brought the stock back up above the precautionary level and reintroduced the principles of sustainable exploitation.

The health of the stock is no longer endangered by over-fishing, but is nevertheless still subject to nature's whims. Since 2001, the number of young herring entering the fishery – what is known as 'recruitment' – has been abnormally small. The causes of these successive poor recruitments are still unknown, but the result is that the stock has slipped below the precautionary level since 2006 and is moving dangerously close to the biologically safe level. Fishing opportunities are reduced every year so to ensure the appropriate mortality rate from fishing. To tackle this problem however, the European Union and Norway revised the plan in 2008, reserving the possibility to vary total allowable catches by more than 15% from one year to the next, if need be.

## HADDOCK



**Species:** *Melanogrammus aeglefinus*

**Stock:** North Sea and Skagerrak

### Protected by cod

With its delicate white flesh, haddock is a time-tested choice commercially speaking. In fact, it is the white fish that sets the standard in the United Kingdom, and especially in Scotland, where consumers prefer it to cod. Haddock is found at all fish & chips stands and fish shops. Until the end of the 1990s, the North Sea stock was the main source of supply for this important market.

A demersal species that feeds on sandbanks, it is caught together with cod as part of mixed fisheries, generally with bottom trawls. It is also a major incidental catch of cod fishing. Commercially speaking, cod is more profitable and therefore more targeted by fishermen.

From the 1980s, the species started to experience a major decline in biomass in the North Sea. Its mortality rate due to fishing rose well above the rate needed to maintain biomass above the biologically safe level. In 1999, the European Union and Norway adopted a long-term management plan to restore the stock. The plan was drawn up at the same time as the cod plan and contains similar technical measures, since the two are caught together in mixed fisheries. It imposed an increase in trawl net mesh size from 100 to 120 mm from 2002. After a 2003 assessment of the plan, it was decided not to exceed a mortality rate of 0.3 (1) and consequently to set TACs on the basis of that limit. From 2004, the stock has benefited from the 'secondary' effects of the multi-annual plan for cod, in particular fishing effort restrictions.

The impact of these measures emerged quite quickly. From 2004, there was a spectacular decline in by-catches of haddock and total catches are still well below authorised

quotas. The management plan was renewed in 2009 with the aim of keeping the mortality rate at 0.3, so as to ensure exploitation at maximum sustainable yield.

Today, North Sea haddock is in a very healthy biological state. It is exploited at maximum sustainable yield or even below. Discards of small haddock have decreased considerably. Even if its situation is satisfactory, however, larger catches are out of the question for a purely biological reason. Recruitment is very uneven for haddock. Several years can go by between two large-scale entries of young fish in the stock. The last strong recruitment was in 1999, followed by a mediocre recruitment in 2005. Since then, there have been no major additions of young fish to the stock. In a context of natural stagnation like this one, it is out of the question to increase fishing opportunities. Furthermore, most haddock and cod fisheries are mixed and the North Sea cod stock remains problematical. Consequently, measures to limit catches have to be maintained.

## SAITHE

**Species:** *Pollachius virens*

**Stock:** North Sea, Skagerrak, West of Scotland and Rockall

### A low-profile stock

Gourmets appreciate saithe, especially in Germany and France, but its greyish flesh keeps it from the same commercial success as cod and haddock. The weak market appeal and consequently low profitability of this species have probably protected it from overfishing. Moreover, although it is a demersal species, it does not frequent exactly the same places as cod and haddock. Unlike those two species, it hunts more in the water column than on the bottom so it is not often taken as a by-catch. On the contrary, most catches of saithe are the result of directed fisheries, using bottom trawls or a Danish seine, mainly on the edges of the continental shelf between Scotland and Norway.

For the reasons just mentioned, saithe has never undergone resource problems. Quotas are in fact never used up completely. It is one of the most stable demersal fisheries in the European Union. For the last 30 years, the stock has had regular recruitment and stable adult biomass, and has provided regular landings, around 100 000 tonnes a year. What is more, since this species can be targeted fairly precisely, discards in saithe fisheries are very limited.

All the same, like all stocks that the European Union shares with Norway, saithe is covered by a multi-annual plan. It has been applied since 2004 and was reassessed in 2008. The plan is based only on catch restrictions. These are calculated on the basis of a mortality rate due to fishing, which corresponds to the state of the stock. For the moment, adult biomass is well above the precautionary level of 200 000 tonnes. Fishing opportunities are therefore calculated on a mortality rate of 0.3 (2), which ensures exploitation at maximum sustainable yield. Natural fluctuations in recruitment are the only factor leading to a variation in TACs.

Nothing much is expected to change for the future. Maintaining the current mortality rate from fishing is likely to ensure the stock's stability and optimal exploitation. All that is missing is a bit of marketing to make this flavourful fish better known among the general public. The recent award of a well-known sustainable fisheries label to certain saithe fisheries may be just what it takes to boost the saithe's profile among consumers.



(1) This is equivalent to an exploitation rate of 30% of the stock's average annual biomass.  
(2) *Idem*.



## COD



**Species:** *Gadus morhua*

**Stock:** Baltic Sea (eastern part)

### A new beginning

Two cod stocks share the Baltic Sea: the western stock, situated west of the island of Bornholm, and the eastern stock, east of the same island. The first is exploited mainly by Danish and German fishermen. The eastern stock is fished by the Polish, Swedish and Danish fleets. We are interested here in the eastern stock, which is presently exploited at its maximum sustainable yield.

Cod needs no introduction. It has been inextricably linked to the history of fishing in Europe for hundreds of years. Catches in the Baltic were – and still are – mainly bought by companies that process the fish into fillets and fish fingers for frozen food manufacturers or fast food chains. The guarantees offered by this industrial distribution chain have made Baltic cod a profitable fish that is consequently a prized catch among fishermen. The downside of this success is overfishing.

For the eastern stock, this problem emerged at the end of the 1980s. Catches dropped suddenly at the start of the 1990s, from 207 000 tonnes in 1987 to 55 000 tonnes of landings in 1992. This decline and the rapid depletion that followed were the result of a process specific to the Baltic Sea. The decrease in cod stocks led to an increase in stocks of its main prey, sprat. Since sprat is a major predator of cod eggs and hatchlings, cod stocks were caught up in a vicious circle that led to a spectacular decline in their population. Added to that were fluctuations in the quality and salinity of Baltic waters, which also had a harmful impact on the species.

All this occurred long before the 2004 enlargement of the European Union. At the time, Baltic Sea resources were managed by several States acting within the regional fisheries management organisation, the International Baltic Sea Fishery Commission (IBSFC). Yet the reductions

in TACs decided by this organisation were well below those recommended by scientists and often seemed to be disregarded. The result was rapid depletion of the stock.

In 1999, at the initiative of the European Union, the IBSFC launched a management plan for Baltic cod: reduction in TACs, increase in minimum landing sizes, restricted access to spawning areas, larger net size, obligation to fit trawls with an exit window, limitation of by-catches, etc. After the 2004 enlargement, the European Union continued this management strategy and introduced a differentiation between the two stocks, based on scientific advice. It was also at this time that a summer closing of cod fisheries was decided, in order to protect spawning stock.

In 2006, the Commission drew up a multi-annual plan for both stocks that entered into force in 2008. It was based on a gradual reduction of mortality due to fishing, so as to restore sustainable exploitation of the stock. This involved not only TAC limitations, but also important measures to restrict fishing effort, on top of those already being applied (two-month summer closing plus additional days set by Member States), a six-month ban on access to spawning grounds and specific monitoring measures to combat under-reporting of catches.

Results appeared quickly. TACs were increased in 2009 because adult biomass was already on the rise. This rapid improvement resulted from the combined effects of the plan's measures, close monitoring and several years of strong recruitment. Biomass is estimated today at 294 000 tonnes and the mortality rate from fishing corresponds to the maximum yield level. Scientists expect biomass to increase further in the coming years if exploitation is kept within the limits set by the plan.

## Maritime Europe takes centre-stage in Gijón



European Maritime Day is a one-of-a-kind opportunity to meet maritime stakeholders from every corner of Europe and numerous political representatives and officials with responsibility for maritime matters.

**At European Maritime Day 2010, the Asturian city of Gijón was the backdrop for an exceptional meeting of the maritime world. From 18 to 21 May, professionals took part in the Third Maritime Day Stakeholder Conference. Participants took stock of and gave their views on the evolution of the European Union's integrated maritime policy.**

Gijón, Spain, was the setting, from 18 to 21 May, for the high point of the now traditional events that form part of European Maritime Day on 20 May. Some 1 600 participants – heads of maritime clusters, delegates of non-governmental organisations, representatives of professional organisations or scientific institutions, members of groups of users of the sea, and local, regional, national and European authorities – were on hand at the *La Laboral Ciudad de la Cultura*, an amazing artistic and cultural centre. This imposing ochre-coloured building was the venue for the four-day event devoted to the European Union's maritime development.

This year marked the third European Maritime Day and the third such stakeholder conference. Make no mistake, however. It is not simply an academic event. For participants, it is a one-of-a-kind opportunity to meet maritime stakeholders from every corner of Europe and numerous political representatives and officials with responsibility for maritime matters at all levels of power.

As European Commission President José Manuel Barroso pointed out in his videotaped message of welcome, this conference has become 'a platform that strengthens stakeholder involvement, networking and exchange of best practices'. In short, the aim is to take forward the European Union's integrated maritime policy: 'Thanks to this dynamic, we will be able to move from the first stage of maritime integrated policy to a new level of ambition where our common vision of maritime affairs will be reinforced and consolidated', explained the president.

### Innovation

The general theme of the event was innovation. At the opening session, Maria Damanaki, European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, went into details on this theme: 'Innovation means of course fostering the development of new technology solutions such as offshore sources of energy and blue biotechnologies, promoting areas such as new design for green ships or a greater focus on sustainable coastal tourism. But in the true spirit of the Policy, it also means integrating innovation from a cross-cutting perspective: innovation in one area should benefit all policy areas. This is a basis!'

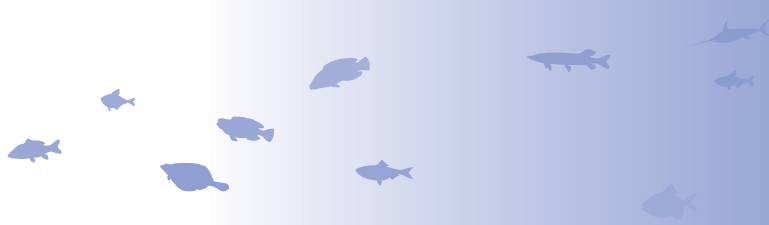
The conference debates and proceedings covered every aspect of the EU's integrated maritime policy, especially economic growth, sustainability, blue jobs, the three transversal instruments (spatial planning, maritime surveillance and data collection) and governance of sea basins. These subjects were explored at the five plenary sessions and 57 workshops making up the rich agenda.

The workshops were organised by different speakers who selected and developed the subject: scientific institutions, professional federations, think tanks, non-governmental organisations and the like, not to mention the Spanish government and the European Commission.

### Sustainability and planning

It is hard to summarise in these pages all the ideas that were discussed. What was expressed, though, were the expectations of socio-economic players for the development of maritime activities, seen as a source of growth and jobs. Innovation is





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### Gijón: an industrial city returns to its maritime roots

Strolling through Gijón, it is hard to imagine this city's industrial past. Yet as recently as 30 years ago, Gijón was known for its shipyards and steel industry. Industrial decline forced it to launch a major restructuring process through which it rebuilt its relationship with the sea. Paz Fernández Felgueroso, the mayor of Gijón, made a presentation on this process at a workshop on the sustainable development of coastal cities. In 1985, the local authorities launched a long-term project to rehabilitate run-down areas abandoned by the defunct industries. The beautiful San Lorenzo beach, popular among large numbers of local inhabitants, replaced a former shipyard that used to mask a view of the sea from the entire eastern part of the city. Gijón gradually put in place the infrastructure that now defines its new role as a maritime city: an oceanographic institute, an aquarium, a spa, a marina, a science and technology park, etc. Local economic activity was able to shift from the secondary sector to the tertiary sector. This effort sparked a renewal with the city's maritime past, particularly with the enhancement of its architectural heritage, like the former fish shops and remains of the Roman city. The port also had to be reinvented and develop purely logistics activities, working jointly with the neighbouring port of Avilés. Today it is Spain's benchmark port for solid bulk goods, mainly coal, ore and cement. It is also the point of departure and arrival of the Gijón-Nantes motorway of the sea.

**The opening session confirmed Europe's determination to take the integrated maritime policy forward. Several speakers expressed this resolve, including the Prince of Asturias.**

considered the driver of this future development. Innovation in the scientific sphere, but also in spatial planning, urban planning, tourist endeavours and economic planning. Participants noted that such innovation must be in keeping with sustainability, be matched with extremely thorough planning (in time and space) and take account of the major challenge that concerns all maritime stakeholders, namely climate change.

One thing is certain. The European Union Member States now look on this yearly conference as a key event for the development of maritime policy. They said so in Luxembourg, at the EU Council on 14 June. The Member States invited the Commission to present proposals in 2011 on the financing of integrated maritime actions and a strategy for the Atlantic region. They also stressed the vital importance of the annual conference of maritime stakeholders.

The Council's view is that the European Union's maritime policy needs the input of all stakeholders to evolve. In this respect, the conference has become a key forum and the ministers noted the quality of its debates and their usefulness for the future evolution of the integrated maritime policy. The Council asked the Commission to reflect on how to increase even further the added value of the conference and to develop new criteria for this purpose regarding its location, organisation and content, to be applied from 2012. The fourth European Maritime Day will be hosted in Gdansk, Poland, next year.

For more information:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/maritimeday/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/maritimeday/index_en.html)

## A public consultation on seabirds



© Richard Stonier  
**The Balearic shearwater is a frequent victim of European fishing gears in the Mediterranean.**

**Too many seabirds are caught in fishing nets or on longline hooks. The European Commission has consulted the public and fisheries stakeholders to identify the best ways to combat this phenomenon. An action plan is expected to be adopted in 2011.**

The European Commission has decided to take action to reduce the number of seabirds taken as incidental catches in fishing gears. Its decision is in line with an international drive to reduce the environmental impact of fisheries. As early as 1999, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Committee on Fisheries (COFI) adopted an international plan of action to reduce incidental catches of seabirds in longlining. Subsequently, the Commission supported the adoption of protection measures in the regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs).

More recently, in 2008, the European Commission asked the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) to assess the situation in European Union waters. This study identified the types of fishing that lead to seabird mortality as well as the main fishing zones concerned.

### Longlining and gillnets

It is apparent from this study that longlining has an impact on seabirds. In the Mediterranean, species listed on the red list of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) are affected by these fishing gears, especially the Balearic shearwater (*Puffinus mauretanicus*), which is critically endangered, and the Yelkouan shearwater (*Puffinus yelkouan*), near threatened with extinction. Cory's shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea*) is the species taken most often in incidental catches. In North Atlantic waters, fulmars (Northeast Atlantic), gannets (Iberian waters) and shearwaters (Iberian and Celtic Seas) are some of the main incidental catches.

Gillnets are another fishing gear that causes problems. Diving seabirds (shearwaters, cormorants, divers, etc.) get entangled in the mesh of gillnets and drown, especially in the Baltic and North Seas. Tens of thousands of long-tailed ducks (*Clangula hyemalis*) are killed in these nets every year. Steller's eider (*Polysticta stelleri*), listed as a vulnerable species, is also strongly affected.

In the light of this assessment, the European Commission proposes certain fields of action. First, information on incidental catches of seabirds is patchy and needs to be improved. Second, in the problem areas identified, at least two mitigation measures should be implemented from among a range of possibilities: night setting of lines, weighting of lines to make them sink, streamer lines, etc. Third, the RFMOs should encourage the adoption of such measures in international waters. Fourth, research should be fostered to add to the range of existing prevention devices. Fifth, fishermen need to be trained in the use of mitigation measures.

By the end of the consultation period, the Commission had received around 100 contributions, mostly from citizens who individually called for the development of a European action plan on this subject (the contributions can be consulted on the Commission's website). These views will serve as input to an impact study, taking into account the consequences the recommended measures have on fishermen. The study will precede the drafting of an action plan on seabirds. The plan, set to be adopted in 2011, will help meet the objectives of the 'Birds' Directive (1) which bans activities that are a direct threat to birds.

### CCAMLR works to protect birds

The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) is an RFMO that pioneered measures to protect albatross and petrels in southern waters. Longlines are sunk as quickly as possible and sometimes weighted. They must be set at night and fish offal may not be dumped during the setting process. A line of streamers must be used during setting to keep seabirds at a distance. Fishermen have also agreed to make every effort to release birds alive and to remove hooks without endangering their life. These measures have proved to be simple and low-cost techniques.

For more information:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/partners/consultations/seabirds/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/partners/consultations/seabirds/index_en.htm)

(1) Directive 2009/147/EC of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds.

## FARNET: a territorial response to a sectoral challenge

**The European Fisheries Areas Network, FARNET, has the task of steering implementation of the territorial measures (Axis 4) of the European Fisheries Fund. FARNET brings together all stakeholders in the sustainable development of fisheries areas: local players, Member State administrations, national networks and the like. This innovative component of fisheries policy puts the accent on a territorial approach.**

FARNET represents an important development in the common fisheries policy (CFP). Until 2006, the public authorities relied on a sectoral approach in its financial support for fisheries. In 2007, the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) set up its 'Axis 4' to cofinance territorial projects. This axis targets fisheries areas (both coastal and inland) that have been weakened culturally, socially and economically by the decline of fishing. Funded projects must encourage new, more diversified sources of economic activity. Twenty-one EU States have allocated part of their public support under the EFF to Axis 4.

To be eligible for EFF funding, such projects must be initiated by local stakeholders grouped into local partnerships: 'fisheries local action groups' (FLAGs). In each of the 21 countries concerned, FLAGs made up of fishermen and representatives of the public, private and associative sectors are being put in place. Together they have to define a local development strategy for their territory.

Thanks to FARNET, the FLAGs and all the stakeholders concerned by Axis 4 are able to share their experiences. To give impetus to this process, in May 2009 the European Commission set up a FARNET Support Unit with a permanent staff of nine, assisted by a network of 21 national experts.

So far, one of this unit's main tasks has been to facilitate the establishment of FLAGs. *'This is taking longer than expected, because some European countries had no experience with the territorial approach'*, explains Paul Soto, project manager at the Support Unit. *'These are complicated projects. It's not just about allocating funds but about building the future of an area with all its players.'*

### Axis 4 in figures

- Number of countries that have allocated part of the EPP to Axis 4: 21.
- EU budget for Axis 4: EUR 567 million, or 13% of the EFF budget (EUR 4.3 billion).
- Overall budget (EFF + public funds): EUR 827 million for 2007-2013.
- Number of FLAGs in place: 35 in May 2009, 136 in June 2010, 180 in autumn 2010, from 225 to 250 expected by spring 2011.



Through measures listed in Axis 4 of its regulation, the European Fisheries Fund supports projects to encourage new and more diversified economic activity.

### Three guidelines

On the ground, projects must be in keeping with three strategic guidelines. The first is to enhance the value of fisheries activities by ensuring better access to markets. For example, in Ostrobothnia (Finland), the Optifish project encourages cooperation among fishermen, local processors and cooking schools with the aim of developing new recipes based on fish species that consumers have not yet learned to appreciate.

The second guideline is to diversify activities in the territory by supporting projects that may or may not be related to the fisheries sector (renewable energy, tourism, etc.). In North Jutland (Denmark), a young fisherman named Richard Kristensen has switched his activity to fishing tourism. He was able to do so after receiving public funds to bring his vessel up to standard. North Sea Fishing, the company he set up in 2008, has two employees and embarked on over 100 sea excursions in 2009.

A third guideline is to give precedence to the area's cultural and social heritage. A project in Ria de Aveiro, in Centro (Portugal), is restoring traditional fish landing sites and giving new prestige to salt marshes.

In its first year of existence, the FARNET support unit focused on its main task of supporting the establishment of FLAGs. Now it is entering into the heart of the project: the exchange of best practice in the network. In November, it will sponsor a seminar in the Netherlands on the added value of fishery products.

# In brief

## North Sea sandeels: TACs raised

Total allowable catches (TACs) for North Sea sandeels have been raised. For short-lived species, it has become habitual in recent years to set a preliminary TAC in December and to review it at the start of the fishing season on the basis of scientific observations and experimental catches. This year, the recruitment of young sandeels hatched last year made possible an increase in TACs from 200 000 tonnes to 400 000 tonnes, to be shared by the European Union Member States and Norway. Sandeel is a small pelagic species targeted mainly by industrial fishing.

## Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture: Gerard van Balsfoort elected Chairman

Dutch national Gerard van Balsfoort has been elected Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture (ACFA). His term will run until 2013. He is a regular participant in fisheries representative forums because, as president of the Dutch association of pelagic freezer-trawlers, he is also active in European professional organisations of vessel owners, particularly the General Committee for Agricultural Cooperation (Cogeca) and Europêche, of which he is a vice-president. Mr van Balsfoort takes up his duties at the ACFA at a crucial time, since the committee's role is expected to evolve as part of the forthcoming reform of the common fisheries policy.

## European standards for organic aquaculture

Organic aquaculture is now regulated by standards that apply to all the Member States, following the example of organic farming. Regulation 710/2009 laying down minimum standards for organic aquaculture production entered into force on 1 July 2010. It puts an end to the patchwork of rules in the European Union, where organic fish farming standards were set either by the State or by professional organisations, and could be vastly different. From now on, the European 'organic aquaculture' label will be awarded to fish, molluscs and crustaceans that meet the same production standards. These include a strict separation between organic and non-organic production units. They also guarantee breeding conditions that ensure the welfare of farmed species. Stocking densities in cages and ponds must now be much lower than in 'normal' production units. Organic fish farming also requires natural reproduction, without the use of hormonal induction. Feed used during the grow-out phase must be produced to organic standards or from sustainably exploited wild stocks. There are currently 123 certified organic aquaculture production units in Europe, which account for around half the world's organic production. The species produced most widely is salmon.

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