



European Commission

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FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE IN EUROPE



Common Fisheries Policy: laying the foundations for the future

 **Self-management:**
the Dutch example

 **Participation:**
the Pelagic RAC initiates the horse mackerel plan

Shows and exhibitions

World Fishing Exhibition & Aqua Farming International, Vigo (Spain), 16-19 September 2009

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> For more information:

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> For more information:

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E-mail: info@nafo.int
Website: www.nafo.ca

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Website: www.danfish.com

Institutional agenda

Upcoming Councils of the Fisheries Ministers of the 27 European Union Member States:

- 28 and 29 September 2009, in Brussels,
- 19 and 20 October 2009, in Luxembourg,
- 19 and 20 November 2009, in Brussels,
- 14 and 15 December 2009, in Brussels.

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We welcome your comments or suggestions at the following address: European Commission – Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries – Information, communication, inter-institutional relations, evaluation and programming Unit – Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 200 – B-1049 Brussels or by fax to: (+ 32) 2 299 30 40 with reference to *Fisheries and aquaculture in Europe*.
E-mail: fisheries-magazine@ec.europa.eu

For further information on maritime affairs and fisheries, please consult the following sites:

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/borg/index_en.htm

<http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries>

<http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs>

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Plenty of Fish in the Sea? *Why European fisheries need fixing – and why this time we need to get it right*

Imagine a situation where we are able to eat healthy and safe fish that is not imported from outside the Union; where the fishing industry is viable and its workers feel secure and adequately rewarded; where younger generations once again start to consider fishing as a reliable way of making a living; and where we can draw from our marine resources without fear of destroying them for good.

This is my dream scenario for European fisheries in, say, 2020. But while steady progress has been made towards this situation since the most recent reform of the Common Fisheries Policy in 2002, frankly speaking we are not yet there. And yet if we want to keep fishing, we'd better make some changes to the way we fish, and we'd better make them fast.

In contrast with my dream scenario, the harsh reality is that 9 of EU fish stocks out of 10 are overfished and a third of them are in worrying state. Europe has to rely on imports for two-thirds of its fish. The sector lives on low profits and depends on subsidies for survival. How did we get here? There is a fairly simple explanation.

We have enough fishing fleets in Europe to fish much more than fish stocks can sustain. In fact, year after year fishing technology makes us even more powerful – or more lethal, depending on your point of view. Clearly, once the fish is taken out of the water, it cannot reproduce. The remaining fish can only produce fewer offspring than the previous levels and so the fish population starts going down. Meanwhile, fishermen notice there is less fish available to catch and see their profits decline; so understandably they resort to those potent technological means to try and catch more fish. Under increasing pressure from the industry, politicians find cushioning solutions that increase short-term fishing opportunities but that do little for the future sustainability of the sector.

Add to this the current global economic downturn and a few intermittent hikes in fuel prices, and you have a very fragile situation which makes fishermen and coastal communities vulnerable in the first place, but which ultimately impacts each and every one of us.

I have therefore come to the conclusion that we need to undertake a thorough review of the Common Fisheries Policy. But we cannot afford to come up with just another reform which might prove obsolete in half a decade or so. This time we need to get it right. For it to be truly innovative, the reform process will have to question some of our basic assumptions and overhaul some of the mechanisms and principles that we have counted upon so far.

There are at least three building blocks that will ensure that our future policy lasts well into the 21st century. Firstly, it should uphold ecological sustainability as the source and economic and social sustainability as the results – and not the other way round. Secondly, rules should become simpler, less costly and easier to implement; decision-making should happen as close as possible to the people it affects. Thirdly, as fish move across oceans and share one single ecosystem, we need to look outside the EU as well and promote responsible fishing throughout the planet.

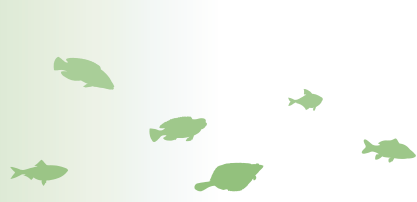
Other than these broad aims, the debate on the future face of European fisheries remains open. It is in fact open right now: between now and December 31st anyone can take part in the European Commission's internet-based public consultation on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (1). To get people involved we have posed open questions, but everybody is free to explore new ideas – I promise a broad-based, no-holds-barred debate which should leave no stone unturned. And I'm hoping for a massive response from civil society too – not just the usual stakeholders but people from all walks of life – because such an ambitious reform cannot be done without them.

We can keep pushing sustainability aside and end up one day with an impoverished marine environment, a struggling fishing industry and a volatile fish market. Or we can preserve our fish stocks and restructure our fisheries today, and a few years from now the sector will thrive, coastal regions will reap the benefits of a diversified local economy and consumers will have more fish on their plates – and everybody will win.

Joe Borg, European Commissioner
for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

(1) The consultation's website: <http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/reform>





■ The Green Paper on Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy: laying the foundations for the future



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Fleet reduction programmes have so far only managed to shrink fleet capacity by 2% a year, which is offset by productivity gains from technological progress.

The Common Fisheries Policy has produced results in the wake of its 2002 reform. However, it has proven inadequate for solving the structural problems that undermine the fisheries sector in Europe: overexploitation of stocks and fleet overcapacity, which have led to low profits and diminishing competitiveness for the sector. The Commission is consequently launching a wide, no-holds-barred consultation in a Green Paper that explores the way forward for the new reform of the CFP.

The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) has existed since the 1980s. At its inception, it was a tool for the common management of fish resources in Community waters and for agreement on their exploitation, and on who could catch how much. Yet for the last 20 years or so, it has become obvious that the sustainability of fishing activity cannot be guaranteed. Overexploitation of stocks, fleet overcapacity, decline in the quantities of fish taken by European fishermen and low profits are the ills that are undermining European fisheries. A reform of the Common Fisheries Policy was launched in 2002 to address these problems.

The 2002 reform introduced a number of practical measures. Many species are fished on the basis of long-term recovery and management plans. In some cases, the recovery plans have restored overexploited fish stocks. Subsidies for building new vessels have been abolished and the environmental dimension has been promoted. The fight against illegal fishing has been stepped up and measures have been taken to halt

discards. Lastly, the creation of seven regional advisory councils (RACs) has significantly improved comprehension and dialogue among the sector, scientific experts and fisheries administrations.

The fact remains, however, that the CFP in its present form has not worked well enough to bring about a fundamental improvement in the situation of European fisheries.

That is why the Commission has kicked off a wide-ranging debate on the future of European fisheries among stakeholders and European citizens. It finds that a thorough reform of the CFP is needed to change course. However, such a reform will only be effective if it proposes real change. It must be based on the involvement of all those with an interest in the sector and can only be put in place after a wide consultation of all players and EU citizens. To launch its debate, the Commission has drafted a Green Paper that analyses the problems, raises numerous questions and proposes ways forward for the future.



The alarming facts

The facts and figures in the Green Paper speak for themselves. To take just one example – one that speaks volumes, however – 30% of stocks are outside safe biological limits, which means they may not be able to replenish. Huge quantities of fish are caught even before they can reproduce; this is the case for 93% of North Sea cod. *This overall picture conceals variations by marine region and species. Nonetheless, European fisheries are eroding their own ecological and economic bases,* concludes the Green Paper, which proposes ideas to tackle the problem at its source.

Too many vessels, too few fish

This is the key element of the Green Paper proposals. The CFP has failed to solve the main problem plaguing fisheries in the EU: overcapacity. Fleet reduction programmes have only managed to reduce capacity by 2% a year, which is offset by productivity gains from technological progress (estimated at 2 to 3% a year). As a result, 88% of stocks in Community waters are overexploited. Too many vessels for too few fish: this explains why, apart from a few exceptions, many fishery companies either earn low profits or operate at a loss. So it is essential to find solutions to this problem.

Potential options, set out in questions in the Green Paper, include the idea of setting up a system of transferable fishing rights. To put it plainly, each vessel would be allocated a certain number of fishing rights, which it could sell to other vessels (owned by the same company or others). To avoid maintaining low-profit activities, the sector would be self-regulating, transferring rights to a smaller number of vessels that would then become more profitable. This solution would oblige the sector to take more responsibility for its situation.

Several member states have introduced national measures of this kind in recent years. They have generally reduced capacity as operators adapt their fleet to their fishing rights in order to ensure profitability. The Commission nevertheless stresses the need to establish mechanisms to avoid excessive concentration of ownership and negative effects on the activities of small-scale fishing and coastal communities.

Prioritizing objectives

The Green Paper observes that social and economic arguments have often been invoked to advocate short-term fishing opportunities more generous than what the experts recommended. Such measures have jeopardized the state of stocks and the sector's economic and social future. The Green Paper therefore suggests that all measures, even those focused on the short term, must be clearly conditional on the absolute priority of

maintaining stocks and their sustainability. The key objective of this reform is therefore to ensure sustainable fishing for the long term. All management measures, including those for the short term, must fit into this framework. In parallel, the Green Paper raises the question of whether the future CFP should aim to create alternative jobs in coastal communities through the Integrated Maritime Policy and other EU policies.

A simpler decision-making framework closer to stakeholders

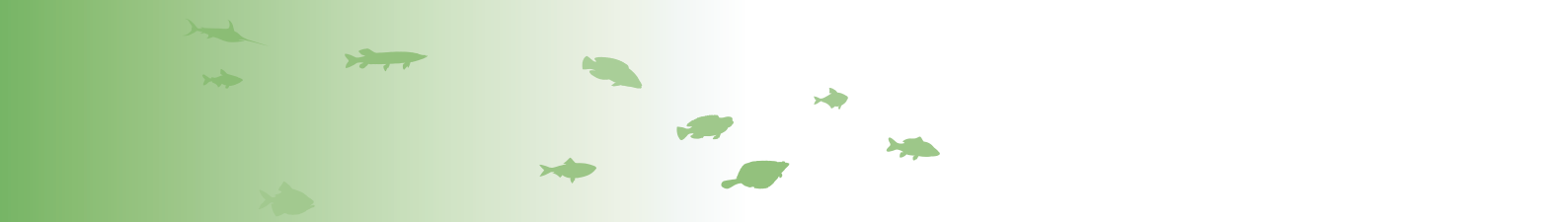
Almost all fisheries decisions, down to the smallest details, are taken at present by the Council of Fisheries Ministers. Many decisions are consequently adopted under short-term political pressure. What is more, the CFP is governed by extremely detailed Council regulations that give little leeway to Member States or the sector. The Green Paper proposes to put 'policy in its right place' by letting Council and Parliament focus on principles and delegating implementation decisions to Member States, on a proposal from the Commission or even from the sector itself, thus making the sector more responsible for its situation (see below). This solution would lead to a simpler and cheaper policy.

It would make implementation more sensitive to specific local conditions and give the industry more responsibility in shaping its own destiny. It would enable governments and the industry to adapt the implementation of the policy to their needs and to find the best solutions both technically and economically. Bodies like the Advisory Committee for Fisheries and Aquaculture (ACFA) or the Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) should also play a role under this new set-up.

Increasing the sector's responsibility

If the 'new CFP' is to produce results, those concerned must understand the need for it and support it. In the place of top-down management, the Green Paper suggests an approach that gives more responsibility to the sector. A results-based culture could be developed: instead of establishing detailed rules about how to fish, rules should focus on the outcome. It would be up to the industry to take the more detailed implementation decisions and to demonstrate that it operates responsibly in return for access to fishing.

Examples of self-management exist in certain Producers' Organisations (POs) that manage their members' quota uptake and penalise those who overshoot their individual quota at the expense of others. This self-management system obliges fishermen to document their catches. According to the Green Paper, these initiatives could be generalised by turning the POs into bodies through which the industry takes responsibility for documentation and quota/effort management.



The Commission's Green Paper clearly suggests that even short-term management measures should be conditional on the absolute priority of stock maintenance and sustainability.

A culture of compliance

In a report published in November 2007 ⁽¹⁾, the EU Court of Auditors pinpointed the ineffectiveness of the fisheries control system in Europe: fisheries control has generally been weak, penalties are not dissuasive and inspections not frequent enough to encourage compliance. Unauthorised fishing activities, undeclared catches, non-standard nets, quota overruns and non-compliance with rules on minimum catch sizes all jeopardise the sustainability of European fishing.

The new approach proposed by the Commission aims to help create a culture of compliance among all stakeholders. The Commission therefore made an ambitious proposal in

November 2008 that is now being discussed with Member States and the European Parliament ⁽²⁾. The proposal aims to reinforce the control system, introduce dissuasive and harmonised penalties, fishing permits based on a penalty point system like the one many countries have adopted for driving licences, and so on.

Safeguarding coastal and small-scale fishing

Small-scale fishing is crucial for maintaining the economic and social fabric of certain coastal communities. The challenge is how to keep jobs and the social fabric in such areas while pursuing the goal to reduce fishing fleet capacity. The solution might be to help the small-scale fleet adapt to the changing conditions by setting up a specific management scheme focused mainly on social objectives through the allocation of fishing opportunities and the use of collective management schemes. The impact of such fishing on resources and the environment cannot be disregarded, however: a specific scheme would therefore have to be carefully designed to ensure the sustainability of the stocks exploited by small-scale fleets.

More effective marketing

The marketing of fish caught in Europe is not optimal for the moment, which has a negative impact on producers' earnings. The Commission would like to see producers' organisations help adapt fisheries to market demand thus improving product marketing. Production would naturally better reflect market demand for quality, especially in terms of traceability, labelling and certification. The Common Market Organisation (CMO) would put more emphasis on this aspect rather than on traditional policies of direct price support.

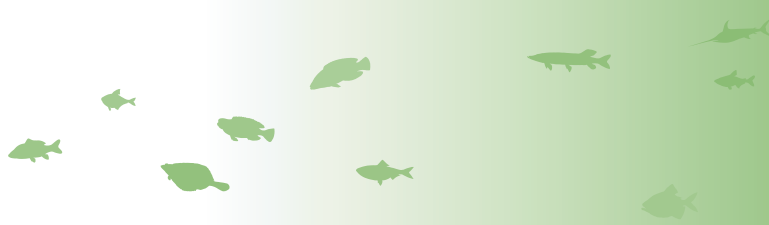
The Green Paper raises certain questions in this context. How could market mechanisms be used to encourage the development of fisheries that are market efficient as well as sustainably exploited? How can the POs better work to match production with market needs?

Integrating the CFP in the Integrated Maritime Policy

The aim of the European Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP) is sustainable exploitation of the tremendous development potential of oceans. To be successful, it will have to ensure that all sectoral policies that interact closely with maritime affairs (fisheries, transport, energy, tourism, etc.) work in a coordinated way. This new policy obviously has important implications for the CFP. Capture fisheries and aquaculture compete increasingly with other maritime sectors for marine space, for example. Marine spatial planning is an important element of the IMP with which the future CFP must be integrated. In terms of adaptation to climate change consequences, development of coastal zones, surveillance, data collection, research and so on, there is strong synergy between the concerns of the fisheries sector and those of other maritime sectors.

(1) Special Report No 7/2007 on the control, inspection and sanction systems relating to the rules on conservation of Community fisheries resources, together with the Commission's replies.

(2) COM(2008) 718.



A wide-ranging consultation

On top of these essential strategic areas, the Green Paper addresses all issues related to European fisheries. It raises the question of international relations, European influence in international bodies and regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs), as well as fisheries partnerships concluded with non-EU countries. The need to encourage research and develop aquaculture are also discussed.

The Green Paper represents the starting point of a wide-ranging consultation. The Commission wishes this debate to engage a wide array of stakeholders, ranging from those directly involved in the fisheries sector to other policy areas to European citizens at large, as consumers, citizens and taxpayers. The Commission will sum up the debate by first half of 2010 and produce conclusions on the direction of the CFP reform. An impact assessment will then be conducted and after further consultations with stakeholders, the Commission will draft a proposal for a new basic regulation which will be presented to the Council and the European Parliament together with all other legal base proposals in the context of the new Financial Framework after 2013.

Long-term management

The management of stocks threatened by overfishing has to be based on a scientific approach covering at least the lifetime of the species concerned and the objectives of responsible and sustainable exploitation. The solution requires long-term management plans that establish multi-annual measures, which also offers the advantage of giving the sector a longer operating perspective, in the place of the annual plans used until now. Multi-annual plans make it possible to manage the fisheries sector and fish stocks in such a way as to create a more stable and more productive balance, with fewer ill effects on the environment.

Multi-annual plans today cover 41 % of pelagic catches and 44 % of demersal catches. New plans are being drawn up, particularly for Baltic salmon and pelagic stocks and for Western stocks of Atlantic horse mackerel. Long-term management is not limited to Community waters: the Commission, acting through the regional fisheries management organisations of which it is a member, has furthered the introduction of multi-annual plans by the ICCAT⁽¹⁾ (bluefin tuna) and the WCPFC⁽²⁾ (tropical tuna, especially bigeye tuna).

At this stage, it is still hard to assess such plans. However, in 2008, most stocks for which quotas could be increased in 2009 had been regulated by long-term plans. Mackerel, which has been managed for more than 10 years under a long-term plan, is now

abundant. North Sea cod is showing only weak signs of recovery, however. For the first time in years, its biomass increased very slightly in 2008. This small sign of recovery encouraged the Fisheries Ministers to increase the 2009 TAC by 30%, although scientists consider it very insignificant, particularly because the biomass is still well below the biologically safe limit. The same holds for other stocks: it is too early to draw conclusions from these limited variations.

Community multi-annual plans in force

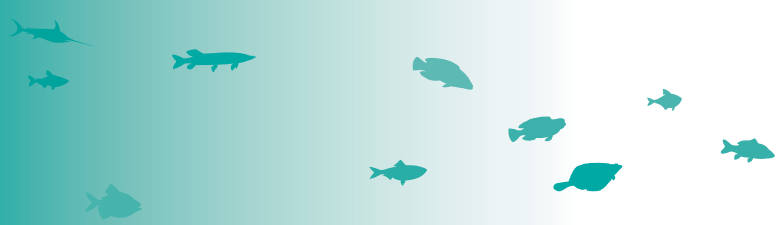
- 2004: cod (from Kattegat to the Irish Sea) and Northern hake.
- 2005: Southern hake and Norway lobster off the coast of Spain.
- 2006: sole in the Bay of Biscay.
- 2007: sole in the Western Channel, North Sea sole and plaice, two Baltic cod stocks and eel.
- 2008: herring in waters west of Scotland.

International multi-annual plans in which the European Union is participating

- 1996: North Sea herring.
- 1997: mackerel.
- 1998: Atlanto-Scandian herring.
- 2003: North Sea haddock.
- 2004, revised in 2008: North Sea cod.
- 2006, revised in 2008: blue whiting.

(1) International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic tunas – www.iccat.int

(2) Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission – www.wcpfc.int



Self-management: the Dutch example



Urk, a town whose economy is based on the fishing industry, is where the Dutch self-management system was devised around 15 years ago.



The Green Paper singles out the need to involve the sector more closely in fisheries management. In most Member States today, fishermen are obliged to accept top-down management rules and have the impression that their views carry little weight. This tends to make them reluctant to comply with these rules. The Commission therefore proposes to involve fishermen further in fisheries management and control. Self-management schemes are already being applied successfully in Denmark and the Netherlands. *Fisheries and Aquaculture in Europe* takes a look at the Dutch experience.

Urk was once an island in the Zuiderzee. Over the last 70 years, with construction of the *Afsluitdijk* (1) and draining of the Flevoland, it has turned into a small town on the banks of the IJsselmeer, around 100 kilometres from the closest sea shore. Whether it is an island or on the banks of a river, however, the town's local economy is still based on fishing. An industrial zone on the edge of town is home to the biggest fish auction in the Netherlands and to some of the leading Dutch fish processing firms.

The 52 fishing vessels secured to the port account for 35% of national quotas for plaice and sole. However, they no longer come here just for the town's shipyards. Although their home bases are in the coastal ports of Harlingen, Den Helder or IJmuiden, they transport the bulk of their catches by truck to the auction in Urk, as do many other Dutch fisheries firms, to take advantage of the traditionally high prices paid here thanks to the nearby presence of large processing plants.

It was also here in Urk that, around 15 years ago, the fisheries management system used today in the Netherlands was put

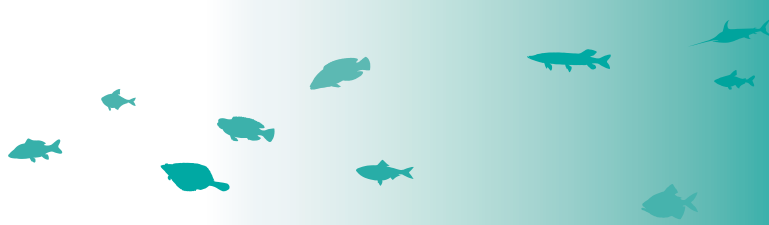
in place. To understand how it came about, it is important to understand the last three decades of history of the fishing industry.

'At the start of the 1980s, the introduction of the Common Fisheries Policy brought to light problems of compatibility between fleet capacity and available quotas,' explains Geert Meun, Secretary of the Coöperatieve Producentenorganisatie voor Visserij Oost Nederland (CPO), the local producers' organisation (PO). 'The situation changed for the worse, particularly between the catch sector and inspectors, who caught many fishermen for quota overruns or failure to declare catches. In the early 1990s, tension was running so high that the Parliament withdrew confidence from the Fisheries Minister and he had to resign. That was when fishermen's awareness started to increase.'

Participation, flexibility and transfers

The key figure who helped spark this awareness was Klaas Kramer, President of the Urk PO and head of the national fishermen's federation. Kramer, who sought to halt the tension and to

(1) The large dyke that closes the Zuiderzee and, by separating it from the North Sea, transforms this former marine gulf into a large inland lake now known as IJsselmeer.



bring the sector out of the semi-legality in which it had become ensnared, was behind a total reversal of the situation. He wanted fishermen to respect quotas, but in the framework of a system in which they would be active participants. Working with Peter Draaisma, then Director for Fisheries at the Ministry for Agriculture and Fisheries, he devised the *co-management* system that has been used for Dutch fisheries since 1993.

This system divided the fleet into six regional demersal groups and one pelagic group. In the meantime, these groups have evolved into POs. Each has an independent president who has no personal interest in the sector. Every year, the State distributes fishing opportunities in the form of individual transferable quotas (ITQs). Each fisherman then puts his ITQs into the PO's pool. From there on, the producers' organisation manages the quotas.

'In the early weeks of the year, we review our members' fishing plans,' explains Geert Meun. *'Depending on what they plan for the year, we split up the ITQs so that everyone can be satisfied.'*

Nothing is set in stone, however. ITQs are transferred from one vessel to another throughout the year in terms of ups and downs and the different opportunities that arise: damage to a vessel, a boss who ceases his activities, a fisherman who operates in Denmark where more plaice can be found and who would like to obtain more quotas on this species by giving up his quotas for sole, and so on. Transfers also occur between POs. The only obligation is that transfers must be coordinated by the PO secretariat in charge of monitoring quota use.

Peer control

In Urk, fishermen sign a contract with the CPO and abide by a very strict system of control and financial penalties. The principle is that all catches must be notified to the PO and sold at auction. The CPO calculates quota use on the basis of the quantities 'officialised' through auctioning. Direct sales are considered a non-declaration and fined at least EUR 2 500.

To ensure compliance, the CPO carries out several types of inspections. First, the president (who has no interests in the sector) attends the auction in Urk or Harlingen once a week to ensure the PO's regular presence in these strategic places. The CPO has also concluded agreements with the auctions, the *Algemene Inspectiedienst* ⁽²⁾ and the *Productschap Vis* ⁽³⁾ obliging the auction staff, fisheries inspectors and quality and hygiene inspectors to report any violations directly to it.

'If a fisherman sells directly, but has reported his catches in his logbook, he is not breaking Dutch law but he is out of line with our rules,' continues Geert Meun, showing a page bearing the *Algemene Inspectiedienst* letterhead. *'Under our agreement, inspectors who detect this type of violation send us a report like this one. And the following Saturday, when the fisherman comes back to Urk, we call him in to our office, show him the report and discuss payment of the fine. As a rule, though, most play by the book.'*

Peer control by the community of fishermen is also a key factor. If a vessel catches more than its ITQs and is caught in the act, the fishery is closed for the entire PO, even if some fishermen still have quotas left. So there is a collective responsibility towards all the PO members.

Adapting capacity

The introduction of individual transferable quotas has been a great stride in reducing fleet capacity. In 1993, when the self-management system was put in place, the Urk group was made up of 125 vessels. Today it has 52, following the decreases in quotas for two essential species, namely sole and plaice, and a succession of six national fleet decommissioning programmes.

'Imagine two brothers each in command of a vessel in a joint venture,' explains Geert Meun, giving a common example. *'At the start, they have enough ITQs to fish individually. When quotas are lowered, they first try to keep operating both their vessels in the North Sea. But after two or three years, they come to the conclusion that it would be better to transfer the quotas to a single vessel and take the other one out of service. That's the advantage of the system: everyone makes his own decision based on a rational analysis of the situation. All the Dutch vessel decommissioning programmes have been applied on a voluntary basis... We intervene as a PO by helping fishermen draw up their fishing plans and analyse their situation.'*

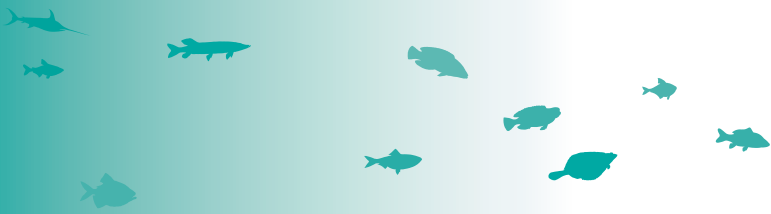
The Dutch system of self-management has been operating for more than 15 years. Of course, there are still infringements. The annual fisheries compliance scoreboard ⁽⁴⁾ still lists serious offences by certain Dutch fishermen. However, the result as a whole is satisfactory.

'During the system's first few years, there were sceptics,' recalls Geert Meun. *'They said it would work as long as quotas were high and the economy was strong. In 15 years, quotas have collapsed and the situation has grown far worse for the fishing sector. But the system is still working... And I'm convinced that no one would want to go back to what we went through during the 1980s.'*

(2) The fisheries inspection service of the Ministry for Agriculture, Nature and Food.

(3) The agency in charge of promotion, hygiene and quality of fishery and aquaculture products.

(4) See COM(2008) 670 – Reports from Member States on behaviours which seriously infringed the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy in 2006.



Participation: a Regional Advisory Council initiates a multi-annual plan

The Commission's Green Paper recommends closer involvement of the sector and of all concerned parties in development of the Common Fisheries Policy. It also calls on the sector to assume greater responsibility for implementation of fisheries policy objectives. A number of stakeholders are already doing so, as illustrated by the recent development of a multi-annual plan for the management of Western stocks of Atlantic horse mackerel, on the direct initiative of the Pelagic Regional Advisory Council.

The seven Regional Advisory Councils (RACs), set up between November 2004 and April 2007, contribute actively to the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). They share with the Commission and Member States the know-how and experience of fishermen and other stakeholders (processors, environmental NGOs, fish farmers, sports fishermen, etc.). The RACs have quickly become important players in the CFP: they facilitate a great number of direct contacts between those in the sector, the Commission, the Member States and scientists. The management plan for Atlantic horse mackerel (*Trachurus trachurus*) proposed by the Pelagic RAC in mid-2007 is one of the most striking examples of this fruitful means of cooperation.

The idea to set up a long-term management plan for Western stocks of Atlantic horse mackerel originated in the Pelagic RAC, without a prior request from the Commission. The proposal for the management plan was debated in WG II on blue whiting and horse mackerel, which is chaired by Sean O'Donoghue (Killybegs producers' organisation, Donegal, Ireland).

Managing resources more predictably

The effectiveness of this working group stems first of all from its small size: apart from the Irish representative, only four other vessel owners were present – one each from the Netherlands, England, Denmark and Spain. Their interactions were transparent from the very beginning. The working group conscientiously carried out a long study: it sought the opinions of four groups of scientists. *'The scientists gave us a questionnaire that we answered very precisely,'* explains Sean O'Donoghue. *'The idea was to obtain as much data as possible on horse mackerel: actual catch figures, catch levels desirable according to fishery, etc.'*

The first problem in setting up such a management plan was the lack of reliable data. Biological information on horse mackerel is too spotty to serve as a basis for setting a fishing mortality objective and establishing a relationship between total allowable catches (TACs) and scientific estimates of catches. But in the case of horse mackerel, the scientists and fishermen had the results of a study using egg abundance as an indicator, carried out in the context of international research every three years since 1977. So what is unusual about this management

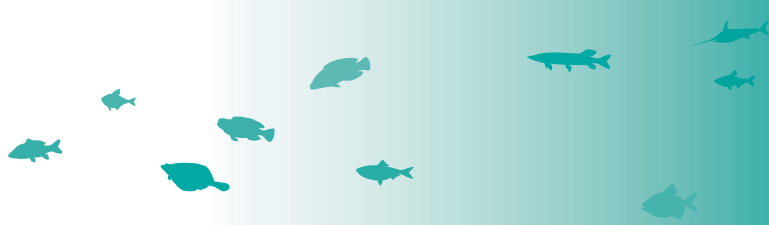
plan is that it is not based on stock biomass or fishing mortality, but on another biological indicator. In 2006, the International Council for Exploration of the Seas (ICES) saw the existence of this long-established and regular data base as very promising.

Another unique feature of the RAC's management plan is that it does not concern an overexploited species. The year 1982, which was an exceptional year for recruitment of immature fish, was chosen as the reference for the scientists' model. Accordingly, the exceptional increase in the stock that followed was not taken into account in stock development simulations.

The catch level remains very reasonable, moreover. Since 2002, catches of horse mackerel have increased regularly but are still below the TAC. There are several reasons for this phenomenon: trawlers, which fish for several species, always have alternatives – mackerel, herring or blue whiting – which are more prized on certain markets and can be sold at higher prices. The high price of fuel oil may also be a factor in these average catch levels.



Every year, 140 000 tonnes of Atlantic horse mackerel are caught from Western stocks, by far the largest of the three stocks present in EU waters, with a catch value of around EUR 60 million.



Whatever the reasons, the fishermen's initiative on Atlantic horse mackerel reveals a change of attitude: until then a management plan was only put in place once a stock had reached a precarious state. In this case, the aim was not to save the stock but to manage the resource more predictably. The existence of a tension-free context facilitated dialogue in the working group between scientists and fishermen. *'The scientists made a tremendous contribution,'* acknowledges Sean O'Donoghue. *'They took our concerns into account.'*

A very thorough proposal

After nine months of work, in July 2007, the Pelagic RAC working group was ready to present to the European Commission the broad outlines of a management plan that established a steady TAC for three years. The sector made a commitment with this text not to exceed the TAC, to carry over to the following year any overrun and to take account of non-targeted catches of horse mackerel. The text proposed was particularly thorough: the fishermen did not merely present a general framework, but also suggested a method for calculating a three-year TAC and even defined the framework of conditions resulting from an exceptional year.

After receiving this text, the Commission contacted the ICES for an external expert opinion. In 2007, the ICES concluded that the plan was compatible with the precautionary approach for the short term. The Scientific, Technical and Economic



The management plan for Western stocks of Atlantic horse mackerel does not concern an overexploited species. Its aim is not to save the stock but to manage it more predictably.

Committee for Fisheries (STECF), the Commission's internal scientific advisors, also approved the ICES conclusions, but recommended review of the plan after several years of implementation.

The initiative, which ensures sustainable stock management, is welcomed by fishermen in more than one respect. *'For us, the fishing industry must remain at the heart of decisions,'* explains Sean O'Donoghue. The plan also offers another major advantage: it ensures the stability of the TAC for three years. *'In the past, the annual discussions on TACs were a real battle and TACs could fluctuate from 20 to 30%,'* he continues.

Promoted by fishermen, this initiative quickly won the support of other stakeholders in the Pelagic RAC and the Commission, which endorsed the RAC's opinion and adopted last April a proposal for a regulation on the Western stock of Atlantic horse mackerel⁽¹⁾. *'We were strongly encouraged in our initiative by the European Commission,'* confides Sean O'Donoghue, who adds that *'this management plan is a fine example of the type of initiatives the RACs can take.'*

The management plan for the Western stock of Atlantic horse mackerel is perfectly in line with the CFP, which aims to ensure ecologically, economically and socially sustainable exploitation of marine resources. Other RACs have undertaken similar projects and are working on setting up long-term management plans for species in their zones of competence.

Atlantic horse mackerel, a species caught mostly for export

Atlantic horse mackerel (*Trachurus trachurus*) is a bony pelagic fish that lives far from shore, can range between 15 and 60 cm long and is caught with mackerel. Some 140 000 tonnes of Atlantic horse mackerel are caught yearly from Western stocks, by far the largest of the three stocks found in Community waters, with a catch value of around EUR 60 million. Around 600 vessels fish for this species, especially large pelagic trawlers that also fish for mackerel, herring and blue whiting, but also, in Spain and Portugal, smaller vessels that fish for a variety of species, including sardine. These fisheries provide 6 000 jobs. Horse mackerel used to be caught for processing into oil and fishmeal, but since the 1970s it has been marketed for human consumption. In Europe, it is eaten fresh in Portugal and Spain. However, nearly 90% of horse mackerel is exported, mostly frozen, to Japan and West Africa.

(1) COM(2009) 189.

In brief

□ Mediterranean: new measures for all fishermen

At its yearly meeting last March, the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean adopted a number of measures aimed at enhancing the sustainable management of resources in this fragile sea. The parties agreed on the common protocol for a fleet register, in which every State will have to enter its data. The idea is to give the regional fisheries management organisation a more accurate estimate of the Mediterranean fleet so that it can take precise measures in fishing capacity and fishing effort. Further recommendations were adopted with the support of the European Union: the use of 40-mm square mesh for trawlers, the mandatory installation of a vessel monitoring system (VMS) on vessels over 15 m in length, the provisional freeze of demersal fishing in an area where spawning stock gather in the Gulf of Lions (for several species, especially hake), a general 10% reduction in fishing effort, a procedure to establish a list of vessels presumed to have carried out illegal, undeclared or unregulated fishing, the mandatory declaration of scientific data and statistics and the establishment of a performance review system.

Bluefin tuna: new control campaign

Following the adoption by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) of a new recovery plan for bluefin tuna, the Commission has decided not to ease control pressure on this problematic species. It has adopted a zero-tolerance approach. Certain joint operations, where an EU operator works with fishing vessels, tug boats or fattening farms from non-EU States, are only authorised if the third State is considered to comply strictly with the ICCAT plan. Following on from last year, a Specific Control and Inspection Programme was also put in place in collaboration with the Community Fisheries Control Agency and the control services of the seven Member States concerned (Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Malta, Greece and Cyprus). This programme focuses on the use of new technologies for remote monitoring of catch, transfer and caging declarations, and the necessity of controlling the entire supply chain, particularly from catch to slaughter and purchase operations in the fall. It is also based on the Joint Deployment Plan coordinated by the Agency, involving 12 deep-sea patrol vessels, 17 coastal patrol vessels and 12 aircraft. There will be 274 days of inspection at sea, 242 days on land and 70 days using aerial surveillance throughout the fishing zone, i.e. from the Azores to the Eastern Mediterranean.

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