



**SUSTAINABLE EU FISHERIES: FACING THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES**  
**EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, BRUSSELS 8-9 NOVEMBER 2004**

*Summary of Conference Conclusions*

**Introduction**

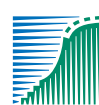
On 8–9 November 2004, a high-level conference was held at the European Parliament, under the patronage of the Dutch Presidency of the EU Council. The event was organized by the Institute of European Environmental Policy (IEEP) and the Fisheries Secretariat (FISH). It was attended by over 100 representatives from the EU institutions, national fisheries and environment ministries and authorities, inter-governmental organisations, the fisheries sector, environmental and consumer organisations, and universities.

In 2002, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the EU committed itself to important global targets concerning stock recovery by 2015, the creation of a global network of MPAs and halting the decline in biodiversity by 2010. The EU's credibility as a global environmental leader was reinforced in December 2002 when – in the spirit of the WSSD – EU Fisheries Ministers agreed to major reforms of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Despite the strength of the new CFP framework Regulation 2371/2002 and significant changes to the EU's subsidy regime, however, progress in relation to stock recovery and management has been disappointing and more, faster efforts are necessary.

The high-level IEEP/FISH conference sought to re-examine the challenges facing sustainable development of the EU capture fisheries and aquaculture sector, taking a long-term, environmental perspective, and placing it within the pan-European and global contexts, in particular the WSSD targets on Fisheries, Oceans and Biodiversity. The aim was to propose new approaches, including a range of possible instruments, to ensure the transition of the EU fisheries sector to a sustainable industry. The resulting conference conclusions are intended to inform discussions within an enlarged EU, with a view to securing commitment to make strong progress in implementing the CFP reform and meeting international targets.

**Key conclusions**

Recognising the complex and challenging nature of sustainable development of the fisheries and aquaculture sector, and the need for new approaches to tackling the issues,



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the conference focused on four broad themes: *production, consumption and trade, instruments* and *governance*. Detailed discussions on each issue resulted in the identification of a number of areas deserving continued or increased attention. Reflecting these and plenary discussions, the following key conclusions and recommendations are being forwarded to the Dutch Presidency of the EU Council for consideration.

### ***Production***

Production methods and processing of fish and fish products can have serious impacts on the environment and, consequently, also on people and livelihoods. Yet fish is a food source of high nutritional value. The challenge is to maximise the positive contribution of fisheries, whilst reducing negative impacts to acceptable levels. Using existing technologies, there is already great scope to redress the balance and some progress is being made by fisheries organisations, the processing industry and policy makers.

Improvements in this area will generate potential benefits for the sector in terms of its sustainability, but also its profitability and competitiveness. Growing awareness of fisheries issues among European consumers will create further benefits for responsible fisheries.

- There is an opportunity for EU Member States to work together to improve the environmental performance and resource efficiency of production, which should be secured through a ***series of targeted and complementary policies and measures***. The EU can stimulate innovation in the sector through research, funding, regulation and even voluntary agreements.
- The unnecessary ***bycatch and subsequent discarding*** associated with fisheries is a key issue, affecting the image, productivity and efficiency of the sector. The capture of large numbers of juveniles, as well as the important “mega-spawners”, is a particular problem. Despite receiving political attention, progress in this area is inadequate. There is a need to re-examine the technical means for addressing these issues, including minimum landing sizes. When bycatch is unavoidable, systems requiring the landing and subsequent auction of bycatch should be considered. In this area there is particular scope to work with the catching sector to develop and implement a ***sectoral plan of action*** to significantly reduce the environmental and resource impacts associated with fishing.
- Recreational fisheries are largely outside the scope of CFP management measures. Consideration should be given to improving information on the

recreational sector, particularly in the Mediterranean, ensuring that *recreational fisheries are fully accounted for within fisheries management* measures. Any measures to protect stocks, such as time and area closures, should apply equally to all parts of the sector. The use of large-capacity (industrial-scale) gear could be restricted to licensed fishing activities, and particularly destructive fishing methods such as night-time spear fishing with light prohibited all together.

- As regards *aquaculture production*, improvements should be secured in order to decrease the sector's dependence on wild-caught fish for feed, by developing high-protein vegetable alternatives. Greater efforts are also needed to address the issue of specimen escaping. The use of wild juveniles, such as young bluefin tuna or elvers, to stock farms needs to be properly identified and recorded within existing catch reporting systems.

### ***Governance***

The State's role in governance is to develop the policy and regulatory frameworks, fix the overriding objectives, legitimate and balance stakeholders' interactions, and carry out enforcement. The Commission's 2001 White Paper on European Governance states five principles underpinning good governance: participation, openness, accountability, coherence and effectiveness. Improvements in governance are already occurring but more substantial changes are needed in areas of policy coherence, accountability of actors, information requirements, and the distribution of responsibilities.

- The decision to establish a *Commissioner for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs* is welcomed as a sign of more coherent inter-institutional workings, in particular, between DG Fisheries and DG Environment. However, the capacity of both DGs and their interactions could be strengthened in order to facilitate further coherence in policy making.
- The need for reinforced stakeholder participation, transparency and accountability is reflected in the *development of Regional Advisory Councils* (RACs), which the conference welcomed. A number of roles that RACs could usefully play, both now and should they be given additional powers in the future, were identified. In the short term, however, attention needs to be given to the composition of RACs and the extent of communication between RACs, stakeholders they represent and institutions they advise. Additional human and financial resources need to be dedicated to RACs to ensure their effective functioning.

- With the application of an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries, there is a need for the collection and exchange of more ***comprehensive, accurate and verifiable information*** about, for example, the state of resources and their ecosystems, fishing operations, compliance with management measures, and origin of fish and fishery products (traceability). This may be achieved, *inter alia*, with wider use of Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) and on-board observer schemes which would also support the gathering of effort and catch data. Where information gaps remain, the precautionary principle and adaptive management strategies will need to be applied.
- There is concern about the excessively top down approach to fisheries regulation in EU waters, particularly given the ecosystem-based approach and the consequent need for management at the local, national, and regional levels, as well as at population or ecosystem levels. Consideration should be given to ***devolving more responsibility***, with the Commission responsible for setting principles and objectives and elaborating the legislative framework for fisheries and environmental management, whilst making regional institutions progressively more responsible for adapting and ‘fine tuning’ management to the local realities.

### ***Policy Instruments***

To date, the CFP has predominantly relied upon ‘command and control’ type instruments to regulate fisheries, as well as financial aid to the sector. Limited use has been made of other types of instruments, for example, to limit individual waste or set environmental standards to underpin consumer labels. There is a need for a ***more effective application of the instruments already in use***, but greater consideration can and should also be given to strengthening and broadening the range of policy instruments used.

- Further use should be made of ***spatial instruments***, particularly by establishing a scientifically robust programme for an effective system of Marine Protected Areas as a fisheries management tool, recognizing that these can provide multiple ecosystem benefits. This initiative should be led by the relevant EU institutions and the Member States, but in close collaboration with Regional Conventions, non-governmental organisations and fishermen.
- ***Improved control and enforcement of effort*** is necessary. This may require the more widespread use of days-at-sea restrictions and real time closures of fishing

grounds. A *higher involvement of fishermen* in developing and improving technical measures is required.

- Although a politically sensitive issue, there is considerable support for generating greater *ownership of the resources* to foster a stewardship and allow the EU to move towards more sustainable capture fisheries. There is a range of potential instruments that can be applied at different levels of geographical scale that will help achieve this. For instance, a distinction can be made between inshore and offshore fisheries. In inshore fisheries, community-based cooperative management arrangements may be a more appropriate mechanism to help achieve economic, social, and environmental, sustainable development goals, while internationally traded ITQs may be an option for offshore fisheries. Serious consideration should be given to this issue within the EU management system. Lessons from the application of rights-based management in EU and other countries should help to demonstrate the potential benefits to fishermen and wider communities.
- There is a potential to build on the CFP reform through the *new European Fisheries Fund* (EFF). Aid should be targeted at helping the sector overcome a period of structural change, supporting efforts that will make it more sustainable and competitive in the long term. In this regard, there should be a reduction in the overall level of subsidies to the sector, an increase in the conditions attached to their use, cross-compliance with other EU policies, better targeting of subsidies and a prohibition of subsidies likely to promote unsustainable practices, reflecting World Trade Organisation discussions. Continued commitment to the EU decision to halt subsidies for fleet renewal is particularly important. Environmental impact assessments need to be undertaken on the use of existing and future subsidies. There is also scope for coordination of national funding schemes, in support of measures aimed at managing international fisheries.

### *Consumption and trade*

Consumption is central to the sustainability debate, not just in terms of how much but also what is being consumed, how it is produced, and the product form and origin. The current levels and patterns of consumption have led to increasing trade in fish products. Trade itself is associated with a number of environmental issues, including the generation of greenhouse gases and chemical pollution. Conversely, the highly traded nature of fish products means that trade-based measures are potentially a powerful tool for securing effective fisheries management.



- There is a major opportunity to harness EU consumer power in order to support sustainable trade and consumption patterns. A growing number of initiatives in the EU Member States include labelling, the production of booklets, mainstream media articles and other public information campaigns. There is scope to learn from ongoing efforts in this area, potentially initiating an EU-wide project to identify and exchange good practice.
- The provision of clear and targeted information is the basis for consumer choice. The EU's efforts in relation to traceability and standards for product labelling are an important start, but need now to be strengthened both to improve their application and, eventually, to provide more relevant and detailed information for consumers. There is scope to work with the production and processing sector, NGOs and consumer organisations, potentially using voluntary agreements backed up by the threat of legal measures should voluntary efforts fail.
- There is also a need for EU level action on product labelling, and particularly eco- or organic labels. Organic labels for fish farming are currently unsatisfactory, as labels vary widely, creating an uneven playing field for producers as well as confusing consumers. There is a good deal of support for developing EU standards for labelling schemes, and the development of an EU 'ecolabel' also has some support.
- As a form of trade, EU third country fishing access agreements present a number of environmental challenges. The environmental impacts arising from fishing under access agreements are likely to be at least equal to those that occur in EU waters. Negotiations should be opened only after an assessment of the status of stocks, which should consider the best available information. In developing agreements, the principle of the user pays should be applied, resulting in a significant increase in access fees for vessel owners.

Clearly there are important opportunities – as well as challenges – ahead for the EU in its drive for sustainable fisheries. In most cases, the opportunities are of a 'win-win' nature, offering potential benefits for the environment as well as the EU fisheries sector; the health of the sector will depend on the successful transition towards sustainable and more efficient practices. The challenge is for policy makers to deliver a coherent and coordinated programme for sustainable fisheries. To ensure that this happens, the Commission needs to initiate and monitor such a programme within the EU. It would be helpful, if a core group of Member States would support the initiative and ensure that it is implemented.