



# **Towards a SUSTAINABLE Common Fisheries Policy**

## **10 Recommendations**

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### **1. The Common Fisheries policy should prioritise ecological sustainability**

The sustainability of social and economic aspects of fisheries can only be achieved by first accomplishing ecological sustainability and therefore minimising the existing/potential adverse impacts and pressures of fisheries activities, while at the same time allowing the recovery of stocks or populations that are depleted or at risk of depletion. Securing ecological sustainability will result in long-term beneficial economic and social outcomes for the fishery sector and other coastal activities (such as tourism).

Oceana recommends that the future CFP prioritise ecological sustainability, as it is indispensable to ensure the long-term viability of fishery activities.

### **2. The Common Fisheries Policy should apply an ecosystem-based approach to the management of fishing activities**

Restoring ocean ecosystems, including rebuilding marine biodiversity and allowing species to recover from exploitation, requires moving away from fisheries management based on the single-species approach. Instead, what is needed is management of the entire ocean ecosystem, which aims to stop biodiversity loss and rebuild the natural diversity of the oceans, thereby enhancing their resilience.

The 2002 CFP referred only to the progressive implementation of an ecosystem-based approach. Given that the Marine Strategy Framework Directive pleads for better integration of environmental consideration in sectoral policies and bearing in mind that its Article 13 states that good environmental status shall be reached by applying an “ecosystem-based approach” to fisheries management, the future CFP must make a significant step forward and apply an ecosystem-based approach.

Oceana recommends that the renewed CFP text raise the implementation of the ecosystem based approach to the level of a guiding principle for fisheries management.



### **3. The Common Fisheries policy should implement a science-based approach**

Over the last 20 years, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) has produced over 1,500 scientific opinions for the EU and other governments in the Northeast Atlantic for the correct management of fish stocks. However, only 350 (22%) have been properly translated into effective catch limits – seventy-eight percent of scientific recommendations on TAC for European Union fish stocks have been continuously ignored. When the Council of Fish Ministers decided on fishing opportunities for 2011, it ignored approximately 35% of the scientific recommendations made by ICES.

Continuing to manage fisheries independently of scientific advice is clearly incompatible with objectives to manage stocks for sustainability and recovery. Decisions on fishing opportunities and other management measures must be based on the best available scientific advice

Oceana believes that a sustainable CFP must be science-based.

### **4. The Common Fisheries Policy should effectively apply the precautionary approach**

The ecosystem approach to fisheries management must apply the precautionary approach, which mainly involves applying precautionary management measures when there is a lack of scientific knowledge or advice. Fisheries must not operate without management measures and new fisheries should only operate when there is proof that they do not harm the ecosystem.

The current implementation of the precautionary approach creates a presumption that fishery stocks are in good shape and can be exploited unless it is proven otherwise. Yet, the state of European stocks today demonstrates that this approach has not been successful. Authorising fisheries with limited restrictions until there is evidence of an unacceptable impact on the marine ecosystem is simply too risky. Fishery stocks should be protected from fishing activities until it is proven that such activities are sustainable. The future text should include the obligation to adopt measures that will preserve fishing stocks above precautionary limits in cases of uncertainty.

Oceana therefore recommends that the renewed CFP be based upon a precautionary approach that is *truly* precautionary with respect to fisheries operating in a context of scientific uncertainty.

### **5. The Common Fisheries Policy should implement a flexible approach based on the protection of Essential Fish Habitats**

In recent years, the degradation of marine aquatic habitats essential for healthy fish populations has increasingly been recognised as a global concern. Consequently, the importance of habitat management within fisheries management is being increasingly viewed as a key component of an ecosystem-based approach.

Essential Fish Habitats are the fragile and vital marine habitats that need to be protected due to their vital role in supporting the biological needs of fish species (e.g., spawning, nursery, and feeding grounds). The concept of Essential Fish Habitats is a useful ecosystem-based management tool for limiting fishing mortality and the environmental impact of fishing activities. It is also a flexible tool because it allows for immediate action to be taken, to restrict or close fishing



activities within varying areas, and at particularly critical times. The protection of Essential Fish Habitats would improve the current status of stocks and also help to ensure their long-term sustainability.

The future CFP should therefore integrate the concept of Essential Fish Habitats, by clearly defining them within the CFP text, and using the concept as a flexible tool for fisheries management. In particular, the renewed CFP should foresee the adoption of technical measures for zones and/or periods in which fishing activities are prohibited or restricted, in order to protect Essential Fish Habitats.

Oceana recommends that Essential Fish Habitats be explicitly defined in the future CFP and used as a flexible tool to improve fish stock status.

## **6. The Common Fisheries Policy should end the wasteful practice of discards**

In Europe, around 1.3 million tones of marine fish are discarded every year, representing 13% of total catches. Because in most cases discards do not survive, the negative ramifications of this enormous waste of marine resources are severe. The unnecessary death of juvenile and mature individuals of commercial species undermines the health of stocks and jeopardises future yields, threatening the long-term economic sustainability of European fisheries. Moreover, the capture of non-commercial species severely impacts the marine environment, disrupting the balance of the ecosystem.

Oceana recommends:

- The establishment of an obligation to land *all* catches
- The establishment of Maximum Acceptable By-catch
- The implementation of a package of technical measures to reduce unwanted by-catch, including the adoption of a Best Available Technologies (BATs) approach in fishing practice, which will:
  - o Improve the selectivity and use of fishing gear
  - o Prohibit gears/techniques that are widely known to have high discard rates, and promote alternative, more selective gears (with lower by-catch rates)
- Progressive implementation of these measures in order to take into consideration the time needed for the fishing sector to adjust to new management approaches

## **7. The Common Fisheries Policy should ensure the management of all commercially exploited species**

Several hundred marine species are commercialised in the European Union. However, only a small fraction is actually managed, and unmanaged species represent a significant proportion of total landings in the EU.

This single fact strongly hampers the implementation of all of the key principles that should guide the future CFP. Therefore, in order to be consistent with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the renewed CFP should guarantee that *all* exploited fish stocks be managed.



Oceana recommends that the CFP require the establishment of management measures for all commercially exploited fish stocks, without waiting for data to be available.

For species that are already managed, the renewed CFP should promote the establishment of management plans as a compulsory measure for all commercially exploited species, and outline the criteria for their development. In particular, management plans should not only regulate the amount of fish to be extracted but also address the impacts of fishing on other species and on marine habitats. In addition, they should be based on the establishment of total allowable catches (TACs) which follow scientific advice and which apply to actual catches and not merely landings. These TACs should also be accompanied by effort management and technical measures.

Oceana recommends that the CFP require the adoption of management plans for all commercially exploited fish stocks, based on an ecosystem approach and including:

- Science-based TACs
- Effort management
- Technical measures

## **8. The Common Fisheries Policy should ensure consistency with international and European objectives for biodiversity protection**

Biodiversity protection is a key requirement for achieving ecological sustainability and it must constitute one of the fundamental elements of the renewed Common Fisheries Policy. Implementing an ecosystem-based approach requires that the impact of fishing activities on the marine environment be clearly addressed. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), in particular, are a demonstrated tool for preserving marine biodiversity and halting the degradation of marine ecosystems.

The Common Fisheries Policy must therefore integrate the objectives set forth in other biodiversity laws and conventions, in order to secure both the ecological sustainability of the seas and the long-term viability of fisheries activities.

Oceana considers that the CFP should be consistent with the objectives of the Habitats Directive, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Barcelona Convention, the Helsinki Convention, the OSPAR Convention, and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species by:

- Promoting the establishment of a coherent network of MPAs in order to fulfil international and regional commitments.
- Protecting threatened and endangered species and habitats listed in international and regional conventions to which the EU is party.

The future CFP should also be written in the spirit of

- the commitment taken by the European Union in Johannesburg in 2002, to rebuild exploited stocks to MSY levels by 2015, and
- the EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy, which established the objective for fishing stocks to be managed at Ecological Sustainable Yield by 2020.

Oceana recommends that the CFP integrate international and European objectives and commitments concerning biodiversity protection.



## **9. The Common Fisheries Policy should ensure that 'good environmental status' be achieved by 2020**

The Marine Strategy Framework Directive sets a binding roadmap to achieve 'good environmental status' in European seas by 2020. This requirement identifies clear boundaries concerning fisheries activities to be carried out in European Seas.

The objectives laid down in the definition of good environmental status must be integrated within the future text of the CFP. In particular, key elements include:

- Protection of marine species and habitats
- Maintenance of biological diversity
- All elements of the marine food-webs, to the extent that they are known, occur at normal abundance and diversity and levels capable of ensuring the long-term abundance of species and the retention of their full reproductive capacity.
- Sea-floor integrity is at a level that ensures that the structure and functions of the ecosystems are safeguarded, and benthic ecosystems, in particular, are not adversely affected.

Oceana recommends that the renewed CFP place at its core the target to achieve good environmental status by 2020, in order to be consistent with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

## **10. The Common Fisheries policy should compel Member States to control and enforce fishing rules**

Even the best text for a renewed CFP will fail if Member States do not ensure that fishermen follow the rules. In fact, every year, the European Commission reports an increasing number of infringements against the Common Fisheries Policy. The lack of political will to ensure compliance is one of the primary reasons for the failure of the CFP of 2002.

With the adoption of the IUU Regulation (Regulation (EC) 1005/2008) and the Control Regulation (Regulation (EC) 1009/2009), the Commission built a comprehensive and effective framework for ending illegal fishing and creating a culture of compliance. It is now up to Member States to assume their responsibility in ensuring that the future CFP will not fail as its predecessor did.

Oceana recommends that the renewed CFP clearly establish the responsibility of Member States to control and enforce fishing rules, as a key component for restoring European fish stocks.

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