



BirdWatchIreland
protecting birds and biodiversity

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20th December 2011

Submission on Common Fisheries Policy consultation

Dear Sir/ Madam

BirdWatch Ireland welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Irish stakeholder (public) consultation on reform of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

We are particularly interested in ensuring that the management of marine resources is carried out in a manner so as to ensure the long term health of marine ecosystems. Wild birds act as indicators of the quality of our environment and seabirds play a particularly important role in flagging changes occurring in marine systems. Significant changes in seabird populations and in prey availability for many wild birds signals changes in our seas. A Common Fisheries Policy must ensure the nations maritime assets are not damaged through fishing activity, in fact it should ensure that the fishing sector should play a significant role in future management regimes that are truly sustainable, by doing so ensuring wide reaching and long lasting public benefits of healthy seas.

We look forward to working further with your department through aspects of the CFP package, in developing and clarifying Ireland's position and role in ensuring healthy seas into the future.

The CFP has failed to achieve social, economic or environmental sustainability within the European fishing industry since initiation in 1983 ([EC, 2009](#); [Khalilian et al., 2010](#); [EC, 2011a](#)). Irish landings of many important commercial stocks have substantially declined and a number of stocks are considered severely depleted. In addition, 42 percent of stocks for which scientific reference points in relation to Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) are known, are currently being overfished ([Marine Institute, 2011a](#)). Despite this we are confident that a fundamental reform could, in time, deliver a healthier marine environment with viable dependent communities i.e. more fish and more fishing.

Furthermore, we believe that transparency and participation between all stakeholders (including a broader public) is essential in realising solutions. In response to the European Commission's recent proposal for CFP reform, our opinions on the major changes that have been proposed are the following:

- ***Multiannual plans with the aim of reaching sustainable [stock biomass] levels [B_{MSY}] of all fish stocks by 2015, governed by the ecosystem approach and the precautionary principle to ensure that the impacts of fishing activities on the marine ecosystem are limited.***

We view MSY only as an intermediate target to achieving healthy abundance levels. Longer-term fisheries management objectives must be developed that are more conservative and precautionary. Thus, as a starting point, we support the aim of reaching sustainable levels of fish stocks within Irish waters by 2015, without exception. To this end, fishing effort must be reduced for those fisheries which are not yet sustainable in relation to MSY in order to achieve sustainable stock biomass levels (B_{MSY}) by 2015. Defaulting to achieving MSY by 2015 only 'where possible' is, in our opinion not acceptable and jeopardises the future viability of dependent fishing communities. Rebuilding stocks to sustainable levels through immediate and sufficient efforts will



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provide the maximum opportunity for full stock recovery and the quickest path to increased economic returns ([EC, 2011b](#)).

MSY is essentially an economic concept for achieving maximum long-term production from fisheries, where higher profits can be made through reducing fishing effort below scientifically calculated limits ([Larkin, 1977](#); [Grafton et al., 2006](#)). The European Commission has predicted that if appropriate management decisions are made, overall stock sizes and catches could increase by, circa, 70 percent and 17 percent respectively, and the gross value-added for the entire EU catching industry could rise from current levels by almost 90 percent ([EC, 2011b](#)). However, the concept of MSY as currently applied within European fisheries is not an ecosystem based approach and fails to incorporate consideration for the interactions between species within marine food webs ([Larkin, 1977](#); [Mace, 2001](#); [Francis et al., 2007](#)). In addition, from an environmental point of view, MSY is not a precautionary concept and fisheries using this model may not necessarily be resilient to unpredictable environmental variability ([Larkin, 1977](#)). As such, MSY should be treated as an absolute upper limit for a fishery, not as a target ([UN, 1995](#); [Mace, 2001](#)).

In order to maintain fully functioning, healthy and productive marine ecosystems within EU waters, it is essential that both scientific advice and fisheries management decisions are grounded in the ecosystem approach ([Pikitch et al., 2004](#)). The precautionary principle must also be upheld within the process of making fisheries management decisions ([Garcia, 1994](#); [UN, 1995](#)). However, we feel that a standardised approach in all situations where scientific data is lacking is not necessary. Decisions should be made on a stock-by-stock basis using the best data available and in mixed fisheries according to the most vulnerable stock. Where data is lacking, it is imperative that decisions are always made with caution and that the scientific advice provided is still followed.

- ***Mandatory introduction of Transferrable Fishing Concessions (TFCs) from 2014 for vessels over 12 metres long and all vessels using towed gear with a minimum validity of 15 years but can be recalled before expiry in case of serious infringement by the holder.***

We are not in support of the mandatory introduction of TFCs, as proposed by the Commission. The proposed system will not address the principal CFP failure that is overcapacity in a qualitative way. We propose the introduction of a system which allocates access to the resource to those who demonstrate they fish in more environmentally and socially responsible ways. The Commission's proposal currently makes a suggestion for the introduction of such access criteria, and specifically in reference to a suggested five percent of quotas that may be set aside for such purposes. If the proposal for the introduction of TFCs within EU fisheries goes forward, we feel that an allocation system integrating social and environmental access criteria should be mandatory for 100 percent of the available quota.

- ***Phased introduction from 2014 to 2016 of an obligation to land all commercial fish species to end discarding of fish at sea.***

The discarding of juvenile commercial fish and other unwanted catch is a significant problem within Irish demersal fisheries that needs to be addressed ([Marine Institute, 2011b](#)). As such, we support elements of the Commission's proposal to eliminate discarding of fish at sea. Discard levels in European fisheries are higher than elsewhere in the world and vary across EU fisheries. The practice is particularly serious in the North-East Atlantic, where annual discards amount to over 1.3 million tonnes, representing nearly 20 percent of global



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discards for just 11 percent of global landings ([Kelleher, 2005](#)). The new CFP must ensure a shift towards more selective fishing practices in order to avoid unwanted catches in the first place. This should go hand in hand with provisions that eventually require all catches to be landed (*de facto* discard ban).

The Irish fishing industry can adapt to this policy change by implementing the recommendations included within the recently published Irish 'Atlas of Demersal Discarding' ([Marine Institute, 2011b](#)). Ireland is at an advantage over other EU member states in dealing with this issue because of the availability of this information and advice. In addition, the negative impact of an obligation to land all catches will be less detrimental to Irish vessels fishing closer to home ports – as opposed to vessels which may need to travel further distances to land total catches of reduced value.

- ***Regionalisation of fisheries management with Member States deciding implementing measures based on general framework set out EU level.***

We support the proposal for a greater regionalisation of fisheries management within the EU; however we feel that it is necessary that a more detailed description of how it is anticipated that this will be achieved is provided by the Commission. A wealth of local knowledge and regional data can be drawn upon to better inform fisheries management decisions and customise the implementation of policies on a case-by-case basis.

- ***Promotion of sustainable aquaculture in Europe with National Strategic Plans in place by 2014 and an Aquaculture Advisory Council to give advice on industry-related issues.***

We are in support of policy proposals for improved governance of the aquaculture industry in Ireland so that all current operations and further expansions fully integrate both the ecosystem approach and precautionary principal. Aquaculture ventures must not be initiated unless it can be proven that surrounding marine habitats and wild species will not be negatively affected. In addition, in the interest of globally responsible seafood production, the development of aquaculture for low trophic level species should be encouraged and it is imperative that efforts are made to reduce the fish-in-fish-out ratio in feed for high trophic level species ([Naylor et al., 2000](#)). The present aquaculture development in Ireland amounts to little more than the globalisation of overfishing – it undermines what should be a valuable wild Irish salmon fishery while contributing to the depletion of valuable fish (and krill) stocks globally.

- ***Financial support will only be granted to support the sustainability objectives of the CFP.***

We support aspects of the recently published proposal for a future European Maritime and Fisheries Fund ([EC, 2011c](#)) that promotes sustainability such as measures to support biodiversity and the elimination of monies for port construction and engine replacement. Disappointingly however, the proposal includes measures which will indiscriminately promote and develop aquaculture without social or environmental considerations and does not rule-out funding contributing to maintaining existing overcapacity ([see Anon, 2011](#)). The Irish fishing industry currently appears to be suffering substantial fleet overcapacity which has been built up through the provision of subsidies ([EC, 2011d](#)). Fleet overcapacity and the subsidies that maintain or encourage overcapacity have been recognised as drivers of overfishing both within EU waters and globally ([Munro and Sumaila, 2002](#); [Pauly et al., 2002](#); [Jacquet et al., 2009](#)). We do not support any financial aid that contribute to the maintenance of existing overcapacity and ask that Ireland reports accurately on the balance between capacity and available resources.



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In closing, as mentioned in previous communications, we would like to stress that 'not exceeding scientific advice' must be made mandatory within the decision-making process concerning all fisheries management issues in the EU. The benefits of taking such an approach are self evident, in the United States the enactment of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) has helped to stabilise many depleted stocks and begin the process of recovery for others ([Safina and Duffy, 2010](#)). Making fisheries management decisions that disregard scientific advice and exceed recommended limits is akin to building bridges and skyscrapers – one would not risk structural collapse by ignoring the advice of engineers – so why take these risks with our fisheries?

We look forward to engaging with your department on this issues.

Yours sincerely

Siobhán Egan
Policy & Advocacy Team

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