

The Green Paper on the Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy

Response of the three Fianna Fail MEPs

The three Fianna Fail MEPs, Pat the Cope Gallagher, Brian Crowley and Liam Aylward welcome the opportunity to make a submission on how best to reform the Common Fisheries Policy in Europe.

On 22 April 2009, the European Commission launched a review of the Common Fisheries Policy. The Green Paper on the future of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) identifies several shortcomings in the current policy. Launching the review, the Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Joe Borg stated that no stone will be left unturned in the context of the reform process. Moreover, this reform process according to the European Commission must not be yet another piecemeal, incremental reform but a whole-scale and fundamental reform.

Any future reform must establish clear and effective rules for fishermen in Ireland and in Europe. The reformed CFP must establish clearer policy objectives, which integrate ecological, economic and social principles. Decision-making procedures must be simplified with enforcement policies standardised across all member states. It is also essential that industry is actively involved at all stages in the decision making process.

We believe that the European Commission must re-examine the following aspects of the CFP to ensure that the Irish fisheries and aquaculture sectors have a viable and sustainable future.

1. Inshore fisheries and islands

Over 80% of the Irish fleet are small boats under 15 metres in length fishing mainly inshore and from small coastal islands. Such small scale fisheries are of huge importance to fishing communities throughout Ireland. There is often no source of alternative employment for these communities.

We recommend the introduction of a de-bureaucratised and separate regime for inshore fisheries and small islands. Such small scale fisheries have little or no impact on stocks and for the most part are fishing non quota species. We also recognise that the definition of small scale fisheries varies from region to region across Europe and therefore we would support a regionalised approach to defining small scale fisheries. One size fits all is not appropriate.

2. The Hague Agreement

We strongly urge the European Commission to re-visit the Hague Agreement and to enshrine the Hague Resolution of 1976 into the reformed CFP. The Hague Resolution reinforces the right of Ireland to protect, sustain and develop its coastal fishing communities. We see scope for enhancing the Hague Resolution to further protect, sustain and develop coastal fishing communities.

3. TAC and Quota Policy

Any change to the quota system would need to be carefully examined. We are not in favour of abandoning the TACs and quota system in favour of effort. Existing effort regimes have had a very negative impact on several Irish fisheries. Moreover, effort control is totally unsuitable for managing pelagic fisheries. Days at sea allocations have created major problems for the Irish crab fleet and vessels affected by the Cod Recovery Plan in areas VI and VII.

The Green Paper suggests that TACs and Quotas may have outlived its usefulness. Quota allocations are a constant source of grievance within the Irish fishing industry. For example, Ireland's share of areas VI and VII amounts to 42% yet annually Ireland receives approximately 16% of the total demersal in areas VI and VII. While the current system is far from ideal, we favour the introduction of new measures designed to re-adjust the current system to better meet today's needs.

4. Access and Third Country Agreements

We strongly support the retention of current access arrangements regarding the 6 and 12 mile limits. In addition, it is vital that the new Irish Conservation Box is fully protected. While the main focus of the Green Paper is on the Southern agreements, the European Commission must give equal standing to the Northern agreements under the reformed CFP.

5. Over-Capacity

Fleet over-capacity must be correctly defined in terms of economic over-capacity. Over-capacity is specific to individual fisheries and regions. Broad ranging scrapping schemes have generally failed as over-capacity is not uniformly spread over the entire European fleet.

6. Discards

Before effective rules are put in place to deal with discards there must be considerable dialogue and careful consideration of all options. It is not practical or indeed environmentally favourable to land everything that is caught. We strongly support appropriate solutions that minimises discarding to the lowest possible levels.

7. Compliance and Enforcement

The reformed CFP must standardise member state compliance and enforcement regimes. We strongly urge the European Commission to introduce a system of administrative sanctions rather than the criminal sanction system that is currently employed in Ireland.

8. Regionalisation

The introduction of regional management structures has the potential to create a simpler, cheaper and more effective CFP. Localised management structures would create many positive effects including increased responsibility on the part of stakeholders and the establishment of a CFP more sensitive to local concerns.

However, a regional structure would not be relevant for all fisheries. For example, pelagic species are widely distributed across regions and joint stock management agreements exist with third countries. We would also support an enhanced advisory role for the Regional Advisory Councils (RACs). We consider RACs as unsuitable regional management bodies.

9. Stakeholder Involvement

It is essential that the fishing industry are allowed to play a more constructive and positive role in the reformed CFP. For example, where Producer Organisations (POs) are involved in management plans and quota management there have been very good results. A greater role for stakeholders has led to improved relationships between fishermen and managers, improved compliance and fisheries management systems. This approach must be further developed under the reformed CFP.

10. Marketing and Pricing of Fish Products

Prices are at an all time low for many fish products. We support the revision of Regulation 104/2000 on the common organisation of the markets in fishery and aquaculture products. Short term revisions to the COM are urgently required to improve current price levels. Moreover, the role of Producer Organisations must be enhanced and adequately funded to improve competition in the market.

Irish and European fish products are of the highest quality among global fish producers. We support improved measures to aggressively market and label Irish and European products within Europe and third countries.

11. Scientific Research and Advice

Existing scientific advice covering biological, economic and social criteria must be improved. Moreover, effective mechanisms should be found to incorporate stakeholder information into the scientific advice. The contribution of fishermen to the body of scientific advice can no longer be ignored. The STECF (Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries) needs to be overhauled to include greater stakeholder representation. It is widely felt that STECF ignores fundamental economic and social concerns when assessing ICES data. In the same way as fisheries are progressively being managed by long-term management plans and an ecosystem approach a similar approach should be established including the provision of accurate scientific advice to manage predators of fish.

12. The Aquaculture Sector

The Irish and European Aquaculture Sector has enormous potential and can offer coastal communities a very valuable source of job creation and economic growth. However, more needs to be done. The FAO estimate that an extra 30 million tonnes of seafood per annum will be needed by 2030 in order to meet future food demand. We strongly support measures to improve the competitiveness of the Irish and European aquaculture sector. We support measures to encourage research and technological development in the sector and to encourage better planning of coastal areas and river basins to create additional space. Funding for the development of more intensive systems allowing water to be recycled must also be made available. The European Commission must also put in place measures to realise the potential that exists for offshore aquaculture in Ireland and Europe.

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