Spend the money wisely

I must admit that on February 6th I allowed myself to breathe a little sigh of relief. MEPs voted 502 to 137 in favour of the draft report by Ulrike Rodust on the CFP Basic Regulation in Plenary, following a milestone committee vote in December 2012 on a new, more sustainable CFP – the cornerstone of the CFP reform package. What a landslide victory for our seas. WWF’s key priorities are included in the European Parliament’s legislative resolution. This included objectives to ensure stocks are allowed to recover to levels above the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) and the introduction of Multi-Annual Plans and a commitment to eliminate discards. The way we fish and manage our seas is about to change, but the journey is far from over.

As MEPs you have a responsibility to ensure that EU Fisheries Ministers do not water down the reform. (cont’d page 2)

Stop bankrupting our oceans

Subsidies must promote sustainability

MEPs voted in favour of ambitious changes to the Common Fisheries Policy. The next challenge is to ensure fishing subsidies support the new policy rather than undermine it.

A poll by WWF shows that 88% of Europeans want to buy fish from stocks that are not overfished. It is one of the great ironies of the fisheries subsidies regime that taxpayers’ money has been used to fund overcapacity and drive overfishing.

The Commission has acknowledged that subsidies have contributed to this imbalance through artificially maintaining excess fishing capacity. In fact, only a few EU fleets are profitable without public support, instead many are struggling financially.

Roberto Ferrigno, WWF’s CFP project director, said the funding system has to change – not least for Europe to have any chance of delivering the robust CFP that MEPs recently voted for.

“Fish is a public resource and the marine environment provides us with many public services which cannot be jeopardised by unsustainable management of fisheries,” he explained. “In February 2013 the European Parliament voted for a strong CFP Basic Regulation. This could be a hollow victory unless we change the subsidies system and ensure it supports the measures agreed in the Basic Regulation. There are over 6.9 billion Euros of taxpayers’ money that must be spent on delivering a sustainable CFP, not undermining it.” (cont’d page 2)
Too big, not too small: EU fleet capacity does not match the available fishing resources

Strong reform package you voted for. In particular, allowing stocks to recover to MSY and managing fisheries through multiannual plans are critical to the future of our seas and our fishing industry.

Indeed, as an MEP your work on fisheries is not yet done. Next we turn to the thorny issue of subsidies, but I have every confidence that once again you will vote for a reform that is both environmentally and economically sustainable. If not, you risk undermining the robust reform you have already put in place.

**EMFF needs to support the CFP, not undermine it**

The Commission has proposed to replace the European Fisheries Fund with a new funding framework. The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) is a €6.9 billion fund which aims to “foster jobs and growth in the sector” according to the Commission. The proposals include: onboard health and safety investments, aquaculture development, the promotion of local jobs and support for implementation of marine spatial planning.

If we are to have a robust CFP reform, then taxpayers’ money needs to be spent on creating this new sustainable system – not undermining it. We certainly can’t use public money to subsidise a spate of destructive fishing activities – so funding the construction of new boats and engine replacement must be stopped.

Instead, we should spend the available funds on promoting research and development of selective fishing gears and practices, supporting measures to improve data collection, control and enforcement and scientific knowledge of fish stocks, for example. This will ultimately improve fisheries management for the well-being of coastal communities and the fishing industry.

Given how you voted in February, I have every confidence that you will vote for your constituents’ taxes to be spent bringing the new CFP to life rather than killing it off.

*Tony Long*

WWF Brussels

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**Compliance with CFP rules**

**The issue:** In the past, several Member States have benefited from EU financial assistance for their fishing sector without proper implementation and enforcement of the CFP rules.

**The solution:** EU financial assistance must become conditional on compliance with the CFP and with relevant environmental legislation, namely the Birds, Habitats and Marine Strategy Framework Directives. Subsidies should be withdrawn or suspended in cases of non-compliance.

**Capacity assessments**

**The issue:** In several Member States, there have been no attempts to assess levels and areas of overcapacity compared to stocks. This has contributed to several countries spending EU subsidies in ways that maintain overcapacity.

**The solution:** Fleet-related subsidies must be conditional upon adequate assessment of the fleet’s capacity and the progress of Member States towards achieving an effective balance between fishing capacity and available fishing opportunities. There must also be an assessment of existing fleet capacities on a fishery-by-fishery basis. Again, failure to comply should result in cuts to funding.

**Shifting resources to public goods**

**The issue:** The current proposal for EMFF falls short of making the much-needed structural shift to ensure that public aid is used exclusively for supporting a healthy and abundant supply of fish to benefit everyone. For instance, too few funds are allocated to data collection, control and enforcement, and far too many to structural measures, such as engine replacement and vessel construction.

**The solution:** Funding for data collection and enforcement needs to be doubled to determine the state of all fisheries and prevent illegal fishing. Minimum levels of spending should be set with Member States offered flexibility to spend more. The fishing sector should also contribute to the costs of data collection and control.
FLEET CONSTRUCTION AND ENGINE REPLACEMENT

The issue

European fishing subsidies have been driving overfishing through the construction of bigger, faster boats and have left stocks in a dire state. Now the system is up for reform. From 2014 to 2020 a new €6.9 billion European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) will replace the old European Fisheries Fund. According to the Commission, the EMFF is designed to “foster jobs and growth in the sector” and should support the new Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). However, in recent Parliament and Council discussions, there were calls for the EMFF to support construction of new fishing vessels and engine replacement. This, despite an admission by the Commission that the EU has failed to achieve the goal it set in previous CFP reforms, namely to end overcapacity and thus overfishing. The phasing out of aid for construction of new vessels in 2004 was one of the few major milestones achieved in the 2002 CFP reform.

The pressure

Modernising is often associated with higher efficiency and a greater capacity to catch fish (called ‘technology creep’ – see figure). While fishing capacity has been reduced, it hasn’t been reduced enough to compensate for the increase in technological efficiency in the past decade. A European Court of Auditors report from 2011 states that vessels equipped with so-called ‘fuel-efficient’ engines still have an incentive to increase their fishing effort, for instance by spending more hours at sea.

The latest

The Commission’s proposal lists construction of new fishing vessels and engine replacement as “ineligible” for funding (Articles 13 and 39.2 of the Commission’s EMFF proposal). However, some Member States have called for the reintroduction of funding for new vessels in the EMFF, as well as engine replacement. WWF argues that EU taxpayers’ money should not be used to modernise vessels in a fleet that already has overcapacity.

The solutions

Given the state of EU fish stocks and continued overcapacity, taxpayers’ money should be used to support the new CFP and the transition towards sustainable fisheries. It should be used for improving data collection, control and enforcement and research to foster sustainable fishing practices. Funding should be made conditional on fleet capacity reporting and compliance with CFP legislation and other relevant environmental directives. A new standard should be developed for capacity declaration which provides a true picture of fleet capacity. This has to result in an effective reduction of fishing capacity within the Member States.

**Did you know?** In July 2012, eight Member States sent a letter to the EU Fisheries Commissioner, Maria Damanaki, demanding maintenance of modernisation and scrapping aids, even though six* of these countries under-use their existing fishing fleet by up to 55%, according to a Commission paper (COM(2013) 85 final).

*Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain

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**EU fishing effort and technology creep**

AN END TO DISCARDS?

The issue of discards – fish thrown back dead or dying – has been one of the most controversial of the CFP reform process.

Every year, a substantial proportion of EU catches is discarded – up to 60% of the fish caught, depending on the fishery. This is a waste of precious, and limited, resources.

On February 27th, 2013, the Council of Ministers announced its position on discards. Unlike the European Parliament, which proposed a wide-ranging obligation to land and record all catches, the Council suggests that fishermen should be allowed to discard up to seven per cent of their catch, depending on the fishery. It remains unclear how this will be enforced and controlled.

But what raises major concerns is that both Parliament and Council propose to commercialise unwanted catches. Providing the option to commercialise unwanted catches undermines the central goal of minimising bycatch levels at sea through the adoption of more selective fishing practices. An obligation to land undersized fish, in combination with options to commercialise them, could fuel new but also black markets in areas like the Mediterranean where juvenile fish are a delicacy. Against this background the EMFF should not contain storage aids, as the aim of a landing obligation is to stop discards and not to encourage fishermen to fish and store more.

The key is to maximise the selectivity of fisheries. Together with other practices such as real-time, area or seasonal closures, most discards could be avoided. Improved gear and practices alongside the use of CCTV cameras are technologies that have to be embraced, but incentives need to be set within the subsidy regime to encourage fishermen to adopt these improvements.

Scotland is proof of what can be done. There, gear selectivity and real-time closures have been used to avoid catching cod. Under the Scottish Conservation Credits Scheme, fishermen have an option to gain extra days above their basic allocation by using more selective practices. Cod discard rates in the North Sea have dropped significantly and, while still low, cod is at its highest level in 14 years. The Scottish example shows how the fishing industry, conservation groups, scientists and government can work together even in complex settings to cut discards. But across Europe this is the exception rather than the rule. This specific model won’t work in every fishery, but the concept will. The Scottish White Fish Producers Association says the scheme has given them “an enthusiasm for exploring new ideas”.

High selectivity: Scottish fishermen have successfully reduced bycatch amounts.

Global Ocean Commission

The Global Ocean Commission was launched on February 12th, and met for the first time in March. Given the dire state of the world’s oceans, this group, made up of an independent panel, will have a crucial role in identifying the key threats to the world’s oceans and making recommendations for future sustainable management. Chaired by former Costa Rican President José Maria Figueres, South African cabinet minister Trevor Manuel, and former British foreign secretary David Miliband MP, the commission panel will look for solutions to the crises facing the world’s oceans. Final recommendations will be presented to the UN in 2014.

World Ocean Review

The first comprehensive analysis of the state of the world’s fisheries, the consequences for the global food supply and the ocean ecosystem has been published. The ‘World Ocean Review 2 – The Future of Fish – The Fisheries of the Future’ shows the threats to the world’s oceans and future food supplies. It concludes that managing fisheries according to the MSY principle is most important for sustainable fisheries. The report serves as a reliable knowledge base for all decision-makers. It can be downloaded or ordered for free at www.worldoceanreview.com