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Reform of the EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)

How to Achieve Sustainable and Profitable Fishing

The European Commission's proposal that 'Maximum Sustainable Yield' (MSY) be at the core of fisheries management policy has rightly been welcomed as a signal of intention to allow the recovery of depleted fish stocks by imposing restraints on fishing. This Brief extends the advice I provided earlier to the Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament supporting the proposal by the Commission to replace the old aim of the CFP, which was simply attainment of sustained yields, by a policy of seeking MSY. This brief is, however, neither a revision nor a supplement of that. It is a standalone document.

But a strict MSY policy also formalizes and legitimises greed and gives excessive status to an otherwise undesirable objective that may or may not be a reality and will impoverish the search party. An MSY policy is an economically very inefficient manner of managing renewable resources such as fish stocks, for long term profitability and social value. It is therefore very encouraging that the European Commission has declared that

“Multiannual plans providing for conservation measures to maintain or restore fish stocks above levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield shall be established as a priority.”

Here I give many reasons, with supporting calculations and arguments, for acceptance of the proposal by The Green Group that the aim should be to maintain fish stocks bigger than would be needed to provide maximal sustainable catches, by reducing the proportion of the population that is annually removed from the sea by fishing, a process we shall call the application of a strained fishing mortality rate. The big questions are why that is not only desirable but is necessary, and by how much should management aim away from the notion of MSY. I give reasons why fishing rates must be much lower than is required to provide maximum sustainable physical yield in order to ensure the future economic viability of fishing, the stability of the industry, the well being of coastal communities dependent on fishing, and continued supply of food and other commodities from marine living resources.

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