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Reforming the Common Fisheries Policy

Now is no time to be timid!

After thirty years of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), fisheries in the EU are in a perilous state, with depleted stocks, the industry lurching between crisis and disaster, and the continued long-term decline of coastal communities. These trends were evident before the CFP was created in 1982 but the Policy has notably failed to redress the situation. Action is urgently needed in the reform to redress this situation, for the importance of Europe in fisheries worldwide means that the reform is of global significance. Overfishing in European waters has led to depleted stocks, requiring increasing amounts of fish from outside the EU to satisfy the enormous demand - over 60% of fish consumed is imported or caught by European vessels in distant waters. But stocks outside Europe are depleted too, so there are fewer and fewer "distant waters" from which to obtain fish, leading to serious problems of food security in many regions, especially parts of Africa and Asia where local fishermen face increasing difficulties in supplying their local markets. Depleted stocks also lead to impoverished food webs that provoke wider ecological problems such as algal blooms, jellyfish blooms and sudden changes in species composition - ecosystem flips. Reduced marine biodiversity diminishes the ability of the oceans to compensate for other environmental problems, notably climate change and ocean acidification. The stakes truly are high. The current situation is often described as a social and economic crisis. In fact, though, a more appropriate perspective is that years of over-fishing have created an environmental disaster that is provoking a socio-economic crisis. That change in perspective offers the clue to how to improve matters so as to promote the survival of coastal fishing communities and the fish stocks they, and future generations, depend upon for their livelihoods and food. In July 2011, the European Commission published its proposals for a major reform of the CFP. The stakes in this reform are high, as the Commission is well aware, as noted in its introduction:

"The plans will secure both fish stocks and fishermen's livelihood for the future while putting an end to overfishing and depletion of fish stocks. The reform will introduce a decentralised approach to science-based fisheries management by region and sea basin, and introduce better governance standards in the EU and on the international level through sustainable fisheries agreements."

The Greens fully endorse these ambitions. However, we feel that while the proposals contain some positive elements, in many ways they are either too vague to fully understand their implications or too timid, probably in an attempt to avoid antagonising some Member States and the fishing industry, which mostly wish to continue with the status quo. (...)

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Green Policy Paper on Common Fisheries Reform

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