en

News | 18.06.2013

CFP Reform

Major improvements for stock and consumers on the way

A deal on proposals to overhaul the EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), struck last month between the European Parliament and EU governments, was endorsed by the EP's fisheries committee today. The final negotiations between the European Parliament, Member States and Commission came to a close at about 03:30 the morning of 30th May. The deal is an important step forward and will undoubtedly improve the EU's dysfunctional fisheries policy. It also includes a number of key Green proposals, such as an obligation on member states to explain what criteria they use for allocating fishing quotas – which may include priority access for sustainable fisheries. However, the outcome is tinged with disappointment that EU governments were not willing to match the ambition of the European Parliament (notably on discards and fisheries management plans).

The deal includes a number of major breakthroughs. The biggest change relates to the inclusion of the concept of Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY). There are three basic parts to it. First is how abundant do we want exploited fish stocks to be. Second is when do we want recovery to those levels of abundance to *begin*. Third is when do we want recovery to be *achieved*. The text creates an ambitious, general objective of restoring and maintaining fish stocks to "levels *above* those capable of producing MSY". This is a very positive outcome and would mean more abundant fish stocks than the norm in international law (UN Law of the Sea). Unfortunately, however, the following sentence states that fishing quotas are to be established to get stocks at MSY levels, not above them (i.e. less abundant than the general objective). This is an unfortunate inconsistency.

EU governments also agreed to Green proposals to ensure that those who fish in a more sustainable way and contribute to coastal communities may get priority access to fisheries. Rules on how the EU fleet fishes in non-EU waters have also been strengthened. EU fishing vessels will only be allowed access to surplus fish in third countries: a crucial measure for preventing the over-exploitation of developing countries' fish stocks.

However, it is regrettable that instead of opting for a full discard ban for all harvested species, as voted by the MEPs, EU governments have insisted on multiple exemptions in the final deal. While EU rules on discards will improve significantly, they may not provide enough incentives to increase selectivity and avoid unwanted catches.

These improvements join the vitally important labelling part of the reform that was finalised two weeks ago. The information available to consumers will also be improved. From 13th December 2014, labels will

have to include more detailed information about the catch area in language understandable to the consumer, such as "Bay of Biscay" or "Baltic Sea" rather than an incomprehensible code that could cover the entire Northeast Atlantic. Labels will also have to include the scientific name in addition to the common name and common information on gear type, such as trawl, net, trap etc. will have to be included, paving the way for a debate about how different gear types affect the marine environment. Consumers will then be able to make informed choices, which will be favourable to the fishermen that use the least destructive equipment.

A final part of the CFP reform remains: the money. The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) will lay down the fisheries subsidy regime for the next seven years. The fisheries committee vote is coming up on the 10th July and plenary vote is expected in September.

Outside of these reforms though, like any regulation, this new agreement is only as good as what the European Commission will do with it. It is, after all, up to them to propose the follow-up and to punish the Member States which fail to implement the provisions. The new regulation also includes a compliance committee to monitor the implementation of the CFP by the member states. The existing regulation has many good things in it that the EC failed to follow up with proposals or other actions. Even the basic regulation of 1992 had a major advance that was never implemented - it had actually proposed fishery management plans, something that never appeared until 2004. So this is a long term regulation that will require considerable political pressure to actually implement. You can count on the Greens will keep up this pressure in the European Parliament.

Recommended

Press release

©jonathan-marchal



Tilly METZ elected European Parliament Vice-President

12.11.2026

Press release



[Ukrainian children in Russia: Parliament to call for u…]

11.11.2026

Opinion

© Christian Kaufmann



[Healthy food starts with healthy farming. Europe must …]

04.11.2026

Press release

Tim Hurst (CC BY-SA 2.0)



[Methane Regulation: European Parliament capitulates to…]

22.10.2026

Contact person



Michael Earle

Advisor on Fisheries

Please share

- E-Mail