Press release | 13.06.2012

Fisheries policy reform

Short-sighted EU ministers fail to tackle problems of overfishing and wasteful discards

EU fisheries ministers late last night decided their position on proposals to reform the EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The Greens expressed dismay that the ministers weakened some of the positive elements of the CFP reform proposed by the European Commission, such as on discards and maximum sustainable yields. Commenting on the outcome of the Council, Green MEP and fisheries expert **Isabella Lövin** said:

"Fisheries ministers have demonstrated total short-sightedness with regards to the urgently-needed reform of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy. Despite all the evidence and attention on the need for fundamental reform, if we are to prevent the demise of fish stocks and the fishing industry, fisheries ministers are keeping their heads in the sand.

"To address the precarious state of many fish stocks and the problems of overfishing, the EU Commission had proposed to set catch levels that would allow fish stocks to increase above the levels needed to ensure sustainability or the 'maximum sustainable yield' (1). Scandalously, the Council has decided to overturn this proposal, postponing any shift to sustainable catches and only ´where possible´. In effect, this is prescribing the continuation of a fisheries industry based on overfishing and resulting unprofitability. This will not only drive fish stocks closer to brink, it will prevent the fishing industry from ever becoming independent of subsidies.

"To add insult to injury, the ministers decided to weaken an already timid proposal from the Commission aimed at addressing the wasteful practice of discards. Instead of banning this much-maligned system of dumping dead fish into the sea, they want to adopt a gradual, case-by-case approach to discards, while increasing catch quotas to include fish that are discarded under the current system. The odious system of discards clearly needs to be ended and this means adopting a robust ban, while accompanying this with measures to promote the necessary improvements in fisheries techniques to improve selectivity and ensure that unwanted fish are not caught in the first place, and avoiding the creation of a parallel illegal market for by-catch.

"The European Parliament must now take up the baton and ensure this CFP reform is meaningful and puts our fisheries on a sustainable footing."

(1) See an explanation for the system of maximum sustainable yields:

http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/maritime_affairs_and_fisheries/fisheries_resources_and_environment/l66037_en.htm

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