



Slow Food®

**Slow Food comments
on the Common Fisheries
Policy reform (CFP)**



INTRODUCTION

The current reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is the third since it was created in 1982. The two previous reforms (1992 and 2002) did not manage to fully meet the set goals and contributed to exacerbate the known crisis of the fisheries sector. The current CFP review process started in 2009 with the adoption of a Green Paper and an extensive public consultation process.

In the 2009 Green Paper, the Commission clearly acknowledges the failure of most of the goals set by the CFP of 2002, and identifies five structural shortcomings as causes:

- A deep-rooted problem of fleet overcapacity
- Imprecise policy objectives
- A decision-making system that encourages a short-term vision
- A framework that does not give sufficient responsibility to the industry
- The lack of a culture of compliance to rules.

In order to overcome this situation, on July 13, 2011 the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the European Commission presented a package of legislative proposals for the new reform of the CFP. The aim is to compensate for the shortcomings of previous reforms and launch a new fisheries policy based on environmental, economic and social sustainability. The proposals shall be discussed and finalized by the Council of the European Union and by the European Parliament, prior to January 1, 2013, and will then be adopted by 27 Member States.

Slow Food will be actively participating in the debate on the reform until this time. The key argument is that the safeguarding of marine and coastal environments must be the first priority, in order to protect the general quality of life of the communities involved, as well as the economic and social needs of small-scale fisheries in these areas. For this purpose, it is necessary to raise awareness and lobby both national governments and European institution representatives.

The following pages present Slow Food's critical analysis of the key new elements contained in the Basic regulation of the reform proposal. Attention is focused on the reform topics that we believe must take priority because of the important role they play in environmental protection, which is essential to safeguarding small-scale fisheries. We emphasize that this is a two-way relationship, as their economic activity of small-scale coastal fisheries also acts in favor of safeguarding the local environment and community. However, in order to set these goals and achieve them, there must be a continuous availability of updated scientific data to interpret the existing situation with full knowledge of the facts. To this purpose – and this is probably the main shortcoming of this reform – research at sea must be strengthened at both a national and community level.

GENERAL GOALS

We welcome the fact that the general goals of the new CFP are expressed in a very clear and unambiguous way.

Among the goals, the following are particularly outstanding:

- The commitment to follow a **precautionary approach** to restore the stocks of target species by 2015 and ensure that fishing activities maintain stocks above the level of **maximum sustainable yield (MSY)**.
- An **approach based on ecosystems** to ensure that fisheries have a limited impact on marine ecosystems.
- **Integration of EU environmental legislation in the CFP.**

However, it is unacceptable that there is no hierarchy allocated to the environmental, economic and social goals. Rather, all goals have the same priority and this generates confusion in the implementation of the principle. **Environmental sustainability should be the priority**, as it is the necessary prerequisite to achieve the other two types of sustainability: if fish stocks are endangered, clearly the economic and social benefits of fishing operations are also at risk.

MULTI-ANNUAL MANAGEMENT PLANS

To achieve the goal of the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) by 2015, the reform proposal stipulates European Union fisheries will be managed on multi-annual plans. These plans are set by the European Union Council and are currently defined for the most exploited stocks. They identify Total Allowable Catches for each stock and contain a series of measures to promote the stock's sustainable management (for instance, the creation of closed zones – such as protected marine areas and nursery areas – technical measures on equipment and mesh size of fishing nets, monitoring, inspection and control activities).

In the Commission's proposal, **these plans refer to the type of fishery and not to individual stocks and wisely introduce a multi-specificity criterion that acknowledges the interdependencies in the system.** This means that more fish stocks are covered by a lower number of plans, which contain measures to reduce both unwanted catches and the negative impact on ecosystems.

When defining such plans, it will also be necessary to **adopt a precautionary approach**, thus taking into account the many uncertainties related to fisheries management and the availability of scientific data and opinions.

Despite these good premises, on the whole the proposal for management plans lacks specific provisions on the concrete ways to define and implement the plans themselves. We believe that this lack of practical indications is also the result of the scarce availability of data from scientific research, whose budget has constantly and drastically decreased in recent years – we have reached a point where there are now only two research programs under way in the entire EU. It is therefore **necessary to set specific deadlines and transparent methods to develop and adopt the plans**, envisaging participatory processes of co-management from the bottom up, which can foster sustainable development and at the same time ensure the involvement and participation of all the segments and stakeholders of the sector.

OBLIGATION TO LAND THE ENTIRE CATCH

One of the most innovative and, theoretically, welcomed elements of the new proposal is the ban **to discard unwanted catches into the sea** and thus the obligation to land the entire catch. Art. 15 of the draft regulation lists the commercial species covered by the provision and a time-frame for its implementation.

Shifting from the concept of fishing quotas to catch quotas is a significant step forward – also from a cultural perspective – because it implicitly introduces the idea that fishing is not a “production” activity. Fishing relies directly on natural resources and thus should not be regulated on a primarily commercial basis. It would be theoretically desirable that quotas are set also for non-commercial species, and that these catches are also taken into account in the calculations.

Unfortunately this innovative proposal, which has been favorably received, is basically inapplicable: it is not technically possible to carry out monitoring or any control, if not randomly, on what fishermen discard at sea when they pull up their nets and are still very far from the docks.

In order to motivate fishermen to respect the ban, the regulation introduces the possibility to sell by-catches once processed into fish flours or animal feed. However, this would not induce fishermen to fish more selectively, and would therefore lead to the failure to achieve the very goal of the ban.

It is necessary to strengthen the mechanisms aimed at avoiding by-catches, tackling the issue in the context of multi-annual plans through the **promotion of more selective fishing methods and active support for research. In addition, an intensive public education and awareness raising campaign is needed in order to diversify the range of eaten species as much as possible by improving consumer knowledge and skills.**

TRANSFERABLE FISHING CONCESSIONS

Fleet reduction programs have not been successful in achieving their intended goals, as a widespread problem of fleet overcapacity for the available resources still exists. The Commission highlights this themselves: 88% of Community fish stocks is subject to a fishing pressure above the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and 30% of stocks is below safe biological limits.

The proposed action to address this issue envisages the **implementation of a mandatory system of transferable fishing concessions by December 31, 2013.** The concessions will apply to all vessels, with the exception of boats shorter than 12 meters with fixed gears, and will have a minimum duration of 15 years. Each State can also impose fees and define clear and transparent criteria for the allocation of concessions.

The Commission asks individual Member States to decide whether to introduce the system of fishing concessions to small-scale coastal fisheries – given the social and economic vulnerability of this segment of the industry.

It is clear that the Commission is favoring a kind of **privatization of Community waters**, and the reduction of the fleet is only the result of market rules. The fear shared by many environmental NGOs, is that the proposed system will lead to an excessive concentration of licenses in the hands of few operators and marginalization of local fishing communities.

The concession system seems to aim at a reduction of the fleet in terms of number of vessels, without looking at their actual fishing capacity. If we allow market dynamics to lead the decision making, no effort is made to eliminate the most inappropriate and environmentally and socially destructive types of fisheries.

It would be **necessary to define minimum criteria to ensure that the reduction of the fishing effort targets, in the first place, those operators who do not implement virtuous and sustainable fishing practices.**

In conclusion, although the idea that - in order to pursue a rational and efficient management of fisheries - it is necessary to limit the access to resources and manage fishing rights makes perfect sense, these mechanisms must be part of a system which entails privileges and responsibilities. In addition, the mechanism of concessions is only one of the possible ways to manage fisheries on the basis of rights. It would therefore be more appropriate to cancel the mandatory nature of the proposal on Transferable Fishing Concessions, and offer Member States a series of instruments to choose from to **allocate fishing rights based on sustainability criteria.**

REGIONALIZATION

In its proposal, the Commission has reviewed the current 'top-down' decision-making system that sets all measures related to fisheries – including specific technical provisions – that are adopted at the European level and imposed on operators.

The solution identified by the Commission is the **regionalization of the decision-making process:** European institutions will define the principles to be pursued and the outcomes to be achieved (for instance, the adoption of multi-annual plans, the obligation to land the entire catch, the definition of total fishing opportunities), while each Member State will have to issue the most appropriate technical measures to attain them.



We believe that the Commission's proposal is rather weak on this point. Without significant participation from stakeholders in the decision-making process, the risk is to go back to a national management of fisheries. In order to really give a sense of responsibility to the sector and respond to the needs and features of each marine region at best, it is necessary to **explicitly mention the involvement of all interested parties**.

Another key element should be added: given the very features of the activities and environments involved, it cannot be ignored that most stocks are shared by more than one region or State. As a consequence, a shared management is unavoidable. Laws and regulations decided by individual Member States would translate (in addition to a sort of abdication of its role by the Commission) into the protection of national and group interests, with the introduction of mechanisms which would damage resources and the weakest operators.

SCIENTIFIC OPINIONS

The proposal defines the main rules and obligations for Member States in terms of collection, management and dissemination of data, with the goal of their harmonization.

As the scientific data provided by individual governments are used - in the first place - as the basis to adopt multi-annual management plans, it would be appropriate to define **precise deadlines for their collection**, as well as some form of **supervision by an independent scientific body**.

Once again, it must be underlined that national and European resources to support such research are completely inadequate.

AQUACULTURE

In order to promote sustainability and contribute to food security, the Commission intends to **define, by 2013, strategic guidelines for the development of aquaculture**. The creation of a new advisory council for aquaculture, with the task of issuing opinions on sector-related matters, is also planned.

We would like to highlight a few critical points:

- It is necessary to avoid the same problems of overcapacity, low profitability and environmental damages already experienced in the fishery sector;
- The promotion of aquaculture should aim at the **development of responsible and environmentally sustainable activities**;
- **Consumer education and information** is crucial, as aquaculture has potentially very negative consequences on the environment.

CONCLUSIONS

The core argument of Slow Food's position is that fishery management cannot be regarded as one, monolithic issue. On the contrary, it is necessary to take into account a series of complex and diverse aspects: different interests, resources, fishing methods, places, histories, eating habits, cultures and economies. For this reason, in order to be effective, regulatory policies must be able to mirror this complexity, and take into account the many specific situations and the real opportunities for intervention. We believe that the proposed CFP that is currently under discussion can become the right tool for intervention - if reviewed and discussed in light of the many needs involved, and if it tries to meet them giving priority to the protection of the environment, seen both as a shared asset and as an instrument and prerequisite for production activities.

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