

Common fisheries policy: conservation and sustainable exploitation (repeal. Regulations (EEC) No 3760/92 and (EEC) No 101/76)

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Member States are required to submit to the Commission, before 1 May each year, a report on their efforts during the previous year to achieve a sustainable balance between fleet capacity and available fishing opportunities. On the basis of these reports and the data in the Community fishing fleet register, the Commission produced a summary for 2007, which it presented to the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) and to the Committee for Fisheries and Aquaculture. This report from the Commission now presents that summary of the Member States' reports.

This year only 13 Member States submitted their reports on time; eight reports were between two weeks and two months late. At the time this report was drafted, the United Kingdom had not yet sent their reports to the Commission. This report sums up Member States' descriptions of their fishing fleets, the impact of the existing schemes to reduce fishing effort, Member States' compliance with the entry/exit scheme and the weaknesses and strengths of their fleet management systems.

In this report, the Commission concludes that **the quality of the Member States' reports has steadily improved since the first one covering the year 2003, but still more needs to be done.** As in previous years, the majority of the reports did not describe the Member States' fleets in relation to fisheries in a manner allowing the Commission to analyse the efforts made to achieve a balance between the capacity of the fishing fleet and the available fishing opportunities. Instead, Member States emphasised the national fleet management systems implemented and the trends in fleet capacity in relation to the entry/exit scheme.

The application of the guidelines for assessment of the balance between fishing capacity and opportunities is a step in the right direction, but not all Member States have made use of this tool. The Commission recognises that both the short deadline for applying these guidelines and their rather technical nature posed difficulties for some Member States. Additional efforts should be made during the current year to implement the guidelines fully for the 2008 report.

Most of the reports are compiled in such a way that a clear link between effort management measures and fleet capacity adjustment cannot be established, nor do they critically analyse the trends in real effort deployed. Generally speaking, the impact of fishing effort adjustment measures on fleet capacity seems to be limited. In some cases, the main driver of fleet capacity reduction appears to be a combination of poor economic performance of the fleet and the availability of Community or national funds. This may be due, in part, to the absence of effort management systems for several fisheries but also to the limited effect of the existing ones.

During 2007 the fishing capacity of the EU fleet continued its slow but **steady decline at an annual rate of between 2% and 3%**. This has been the overall trend for the last 16 years, although, the trend is not so uniform when looking at individual Member States. This fact puts a question mark over the effectiveness of the capacity adjustment measures applied under the CFP.

The scientific assessment tells us that 30% of the stocks for which data exist are fished outside safe biological limits and 80% are fished at levels above Maximum Sustainable Yield. At the same time, for large parts of the fleet, the capacity is under-utilised, i.e. the number of fishing days is less than the maximum possible, and poor economic performance is recorded, which has been further aggravated

during 2008. In the light of these considerations the capacity reductions achieved appear to be insufficient to result in a sustainable balance between capacity and fishing opportunities in the short term. Moreover, technological progress, which according to some estimates is of the same order of magnitude as the observed capacity reductions, risks neutralising their effect.

Lastly, the Council adopted, on 22 July 2008, temporary and specific measures for the restructuring of the EU fishing fleet, thus providing an opportunity to achieve the necessary restructuring of the fleet which should not be missed.