

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

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The Commission presents a report on Member States' efforts during 2009 to achieve a sustainable balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities. The report sums up Member States' descriptions of their fishing fleets, the impact of the existing schemes to reduce fishing effort and Member States' compliance with the entry/exit scheme.

Fishing capacity trends during 2009: according to the EU fishing fleet register, on 31 December 2009 the EU fishing fleet was made of 84 301 vessels with a total fishing capacity of 1 797 183 GT and 6 606 556 kW. During 2009, the number of vessels decreased by 1.53%, while tonnage and power decreased by 2.84% and 2.24% respectively. These figures include the vessels registered in the outermost regions.

Results for the mainland fleet, i.e. excluding vessels registered in the outermost regions: the fleet subject to the entry-exit regime, i.e. excluding vessels registered in the outermost regions and those used exclusively for aquaculture, reduced its capacity during 2009 by approximately 2.80% and 2.55% in terms of tonnage and power respectively. Despite the 2004 and 2007 enlargements, the EU fishing fleet is smaller now than it was on 1 January 2003.

During the period seven year period 2003-2009, the capacity of the 'EU-15 fleet' was reduced by approximately 16% both in terms of tonnage and power. The 'EU-10 fleet' was reduced by 31% in tonnage and 27% in power. Romania and Bulgaria have withdrawn around 7% of capacity in terms kW.

Results for the fleets registered in the outermost regions: the capacity of the fleet registered in the Canary Islands has been reduced in terms of both tonnage and power. In the French Overseas Departments, the tonnage of the fleet was reduced but its power increased due mainly to the regularisation of engine power, following an increase in the reference levels. In Azores and Madeira, following the implementation of a fleet development plan, the power of the fleet increased, although its tonnage continued to decline. In all cases the reference levels for the various fleet segments were complied with.

Compliance with fishing capacity management rules: all Member States have complied with these rules, including the specific limitations for the fleets registered in the outermost regions. On average, the fishing capacity of the EU fleet is roughly 9% below the fishing capacity ceilings that result from the management rules.

Quality of Member States' reports: the report gives a summary of the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) assessment of Member States' reports. Overall there is variation in the completeness and quality of reports for 2009 but there is a general improvement in completeness compared to the reports for 2008. Once again a common strength amongst the Member States' reports was the description provided of their fleets, changes of the fleet over the year and linkages with fisheries.

The main conclusions are:

- during 2009, the **overall reduction in fleet capacity** continued to be between 2% and 3% on average, as it was during previous years. The overall trend in fishing capacity since 1992 shows no appreciable change in the tendency;
- the Commission is concerned that **the total power of the fleet as recorded in the EU and Member States Fleet Registers may not reflect the power effectively deployed at sea**, an issue that will be addressed by way of application of the new Control Regulation and its implementing rules;
- the economic data for 2009 was not available for the majority of the Member States in which case, the reports include data for 2008. The Annual Economic Report shows a deterioration of the economic performance in 2008. It is reasonable to conclude that, the **economic performance of the fleet in 2009 was influenced by the high fuel prices in 2008 and the subsequent economic crises**. Furthermore, it can be seen from the Member States' reports that fishing activity, i.e. the average number of fishing days per vessel is rather low and often, when times series are available, shows a declining trend;
- **the amount of capacity decommissioned with public aid in 2009 increased approximately 10% in relation to 2008**. Capacity reductions with public funds accounted for 73% in GT and 79% in kW of the net capacity reduction during 2009. This seems to indicate that economic problems and the scarcity of fishing opportunities due to overexploitation of resources are pushing down the size of the fleet. For many Member States, the size of their fleet is well under the capacity ceilings which result from the entry-exit regime, as mentioned above;
- moreover, **decommissioning programmes**, being always a voluntary option for vessel owners, are driven by poor economic results and not necessarily by the state of the stocks. These considerations call for a reflection on the role of fishing capacity limitations and put into question the need and effectiveness of publicly financed capacity reductions;
- **the implementation of individual transferable rights (ITR)** in some fisheries has resulted in capacity reductions without public aid. The extension of ITR schemes to more fisheries, especially those with a greater excess of fishing capacity could facilitate its adjustment;
- despite the fact that some specific fleets seem to be reasonably in balance with its fishing opportunities, **the overall assessment indicates an excess of fishing capacity**. This can be concluded from the combination of over fishing, i.e. excessive fishing mortality in some stocks which calls for fishing effort reductions, low capacity utilisation, i.e. a very low average number of fishing days per vessel and low profitability. The current rate of capacity reductions, which are at least partly compensated by technological progress, will make it difficult to eliminate overcapacity in the short term if no changes are made to the current policy.

The opportunity to implement the policy changes required to eliminate excess of fleet capacity in the coming reform of the common fisheries policy should not be missed.