



GREEN BUDGET GERMANY

FORUM ÖKOLOGISCH-SOZIALE MARKTWIRTSCHAFT

EU CITIZENS WANT MAJOR SHIFT IN FISHERIES SUBSIDIES

GBE Briefing

SUMMARY

On 22 and 23 October EU Fisheries Ministers are scheduled to reach a preliminary agreement on how the EU should subsidise the European fisheries sector in the future. To gauge public opinion in the lead-up to that meeting, Green Budget Europe recently asked citizens in six EU member states about their opinion on EU fisheries subsidies, via a representative survey conducted by YouGov. Survey results clearly indicate that the public has **a strong opinion on how public money should be spent in the European fisheries sector:**

- **76 percent of respondents want fisheries subsidies not to be granted before proper fleet assessments have been carried out**
- **68 percent expressed their view that subsidies should be put toward stock maintaining and rebuilding instead of fleet-related issues.**
- **80 percent do not agree with giving subsidies to fishermen who break fisheries law.**

BACKGROUND: DESTRUCTIVE EFFECTS OF FISHERIES SUBSIDIES

Subsidies are funded by us as taxpayers and aim to have effects on the national economy. This is not always the result, unfortunately, and direct or indirect subsidies for fuel, energy or the agricultural sector are examples of when public aid can lead to economically damaging incentives and wider negative impacts.

Public discussion about subsidies for energy or agriculture has been widespread and thorough, however, **there has been little public debate on fisheries subsidies and their negative effects**. Despite, or perhaps because of, this fisheries subsidies are commonly linked to overfishing¹.

Fifty percent of assessed stocks in the Atlantic are overfished, as are 80 percent in the Mediterranean and five out of seven fish stocks in the Baltic². It is widely accepted in the EU that fisheries subsidies have fuelled overfishing by contributing to the structural problem of fleet overcapacity³.

¹ See for instance the 2002 Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, 31f; the 2005 WTO Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration Annex D 9; and the final text of the 2012 Rio+20 conference, paragraph 173 (now endorsed by the UN General Assembly).

² European Commission (2012), Communication from the Commission to the council concerning a consultation on Fishing Opportunities for 2013, COM(2012) 278 final.

³ See for instance EU Commission (2008) non paper: Reflections on further reform of the Common Fisheries Policy; Sumaila, R. & Pauly, D. (2006) Catching more bait: A bottom-up re-estimation of global fisheries subsidies (2nd version), Fisheries Centre Research Reports 2006 Vol. 14 No. 6, University of British Columbia

In order to gauge the extent of public knowledge of fisheries subsidies and their effects during this period of reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and the future European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), Green Budget Europe conducted a poll in several EU member states.

METHODOLOGY

From 14 to 20 September 2012, just over 7,000 people⁴ from the six EU member states: Germany, France, United Kingdom, Poland, Italy and Spain, were asked four questions on both their view of the effects that fisheries subsidies might have and how the subsidies should be spent. The representative survey was conducted by the polling institute YouGov and was based on an online-panel omnibus and included data clusters in gender, age and region.

QUESTIONS AND RESULTS

Question 1

People were asked to agree or to disagree with the following statements:

- EU public aid to fishermen contributes to overfishing
- EU public aid ensures an economically viable fishing industry
- EU public aid makes fish in the supermarket cheaper.

The causal relationship between fisheries subsidies and overfishing has been well-documented; indeed segments of the EU fishing fleet are even dependent on public aid to remain viable.⁵

Yet on average across the six EU member states, 44% agreed with the statement that public aid to fishermen contributes to overfishing, while 36% disagreed; 56% agreed that public aid ensures an economically viable fishing industry, and only 28% did not; finally, only 35% agreed that public aid makes fish in the supermarket cheaper, while 47% disagreed^{6,7}.

The results for question 1 varied across member states. The majority of respondents in Poland and Spain disagreed with the statement 'EU public aid to fishermen contributes to overfishing', while people from Germany, Italy, France and the UK tended to agree that there was a link. One possible explanation for these mixed results is that the impacts of fisheries subsidies have not been adequately communicated to the public.

Question 2

"In general, EU public aid is divided into subsidies for fishing businesses and subsidies for policies that aim to maintain and rebuild fish stocks, such as collecting data and combatting illegal fishing. Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?"

Respondents could choose between two statements and 'Don't know'.

⁴ 1,000 in France, 1,002 in Italy, 1003 in Spain, 1001 in Poland, 1,086 in Germany and 2,001 people in the UK.

⁵ See for instance Poseidon (2010), FIFG 2000–2006 Shadow Evaluation, available at http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Protecting_ocean_life/FIFG-evaluation.pdf, or Sumaila et. al. (2009), Subsidies to High Seas Bottom Trawl Fleets and the Sustainability of Deep-sea Demersal Fish Stock, available at <http://www.ecomarres.com/downloads/subsid3.pdf>

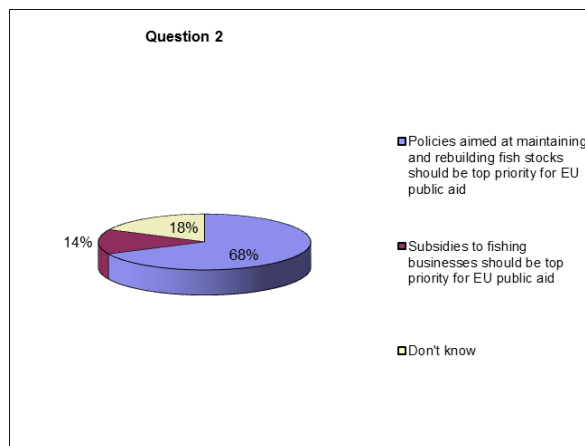
⁶ Agree = (Totally Agree + Agree); Disagree = (Disagree + Totally Disagree)

⁷ Where percentages do not add up to 100%, we have not added in the 'don't know's'.

14% of respondents felt the statement closest to their view was: *Subsidies to fishing businesses should be top priority for EU public aid.*

68% felt the statement that most closely reflected their view was: *Policies aimed at maintaining and rebuilding fish stocks should be top priority for EU Public aid.*

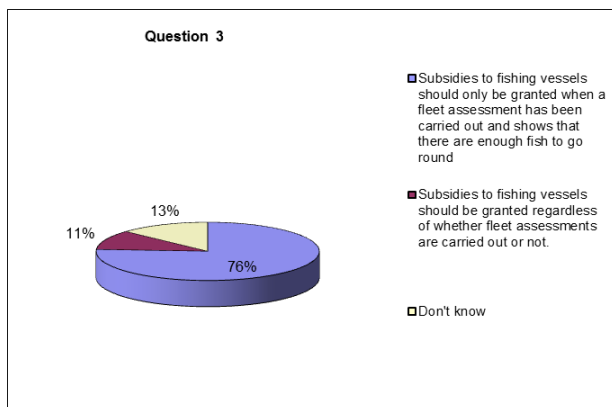
Current EU fisheries subsidies favour individual fishermen rather than using public funds for public services, such as collecting data and combatting illegal fishing. **Currently, the EU supports the fishing sector with annual funding of roughly €836 million for structural measures and about €156 million for fisheries partnership agreements. In comparison, funding for research and data collection and for control and enforcement measures is relatively low, with less than €50 million allocated for each funding area per year.**⁸



Therefore, the results to this question imply that the public would favour funding towards support for policies aiming to rebuild fish stocks, such as collecting data and control and enforcement being given priority.

Question 3

“There are many types of fishing vessels catching many types of fish in many different places. The result of all this fishing is that fish stocks are often depleted. The aim of a ‘fleet assessment’ is to avoid this by keeping the size and power of the fishing fleet in line with the amount of fish that can be caught without unnecessarily depleting them. Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?”



Respondents could chose between two statements and ‘Don’t know’.

76% of respondents across the six EU member states felt that the following statement most closely reflected their view: “Subsidies to fishing vessels should only be granted when a fleet assessment has been carried out and shows that there are enough fish to go round”.

11% of respondents felt that this statement was closest to their view: *Subsidies to fishing vessels should be granted regardless of whether fleet assessments are carried out or not*“.

The real power of the EU fishing fleet is unknown. However, the fishing sector receives subsidies irrespective of whether it might already fish beyond sustainable levels. While there is not enough public data to link specific payments for vessel modernisation with the state of stocks, it has been shown that between 2000 and 2008 member states paid more than 30 million euro in EU subsidies to the bluefin tuna fishing fleet, in spite of the endangered status of the species⁹.

⁸ EU Court of Auditors Special Report No 7/2007.

⁹ <http://www.greens-efa.eu/de/eu-subsidies-to-bluefin-tuna-fishing-fleets-3052.html>

The key message from the responses to this question is that the majority of people do not want subsidised vessels hunting too few fish. People recognise the need for an EU fleet that complements the fish stocks and does not deplete them.

Question 4

“ To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? ‘Fishermen who break the rules should not receive EU public aid for fishing’.”

80% of participants agreed¹⁰ with the statement.

EU citizens find it unacceptable that operators who engage in serious infringements can continue to benefit from EU financial assistance, although this is currently the case¹¹. EU fishermen can break the rules of the CFP one day then benefit from aid for the modernisation of their vessel the day after. A list of vessels that have received fisheries subsidies and have been involved in serious infringements is available at <http://fishsubsidy.org/infringements/>.

CONCLUSION

Even though European fisheries subsidies have not been a strong focus of public discussion to date, the results of the public poll show that European citizens have a clear view on how their tax money should be spent. The majority of EU citizens want to see public money being spent on policies that support the restoration of fish stocks, and do not want it spent on modernising fisheries that have too many and too-powerful vessels for the available fish stocks. Last but not least, the public strongly believes that operators who do not obey the law should not benefit from future aid.

It is striking that the participants’ responses indicate how EU citizens would like fundamental changes to the existing policy and position of governments in the ongoing reform of the CFP and the subsidies regime.

Meanwhile, the question on whether the public saw a link between fisheries subsidies and overfishing, or the industry or supermarket prices, brought a rather mixed response. As a link to overfishing has been well-documented, this response highlights a need for decision-makers, the fisheries sector and environmental organisations to communicate the issue to the public more often, more widely and more explicitly.

CONSEQUENCES FOR EUROPEAN DECISION-MAKERS

Up until early 2013, European decision-makers will decide on the path of future European fisheries policy as well as the legislative framework for EU fisheries subsidies. During the reform of the CFP and discussions about the new European Marine and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), EU fisheries ministers and European parliament representatives should recognise the will of EU citizens when making such long-term decisions. The results of the public poll clearly indicate the wish by EU citizens for a fundamental change regarding public spending in fisheries.

¹⁰ Agree = Totally Agree + Agree

¹¹ EU Council Regulation (EC) No. 1224/2009 establishing a Community control system for ensuring compliance with the rules of the common fisheries policy.

ABOUT US

Green Budget Europe is a platform that aims to promote Environmental Fiscal Reform and Market-Based Instruments on the European level and bring together EU and government institutions, NGO's, industry associations, and experts. GBE was founded in 2008 and currently operates as a project within Green Budget Germany.

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Green Budget Europe is a member of the Ocean2012 coalition.

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