



Unknown waters

Without better funding for data collection and enforcement, reforms to the common fisheries policy risk falling flat

We know nothing about the health of half our EU fish stocks. Lax government controls and law enforcement mean that 30–40% of the fish we land comes from illegal, unreported or unregulated sources. To return our seas to a sustainable and profitable state we need adequate data on our fisheries and proper enforcement of the laws that govern them.

Executive summary

Imagine if European waters had enough fish to feed an additional 160 million EU citizens; if our fishing industry yielded an additional revenue of €3.2 billion each year and created up to 100,000 new jobs.^{1,2} This could be a reality if we let fish stocks grow to their maximum sustainable yield (MSY) by setting appropriate catch quotas. The sooner fish stocks are returned to sustainable levels the sooner these benefits can be realised.

The newly approved Common Fisheries Policy aims to restore fish stocks and make European fisheries sustainable and profitable once more. But this can only be done with adequate data on fish stocks and the proper enforcement of laws that prevent overfishing.

It is vital for the future of Europe's fish stocks that the financial instrument of the CFP – the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) – is targeted towards data collection, control and law enforcement.

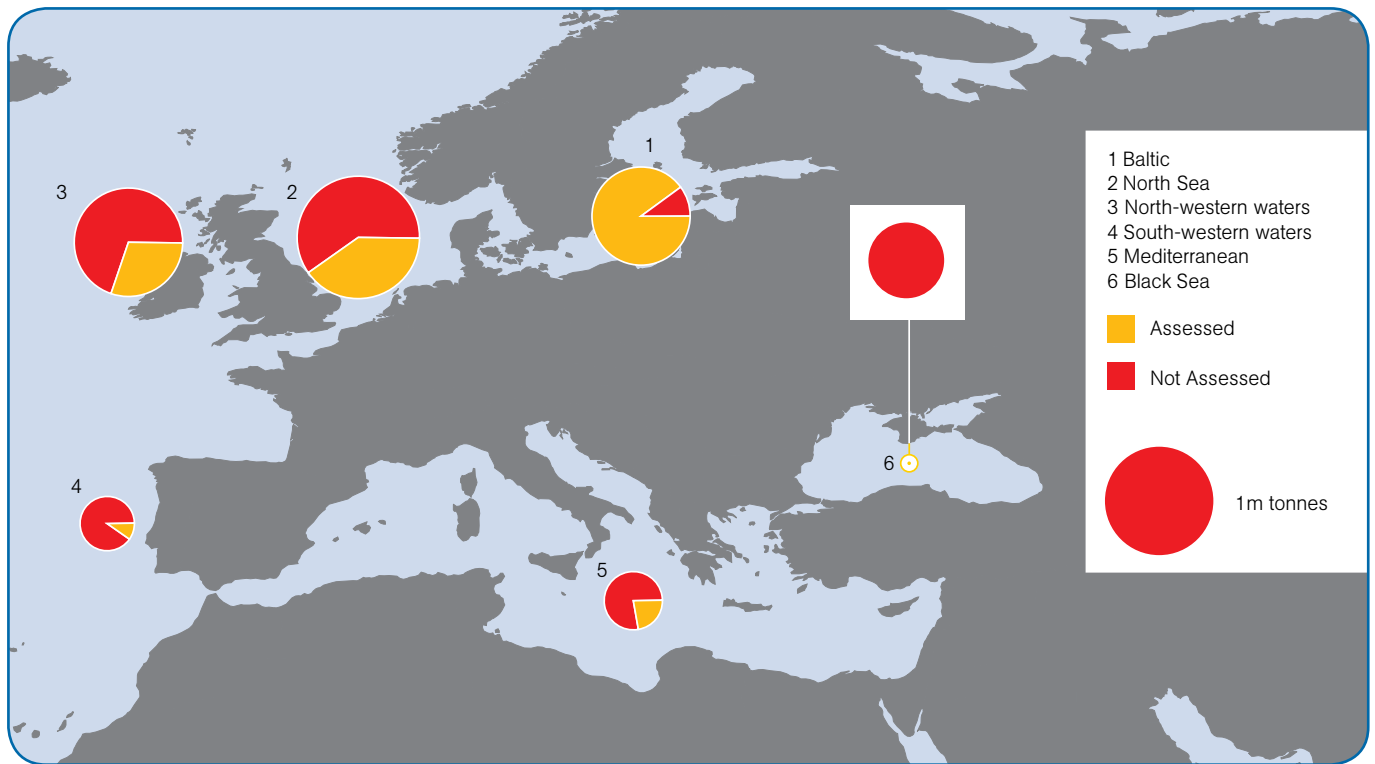
Current funding for data collection, control and enforcement is currently at just 1.5% of the value of

landings. Tripling this amount to €302 million annually would be a small investment given the additional gains in jobs and food supplies. For every €1 invested in data collection, control and enforcement, there is a potential return of €10. What's more, industry stakeholders support the idea of communal measures, with some calling for better coordination of data collection.^{3,4}

The new EMFF subsidies framework is an opportunity to dramatically increase funds for data collection, control and enforcement. The outcome of the upcoming EMFF vote in the European Parliament will either support continued overfishing or support appropriate quotas, sustainable catches and the responsible management of our fish stocks.

Data collection

Accurate information on the available fish stock biomass in EU waters enables appropriate catch quotas to be set. Unfortunately, the health of much of the EU fish stock is unknown.⁵ In the North East Atlantic less than half of the fish stock by gross tonnage has been assessed. In the Mediterranean and Black Sea this number falls to less than a quarter (see map).



Source: Le Quesne *et al.*⁶

Better management

Evidence shows there is a direct link between stock assessment and sustainable management. One study that looked at fisheries around the world found a clear decline among unassessed fish stocks and signs of recovery among those that were assessed.⁷

Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing disregards catch quotas. In 2008, a report estimated that 30–40% of the fish caught in EU comes from IUU fishing.⁸

The recent CFP reforms include a new ban on fish discards. But without proper control and enforcement, this law will be completely undermined. The focus on discards was triggered by public outcry when European Commission data showed that EU fishers currently discard on average nearly a quarter of their catch and up to 70% in some areas – an event that illustrated the powerful role that data collection can play.⁹

Research has also shown that globally there is a link between the strength and competence of government and smaller levels of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.¹⁰ This finding holds for European countries, where vessel observers have reported attempted intimidation and bribery.¹¹

In Europe, data from inspections coordinated by the Community Fisheries Control Agency indicate that at least one in 17 EU vessels may be infringing regulations at any one time.

Current funding

To date little has been invested in data collection, control and enforcement to support sustainable fishing. From 2007–13, annual EU investment in data collection was €51.4 million. The EU invested €49.3 million annually in control and enforcement over the same period. The combined expenditure of just over €100 million is only 1.5% of the value of landings – despite the large extent of overfishing.¹²

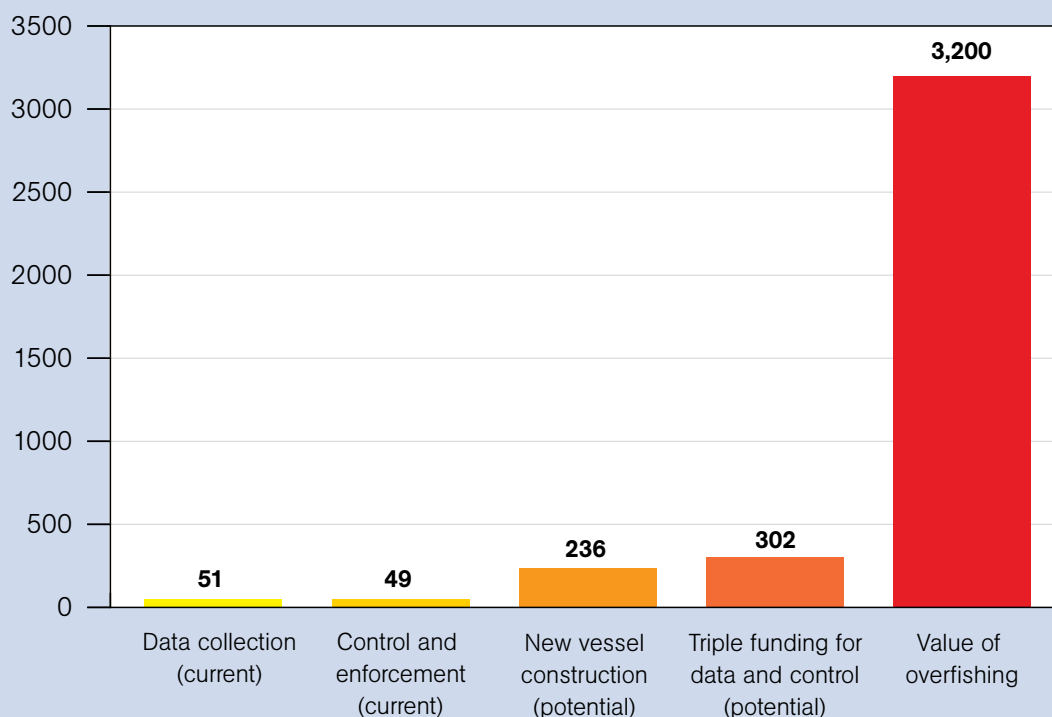
European Commission data shows that subsidies for other measures – many of them harmful – greatly exceed funding for data collection, control and enforcement. For example, funding to gain access to foreign waters is over three times what is spent on data collection in EU waters.¹³

A profitable investment

Tripling the amount of current funding for data collection, control and enforcement to an annual investment of €302 million would go a long way towards tackling overfishing in the EU, which could deliver additional catch worth €3.2 billion each year. If these measures are successful, for every €1 invested in data collection, control and enforcement, there is a potential return of €10. Clearly the relatively small funds can deliver massive benefits when overfishing is addressed.

The increased funds are still only 4.6% compared to value of landings. Furthermore, the investment of €302 million is comparable to the potential funding in the EMFF for new vessel construction (€236 million) under

Figure 1. Annual Amounts in EU Fisheries (€ Million)



Source: European Commission^{14,15,16}; Crilly & Esteban¹⁷

amendment 32b (see table). More vessel construction will undermine progress towards restoring fish stocks, as it contributes to overcapacity – the main cause of overfishing.

This level of return on investment is reflected in other studies on data collection, control and enforcement. An impact assessment of the European Marine Observation and Data Network estimated that a programme cost of €20 million could expect returns in the range of €360-500 million. This is a return of €18 to €25 for every €1 invested.¹⁸

As for control and enforcement, a recent trial of banning discards in the UK used electronic monitoring on all vessels yielded dramatic reductions in the level of discards. The annual cost of electronic monitoring per vessel was €9,139, which is estimated to fall to around €8,000. Yet even this expensive surveillance technology – which on an EU-wide scale might cost up to €1 billion – would pay for itself with a similar level of discard reduction.^{19,20}

An opportunity for change

Without proper data collection and control and enforcement, EU fisheries law risks being little more than paper policy. The extent of data deficiency in EU fisheries is significant with half of fish stocks having an unknown status.²¹ The extent of fishing bypassing control and enforcement is estimated at 30-40%²² and the current EU discard rate is 23%.²³

UK Discard Trial Results

Fishery	Average discard rate (%)	Trial discard rate (%)
Cod trawl fishery (North Sea)	38.0	0.2
Sole beam trawl fishery (Area VIle)	28.0	0.1
Plaice beam trawl fishery (Area VIId and e)	8.0	0.2
Anglerfish beam trawl fishery (Area VII)	6.0	1.1
Megrim beam trawl fishery (Area VII)	12.0	1.3

Source: Marine Management Organisation²⁴

The potential rewards from sustainable fisheries management are massive. The new EMFF subsidies framework is an opportunity to dramatically increase funds for data collection, control and enforcement. It is a chance to tackle overfishing and enjoy the subsequent benefits of increased revenues, food supplies and jobs.

Endnotes

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