



10 Reasons to End Overfishing in Europe

Taking action would benefit the marine environment, as well as EU citizens and fishermen

Overview

In the waters of Europe, fish and fisheries have played an important part in the history, culture, and well-being of local communities for many centuries. However, this renewable resource has been overexploited for decades, leading to serious consequences for marine ecosystems.

Management of fisheries in the European Union has improved over the past 15 years, but the fishing limits set by EU fisheries ministers too often exceed the levels advised by scientists. That prevents Europeans from realising many of the benefits of sustainable, productive fish stocks and fisheries.

The EU's reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), which took effect at the start of 2014, requires an end to overfishing by 2015 where possible, and by 2020 at the latest. Restoring fish stocks to sustainable levels through science-based management is essential not just because it is the law, but also because it will help ensure a healthy marine environment for generations to come.

Why Overfishing Must End



- 1 Fish stocks would be allowed to recover.**

Too many assessed stocks in EU waters remain outside safe biological limits. Ending overfishing would finally allow these stocks to rebuild and thrive.
- 2 Fishermen would benefit.**

Ending overfishing in the north-eastern Atlantic alone could potentially create additional annual revenue of €4.6 billion for the EU fishing fleet¹ and support more jobs in the sector. Healthy fish stocks contribute to a more stable business environment and require less time and fuel for fishing. More profitable fisheries in turn reduce the need for taxpayers to support the industry through subsidies.
- 3 It would help restore the health of our marine environment**

Fishing activities can take a toll on the marine environment beyond the removal of fish. Among the common negative impacts are damage to the seafloor and corals, as well as unintended catch of animals such as seabirds, dolphins, and turtles. Healthy fish stocks require less intensive fishing activity, limiting harm.
- 4 Europeans could eat more locally caught and sustainable fish.**

Europe currently depends heavily on seafood imports from non-EU countries; almost half of fish consumed in the EU comes from external waters.² This also has repercussions for developing countries where fish is a key source of protein for large parts of the population.
- 5 The ocean would be more resilient.**

The ocean is under a variety of stresses, ranging from changing water temperatures to pollution and acidification. Healthy fish stocks play a key role in keeping marine ecosystems balanced and represent an investment in the future because they can help the ocean resist these kinds of stresses.
- 6 Fisheries management would be easier.**

Managing fisheries with a high likelihood of collapse is complicated, risky, and demanding. It requires detailed and timely information. Healthy fisheries, on the other hand, are less sensitive to changes, uncertainties, or mistakes in data, making management easier.
- 7 It's the law.**

In 2013, EU decision-makers agreed on a reformed Common Fisheries Policy that requires an end to overfishing by 2015 where possible, and by 2020 at the latest for all stocks. Failing to end overfishing in line with this legal requirement would undermine EU citizens' trust in European institutions.
- 8 It would bring greater transparency.**

Setting fishing limits that do not exceed scientific advice would make EU fisheries management more rational and predictable. Discussions could centre on maximising the socio-economic benefits of healthy fisheries.
- 9 Case studies around the world—and closer to home—show the benefits.**

Other countries, such as the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, have already made major progress toward ending overfishing and are starting to reap the benefits. The EU has its own examples, such as hake in northern European waters, which prove that it is possible to end overfishing and illustrate the potential gains.
- 10 Decision-makers have both the power and the responsibility to do so.**

Many contemporary problems, such as climate change, are extremely challenging to address, but ending overfishing depends largely on better decisions by EU fisheries ministers. Political will is needed to implement the CFP reforms and to set fishing limits that do not exceed scientific advice.

Our goals

To support effective implementation of the reformed Common Fisheries Policy, The Pew Charitable Trusts is working to:

- End overfishing in Europe's north-western waters by advocating that EU member states set fishing limits allowing fish stocks to recover to sustainable levels.
- Protect vulnerable species and ecosystems in the deep sea by securing EU measures to regulate Europe's bottom-fishing fleet in accordance with agreed-upon United Nations resolutions.

Support our campaign

Join Pew's efforts to persuade EU decision-makers to bring a rapid end to overfishing in Europe's north-western waters. For more information and to add your voice, please sign up at pewtrusts.org/endeuoverfishing.

Endnotes

- 1 Jordi Guillen et al., "Sustainability Now or Later? Estimating the Benefits of Pathways to Maximum Sustainable Yield for EU Northeast Atlantic Fisheries," *Marine Policy* 72 (2016): 40-47, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2016.06.015>.
- 2 European Market Observatory for Fisheries and Aquaculture Products, *The EU Fish Market* (2015), http://www.eumofa.eu/documents/20178/66003/EN_The+EU+fish+market_Ed+2015.pdf/4cbd01f2-cd49-4bd1-adae-8dbb773d8519.

For further information, please visit:

pewtrusts.org/endeuoverfishing

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