



## Bringing fishing capacity in line with available resources

The reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) must reduce fishing capacity to match available resources. Measures to reduce capacity must ensure that the remaining fleet is sustainable in size and characteristics.

### Desired policy

OCEAN2012 proposes capacity reduction within the EU fleet, promoting low-impact fishing while removing the most destructive and unsustainable practices. We call on fisheries management bodies to:

- evaluate the balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities on a fishery-by-fishery basis;
- establish qualitative and quantitative capacity management objectives and implementation plans, with mandatory, time-bound reduction targets for each fishery;
- create a combination of financial, legal and other instruments that allow a restructuring of the EU fleet based on criteria prioritising environmentally and socially sustainable fishing;
- end subsidies that support fleet capacity and overfishing; and
- acknowledge that, even once the fleet has reached a sustainable size, there is a constant need to mitigate the effects of increased capacity due to technological improvements, in order to maintain sustainable fleet capacity in the long term.



However, overcapacity is not only a 'size' problem.

The quantitative 'one size fits all' solutions applied in the past frequently resulted in many smaller boats being scrapped and left overall fishing capacity undiminished. Overcapacity is also a qualitative problem, as different fleet segments and gears have differing environmental impacts and fuel requirements, deliver different qualities of fish and result in different social outcomes.

### Criteria for assessing overcapacity

The accurate assessment of capacity relative to the available resources in individual fisheries is a basic prerequisite for effective fleet reduction.

Current methods of assessing capacity, based largely on engine power (hp or kW) and the weight (GT) of a vessel, are frequently abused and do not reflect the ability of a vessel to catch fish. The new CFP should require assessments to be based on *fishing power*, defined as the fishing mortality that a vessel inflicts on the target fish stock(s).

Member States are currently obliged to report annually on the balance between the capacity of their fleets and the available resources. In practice, many fail to do so. Under the new CFP, such flouting of the rules should result in the denial of access to fish resources and to public funds.

### Criteria for reducing capacity

Reduction targets should be based on both quantitative and qualitative assessments to achieve a sustainable fishing fleet.

### Background

The long-standing overcapacity in the EU fleet is one of the root causes of problems that we currently face in EU fisheries. Overcapacity is in some cases estimated at two to three times the sustainable level. It drives overfishing, fosters illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and leads to low economic performance and inefficiency.

EU fisheries managers have been trying to address overcapacity for decades. Repeated attempts to reform the subsidy regime and several decommissioning programmes have failed to balance capacity with resources, mainly due to weak reduction targets, efficiency gains through modernisation and counterproductive subsidies programmes. As part of the CFP reform process, the European Commission is now discussing the introduction of an EU-wide scheme for individual transferable quotas (ITQs) as their main strategy to reduce capacity.

OCEAN2012 calls for a reduced European fleet in line with environmental and social criteria, as well as for fleet management plans that contain specific targets and provisions to remove vessels which do not meet those criteria. The aim is to retain the vessels that contribute the most to the objectives of the CFP by:

- using more selective fishing methods, gears and practices with low bycatch and low impact on the marine environment;

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- deploying gear and fishing methods which consume less energy per tonne of fish caught; and
- having a good safety and CFP compliance record and providing more and good quality employment.

### Tools to achieve capacity reduction

Legislation should be put in place obliging fisheries management bodies to meet capacity reduction targets within a clear timeframe, with rigorous sanctions for non-compliance. Both rights-based and other instruments can be used to support such policy measures.

The provision of aid for decommissioning has been highly ineffective, because it was “*promoting over-investment and undermining government credibility*”<sup>1</sup>. OCEAN2012 sees one-off scrapping funds as a useful short-term tool but they do not address the root causes of overcapacity. From an environmental point of view, the buyout of gear with high impact on ecosystems can help accelerate a fleet’s conversion to gear with less impact.

OCEAN2012 does not support an EU-wide ITQ system, as the evidence of its application elsewhere so far does not show a consistent recovery of stock biomass. In addition, an EU-wide ITQ system:

- will make it more difficult to adapt fisheries management systems to local or regional circumstances;
- may disenfranchise Member States from the strategic objectives of the CFP;
- may foster speculation in the market place for quotas and rights trading, and does not necessarily provide access for those fishing in the most sustainable way.

<sup>1</sup> OECD, 2009. Reducing fishing capacity. Best practices for decommissioning schemes.

Rights-based management (RBM) can be successful at Member State level in giving the sector more flexibility, but only under the right conditions and not in all circumstances. Rights can belong to individuals or groups and can be applied to catch, effort, or area.

For any RBM approach to be effective, it needs to be applied within a framework that includes, among other elements:

- a specific set of management objectives as defined in law;
- criteria for access to resources based on environmental and social considerations (see Briefing paper 4: Reward responsible fishing with priority access);
- provisions on social equity, such as initial allocation and restrictions on quota;
- restrictions on concentration of ownership or creation of fishing monopolies or cartels;
- involvement of all affected stakeholders in its design and implementation;
- provision for cost recovery (‘beneficiary pays’ principle);
- adequate enforcement and regular reviews against pre-determined objectives; and
- limitation of the duration of the rights and inclusion of a sunset provision/exit strategy.

Finally, under no circumstances should capacity reduction be achieved by exporting vessels to developing countries.

### Financing

The role played by subsidies in promoting excessive fishing capacity is well documented. A reformed European Fisheries Fund must help to meet the objectives of the new CFP instead of undermining them. See Briefing paper 6: Subsidies: public funds for public services.

OCEAN2012 is an alliance of organisations dedicated to transforming European Fisheries Policy to stop overfishing, end destructive fishing practices and deliver fair and equitable use of healthy fish stocks.

OCEAN2012 was initiated, and is coordinated, by the Pew Environment Group, the conservation arm of The Pew Charitable Trusts, a non-governmental organisation working to end overfishing in the world’s oceans.

The founding members of OCEAN2012 are the Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements (CFFA), the Fisheries Secretariat (FISH), nef (new economics foundation), the Pew Environment Group and Seas At Risk (SAR).