

Turning the tide for low impact fisheries

Ways to improve the CFP reform proposal

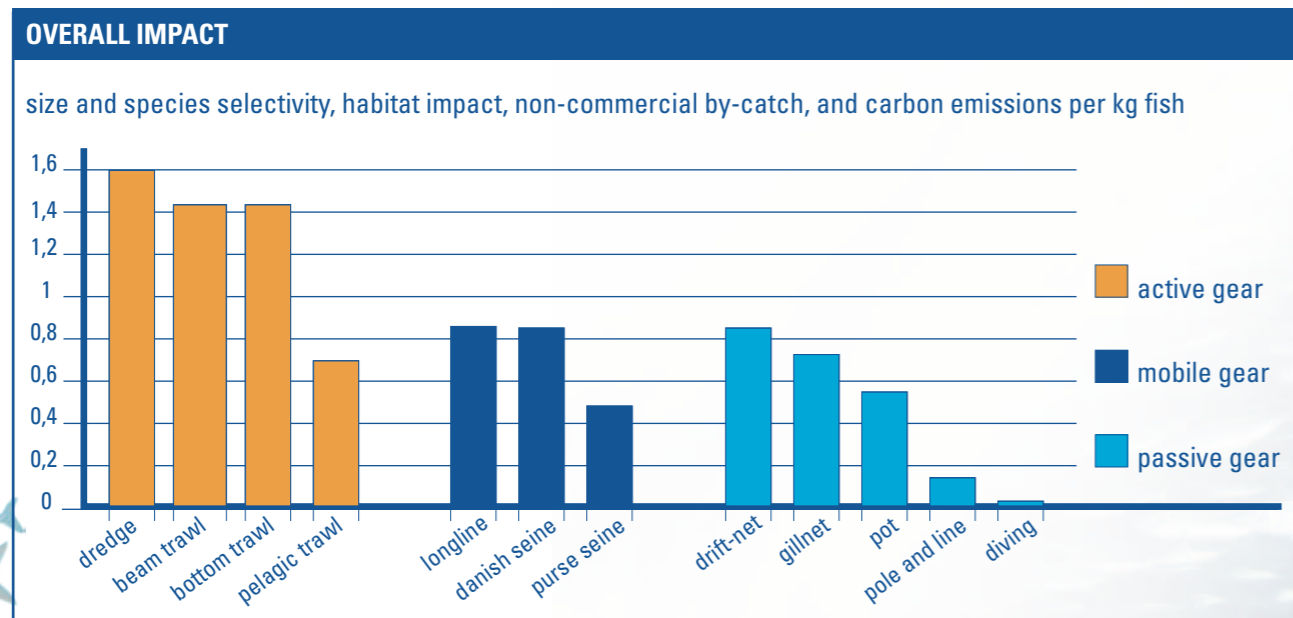


Turning the tide

Promoting low impact fisheries

All fisheries have an impact on the marine environment, both directly on marine species and habitats and indirectly through the emissions of greenhouse gases.

However, not all fisheries affect the environment to the same extent. Generally speaking, fuel intensive active gears such as bottom trawls and dredges tend to have greater impacts on habitats and species and cause higher greenhouse gas emissions. Mobile and passive gears generally have a lesser environmental impact and use much less fuel.



Source: ICES (2006), Report of the ICES-FAO Working Group on Fishing Technology and Fish Behaviour

Smaller scale fisheries tend to have fewer impacts, though this is not always true. Also, some large scale fishing operations have minimal bycatch and impact on habitats, and low fuel emissions per tonne of fish caught. Therefore, low impact fisheries do not always equal small scale fisheries.



Shifting to low impact gears and fishing methods would decrease the damage to marine ecosystems, reduce greenhouse gas emissions from fisheries, and lower fuel costs, thus favouring both fishermen and the environment.

CFP reform: an opportunity not to be missed

The framework for fisheries management in the EU will be revised by the end of 2013. The European Commission has put forward its reform proposal which contains good elements that will contribute to sustainable fisheries. However, it has failed to properly address the overall environmental impact of fishing. The Commission has therefore missed an opportunity to include incentives to continuously improve the environmental performance of the European fleet – promoting low impact fisheries.

Including incentives to shift to low impact fishing would strengthen certain aspects of the proposal regarding access to resources, fleet management, and discards. This brochure illustrates how this could be achieved.

Rights Based Management

Rights Based Management

Access to resources and fleet management

In its legislative proposal for the reform of the CFP, the European Commission suggests that all Member States introduce a specific Rights Based Management tool – Transferable Fishing Concessions, or TFCs.

A TFC is an individual user entitlement to a specific part of a Member State's fishing opportunities which can be transferred to other holders of such entitlements. According to the proposal, TFCs should apply to all fishing vessels of 12 metres or more in length and to all vessels using towed gear, regardless of size. These concessions would be given to the owners of fishing vessels or to legal or natural persons for a period of at least 15 years.

The proposal also includes the possibility for a Member State to reserve a maximum of 5% of its fishing opportunities and to allocate these according to criteria, such as selectivity – but this percentage can only be allocated to eligible holders of TFCs.

Rights Based Management

Rights based management (RBM) is a fisheries management tool that creates rules defining both the right to use and the allocation of fishing opportunities. Most commonly, fishermen, fishing vessels or fishing communities are awarded a licence, quota or fishing right.

There are a large number of different RBM approaches, such as limited non-transferable licensing; community catch quotas; individual non-transferable or transferable effort quotas; individual non-transferable or transferable catch quotas; vessel catch limits; or territorial use rights in fisheries. In the EU, most Member States have already implemented some kind of RBM approach.

TFCs and low impact fisheries

TFCs are an instrument regulating access to resources, but in the Commission proposal the main aim is to reduce fishing capacity. Experience shows that systems of transferable individual user entitlements can indeed lead to reductions in fishing capacity. However, they also tend to lead to a concentration of rights in the hands of fewer operators, and to a steep decline in smaller scale, lower impact vessels

By leaving fleet management in the hands of market forces, pursuit of improved profitability becomes the main driver for change with little regard for social and environmental impacts of the different fleet sectors.

TFCs favour larger vessels with easier access to capital, while making it difficult for low impact operators to remain competitive, not least because the environmental costs of destructive gears are externalised. The result is a reduced fleet, but no improvement in the environmental performance of the fleet. The Commission proposal does not address these side effects, nor does it contain any measures or guidance to mitigate them.

Turning the tide for low impact fisheries

- The introduction of TFCs should not be mandatory. Member States should assess their fleet in relation to available fishing opportunities and then be able to choose the most appropriate fleet management system in accordance with the regional specificities of their fisheries.
- **A fleet management policy should not only take into account the quantitative aspects of fleets** (e.g. number of vessels, gross tonnage) **but also qualitative aspects** (e.g. selectivity, impacts on habitats and non-target species, greenhouse gas emissions).
- If TFCs or other trade-based systems are adopted, a range of management tools to restrict or counter the negative effects of these systems on low impact fisheries should be used. For example, reserving certain zones for, or giving preferential access when allocating concessions to those vessels adopting low impact gear and practices.
- The proposed allocation of up to 5% of national fishing opportunities according to specific eligibility criteria can be a powerful driver for the use of low impact fishing methods and should become mandatory. Eligibility should not be restricted to holders of TFCs, and the Member State's reserve should be significantly increased (to at least 25%). Specific guidance on criteria should be agreed at EU level to ensure this tool serves to promote low impact fisheries.



Discards

Discards



Discards

Discards usually occur when a fishing vessel catches organisms that are either commercially irrelevant (e.g. not edible), cannot be legally landed (e.g. undersized or over quota fish), or are of low commercial value. These organisms are thrown overboard, or “discarded”.

It is estimated that certain European fisheries discard on average between 20 and 50 percent of their catch, with some Nephrops fisheries having discard rates as high as 98 percent. This represents an enormous waste of marine life and has obvious consequences on marine species and ecosystems.

Discards and low impact fisheries

The European Commission’s legislative proposal includes a gradual introduction of a partial discard ban from 2014 to 2016. After 2016, all catches of circa 35 species will have to be landed. If the catches are below a minimum size, they will not be sold for human consumption, but will be used for fish meal or pet food.

In its attempt to address discards, the Commission has failed to focus on the main source of the problem – insufficient selectivity which leads to unwanted catches.

Operators which currently use more selective fishing methods will probably fare comparatively better when the partial discard ban is implemented. However, by still allowing many species to be discarded, and by encouraging the marketing of undersized or non-targeted fish which was formerly discarded, the Commission proposal does not provide much of an incentive for fishermen to increase their selectivity – they will simply get paid for what they would have formerly thrown overboard. In addition, the Commission proposal does not address bycatch and discards of non-commercial species at all. As a consequence, the amount of biomass being unnecessarily removed from European seas will remain, at best, the same.

Turning the tide for low impact fisheries

- **There needs to be an explicit link between the discard ban and selectivity** to ensure that the discard ban is not just an encouragement to land everything, but rather contributes to increased selectivity;
- Higher selectivity should be encouraged by giving preferential access to those who fish in the most selective way when allocating fishing opportunities;
- The discard ban should be expanded to encompass all commercially exploited as well as vulnerable and/or protected species;
- Control and enforcement should be combined with incentives in order to ensure that fishermen comply with the discard ban;
- Financial incentives for landing formerly discarded species should be limited - the majority of the revenues from selling bycatch should revert to fisheries control and/or research, so as not to provide an incentive for the overexploitation of non-target individuals.

Norwegian discards policy

Norway has progressively implemented a ban on discarding several species, and since 2008 there is a full discard ban on all species with commercial value.

However, it must be noted that the discard ban in itself is not the central feature of the Norwegian anti-discards policy. Instruments like a flexible closed area policy, the ongoing effort to increase selectivity of gear, and the obligation to change fishing grounds if undersized fish make up more than a certain threshold amount of the catch, play a big role in reducing bycatch of unwanted fish. The implementation of the discard ban is thus facilitated, because bycatch levels have already been reduced by these other measures.

The catches of fish for which the quota has already been exhausted as well as juveniles have to be landed, and this quantity is deducted from the TAC. Simultaneously, at-sea control by the coastguard is considerable (up to 2,200 inspections per year), providing a key deterrent to discarding.

Source: European Commission, June 2011. Studies in the Field of the Common Fisheries Policy and Maritime Affairs, Lot 4: Impact Assessment Studies related to the CFP: Impact Assessment of Discard Reducing Policies

Results based Management

Results based Management



What is Results based Management?

Results based management is a system where a central authority defines objectives, but leaves it up to regional and local levels to decide how to achieve those objectives.

This form of management reverses of the burden of proof, as it is the operators' responsibility to demonstrate that they fish sustainably and in accordance with the objectives set at the central level.

Results based management and low impact fisheries

While acknowledging that centralised top-down management has contributed to some of the failures of the current CFP, the Commission has failed to provide a clear incentive-based approach to fisheries management in its proposal.

The proposed policies for fleet management, resource management and discards are insufficient and will not bring about a shift towards low impact fisheries. Further incentives are required, including the use of preferential access to fishing opportunities for those operating in a sustainable manner.

The current CFP and the Commission's proposal do not distinguish between destructive fisheries and low impact fisheries. Operators are not held responsible for the damage they cause on associated species or habitats. In addition, larger scale, fuel intensive vessels generally receive more public aid (also in the form of indirect subsidies such as fuel tax exemption) than their low impact counterparts. Unless low impact operators are given incentives to continue and further reduce their impact on the environment, they will most likely not be able to compete on a level playing field with companies which are allowed to continually externalise their environmental costs.



Turning the tide for low impact fisheries

- The proposal needs to specifically support low impact fisheries, including elements that ensure overall bycatch reduction through greater use of both size and species selective gear, as well as use of fishing opportunities as an incentive mechanism. As with the proposed policies for resource management and the partial discard ban, these elements need to be accompanied by details such as expected outcomes and specific timelines – essentially “results based management”;
- **Access to fishing opportunities should be allocated on the basis of environmental and social performance:** operators delivering on objectives such as higher selectivity, lesser impact on habitats, and better quality of employment should be given preferential access to resources (both in terms of quota and days at sea);
- Zoning could be used as an instrument to clearly define areas reserved for operators using low impact gear;
- Financial support should be reserved for those who comply with the rules of the CFP and who wish to better meet its objectives.

The Scottish Conservation Credits Scheme

The Scottish Conservation Credits Scheme (SCCS) was designed to respond to the restrictions imposed by the cod recovery plan, aimed at significantly reducing cod mortality in the North Sea.

Using days at sea as an incentive to fishermen, the SCCS put in place a range of cod avoidance measures, such as real time closures and the compulsory use of selective gear once a certain proportion of the quota has been exhausted. In addition, a matrix of fishing gear options has been created, whereby fishermen using the most selective gears receive a proportional increase in their days at sea. Additional quota was also available for fishermen who voluntarily agreed to install CCTV cameras as a means to ensure that they were not discarding any cod.

The SCCS has been heralded as a successful example of cooperation among the fishing industry, the Scottish government and environmental NGOs. However, such a system relies on the buy-in of the industry, and on appropriate control and penalties for non-compliance.

Source: http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/scottish_conservation_credits_scheme.pdf

Key recommendations

Turning the tide for low impact fisheries: key recommendations


The contribution of low impact fisheries to meeting the objectives of environmental and social sustainability enshrined in the CFP should be recognised. Therefore the reformed CFP should provide a framework incentivising low impact fishing, with links to resource management, fleet management and the discard ban.



It is now up to the Members of the European Parliament and to the Member States to ensure that strong incentives to a shift to low impact fisheries are added to the Basic Regulation, while the disincentives currently in the proposal are removed or adjusted. These key areas need to be addressed:

- **The introduction of Transferable Fishing Concessions (TFCs) should not be mandatory.** Such a system may be efficient from an economic perspective but, on its own, it is unlikely to encourage and will probably act as a disincentive to the uptake of low impact fisheries.
- Member States adopting TFCs should make use of a range of management tools to restrict or counter the negative effects on low impact fisheries. Clear guidance on appropriate tools should be included in the Basic Regulation. **Preference in the allocation of TFCs to those vessels deploying low impact fishing gear and practices** should be one of those tools.
- The proposed possibility for Member States to reserve up to 5% of national fishing opportunities for allocation according to eligibility criteria should be expanded gradually to a mandatory reserve of at least 25% of national fishing opportunities. **Guidance on allocation criteria should be agreed at EU level to ensure this 25% reserve serves to promote low impact fisheries.**
- **There needs to be an explicit link between the proposed discard ban and selectivity** to ensure that the discard ban is not just an encouragement to catch and land everything, but rather contributes to increased selectivity. Higher selectivity should be encouraged by prioritising the allocation of fishing opportunities to those who fish in the most selective way.





More information on low-impact fisheries in the context of the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy can be found in the report "Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy: Turning the Tide for Low Impact Fisheries", which was commissioned by Seas At Risk in 2011.



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