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Policy Statement Proposes Major Changes in Fisheries Management Regimes for 2009

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Although considerable measures were set out in the last reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) at the end of 2002, including long-term planning, precautionary management and fuller stakeholder consultation, there has been no discernable improvement in EU fish stocks since then. In fact, compared to the rest of the world where 25 per cent of stocks are overfished, in the EU 88 per cent of stocks are overfished. Lack of complete data or misreporting also means scientists still do not know the status of 57 per cent of EU stocks. Given this situation it is unsurprising that the policy statement for 2009¹ proposes bolder actions.

Total Allowable Catches (TACs) are set annually for the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, the North East Atlantic (including the North Sea) and once every two years for deep sea species. Only bluefin tuna is managed by TACs in the Mediterranean. Some stocks are under multi-annual management plans, which provide stability of TACs for the fishing industry since there is a limit for TAC variation year on year of 15 per cent. This 15 per cent is not appropriate for severely depleted stocks, where greater than 15 per cent cuts need to be made, nor for stocks that have recovered, where TACs could be increased by more than 15 per cent. In general it can go against the interests of the industry and instead the new Communication advocates greater flexibility in setting TACs each year as detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Rules for TAC setting under the new proposal for 2009¹

Stocks which have recovered beyond the level which allows the highest yield to be taken	TACs can be increased by up to 25 per cent/year
Stocks with low level of biomass	TACs can be reduced by up to 20 per cent/year
When the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) advises zero catch	TACs should be reduced by at least 25 per cent/year

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Current limits on fishing effort, using a days at sea system, were also meant to reduce fishing effort in line with reductions in TACs and were instrumental in a number of long-term plans including those for cod. However, with a number of derogations, the system has proved ineffective and a more effective approach is needed. In December 2007, the Council agreed that a kilowatt-day (kW-day) system would be more effective. This system, which uses a figure reached by multiplying a boat's engine power by the days spent fishing, was proposed for cod back in 2003 and is now in the revised Cod Recovery Plan adopted in April 2008. A kW-day system places the onus of responsibility on Member States themselves, who must decide on a balance between fleet capacity and fishing opportunities and then set a kW-day effort ceiling for groups of vessels or fleet segments, based on recent levels of real effort deployed. The system allows Member States to allocate kW-days that encourage low-discard fishing.^{1,2}

EU Maritime Commissioner Joe Borg is giving his full support to the new approach set out in the policy statement. Member States and stakeholders now have until 30 June 2008 to submit their comments so they can be taken into account when formulating proposals for 2009 fishing opportunities. The Commission is also actively pursuing technical consultations on a number of issues with both national authorities and stakeholders.

Finally, Mr Borg has issued a statement³ reacting to the huge increase in fuel costs. He calls for the restructuring of the fisheries sector to better align the size of the EU fishing fleet to the sustainable level of fishing possibilities. He is completely opposed to fuel subsidies and increasing quotas as these are short-term solutions that 'do nothing to deal with the underlying problems'.

References

1. Commission: policy statement proposes major changes to fisheries management regimes for 2009
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