

Who Should Have the Right to Fish

A question from the Greens
in the European Parliament



TOO MANY VESSELS SMALL PROFITS ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTER

88% of Europe's fish stocks are **overexploited**

compared to 25% globally.

European Commission
Communication on Fishing
Opportunities for 2009. May 2008

There are far too many vessels for available
fisheries resources – with estimates at a **fleet 40% too large.**

European Commission Mid term
review of the Common Fisheries
Policy (2008)

Much of the EU fleet is not economically viable
and is **operating at a loss** or with very small profits,
with most profits provided by subsidies.

European Commission
Communication on Fishing
Opportunities for 2010, COM (2009)22

Photo © Håkan Lindgren / SCANPIX



GIVING ACCESS TO FISHERIES- TO WHOM ?

The Common Fisheries Policy is under reform. **It needs change.** Radical change. Today the European fisheries fleet has almost double the capacity it needs in order to fish the fish available. Almost 90 percent of all the fish stocks are presently being fished to - or over - the sustainability limit.

The key questions now are:

How shall fishing capacity be adjusted to available resources?
To whom does society want to grant the privilege of fishing,
and how should fishing be done?

Is it perhaps possible to meet ecological, social and economic challenges with just one approach?

We think it is.



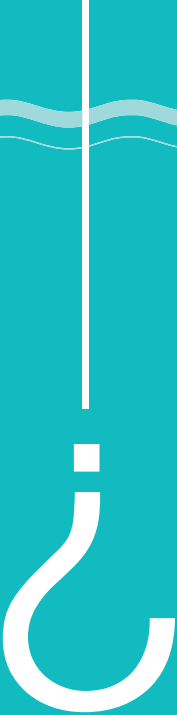
HOW TO DECIDE WHO SHOULD FISH ?

Marine resources are a public good, not a private resource. The right to exploit those resources, therefore, should be allocated according to criteria that ensure that fishing contributes as far as possible to the public interest.

Traditionally, fishing permits have been granted based on historical participation in the fishery. Frequently those who have had larger catches receive the largest share of the quota. Such an approach allows those who have been most responsible for over-fishing in the past to have the most fishing opportunities in the future. This principle fails to contribute to stock recovery or promote sustainable fishing and coastal communities.

“The right to fish should be based on environmental and social criteria.”





Some larger fishing interests have suggested establishing privatisation of access to the fish stocks, through systems of tradable rights, so-called individual transferable quotas (ITQs).

This runs contrary to the principle of fishery resources as a public good. It also leads to concentration of access to fisheries in the hands of large companies, corporations, banks and finance houses, whose priorities are not necessarily in line with the public interest. The contribution of ITQs to improved fishery management is also unproven.

Greens believe in other criteria. The right to fish should be based on the environmental and social aspects of the fishery. Fishermen should be required to demonstrate that their fishing operations do not damage the marine environment. Moreover, fisheries should make significant contributions to coastal fishing communities.

Fishing can vary greatly from region to region and from species to species. The criteria of course need to be adapted to different conditions across Europe.

BY USING CRITERIA ;

The criteria are applicable at all levels, from the international to the regional and local, and should be used for all fisheries Specific criteria could include:

Contribution to the local economy	Fishing activities should clearly benefit coastal communities, for instance by basing the vessel's activities there (crew, supplies, etc) or by landing the catch locally.
Selectivity of gears and practices	Fishing gears and practices should minimise the catching and discarding of undersized fish or of uneconomic species.
Damage to the sea floor and habitats	Certain fishing practices inflict severe and unacceptable damage to the sea floor and to the species and habitats found there. These practices should be limited to areas where unacceptable levels of damage cannot occur.
Fuel consumption and CO ₂ emissions	Certain fishing practices are extremely energy-intensive, consuming vast quantities of fuel compared to the size of the catch, with significant greenhouse gas emissions. Preference should be given to vessels that consume relatively little fuel for a given amount of catch.
Quality of the fish	Fish that has not been damaged during the fishing operation or has been landed very fresh is worth more, so less needs to be caught to make the same money. Such an approach to fishing, "fish less, earn more", should be prioritised.
Employment	Modern technology has made fishing a very efficient activity but it has also led to reduced employment. Fishing practices that provide more jobs for a given amount of fish caught should be favoured. Share systems that distribute catch earnings more equitably should also be encouraged.
Fishing legally	Fishermen who break the rules should be given reduced opportunities to fish and if they persist, should be denied the right to fish at all.
Fishing for human consumption	Some species can be sold for human consumption or can be used for production of fish meal or oil. Preferential access should always be given to the fishery for direct human consumption.



THE WAY FORWARD

To facilitate the move to the allocation of access to fish resources based on criteria, a three step procedure should be followed.

1. How much fish can be safely taken from the sea?

The answer to this must be based on scientific analyses using the precautionary and ecosystem-based approaches to fisheries management, while eliminating the possibility of political interference.

2. How should the fish be caught?

This should be done by establishing the number of vessels and the type of gear they use before they begin to operate. If the worst fishing methods are eliminated to begin with, it is easier to make improvements to fishing fleets later to reduce the environmental impact of fishing.

3. Who should get primary access to fish?

Currently this is determined by historical catches, codified by relative stability. Priority access to fish resources and fishing capacity should be based on a series of transparent environmental and social criteria, with preferential access being awarded to those who best comply with the criteria.

How to get there?

The best way would be a bottom-up approach, using a de-centralised decision-making mechanism for allocation, based on the criteria.

The involvement and participation of those people whose livelihood depends on environmental and socially sustainable fisheries is of course essential.

Stakeholder Voices

“The current model based on skewed historical catches and treating quota as nothing more than a commodity, rather than a public resource benefits those with the deepest pockets. Society at large must decide who benefits from fisheries.”

Jerry Percy, fisherman, New Under Ten Fishermen’s Association, representing 75 percent of the active fleet in England & Wales, that has access to only four percent of the quotas

“Small-scale fishermen need some sort of preferential access in order to survive.”

Ramon Tarridas Campos, fisherman, Asociación de Armadores de Artes Menores de Cataluña, Spain

“The access criteria are very good and we have ourselves proposed something very similar in our decentralised co-management project in Bohuslän.”

Charles and Robert Olsson, fishermen, winners of Coops Environmental Award, Grebbestad, Sweden

“In order to move to sustainable fishing, many of the criteria proposed demonstrating that fishing activities do not harm the environment and make a significant contribution to life in coastal communities could in principle be added to the current access rights based on historical catches but they should not replace them.”

Guy Vermaeve, Europêche, which represents European fishing vessel owners

“The Commissioner is open to the idea of the criteria, and the Commission can only support the idea that fishing must become more environmentally friendly and take social aspects into consideration”

Carla Montesi, Director, DG MARE for Atlantic, Outermost Regions, Arctic, North Sea, Baltic Sea and Landlocked Member States

“The criteria should not just be applied to fishing itself but to the whole fishery production chain, since fishing is just one component in a whole chain of sea going and shore based activities, with both upstream and downstream components.”

Brian O’Riordan, International Collective in Support of Fishworkers



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