

Abstract

Reforming Europe's fleet policy: A "Sea change" solution to overcapacity?

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Special session: Socio-economic assessment of Management Measures of the new Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)? Challenges and Methodological Background (Doering et al)

In July 2011 the European Commission acknowledged that "Our current system is not working in favour of sustainability. Too many fleet segments live on low profits, depend on subsidies for survival. 'Business as usual' is not an option".

Indeed, the reform of the policy "must not be yet another piecemeal, incremental reform but a "sea change" cutting to the core reasons behind the vicious circle in which Europe's fisheries have been trapped in recent decades." (Green Paper on Reform of the CFP, April 2009.)

The reform package for a new policy is comprehensive and touches upon all aspects of fisheries management, and ongoing negotiations should lead a new policy being implemented in 2013. This paper focuses on the reform of fleet (access) component of the policy.

The Commission has proposed a system of transferable fishing concessions, or user rights, for all large scale vessels (>12m). The concessions will be distributed by each Member State, and will grant their owner a share of the national fishing opportunity for each year. Operators will be able to lease or trade their concessions nationally, not between Member States, and will have a minimum validity of 15 years. More lenient capacity rules will apply to these vessels.

In parallel, the new Maritime and Fisheries Fund 2014-2020 will discontinue the use of publicly financed vessel decommissioning, following decades of ineffectiveness.

This paper offers a personal analysis of whether a "sea change" reform can be achieved, in promoting market based solutions to solve the overcapacity problem.