

MAKING THE COMMON FISHERIES POLICY A REALITY MEANS ENDING OVERFISHING



“Healthy ecosystems
are essential for
human well being”

As a result of the Parliament’s leadership and determination, in May 2013, the European Union agreed to an ambitious reform of its Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The policy now includes a binding commitment to end overfishing, with the aim of restoring fish stocks. This is a first step in the delivery of a healthy marine environment, profitable fisheries, and viable coastal communities.

Part of realising these commitments involves putting in place multi-annual plans (MAPs) for the different regions and fisheries in the EU. These multi-annual plans for EU fisheries are intended to move beyond the short-term decision-making for each year’s fishing limits, and achieve sustainable fishing for the long-term. While the Fisheries Council has historically legislated overfishing for decades, under the Lisbon Treaty, the Council is not the sole decision-making body for the drafting of multi-annual plans, it is shared with the Parliament.

Proposals for multi-annual plans are expected in the next year for the North Sea, Europe’s Western Waters and Adriatic Sea, and further on for the Gulf of Lyon and Sicilian Channel among others, but the first plan being agreed

is for fisheries in the Baltic. Whilst the Baltic might seem distant from Spanish interest, the negotiation of this MAP highlights the approach the Commission, Council and Parliament are taking on implementation of the reformed CFP and offer lessons for future plans. The Commission proposal, and then the Council position on it, would, if implemented, undermine the CFP, potentially



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legislating more overfishing. Crucially, the Parliament has adopted a position in line with the CFP’s ambition, and so trilogue negotiations have hit an impasse. And this is of great interest to Spain.

When the Commission was drafting the proposal for a plan for the Baltic, it asked scientists for ranges “around” the sustainable fishing limits set out in the CFP. This request implied that the Commission was willing to consider limits above those clearly specified in the CFP, and which would result in continued overfishing.

The Council welcomed this Commission proposal, effectively giving ministers the leeway to continue to legislate overfishing.

However, the Parliament, led by the Polish MEP Jarosław Wałęsa, has been unwilling to agree to a plan that threatens the principal ambition of the CFP. MEPs are pushing for ranges that do not exceed sustainable fishing limits. This position secured a large majority in the Parliament, giving Walesa a strong negotiating position in the trilogue negotiations.

The conflicting positions have resulted in a stalemate. The Council’s failure to agree to a Baltic multi-annual plan that meets the objectives of the CFP would threaten the policy’s very implementation. This has to be dealt with before additional plans are developed further. That is what is enshrined in the CFP after the reform that was celebrated by hundreds of thousands of citizens across Europe. Those citizens are behind the Parliament holding its line, and are calling on fisheries ministers to stop delaying, and agree multi-annual plans and annual fishing limits that finally end overfishing.



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