

PRECAUTIONARY APPROACH IN THE CFP – A CLEAR WAY FORWARD

The Precautionary Approach is a globally recognised concept in environmental management. When it comes to the European Union's (EU) fisheries, the EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) says that when scientific information is absent or inadequate you should manage fish stocks in line with the Precautionary Approach, using best available scientific advice (as per United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement - UNFSA, 1995). The fishing mortality rate, which generates the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY), should be regarded as a minimum standard to guard against overfishing and we should take precaution to not exceed it, even when it is unknown.

PRECAUTIONARY APPROACH AS DEFINED IN THE COMMON FISHERIES POLICY AND UNITED NATIONS FISH STOCKS AGREEMENT

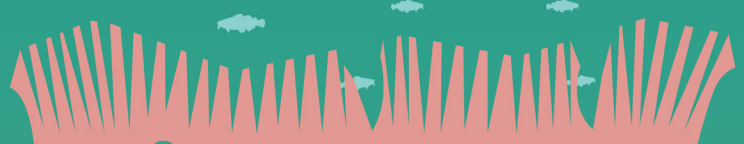


HOW THE PRECAUTIONARY APPROACH SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED IS CLEARLY STATED IN THE CFP:

Definition - "Precautionary Approach to fisheries management, as referred to in Article 6 of the UN Fish Stocks Agreement, means an approach according to which the absence of adequate scientific information should not justify postponing or failing to take management measures to conserve target species, associated or dependent species and non-target species and their environment". (Art. 4.1(8))

The Precautionary Approach as the objective - "The CFP shall apply the Precautionary Approach to fisheries management, and shall aim to ensure that exploitation of living marine biological resources restores and maintains populations of harvested species above levels which can produce the maximum sustainable yield." (Art. 2.2)

Example of how to use the Precautionary Approach - "Where targets relating to the maximum sustainable yield as referred to in Article 2(2) cannot be determined, owing to insufficient data, the multiannual plans shall provide for measures based on the Precautionary Approach, ensuring at least a comparable degree of conservation of the relevant stocks." (Art 9.2)



THE PRECAUTIONARY APPROACH IN SCIENCE (INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE EXPLORATION OF THE SEA - ICES)

THE PRECAUTIONARY APPROACH IN THE OFFICIAL SCIENTIFIC ADVICE - DATA LIMITED STOCKS

Sometimes there is not enough scientific data to provide clear guidance on sustainable fishing pressure e.g. MSY. For those stocks ICES advice based on the data-limited Precautionary Approach framework is the best available science and should be the minimum standard followed by decision makers, as required by the EU's CFP.

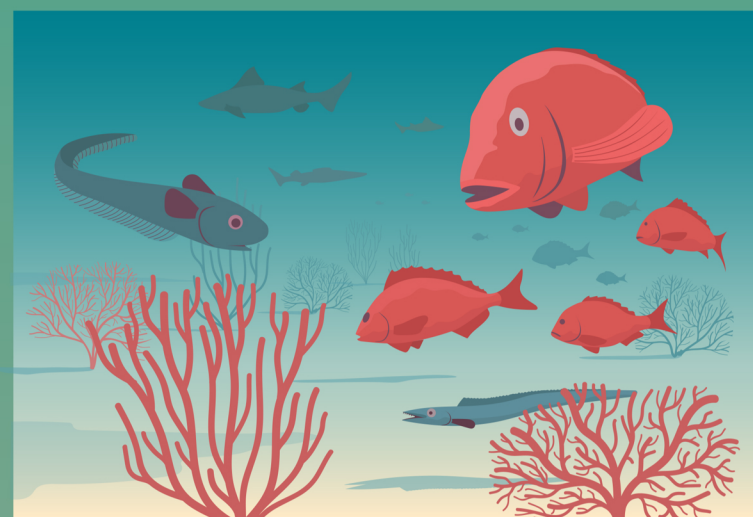
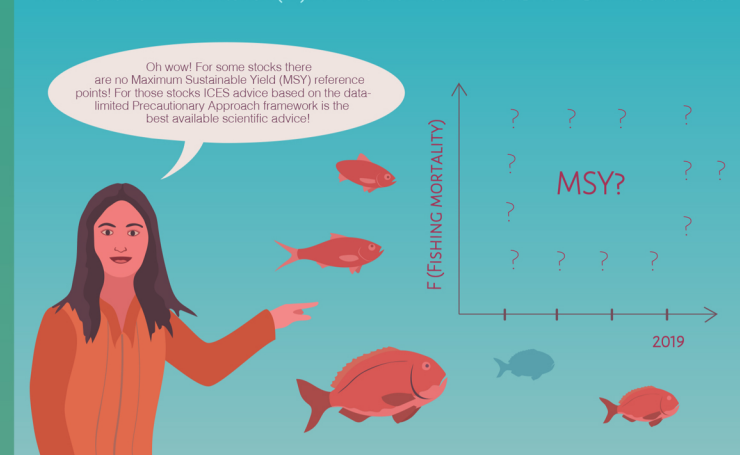
But there is even more that could be done to manage these stocks, as required by CFP and UNFSA! Managers should:

Increase data collection

Request more work on MSY proxies

Improve scientific assessments

THE PRECAUTIONARY APPROACH (PA) IN THE OFFICIAL SCIENTIFIC ADVICE – DATA POOR STOCKS



THE PRECAUTIONARY APPROACH - A CLEAR PATH TO ENDING OVERFISHING

In the context of the CFP, decision-makers should always set catch limits not exceeding MSY-based scientific advice provided by ICES. Choosing to fish at levels higher than MSY (e.g. FPA) will not lead to long-term sustainable yields, as required by the CFP.

Where science cannot provide MSY-based advice, catch limits should be set in accordance with the best available and precautionary scientific advice from ICES.

In these cases, decisions-makers should take a risk-averse approach to setting catch limits where scientific certainty and data are low – the approach mandated by UNFSA. This is especially true for long-lived, slow to mature species where data are limited (e.g. deep-sea fish), which could easily be overexploited.