

Common Fisheries Policy

The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is an EU policy designed to make EU fishing grounds a common resource by giving access to all member states. In theory this access is supposed to be equal, but in practice it is not: the EU manages access to fishing waters and determines how many fish a national fleet can catch. The stated aim of the CFP is to help conserve fish stocks. However, this has been widely criticised by those who see the CFP as a wasteful policy that damages the environment and the fishing industry. Employment in the fishing industry has declined dramatically, particularly in the UK, and fish stocks continue to fall despite recent reforms.

History

The CFP was launched in 1970 by the six founding members of the European Community to provide a common market in fish. All subsequent members of the EU, including the UK, have accepted the CFP principle of equal access to fishing grounds (although the UK has a concession that gives UK fishermen exclusive fishing rights up to six miles off its coast). However, this principle has been modified. In 1983 **Total Allowable Catches** (TACs), **species quotas** and minimum net sizes were introduced, in an attempt to curb over-fishing. Moreover, in 1991 the European Court of Justice (ECJ) overruled a court decision in the UK and legalised the practice of **quota hopping**. This set a precedent allowing national fleets (Spanish, in this instance) to register their boats and buy quotas in other member states to avoid fishing restrictions.

Negotiations on TAC species quotas take place every year in December. In light of severely reduced fish stocks the EU has, since 1992, consistently ordered all national fleets to reduce their 'fishing effort'; the UK had its fleet cut by 19% and a further 40% in 1996. The EU's last major reform of the CFP, in 2002, allowed tougher action against those who break the rules. However, the reform was a limited success and cod catches were cut again in December 2006, by around 20%.

In 2008, as a result of stock recovery, North Sea cod catches were increased by 11%. Similarly, in December 2009, fishing quotas for a minority of species were 'cautiously increased', but the majority of species quotas were still reduced by 20–25%. At that time, the UK (along with Denmark and Germany) proposed a deal to allow fishermen to catch an extra 5% if they agree to fit CCTV cameras to their boats. If fishermen find stocks of young fish they must report it and fishing can be temporarily suspended in those areas. Many TAC quotas were reduced again for 2011.

In 2009, for the first time MEPs played an equal role in CFP negotiations with national fisheries ministers but still had no say in deciding TAC species quotas. The EU is currently reviewing the entire CFP, with a legislative reform package proposed by the European Commission in July 2011.

How does the CFP work?

The CFP says that EU waters are a shared resource that can be fished by any national fleet. It tries to manage this through the use of quotas and TACs to control who catches what. However, because quotas are managed by member states' governments, the CFP depends on commitment at a national level. As a result of poor implementation by some national governments (most notably the Spanish), the CFP has seen fish stocks decrease dramatically. Billions of dead fish have been thrown back into the sea because they did not meet

species quotas. To tackle the illegal dumping of dead fish, a Conservation Credits scheme was introduced in 2007.

The EU has also expanded its fishing area by paying other governments to allow EU ships to fish in their waters. These Third Country Agreements have proved controversial as some claim that fishing by EU vessels off the coast of North Africa has crippled local fishing communities. The negotiations themselves are often difficult, for example, in 2009, annual negotiations between the EU and Norway on shared fishing zones broke down.

The European Fisheries Fund (EFF) was established in 2006 to replace the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance as the main fund through which the EU will support fisheries across the union. Its 2007-13 budget is about €3.8 billion.

The CFP is a particular area of tension surrounding the Icelandic accession negotiations, as Iceland's economy is reliant on fishing.

Arguments about the CFP

For

- Fisheries are a natural and mobile resource and are thus, by nature, common property.
- The CFP protects the environment and improves fish stocks by placing limits on how many fish can be caught.
- The restructuring of the fishing industry in the EU has ensured fairer prices for efficient European fishermen.

Against

- The willingness of national administrations to enforce the policy varies widely making it an inconsistent and ineffective policy.
- The damage to the environment has been increased rather than decreased due to CFP measures, which waste natural resources.
- Through the practice of dumping catches that do not conform to the TAC species quotas, fish stocks have continued to decrease.

Quotations

'In 30 years at sea I have never caught a whale, destroyed a dolphin... or dumped nuclear waste, but I have been forced by the EU to dump hundreds of tonnes of edible fish in the name of "euro-conservation".' George Stephen, Aberdeenshire fisherman, 2000

'I believe [the reformed CFP] will help conserve fish stocks, preserve the marine environment and help the long-term future of the fishing industry...' Ben Bradshaw, UK Fisheries Minister, 2005

Technical Terms

Total Allowable Catches (TACs): maximum quantity of fish that can be caught. Negotiations take place every December. TACs are shared among states according to national quotas.

Species Quota: a limit on the number of any particular species of fish that can be caught.

Quota-Hopping: the practice of buying fishing quota permits abroad to avoid EU restrictions.

Links

http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/index_en.htm

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/north_east/8263219.stm