

Fishing effort

FACT SHEET



There are two basic ways of limiting the pressure which fishing places on a stock of fish: by input, and by output. Catch limits – TACs and quotas – are the classic way of limiting output. There are a number of ways of limiting the input to the fishing process. One of these which has become increasingly important under the CFP in recent years is to place limits on the fishing effort applied.

Fishing effort is defined in the Basic Regulation of 2002 (Article 3(h)) as fishing capacity x activity. Both the variables can be defined in a number of ways, which are more or less precise. Capacity can be measured roughly in terms of the number of vessels granted licences, or more precisely in terms of the size of the vessels (gross tonnage) or the power of their engines (kW). Activity can likewise be measured in various ways, of which the most common to date has simply been the number of days a vessel spends at sea. As a result, the EU now has two ways of measuring fishing effort: either in terms of GT days, or kW days.

Fishing effort management first developed in the mid-1990's. At that time, the main driver was the need to limit fishing capacity in certain specific fisheries, such as the benthic and demersal fisheries in Western

Waters, or those working in the North Sea plaice box. But since the 2002 Reform of the CFP identified the global overcapacity of the EU fleet as a major obstacle to sustainable fisheries, the scope of effort management has been expanded. In the absence of any clear political decision at EU level on how and at what rhythm that capacity might be reduced, it was decided to introduce measures to limit fishing effort in certain fisheries, so as to ensure that the excess capacity in the fleet did not place undue pressure on the stocks concerned.

Setting limits

Two kinds of limitation on capacity currently exist under the CFP:

- in certain fisheries, the CFP seeks to prevent fishing effort (and/or capacity) from expanding beyond the historic or present level. This is the case in the Western Waters (ICES Areas V, VI, VII, VIII, IX and X, CECAF areas 34.1.1, 34.1.2 & 34.2.0), and in the Plaice Box in the North Sea;
- in other fisheries, the level of fishing effort is linked to the level of fishing mortality, and the goal is set of reducing both in tandem until they reach precautionary levels, and ultimately those

which will produce a long-term high yield: this is the case for those stocks which are covered by long-term plans, and for fisheries on deep sea species, where TACs and fishing effort are set every two years. In the case of the cod recovery plan, there are also measures to limit effort in fisheries which do not target cod but cause significant cod mortality (listed in Annex II to the plan).

As the EU moves further towards implementing its commitment to manage fisheries for maximum sustainable yield, systems which link fishing effort to fishing mortality are likely to become more common. The increasing role of the ecosystem approach will also lead to more emphasis on effort management tools, as they are one of the main ways in which it is possible to reduce the pressure exerted by fishing not only on fish stocks, but on marine ecosystems as a whole.

Since 1995 all vessels fishing in European Union waters and EU vessels operating outside EU areas are required to carry a fishing licence. Fishing effort can therefore be controlled through the issue of special fishing permits to those vessels authorised to take part in the fishery. In some cases, the Council of Ministers set

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an overall limit on fishing effort, in others they may specify the number of vessels authorised to fish, or the number of days which can be spent at sea by vessels using certain kinds of gear.

However, while issuing permits to operators is easy, controlling the actual level of fishing effort exerted in practice is much harder to achieve. Beyond the problems of control and enforcement common to fisheries management in general, fishing effort control is further complicated by the fact that fishing capacity is difficult to define, and fishing activity difficult to monitor. In February 2007, the Commission published a Communication on improving fishing capacity and effort indicators under the Common Fisheries Policy. This document reviewed the commonest problems with existing systems for measuring capacity and effort, and proposed a number of solutions. In particular, it looked at the possibility of methods for measuring capacity based on the type and size of fishing gear, and proposed that, in certain cases, the best indicator of fishing activity would be 'soak time', or the time actually spent fishing. It then went on to lay down an action plan to come up with concrete improvements to the current system, including consultations with

gear manufacturers and pilot projects to test alternative indicators in real-life situations.

A first step towards a new approach to effort management was taken with the revision of the cod recovery plan in November 2008. The system implemented for these fisheries through an annex of the annual TAC and quota regulation had become so complex, notably due to the accumulation of many derogations to adapt to specific local conditions, that it has become difficult to implement, to monitor and to control. A new system was therefore introduced, based on effort ceilings expressed in kilowatt-days for groups of vessels or fleet segments. These ceilings will be managed at national level by the Member States. Reductions in effort will henceforth be proportionate to the targeted reductions in fishing mortality for the segments that contribute most to cod or flatfish mortality, whereas for other segments concerned effort will be frozen at the average level for either the 2004-2006 or the 2005-2007 period.

The result is a simpler and more flexible system which it will be easier to implement effectively. While none of the existing methods for measuring and controlling fishing effort are perfect, as long

as the EU fleet has substantial excess fishing capacity, some form of control of the amount of effort deployed will remain a necessary part of the CFP.

Documents

Council Regulation (EC) No 1954/2003 of 4 November 2003 on the management of the fishing effort relating to certain Community fishing areas and resources and modifying Regulation (EC) No 2847/93 and repealing Regulation (EC) No 685/95 and Regulation (EC) No 2027/95

Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament of 5 February 2007 on improving fishing capacity and effort indicators under the common fisheries policy – COM(2007) 39 final.