

The European Union and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)

The European Union represents the world's second biggest fishing power, after China. In 2005, EU Member States caught around 5.6 Mtonnes of fish, 75% of which were caught in the OSPAR Maritime Area, with a fleet comprising more than 88,000 vessels. Within the EU, 4 Member States are responsible for nearly 60% of total EU commercial fisheries production. These are Denmark, Spain, France and the UK.

Despite these statistics, fishing provides a low share of employment and accounts for less than 1% of GDP across Member States. This apparent disparity is due to the highly regionalised nature of fisheries across Europe. Fisheries remain an important economic and social activity in places removed from the industrial and commercial centres of Europe. The most fisheries-dependent areas in the EC include Galicia in Spain, the Algarve and Azores of Portugal, North East Scotland and parts of Greece.

The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is the EU instrument to manage fisheries. It is a complex piece of legislation dealing as it does with a huge number of stocks, fishing vessels and fishing patterns. Member States have widely varying interests in particular stocks and the annual negotiations in December to establish fishing opportunities for the following year tend to dominate fisheries policy concerns.

Management of exploitation rates within the CFP is primarily based on TACs and Quotas with growing emphasis on effort management and long term management plans. The CFP applies to all EU vessels in all waters and to EU waters for all vessels and provides access to Member States outwith each Member State territorial zone (areas beyond 12 nautical miles – see Figure 3.1).

The CFP is unlimited in time but it is reviewed approximately every 10 years. As detailed earlier, the most recent formulation of the CFP has been in operation since 1 January 2003. The reforms introduced in 2003 included:

- Implementation of a long term approach to stock management to improve stock condition and economics;
- Fleet policy measures to reduce capacity including the removal of subsidies to increase capacity;
- Streamlining and harmonisation of enforcement rules; and
- Increased stakeholder involvement in policy design.

These improvements have been achieved to some extent although it is widely accepted that greater reform is still required, including further reductions in fleet capacity. The Commission have already embarked on the reform process with a Green Paper published during 2009.

The European Fisheries Fund (EFF) is the financial component of the CFP. The EFF will run for seven years (2007-2013) with a total budget of around € 3.8 billion. The EFF aims to support the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) by:

- supporting sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources and a stable balance between these resources and the capacity of Community fishing fleet;
- strengthening the competitiveness and the viability of operators in the sector;
- promoting environmentally-friendly fishing and production methods;
- providing adequate support to people employed in the sector; and
- fostering the sustainable development of fisheries areas.

➔ [Go to full QSR assessment report on environmental impact of fishing \(publication number 465/2009\)](#)