



A deep sea disaster

Deep sea fishing - one of Europe's most destructive sectors

What: EU decision on deep-sea quotas for 2011 & 2012

When: 29/30 November 2010; Fisheries Council, Brussels

What is at stake?

Fisheries ministers will decide how much deep-sea fish can be caught during the next two years by EU fishermen using large trawl nets that are dragged across the seafloor at depths of 400 metres or more. This method is highly destructive and unsustainable. It impacts on fragile habitats, such as cold water coral reefs, and targets highly vulnerable stocks.

The decision presents the 27 EU governments with a test case for their commitment to sustainability, the protection of marine biodiversity and real change to EU fisheries management. By granting catch quotas for seven vulnerable species, the EU chooses to allow fishermen to use one of the most indiscriminate and destructive forms of fishing.

What is likely to happen?

Scientists recommend catches be frozen, decreased or set to zero, depending on the species. Ministers routinely ignore such advice, resulting in catch levels 47% higher than recommended across all quotas. In spite of the marginal economic value of deep-sea fisheries, ministers, in particular from France, Spain and Portugal, are set to once again ask for higher quotas than proposed in some of the fisheries management areas. This will benefit only around 100 bottom trawlers, mainly from France, Spain and Portugal. Small quantities are also caught by fishermen from the UK, Germany, Ireland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, Denmark and Poland.

Ministers are also ignoring obligations under a 2009 UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution, which calls on states to *“adopt conservation and management measures (...) to ensure the long-term sustainability of deep-sea fish stocks and non-target species, and the rebuilding of depleted stocks (...).”* The UNGA further called on states *“not to authorize bottom fishing activities until such measures have been adopted and implemented.”*

Why is deep-sea fishing unsustainable?

Overfishing

The special biology of many deep-sea fish species makes it difficult or impossible to catch sustainably. A 2007 Commission review concluded that "many deep-sea stocks have such low productivity that sustainable levels of exploitation are probably too low to support an economically viable fishery" and that "measures currently in force have been too poorly implemented to protect deep-sea stocks." The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), which advises the European Union on the state of fish stocks, warned that 100% of the catch of deepwater fish managed by the EU is outside safe biological limits.

Irreversible impacts

Trawl gear typically weighs in excess of 10 tonnes and the largest nets can be 60m wide or more, large enough to engulf a Boeing 747 airplane. They cause irreparable damage to sensitive corals and sponges. These habitats have grown over hundreds or thousands of years and provide shelter for many important species.

Wasteful

Deep-sea fisheries are inflicting terrible collateral damage. Only a small number of species are marketable. The rest are unpalatable and unsuitable for fishmeal.

Subsidy dependence

Deep-sea fishing tends to be more capital-intensive than other fisheries and is only viable with significant public subsidies. Trawling at depth requires large vessels with more expensive gear. Globally, the sector is subsidised by over \$152m US annually, according to the University of British Columbia.

What changes are needed?

In the context of the CFP reform, Greenpeace is calling for:

- Legally binding fleet reduction targets that lead to a shift in fleet structure towards environmentally sound and socially acceptable fisheries, scrapping overcapacity and destructive fishing practices;
- Marine reserves as part of regional fisheries management strategies;
- Science-based decision making, including the introduction of a legal cap on total catches.
- Greater transparency, accountability and traceability.