European Parliament takes a leap to halt subsidizing overfishing

Title

In October the European Parliament gave a massive boost to the future of Europe's fisheries by voting against public funding being used to build new fishing vessels. There is broad agreement that the EU has been subsidising a build-up of excessive fishing capacity, estimated by the European Commission for some fisheries to be two to three times above the level compatible with sustainable fishing. Scientists advise that 88% of fish stocks in the Mediterranean and 39% of those in the North-east Atlantic are overfished. Increasing the fishing fleet capacity would have permitted to catch more fish, which is unwanted at a time when fish stocks are already falling down under a too high fishing pressure.

The European Parliament's vote encourages EU countries to increase spending on data collection and better controls of the fishing fleet. Recipients of public subsidies are also required to comply with EU law. By spending taxpayers' money on managing fisheries better, rather than on further encouraging an enlarged industrial fishing fleet, we can give a future to fish, fishermen, seabirds and the rest of our marine ecosystem.

Only one shadow is regrettable in this overwhelmingly positive vote; the introduction of subsidies for engine replacement, albeit limited to small boats. Unfortunately the definition of "small boats" isn't clear and it could make it possible for industrial trawlers to qualify. BirdLife Europe hopes that the new tools at the disposal of Member States will keep this from happening.