

New EU fisheries fund: a shift towards sustainability?

Title

On Friday 2 December, the European Commission has made a step in retargeting EU fisheries subsidies towards sustainable fishing and supporting marine life and ecosystems, while increasing transparency and conditionality of the fund. However worryingly, a large proportion of the fund can potentially be used for unsustainable aquaculture and continuing to drive overfishing.

After 30 years of building more and superior boats and devastating our fish stocks, it's high time that EU public money will now be spent to restore marine ecosystems, the very basis of the fishery sector, thus we welcome the shift in this direction. However, unless the fund has ended all drivers of overfishing, the problem will not be solved, said Ariel Brunner, Head of EU Policy at BirdLife Europe.

The Natura 2000 network is the EU's backbone for the protection of marine biodiversity and ecosystems of which its establishment at sea is sorely lagging behind the land-based network. Commissioner Damanaki's proposal represents a potential for funding of these precious sites, and we hope that Member states will seize this opportunity.

Bruna Campos, BirdLife Europe's EU financial perspectives officer added. With more than 200,000 birds dying every year as bycatch and huge amounts of fish being discarded in EU fisheries operations, BirdLife Europe is pleased to see the support for improving selectivity of gear. However, better safeguards are needed to ensure that under the veil of well-intentioned improvements, the EU does not continue to support modernisation of vessels that are driving fish to commercial extinction.

BirdLife Europe now calls on Member States and the European Parliament to support investment in the health of our ecosystems, including marine Natura 2000. The proposal must be strengthened with robust safeguards for ensuring that only sustainable aquaculture is supported, and that any investments in modernisation represent a genuine improvement and are eligible only to operators who fish in a sustainable way.
