

Official report confirms massive misuse of EU fisheries funds

Title

On Monday 12 December, the EU Court of Auditors published a report damning costly failures to eliminate overfishing in Europe.

The report found that the multi-billion euro European Fisheries Fund designed to balance fishing activities at sustainable levels is actually doing the reverse. Loopholes mean that fleet owners are receiving subsidies to increase the capacity and fishing power of their vessels, adding to fleet overcapacity. A small fraction of the money available for scrapping is being used as intended, with most being spent on vessels that are old or no longer active. The court did not stop at criticising the mispending of taxpayers' money, but highlighted fundamental flaws in the existing fleet adjustment rules.

The report warns that fleet overcapacity is driving the depletion of fish stocks, threatening marine life and the viability of fishing sector and coastal communities. The result is that three out of four European fish stocks are overfished. Birdlife Europe, Greenpeace, OCEAN2012, Seas At Risk and WWF are urging the European Parliament and Council of Ministers to follow the court's recommendations. The report shows that the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) reform will be meaningless unless measures are based on a full assessment of the fishing capacity coupled with deadlines for fleet reductions, the groups argue.

The European Commission's reform proposals are not up to the task: **European Maritime & Fisheries Fund (replacing the European Fisheries Fund)** - Unless safeguards are put in place, there is little evidence that subsidies will stop fuelling overcapacity let alone reverse it. For instance, the recent Commission proposal does not require member states to assess the balance between fishing capacity and stocks before receiving modernisation funds.

CFP reform ? Clear timelines and targets for fleet reductions should be introduced in the revised proposals. Moreover, the text should be amended to create a wider range of options for allocating fishing rights, introducing preferential access for those that fish in the most sustainable and responsible way. Fisheries ministers will meet on 16 December to set fishing quotas for 2012. These should be set in line with the scientific advice, and consistent with the goal to recover fish stocks to above levels that can produce maximum sustainable yields by 2015, the groups say.
