

Briefing: Technical measures to support management of EU fisheries

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Background

As part of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) reform, the Commission is developing a proposal for a new over-arching framework for the conservation of fishery resources through technical measures for the protection of the marine environment.

According to the Commission's Oct 2012 roadmap, its proposal must 'ensure the protection of marine biological resources and the reduction of the impact of fishing activities on fish stocks and on marine eco-systems. It must also be clearly aligned with other elements of the CFP regulation, e.g. multiannual plans and the discard policy as well as environmental conservation legislation including the Habitats Directive, the Birds Directive and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) (2008/56).'

Below are BirdLife's recommendations listing detailed objectives and their measures that must be supported under a new regulation. Where the application of technical measures, particularly area closures, is likely to lead to the displacement of fisheries, BirdLife considers that additional measures should be taken to mitigate any transfer of potentially damaging fishing effort to other sensitive areas.

Supporting objectives of the Natura 2000 network and other Marine Protected Areas

As per the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy, Member States are to ensure fisheries management is coherent with environmental legislation, including the Birds and Habitats Directives. Therefore, in order to maintain or restore the conservation status of relevant habitats or species, Member States should assess if there is a need for fisheries management measures.

A number of marine Natura2000 sites exist where a negative impact of fisheries on the conservation objectives is already known, or where an assessment of the impact of the fisheries has never been made, preventing fishery management measures being adopted for these sites. Such sites should take priority for the introduction of mitigation measures, gear restrictions, seasonal and temporal closures. Equivalent priority should also be given to measures to protect seabirds in other MPAs including IBAs (Important Birds Areas) (see Actions in EU Seabird Plan of Action, referenced below).

Recommendations

1. **Detailed objective:** Achievement of the conservation objectives of designated Natura 2000 sites
Proposed Measures: Adopt relevant measures as a pre-condition of access to fishing opportunities in those areas and subject to appropriate assessment as necessary
2. **Detailed objective:** Minimise the impact of bottom trawling and others gears with potentially adverse impact on Special Areas of Conservation
Proposed Measures:
 - Proportionate to the sensitivity of the qualifying feature(s), risk assessment and the conservation objectives of the site, exclude from SACs bottom trawling and others gears with potentially adverse impact on the benthos.
 - Exclude bottom trawls and others gears with adverse impact on the benthos from all reef SACs

Minimising incidental catches of seabirds

A significant interaction that has mostly escaped the attention of statutory technical measures is the incidental catch of seabirds. The EU Plan of Action (EU-PoA) for reducing incidental catches of seabirds in fishing gears (COM (2012)665final) states that ‘available data indicates seabird mortality is substantial in a number of areas within EU fisheries. Recent estimates report bycatch by the EU fishing fleet at ca 200,000 seabirds annually in EU waters’ (one estimate indicates that Baltic Sea fisheries alone may inflict mortality on this scale). Given the assessed scale of this impact, the objective of the EU-PoA is ‘to minimise and, where possible, eliminate the incidental catch of seabirds’.

Recommendations:

1. **Detailed objective:** Minimise the incidental catches of seabirds in longline fishing (including demersal and pelagic)
Proposed Measures: Vessels carrying longline gear are to implement at least two of the following measures and to specification which complies with the minimum standards as set out in BirdLife and ACAP (Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels) guidelines:
 - bird-scaring/tori line
 - line weighting/integrated weight longlines
 - night-setting with minimum deck lighting
2. **Detailed objective:** Minimise the incidental catches of seabirds in pelagic fisheries covered by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)
Proposed Measures: Apply agreed ICCAT measures
3. **Detailed objective:** Minimise the incidental catches of seabirds where gill-nets and other static gear fisheries are in significant conflict with seabirds
Proposed Measure: In the absence of effective deterrents (e.g. pingers) or modifications of the gear, apply spatial and/or temporal bans during periods of highest risk, or develop transition to alternative fishing gears (e.g. fish-traps) with proven negligible impact on birds.

Closed areas: the special case of the sandeel box

The UK index of Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* abundance, whose changing status is most closely linked to sandeel availability, has declined rapidly since the early 1990s such that by 2013 the index was just 28% of that in 1986, the lowest value in 28 years of monitoring. The species experienced a 41% decline in abundance between 2000 and 2011 alone. Most of this was driven by declines on the North Sea coast of Scotland. This decline will continue unless strong measures are placed on the North Sea sandeel fishery.

Recommendations

1. **Detailed objective:** Maintain and preferably increase sandeel availability to support the breeding success of seabirds (especially kittiwakes)
Proposed measure: Maintenance of the area closure (established 2000) for sandeel fishing in the North Sea

Contact

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