

PRESS RELEASE

Fisheries Ministers Fail Sustainability Test

Brussels, 19th December 2011. Fisheries Ministers have once again missed their opportunity to place European fisheries on the path to sustainability. Fisheries Council negotiations on fishing limits for 2012 have resulted in a decision to set Total Allowable Catches (TACs) at a level which exceeds scientifically recommended limits.

At the two-day Council meeting European fisheries ministers had the chance to take a big step towards the sustainable exploitation of European fisheries resources – and failed.

While progress has been made, it has been insufficient to achieve the European commitment to manage all fish stocks at Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) levels by 2015.

Despite the repeated pleas of Commissioner Maria Damanaki, the December tradition of ignoring scientific advice and setting unsustainably high fishing limits has not been broken. Whereas the proposal of the Commission for fishing limits in 2012 followed scientific advice for the majority of stocks, the Council followed this proposal for only 14 of the 75 decisions regarding stocks in EU waters. For all other cases they have set fishing limits higher than what was proposed, and in 53 instances this difference was more than 10%.

Ministers have also chosen not to follow the long-term management plan for North Sea herring and increased the TAC by more than 100% - whereas the plan foresaw maximum annual increases of 15%. Multi-annual plans make for better management than yearly bargaining. The Council therefore made a real mistake to disregard this long-term management plan, setting a dangerous precedent for other stocks.

According to the European Commission, Ministers' decisions have exceeded scientific recommendations by an average of 47% since 2003. Setting catch limits that do not exceed scientific advice is essential in order to achieve levels that can produce the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) by 2015 – a target that was set at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 and to which the EU and its Member States have committed themselves.

Dr. Monica Verbeek, Executive Director of Seas At Risk said:

“Ministers remain under the illusion that overfishing will somehow save jobs. This disregard for scientific advice and for international commitments will undermine the future of the fishing industry and does not bode well for the ongoing reform of the Common Fisheries Policy.”

The European Commission's proposal regarding fishing opportunities for 2012 was based on the goal of managing stocks at MSY levels by 2015, on

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following scientific advice, and on applying a precautionary approach in the case of data-poor stocks.

By opposing the Commission's proposals, Ministers made a mockery of stated ambitions to reform the CFP so as to achieve economically, socially and environmentally sustainable fisheries.

The outcome of this year's horse-trading regarding fishing opportunities shows once again that the system is flawed - the CFP reform process must put an end to this yearly disgrace if there are to be healthy fish stocks for fishers and the environment in the future.

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Notes to the editor:

- 1) Seas At Risk is a European association of non-governmental environmental organisations working to protect and restore to health the marine environment of the European seas and the wider North East Atlantic.
- 2) Seas At Risk's recommendations prior to the Fisheries Council meeting: http://www.seas-at-risk.org/1images/SAR%20Letter%20Ministers_111202.pdf, <http://www.seas-at-risk.org/1images/Annex%201%20TACs%202012%20EU%20waters-1.pdf>
- 3) Council press release: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/agricult/127031.pdf