

Dear Members of the European Parliament,

Very soon, you will decide on the future of Europe's fishing industry as you vote on proposals for reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). This historic occasion will be an opportunity that will not arise again for another decade to secure the future of this important sector, rather than expose it to further degradation.

We, the signatories to this letter, are experts in fisheries science and management. In November 2012 we came together for a meeting with members of the European Parliament Fisheries Committee chaired by Mr Stanley Johnson and hosted by Mrs Ulrike Rodust, to give our views on what would make this reform of the CFP successful.¹ Comparing our experiences over many years, in the EU and around the world, we shared a number of common conclusions on actions that should be taken. We bring to your attention the following key elements that we agree are essential for profitable and sustainable fisheries management:

The new CFP must bring an end to overfishing. Though some improvement has been seen in recent years, many stocks in EU waters remain over-fished, some of them seriously so. This fact is one big cause of unprofitability and instability in the fishing sector, with consequences not only for the marine environment, but for businesses, livelihoods and coastal communities. The report voted for by the Fisheries Committee on 18 December 2012 requires that by 2015, fishing levels must be set which will allow stocks to recover, by 2020 at the latest, above levels that are capable of producing the maximum sustainable yield (a threshold important in fisheries management). Such a recovery is achievable (based on work by the EU's own scientists²). This approach, including importantly the objective of keeping stocks above maximum sustainable yield levels, will provide long-term sustainability. To reach the ultimate goal both of sustainable stocks and increased profitability, we must ensure that the amount we take out of the sea is below that needed to take maximum sustainable yield. That way any excess fishing effort and hence unnecessary costs are avoided and major improvements in fisheries profitability, increases in average size of fish (reduced waste of undersized unmarketable fish), and more stability of catches will follow.

We must manage our fisheries according to what we catch, not what we bring to land, and eliminate the practice of 'discarding'. Current fisheries rules are based on what boats bring to shore - which may be very different to what is caught at sea. Even the EU's central measure for controlling fishing intensity, Total Allowable Catches (TACs), are actually limits on what is landed, not what is caught. Fish caught in excess of the TAC, unwanted, or lacking in market value, are thrown dead overboard. This is the root of the problem known as discarding.

Crucially, counting and reporting only landings, not the total catch, leads to uncertainty over how much fish is actually caught and what the true state of the stock is, which means scientists cannot accurately calculate the best fishing levels. The reformed CFP must ensure everything that is caught is recorded and counted against *catch* limits. Collecting this data will allow us to make better management decisions, and help stabilise fishing levels, avoiding sudden dramatic reductions in catch limits resulting from previous underestimations.

Discarding is also a waste of money and resources. The report of the Fisheries Committee proposes to eliminate it through a phased requirement to land all that is caught. This will also provide a strong incentive for the industry to adopt more selective and sustainable techniques. To be effective, this landing obligation must be as comprehensive as possible, covering all harvested species. Exemptions which would, for example,

¹ For more details and conclusions of the November 2012 meeting, organised by environmental group ClientEarth and the GLOBE International legislators forum, please see ClientEarth's blog: <http://www.blog.clientearth.org/reforming-the-common-fisheries-policy-ending-overfishing-and-discards/>

² General Context of ICES advice, 2012

<http://www.ices.dk/committe/acom/comwork/report/2011/2011/General%20context%20of%20ICES%20advice.pdf>

allow a small amount of catch to be discarded, will be very hard to apply in practice and could undermine efforts to end this problem.³

By underlining these fundamental points, we seek to help secure a new CFP providing better livelihoods for fishermen, cheaper fish for consumers, less dependence on subsidies, plus less wastage of natural resources and human effort.

Yours sincerely,

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Professor Seth Macinko, Department of Marine Affairs, University of Rhode Island, USA

Dr Carl O'Brien, outgoing Vice-Chair ICES Advisory Committee and Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, UK

As the Chairman of the November debate

Mr Stanley Johnson, former Vice-Chairman of European Parliament Environment Committee

³ Only species with a proven ability to survive the process of discarding should be exempt.