

Scottish Fishing Policy

Sustaining fish stocks whilst sustaining the fishing industry and the communities it supports

Background

In the Foreword to a 2004 Inquiry by the Royal Society of Edinburgh into the future of the Scottish Fishing Industry, the Inquiry Chairman, Sir David Smith, said: "Restrictions imposed under the Common Fisheries Policy ...have proved particularly severe for the demersal or whitefish sector of the Scottish Fishing Industry – with the potential to inflict lasting damage on the communities concerned".

Fishing is of much greater importance to Scotland than to the UK as a whole. Because of quota restrictions, landings in all demersal fish by the Scottish fleet declined from 300,000 in 1982 to 130,000 in 2002. In view of this, a collapse in profitability has placed huge pressure on vessel owners and their crews, many of whom live in remote coastal areas and islands where the prospects of alternate employment are few.

Issues

The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) - launched by the European Union in 1970, the CFP made EU fishing grounds a common resource to all member states. In order to help conserve fish stocks the CFP regulates how many fish each national fleet can catch, specifying quotas for the various species as well as minimum net sizes. In 2009 the EU began a policy review the chief aim of which is to minimise so-called 'discarding' – throwing fish back into the sea, dead or alive, because they did not match the quota. It is widely accepted that the current CFP has failed. A spokesman for the UK government says the focus for its delegation will be to argue for less 'micro-management' from Brussels and more responsibility for the industry.

Conservation – Scottish skippers have been piloting ground breaking conservation measures, however, there is debate about whether they have done enough to save fragile cod stocks. Industry concerns include reaction to a controversial reduction to days at sea, under the plan for cod recovery. The Scottish Fisheries Secretary has stressed that the Commission's proposals for fishing in 2010 were just the starting point for the autumn negotiations, and that the Scottish Government would be fighting 'tooth and nail' to secure an outcome that helps keep the Scottish fleet viable without endangering stock recovery. Although Marine Scotland manages the Scottish quotas and regulations, fishing policy is remains reserved to the UK Government.

Questions

- What should the Scottish fishing industry look like in the future?
- What further conservation measures can be used to allow the Scottish fishing industry to be sustainable?

Further information

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