

Active Planet: agreement to reduce wasted fish

The Fisheries Council of the European Commission has agreed to a proposal by the UK Government to take action to reduce the number of fish caught, killed and thrown away by commercial fishermen. It has also secured agreement to allow larger catches.

It's a problem few people know about: fishing fleets target a particular type of fish; when they catch things they don't want, they just throw them back, usually dead or dying.

In part, this is because a cod-boat may have a quota of x kilos, and if it retains the non-cod catch, its quota will be reached with catch that may not have the same commercial value.

The result is that catches are sorted on board, and a considerable amount of saleable fish is tossed overboard.

This leads to depletion of fish stocks.

The plan is to conduct trials of schemes to reduce wastage. From a consumer's point of view, there should be an increase in variety and a reduction in cost.

Also agreed, at the instance of the UK government for the benefit of the UK fishing industry were:

- Until EU/Norway negotiations are concluded, provisional quotas equivalent to 90 per cent of 2009 allocations for relevant stocks such as North Sea Cod, Haddock and Whiting, better than the 50 per cent originally proposed by the Commission;

- Nine per cent quota reduction in Nephrops (such as Langoustines, Scampi and Dublin Bay Prawns) in an area including the Irish Sea, better than the 30 per percent reduction originally

proposed;

- A quota reduction of 25 per cent in West of Scotland Haddock, better by over 50 per cent than the Commission's initial proposal;

- A quota reduction of five per cent for Western Channel Sole, better than the 15 per cent originally proposed;

- A 10 per cent increase in quotas for North Sea and West of Scotland Megrin, better than the original Commission proposal of no change;

- No reduction for Celtic Sea Cod quota, better than the initial proposal of 25 per cent; and

- Greater flexibility for Producer Organisations to better manage their North Sea Cod quotas.

The UK fishing fleet has been reduced to a fraction of its previous size as the waters it is allowed to fish have been restricted and others, notably the Spanish fleet, have been given permission to fish ever-further north into UK waters.

Over-fishing, particularly for cod, has led to concerns as to the future of the species, with haddock also reducing significantly.

Worldwide, cod stocks are falling: the fish take several years to mature. Cod are often caught before they breed, and even more often before they have bred in successive seasons. Supermarkets and restaurants in the Far East, in particular Japan, sell cod steaks from juvenile cod as a matter of course.