

Council of the EU

Addressing the issue of overfishing in European waters and considering its environmental repercussions



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Introducing Your Chairs

Hey all! I'm Luna, a 20-year-old first years bachelor of Biology student at Utrecht University. I've been doing MUNs for roughly seven years now, and in those seven years I've made quite some friends; So, if you can't find me I'm probably catching up with some of the other chairs. The MUN that thoughts me everything was MUNSSCE, in which I've filled in multiple OC roles, and was Secretary General for two years. Together with my favourite MUN-man Bernd.

Aside from MUNs and studying, I absolutely adore walking through nature, horse riding, playing guitar, and making art. Oh, and obviously I enjoy bullying Bernd a bit ;)

I am extremely glad that I get the opportunity to chair the European Council of Famun. See you all soon!

An Introduction To The Topic

In the modern day ways of European fisheries, the issue of overfishing causes major problems for the fragile balance of the world's marine ecosystems. European waters, blooming with diverse marine life, face the daunting challenge of keeping up with the demands of an ever-growing population, whilst crumbling under the environmental consequences of overexploitation.

Overfishing, driven by complex interactions of economic interests and resource management, poses a great threat to marine biodiversity. It disrupts ecosystems, and jeopardises the long-term ability to work, and survive, successfully from the fishing industries. Despite the awareness of all these problems, finding an effective long-term solution still seems impossible.

This report will tell you the basics of what you need to know about overfishing in the European waters, examining a part of the current state, its environmental impacts and current attempts to solve the issue. As the European Council shoulders the responsibility of the policies made, the imperative to address overfishing is not simply a choice, but a crucial step towards ensuring the future and sustainability of Europe's marine ecosystems and the fishery industries.

To be able to navigate these turbulent waters during debate a basic understanding of the economic, social, and environmental aspects of overfishing are required. Finding a way to balance the interests of fishing communities, ensuring food security, and preserving the ecological integrity of marine habitats. By exploring innovative solutions the European Council can play a pivotal role in steering towards a future where Europe's waters and accompanied industries can thrive.

Definition of Key Terms

1. **Overfishing:**
 - a. Definition: Harvesting fish at a rate that exceeds the ability of the species to replenish itself.
 - b. Simplified Explanation: Catching too many fish, killing their populations faster than they can reproduce.
2. **Biodiversity:**
 - a. Definition: The variety of living organisms in a particular habitat.
 - b. Simplified Explanation: The different types of plants, animals, and all other living things in an area.
3. **Ecosystem:**
 - a. Definition: A community of living organisms and their physical environment, functioning as an ecological unit.
 - b. Simplified Explanation: The combination of living organisms and their surroundings, working together as a system.
4. **Resource Management:**
 - a. Definition: The efficient and sustainable use of natural resources, such as fish stocks, to meet human needs.
 - b. Simplified Explanation: Using resources wisely to make sure that they are available for the long term future.
5. **Sustainability:**
 - a. Definition: Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
 - b. Simplified Explanation: Making sure that we use resources in a way that does not harm the environment for the current and future generations.
6. **Economic Interests:**
 - a. Definition: Pursuits, activities, or goals related to financial well-being and wealth.
 - b. Simplified Explanation: Actions or decisions based on making money and improving economic conditions.
7. **Marine Ecosystem:**
 - a. Definition: The interconnected system of marine life in oceans, seas, and other bodies of saltwater.
 - b. Simplified Explanation: The combination of plants and animals living in the oceans and seas and their interactions.
8. **Policy Determination:**
 - a. Definition: The process of making decisions and setting guidelines through governmental or organizational policies.
 - b. Simplified Explanation: Deciding on rules and guidelines for specific issues.
9. **Food Security:**
 - a. Definition: The state of having reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable and nutritious food.
 - b. Simplified Explanation: Making sure everyone has enough good-quality food to eat.
10. **Ecological Integrity:**
 - a. Definition: The overall health and natural balance of an ecosystem.
 - b. Simplified Explanation: Keeping nature in a good, healthy state without disruptions.

A General Overview of the Issue

Overfishing and Environmental Repercussions

The issue of overfishing in European waters poses a significant threat to the balance of the marine ecosystems. With the diversity of marine life declining in European waters, the challenge lies in meeting the demands of a growing population while solving the environmental consequences of overexploitation.

Challenges

Overfishing is driven by a complex interplay of economic interests and resource management, resulting in a threat to marine biodiversity. This practice disrupts ecosystems and jeopardizes the long-term sustainability of fishing industries. Despite awareness, finding effective and lasting solutions remains a considerable challenge.

Opportunities

Exploring solutions to overfishing presents opportunities for Europe to:

- Preserve biodiversity and ecological balance in marine ecosystems.
- Sustain long-term viability for fishing industries, ensuring economic stability.

Key Strategies

To tackle overfishing and its environmental consequences, the European Council should consider the following key strategies:

1. **Sustainable Fishing Practices:** Promoting and enforcing sustainable fishing methods to prevent overharvesting.
2. **Ecosystem-based Management:** Implementing strategies that consider the entire ecosystem to maintain ecological balance.
3. **Regulatory Measures:** Strengthening regulations and enforcement to prevent illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing activities.
4. **International Cooperation:** Collaborating with neighboring countries and international bodies to create comprehensive solutions.
5. **Research and Monitoring:** Investing in scientific research and advanced monitoring technologies to assess and manage fish stocks effectively.
6. **Community Engagement:** Involving local fishing communities in decision-making processes to ensure a balanced approach.
7. **Educational Initiatives:** Raising awareness about sustainable fishing practices and the importance of preserving marine ecosystems.

Historical Background

For thousands of years marine life has been a staple in the human diet. During the Middle Ages rising human populations and demand changed the practices of fisheries. Many fisheries went from fishing exclusively to feed their own household or that of the lord to selling to local customers, a local market. These markets helped the rise of the exchange sector in the middle ages. Eventually these local fisheries started to sell to consumers further away and also started to fish in waters further from shore. Eventually even whales were being hunted. Essentially fisheries had transitioned to more profit focused businesses.

Since the industrial revolution the human population has grown rapidly, further increasing the human consumption of fish. This in addition with the human urge for profit has led to the endangerment of many species.

In the 20th century the demand for fish has increased even further however since the creation of the European Union new legislation and regulation to help reduce overfishing has been put in place. There are now multiannual management plans and annual catch limits (TACs) to help regulate the fishing industry.

Major Parties Involved

EFCA

The European Fisheries Control Agency is the main EU body working to organise coordination and cooperation between national control and inspection activities so that the rules of the CFP (common fisheries policy) are respected and applied effectively.

The Mediterranean Sea

Out of all the European seas, the Mediterranean is currently the most overfished. Around the 70s, when fishing efforts increased considerably due to technological advancements, which allowed fleets fish deeper and farther and locate catches more readily.

NGO's

Many Non-Governmental Organisations are urging the EU to take further actions and for nations to follow scientific advice to protect the environment and ensure sustainability. They are calling for action and change

Spain

In 2022 Spain's fleets caught more than 20% of all EU catches in weight. Followed by France and Denmark. Furthermore, it is second in consumption per capita, only behind its neighbour Portugal.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies at WTO's 12th ministerial Conference

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) successfully negotiated a historic agreement in June 2022 with the goal of lowering global overfishing and cutting fish subsidies. The landmark Fisheries Agreement established regulations to help preserve the world's oceans, support declining fishing stocks, protect the many communities worldwide whose livelihoods depend on marine resources. The legislation includes provisions to improve government accountability and openness regarding the act of (over)fishing. The text allows for subsidies as long as they are implemented to rebuild the fishing stock to a "biologically sustainable level".

WWF Marine Stewardship Council

The Marine Stewardship Council has developed an internationally recognised standard for fisheries environmental performance and established a transparent method to assess fisheries against this standard using incentives provided by the market. By doing this, the MSC has greatly aided in ocean conservation and offered a global framework for motivating fisheries to advance toward sustainability. In addition, many fisheries have benefited from the traceability, legality, and openness provided by the MSC's chain of custody criteria

Catch-share programmes in the USA

Regional fishery management councils, mostly in the USA, have previously chosen to adopt so-called 'catch-share programmes'. Such small-scaled programs entail fishery management plans that give individual fishermen, cooperatives, or fishing communities a set percentage of the overall authorised catch. A portion of a species' catch, or a share, is allocated to an individual fishermen or groups. After reaching his limit, each holder of a catch share must cease fishing. Fishermen can often buy, sell, or lease shares during a given year. This enables other businesses that depend on the fishing industry to plan more efficiently and enables them to

schedule their fishing around the weather, markets, or other factors.

This method provides many benefits, including:

- Eliminating the race to fish
- Reducing the likelihood that annual catch limits will be exceeded
- Reducing the costs to produce seafood
- Reducing market gluts and increasing dockside prices
- Extending fishing seasons
- Reducing bycatch
- Improving fishermen's safety

Possible Solutions For The Issue

Sustainable Quotas

Establishing and enforcing scientifically determined catch limits for different fish species to prevent overfishing. This involves setting sustainable maximums that consider the needs of each species.

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

Designating and managing Marine Protected Areas where fishing is restricted or prohibited. MPAs can serve as safe places for marine life to reproduce and live, contributing to the overall health of the world's ecosystems.

Selective Fishing Gear

Encouraging the use of selective and environmentally friendly fishing gear that minimizes bycatch (too many) and reduces the impact on non-target species (unwanted). This can include adopting gear modifications and technologies that allow for more precise and less destructive fishing practices. For example different fishing nets.

Monitoring and Surveillance

Enhancing the monitoring and surveillance through advanced technologies such as satellite tracking, drones, coastal guards, and vessel monitoring systems. This helps detect and prevent illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing activities.

Community-Based Fisheries

Involving local fishing communities in the decision-making process and empowering them to participate in sustainable fisheries. Community-based approaches often result in more effective and culturally sensitive solutions. Influencing both the economical and ecological aspects positively.

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