

EU subsidies have encouraged overfishing: study

March 31 2010



Fishing nets are laid out on the dock at a port in northwestern France. EU fisheries subsidies have encouraged overfishing over the years and helped maintain an over-capacity in the industry, according to a study published Wednesday

EU fisheries subsidies have encouraged overfishing over the years and helped maintain an over-capacity in the industry, according to a study published Wednesday.

The study was carried out in 10 European countries -- including Britain, Denmark, France and Spain -- which accounted for almost all of the 4.9 billion euros of fishing subsidies handed out by Brussels from 2000-2006.

"EU fisheries subsidies and the overfishing of valuable [fish](#) stocks are

clearly connected," said Tim Huntingdon, consultant at British-based Poseidon Aquatic Resource, which carried out the study along with fellow NGO the Pew Environment Group.

The researchers complained that changes to the funding and reporting systems meant that such a study covering more recent years would be impossible to carry out.

According to their report, 29 percent of the EU handouts went to measures which contributed to overfishing -- modernisation of fleets, vessel construction -- while just 17 percent was dedicated to measures to support healthy fisheries -- scrapping and temporary fishing bans.

Spain, France, Portugal and Germany in particular were said to have benefited from subsidies for "negative measures" as far as sustainable fisheries are concerned.

Of the boats scrapped, the researchers found that more money went to scrap small boats, of less than 12 metres in length, while the reverse was true for the big boats of over 24 metres in length.

Over the study period they found that almost 3,000 new fishing boats were built and 8,000 modernised thanks to EU funding.

However only 6,000 vessels, many of which were small fishing boats on the Greek and Italian coasts, benefited from scrappage aid.

The aim of the EU's Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG), from where the finding came for the period in question, was in part to "contribute to revitalising areas dependent on fisheries and aquaculture".

It was also designed to "contribute to achieving a balance between

fisheries resources and their exploitation," according to the European Commission.

However the researchers are unimpressed by the results.

"EU fishing subsidies have failed to reduce fleet overcapacity, thus exerting fishing pressure on stocks at two or three times sustainable levels," the Pew group argues.

Among the key European [fish stocks](#) where [overfishing](#) has been enabled are Southern hake, monkfish, sharks and prawns, the report says.

Since 2007, the EU subsidies have been handed out under the European Fisheries Fund (EFF).

With the change of funding instrument "the transparency has been removed," complained Markus Knigge, of the Pew Environment Group.

The EFF "tighter disclosure criteria make a similar allocation study impossible," he said. "The public have a right to know what they have funded".

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Citation: EU subsidies have encouraged overfishing: study (2010, March 31) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-03-eu-subsidies-overfishing.html>

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