

Sustainable fishing is possible and necessary

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Sustainable fishing is possible and necessary. Credit: SINC

In the 1990s the European Commission approved a series of management measures to avoid the over-exploitation of fishery resources. A study carried out by the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC) now reveals that the Common Fisheries Policy in Europe has promoted the extension of the European fleet into more vulnerable eco-systems such as deep waters. However, the next reform of the fishery policy could reverse this trend and achieve sustainability of marine resources.

"The regulation of fishery resources and of the Community fleet has not achieved the expected results", confirm two Spanish research projects

which appear in the latest edition of the *Marine Policy* magazine and which provide an update on all the information available regarding European fishery resources.

"The Common Fisheries Policy has drastically reduced small-scale fishing in the main European coastal towns, and has subsidised the increase of larger fleets that fish in community waters, and in third countries, but above all in fishing grounds in waters more than 400 metres deep", Sebastián Villasante reports to SINC. He is the author of the studies, which are the product of a doctoral thesis led by María do Carme García-Negro, head of the Fishery Economy and Natural Resources Research Group in the USC.

Only a limited number of the community fishing ground stocks will have been recouped in 2015. "The rest is in a situation of over-exploitation and decline", states the fishery economy expert.

The laxness of the controls, the technological advances in vessels, and "the reluctant will of the member states to reduce their fishing capacity" are some of the reasons why the common policy has not been effective. "This has created a very delicate situation both in terms of the marine eco-systems and the fishing industry itself", Villasante points out.

"Non-cooperative management, the high volume of waste and illegal fishing, the "bad" subsidies assigned to the industry by the governments, the quest for short-term financial profit, and the ineffective forms of governing" the sea can all be added to the list of problems, according to the researcher.

A threat to marine biodiversity

In recent years the European fleet has experienced an "unprecedented" geographic and bathymetric growth that has especially affected those

species with high longevity, slow growth and low fertility rates. For this reason, "the conservation measures need to be stepped up", the study claims.

Villasante believes that with the increasing demand from the community market, the Common Fisheries Policy "has not been able to reduce the importation of [fish](#) products from developing countries, and the food safety of coastal towns in Africa, Asia and South America has also been put at risk".

"We are witnessing an era of financial globalisation of the fishing industry, but also a globalisation of the effects on oceans and coastal towns. In view of this, an overall response is also necessary from the scientific community and the governments", specifies the scientist.

More marine reserves and new regulations

The results of the conference on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy which took place in A Coruña on May 2nd and 3rd are "positive" in general, according to the expert.

"Mechanisms needed by experts, industry and governments for discussing and exchanging opinions are being created, although these results are not binding for the purpose of the next reform of the Common Fisheries Policy", warns the researcher, who considers that the next reform arises as "an excellent opportunity, although somewhat late since the EU will not carry out the international agreements made in the Johannesburg Summit for 2015".

The focus of the next reform of the Common Fisheries Policy will be to create more marine reserves, and "to adopt new mechanisms for the distribution of fishing resources that will guarantee that stocks will be recouped and jobs maintained, as well as to establish incentive measures

for fishermen and women so that they take part in the decision-making process", states the expert.

In order to achieve sustainable fishing, Villasante proposes new biological, ecological and economic goals for 2020. "We need to eliminate the subsidies that encourage overfishing, create mechanisms to protect small-scale fishing, create protected marine areas according to the intensity of the fishing and the vulnerability of the species, and adopt a regime to sanction non-sustainable fishing practices", the researcher concludes.

More information: Villasante, S (2010) "Global assessment of the European Union fishing fleet: An update" *Marine Policy* 34(3): 663-670. [doi:10.1016/j.marpol.2009.12.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2009.12.007)

Villasante, S., Sumaila, R. (2010) "Estimating the effects of technological efficiency on the European fleet" *Marine Policy* 34(3): 720-722. [doi:10.1016/j.marpol.2009.12.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2009.12.007)

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