

EU keeps controversial fishing subsidies

October 24 2012



Bream in the Mediterranean Sea off the Sormiou Creek in southern France. The EU has agreed to maintain controversial fishing subsidies, sparking a sharp response from environmental groups who say the payments contribute to overfishing of already stressed stocks.

The EU agreed on Wednesday to maintain controversial fishing subsidies, sparking a sharp response from environmental groups who say the payments contribute to overfishing of already stressed stocks.

After tough, drawn-out talks which went into the night, a draft statement said that ministers would keep subsidies for modernising fishing fleets through to 2017 as part of a wider policy to put the industry on a sustainable basis.

The [subsidies](#) pay for modernising existing vessels or taking older boats out of the fleet and are jealously guarded by the main fishing powers—France, Portugal and especially Spain.

Critics, however, say this only increases fishing capacity at a time when the focus should be on reducing the catch so as to allow stocks to recover.

In June, the EU agreed a series of reforms, chief among them proposals to set so-called Maximum Sustainable Yields (MSY)—the maximum amount of fish that can be caught without compromising a stock's ability to reproduce.

Scientists say, for example, that 80 percent of Mediterranean stocks are overfished although the situation has improved in [Atlantic waters](#).

Combined, the EU counts as the world's third biggest fishing power, making what it does a key marker for the global industry.

The [Greenpeace](#) environmental group dismissed Wednesday's accord under the headline "European ministers want to continue bankrolling overfishing."

It said EU ministers were "selling out to the short-term economic interests of the industrial [fishing industry](#), instead of putting Europe's [fisheries](#) onto a path of recovery.

"Many parts of the EU [fishing fleet](#) are already able to catch two to three times more than is sustainable, but ministers ... have signalled that they want to continue funnelling [subsidies](#) into the modernisation of vessels."

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Citation: EU keeps controversial fishing subsidies (2012, October 24) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-10-eu-controversial-fishing-subsidies.html>

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