

EU says more need to use science to cut fish quota (Update)

December 14 2012, by Raf Casert



In front of the Mediterranean sea, a fisherman works fixing his net at the fishing port of Barcelona, Spain, Thursday, Dec. 13, 2012. The European Union's executive Commission is calling for a new approach to protect dwindling fishery stocks and eliminate a system of setting catch quotas in which scientific advice is widely disregarded. The WWF wildlife group produced a report Friday highlighting how EU nations have exceeded scientific advice in all but 13 percent of their decisions on setting fisheries quotas over the past nine years. (AP Photo/Emilio Morenatti)

(AP)—The European Union's executive Commission is calling for a new approach to protect dwindling fishery stocks and eliminate a system of setting catch quotas in which scientific advice is widely disregarded.

The WWF wildlife group produced a report Friday highlighting how EU nations have followed scientific advice in only 13 percent of their decisions on setting fisheries quotas over the past nine years.

WWF said that quotas EU nations set for their fisheries industry are on average 45 percent higher than the scientific recommendations.

"We see the consequences of this bad decision-making in the depleted status of our fish stocks," said WWF expert Roberto Ferrigno.

The Commission called on legislators to back a drastic review of policy when their fisheries committee votes on the reform next Tuesday.

The same day, EU nations will open a marathon negotiating session that could last until Thursday to divide up the catch quotas for next year.

It often turns into all-night bartering sessions that environmentalists have pinpointed as a serious contributor to overfishing. With strong fishing lobbies at home, many coastal nations like France, Spain and Britain often exceed catch allowances for fishermen far beyond what scientists consider sustainable.

"Europeans throughout the EU have been calling on decision-makers to end overfishing. Next Tuesday, fisheries ministers must heed this call and not exceed scientific advice," said Uta Bellion, an expert at the Pew Environment Group.

The European Commission found that 47 percent of stocks in its Atlantic and North Sea waters are still overfished, peaking at 80 percent

in the Mediterranean.

Although there have been improvements in some stocks recently, the overall situation remains dire.

North Sea stocks of cod, the emblematic fish in the EU's Atlantic waters, have dropped by three-quarters over the past three decades although they now show some hesitant signs of improvement.

Bluefin tuna, once the pride of the Mediterranean, has seen stocks drop by 80 percent over the same time. The situation is no different in the rest of the world.

Beyond the quotas, the EU is working on a wholesale reform of its policies to kick in during 2014, seeking to tackle the problem of discards—where good fish is needlessly thrown back into the waters—and subsidies for boats, which can contribute to overfishing.

After the fisheries committee votes on Tuesday, the full parliament is expected to assess the program early next year.

"The European Parliament's fisheries committee can set ambitious targets to prevent them overfishing in the future," Bellion said.

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