

Report: EU fishing rules reform could lead to legal challenges to overfishing

December 17 2013

A new report published by the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) says that reforms to the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) could pave the way for legal action by campaign groups if scientific advice on fish stocks is ignored.

The report, commissioned by ocean conservation charity Blue Marine Foundation (BLUE) , says that quota allocations for threatened [fish stocks](#) including sole, cod and [sea bass](#) could face [legal challenges](#) for the first time.

According to the report, previous practice by European politicians of routinely allocating fishing quotas over the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) levels recommended by scientific studies will become legally untenable under the revised CFP framework.

Under the new regulations, the European Parliament has committed to ensuring [sustainable fisheries](#) in most cases by 2015, with a long stop of 2020. Crucially, the new CFP framework will also allow special interest groups including environmental campaigners from member states to mount formal legal challenges to fisheries legislation at an EU level – a practice that was previously impossible.

These changes to the CFP come at a critical time for a number of iconic fish species, the long-term survival of which in European waters currently hangs in the balance.

For example, research by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), a key advisor to the EU, has highlighted the imminent threat facing Irish Sea stocks of Dover sole. Stocks are currently being exploited at 88 per cent above sustainable levels and ICES is pushing for a closure of the fishery. Similar threats face stocks of cod in the North Sea and Irish Sea, where fisheries regulators have historically set quotas at levels that have been both technically illegal and often far in excess of scientific advice. The threat to stocks in the Irish Sea is being exacerbated by the large numbers of juvenile fish (or bycatch) currently being discarded by prawn fishing operations.

Tom Appleby, a senior lecturer in law from UWE's department of architecture and the built environment, one of the authors of the report, said, "I have already spoken to a number of environmental groups and fisheries organisations that are considering court action if the reforms set out to the new CFP are not put into practice. The law requires effective management based on scientific evidence and this is what people are expecting."

The new CFP regulations come into force in 2014 and the first serious test comes this week as EU fisheries leaders meet to decide the following year's fishing quotas. The long-term survival in European waters of a number of the continent's most iconic and sought-after fish may well hang on the outcome of these discussions.

Charles Clover, chair of the UK-based Blue Marine Foundation (BLUE), which funded the UWE study, said, "This really is a pivotal moment – we could at last be witnessing the beginning of the end to overfishing in EU waters. The acid test will be this December's meeting of [fisheries](#) ministers, though. The fate of sole and other threatened stocks including cod and sea bass in European waters will be closely watched. If quota allocations continue to disregard scientific advice, there could be some real fireworks."

Provided by University of the West of England

Citation: Report: EU fishing rules reform could lead to legal challenges to overfishing (2013, December 17) retrieved 23 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-12-eu-fishing-reform-legal-overfishing.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.