

CFP reform – Maximum Sustainable Yield

Why should the new policy be based on Maximum Sustainable Yield 2015?

75% of EU fish stocks are overfished, compared to 25% on average world wide. This overfishing in the EU damages fish stocks, leads to uncertain catches and makes our fishing industry financially vulnerable. Fragile fish stocks lead to suboptimal catches and this in turn leads to more fishing. Today, overfished stocks are mostly made up of smaller and less valuable fish. These are discarded back into the sea either because of their low commercial value or because they are below the minimum size.

We have to break this vicious circle. This is the idea behind MSY, which is the largest catch that can be taken from a fish stock over an indefinite period without harming it. Managing stocks according to MSY will mean going from fishing desperately on smaller fish stocks to fishing rationally on abundant ones. It will lead to larger stocks, and thus higher catch potential, higher profit margins and higher return on investment –in other words, an additional income for our fishing industry. It will also bring larger fish in the catches fetching higher market prices per kilogramme. With less undersized fish in the hauls there will be less pressure to discard. Furthermore as it takes less fishing time to catch a tonne of fish from an abundant stock than from a smaller one, this will also reduce fuel expenditures as well as carbon emissions of fishing vessels. Finally consumers will have a much wider choice of fish from healthy EU stocks.

Member States (MS) and the EU subscribed to the MSY objective almost thirty years ago in the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Seas. They then reiterated it in the 1995 UN Fish Stock Agreement, in 2002 in the Johannesburg Declaration and finally in 2010 in Nagoya. Important international partners, such as the United States and Australia, have already moved in this direction and the EU is lagging behind.

How would MSY be achieved in EU fisheries?

The best way to manage fish stocks according to MSY is through multiannual plans. Fixing the fishing mortality to be achieved by a plan is the best management measure to ensure stability from one year to the next. The multiannual plans should fix mortality rates at a level that can help us obtain larger stocks over time.

What progress has the EU made to date on MSY?

A number of existing long-term management plans are based on the MSY principle. Since 2010 the Commission bases its proposals for annual TACs and quotas on scientific advice and on achieving MSY by 2015. The fishing industry in Europe has proven that it is possible to move to MSY, because we have already achieved it for 11 stocks, namely sole in the Skagerrak, Kattegat and Baltic Sea, in the western Channel, in the Celtic Sea; North Sea haddock, Rockall haddock; herring in the North Sea, the west of Scotland and the Celtic Sea, megrims off Spain and Portugal and North Sea Nephrops. All of these stocks are today fished sustainably with increased landings and incomes for the fishermen and the coastal communities. Furthermore for a number of other stocks we are on a good way towards MSY 2015. Eastern Baltic cod is a show case where determined action has brought the fisheries from serious overexploitation to sustainable exploitation and quotas are increasing year on year.

How would MSY be achieved for stocks with a lack of data?

In order to have reliable information to determine MSY we need to have reliable data on fishing. Two developments under the reform will bring about this reliable data: firstly, the obligation to land all catches (as opposed to the current estimates of discard data); secondly, the new partnerships between fishermen and scientists. These will improve the collection of more reliable catch data and will significantly improve the knowledge base to determine MSY.

How should MSY be dealt with in mixed fisheries ?

In mixed fisheries, it should be the most vulnerable stock that determines the limits of exploitation for all other fish taken in the same fishery. This is the only way to ensure that MSY is reached for all stocks in a fishery. For instance, reaching MSY in the sole fishery requires adjusting the fisheries for plaice (and for other by-catch stocks) accordingly, and may imply a fishing mortality lower than MSY for plaice. At the same time fishermen can decrease the impact of fishing on the most vulnerable species by using more selective gear. Selective gears will be part of multi-annual plans and technical measures and they can be adapted by the MS via regionalization to the specific requirements of the fishery in question.

In a number of fisheries the most vulnerable stock is at the same time the most valuable one. This is for example the case for cod in the whitefish fishery and sole in the flatfish fishery. Establishing the corresponding fishing opportunities in such mixed fisheries will require fixing MSY rates for each of the stocks and ICES is currently working on this.

MSY in the international context

In the international context the EU needs to apply the same principle as for itself. When acting on behalf of the EU, the Commission will seek to integrate the MSY objective in its negotiating position, basing itself on scientific advice or input.

What do we do in meantime?

There is consensus that in the medium term MSY will ensure environmental, social and economic sustainability. The issue is how to get there and the Commission is determined to help the fishing industry and the coastal communities cope with the transition. It has therefore proposed a strong EMFF with a whole catalogue of funding possibilities for the fishing industry including funding

- for the fishing industry to develop more selective fishing methods
- for vessel owners and fishermen to participate in selectivity trials
- for social dialogue meetings of the fishing industry in and across MS to exchange ideas and best practises
- for training and professional qualifications to become familiar with innovative gears
- for diversification of small scale fishermen
- for the fishing industry to collect specific data, be it biological or socio-economic data
- for marketing initiatives to develop products brands, such as "MSY fish"

- for fishermen to participate actively in regionalization by coming forward with concrete proposals on how to achieve MSY 2015.