



There is no Point in Camouflaging...

... the Crisis in North Sea Fisheries

Evolution of fish species has resulted in a number of strategies to avoid predation, protect offspring and maintain sustainable stock levels. Flatfish, such as plaice and sole, have taken to **camouflage** as a means to survival.

But for fish such as plaice, there is little point in **camouflaging** themselves any longer. There is no chance to escape: heavy beam trawling, small-sized mesh and hoover fishing as well as the overall increase in fishing fleet and effort have led to over-exploitation of stocks and are posing a serious threat to the entire marine ecosystem. The problem can be best illustrated in the North Sea.

Politicians who try to **camouflage** the crisis in North Sea fisheries with solemn statements cannot escape the seriousness of the situation.

WWF's Essentials for the

North Sea Intermediate Ministerial Meeting on the Integration of Fisheries and Environmental Issues (IMM)

March 1997

The Fisheries Impact - An Urgent Issue Emerging from the 4th North Sea Conference

Spurred by the concerns that were raised in the North Sea Quality Status Report (1993), the Ministers of Environment at the 4th North Sea Conference (Esbjerg, 1995) were of the opinion that the ecological impact of fisheries deserved special attention and hence scheduled an Intermediate Ministerial Meeting (IMM) on the Integration of Fisheries and Environmental Issues. WWF welcomed this and therefore encourages all participants in the IMM '97 to **agree** on joint action, targets and deadlines regarding the following:

Precautionary Approach

European scientists are concerned that North Sea cod stocks are in danger of collapsing, due to the poor status of stocks of reproduceable age. WWF believes that the lack of a precautionary approach to the management of North Sea fisheries over the last decade means that many other commercial species could go down the same road as herring and cod. WWF is **calling** on the North Sea Ministers to **adopt** a precautionary approach to management of fisheries as a top priority to halt overfishing of North Sea fish stocks. This would put an end to the application of the reactionary approach where the EU waits for a disaster before taking action. True implementation of the precautionary approach does not mean a moratoria on fishing. It means that decision-makers cease using the lack of scientific advice as an excuse for inaction. Furthermore, Ministers should **agree** that uncertainty is taken into account when setting quotas for major commercial species so that the impacts on dependent species can be included. In this way, we may avoid having to take such drastic measures while at the same time conserving the North Sea stocks, ecosystems and industry.





Recovery Plans

There has been considerable resistance to agreeing to establish recovery plans for major North Sea fisheries. We know that most North Sea stocks are not in good condition and believe that recovery plans are essential for rebuilding these stocks. WWF is **calling** on the North Sea Ministers to request the establishment of recovery plans as a key element of the precautionary approach. As a top priority, recovery plans **must** be established for species which are currently overfished, threatened and depleted. These plans should be specific in the measures which should be applied, the time periods for recovery and recovery levels. The rate of recovery should be monitored by the relevant authorities and be made publicly available. Species or stock rebuilding may require the establishment of "no-go" areas: marine refuges and semi-permanently or permanently closed areas. Enough information exists on the areas which could be considered for these purposes. WWF is **calling** on Ministers to act responsibly and take action now.

Fishing Gears, By-catch and Discards

The adverse impacts of specific fishing methods used in the North Sea is well documented. There is also evidence that some fishing methods are more harmful than others in terms of damage to young fish of commercial and non-commercial species caught as by-catch and discarded. The damage to the marine environment caused by some fishing methods such as beam trawling is of particular concern since there seems to be no political will to control the activity. WWF **urges** North Sea Ministers to give a high profile to the protection of juvenile fish, non-commercial species and the North Sea ecosystem, as a whole. Ministers must **agree** on actions on the control of specific fishing practices such as beam trawling and industrial fishing as well as ways to control by-catch and discarding. Strict regulations such as a discard ban in the North Sea before 2002 should be **agreed**. Assessments of the potential damage of new and modified fishing techniques should be carried out before they are used in commercial fishing operations.

Industrial Fishing

North Sea fish species such as cod, haddock and plaice are already under heavy fishing pressure due to the demand for these species for human consumption. At the same time, their primary food source in the form of smaller fish species such as herring and sandeels are being put under pressure for the purposes of conversion to fish meal and oil. This means that pressure on some species in the North Sea is coming from two angles. The result is potential disaster not just for fish species but also dependent species such as mammals and birds. WWF believes that North Sea Ministers must decide whether to harvest the food of commercial species or the target species. In either case, Ministers must **agree** to establish precautionary quotas for all harvested species in the North Sea and in some special cases introduce a moratoria on indiscriminate fishing practices such as industrial fishing in ecologically sensitive areas.



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