



Global Marine Programme

Restoring the balance

Managing Fishing Fleets

Milestone 2.2 - Managing Fishing Fleets

Measures are adopted to better manage fisheries (through the reduction of fishing capacity to levels that marine ecosystems can sustain) in national waters, on the high seas and in distant waters, including in ten G200 marine ecoregions by 2007.

The Multiple Causes of Overfishing

The world's fisheries are facing an unprecedented crisis. Overfishing is threatening the future sustainability of fisheries, the livelihoods of coastal and offshore fishers, marine biodiversity and ecosystems. Populations of fish - and most marine species - have fallen to a fraction of historical levels. Most large marine fish species populations have declined by 90% from previous levels, causing major changes to marine ecosystems and putting the commercial productivity of the oceans at an all-time low. Around the world, marine ecosystems and people are suffering the consequences.

The causes of this global crisis are multiple and complex. Many fisheries remain poorly managed or ineffectively policed. There are too few marine protected areas and no-take zones to provide real insurance against stock collapse and to encourage fisheries replenishment. Adding to this, the marketplace has been slow to reward sustainable practices.

When fish stocks shrink in home waters, many countries forge agreements with distant nations in order to access fish in their waters. Some fishers also resort to exploiting loopholes in national and international legislation to fish illegally in other countries' waters or on the high seas, in the trade known as IUU (Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported) fishing.



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Access agreements with developing countries can, if properly designed, provide well-needed foreign exchange and contribute to sustainable development. If not, they contribute to overfishing and exacerbate poverty.



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Fishing subsidies have contributed to the current 250% overcapacity of the global fishing fleet.

Alongside these causes of overfishing are two crude facts: the world's fishing **fleets are vastly oversized** and many continue to receive **massive government subsidies** that encourage excess capacity and overfishing. Ultimately, restoring the health of the oceans will depend on correcting these root causes of the overfishing crisis. WWF's Global Marine Programme has developed an area of work focused on these problems.

WWF Works to Improve Fisheries Management

WWF's fisheries management work includes promoting effort reduction, restoring fisheries and advocating that governments adopt principles of an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management.

We work at many levels and with a range of activities, including:

1. Developing and advocating for recovery plans and management plans for fisheries within national or regional jurisdiction.
2. Developing management regimes for fisheries on the high seas, including reducing or eliminating Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported fishing.
3. Developing partnerships with the fishing industry specifically to promote good fisheries management practices.
4. Ensuring fisheries access agreements are equitable and ecologically sustainable.
5. Identifying specific fisheries where overcapacity is an issue and developing capacity reduction plans with relevant stakeholders.
6. Reforming fishing subsidies regimes and allocations.

Decreasing the Footprint of Distant Water Fleets

Many countries, mainly the EU, the US, Korea, China and Japan, sign deals with developing countries to access their fish stocks. Such agreements, if properly designed, can provide much-needed revenue for cash-strapped countries. But if not, they cause overfishing and create substantial tension between governments, fishers' organizations and industrial groups.

In addition to being biologically untenable, the economic benefits from most current agreements are not fairly shared between producer and extractor nations.

Individual EU countries strike deals with third countries, under the auspices of the European Common Fisheries Policy. In 2004, Spain, for example, had access agreements in place with 18 countries, 16 of which in the developing world - as far apart as Cape Verde and Kiribati.

WWF believes fair access agreements should respect sustainable fishing levels, account for environmental costs, protect local fishers, include compliance with flag state laws, be based on best practice fisheries management, include cooperation on research and monitoring and ensure adequate monitoring and enforcement capacity.

WWF has developed a global strategy to negotiate fairer access agreements and is working in Latin America, West Africa and the Pacific Ocean to share this strategy with fisheries managers, governments, fishers and other stakeholders. WWF has also produced a handbook for developing nations to use when negotiating agreements with the EU, the United States and Asian countries.



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Access agreements with developing countries contribute to the overfishing of fish stocks in waters far from home. WWF advocates for access agreements that are fair and transparent to ensure the needs of local livelihoods are not compromised.

Curbing Illegal Fishing

A major obstacle to bringing international fisheries under tighter control is exploited by unscrupulous fishing companies – registering their fishing vessels to fly “flags of convenience” in countries who are not signatories to international agreements or do not enforce them. This allows these companies and their ships to escape penalties for operating in violation of the regulations established by regional fisheries management organisations to govern fishing on the high seas. Flag state irresponsibility is at the heart of the problem with illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. This system also acts as a means to facilitate illegal fishing within territorial waters by distant water fleets.

WWF works at many levels to curb IUU fishing. One example is the OECD ministerial task force that has been set up to prepare realistic recommendations on how to prevent and eliminate IUU fishing. WWF is a partner of this task force, advising on options and working to ensure that the recommendations are implemented.

Invest in Fish



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WWF works with local and national partners to develop pilot projects that show how the ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management can be used to improve the situation for fish and fishers.

In Southwest England, WWF has developed the Invest in Fish project with the government, industry and local communities. It involves a multi-stakeholder management process for the fisheries in the region and includes the identification of no-take zones and options for developing alternative livelihoods for people dependent on fishing.

In the first phase, conducted in 2004, the project team worked with stakeholders, including fishers, anglers, hotel owners and NGOs, to assess their views on how fish stocks in Southwest waters should be managed. The three year initiative is now scientifically modelling a series of scenarios to be rigorously tested for their economic, social and environmental implications for the region.

Invest In Fish is led by WWF UK, the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisation and the retailer Marks & Spencer. Funding for the project came in part through reallocation of fishing subsidies money towards sustainable initiatives.

Using Subsidies to Reduce Fishing Capacity

Although subsidies to the fishing sector is one of the root causes of overfishing, not all subsidies are bad. By using funds effectively, subsidies can help motivate sustainable fishing practices and thus provide a remedy to the current fishing crisis.

WWF is tackling fishing subsidies using a two-pronged approach aimed at two important international bodies: the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the EU. WWF is advocating for the elimination of harmful government subsidies, and for these funds to be redirected to more sustainable causes, such as capacity reduction, the development of stock recovery plans, research on stock assessments, and to help train fishers in seeking new sources of income where necessary.

In December 2002, after WWF's Stop Overfishing Campaign, the EU announced plans to phase out the three most destructive fishing subsidies by 2004 (new builds, modernization of fleet, and export of capacity). WWF is now working to influence the structural funds legislation of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy, using their mid-term review to remind the EU of its commitment to switch to supporting sustainable fishing practices only.

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