

To: DG MARE
Date: 15 December 2009
Ref No: RSK 1119-2009

Opinion on the European Commission's Green Paper on the Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy

It is very important to Västra Götaland that fish stocks are balanced, both as a natural resource, as part of our biodiversity and as the basis for a strong rural industry.

The North Sea is rich in food and has a high salt content. Sweden's first marine national park was recently founded in the Koster Sea off the northern coast of Bohus county, as it is home to the highest number of marine species in Sweden. Thanks to the high number of fish species found there, Västra Götaland has become the most popular fishing region in Sweden, with around 800 licensed professional fishermen. What is more, Lake Vänern in Västra Götaland means the region has one of the largest inland fisheries in Europe. Fishing has formed the basis for a Swedish processing industry, 75% of which is located in Västra Götaland.

The common fisheries policy (CFP) provides the framework for the development of fishing in Västra Götaland. The reform of the CFP gives Västra Götaland the opportunity to highlight certain aspects of the fisheries policy which particularly concern the region.

The discussion in the Green Paper is accompanied by specific questions on the nature of the fisheries policy. This opinion follows this structure to some extent, and our points of view are given as replies to the questions.

Views on the main points of the Green Paper

1. The region of Västra Götaland agrees with the assessment made in the Green Paper that fleet overcapacity must be reduced. Despite the fact that significant reductions have been made in certain fishing fleets and despite the fact that a large amount of tonnage has been scrapped in recent years, greater efforts must still be made. The fleet capacity, and first and foremost the use made of it, must be adapted so that catches are sustainable and balanced. Monitoring methods and instruments must be developed such that there is a clear link between sustainable catches and fishing effort.

2. Västra Götaland agrees that the main aim of the fisheries policy should be formulated such that environmental sustainability targets do not lose out to economic and social ones. Nowadays there is tendency to put economic and social sustainability first, at the expense of environmental and ecological considerations. The fisheries policy does of course refer to the precautionary principle and the ecosystem approach, but lacks clear indicators and benchmarks which offer specific guidance when balancing short-term sustainability targets.

The Green Paper asks whether the common fisheries policy should aim to maintain traditional fisheries or create alternative employment options in coastal societies. Västra Götaland is in favour of supporting alternative employment possibilities. We would welcome diversifying the measures in the CFP to facilitate development within neighbouring areas. The region of Västra Götaland and several municipalities in the region contribute financially to promoting “fishing areas”, in which cooperation between traditional fisheries and other coastal food production and tourist industries is prioritised.

3. Västra Götaland is in favour of regionalising parts of the fisheries policy, with the focus at central level on “a decision-making framework with core long-term principles” and where “specific regional management solutions” are used to take implementation decisions.

The Green Paper asks how the Regional Advisory Councils would adapt to a regionalised approach. Since 2006 there have been Regional Advisory Councils (RAC) for the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. The RAC give both industry representatives and those representing other interests such as conservation and outdoor activities the opportunity to channel carefully considered advice into the decision-making process for the CFP. Västra Götaland supports these regional advisory councils and believes they can be enhanced to help implement the fisheries policy. However, this requires the membership of the councils to change so that “industry” alone does not form a majority. The regions must also be involved in the councils, and there must be scientific advice on regional maritime areas.

Here the region of Västra Götaland wishes to point out that the translation of “regional advisory councils” as “regionala rådgivande nämnder” is incorrect. It is misleading to translate the English term “councils” as “nämnder” [lit: committees]. In Sweden “nämnder” are decision-making bodies, while regional advisory councils have merely an advisory function as regards fisheries policy.

4. The Green Paper stresses the importance of industry taking more responsibility for implementing the common fisheries policy. Experience has shown that when the interests affected by a decision are more involved and therefore take greater responsibility, it results in decisions being implemented more effectively. The Green Paper notes in particular that the industry can be given more responsibility through self management, and observes that “results-based management could be a move in this direction”. Results-based management relies on reversing the burden of proof. The industry must itself demonstrate that it operates responsibly in return for being allowed to continue fishing. In order to monitor the results of this method highly-developed quality-controlled performance measures are needed, which will reduce the risk of inaccurate and incomplete information.

The region of Västra Götaland supports such a development. Experience of fisheries in west Sweden, e.g. shrimping in the Koster-Väder islands, shows that economic and ecological sustainability and a balanced capacity are promoted by encouraging the industry to take more responsibility.

5. The Green Paper refers to a “culture of compliance” within fisheries controls. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fisheries, known as IUU, affect stock sustainability, the economy of the industry and competition between different legal and illegal companies, as well as consumer confidence in the industry. The Green Paper notes that the extent of IUU varies across the Union and has generated strong resistance to implementing measures to tackle the problem and the feeling that enforcement is not applied across the board in a uniform manner. One example of a disparity that undermines confidence in the CFP is that data collection systems for quota monitoring differ between countries and maritime areas, and the Green Paper emphasises that uniformity and coherence have to be improved.

Västra Götaland therefore agrees that IUU is a priority and that efforts must be made to achieve a “culture of compliance”.

The Green Paper asks whether a link should be created between effective compliance with control responsibilities and access to Community funding. In practice this would mean that Member States where compliance is not effective would receive less Community funding. Västra Götaland is in favour of creating such a link.

Other comments

Of all the other comments made in the Green Paper, the region of Västra Götaland wishes to stress in particular the importance of the common fisheries policy becoming part of Europe’s integrated maritime policy. The

aim of maritime policy is to take advantage of the enormous development potential of the sea. This requires better coordination between maritime-related sectoral policies. There are close synergies between areas such as the environment, fisheries, shipping, energy, research and tourism. Västra Götaland is in favour of the EU continuing to integrate the various maritime policy areas, both generally and in particular between fisheries and the other areas.

In connection with the CPMR's plenary meeting in Gothenburg on 1-2 October 2009 Västra Götaland made a statement focusing in particular on the priority areas as part of the CPMR's opinion on the Green Paper. These are summarised below:

- i) The current fisheries policy results in nutritious and valuable fish being thrown overboard instead of being landed and consumed. These discards are a terrible waste which shocks consumers in our regions. For each fish landed almost one is discarded. The region of Västra Götaland calls for a fisheries policy that puts a stop to discarding.
- ii) Long-term fisheries must be ecologically and economically sustainable. Fishing capacity must be adapted to the sea's resources.
- iii) We call for a stop to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Joint, more stringent checks in the Baltic Sea have produced good results. Västra Götaland wishes to see more cooperation in other parts of Europe too in order to tackle IUU.
- iv) Västra Götaland wants to promote small-scale fisheries in particular. Small-scale fisheries help boost employment in coastal regions and are often closely linked to local trade and processing businesses, not to mention their very important synergies with tourism.
- v) There is a wide range of organic foods on sale today. Recently, demand for these products has increased year on year. Västra Götaland therefore wishes to stress the importance of increased organic production of fisheries products.

Concluding remarks

Västra Götaland welcomes the European Commission's Green Paper on the Common Fisheries Policy. It focuses on key issues that are important if Europe is to tackle the fisheries policy, which is both environmentally irresponsible and economically ineffective.

Regional Executive Board

Roland Andersson
President

Johan Assarsson
Regional Director

Copy to:
The Government