

The European Common Fisheries Policy regarding distant water fishing during the last 20 years: evolution of the fleets and their impact on small-scale West African fisheries.

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The European Union has a very large, and growing, market for fish and very limited, and diminishing, fisheries resources in its own waters. In order to reconcile this difficult situation, the EU pursues an aggressive policy to secure access to fish in other waters, using a variety of approaches. These include:

- fishing on the high seas under EU flags;
- fishing in third country waters under agreements;
- joint ventures in third countries;
- buying fish on the world market;
- fishing under flags of convenience.

Most of these are subsidized by funds from the Community and/or the Member States. In Western Africa, the EU currently has agreements with ten countries, the largest being with Mauritania. Almost €150 million is budgeted for these in 2002. The other major source of funding is the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG), which funds activities as diverse as export of vessels to third countries, the establishment of joint ventures in third countries, modernization of existing vessels, construction of new ones and scrapping of old ones. The extent of this funding means that the EU fleets have a significant competitive advantage over local fleets, which do not benefit from such levels of support.

There has been an evolution in the nature of agreements which the EU negotiates with third countries. The original model was a simple payment in exchange for the granting of fishing rights. The so-called "second generation" agreements involved the establishing of joint ventures, and the Argentinean and Greenland agreements are of this type. The most recent type of agreement involves the insertion, into a wider association agreement between the EU and the third country, of a protocol to allow investment in the local fishing industry. This is the path the EU has tried to pursue with South Africa and has now negotiated with Chile.

The Common Fisheries Policy is under review at present, and current indications are that the European Commission is committed to ensuring that fisheries activities in Europe are put on a truly sustainable footing. The Commission states that it wishes to apply the same standards to its distant water fishing activities as well. The time seems ripe to have a positive influence on the EU's distant water fishing policies.