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**Special
report**
Global
fishing crisis

Europe clamps down on fishing

'Make or break' as critics say 28,000 jobs will be lost

Andrew Osborn in Brussels and Paul Brown

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[The Guardian](#)

The European commission yesterday unveiled the biggest shake-up of the EU's failing common fisheries policy since the early 1970s. Critics say it will cost 28,000 jobs across Europe, and cause untold pain to fishing communities in the UK.

Faced with a collapse in fish stocks, the commission has opted for what one official described as "the nuclear option", confounding critics who had expected it would bow to lobbying by Spain.

Brussels demanded that the time some European trawlers spent at sea be cut by up to 60%, and said an estimated 8,600 fishing boats, 8.6% of the EU's 100,000 fleet, needed to be scrapped.

"This is the first time in the history of the fisheries policy there will be a thorough reform," said Franz Fischler, the fisheries commissioner. "It's make or break time. If we want to give our fishermen a future, we need a new CFP. If we carry on as we are, both the fish and the fishermen will continue to dwindle and disappear."

Irresponsible fishing by sophisticated trawlers had seen stocks steadily decline, the commission said, complaining that member states repeatedly ignored scientific advice to curb their fishing.

It promised an end to the farcical situation whereby the EU handed out subsidies to build vessels with one hand while paying fishermen to scrap their boats with the other. There would, the commission insisted, be no more money for new boats.

The annual fixing of catch quotas, which sees states descend into haggling motivated by national interests, must also be relegated to the past, Brussels announced, and replaced with long term quotas based on sound science.

And if fishermen thought they could ignore the commission, they could think again, warned Mr Fischler. He called for the increased use of satellites to track boat movements, and a European inspection agency to enforce the rules. Boats would have to invest in more tightly meshed nets, to avoid catching other fish species inadvertently and entangling dolphins and seabirds.

The stage is set for a long battle between member states - a majority must ratify the commission's proposals for change to be effected. The replacement policy for the £650m a year CFP must be in place by January 1.

Britain is one of the few states accepting reform. "This long anticipated review comes out not a moment too soon," Elliot Morley, the fisheries minister, said. "This blueprint has tough implications for the UK industry, but we welcome it. For the UK, I cannot rule out job losses; but, in some areas, so many have already left fishing that crew members are hard to find. We have already reduced our fleet by 10%."

Some British fishermen said they were dismayed. "It will reduce our fishing to nothing more than a cottage industry," said Dave Pessell, a skipper in Plymouth. "We're horrified. The majority of fish in EU waters are in British territorial waters; these cuts are not fair on the British fleet."

Six states, who call themselves "the friends of fishing", led by Spain, are also unhappy. Spain has the EU's largest fleet, employing 65,000 compared with 6,000 in the UK.
