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Endangered Seas Programme

Newsroom

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Press Release

EU bid for Senegalese fisheries alarms WWF

Gland, Switzerland - The European Union's bid for a 60 percent increase in fishing access rights in already overexploited Senegalese waters, threatens the survival and sustainability of these fisheries, and contradicts proposed EU policy, WWF, the conservation organization said today.

"The European Commission knows first-hand the devastating effect ill-managed fisheries have had in its own waters," said Dr Claude Martin, Director-General of WWF International in an open letter to EU Fisheries Commissioner Franz Fischler opposing the EU's plans. "It is inconceivable to think the Commission would use taxpayers' money to export this unsustainable fishing practice to threatened coastal states in West Africa."

With Africa's fisheries increasingly under pressure from highly-subsidised foreign fishing fleets, and lack of resources hampering the monitoring systems of most governments, reports that the EU is seeking to increase its access to fisheries in upcoming talks with Senegal also signals the urgent need to create national and regional fisheries' management plans.

Every year, the EU spends about 270 million Euro to purchase access to fisheries' resources in other countries, the majority of which are in Africa. While this brings in much-needed foreign-currency to these countries, the payments are often way below the real market value. The current EU fishing agreement with Senegal ends in May 2001 and the next round of negotiations is scheduled to resume on 20 April, 2001, in Brussels. Similar fishing agreements with the West African states of Mauritania and Guinea Bissau are also set to expire soon, and the Commission is expected to renew these agreements as well. While such negotiations should be based on expert assessment of sustainability of the fishery resources available, that is not so with the latest EU bid which flies right in the face of proposed EU policy.

"The conservation and sustainable use of fisheries' resources should be the starting point for fishing access agreements with third countries, not the short-term needs of the European Union," said Dr Martin. "The Commission's own Green Paper on the Future of the Common Fisheries Policy, released last month, clearly states as one of its aims the acquisition of "fishing rights in the waters of third countries without threatening the sustainable exploitation of fisheries."

WWF believes that the European Union should match its words with action. There is potential for both West Africa and Europe to benefit from sustainable and equitable fisheries co-operation, but this is not what is being offered.

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