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Story of the Day

Italy : one third of EU fishing subsidies not sustainable

Rome, Italy – WWF, the conservation organization, today launched a new report that demonstrates that at least one third of EU fishing subsidies to Italy have a negative impact on the environment. WWF is calling for an end to the depletion of marine resources and for governments to tackle the crisis currently affecting the Italian fishing sector, through a more sustainable allocation of EU fishing subsidies.



© WWF-MEDPO Tuna fishing, Mediterranean sea

The report 'EU subsidies to Italian fisheries: analysing the impact on marine resources and environment' says that EU subsidies cause environmental damage in a range of ways. Italian fishermen are using subsidies to transfer their fishing effort to waters of developing countries where there are more fish - thus dramatically increasing the pressure on fish stocks in these areas. Another type of EU subsidy finances the construction of new boats and the improvement of technical instruments such as motors or radars - as a result of which, the fishing effort in Italy increases by 7 percent every year. WWF is also concerned that in its drive to comply with EU objectives to reduce fishing effort, rather than targeting industrial fishing, the Italian government is targeting artisanal fisheries - a sector that provides extensive employment, and at the same time causes less environmental damage.

“Fish and fishermen are two endangered species we want to save. EU subsidies can help to safeguard them, if those subsidies with a negative impact are reallocated to better use,” said Paolo Guglielmi, WWF Mediterranean Programme Office Head of Marine Unit. “WWF recognises that the EU has been aiming for some years to make its fisheries subsidies sustainable. Nevertheless, some of these subsidies are misused and WWF is calling on the EU to reform them or add conditions to their use, to ensure they really support sustainable fishing.”

2002 is the year when the European Union’s CFP – Common Fisheries Policy – comes up for review. This is the first opportunity in ten years to fundamentally change the CFP and up to now, Italy has been against this reform. WWF is urging the Italian government to support a new “greener” CFP, clearly committed to eliminate the 40 percent over-capacity in the EU fishing fleet, to aid the building of a healthy fishing industry and to take into account environmental and social sustainability criteria.

WWF is also calling upon the Italian government to create “fish districts” as zones exclusively for local fishermen as well as “no-take zones” to allow fish stock recovery. Those zones could be implemented with the installation of 'blue boxes' that would register the position of all Italian boats more than 12m long.

The largest fishing industry in the Mediterranean, and the 6th largest in Europe - around 17,000 vessels, 200,000 gross tonnes of fishing capacity and 53,000 fishermen - Italy receives the second largest fishing subsidy from the EU. A large part of the subsidy goes to Sicily, with the main centres of the Italian fishing industry being Napoli, Venezia, Bari, Mazara del Vallo, Chioggia, Catania.

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