

EU fisheries policy under fire

Tina Adler

Since the European Union passed its first Common Fisheries Policy in 1971, the numbers of both fish and fishermen have dropped precipitously. In December 2002, in an effort to halt the decline, the EU fisheries ministers proposed reforms to the policy, last updated in 1993.

Catching the headlines was the call for a 45% reduction in the cod limit. Scientists have recommended a moratorium on cod fishing because the stock is at risk of collapsing, according to an EU press release. Fishermen, however, opposed the ban, saying it will drive them to bankruptcy. The ministers also recommended cuts

in the amounts of other fish species netted, including North Sea haddock, whiting, and plaice. In addition, North Sea fishing boats would be limited to 15 days at sea per month, including the time spent traveling to fishing grounds.

State aid to modernize fishing vessels would be limited to boats at least 5 years old, but only for improving safety, product quality, working conditions, or selective fishing techniques. Modernization could not enable larger catches, and money for purchasing more boats would be discontinued next year, after a transitional period for smaller vessels. "This will ensure that public money is not used in the future to further expand a fleet which is already too large", says Franz Fischler, the European Commis-

sioner responsible for agriculture, rural development, and fisheries.

Scientists warn that the new recommendations are unlikely to reverse the fate of the fish or the fishermen. "It doesn't go far enough", says Daniel Pauly, a professor of fisheries at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver, Canada). One obstacle to successful reform is black market fishing, which ignores legal quotas. Moreover, says Pauly, the changes are unlikely to be implemented, because six European countries oppose them, and the European Council must review and adopt the proposal by March. The World Wildlife Fund has called the proposed changes a "death sentence for cod", although it applauded the reduction in subsidies. ■