



## Who Should Have the Right to Fish?

Marine resources are a public good, not a private resource. The right to exploit those resources, therefore, should be allocated according to criteria that ensure that fishing contributes as far as possible to the public interest.

Traditionally, fishing permits have been granted based upon historical participation in the fishery, with those who have had larger catches frequently receiving the largest share of the quota (whether quotas are allocated to Member States, to fleet segments or to individual fishing vessels). In the situation that exists in Europe today, though, with so many fish stocks over-exploited, such an approach too often simply allows those who have been responsible for over-fishing in the past to continue fishing in the future<sup>1</sup>. It is difficult to see how this principle can contribute to stock recovery or promote sustainable fishing and coastal communities in the future.

Outright privatisation of access to the fish stocks through systems of tradable rights (as with the introduction of full-fledged ITQs (individual transferable quotas)), is not only counter to the principle of fishery resources as a public good, it also leads to concentration of access to fisheries in the hands of parties (including large companies, corporations, banks and finance houses) whose priorities are not necessarily in line with the public interest.. The contribution of ITQs to improved fishery management is also unproven.

Greens believe that the right to fish should be based upon other criteria – specifically, on the environmental and social aspects of the fishing. Fishermen should be required to demonstrate that their fishing operations do not damage the marine environment and make significant contributions to coastal fishing communities. Specific criteria could include:

- Contribution to the local economy. Fishery activities should be of demonstrable benefit to the coastal communities, for instance by basing the vessel's activities there (crew, supplies, etc) or by landing the catch locally;
- Selectivity of gears and practices. Fishing gears and practices should minimise the catching and discarding of undersize fish or of uneconomic species,;
- Damage to the sea floor and habitats. Certain fishing practices inflict severe and unacceptable damage to the sea floor and to the species and habitats found there. These practices should be limited to areas where unacceptable levels of damage cannot occur;
- Fuel consumption and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Certain fishing practices are extremely energy-intensive, consuming vast quantities of fuel compared to the size of the catch, with significant greenhouse gas emissions. Preference should be given to vessels that consume relatively little fuel for a given amount of catch;

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<sup>1</sup> Systems using historical catches as the key criterion usually base the allocation on a few years' worth of catches, rarely more than five, which encourages high catches just before quota management is introduced in an attempt to build up quota share. This can end up putting coastal communities that have depended upon the local stocks for generations at a disadvantage.

- Quality of the fish. Fish that has not been damaged during the fishing operation or has been landed very fresh is worth more, so less needs to be caught to make the same money. Such an approach to fishing, “fish less, earn more”, should be prioritised;
- Employment. Modern technology has made fishing a very efficient activity but it has also led to reduced employment. Fishing practices that provide more jobs for a given amount of fish caught, and share systems that distribute catch earnings more equitably should be favoured;
- Fishing legally. Fishermen who break the rules should be given reduced opportunities to fish and if they persist, should be denied the right to fish at all;
- Fishing for human consumption. Some species can be sold for human consumption or for reduction to fish meal or oil. Preferential access to these stocks should always be given to the fishery for direct human consumption.

Fishing is a highly variable activity, from region to region, from species to species. This diversity means that these criteria cannot be measured in an absolute sense, in that everybody who participates in any fishery must meet certain specific criteria, such as less than 10% discards or landing at least 80% of the catch locally. Rather, they are relative criteria, meaning that in any specific fishery, those who do better in the criteria compared to others in that same fishery should be given preferential access. For instance, if there are three main gear types in a specific fishery, the one that does the best in meeting these criteria should be encouraged and the ones that do the worst should be phased out or modified to do better.

Finally, these criteria should be applied to all fisheries.

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