

Press Release

Joint Press Release of the Excellence Cluster „Future Ocean“ and the Leibniz Institute of Marine Sciences (IFM-GEOMAR)

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Slipped through the Net – Europe Misses by More Than 30 Years the International Goal of Rebuilding Its Fish Stocks

Kiel, Germany, 21.01.2010. At the Development Summit in Johannesburg in 2002, the European countries agreed to rebuild their fish stocks to levels that can produce the maximum sustainable yield, no later than 2015. According to scientists of the Excellence Cluster “Future Ocean”, that goal is already out of reach: Of 54 analysed stocks, only saithe, western horse mackerel and Baltic sprat have a sufficiently large stock size and are fished at a sustainable rate. The state of twelve stocks, including North Sea cod, plaice and halibut, is so bad that they can not recover sufficiently until 2015, even if all fishing was halted. Other stocks could reach the target if fishing pressure was reduced substantially, but that has not happened so far.

These results were published by Dr. Rainer Froese, Leibniz Institute of Marine Sciences (IFM-GEOMAR) und Prof. Dr. Alexander Proelß, Walter-Schücking-Institute of International Law of the University of Kiel, in the journal „Fish and Fisheries“. The German scientists, both members of the interdisciplinary Excellence Cluster „Future Ocean“, point out that the continuous overfishing of European stocks constitutes a breach of the precautionary principle, which is a binding principle of Community law.

„The precautionary principle is a binding legal principle for the organs of the European Commission and for the Council of Ministers. The current practice of continuous overfishing violates international law as well as Community law“, says Prof. Dr. Alexander Proelß, expert of international law at the Walter-Schücking-Institute. The obligation to manage fish stocks such that they can produce the maximum sustainable yield is part of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982, which entered into force in 1994. In the „Johannesburg Plan of Implementation“ (2002) the European Union as well as Norway, Russia and Iceland, agreed to rebuild their fish stocks to the level that can produce the maximum sustainable yield, no later than 2015. „Until now, the provisions of the Law of the Sea have not been introduced into national law, and the plan of implementation had no visible impact on European fisheries management,“ says Proelß.

On the contrary: the fishing quotas for 2010 decreed by the Council of Ministers again exceed by far the catches that would allow the rebuilding of the stocks. „If this practice continues, Europe will miss by more than 30 years the goal that it has propagated“ says Dr. Rainer Froese, fisheries biologist at the Kiel Leibniz Institute of Marine Sciences (IFM-GEOMAR). Yet, catches from sustainably managed stocks could be substantially higher. „Our analysis suggests that landings could be 79% higher if stocks had been managed according to the international agreements,“ says Froese. „However, in European waters stocks are intentionally managed such that they stay close to the brink of collapse. This policy makes no sense from an ecological or economic point of view.“

Dr. Rainer Froese and Prof. Dr. Alexander Proelß work in the Excellence Cluster „Future Ocean“ together with economists and other experts towards solutions for the future fisheries policy of the European Union.

The Leibniz Institute of Marine Sciences is member of the

Original Publication

Froese, R., and A. Proelß, 2010: Rebuilding fish stocks no later than 2015: will Europe meet the deadline? Fish and Fisheries, doi: 10.1111/j.1467-2979.2009.00349.x

Link: <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/123242614/abstract>

Pictures and graphs:

At www.ifm-geomar.de/presse you can find pictures and graphs in support of this press release.

Figure captions:

Fishing for scientific purposes: Marine scientists during a fish stock assessment cruise. Source: IFM-GEOMAR.

Status of European fish stocks relative to the size (1.0) that can produce the maximum sustainable yield. Stocks below 0.34 are threatened by collapse. Source: IFM-GEOMAR.

Average fishing pressure on 54 European fish stocks. The lower arrow indicates the path if 75% of the stocks were to be fished at the maximum sustainable rate in 2015. However, with the current trend that target will be missed by more than 30 years. Source: IFM-GEOMAR.

Contacts

Dr. Rainer Froese, Leibniz Institute of Marine Sciences (IFM-GEOMAR),
rfroese@ifm-geomar.de, Phone: +49-431-600-4579

Prof. Dr. Alexander Proelß, Walter-Schücking-Institut für Internationales Recht, Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel, aproelss@internat-recht.uni-kiel.de, Phone: +49-431-880-2083

Dr. Andreas Villwock, Public Relations, Leibniz Institute of Marine Sciences (IFM-GEOMAR),
avillwock@ifm-geomar.de, Phone: +49-431-600-2808

Friederike Balzereit, Public Relations, Excellence Cluster "Future Ocean",
fbalzereit@uv.uni-kiel.de, Phone: +49-431-880-3032