
### Recommendation 8

The Marine Stewardship Council has successfully implemented the Sustainable Seafood campaign elsewhere in Europe. The Irish fishing industry and fisheries managers should be expected to achieve 'Sustainable Seafood' compliance for Irish fisheries and fish products. Customers to be provided with full information on the source of fish and the fishing methods used to catch them.

## Ecosystem Management

Ultimately fisheries should not be managed on a single species or stock level. The new Fisheries Bill promotes multi-species and multi-annual management policies and this is welcome but fisheries cannot be managed in isolation from the environment in which they are sustained. It is also important to recognise that human exploitation of fish stocks cannot be viewed as the sole use or value of fish since the same fish stocks form the basis for a food web which supports predators in the marine environment such as, marine mammals and seabirds.

All photos: Simon Berrow

The wasteful practices encouraged by the EU Quota system of fisheries management results in massive discards of non-target fish (and other marine organisms) each year. Such discards are a waste of marine resources and have a significant negative impact on the species and ecosystems involved. The EU needs to urgently review its system of fisheries management, which has failed to achieve long term sustainable fisheries. The EU should be working towards a goal of zero discards (which is achieved by other European countries) and look towards control methods used in neighbouring non EU states for examples of sustainable fisheries management.

Some forms of fishing gear are highly destructive in the marine environment. Examples include bottom trawling (which destroys benthic habitats and fauna), deep-water fishing for species, which provide great difficulties for sustainable fishing due to their slow growth (e.g. deep-water shark species and fish such as orange roughy) and deep-water tangle nets and gill nets (which can be abandoned or lost). Such fishing methods need to be reviewed and changed, adapted or halted where necessary.

An ecosystem approach to the management of fisheries and the marine environment is the only option for the long-term achievement of sustainable fisheries in Ireland. This approach should be incorporated into an Oceans Policy framework. The IWDG does not under-estimate the challenge this presents nor does it under-estimate the amount of uncertainties in the data available to implement such a policy, including the impact of global climate change. However those responsible for management and exploitation of marine resources must consider this approach for the future.

### Recommendation 9

The IWDG recommends that an ecosystem approach to fisheries management be incorporated into Ocean Management Policies. The IWDG encourages the EU Fisheries Commission to review current methods of fisheries management with a view to achieving long-term sustainable fisheries. Destructive fishing practices to be reviewed and changed, adapted or halted where necessary.

### More information

For more information see:

ASCOBANS: www.ascobans.org
Marine Stewardship Council: www.eng.mcs.org

### References


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### The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group

Dedicated to the conservation and better understanding of whales, dolphins and porpoises in Irish waters, through study, education and interpretation.


Website: www.iwdg.ie

Email: enquiries@iwdg.ie

IWDG Policy Document

# Commercial Fisheries Policy Document

Commercial fishing is the human activity, which has one of the largest impacts on the marine environment and on those creatures that live therein. The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG), with our interest in the conservation and protection of cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoise), supports sustainable commercial fishing and those coastal communities engaged in this activity.

Most cetaceans are considered apex predators at the top of the marine food chain and are excellent indicators of the health of our seas and the fish populations living therein. Equally, as top predators they are vulnerable to any changes in this food chain, therefore, healthy and abundant fish stocks are good for both the fishing industry and for cetaceans.

Collectively, the fishing industry, coastal communities and fisheries managers face great challenges at the present time. Poor fisheries management has now left many stocks severely depleted and unable to sustain fishing at a viable level. Depleted fish stocks impact strongly on coastal communities and on the fishing industry generally, resulting in job losses both within the fishing fleet and onshore. Increasingly, people have been abandoning fishing and associated trades as a livelihood and this is having significant and possibly irreversible implications for coastal communities especially those in the more remote areas of the west of Ireland.

The same problem of depleted fish stocks must affect cetacean populations around our shores and could impact on the growing potential for marine tourism, particularly whalewatching, which is a growth income area for former fishing-boat owners. However, while alternatives such as marine tourism and aquaculture have great potential for some communities they are unlikely to ever fully replace commercial fishing.

Ireland's waters contain a high diversity and abundance of cetaceans, which classifies our waters as amongst the most important in Europe for these species. The future of our seas is dependant on our ability to maintain the ecosystems which support these populations. The development of a sustainable fishing industry through proper structuring and conservation of the marine ecosystem can help both the coastal economy and cetacean conservation.

In this document the IWDG outlines its policy and makes recommendations which, if implemented, will help to ensure that Irish waters will:

- maintain abundant and healthy cetacean populations into the future,
- secure the health of the ecosystems that support these populations, and
- help to create and maintain viable fisheries for our coastal communities

## Knowledge of cetaceans in Irish waters

Although our knowledge of the ecology and habitat requirements of cetaceans in Irish waters is poor, existing information shows that Irish waters support a wide variety of cetacean species, both inshore and offshore including both resident (breeding) and migratory. To date, 24 species have been recorded in Ireland which is nearly one-third of all the known species of cetaceans in the world. Some species - such as harbour porpoise - are widespread and relatively abundant, while others - such as blue whales - are rare but migrate annually along the west coast. A few species - such as some of the beaked whales - have never been seen alive in Irish waters and are only known from carcasses that have become stranded on our shores.

All cetacean species and their habitats are protected under Irish and EU legislation and in addition, many of these species are protected under International legislation. To protect all these species and their habitats we need to understand more about their population dynamics and ecology.

### Recommendation 1

Increase the level of research to estimate cetacean distribution and abundance, population structure and stock identity in order to quantify the impact of fishing on cetaceans in Irish waters.

## Fishing & Cetaceans

Fisheries and cetaceans interact in three main ways: (a) operationally through direct entanglement or capture in fishing nets, (b) biologically through competition for fish species, and (c) disturbance - fishing activity may displace cetaceans from their preferred habitats.

The incidental capture of cetaceans has been quantified in some gillnet and trawl fisheries in Ireland. It was estimated that in 1993-94, around 2,200 harbour porpoises and 230 common dolphins were killed by bottom-set gillnets in the Celtic Sea. This accounted for 6.2% of the estimated number of harbour porpoises (32,280) occurring in the area, which was considered unsustainable. No cetacean bycatch was reported by a study of the Celtic Sea Herring fishery but five cetacean species were caught by Dutch mid-water trawlers off the southwest coast of Ireland. Although largely conducted outside of the Irish territorial waters, an estimated 500 cetaceans, mainly common and striped dolphins but also bottlenose, Risso's, white-sided dolphins, pilot, minke and sperm whales, were recorded as having been incidentally caught in the Irish Albacore tuna driftnet fishery in 1996. Driftnets are now banned in this fishery but pelagic trawls, brought in to replace drift-netting can also catch large numbers of dolphins.

Clearly, incidental capture in fishing nets is one of the most immediate threats to cetaceans, but not all fisheries have significant bycatch. Therefore, there is an urgent need to collect data to quantify the current bycatch levels of cetaceans in Irish fisheries. Such data will allow for the identification of fisheries which have an unsustainable level of bycatch and the development of suitable mitigation measures.

The diet of cetaceans in Irish waters is poorly known although a range of commercially important fish species such as mackerel, herring, cod, whiting and salmon have been recorded in the diet of harbour porpoise and common, bottlenose and white-sided dolphins. The cetacean species likely to be affected by a fishery depends on the distribution of cetaceans, the distribution and intensity of fishing effort and the type of gear used.

### Recommendation 2

Increase the level of research on the diet of cetaceans in Irish waters to capture data on prey types and size selection as well as on seasonal and geographical variations. Data of this kind is essential to better explore the relationship between cetaceans and their prey, and to assess the impact of fishing and competition.

## Cetacean Bycatch & Mitigation Measures

Although there has been an increase in awareness of the problem of cetacean bycatch and attempts to mitigate against its impact, there is still a lack of basic information on operational interactions and bycatch rates. The recent EU Resolution 812/2004 on the use of pingers is a welcome step towards mitigating the effect of bycatch on small cetaceans. The IWDG is concerned that issues over the current reliability and durability of pingers mean that full implementation of Articles 2 and 3 of Resolution is not yet a practical step, as a high failure rate of pinger gear could result in a loss of confidence among fishers in the effectiveness of the gear and may result in increased bycatch rates in net sets where pingers are defective. The IWDG is also concerned that some pingers are ineffective against some dolphin species, while others have an unacceptable negative effect on dolphins in their vicinity. The IWDG does support the immediate implementation of the remainder of Regulation 812/2004, which includes requirements for a bycatch observer programme in a number of fisheries.

### Recommendation 3
While the IWDG supports the EU Bycatch Resolution 812/2004, more research is urgently required to develop pinger reliability and effectiveness, prior to their deployment in the gill net and tangle net fleets. The monitoring requirements laid out in Resolution 812/2004 should be implemented fully and without delay to determine current bycatch rates (including seasonal and geographical variation) and to identify those fisheries and areas with unsustainable rates.

## Conventions & Legislation

There are a number of conventions that Ireland has ratified which have implications for fisheries management. These include the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn Convention), the Habitats Directive and OSPAR. The main agreement containing fisheries management implications which Ireland has not signed is ASCOBANS (Agreement on Small Cetaceans in the Baltic and North Sea). ASCOBANS has extended its boundary to include the western seaboard of Europe south to Portugal: and Ireland is now one of the range states. Although the Irish Government has committed to signing up to ASCOBANS under the National Biodiversity Plan, no progress has yet been made towards fulfilment of this commitment.

### Recommendation 4
That Ireland fully implements those conventions with implications for fisheries management and cetacean conservation which it has already ratified (Habitats Directive and OSPAR) and also signs up to ASCOBANS without delay.

## New & Developing Fisheries

As existing fisheries become unsustainable due to poor management and environmental change, there is more pressure to develop new fisheries and modify existing fishing gear. Increased fuel costs are likely to accelerate these changes. New techniques or fisheries are likely to change the relationship between fishing activity and cetaceans. Changes might either benefit cetacean populations or create new threats and these changes must be considered during the development of new fisheries and gear. It is standard procedure in most modern industries to conduct an environmental audit of the impacts of new developments and technologies. Other marine industries (e.g. oil and gas exploration and marine aggregate extraction) already operate such audits.

### Recommendation 5
All new fisheries and gear developments to be subjected to a full Environmental Impact Assessment before being licensed for use.

## Marine Protected Area & No Take Zones

Increasingly Marine Protected Areas (MPA), either through designation as Biologically Sensitive Areas or No Take Zones are being considered for fisheries management. No Take Zones usually try to protect critical habitats such as spawning areas. Other MPAs such as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) can also have implications for fisheries management though they are designated for their nature conservation interest. Fisheries management in SACs is hampered by poor communication and consultation between government departments. Although the National Parks and Wildlife Service within the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) designate SAC, management of fisheries within these areas is the responsibility of the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (DCMNR).

### Recommendation 6
IWDG supports Marine Protected Areas or No Take Zones for fisheries management. However they should be of a large enough spatial scale to benefit predators and facilitate the assessment of the impact of this management tool on the ecosystem as well on fish stocks.

### Recommendation 7
A system should be established to enable effective communication between the DCMNR and DEHLG and other stakeholders regarding management of commercial fishing in Marine Protected Areas.

## Consumer Rights & Responsibilities

There is significant public concern over the impact of fishing on the marine environment and the state of fish stocks. Fish is actively promoted as a healthy food but information on the origin and fishing method used is not always available to the consumer. The ‘Dolphin Safe’ tuna campaign clearly demonstrates the power of consumer demand where this information is available. A number of initiatives including the Marine Stewardship Council certification program are in place to promote fish and fish products sourced from well-managed and sustainable fisheries and harvested using environmentally responsible methods. Similar initiatives should be promoted in Ireland and Irish fisheries should strive to produce fish eligible for inclusion in these programmes as soon as possible in order that these eco-conscious markets are open to Irish fish products and Irish fishers get the highest premium possible for their catch.