



## PRESS RELEASE

**Brussels, 8 November 2012:** The European Parliament Intergroup “*Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development*” organised a workshop of experts on the concept of Balance Harvest in fisheries management under the “*Fisheries and Aquaculture*” working group. The workshop was chaired by MEP Struan Stevenson, Chair of the Intergroup and vice-Chair of the Fisheries Committee in the European Parliament. Participants included representatives from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the International Council for Exploration of the Seas (ICES), and the European Commission (DG MARE).

Scientists and collaborators of the IUCN Fisheries Expert group introduced the Balanced Harvest concept and its potential policy and discussed the implications for management. Balanced Harvest is a concept for sustainable use, which fits within the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries. Aiming at maintaining the ecosystem structure and function (as required by the CBD), it calls for harvesting – with moderate fishing levels – the largest possible range of species and sizes in proportion to their natural productivity. While not totally new in fishery science, it contrasts with the way selectivity is presently managed and calls for a shift from considering the selectivity of the gear/vessel to that of the total set of fleets exploiting the ecosystem. In addition to defining what can be taken out of the sea, it defines what needs to be left in it. Correctly implemented, balanced harvest should produce more yield, maintain species diversity and reduce ecosystem fluctuations.

A number of key questions regarding practical implementation emerged from the ensuing debate related to:

- The rate of removal (the part of the productivity taken out) of the ecosystem and its components that would be authorised;
- The way in which vessels and fishery-specific selectivities will be combined/managed to result in the desired ecosystem-level selectivity;
- The way in which Balanced Harvest could be aimed at in situations of overfishing;
- The economic implications of the concept.



It was recognised that the single-species management models presently followed were not adequate anymore and were failing to address ecosystem considerations. But it was also agreed that ICES has all the capacity to face this challenge, and could, if formally asked by the EU, study the concept in depth and, if agreed, design strategies to implement it in a participatory manner.

With the new CFP reform, the EU stands at a cross road: one direction is to continue the conventional approach, further concentrating fishing in smaller ranges of sizes and species, forcing an hyper-specialisation of vessels, and facing increasing problems with single species selectivity, discards and unwanted structural ecosystem changes. The alternative – perhaps not easy but going in the right direction – would be to start really integrating the concept, operationalising it progressively, aiming at more diversity in catches and better rational use of small individuals and species. The emerging new CFP could foresee the action needed to have such a concept carefully considered, tested, and eventually implemented at the next round.

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*This conference was organised by the Secretariat of the European Parliament Intergroup “Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development” run jointly by the European Bureau for Conservation and Development (EBCD) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).*

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