

25 May 2009 22:34 UK

Consensus on EU fisheries change

By Chris Mason

BBC News, Brussels

Talks focus on what should replace the Common Fisheries Policy

European fisheries ministers have concluded a meeting in Brussels with a consensus to effectively scrap current rules that decide fishing quotas.

Environmentalists and fishermen alike have long argued the existing system - set annually - has failed the industry.

Fish caught over quota are dumped back in the sea even if dead, and in the UK alone numbers of fishermen have fallen by a third over the decade.

The European Union has until 2012 to draw up a new Common Fisheries Policy.

It is estimated the existing system of quotas means for every kilogram of cod caught in the North Sea, another kilogram has to be dumped overboard, dead or alive

Replacing 'horse-trading'

There was also unanimous support for a new Common Fisheries Policy to be radically decentralised - giving more power to member states and to the industry - an official representing the Czech Republic confirmed to the BBC.

This was a central objective of the UK delegation. It was essential the annual "horse-trading" over quotas was replaced by a "longer term view informed by good regional science and management", according to the Huw Irranca Davies, UK Fisheries Minister.

"Discussion of reform of the Common Fisheries Policy was the lengthiest debate today," said Jakub Sebesta, Minister of Agriculture of the Czech republic, the current holders of the rotating presidency of the EU.

EU Fisheries Policy

Common Fisheries Policy was established in 1983

EU fisheries policy last reformed in 2002

EU fishing fleet is second largest power after China.

In 2006 EU imported 3 times as much fisheries products as it exported

Clampdown urged on shark finning

Quota calls fail to catch the drift

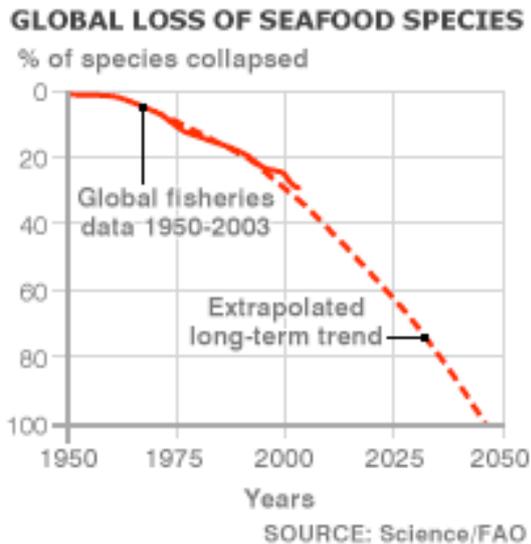
"All member states wanted to take part. We are in a situation where there are fewer fish, there is falling productivity and fleets are getting smaller," he added.

"Lots of suggestions were put forward - an array of ideas," Mr Sebesta concluded.

Danish model

Bertie Armstrong, the Chief Executive of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, told the BBC he was delighted with the result.

"We hoped that decentralisation would be the focus - so that's very good news. The basic decentralisation message is absolutely key here."



Graph of fish decline.

'50 years left' for sea fish

"The consensus on the need for change is important too - there appears to be genuinely no holds barred in terms of the scale of reform that could happen here, which is great," Mr Armstrong added.

Earlier in the day, Denmark urged Europe to stop over-regulating its fisheries sector and help species survive by taking steps such as putting video cameras on boats to stop fishermen cheating.

The EU's executive, the European Commission, says more than 80% of Europe's fish stocks are now overfished. The global average is 28%.

The environmental pressure group Greenpeace suggests Europe's fishing fleet needs to halve.