

May 2007

Cod Crisis

North Sea cod stocks are in crisis; it has been classified as a 'threatened and declining species' since 2002.

Scientists say that a cod stock in the North Sea of 150,000 tonnes is the bare minimum required, yet stocks are currently estimated at under 70,000 tonnes.

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), the official scientific advisory body to the European Union, recognises the crisis, describing the stocks as 'outside safe biological limits'. They have repeatedly called for a complete ban on cod fishing in the North Sea every year since 2001.

North Sea cod quotas	ICES recommended quota	European Union quota
2001	0 tonnes	48,600 tonnes
2002	0 tonnes	49,300 tonnes
2003	0 tonnes	27,300 tonnes
2004	0 tonnes	27,300 tonnes
2005	0 tonnes	27,300 tonnes
2006	0 tonnes	23,200 tonnes
2007	0 tonnes	20,000 tonnes

And, unless a fishing ban is implemented, cod will become commercially extinct in the very near future.

Yet the European Commission and the European Fisheries Council have consistently chosen to ignore the dire warnings from experts. So today North Sea cod is being pushed towards extinction. Last year the European Commission set a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for North Sea cod of 23,200, while the TAC for 2007 is 20,000 tonnes.

To tackle this crisis, politicians across Europe must enforce a 'zero catch' allowance for cod in the North Sea and close some fishing grounds completely to rescue trashed fish stocks.

In the longer term, the only way to protect cod (as well as the fishing industry and the North Sea habitats) is to create large marine reserves.

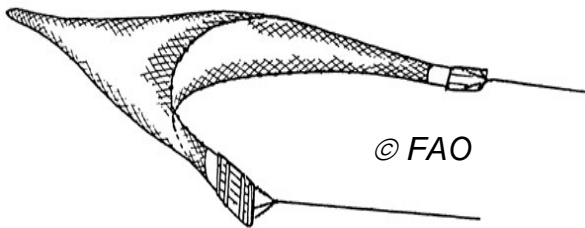
Marine Reserves

The North Sea, along with all the world's oceans, needs long-term protection to allow time to recover. The implementation of large-scale marine reserves – essentially like national parks at sea – will protect these habitats from threats such as over-fishing.

Marine reserves should encompass spawning, nursery and feeding grounds, along with migration routes for key fish species. This will allow large numbers of fish to reach a high age and breed, helping to reverse crashing fish stocks.

Large-scale marine reserves will restore the declining health and biodiversity of habitats like the North Sea and, to be truly effective, they should cover 40 per cent of the total sea area.

Cod Fishing Gear



One of the main cod fishing methods in the North Sea is the otter trawl. The otter trawl is a towed fishing gear designed to herd fish into the net. The fish drop back into the cod-end where only the smallest fish can escape through the larger meshes in the top panel. The trawl is kept open vertically by the head-rope and horizontally by what are

known as 'otter boards'. The vessels range from small open boats to large factory trawlers.

Cod Facts

- Cod is a demersal fish – meaning it lives at the bottom of the sea.
- Cod are omnivorous; they will eat anything, including young cod.
- A cod surviving to a year old has virtually no predators from then onwards, other than man.
- A female cod of about a metre in length can produce 3 million eggs when spawning.
- Cod produce a natural 'antifreeze' to survive cold waters.
- Cod flesh is whiter than most other fish as its muscle tissue is not built for speed, but for quick action to catch prey. For this reason cod are usually unable to 'outrun' trawlers.
- The main cause for the decline of cod is over-fishing, compounded by the detrimental effects of climate change and pollution.

For more information, contact the Greenpeace press office on 020 7865 8255.