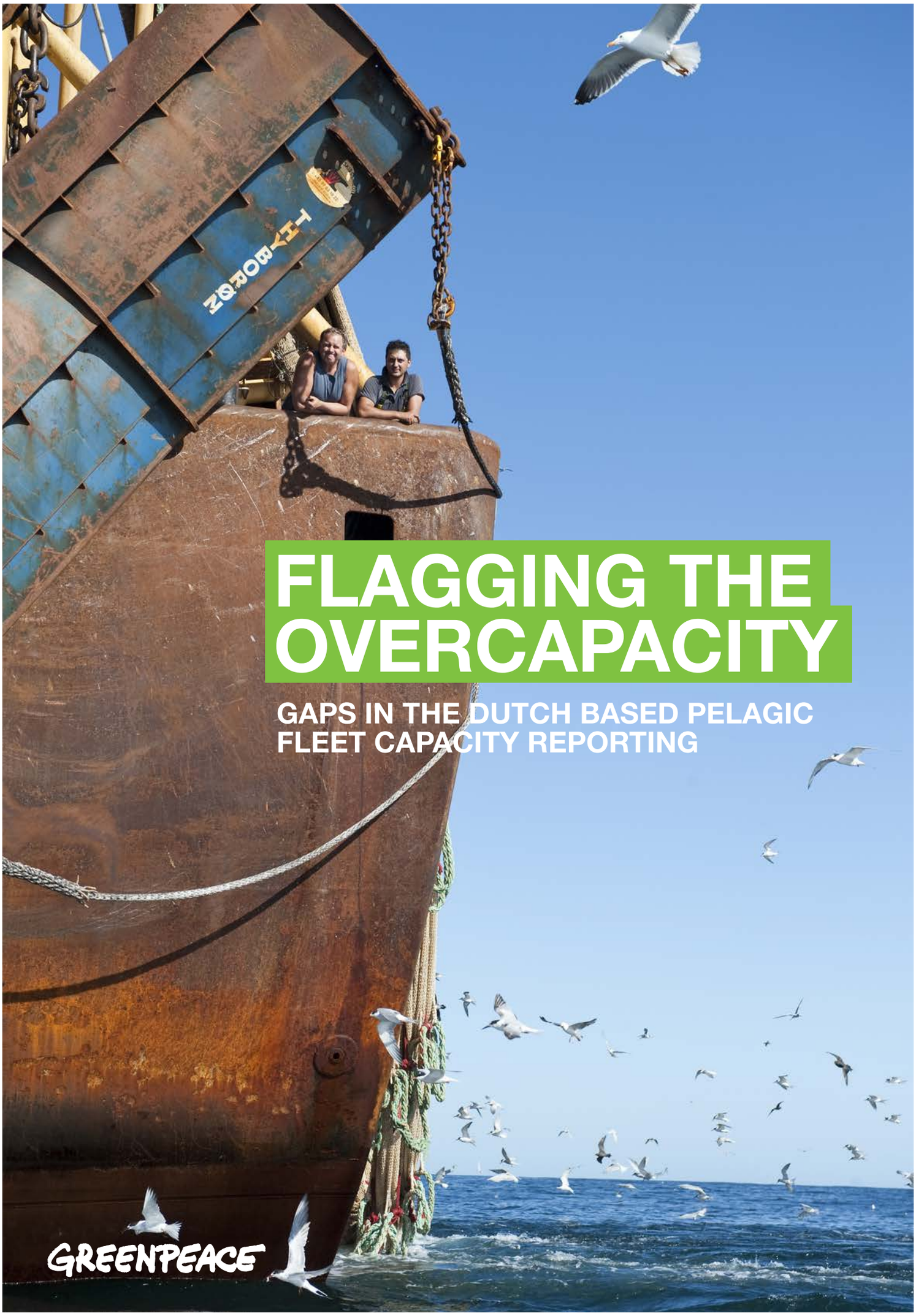
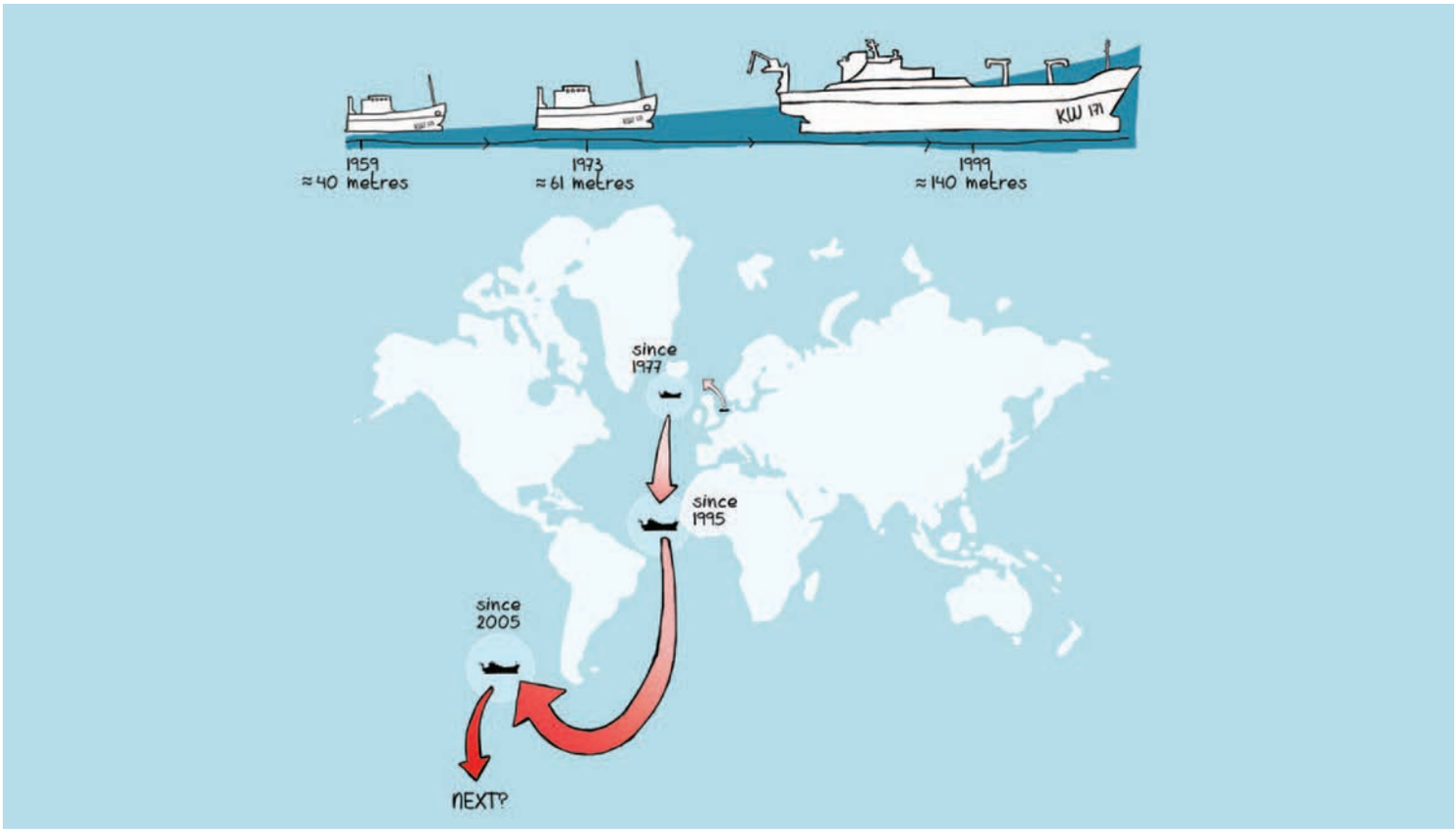


FLAGGING THE OVERCAPACITY

GAPS IN THE DUTCH BASED PELAGIC FLEET CAPACITY REPORTING

GREENPEACE



‘Excessive fishing power is a major driver for overfishing. To put it simply there are too many vessels chasing too few fish. By coming together in Thessaloniki, the international community has shown its willingness and commitment to tackle the issue of global fishing overcapacity and embed a culture of sustainable, responsible and smart fishing worldwide’.

Commissioner Damanaki 12th of March 2014[1]

The recent reform of the EU’s Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) seeks to eradicate the overcapacity in the European fleet. It also intends to make sure that when EU vessels fish in the rest of the world they only fish within scientifically safe margins and only after the food needs and livelihoods of the local populations have been met. As in the past, the new CFP obliges governments to balance fleet capacity with the available fishing opportunities, and to assess and report the fishing capacity of their fleet annually. Capacity ceilings, a basic entry/exit scheme and regular reporting under the fleet register also continue to apply. However, the detailed fleet management provisions have now been strengthened.

EU Member States are obliged to assess their fleet’s capacity in an annual report that can be found online.[2] All national reports are due annually on the 31st of May and have to be made public. In most cases the quality of these reports is still poor, in some cases Member States did not even report at all. Unfortunately these reports have not yet led to a well-documented overview of the overcapacity of the EU fleet.

From January 2014 onwards, governments have to assess and report fishing capacity by fleet segment (rather than in aggregated form) and to do so in relation to their available fishing opportunities. According to the State Secretary Dijksma the current Dutch approach ***“complies with the rules of the basic Regulation, to the extent that it was agreed in the reform that the annual report must identify fleet segments with a structural overcapacity and, where necessary, submit an action plan with reduction targets and instruments to the European Commission”***.[3]

Greenpeace acknowledges that the Dutch reporting forms a good basis, but identifies an urgent need for further improvement where signs of overcapacity are indicated that have not yet led to action.

This factsheet is about the annual reporting of the pelagic fleet, which belong to Europe's largest vessels with a huge catch capacity and impact beyond EU waters. It highlights some of the limitations and contradictions of the Dutch and German annual Member State fleet reporting to date.

A DUTCH FLEET WENT GLOBAL

A major part of the Dutch and German fleet (in gross tonnage) consists of pelagic trawlers. This fleet is represented by the Pelagic Freezer-trawler Association (PFA). It has its origin in the North Sea herring fishery.

After overfishing caused stocks to collapse (1977-83) the fleet moved into new fishing grounds in the North-East Atlantic. In 1995 the fleet went further south into West African waters (Mauritania and Morocco). In 2005 they further expanded their territory into the Southeast Pacific, fishing off the coast of Chile. Recently, parts of this fleet have even shown interest in fishing for krill even further south into the Antarctic waters.

(RE)FLAGGING

The majority of the PFA fleet carries a Dutch, German or UK flag. But over the years many flag changes have taken place (see figure below). This complicates an overall analysis of fleet capacity in light of national fleet fluctuations and the overall pressure on global stocks.

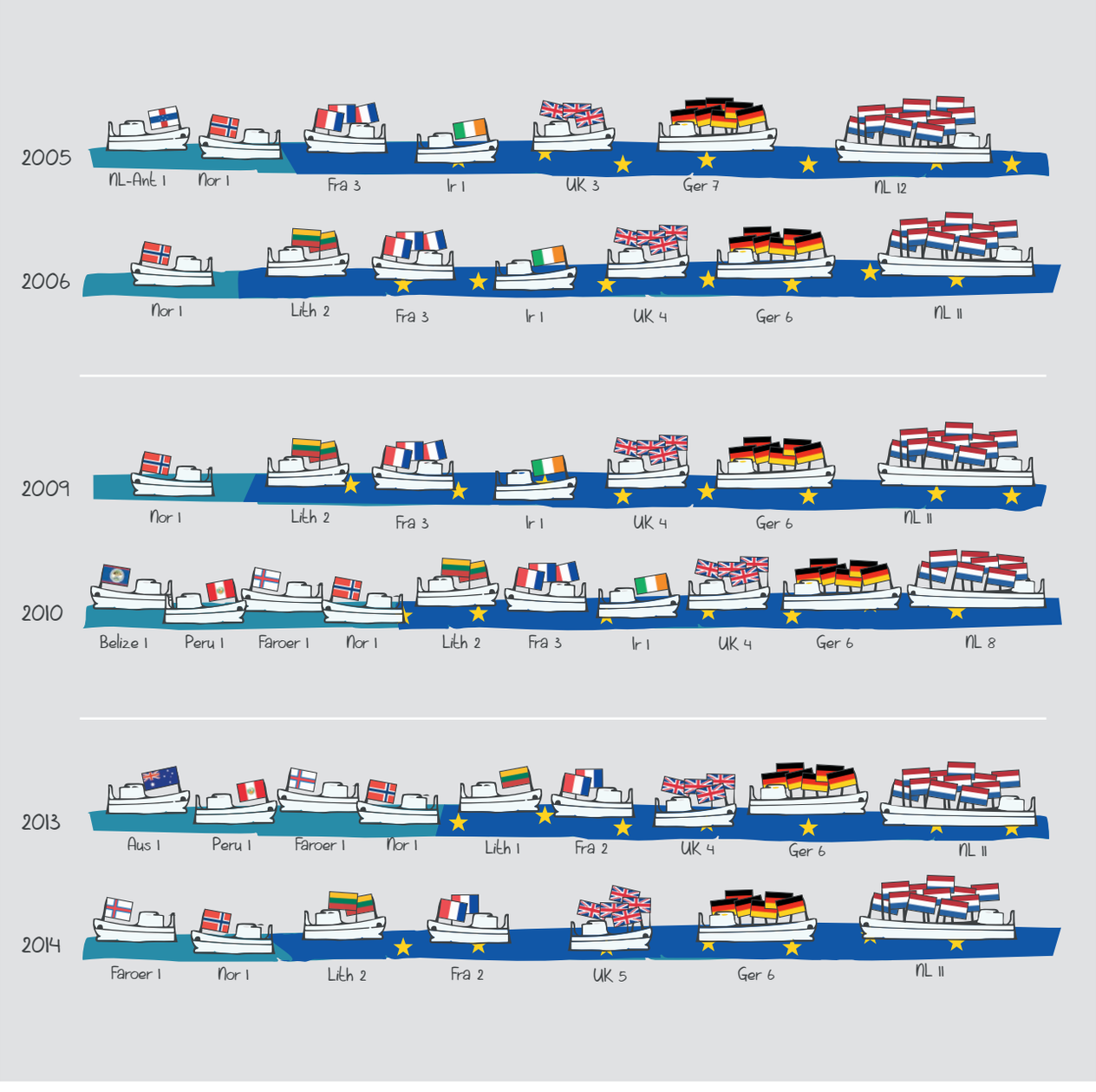


Figure: Overview of the flag composition of 28 vessels from PFA companies in the period 2002-2014

MASTER OF FLAG CHANGES

1 — KL843 NAERABERG

German flag (11-2009)
↓
Faroer flag (10-2011)
↓
Lithuanian flag (09-2012)
↓
Faroer flag (current)

2 — KL749 MARGIRIS

Dutch flag (01-2006)
↓
Lithuanian flag (10-2012)
↓
Non-EU: Australian flag (03-2013)
↓
Lithuanian flag (current)

3 — SCH54 FRANZISKA

Dutch flag (02-2010)
↓
Non-EU: Peruvian flag (08-2013)
↓
Dutch flag (current)

For example, in the 2006 Dutch annual report it reads that the number of pelagic freezer-trawlers fell by two (a reduction of 13.3% in number of vessels). The report concludes ***"The capacity reduction realised has created a healthier balance between stock size and fleet size."*** In reality the two vessels – the Margiris and the Cornelis Vrolijk- were reflagged to Lithuania and the UK. The company-owners of the two vessels did not change, nor did their overall presence in the different fishing grounds. The reflagging practices of vessels should be taken into account more accurately in the fleet capacity analysis.

FISHING BEYOND EU BOUNDARIES

The new CFP commitment is to ensure that European Union fishing activities outside EU waters are based on the same principles and standards as those applicable under EU law in CFP areas. This should lead to significant changes in the way the European Union practices fishing outside EU waters, e.g. with respect to implementing precautionary catch limits and ecosystem-based fisheries management. Greenpeace welcomes this step in the new regulation. In the past decreased fishing opportunities in European waters were compensated in areas where there was poor management and unknown stock status (West Africa and the South Pacific).

'[The quota reduction for the blue-whiting fisheries in European waters] could mean that we have to reduce our efforts in EU and North East Atlantic Fishery Commission waters by as much as three vessels, for which we have to find alternative opportunities by adding them to our vessels off Mauritania and in the South Pacific.'

Gerard van Balsfoort, PFA president 2008[4]

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WEST AFRICA[5]		
Sardine (S. pilchardus)	Zone A+B	Overexploited
	Zone C	Not fully exploited
Sardinella (S. aurita, S. maderensis, Sardinella spp)	Zone A+B+C	Overexploited
Horse mackerel (T. trachurus, T. trecae)	Zone A+B+C	Overexploited
Chub mackerel (Scomber japonicus)	Zone A+B+C	Fully exploited
SOUTH PACIFIC[6][7]		
Horse mackerel (Trachurus murphyi)	Chili	Very low levels
Mackerel (Scomber Japonicus)	Chili	Range between moderately exploited and overexploited

Table 2: Pelagic stocks status of PFA target stocks outside EU waters

Today the PFA fleet captures more than 20% of its catch outside European waters, which it claims it has to do to remain financially viable. Nowadays, most of these stocks are in a poor state (as shown in the table above). This is a major concern since these resources are crucial for coastal communities in the region.

From 2009 to 2011 in the Dutch annual reporting the pelagic fleet was marked as 'amber', according to the EU traffic light system as a result of its poor economic performances. That means that the balance between fleet and opportunity is considered potentially or somewhat unsatisfactory / problematic. However, the traffic light system is supposed to also be based on biological indicators, but these factors were not even incorporated for the stocks in the 'South' [West-Africa, Pacific Ocean] at that time, due to the absence of an applicable method. The Dutch annual report of 2011 recognised that overfishing was occurring; ***"As regards the stocks in the 'South' [West Africa and Pacific] it is known that the fishing pressure there is currently too high for most species."***

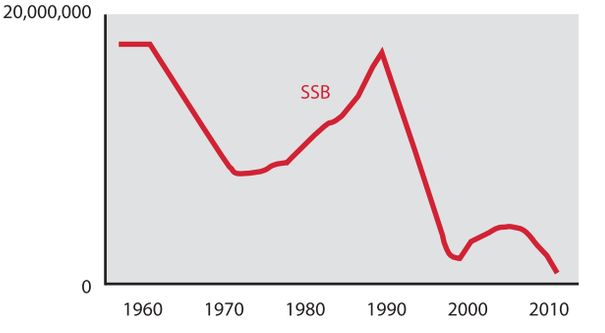
OVERFISHING THE PACIFIC

'As a result of the poorer prospects in North and West Africa, Dutch vessel owners have developed a new fishery: the South Pacific, fishing for jack mackerel. This fishery also declined last year.'

Dutch annual Member State report 2010

In 2006 at least two PFA vessels were active in the South Pacific (Irish and Dutch flag), this fleet capacity grew up to seven vessels in 2010 (Dutch, German, UK, Lithuanian, Irish and Peruvian flags). While the capacity of the EU pelagic fleet increased there was still no effective management system in place and concern over the stocks grew. A specific factor of concern was the recent increasing trend in the size of the catch and the growth of the distant flag fleets (including the EU fleet) off Chile and beyond the EEZ.[8]

Although the German and Dutch reporting addressed the status of the Pacific stocks, it remained 'unknown' in the German reporting and 'unspecified' in Dutch reporting until 2009. In 2008 the Dutch reporting even claims: ***"These vessels also fish in Mauritanian waters, among other things for sardinella and sardines, and in the international waters of the South Pacific around Chile. The responsible spreading of the fishing capacity of the pelagic fleet over the different fish stocks available worldwide is an important aspect of preventing excessive pressure on individual stocks."*** But it was obvious that the stock concerns and fishing pressure posed a large risk to the resources. It was not until 2010 that the Dutch and German reporting addressed these concerns. The Dutch report stated that ***"This fishery also declined last year"*** and the German reporting that ***"For Chilean jack mackerel an immediate reduction is required."***



Graphic: Biomass Chilean jack mackerel Chilean EEZ and offshore[9]

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POOR ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

“The pelagic fleets [of the Netherlands] showed signs of economic over-capitalisation.”

EC annual report 2011

Under the new CFP regulation, the long-term profitability of fleet segments will also form part of the assessments. Many of the fuel-intensive mobile gear/trawl fleets commonly rank amongst the least profitable in the EU.[10] This is more specifically the case if one takes into account subsidy payments and tax exemptions to this fleet (for PFA see Profundo 2011[11]). High fuel consumption and costs, the comparatively low value of the catch and intense competition amongst large fleets are generally to blame for their low profitability. The net profit of the Dutch pelagic fleet decreased from 0.9 million euros in 2003 to a loss of 29 million euros in 2012.[12]

END OVERCAPACITY

‘Since the Dutch pelagic fleet is active worldwide and ships from various countries outside the EU waters are fishing for the same pelagic stocks, it is difficult to draw sound conclusions as to the balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities.’

2009 Dutch annual fleet capacity report

Governments are now required to draw up action plans for those fleet segments operating at overcapacity. These plans must outline how and by when overcapacity will be eliminated and should be presented as part of the annual report. Moreover, governments are meant to take into account trends and the best scientific information to achieve “a stable and enduring balance” of their fleet’s fishing capacity. This suggests that future management decisions should consider projections of stock health and technological improvements in fishing methods (efficiency over time (technological creep); both are factors that are largely ignored in current fishing capacity management.

EU Member States that have pelagic fleets that fish both within and outside EU waters should make substantial progress this year in improving the content and quality of their annual fleet capacity assessment. This requires detailed, fleet-segment based analysis and projections of the fishing capacity of their fleet in relation to their available fishing opportunities globally.

GREENPEACE ASKS THE DUTCH GOVERNMENT TO:

- Make a detailed assessment of the balance of the pelagic fleet capacity in relation to their available fishing opportunities globally.
- Use the technical, biological, social and economic indicators defined in the Commission guidelines and make sure to apply these both for operations within and outside EU waters.[13]
- Coordinate with other relevant Member States (e.g. Germany, UK, France, Lithuania and Poland) to solve the problem of overcapacity in the EU pelagic fleet that fish both within and outside EU waters.
- Adopt a detailed action plan to remove excessive capacity within a clear timeframe.

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ENDNOTES

1 http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/mare/itemlongdetail.cfm?item_id=15110&subweb=343&lang=en
2 http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/fleet/index.cfm?method=FM_Reporting.AnnualReport
3 http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/kamerstukken/2014/03/18/kamerbrief-met-kwartaalrapportage-gemeenschappelijk-visserijbeleid.html
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9 http://depts.washington.edu/ramlegac/wordpress/wpcontent/uploads/2013/08/StockSummaryFiles/CHTRACCH.pdf
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11 http://www.greenpeace.nl/global/nederland/report/2011/direct%20and%20indirect%20eu%20support%20pfa.pdf
12 http://www.agrimatie.nl/SectorResultaat.aspx?subpubID=2386&sectorID=2390&themaID=2459
13 Guidelines for an improved analysis of the balance between fleet capacity and fishing opportunities http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/maritimeaffairs_fisheries/contracts_and_funding/calls_for_tender/2009_03/annex_5_guidelines_en.pdf

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