

# **EUROPEAN CODE OF SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE FISHERIES PRACTICES**



EUROPEAN COMMISSION



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## PREAMBLE

As part of its reform of the common fisheries policy (CFP), the Commission, in its communication on the timetable for implementing the reform <sup>(1)</sup>, proposed the drawing up of a European code of responsible fisheries practices with the active participation of fishermen and other interested parties. The professional organisations undertook to participate actively in this process via the Advisory Committee for Fisheries and Aquaculture (ACFA) <sup>(2)</sup>.

The code was adopted by ACFA during its plenary meeting of 11 September 2003.

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<sup>(1)</sup> COM(2002) 181, Chapter 3.9.

<sup>(2)</sup> Commission Decision 1999/478/EC.

## EUROPEAN CODE OF SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE FISHERIES PRACTICES

Fisheries, including aquaculture, are a vital source of food, employment, recreation, trade and economic well-being.

Therefore, the Advisory Committee for Fisheries and Aquaculture (ACFA) is committed to contributing to responsible and sustainable fishing activities. This code sets out standards of behaviour for the fishing sector to favour and preserve healthy marine ecosystems and to carry out fishing activities responsibly.

It is aimed at Community fishing operators in Community waters and elsewhere, i.e. in international and third-country waters. Building on the framework that the FAO Code of



Conduct <sup>(3)</sup> provides for fisheries authorities, this code refers more relevantly to EU fishing activities and is fundamentally directed at fishing operators. The code is intended to supplement international, European or national legislation

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<sup>(3)</sup> The Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries was adopted by the Conference of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) during its 28th session on 31 October 1995: <http://www.fao.org/agreem/codecond/ficonde.asp>

in force on a voluntary basis and add to existing legislation with a view to contributing to a sustainable development of the fisheries sector.

There is a clear need in the fisheries sector to maintain the profitability of fishing businesses. We should be mindful of this when the code is applied voluntarily. That is why there needs to be close cooperation between stakeholders and why the international application of the code must be uniform, to prevent distortion of competition.

On the other hand, fisheries have to be regarded as one of the most dangerous occupations in the world. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that crews are adequately trained/educated. Vessels should be well maintained, be fully seaworthy and contain proper facilities for the crew, taking into account the duration of the voyage and the area of operation.

Although the code is primarily aimed at fishermen and their businesses, responsible fisheries require the involvement of other actors, such as recreational fishing, administrations, the inspection services and the scientific community.

The organisations which voluntarily join up to the code will encourage their members to apply it correctly.

It is also necessary that other activities which have an impact on the marine environment take the necessary measures with a view to avoid all negative environmental impacts.



## OBJECTIVES

- a) To contribute to the conservation of fish stocks while promoting the continuation of professional fishing activities in Community, international and third-country waters.
- b) To contribute to the creation of wealth and employment in fishery-dependent regions under conditions of sustainability.
- c) To promote the contribution of fisheries to food security and the provision of high-quality fish.
- d) To develop a culture of good fishing practice and to provide standards of conduct for all persons involved in the fisheries sector wherever they fish, including in international or third-country waters.
- e) To promote the participation and cooperation of stakeholders in the implementation of the common fisheries policy (CFP).
- f) To guarantee equitable, safe and appropriate working and living conditions on board vessels.



## GUIDELINES

European fishing operators will endeavour to respect the following rules, wherever they fish, including in international or third-country waters.

### I — Respect for fisheries resources and their environment

1. Place quality before quantity, respecting responsible fishing practices.
2. Where choices can be made on alternative fishing practices, include respect for the environment as a criterion to make a decision.
3. Promote the development of awareness of environmental protection; encourage crew members to take part in educational and training programmes centred on responsible fishing and sustainable development practices.
4. Adopt the necessary measures to minimise the risk of gear loss. Where possible, efforts will be made to recover any lost gear as quickly as possible. Where immediate recovery is not possible, masters will record the position of the lost gear, report it and try to recover it at a later stage.
5. In order to avoid overfishing, set out only the amount of gear (number, length, etc.) that is actually needed, ensuring that it is properly marked with the identity of the vessel.



6. For the purposes of reasonable and sensible coexistence, ensure that gear is set in such a way as not to hinder other fishermen or users, and take appropriate precautions (such as ensuring the visibility of the vessel and of the gear) when fishing in areas of high marine traffic.

7. To avoid discards, voluntarily depart from fishing grounds where high quantities occur of fish which will not be kept on board due to their nature, size or condition.
8. Do their utmost to treat waste generated on board as if it were domestic waste, for example, by using a compactor on vessels where that is economically possible to treat refuse and other on-board waste during fishing trips; not dump the waste but retain it for later treatment where suitable structures and equipment exist on land.
9. Develop, in association with the appropriate authorities, facilities to carry out 'waste projects'.
10. Use judiciously automatic sorting equipment with a view to facilitating commercial

classification and not as a means of highgrading <sup>(4)</sup>.

11. Use and trim fishing gear in a manner appropriate to their characteristics and purpose, with a view to better complying with mandatory minimum landing sizes, in order to ensure that a satisfactory proportion of the stock reaches breeding age.
12. Where appropriate, make more use of more selective gear so as to avoid catching juveniles and non-target species.
13. Optimise the use of resources (energy and water) on board. Keep insulation of holds in good condition, free from hoarfrost and protected from excessive heat. Use good quality fuels with low sulphur content. Also,

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<sup>(4)</sup> 'Highgrading' refers to a practice whereby fishermen catch more than necessary, in order to sort the most valuable components of the catch with the resulting discarding of the remainder.

use vessels' engines judiciously so as to minimise emissions of noxious substances.

## II — Maritime safety

1. Manufacture and install fishing gear in conformity with safety requirements.
2. Maintain regularly all parts of the vessel, in particular engines and safety equipment. Vessel masters and owners will ensure that regular inspections are carried out, alongside statutory inspections, to guarantee permanently safe conditions.
3. Provide a safe working environment. Officers will not allow any working without appropriate equipment beyond mandatory requirements such as helmet, working clothing (including oil skin), gloves, shoes, goggles, etc.



4. Ensure fishermen's training on work risks and how to cope with dangerous situations. Fire drills and emergency exercises will be carried out regularly.
5. Train at least the skipper and/or one crew member and make available the necessary equipment so as to ensure medical care and

help in the event of an accident; encourage the development of the remote medical consultations by radio.

6. Keep all information on obstructions and other navigation risks regularly updated and communicate new findings and observations to other colleagues and to the appropriate maritime authorities.

### III — Social aspects

1. Encourage the negotiation by social partners of collective conventions and agreements laying down the employment, working and remuneration conditions.
2. Maintain a good working atmosphere. Officers will promote team spirit and establish procedures to resolve conflicts amicably.

3. In cases of competition for reduced space in fishing grounds, anticipate this and seek consensual solutions with other partners.
4. Maintain the vessel in the best possible hygienic conditions.

## IV — Cooperation

1. Practice reasonable and sensible coexistence at sea with vessels plying a different trade in a spirit of mutual respect regardless of their flag and acknowledge the rights of other users to access the marine environment and its resources.
2. Develop a policy of closer coexistence where possible by adopting bilateral or multilateral cooperation agreements at the level of trade associations, local, regional and national bodies and/or networks of producer

organisations and/or regional advisory committees <sup>(5)</sup>.

3. Cooperate with fisheries inspectors and other authorities at sea in ensuring safe and fair inspections.
4. Promote and obtain a code of good practices for the various inspection services and their agents in order to harmonise controls at European level.
5. Promote a spirit of cooperation and partnership with scientists whose responsibilities for contributing to responsible fishing are an integral part of the code. Masters will endeavour to spend some time responding to surveys expedited by the administration

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<sup>(5)</sup> See Articles 31 and 32 of Council Regulation (EC) No 2371/2002 on the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources under the common fisheries policy.

or the authorised research institutes or on their behalf, knowing that this effort will be worth the long-term benefits for the fishing world of a good scientific basis for fisheries management.

6. Encourage the installation of the VMS <sup>(6)</sup> system in ships that are not legally required to carry it.
7. Encourage the conclusion of agreements between fishermen for the purpose of implementing certain elements of the code and do the same with other parts of the sector for the same reasons.
8. Inform the competent local authorities of any temporary or permanent anomalies in the environmental and biological situation of a fishery zone, indicating the cause of the anomalies where possible.

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<sup>(6)</sup> Vessel monitoring system.



## V — Information and transparency

1. Ensure the traceability of fish in accordance with the relevant European and national legislation (place and date of catch, place of unloading, discards).

2. Promote the spread of the regular and reliable log-book keeping, in order to allow the collection and treatment of basic accurate statistical data. Encourage in this respect the conclusion of 'charters' or of partnership protocols between the sector, scientific bodies and the administration.
3. Keep the log-books and the corresponding aggregated data for a long period, or ensure that they are kept by administrative or scientific authorities.

## VI — Marketing conditions

1. Keep fish on board in good condition in order to increase their market value and encourage added-value strategies for fishery products by giving priority to quality.

2. Provide beforehand information concerning the unloading of catches so as to improve the potential marketing possibilities and to favour unloading at places where there are appropriate outlets.
3. Catch, handle, process and distribute fish and fishery products in such a way as to preserve their nutritional value and quality.
4. Collaborate with public authorities and other stakeholders to promote the benefits of eating fish.
5. Facilitate appropriate controls and implement quality labels and traceability for fishery products, and, where appropriate, give priority to selling or to recording sales at auctions.



## VII — Aquaculture

1. Guarantee both the quality of the consumer product and maintenance of the well-being of the farmed fish (?).
2. Plan and operate fish farming in a manner that avoids negative interaction with the environment and resources.



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(?) For more details, refer to A Code of Conduct for European aquaculture produced by the Federation of European Aquaculture Producers (FEAP) and adopted at its June 2000 general assembly (<http://www.aquamedia.org/feap/code>).



European Commission

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