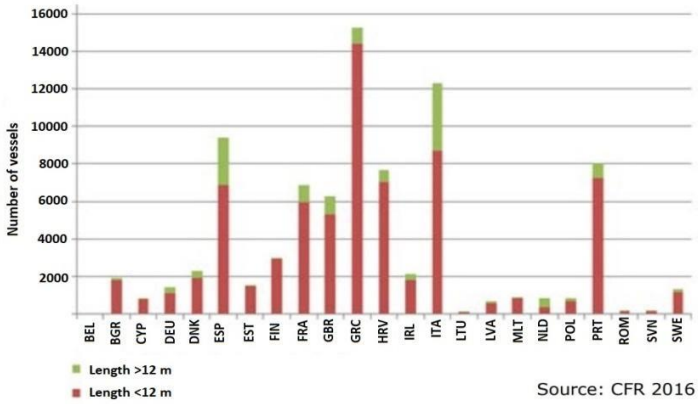
EU Control System Factsheet
Managing Small Scale Vessels

Importance

Since ancient times, small-scale fisheries (SSF) have been playing an important socio-economic and cultural role in European waters and coastal communities. Today, small-scale vessels (those below 12 metres) represent 85% of all fishing vessels and at least 23% of total catches in the EU. The fragmentation of the sector, the diversity of cultural and economic contexts, and the reluctance at national level to regulate the sector are such that SSF remains a sector characterised by insufficient information, inadequate governance, and limited financial investment in comparison to the big industrial fishers. As a result they are often disempowered and 'voiceless' which contributes further to mismanagement.

While they generate limited amounts of daily catches, SSF are not necessarily a synonym for low impact fisheries. Their activities may have a significant impact on the marine environment and the fish stocks if they are not properly managed and controlled. Their impact is mainly because the specific rules in the current fishing Control Regulation applying to vessels smaller than 12 metres leave them unmonitored as well as due to the lack of political will to implement effective monitoring measures and the lack of a culture of compliance, . Their operations need to be properly assessed and controlled to guarantee their impacts are accurately accounted for.

Numbers of SSF vessels and large-scale vessels in each MS



Source: CFR 2016

Problems and solutions

1. Lack of mandatory tracking systems

Monitoring systems to track the activities of fishing vessels below 12 metres are not mandatory under the current Control Regulation, and it is therefore not possible to automatically locate and identify small vessels or receive other types of information in real time such as course and speed. This not only jeopardises safety −if fishers have an accident at sea, authorities will not have the tools to easily locate such vessels−, but also jeopardises marine conservation and management. Without proper assessment of SSF operations, their impacts cannot be accurately accounted for, and it is not possible to ensure compliance, for instance monitoring that fishing activities do not take place in restricted or protected areas.

'Green Box' device installed in a small-scale vessel. Sanlucar, Andalusia, Spain

Source: Andalusian regional government

Several EU regions have adopted voluntary tracking systems for their SSF fleets, precisely with the aim to ensure safety at sea, better control fishing activities and improve assessment of fisheries resources. This is for example the case of the Regional Government of Andalusia, Spain, which started to install its own real-time monitoring system on small vessels in 2004 ('green boxes'). Currently, 1.343 out of the 1.384 small scale vessels (97% of Andalusia's fleet) are successfully equipped with this energy and cost-efficient system, which transmits the vessel's position to the control authorities every 3 minutes.

Several simple tracking systems exist nowadays to transmit the a vessel's position, course and speed to the control authorities (either by satellite or cellular networks). In case of loss of coverage, data continue to be recorded and are transmitted to the data control centre once the coverage is recovered. The information provided by these tracking systems is not only used by the control authorities to ensure maritime safety and control fishing activities, but also by fishers themselves to prepare studies about fishing effort per hour, the location of valuable fishing resources and even the average price per kilogram of each of the species. This greatly enhances their ability to manage their local fisheries.

2. Lack of catching information

Vessels below 10 metres are not required to record fishing logbook data or complete a landing declaration indicating their catches, which poses a significant threat to the quality of stock assessments. Several Member States do not collect any type of catch or landing data for vessels under 10 metres long (e.g. Italy). Although individual small-scale vessels might not catch large amounts of fish, their total catch volume in some fisheries, and particularly their impact on some species, can be significant.

In addition, reporting for vessels between 10 and 15 metres is still largely paper based, as provided by current derogations, despite the existence and accessibility of more modern and cost-efficient electronic reporting tools. In Spain and Italy most vessels between 12 and 15 metres (85% and 90% of vessels respectively) are exempt from submitting an electronic declaration, which leads to errors being recorded in the Member States' catch databases. This lack of credible data severely undermines the quality of the fish stock assessment and hence of the scientific advice for the management of the fishery, compromising sound management decisions at national and EU level.

The current rules applicable to these small vessels are not fit for purpose. Ensuring a level playing field when gathering reliable and comprehensive data on fishing activities is therefore essential for managing fisheries effectively. To allow for data to be consolidated and used at EU level, it needs to be comparable across Member States and provided on a timely basis.

The introduction of user-friendly electronic reporting systems for all vessels, independent of their size, would result in increased quality and availability of data required for resource assessments, and thus in net positive socio-economic and environmental impacts, including a more reliable stock assessment and fairer distribution of quotas when applicable.

Recommendations

- **Mandatory use of cost-effective tracking devices** (new art. 9 of the Commission's proposal) **for effective monitoring of position and movement of all fishing vessels, independently of their size**. All fishing vessels should have installed a fully functioning device which transmit position data at regular interval to control authorities, and allows for vessels to be automatically located and identified. Obligations should however not be the same for large-scale and SSF vessels. While larger vessels should have a satellite-based system installed, vessels below 12 metres should be allowed to carry on-board simply a mobile device with GPS signal linked to an electronic navigation chart.

- **Obligation to maintain on-board all vessels an accurate and complete fishing logbook recording their operations** and indicating specifically all catches, type of gear used and number of fishing operations (new art. 15 of the Commission's proposal). This information must also be reported electronically to the competent fishing authority through the introduction of user-friendly systems, particularly mobile applications. The obligations will not be the same for large and SSF vessels, since the regulation does not provide the technicalities or details on what type of reporting and logbook system can be used. It simply sets out baselines under which the reporting has to take place.

Read the full NGO position paper