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Project name: MOSES: Maritime, Ocean Sector and Ecosystem Sustainability: Fostering Blue Growth in Atlantic Industries.

Author: Arantza Murillas and Raúl Pallezo (AZTI), and Marta Escapa (UPV-EHU)

Further Reading: The full report is available to download here: http://mosesproject.eu/ban/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/ONIA_Fisheries_v1.pdf

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Blue Growth Pathway for Commercial Fishing

One of the main objectives of EU's Common Fisheries Policy is to rebuild fish stocks to levels compatible with producing the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY), while the Atlantic Action Plan aims to foster blue growth and promote carbon neutrality. The fishing sector's contribution to these priorities can happen through maintaining the stock abundance while reducing their carbon footprint and other impacts on marine ecosystem services. In order to achieve these goals as well as address other environmental impacts from fishing, AZTI developed an impact assessment index, as part of the EU MOSES project, that combines economic performance indicators (added value, profit and employment) with other parameters such as the size of the fishing activity, scale, spatial extent, frequency, the fishing gear used, the type of ecosystem services affected and a sustainability factor that ensures biomasses capable of producing MSY levels. The index was tested in five different fishing segments in the Basque fishing fleet on four marine ecosystem services (ES) (i.e. fish provision, regulation, and cultural ES).

Research Findings

The main finding of this study is that consideration of stock status and carbon footprint are important, but these are not the only variables to consider. Issues such as the intensity of the activity or the vulnerability of the area may be of great importance in designing future blue growth pathways for commercial fishing. The results also suggested that a low score on the calculated impact assessment index can be unsustainable if the stocks are heavily depleted, whereas a high score may still be sustainable if the stocks composing the catch-portfolio of each fishing fleet are in a healthy status.

Policy implications

When Total Admissible Catch or other management measures are in place, stock diversification is not always the best option to guarantee more efficient portfolios. This must be taken into account when selecting between different policy options. For example, if a policy induces changes in landings portfolio to increase sustainability and fishing activity increases to maintain the fleet's efficiency, this may lead to a higher impact on ecosystem services (changing the impact index). Actions for sustainable growth of the fishing sector have to be assessed at the individual segment level. Therefore, there is not a specific general action that will determine the final value of the pressure on the environment. Finally, stock status and carbon footprint are important to foster sustainable blue growth paths, but they are not the only variables to consider. Issues like the intensity of the activity or the vulnerability of the area may be of great importance to design future blue growth pathways for commercial fishing.