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Estimate potential catch loss for the Belgian fishery sector in a changing maritime landscape

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For several decades, the fishing industry is under pressure due to high fuel costs and catch limitations (declining stocks), but also the available fishing grounds are increasingly regulated by numerous (European) directives. In addition, a more intensive use of marine space and new stakeholders lead to a greater competition between the fishing industry and other maritime sectors. All of this makes it difficult to keep a clear overview of the actual space for fisheries. Therefore, we created a novel visualization tool called "Geofish" (www.geofish.be), which presents available geographic information in multiple layers in an online consultable system. The Belgian fishing fleet, wherefore it is developed in first instance, operates in a wide region (from Irish Sea to the Greater North Sea), facing a lot of spatial competition. For example, around 280000 km² of Belgian fishing grounds are currently designated as marine protected area (MPA), under various legislation (mainly Natura 2000). At the moment, most of these areas are still accessible for fishing activities but certain restrictions (closure, technical net adaptations,...) are ready for implementation. Besides, MPAs, the construction of wind farms is also substantially reducing the areal extent of the fishing grounds (+- 14400 km²), already causing loss of fishery grounds. By including fisheries landings data (weight and value of commercial fish) in the tool, we can also estimate possible financial loss of fishery closures. Such information is essential to support the sector in the changing maritime landscape and increased competition for space.

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