

## Reform of the EU Common Fisheries Policy

### Briefing on discards

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#### **Introduction**

The Common Fisheries Policy, Europe's fisheries policy management tool since 1983, is up for review for the first time in 10 years.

This year, for the first time, the European Parliament under the codecision procedure has a crucial role to play in reforming the policy.

This briefing provides more specific information about one of the key issues of this CFP reform, discards.

#### **1. How many fish are discarded?**

The practice of throwing fish overboard at sea is a major waste. Globally, the FAO estimate that each year around 27 million tonnes are discarded from a global catch of 90 million tonnes.

In Europe, 1.7 million tonnes of fish are killed and thrown back in the sea each year. In the North East Atlantic fishery alone, around 20% of the total catch is discarded. Demersal fisheries, the largest source of catches in the Mediterranean, are estimated to have discards rates of between 40-50% of the total catch.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tudela S. Ecosystem Effects of Fishing in the Mediterranean: An Analysis of the Major Threats of Fishing Gear and Practices to Biodiversity and the Marine Habitat. General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean

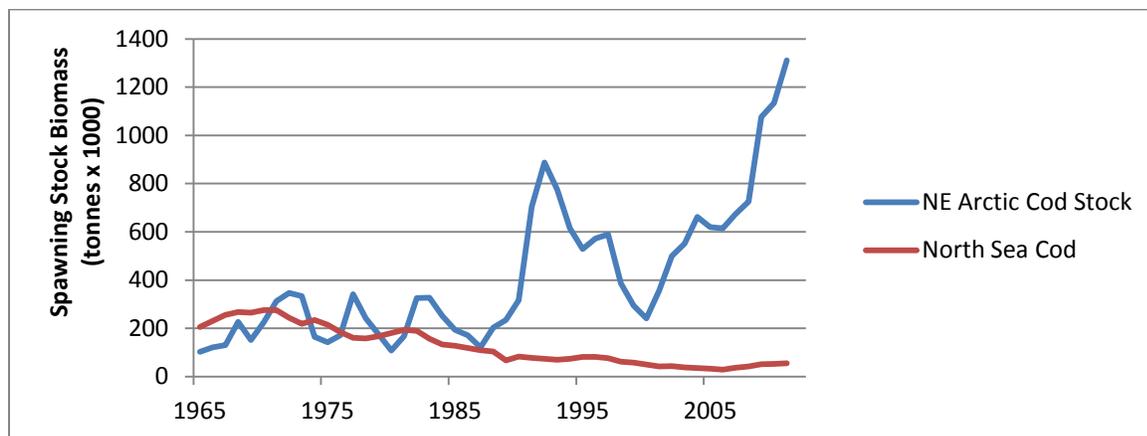
Why do we have discards? Discards are a direct result of the current Common Fisheries Policy.

## 2. Benefits of a discard ban

A discard ban will help accelerate stock recovery, allow significant improvements in the collection of scientific data, and, importantly, help to restore consumer confidence in the fisheries.

Currently, the 20% average discard levels in the North Sea are included in the landing quotas in order to calculate the fishery's yearly fish mortality. This means that if nothing was discarded, these 20% could be landed and sold instead. Thus, there is room for increased quotas if the industry can show that everything is landed under a discard ban system. The industry would benefit by higher profitability and more jobs to the sector.

In addition to the positive economic impact, discard measures can assist stock recovery. This has been seen in Norway and the Barents seas (Diamond and Beukers-Stewart, 2011). Today, Norwegian waters and the Barents seas are some of the most profitable in the world; catches of North East Arctic cod have increased from 307 920 tonnes (1985) to 610 000 tonnes (2010) while the stock continues to increase. The North Sea however tells a different story; here since 1985 the catch of cod reduced from 250,000 tonnes in 1985 to just 20,000 tonnes in 2007. (Source ICES Advice 2008, Book 3, p.51)



In addition to the commercial benefits of stock restoration, dealing with discards will help to restore consumer confidence in fisheries. Many members of the public find it hard to accept this large scale waste, and there is confusion about the sustainability of commercial stocks. Helping restore stocks will

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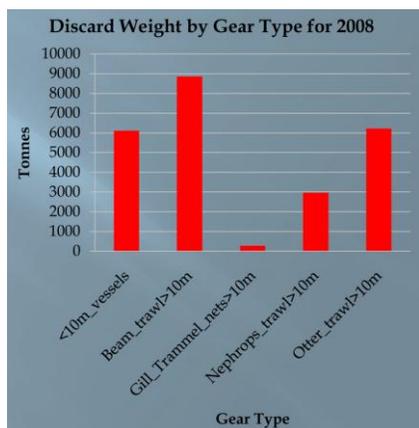
Studies and Reviews No.74, 2004. [81] Vassilopoulou V, Papaconstantinou C. Discarding at sea by commercial trawlers in Hellenic Waters. In: Rapport du 35e Congrès de la Commission Internationale pour l'Exploration Scientifique de la Mer Méditerranée. CIESM congress proceedings, 1998, p. 502–503. Source: DAVIES RWD, et al. Defining and estimating global marine fisheries bycatch. Marine Policy (2009)

lead to a return of public confidence and their return to buying European caught fish. At the moment, that gap is filled by Norway with a plentiful stock brought about, in part, by a discard ban.

### **3. Do all fisheries discard the same levels?**

The rate of discarding varies significantly depending on the type of fishery. Static gear, such as gillnets, often generate very low levels of discarding, while on the other hand some trawling results in high levels of discards.

CEFAS estimates that:



*Sources of discards in the UK CEFAS (Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (UK) 2010 (CEFAS)*

These figures are in line with STECF previous guidance on North Sea discards. Between 2006 and 2008 the rate of discarding in the North Sea was:

- UK Beam Trawl discard rate: 28%
- Non –UK Beam trawl discard rate: 49%
- UK Demersal trawl discard rate: 35%
- Non UK Demersal trawl discard rate: 41%

For three years a total of 310,835 tonnes of fish were discarded in the North Sea; average of 103,612 tonnes a year. This is the equivalent of 864 blue whales, or 6907 London double decker buses. You can find this information online @ <http://www.ssacn.org/north-sea-discards-2006-2008>

## 4. What is discarding?

There are three different types of discards:

- Under the current CFP regulation, fish that are smaller than the regulated minimum size for the specific species have to be discarded and not landed.
- Fish species that have a quota has to be discarded if caught when there is no quota left.
- Fish and other organisms with no commercial value that are caught as by catch are discarded.

In each of these cases, the reasons for the discard differ:

- Undersized fish are caught both because the fishing gears used are not selective enough, and because there are no incentives for fishermen to avoid fishing in areas where fish is predominantly smaller.
- Catching fish when there is not enough quota. This often happens in mixed fisheries, where fishing gears that catch several different types of species are used and where it is difficult to differentiate between species for which a quota still exists and for which there is no quota left. While it is today legal to continue fishing, species for which quota is exhausted have to be discarded.
- High grading, where fishermen discard fish with a lower value in order to optimise the value of their individual quota.

In their 2010 assessment for the causes of discarding in the UK CEFAS reported that:

- Half are caused by the mismatch between gear selectivity and market opportunity
- Quota restrictions cause less than 22% of discards
- Around one third of discards are caused by inconsistent markets or sorting, damage to the catch and/or catch composition regulation

## 5. What are the solutions to discards?

Discards have been reduced and eliminated in pilot projects through a package of measures. All measures encourage fishermen to use their ingenuity to stop the waste of fish

- The most promising system is catch quota management (CQM), where all fish caught count towards the vessels' individual quota. This should be combined lowering the value of undersized fish in order to encourage fishermen not to catch them in the first place, incentivising instead the industry to avoid bycatches. Incentives to join CQM systems also come through quota supplements, where increased quotas come through the accounting for of former discards as landings under a landing obligation system. Individual quotas that

facilitate the pooling of quota and allow fishermen to balance their quota to match their catch composition is another successful tool in mixed fisheries situations.

- Technical regulations such as increased selectivity of gears as well as real time closures have also worked well.

## **6. Have discards been reduced elsewhere?**

Dealing with discarding is nothing new.

In 1987, Norway introduced a ban on the discarding of cod and haddock. This was followed in 1988 by a ban on the discards of six other species, including saithe and herring. Norway's ban was introduced against the advice of civil servants and with the opposition of the fishing industry. It is enforced by rigorous inspections by the coast guard. Diamond and Beukers-Stewart (2011) showed that the ban has reduced discards to such a degree that it has significantly contributed to the dramatic recovery of the Northeast arctic cod.

In 2008, Denmark introduced a large scale trial to reduce discards. Fishermen could opt into a CQM scheme in return for a slightly increased quota. Compliance was monitored using CCTV cameras. Today, the catch quota management scheme covers around 70 vessels in Denmark, UK, Germany and Holland. All fish caught are counted against quota, which has incentivised fishermen to avoid unwanted catches. Vessels under CQM have 1% -7 % by catch rate.

In 2010, a CQM trial in English waters saw discard rates fall from 38% for North Sea cod trawlers and 28% for Western Channel sole beam trawlers to just 0.2%. This trial was introduced to test the effectiveness of catch quota management in reducing discards and using CCTV. The trial showed that fishermen can deliver large discard reductions.

## **7. Compliance**

As with any regulation, compliance at sea and at land is needed. This can be brought about by frequent and effective inspections by the coast guard at sea and when vessels land fish. On board inspections can be used but inspectors can be subject to pressure to look the other way. The CQM solution in the North Sea that relies on the use of non-intrusive cameras has positive results. They allow catches to be monitored and provide an incentive not to discard fish.