

## North Sea Commission Resolution on landing obligation

The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is a set of rules for managing European fishing fleets and for conserving fish stocks. Stocks may be renewable, but they are finite. Some of these fishing stocks, however, are being overfished. As a result, EU countries have taken action to ensure the European fishing industry is sustainable and does not threaten the fish population size and productivity over the long term. At the same time the scientists will get the best possible data in order to give better advice for future fisheries and quotas. The CFP was first introduced in the 1970s and went through successive updates, the most recent of which took effect on 1 January 2014.

One of the more debated areas of the reform process has been the landing obligation, commonly known as the discard ban. It was applied to pelagic fisheries in the North Sea on 1 January 2015 and to demersal fisheries from January 2016. Fishery-dependent communities fear a rigid, inflexible and heavy-handed implementation of the discard ban, especially as it is being introduced before necessary changes to fisheries management systems. Most concern is connected with demersal fisheries, as the pelagic fisheries are mostly single species catches. Mixed fisheries represent a particular challenge in implementing a landing obligation.

The more practical and socio-economic effects of the landing obligation are still to a large degree uncertain at the regional level. The North Sea Commission's Marine Resource Group had a meeting on Shetland January 2016. Shetland Fishermen's Association gave a presentation about the practical problems certain to be caused by the phased introduction of the new EU ban on demersal fish discards. Shetland is one of the NSC member regions where a strong fishery sector is important for jobs and growth in the region. This is not unique in the North Sea Region; messages from Shetland are comparable with those from other fishery dependent regions in the EU. Norway, on the other hand, has practiced discard ban since the late 80s.

The NSC Marine Resources Group wishes to draw the attention of the following urgent concerns when the landing obligation for demersal fisheries now is coming into force:

- The fishing industry needs time to restructure the quota system to enforce the necessary measures regarding landing obligation.
- If rigorously implemented without changes in the way multi-species fisheries are managed, the changes are very likely to bankrupt many demersal fishing vessels. This is because of the presence of so-called 'choke species', these being locally abundant fish for which quotas could quickly be exhausted. This situation could force vessels to cease fishing well before they have caught their quota allocations for their target stocks;
- Further financial penalties may be incurred in disposing of over-quota fish which cannot be sold or which attracts a price less than the cost of catching it;
- The regulation appears to ignore the fact that adult commercial fish of different species regularly caught together in mixed fisheries vary widely in size, making selectivity extremely difficult - for example, when all whiting are able escape a net mesh size which traps the much larger hake;

- The Norwegian government has extensive experience of implementing a no discard policy in similar mixed fisheries over the past 30 years; the potential for European authorities to learn from that experience is not fully explored;

**The North Sea Commission recommends:**

- The North Sea Commission sees the landing obligation as an important mean to prevent overfishing and maintaining a sustainable marine environment. However there are unresolved problems which need to be addressed and brought to the attention of the European Commission, particularly concerned mixed fisheries.
- Unresolved difficulties, especially in fishery dependent communities, lead us to suggest that a flexible and workable landing obligation must be implemented in close cooperation with stakeholders, mainly through the North Sea Advisory Council
- A cooperation forum between fisheries organisations and authorities from Norway and EU countries should be established to exchange good practice, as Norway has 30 years' experience with a discard ban
- The North Sea Commission therefore asks for incentives for the fishing sector to apply **technology** which **reduces** the bycatch. It is important that the fishermen are allowed to implement and adjust their gear over time. Rules and regulations should be harmonized simultaneously throughout the whole EU – in order to avoid a situation of distorted competitiveness between fishermen from different member states.
- The North Sea Commission encourages the fishing sector in the member regions to make use of the services provided by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).”