



BRIEF

2018

FACING UP TO THE LANDING OBLIGATION: A CHALLENGE FOR EUROPEAN FISHERIES

WWF MARINE MEDITERRANEAN INITIATIVE, DECEMBER 2018



Exchange on slipping methods to reduce discards, Olhao, Portugal, 2017. © WWF - MINOUW / Nuno Alves

THE ISSUE OF DISCARDS

Over 7 million tons of fish are thrown overboard every year globally (Source: Food and Agriculture Organisation - FAO (Kelleher et al, 2005). The catching of unwanted species is a pervasive problem in fisheries worldwide. In most cases unwanted catches are returned dead to the sea as discards.

In European fisheries, discarding occurs mainly because fishing gears are not selective and the catch is also made of several species of no commercial value. Fish are thrown back to the sea because they are too small to be sold or because the yearly authorized quota has been reached.

This results in a waste of natural resources and a threat to the health of marine ecosystems. Unwanted catches damage fish stocks, by killing juvenile individuals before they reach reproductive age and by destroying the biodiversity of fish habitats, impacting on the entire marine life chain.

From a socio-economic point of view, a fishery that is not selective is less efficient because time and labour are wasted in the sorting of the catch.

The landing obligation

European fisheries are currently making the transition to reduce discards, and to bring all catches to land as part of the implementation of the Landing Obligation which will fully enter into force on January 1st 2019.

Introduced under EU legislation as part of the reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP, EU Reg. 1983/2013, Art 15), the landing obligation has been described as ‘the biggest change in European fisheries since the 1980s’.

Up to half a million tonnes of fish is estimated to be discarded in Europe each year (Source: Maynou et al. (2018), “Handling, storage, transport and utilization of unwanted catches”, Report D2.19 of the MINOUW project). The landing obligation is designed to catalyse an end to fishers’ practice of throwing non-target and undersized species back into the sea.

From January 1st 2019, all catches of regulated species (i.e. those listed in European Regulation 1967/2006) will need to be landed in port. Those below the minimum conservation size won’t be allowed to be sold for human consumption (to avoid black market trade in juveniles).

The obligation to land catches that were previously discarded at sea will create an enormous increase in work on board and on land, that will not generate an equivalent increase in income. To overcome this problem, fishers will be pushed to improve their fishing practices, to adopt selective gears, so to minimize the obligatory landing of unwanted catches.

The landing obligation represents a huge change in fishing practices for fishers across Europe, and full implementation and compliance represents a major challenge.

The fishing industry is not prepared

Despite the incremental introduction of the landing obligation over the last four years, the fisheries industry remains woefully underprepared for its implementation, and complying fully will cause real difficulty for fishers both economically and logically.

The requirement to land all catches of regulated species will have a real financial impact, with increased handling costs both at sea (sorting, storage) and in port.

These costs are not the only issue; dealing with the landings itself will be problematic. Fish that would have been discarded cannot be sold for human consumption, and so must be disposed of in other ways - for example as food for pets or aquaculture - but the facilities, logistics and markets for dealing with this are not yet in place.

Fishers could find themselves having to pay for the destruction of these fish, as special waste of animal origin. In addition, as of January 1st 2019, any fishers not complying with the landing obligation could be considered as acting illegally, with the EU Commission coming under increasing pressure to ensure the rules of the CFP are enforced.

ELIMINATE DISCARDS AT SOURCE

Faced with this situation, a practical and constructive approach to the implementation of the landing obligation needs to be found, one that helps fishers to adapt.

First, fishers should be encouraged to face reality: ultimately, they will have to abide by the landing obligation. Second, they should be provided with the tools, information and funding that helps them do so.

Given the difficulty of completely avoiding unwanted catches in current fishery, WWF believes it is necessary to devise technical and technological solutions, along with economic and social incentives, to gradually improve fishing gear selectivity and consequently eliminate discard practices.

By developing these technical and technological solutions, increasing the awareness of producers and consumers, there is the possibility of considerably reducing unwanted catches and ensuring a more sustainable supply of fish resources in the future.

WWF has been working over four years with scientists, fishers, NGOs and policy makers (15 maritime science institutes and bodies from across Europe) in the framework of the Minouw project - minouw-project.eu, to identify technical and technological solutions to increase gear selectivity through a multi-stakeholder participatory approach.

WWF and the Minouw project members have developed and tested affordable, more selective fishing gears to minimize unwanted catches.

More selective fishing gear can bring many additional benefits to fishers, and is an affordable, practical and effective action for fishers to consider. Information about more selective gears, where and how they can be used, and funding to help fishers switch to using them will be key to a successful implementation of the landing obligation.

Research at the University of York (UK) found that the introduction of a discard ban in Norwegian cod and haddock fisheries in 1987 ultimately encouraged fishers to install more selective fishing gear. Despite some short-term economic costs, the Norwegian and Barents Sea fisheries are today among some of the most prosperous in the world.

The more selective fishing gears successfully tested by the Minouw project - minouw-project.eu are inexpensive and easy to implement, and the use of European Maritime Fishery Funds (EMFF) could help scale up the adoption of more selective gears at a regional scale, e.g. in the Mediterranean.

WWF is urging fishers to get information about the landing obligation and the existing solutions and to adopt more selective gears.

WWF is also asking policy makers to make selectivity the priority, to accompany fishers through this crucial transition and in particular to use European Maritime Fishery Funds (EMFF) to support European fisheries to implement the landing obligation and so to improve selectivity.

Examples of solutions

Trammel nets in Tuscany, Italy

[Here](#) and [here](#)

Bivalve dredge, Algarve, Portugal

[Here](#) and [here](#)

[Sea trammel nets in Catalonia](#)

[Bottom trawling in Italy](#)

[Purse seine fisheries in Portugal](#)

Watch more videos about this issue:

<https://vimeo.com/minouw>

SUMMARY OF WWF ASKS

The catching of unwanted species, called discards, is a pervasive problem in fisheries worldwide. In most cases unwanted catches are returned dead to the sea as discards. Up to half a million tonnes of fish is estimated to be thrown overboard in Europe each year (Maynou et al. (2018)).

The landing obligation will fully enter into force on January 1st 2019. All catches (wanted and unwanted-discards) of regulated species will need to be landed in port. This will create an enormous increase of work on board and on land and will not generate an equivalent increase in income. Any fisher not complying with the landing obligation could be considered as acting illegally.

WWF believes the only viable solution is to improve gear selectivity and to fish in areas generating low unwanted catches. WWF is urging fishers to get prepared and to adopt more selective gears. WWF is promoting affordable technical and technological solutions to minimize unwanted catches. WWF is also asking policy makers to support fishers through this important transition and make selectivity the priority for European fisheries.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.