



POSITION

FEBRUARY
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MORE FISH FOR HEALTHY SEAS

REFORM OF THE COMMON FISHERIES POLICY

TACKLING BY-CATCH AND DISCARDS UNDER THE REFORMED COMMON FISHERIES POLICY (CFP)

Unwanted catches and related discards are a major problem in many European fisheries, and one that the reformed CFP must tackle effectively in order to move to a long-term sustainable future for the marine environment, the species within it, and the people who depend on them. Experience has shown that this problem, like many others, will not be solved by one-size-fits-all stand-alone measures, due to the great variety of fisheries in the EU. Therefore, WWF believes that adapted solutions, compliance and positive outcomes will only be achieved with participative management. Sustainability objectives must be set centrally by the European Union and the practical solutions to achieve these objectives developed at a fishery level with the involvement of stakeholders. Thus, specific strategies to address by-catch and the wasteful practice of discarding must be established for each fishery. Fishermen must be held accountable for what they catch. Fishing gear and fishing operations must be selective to avoid the capture of non-target species and undersized or immature fish. The CFP must tackle not just discarding of commercial species, but the unintentional removal of any marine life from the sea.

THE PROBLEM: By-catch and discards are bad for target and non-target species, for the wider marine environment, for fishermen, for the economy and for the reputation of the fishing industry. To turn around current trends in European fisheries and end discarding we need to take the following steps:

1. Know what is being removedⁱ from the seas how and when;
2. Be sure that what is being removed from the sea is being done at sustainable levels;
3. Achieve maximum selectivity in all European fisheries, which in turn should;
4. Achieve minimum by-catch and discarding by an appropriate date

THE SOLUTION: There needs to be a framework to implement and incentivise the delivery of these asks. The reasons for discarding are many and complex; WWF believes there must be tailor made solutions for specific fisheries. By-catch and discard strategies with clear interim targets and timeframes must be developed and adopted for each fishery, and must include:

1. a comprehensive assessment of by-catch and discard levels and an on-going commitment to full documentation of the entire catch and of vessel operations;

2. where by-catch and discarding is identified, specific targets to meet the central goal of minimising by-catch and discards and achieving sustainability must be set;
3. the establishment of a clear timeframe and interim targets within which to meet these targets;
4. a clear by-catch and discard strategy that details the tools to be used to achieve the targets such as the use of more selective gear, real time/area closures or a landing obligation

Multiannual Plans (MAPs) should form the framework for the delivery of the key policy objectives of the CFP, including minimising by-catch and discards by 2018 at the latest, as well as representing the key means of delivering regionalisation.

FULL DOCUMENTATION AND TRANSPARENCY: Full documentation and transparency, through for example vessel monitoring systems, observers or camera technology, of catches is essential so that there is effective monitoring, control and surveillance and clear records and verification of what is being removed and how much is discarded. This must be accompanied by robust scientific data to ensure understanding of the effects of fishing activities on the marine environment.

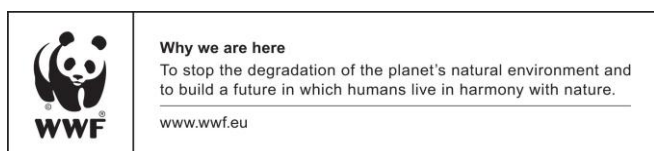
FUNDING AND MARKETING MEASURES: Funding could be made available through the EU Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) to support developing selective gears and fishing practices and implementing full documentation as well as for the management of the fisheries level MAPs. Economic assistance for gear selectivity should be as one off payments that are carefully targeted. Funding should always be aligned with sustainability targets and timelines and should be removed if targets and timelines are not met.

The new CFP must not support or subsidize any commercialisation of unwanted catches. The Common Market Regulation and the EMFF proposals must be amended to prevent any commercialisation of juvenile or immature or other unwanted catches, as this is in contradiction to the objective of the CFP to maintain and restore the health of fish stocks and the marine ecosystem. Financial aid must not be given for investments in vessels or ports for the handling or use of unwanted catches or the valorisation of underused components of fish catches (EMFF Articles 40 & 41).

IN CONCLUSION: Due to the great variety of fisheries in the EU, WWF believes that instead of the European Commission's proposal of introducing an *a priori* obligation to land all catches of a number of commercial species, a requirement to land all catchesⁱⁱ (discard ban) should become a mandatory measure when a fishery fails to meet agreed by-catch and discard minimisation targets within the established timeframe. Under no circumstances should there be any commercialisation of any undersized or immature fish as proposed by the European Commission. In the case of a discard ban, the cost of handling and disposing of non-commercial landings on shore must be the sole responsibility of the owner of the vessel and no subsidies should be provided to support this. If a landing obligation is implemented it must be subject to real time scientific monitoring and where necessary accompanying measures should be adopted to ensure that these landings do not result in negative environmental impacts.

ⁱ A marine organism is removed from the sea when it is caught by fishing gear, irrespective of whether it is then retained on board, or if it is thrown back (discarded), or whether it is target or by-catch species.

ⁱⁱ Such a requirement should not include species that are alive, healthy and with high anticipated survival rates including benthic invertebrates, some fish species, sharks, turtles, marine mammals or seabirds. These should not be retained but must be released immediately.



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