

# Securing the objectives of the landing obligation under Article 15 of the Common Fisheries Policy

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The Committee on Fisheries adopted the own-initiative report by Søren GADE (DK, Renew) on securing the objectives of the landing obligation under Article 15 of the Common Fisheries Policy.

The landing obligation makes it mandatory to land and deduct from applicable quotas all catches of species which are subject to catch limits and, in the Mediterranean Sea, are subject to minimum sizes in EU waters, or in certain cases by EU vessels in international waters and forbids the use of undersized fish for direct human consumption.

The landing obligation is not a fully comprehensive discard ban as it only applies to regulated species (total allowable catches (TACs) and effort-regulated fisheries for which a minimum size has been defined.

## *Lack of information on landing obligations*

The report recalled that the landing obligation is not a goal in itself but a tool to drive improvements in fishing and operational behaviour, incentivise the development and usage of more selective gears to minimise unwanted catches, and improve catch documentation for a better understanding and scientific assessment of fish stocks. Many fishers do not concur with the link between the objectives of the landing obligation and its implementation, which tends to hamper compliance.

Members regretted that the Commission's annual reports on the state of play of the CFP include very little information on the implementation of the landing obligation, with no information so far on the extent to which discards have been reduced under the obligation. The introduction of the landing obligation represents one of the greatest challenges in the history of EU fisheries management – from recording landings, and even making discards mandatory at times, to a system that records the entire catch – which together with the introduction of the MSY policy, has inevitably had a range of far-reaching short- and long-term ecological and socioeconomic impacts.

The landing obligation continues to raise concerns in the fishing industry and within the scientific community due to obstacles of a diverse nature. The report pointed out the fisheries sector's causes of concern are the lack of adequate infrastructure at ports, rising operating costs, lack of incentives for compliance provided by the authorities, and difficulties in achieving greater selectivity in some fisheries without jeopardising the economic viability of fishing.

## *Improving the implementation of landing obligations*

The report recommended the following measures and management tools to improve the situation such as:

- further use and optimisation of quota-based tools;
- studying the feasibility of implementing a marine spatial planning and area-based management approach;
- providing greater flexibility to allow fishers to choose gear solutions;
- providing flexible mechanisms for the approval of new types of selective gear;

- granting exclusive access to fishing locations or time periods in order to encourage selectivity;
- adopting strategies to make the best use of unwanted catches for purposes other than human consumption without creating a demand for undersized catches and provided that it is feasible for fishers in economic and operational terms;
- using and developing voluntary and incentive-linked artificial intelligence tools to increase selectivity and control and improve species identification;
- progressively introducing the requirement for compliance with the same discard policy for imports of fisheries products from third countries in order to eliminate the comparative disadvantage and unfair competition for the European fleet, while moving towards better protection of global fisheries resources;
- renewing the Commission's obligation to report annually on the state of play of the CFP and the implementation of the landing obligation and providing more information on its implementation.

Members called on the Commission in the framework of the evaluation report on the implementation of the CFP due in 2022 to, in particular:

- assess the extent to which the reduction of discards under the landing obligation has been achieved;
- assess the socioeconomic impact of the landing obligation, the remuneration system, the number of crew members and the safety and working conditions on board;
- assess the impact on the sustainability of the species removed by the Council from the list of stocks subject to TACs in recent years and evaluate the potential consequences of its reintroduction under the TAC system;
- identify and remove the administrative difficulties encountered in developing and implementing selectivity pilot projects, which are hampering fishers' efforts to be more selective;
- assess whether the current landing obligation policy is fit for purpose and evaluate the feasibility of adapting the landing obligation on a case-by-case basis by fishery and/or stock;
- assess pathways for better adaptation and simplification of Article 15 of the CFP on landing obligations to facilitate its implementation and understanding by all stakeholders and in particular the use by Member States of the overall available tools provided by the legal framework in place to improve selectivity and reduce unwanted catches.

Lastly, the Commission is called on to submit, based on this evaluation and if appropriate, a legislative proposal in order to better achieve the objectives of reducing discards and improving stocks.