

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

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The European Parliament adopted by 624 votes to 29, with 43 abstentions, a resolution on securing the objectives of the landing obligation under Article 15 of the Common Fisheries Policy.

Reaffirming the EU's overall objective of achieving sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources, Parliament stressed that reducing discards and minimising unwanted catches are public policy priorities. These priorities have been developed in response to concerns about responsibility, conservation and waste, as regards natural resources, and the scientific need to take full account of all sources of fishing mortality.

## *Difficulties in implementing the discard ban*

The introduction of the landing obligation represents one of the greatest challenges in the history of EU fisheries management. Many fishermen do not understand the aim and procedure for implementing this obligation and question its legitimacy, which tends to hamper compliance.

The landing obligation continues to raise concerns in the fishing sector and in the scientific community due to various obstacles. Concerns relate to the lack of adequate infrastructure in ports, increased operational costs, lack of clear incentives and difficulties in increasing selectivity in some fisheries without compromising the economic viability of the fishery.

Deploping that difficulties in implementing the discard ban have led to a negative representation of fishermen, Parliament stressed the need to remove administrative obstacles to the effective implementation of the landing obligation, to strengthen the development and adoption of new selective gears and to draw up effective plans to reduce by-catches in order to rebuild vulnerable stocks.

## *Lack of information on landing obligations*

Members regretted that the Commission's annual progress reports on the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) include very little information on the implementation of the landing obligation and have so far failed to report on the level of discard reduction achieved under this obligation, or to study the socio-economic impact of the landing obligation or the consequences of its implementation on safety on board fishing vessels.

In order to ensure proper implementation of the landing obligation, the Commission and the Member States should increase their efforts to fully implement the relevant EU legislation and take additional measures to ensure comprehensive catch documentation and data collection in a manner proportionate to the fishing capacity of the small-scale coastal fleet.

## *Improving the implementation of landing obligations*

Parliament 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.