Fisheries: reduction of discards of fish by the fishing fleets, action plan

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PURPOSE : to invite Member States, fisheries scientists and industry to join it in a collaborative effort to reduce discards. CONTENT : this communication deals with the problem of discarding of fish by the Community's fishing fleets in all areas of operation but with particular emphasis on Community waters of the north-east Atlantic, the Baltic and the Mediterranean. Its purpose is to provide a general overview of the magnitude of discarding; to analyse reasons for discarding; to indicate the biological and economic consequences of discarding; to indicate possibilities for reducing quantities discarded and future action by the Commission and Council. Discards can be defined as fish retained by a fishing gear which have been brought on board a fishing vessel and are thrown back into the sea. The Commission envisages that for all the major fisheries or methods of fishing where discards are known or perceived to be a problem actions needs to be developed, probably within forthcoming multi-annual management processes. These actions should be developed in close co-operation with the industry and relevant stakeholders and also within the proposed framework of Regional Advisory Committees. These plans could include: - development of a requirement for voluntary departure from fishing grounds when and/or where large quantities of discards are being generated; - development of conditions to increase the commercial value of fish of currently low value; - adoption of measures intended to reduce discarding incited by TAC/quota restrictions; - development of pilot projects to investigate innovative fishing practices which avoid or reduce discarding; - support for continuation of collection of data on quantities of fish discarded; - developed of improved technical measures including : - adoption of measures to ensure improved structure of fishing gears; - review of minimum landing sizes; - review of conditions defining species composition of catches to be taken with nets of specified mesh size; - review and or augmentation of closed or controlled areas and/or seasons including real-time closures; - consideration of the institution of a discard ban following the consultation process.