The problem of discarded catches

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The European Parliament adopted the resolution by Veronica Hardstaff (UK, PES) on the problem of fish discards. The report describes current discard levels as unacceptable and highlights the need for appropriate technical measures and controls to reverse this trend. It proposes wider use of selective gear and efforts to achieve a ban on gears which generate excessive bycatches, research to identify species most at risk from discarding, proper marine management and regulation to protect the stocks of certain species and, if necessary, an obligation to change fishing grounds where more than 15% of any single catch are undersized. The Parliament suggests that the Commission should investigate the possibility of banning discards of certain key species. Within this context, it proposes a flexible application of quotas provied there has not been deliberate over-fishing. The report recommends that those landed fish not suitable for human consumption should be used for fishmeal and fish-oil in order to reduce dependence on industrial fishing and that designated species should only be landed at designated ports with proper inspection facilities, to cut down on the number of over-quota fish reaching the markets. With regard to the responsibility of Member States, the report makes the following recommendations: - Member States should fulfil their responsibility to ensure effective and efficient on-board inspections and port controls to make conservation measures work and impose appropriate penalties for abuses of the regulations; - they should commit themselves to close fishing grounds within their jurisdiction when there is a clear conservation case to do so. To relieve pressure on the most at-risk species and as an alternative source of jobs for fishing communities, the report calls for research into increasing the scope of aquaculture. It also urges better training for fishermen, particularly as regards the need for conservation, and better use of structural funds and special grants to reduce dependency on fishing where it is a major occupation.