



The new Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and the Landing Obligation (LO)

The practice of discarding – throwing perfectly edible fish back into the sea – was widely criticized in the EU for years. Reasons for discards varied, and included catches under the legal minimum size, outside permitted quotas, or fish that were perfectly sized, edible and permitted, but that had a low market value. Exceptionally, the problem of discarding was a topic on which all stakeholders agreed, from fishermen to the end consumer, and campaigns were organised against this practice.

The new Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) basic regulation, which came into force on 1 January 2014, has the objective of ensuring that fishing and aquaculture activities are environmentally sustainable over the long term and create new opportunities for jobs and growth in coastal areas. As a key element, the policy aims to reduce unwanted catches and wasteful practices to a minimum or avoid them altogether through the gradual introduction of a landing obligation.

Under the landing obligation rules, catches will be subject to catch limits, while in the Mediterranean they will also be subject to minimum conservation reference sizes, kept on board, recorded, landed and counted against the quotas. Landings of fish under the minimum conservation reference sizes can not be destined for sale for direct human consumption. The improvement of selective fishing techniques to avoid and reduce unwanted catches as far as possible is a high priority. The obligation for all catches to be landed in European Union waters or by EU fishing vessels would be gradually implemented.

The importance of accurately recording discards

Sub-paragraph 4 of Article 14 of Regulation (EC) No. 1224/2009 requires that “*Masters of Community fishing vessels shall also record in their fishing logbook all estimated discards above 50 kg of live-weight equivalent in volume for any species*”. The entries of discards in the logbook are an important basis for the estimation of the ratios of unavoidable by-catches in the implementation of the landing obligation. Only in this way, for example, can possible bottlenecks in the composition ratio be determined and documented. The entries are therefore required to ensure the uptake of target species.

The accurate recording of discards will contribute to:

- Improving the accuracy of scientific evaluation and catch advice, thereby making it possible to address the management needs of the stocks in a more precise way;
- Permitting a sounder management of stocks by computing the otherwise missing discards data;
- Permitting an analysis of the catch composition, an important element for promoting selectivity and identifying choke species for some fisheries;
- Improving stock management through the use of more complete data sets.

EFCA ambition

In accordance with its role in supporting the implementation of new CFP requirements as referred to in its Multi-Annual Work Programme 2014-2018, the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) has the ambition of assisting Member States and the European Commission to develop simple and cost efficient methods for monitoring and ensuring compliance with the obligation to land all catches.

EFCA is initiating, in the framework of the JDPs, a project to coordinate the implementation of the obligation of recording discards set out in article 14.4 of the Control Regulation. This project has been initiated by controlling the compliance of the legislation in force requiring the recording of discards in the fishing logbook, compiling and analysing inspection data.

The current project proposes to focus on compliance with the requirements for accurate recording of discards in the Baltic Sea, Western Waters pelagic and Mediterranean Sea (Adriatic) JDP areas. The final product should provide a mapping of discards as well as a toolbox for inspectors indicating the risk factors associated with discards in those areas and the suitable control tools to be used in each case. The project could be expanded to the North Sea JDP in 2015.