



Scheveningen Group

North Western Waters Control Experts Group (NWW CEG)

**Evaluation of Compliance with the Landing Obligation
Mackerel in North Sea and North Western Waters
2015 - 2017**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





Executive summary

The MS Control Expert Group (CEG) for the NS (Scheveningen Group) and for NWW formally requested the assistance of EFCA in carrying out a compliance evaluation with the provisions of the LO for the MAC fisheries. The framework EFCA methodology agreed for this evaluation is the same as that applied to similar evaluation exercises in other areas. This report presents the findings of an evaluation of compliance with the LO in the NS and NWW regions over the period 2015 and 2017 for the MAC fisheries. This compliance evaluation is essentially addressing illegal discards as a proxy to compliance. Compliance with recording obligations of LO exemptions are not fully considered.

The most reliable of the methods would be reference data derived from direct observations (Method 1). However, in the case of the pelagic fisheries in the NS and NWW, so few last haul inspections have been carried out (the large-scale pelagic fisheries being not ideally suited to this type of approach) that turn the estimates of discards, when available, uncertain. Using scientific data (method 2) high discard rates in these fisheries have been identified, suggesting a high level of non-compliance with the LO these fleet segments, in particular pelagic trawlers (PEL01 to PEL04). The ICES assessments of discards are not informative in this evaluation due to them being at the stock level and so not readily aligned with fleet segments. Method 3 (infringement analysis) results indicate two infringements for suspected high-grading in 2015, but given the difficulties in detecting illegal discarding at sea, the lack of infringements should not be taken to indicate compliance with the LO. For Method 4 (interviews with control experts and industry stakeholders) results point also in the direction that compliance with the LO is low. In Method 5 (Market Analysis) some respondents state that the average size of the lowest commercial grade had dropped to 'unacceptable' levels. That in itself is a huge market incentive to discard lower value fish and reserve hold volume for the higher-priced grades of fish.

This compliance evaluation was complicated mainly by the lack of reference data available. Reference data needed to obtain estimates of (illegal) discards rates with a given level of certainty are crucial to evaluate compliance, in particular considering data scarcity is a particular problem for compliance evaluation with the LO.

As discarding take place in exposed areas of the sea, it is particularly difficult to board the vessels at sea and to perform LH inspections in the heavy sea conditions encountered especially in the area and periods where the MAC fisheries take place.



Since the collection of reliable reference data is essential for an effective compliance evaluation exercise, and also traditional control tools have proven to be inefficient in control and monitoring the LO, the introduction of REM systems could be instrumental for these purposes.

Most MS control experts assisting EFCA in this evaluation have indicated that compliance with the LO in the MAC fishery is in their view lower than these precarious results indicated.