

How to reduce discards in the EU and meet the landing obligation

Being forced to dump perfectly good fish overboard—seafood that could otherwise be served on someone’s dinner table whether in high demand or not—has been an unavoidable practice for fishermen around the world for decades. This practice, “discarding,” is one that is abhorred by both the fishing industry and environmental groups. While the exact scale of discarding is unknown, a large amount of fish is discarded annually. It has been estimated that each year roughly 6.8 million tons of fish are discarded globally (Kelleher, 2005). That is about eight percent of all fish caught by commercial fishermen.

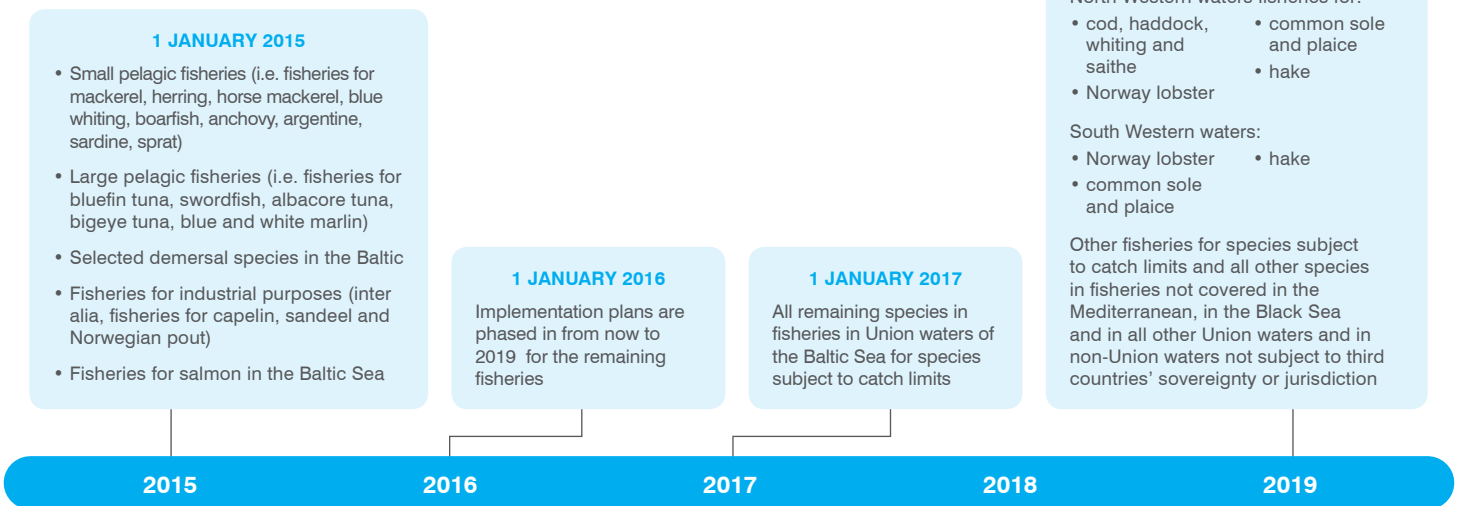
To address discarding, the European Union (EU) recently implemented a new set of laws, called the landing obligation,

that bans discarding as part of its Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) reform. As a key centerpiece of the CFP, the EU has implemented an obligation to establish full catch accountability, gradually eliminate discards; and avoid and reduce unwanted catches while taking into account the best available scientific advice to help inform better management.*

While this is a huge step in the right direction, it will be a challenge to require fishermen to record, land and account for all fish that make it aboard their boats. Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) has recently released the EU Discard Reduction Manual, to help provide tools and solutions to help fisheries meet the landing obligation. This factsheet provides a brief overview of the available tools.

Landing Obligation Implementation Timeline

Article 15: All catches of species which are subject to catch limits and, in the Mediterranean, also catches of species which are subject to minimum sizes as defined in Annex III to Regulation (EC) No 1967/2006, caught during fishing activities in Union waters or by Union fishing vessels outside Union waters in waters not subject to third countries’ sovereignty or jurisdiction, in the fisheries and geographical areas listed below shall be brought and retained on board the fishing vessels, recorded, landed and counted against the quotas where applicable, except when used as live bait, in accordance with the following time-frames:



*The new CFP also calls for an end to overfishing by 2015 for most total allowable catch TAC species, and by 2020 at the latest for all such stocks; and CFP Article 2.2 sets an objective of rebuilding depleted fisheries to abundance levels above Maximum Sustainable Yield.

What can be done to reduce discards?

In order to effectively reduce the amount of discarded fish to meet the landing obligation, the EU will need to consider a range of solutions. *The EU Discard Reduction Manual* provides a broad suite of tools that can help meet requirements of the landing obligation. The guide is not prescriptive, but rather discusses different options that can be tailored to the diverse circumstances and variety of fisheries in EU waters. Solutions for exploration include:

- **Adopt management systems that shift fishermen's incentives** by giving them their own secure access and share of the catch under rights-based management (RBM). RBM provides the industry with an important mix of rights, responsibilities and rewards. Through RBM, fishermen have a secure stake in the overall health and sustainability of the ocean as well as the incentive to comply with legal obligations. This new mindset allows them to be more selective when fishing, avoiding areas with too many excessively small or undesirable fish. With their secure privilege to fish, they also have greater flexibility in planning their business operations and can keep marketable fish rather than throwing them overboard to die.
- **Employ innovative smart quota tools** while operating under the flexibility of RBM. Experiences from fisheries around the world have demonstrated the ability of smart quota tools to significantly decrease discards (Essington, 2010; Branch, 2008; Fujita, et al., 1998). For example, with *risk pools*, fishermen work cooperatively in groups to place their unwanted or overfished species in a common pool, based on the understanding that members have access to cover unexpected catches of those species. Fishermen can also work together to inform each other about the location of wanted and undesirable fish. Other smart quota tools include: inter-species flexibility, banking and borrowing, buffer quotas, transferability and deemed values.
- **Improve selectivity of fishing behaviors** through avoidance technologies and eco-friendly fishing gear that impact marine ecosystems less, leaving more fish in the water to allow populations to rebound. For fisheries managed by

minimum conservation reference size, instead of a catch limit this will be the key to meeting the landing obligation.

- **Implement effective monitoring programs** that ensure data on discards and catch are accountable at an individual vessel level. Monitoring systems can provide new data to inform the fishery's science and bolster fishery knowledge in addition to the conventional methods of stock assessments. Monitoring systems providing individual accountability include electronic monitoring (EM) systems and on-board observers.
- **Test solutions through pilot project implementation.** Pilot projects may be used to demonstrate new control technologies, new systems for data management and changes in fishing regulation or a combination thereof, showing how the landing obligation can successfully be met. They also can help build the evidence needed to give the European Commission confidence to shift away from micromanagement rules such as technical and control measures. Finally, pilot projects provide the industry with an opportunity to test tools, or a combination of tools, and to reduce discards prior to adopting them in a permanent capacity.
- **Raise awareness among consumers** about discarding and encourage them to enjoy sustainable and non-traditional seafood choices. By adding diversity to their seafood diet and embracing new types of fish, consumers are doing their part to relieve fishing pressure on popular species. Consumers also tend to keep more money in their pockets by exploring less expensive seafood options.

References

- Branch, T. (2008). How do individual transferable quota affect marine ecosystems? *Fish and Fisheries*, 10 (1), 39–57.
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- Kelleher, Kieran. (2005) Discards in the world's marine fisheries: an update. FAO Fisheries Technical Paper. No. 470. Rome, FAO. 2005. 131p.

For more information on the ways to reduce discards to meet the landing obligation, please read *The EU Discard Reduction Manual*