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Discarding: Key challenge in Fisheries Policy Reform

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

High Level Meeting on banning discards

Brussels, 1 March 2011

Dear Ministers, Members of the European Parliament, dear Mr. Lazarou,

Let me first of all thank you for having taken time out of your busy schedules to come to Brussels for our discussion on how to end discarding. As you know this topic has come very much to the forefront in the past few weeks and our discussion is therefore timely.

Today discarding is a key challenge in fisheries management. In 2004, the FAO estimated that 7,3 million tonnes, that is 8 % of the total fish catches were discarded. Some of you may think this figure is not so striking. Well let me give you some figures for European fisheries, which proves that we are doing much worse than the global average: in the whitefish fishery up to half of the catch is thrown overboard and in the flatfish fishery we are even talking about 70 % of the catches being discarded.

Surely you will agree with me that these figures are alarming. I have to make it very clear: I consider discarding of fish unethical, a waste of natural resources and a waste of fishermen's effort. But I would like to go further. Beyond our own beliefs or principles, since our stocks are declining, these figures are not justifiable anymore.

If we continue with our policy, then we will soon face a situation where the production capacity of marine ecosystems is at risk.

If we continue with our policy, then discarding will erode the economic basis of our fishermen and our coastal regions will be eroded. Then fishermen and their families will pay the bill. If we continue our policy, the consumers will turn away from fish, because, sooner or later, it will receive a negative image of waste of our natural resources.

We need to avoid this under all circumstances. So far we have tried to tackle discards with technical measures. But let's be honest, if we continue this it is like treating a serious illness with Aspirin. We have to recognize that our policy gives sometimes incentives to discarding. So, I am convinced that we have to start thinking outside the box.

To effectively tackle discarding we need to look at new ways forward. Therefore, I am considering proposing a discard ban as part of the CFP reform proposals. And while I say this word – discard ban – out loud, I am conscious that some of you would rather not discuss such a ban, while others already support this idea. But I need to point out to you: if we don't tackle this problem now, it will come back to haunt us. We will regret having missed this unique chance of the upcoming CFP Reform to find a new way forward.

We have tried to put this new way forward into a short non paper with an outline of ideas on how to effectively implement a discard ban, which you have all received.

Let me quickly outline the basic ideas. My idea would be to have a gradual approach. For example we can start with the pelagic fisheries, and then cover a few important demersal mixed fisheries after a short phase in period. The list of species covered by a discard ban could then be enlarged year by year.

The question then is which management system to choose, in order to manage fish stocks. One possibility would be to only manage our mixed fisheries with an effort system. The idea is to preserve relative stability by translating the relative stability in quotas into a relative stability in effort for mixed fisheries. Such a management system is relatively simple as all catches would need to be landed. Control is also easy as the time spent at sea can be easily controlled by the vessel monitoring system.

Another possibility is the catch quota system with by catch quotas. All catches would have to be counted against quotas and then later against the by catch quotas. In such a system it would also be necessary that Member States allocate quotas more in line with the real possible catches of their vessels. A catch quota system would need guarantees that it would work, because it will be more complicated.

Whatever system is chosen in the end, whether it is effort management or catch quotas, a discard ban needs consistency in all rules of the CFP. We need consistency in market measures. Also the control pillars of the CFP, will be very important. We will need CCTV or observers on board vessels above a certain length.

Dear friends,

We owe it also to our fishing industry to do something about discarding. Actually the industry itself has already understood this, as they have taken measures such as designing more selective gears. There are many good examples like the 50% project in the UK, the langoustine project in the Golf de Gascogne as well as projects in Sweden and Denmark. A discard ban will further incentivise these very good initiatives.

Dear colleagues,

We need to discuss a discard ban as part of the reformed CFP. The new CFP must become a policy that has sustainability written all over it. If it does not do away with discards then it will not deserve this name.

But make no mistake; I am also conscious of the complexity of this challenge. So I would like to have an open discussion with you on all these elements so that we can identify a constructive way forward. If we can find some solutions here, then we have to open a broader consultation involving all members states, stakeholders and our citizens.

Note for Editors :

On 1 March, Commissioner Maria Damanaki invited members of the European Parliament, EU fisheries ministers and the Court of Auditors for an informal political discussion on how to end discards in the context of the Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Today's discussions will feed into the formal debate on the CFP reform, due to be presented by the European Commission in the coming months.