

Landing Obligation Seminar November 2017 - summary

The Landing Obligation Seminar hosted by DG-MARE of the European Commission on November 15th, 2017 gathered many stakeholders, including Advisory Councils, industry and NGO representatives, and representatives from Member States to discuss issues surrounding the implementation of the landing obligation. Discussions focussed on finding appropriate solutions and to hear the different experiences and challenges that have arising since its introduction in 2015.

The seminar was organized by four separate workshops. The first considered the issue of choke species in mixed demersal fisheries. This is the situation where fisheries may be closed due to quota being exhausted for one species, but where quota for others remains. This workshop heard about the analysis undertaken by the North Western Waters Advisory Council and regional group of Member States with the Choke Mitigation Tool, which identified key choke, high risk stocks. While it was felt that tool is very useful to help identify the key issues, further collaborative work between all stakeholders should focus on the critical stocks with a more detailed assessment of the possible technical solutions and what the implications of these may be in terms of the impact on other target species and what other measures may be required if technical solutions were not available.

Control and Catch Reporting Issues were discussed in the second workshop which concluded that control and monitoring of the landing obligation is difficult at sea and in real time and that it is necessary to improve catch monitoring approaches including the possible introduction of remote monitoring systems in high risk fisheries, this was a source of considerable debate.

Technical Solutions to reduce unwanted catches was the subject of the third workshop and while there have been significant advances in the development of more selective fishing techniques to adopt to the landing obligation, supported through projects such as DiscardLess and MINOUW, there is still a lot to be done to get these introduced into the fisheries and the importance of removing barriers to their implementation is important but that loss of marketable catch associated with improvements offer an immediate constraint.

The final session focussed on marketing issues. Many from the sector felt that it is not viable for fisherman to bring by-catch back to shore and process the by-catch onshore as this is too expensive. Evidence suggests that the anticipated volumes of unwanted catches are not being landed and this could inhibit the development of alternative uses. Compliance with the landing obligation continues to be an issue with some industry representatives arguing that this could become an issue with consumer trust. It was noted that this could represent a threat to certification of sustainable fisheries since continued discarding could be seen as an IUU activity. It was noted by both the NGOs and a fishermen's representative that we should not be having discussions on how to find markets for unwanted catches but that we should be investing our money in selectivity and not catching the fish in the first instance as this was the fundamental objective of the landing obligation.

Overall, the dialogue was very informative and allowed for the Commission, as well as Advisory Councils, industry representatives and member states to openly discuss and brainstorm solutions regarding the challenges of the implementation of the landing obligation, which will apply to all EU waters from 1 January 2019.

The European Commission concluded the seminar by thanking all of the participants and encouraging further cooperation between the sector, Member States, Advisory Councils and the Commission itself. The presentations from the seminar can be found below.