

Vision of French fishers about the European Union regulation on Landing Obligation (LO): which ecological and economical impacts and which strategies to cope with it?

Authors: Katia Frangoudes*, Kévin Leleu**, Marie-Joëlle Rochet ***, Verena Trekel***

*University of Brest, UMR AMURE, IUEM, **Comité National des Pêches Maritimes et des Elevages Marins, ***IFREMER

Contact: Katia.Frangoudes@univ-brest.fr

2. Summary

The last reform of the Common Fisheries Policy of the European Union imposed the “Landing Obligation” (LO) so to ban discards. The principle of Landing Obligation has been contested by fishers but strongly supported by environmental NGOs during the public consultation process. Faced with this obligation, the fishing industry in France asked fisheries and social scientists to conduct a participatory project so to better understand the views of fishers about the LO and how they plan to adapt to this new regulation. Focus groups were organized along the Atlantic coast where scientists presented the results of discards assessment campaigns and fishers explained why fish is discarded. Plans to reduce discards and feasibility of LO were also discussed. Fishers and scientists questioned the way this regulation has been adopted in terms of governance of decision-making at the EU level.

3. Introduction

The recent reform of the Common Fisheries Policy has banned the practice of discards to all EU fishing fleets by creating a landing obligation for all species caught under the TAC system. The regulation applies to EU pelagic fleet and all boats working in Baltic Sea from 2015. Others fleets will follow in the following four years period. European Union justifies this decision with the argument that European civil society considers discards as an unacceptable behavior. For fishers this rule cannot be implemented in many cases.

French fishing industry asked scientists to run a project related to discards “because they wanted to be ready in case of discard ban”. CarRejet the project that it will be presented here is a national project focused on “discards” or Landing Obligation led by IFREMER (fisheries sciences) in collaboration with the National Organization of Fishers (fishing industry) and the University of Brest (social sciences).

4. Material and methods

The project had two main objectives: to produce an overview of discards by fleet and regional sea (except Mediterranean) based on the data gathered by the national program of observation onboard fishing vessels and to bring the voice of fishers to the national discussions on discards and landing obligations. The steering committee of the project was composed by the representatives of the regional fisheries committees and PO’s, the national administration and the scientists. During the steering committee meetings, the objectives and the results of the project were presented and discussed.

Then, ten focus groups, each comprising fishers operating the same gear, were organized along the Atlantic coast. The objectives of the focus groups were to discuss with fishers the results of the quantitative analysis of discards (quantification of discards by fleet) and to gather fishers' opinions on the European regulation, discards and the strategies for change.

5. Results and discussion

For French fishers the main causes of discarding are the quota system, the market and the limitation of quotas. All fishers met in the different focus groups stated "I don't have quotas for [species X], so if I catch them I throw them away". Some of them do not have any quotas because they are not members of PO's, usually small scale boats operating on a small amount of quota kept by national authorities for non PO vessels. But as soon as the quota of a given species is filled, they discard. This principle is also followed by those with quota. It is obvious that under this system discarding is a common behavior. The "lack of good price" for some species, for example plaice in one area and hake or Atlantic horse mackerel in others, is another reason for discarding.

Fishers' opinions on landing obligation were discussed. For them this regulation shows that decision makers respond to the claims of particular groups, for example environmental NGO's and the aquaculture sector. Fishers' needs and interests, they maintain, were not taken into consideration by decision makers. They believe that the additional costs to them of such regulations were not considered. "For me this decision satisfies aquaculture needs. They need fish to make food for the fish and they need our fish". For fishers this decision illustrates the ignorance of decision makers about all the efforts they have expended on resources management over recent years. They cannot understand how environmental NGO's are in favor of this regulation asking "to bring on land small fish which have a high rate of survival if they are concerned with protecting the resources."

The case of "landing obligation", considered as a major innovation under the last CFP reform, has created a lot of concerns and debate among fishers. While some express the view that the "no discard" objective is unrealistic and cannot be implemented, we observe that much energy is spent nowadays for adaptation at the fishing operation and collective levels. As an empirical case for governance in European policy, the process that led to LO rule adoption raises few questions. It is hard to find scientific works that supports the idea of an overall discard ban, although some fisheries certainly call for improved selectivity. Good governance in policy making would also suggest that applicability of new regulation and social and economic impacts be documented. So the case for the scientific basis of this policy is questionable. The expert forum, which is important in fisheries matters, and the political forum didn't really work together. Ex-post, there is a strong feeling that the public consultation acted as a legitimating process for organized voices from the civil society with little concern for consequences. The Landing Obligation obviously satisfies a claim carried by environmental NGOs that has all the characteristics of a simplistic campaigning slogan that easily communicates to the people and to the policy-makers. Good governance now requires that a sound evaluation of the costs and benefits, in ecological, social and economic terms be soon carried out.