



North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council

Position Paper on Fully Documented Fisheries

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1. Background

At its Executive Committee meeting in Paris on 29th February 2012, the NWWRAC undertook to explore and discuss the role of fully documented fisheries in a broader sense than the Catch Quota trials currently under way in Denmark, the UK and the Netherlands.

These trials use CCTV to verify *total* catch (i.e. landings plus discards) but may be regarded as a *subset* of a more general approach to fisheries management which is designed to:

- Develop discard reduction initiatives
- Provide fisheries managers and fisheries scientists with comprehensive catch information, improving the quality of assessments and avoiding a range of problems associated with data poor fisheries
- Align economic incentives with management objectives
- Provide economic incentives at the individual business level
- Build a collaborative relationship between fisheries managers, fisheries scientists and stakeholders
- Break with fisheries micro-management and move technical conservation decisions to the vessel level
- Change fishing patterns in a positive direction (e.g. cod avoidance)
- Apply a form of results based management
- Apply a form of reversing the burden of proof in fisheries

In developing such systems it is important to ask three questions:

1. Does it work for this particular vessel?
2. Does it work without prejudice to the rest of the fleet?
3. Does it deliver management objectives?



CCTV has often been the focus of attention within catch quota trials but in fact it is simply one technical form of verifying catches. Other forms of verification could be:

- On board observers
- Reference fleets
- Self-sampling/ self declaration
- A risk based approach
- Or some form of hybrid of the above

On cost grounds alone it is probably unrealistic to assume that CCTV cameras could be installed on the whole fleet. In any event the essence of Fully Documented Fisheries so far has been that:

1. Participation has been voluntary
2. The incentives provided in terms of additional quota or exemption from effort restrictions have been sufficient to attract a sufficient number of participants

2. Why Fully Documented Fisheries are a good thing?

Assessment Uncertainties

Since the application of the precautionary approach in EU fisheries, in what some might regard as an inflexible and over-precautionary way, the Commission has proposed TAC reductions in all fisheries where there is considered to be a data deficiency. Inadequate information on discards can also undermine assessments leading through one route or another to lower quotas. It is generally the case that the more soundly based the stock assessments, the higher the TAC. It is therefore in the fishing industry's interest to strengthen any elements of assessments that are the cause for uncertainty if it lies in their hands to do so.

Discard Reduction

Where additional quota of, say, cod is allocated to a Catch Quota vessel on condition that the vessel stops fishing completely when the cod quota is exhausted, the result can be a demonstrable reduction in cod discards because the vessel takes what steps it deems fit to avoid cod caught in excess of its quota; full documentation is used to verify the catches and therefore justify the additional quota. It can also result in a reduction in overall fishing mortality if the level of allocated quota remains below that which would have been caught and discarded.

Additional Quota

Fully documented fisheries can be a way for a vessel to access additional quota strengthening the vessel's economic viability.

Effort Exemptions

Fully Documented Fisheries can be a way for a vessel to escape from effort restrictions.



3. Why and Where Fully Documented Fisheries may not be a good thing?

- Where assessments are adequate and discards are either low or the species discarded have a high survival rate, fully documented fisheries would amount to a considerable increase in catch reporting burden for little purpose
- For those fisheries (or member states) which run a quota pool system with monthly catch limits (rather than allocating on an annual or individual vessel basis) there is no mechanism available to reward individual vessels with additional quota
- Within a top-down command and control fisheries management system the a catch quota type arrangement using CCTV could in principle be extended to all vessels in that fishery on a mandatory basis
- Disproportionate cost and bureaucracy could outweigh benefits

4. Hybrid

A hybrid arrangement could cover a fleet of broadly similar vessels/metier targeting a similar group of species. This could be considered a fully documented fishery if:

- A reference fleet (say 10%) in the overall group of vessels carried on-board observers or CCTV equipment to record total catch (landings plus discards)
- The catch composition of vessels would be compared and any significant variations brought to light. Vessels carrying the CCTV/observers could be initially selected by random but if a risk based analysis detected consistent disparities vessels with non-representative catches would be required to carry the cameras/observers
- This risk based sample approach could be applied as part of a fully documented fishery approach whether the verification method is cameras, observers or self-sampling of catch

5. Fisheries Science Partnerships

Collaborative projects focused on specific aspects of a fishery under scientifically valid data collection protocols are increasingly prevalent and strengthen confidence in fish stock assessments. Each fishing vessel has the potential to be a marine research platform.



6. Conclusions

- If it is accepted that fishing vessels will over time progressively come to take on a greater degree of self-management, in order to escape from micro-management and a top-down system, it will become increasingly important for fishing vessels to document their activities in order to demonstrate their compliance. This is doubly true if incentives of various kinds (quota, effort) are built into the management system.
- This is the context in which FDFs have and will continue to be increasingly important. It is important to investigate as many variants of FDF as possible because advancing technology, changing mindsets within the industry and increased collaboration between fisheries managers, fisheries scientists and fishing vessel operators are providing opportunities that were not even dreamed of a decade ago.
- The description above is not likely to have exhausted the possibilities and the challenge is to develop and trial tailored solutions for specific fisheries.

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