

Joint Declaration on Discards under a Reformed Common Fisheries Policy

Denmark, France, Germany and the United Kingdom

1. REINFORCE their commitment to an ambitious reform of the Common Fisheries Policy based on the principle of sustainable development and that, within a system of ecosystem-based fisheries management, which reflects the importance of integrating wider conservation objectives, sets fishing opportunities at a level consistent with maximum sustainable yield; in this context they SUPPORT the wider application of multiannual management plans and for these to reflect the range of key fish stocks present in particular sea areas;
2. REITERATE their strong commitment to the sustainable use of fisheries resources based on the best available scientific knowledge and the need to develop a more robust pool of scientific expertise at European level, capable of providing the necessary independent scientific advice to support an effective ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management.
3. REAFFIRM THEIR SUPPORT for the basic pillars of the Common Fisheries Policy, in particular for the principle of relative stability and the system of national quotas (including quota swaps), and in this regard ADVOCATE a quota-based regime as the management system most likely to be effective, based on experience in the North Sea to date;
4. NOTE that management systems based on fishing effort in the present form are not suited as a means of ensuring the sustainability of mixed fisheries under the conditions that prevail in the areas covered by the long term management plan for cod;
5. REITERATE THEIR VIEW that the wasteful practice of discarding significant quantities of fish, that is tolerated and in some cases even promoted by the current structure of the management system, must be ended, in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of fish stocks and a viable future for EU fishermen;
6. ENCOURAGE the Commission to undertake an impact assessment in order to consider the extent of discarding in the various fisheries, the different causes of those discards and the measures necessary for their eradication;
7. CALL for discard bans to be gradually introduced where appropriate by changing to a system of genuine catch quotas as part of a “tool box” of measures to avoid discards, after a sound evaluation of existing pilot projects , and to improve control and data on the overall mortality and state of fish stocks. This should also be available to Member States as part of possible future regional management arrangements, if appropriate, focused on the application of long-term management plans. In fisheries suitable for discard bans, such bans should be gradually introduced where appropriate, all species intended for human consumption should be landed and – insofar as these are regulated species – catches counted against the respective quotas;

8. ARE CONVINCED that the role of the producer organisations, where so wished, should be strengthened and that these organisations should, in a system of genuine catch quotas, be given the task of aiming to ensure, that each fisherman has the required quotas for target species and by-catches, by striking a balance between its members – whilst at the same time, ensuring the effective management of quota uptake more generally; also TAKE THE VIEW that the authorities of the Member States should have instruments at their disposal, to enable fishermen to make better decisions on matching quota to fishing opportunities, in order to ensure that quotas are properly allocated and discards reduced. RECOGNISE that only with the active engagement of fishermen, sustainable fisheries management can be achieved;
9. POINT out that the introduction of a system of genuine catch quotas requires the behaviour of fishers at sea to be at the centre of the control system, and that control methods must be adapted in order to take account of the higher degree of fishermen's responsibility to develop their fishing activities;
10. POINT OUT that, in the transitional phase towards a system of genuine catch quotas the participation of the fishermen should be on a voluntary basis, in order to gather experience for the specific structuring of new regulations, and CALL for the fishermen to receive additional quotas and to be exempt from effort limitations and for the existing regulations and pilot projects to be continued;
11. ARE CONVINCED that this will trigger innovations in improving the selectivity of fishing gear and will significantly improve the quality of scientific recommendations for many stocks due to more accurate data on the actual harvests;
12. SUPPORT the establishment of incentives to use selective and environmentally friendly fishing practices in fisheries in which the introduction of a genuine catch-quota system is not yet an option, in order to strengthen the individual responsibility of the fishery and to achieve improvements in selectivity more quickly;
13. POINT OUT that the introduction of landing obligations presupposes, in respect of all of the catches suitable for human consumption, that these catches can be used and marketed, and TAKE THE VIEW that to this extent minimum landing sizes may no longer remain necessary, but that minimum marketing sizes should be retained for certain marketing channels;
14. ARE CONFIDENT that this system will in the medium term, enable the CFP to be radically simplified for example by dispensing with the existing catch-effort administration, which is labour-intensive and counterproductive with regard to the promotion of more selective fishing gear;
15. ARE CONVINCED that genuine fully documented catch-quota systems will promote sustainable development and a sustainable approach to fishery management focussing on total removals from the sea and will in the medium term significantly increase the profitability of the fisheries suited for such systems, and will strengthen the acceptance and reputation of fisheries policies in general;
16. DECLARE their willingness, in respect of the discussed regionalisation that is being sought in the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, to do their utmost to support the introduction of genuine catch-quotas in the North Sea to all fishers who wish to participate, based on a sound evaluation of current pilot projects on cod, and the necessary preliminary scientific work; and

17. CALL UPON the Commission to make the avoidance of discards and the introduction of genuine catch-quota systems one of the central elements of the reformed Common Fisheries Policy.

Signed in Brussels 1 March 2011