

JOINT NWWAC/NSAC ADVICE

on the European Commission “Study supporting the evaluation of the landing obligation – Common Fisheries Policy – Final Report”

Framework contract CINEA/2021/OP/0011-Lot 1 – Specific Contract No.04
(CINEA/EMFAF/2023/3.5.1-Lot 1-05-SC04)

18 December 2025

NSAC Advice Ref. 02-2526

Executive summary

Following the publication of the European Commission’s independent study on the performance of the Landing Obligation on 16 June 2025, the North Western Waters Advisory Council (NWWAC) and the North Sea Advisory Council (NSAC) have jointly prepared advice presenting their members’ views on the study and providing recommendations on the future of the Landing Obligation (LO), including detailed input on each of the study’s recommendations.

Main NWWAC/NSAC recommendations:

- The ACs call for a comprehensive reform of the LO in the context of the upcoming Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) evaluation, advocating a shift towards an adaptive management system centred on avoiding and minimising unwanted catches, developed in close cooperation with the fishing sector.
- The ACs highlight the need to better integrate economic and social considerations, and to recognise ongoing industry efforts to improve selectivity.
- The ACs call for more consistent use of quota flexibilities; a review of the conditionalities supporting the development of exemptions to provide clarity in their development; adaptation of TACs and the LO species list to ease restrictions in mixed fisheries; prioritisation of avoidance measures to reduce unwanted catches; continuation of the quota-exchange pool to prevent premature closures.
- The ACs emphasise practical, case-specific solutions – acknowledging that full selectivity is not yet feasible in mixed fisheries – and support a holistic, participatory implementation model that fosters innovation, improves data collection, and aligns with technical measures and multiannual plans.
- The NWWAC/NSAC reiterate that the Commission should carry out an assessment and definition of “high risk of non-compliance with the landing obligation” related to the Control Regulation, in close collaboration with Member States and EFCA.
- Given persistent implementation challenges and continued choke risks – particularly in mixed fisheries of the NWW and North Sea, the NWWAC/NSAC recommend reforming the LO into an adaptive, evidence-based system focused on bycatch avoidance, improved selectivity, and robust data collection, prioritising prevention of unwanted catches, assessing existing tools before adding new rules, and recognising that long-term solutions depend on healthy stocks.
- The ACs recommend that implementation of the LO must go beyond enforcement and instead adopt a more holistic, participatory and results-oriented approach.

- The ACs recommend continuing pilot projects to test and scale practical bycatch-reduction strategies using the best scientific data and active AC involvement.
- The NWWAC/NSAC recommend ensuring adequate financial support for innovation, including selective gear, catch-handling improvements, and operational and energy transition measures supporting decarbonisation.
- The ACs call for ensuring coherence between the Landing Obligation and other EU regulations, promoting flexible legislation, full use of Joint Recommendations with Member States under regionalisation principle, and providing certainty for the future of demersal fisheries.

Background

On 16 June 2025, the European Commission published an independent study assessing the performance of the Landing Obligation (LO), “Study supporting the evaluation of the landing obligation – Common Fisheries Policy, Final Report”. This independent study was conducted by external experts, and it was based on desk research, case studies, surveys and interviews. The study was launched in 2024, and its results will feed into the ongoing evaluation of the common fisheries policy regulation.

The study’s findings have been discussed during the latest meeting of the NWWAC Focus Group on Landing Obligation, held on 16 July 2025 and NSAC Focus Group from 3 September 2025. Focus Group members convened to develop a piece of advice to share input and views on the Study.

Both NWWAC and NSAC have contributed to considerations on the implementation of the LO since it was first introduced and also regularly to Joint Recommendations proposing de minimis and high-survivability exemptions. The NWWAC contributed to the study by responding to the Deloitte questionnaire¹. Additionally, in June 2023, the NWWAC developed advice identifying scenarios where the implementation of the LO is impracticable and where alternative approaches are required².

The Advisory Councils’ ongoing work on the LO is also reflected in other advice, such as the NWWAC Advice on the Evaluation of the CFP Regulation³, the NSAC/EAPO Advice on Innovative Fishing⁴, the Joint NWWAC/PelAC/NSAC Advice on the Implementation of the Control Regulation⁵, and the NWWAC Advice on Fishing Opportunities for 2026⁶. The ACs regret to note that the study seems to have omitted some of the most important contributions on the functioning of the LO by selectively analysing advice up until only 2017, even though the cut-off date of the study was 2024. In 2023, the NSAC organised a stakeholder workshop on the functioning of the LO exploring the state of play, experiences and challenges posed by the LO and

¹ [NWWAC response to the MRAG/Deloitte questionnaire evaluating the landing obligation](#); and [NWWAC letter to DG MARE on the MRAG/Deloitte on the landing obligation](#)

² [NWWAC letter to DG MARE on difficulties with the landing obligation](#)

³ [NWWAC Advice on the CFP Regulation Evaluation](#)

⁴ <https://www.nsrac.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/09-2324-NSAC-EAPO-Advice-on-Innovative-Fishing.pdf>

⁵ [Joint NWWAC, PelAC and NSAC Advice on the implementation of the EU Fisheries Control Regulation](#)

⁶ [NWWAC advice on Fishing Opportunities 2026](#)

a possible way forward.⁷ The workshop resulted in Advice on the functioning of the LO⁸, which the study fails to capture in its report. The Advisory Councils would be grateful if the Commission would thoroughly consider these later contributions when designing new and improving old policies.

In light of this, NWWAC and NSAC have joined forces to prepare a Joint Advice, representing their members operating in the North Western Waters and North Sea regions. The advice is structured in two parts:

- First part – Strategic Recommendations: The first part presents the general comments of the NWWAC and NSAC on the study, along with their recommendations regarding the future implementation of the landing obligation.
- Second part – NWWAC/NSAC comments and inputs on the Landing Obligation Study's recommendations.

1. Strategic recommendations

In this section, the NWWAC and NSAC present a series of strategic recommendations, building on previous joint and individual advice, as well as on recent discussions held during the NWWAC and NSAC Focus Groups on the Landing Obligation.

The Advisory Councils wish to provide further commentary and reflections regarding several of the recommendations put forward in the Study on the Landing Obligation. While the study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the LO, some of its proposals are seen as falling short of addressing the fundamental challenges of unwanted catches and discards, particularly in complex mixed fisheries. In some cases, the recommended approaches focus primarily on compliance and control, without sufficient attention to whether the measures will meaningfully contribute to the overarching objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), namely, the minimisation and avoidance of unwanted catches.

The Advisory Councils underline that the most viable and constructive alternatives to achieve the LO objectives can already be found in earlier AC advice. These include recommendations on Fully Documented Fisheries (FDF)⁹, adaptive management, communities of practice and improved procedures for innovative gear, gradual move towards real-time stock assessments, better use of exemptions, targeted financial support, and practical solutions tailored to specific fisheries. The ACs urge the European Commission and Member States to revisit and build upon these proposals in future evaluations and policy developments.

⁷ <https://www.nsrac.org/projects/nsac-landing-obligation-workshop/>

⁸ <https://www.nsrac.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/08-2223-NSAC-Advice-on-the-functioning-of-Landing-Obligation.pdf>

⁹ [Fully documented fisheries - European Commission](#)

a. Refocus on the minimisation and avoidance of unwanted catches

The ACs recognise that the implementation of the LO has caused significant difficulties for the fishing sector. As highlighted in both NWWAC and NSAC previous advice, the LO has increased the operational and administrative burden on fishers and has not delivered the expected outcomes. In light of the forthcoming evaluation of the CFP, the ACs therefore call on the Commission to comprehensively reform the LO with the aim of replacing it with a measure that places greater emphasis on the avoidance and minimisation of unwanted catches and is developed in close cooperation with the fishing sector.

While the effectiveness of the LO has already been evaluated, future assessments should build on these findings by focusing more explicitly on outcomes particularly the extent to which the LO contributes to reducing unwanted catches and achieving sustainability objectives. This shift in focus is crucial to ensure that alternatives for the LO lead to tangible improvements in fisheries management, while simultaneously enhancing fishing operators' confidence in the measure.

b. Addressing challenges of the Landing Obligation

The NWWAC/NSAC acknowledge the need to address the avoidance and minimisation of unwanted catches and the need for adequate catch reporting, but the principle of the Landing Obligation has proven highly challenging if not impossible. Landing undersized fish contradicts EU food policy, undermines stock survival, and creates operational and compliance burdens. Developing discard plans demands significant resources with limited results, while rigid rules, complex exemptions, and underused flexibilities hinder practical application, particularly in mixed fisheries.

To improve fisheries management, the NWWAC/NSAC call for:

- More consistent use of quota flexibilities.
- Review of the conditionalities supporting the development of exemptions to provide clarity in their development.
- Adaptation of TACs and the LO species list to ease restrictions in mixed fisheries.
- Prioritisation of avoidance measures to reduce unwanted catches.
- Continuation of the quota-exchange pool to prevent premature closures.

Long-term solutions must focus on stock recovery and better data collection. A more pragmatic and adaptive approach is needed, with exemptions treated as essential compliance tools rather than loopholes, and applied under clear, transparent criteria.

However, as long as the LO is in place, the NWWAC/NSAC support maintaining the quota-exchange pool (established in the 2019 Fishing Opportunities Regulations) to cover unavoidable bycatches for Member States without quota and for zero-catch-advice stocks, thereby preventing premature closures in mixed fisheries. Directed fishing on such stocks should remain prohibited.

c. Acknowledge and support the fishing industry's continuous efforts towards compliance

The NWWAC/NSAC emphasise the importance of acknowledging the fishing sector's continuous efforts in developing and implementing technical and gear-based solutions to achieve the objectives of the LO. Such proactive initiatives should be encouraged and supported, rather than being overshadowed by an excessively control-focused approach.

The LO design and implementation have, to date, given insufficient attention to the economic and social dimensions of compliance. This is reflected in the limited consideration given to the economic and social costs associated with the LO that industries and fishers face (increased time and workload associated with processing catches that cannot be marketed, reduced time off on board vessels, reduced storage volumes allocated to marketable catches by the tonnage limits, etc.), as well as the difficulty in ensuring that the relevance of the socio-economic costs argument is recognised when assessing the de minimis exemptions. Given the challenges of renewing fleets and generations, any changes to the LO must take these socio-economic factors fully into account.

The NWWAC/NSAC emphasise the importance of adopting a bottom-up approach in the design and implementation of the LO, or any other measure effectively addressing the challenges in European fisheries. Measures that are co-designed with, rather than imposed on, the fishing sector are more likely to gain the support of operators, promote compliance, and reduce the administrative and enforcement burden. By prioritising practical, workable, and simplified solutions, such an approach ensures that the resulting measures are both effective and achievable for fishers, while enhancing the overall efficiency and credibility of the management framework. For example, voluntary and proactive engagement in FDF shows that the fishers are willing to contribute to data and science without the need to impose a surveillance regime for control purposes. A more positive narrative about fishers' genuine contribution to sustainability and cooperation on data collection efforts would in our view be a more pragmatic and fair approach.

Concerning the involvement of ACs members in the preparation of the LO Study, NWWAC/NSAC members have reported that consultation was limited. A more comprehensive engagement would have allowed the study to better reflect the perspectives and practical experiences of the fishing sector, thereby enhancing the relevance and applicability of its findings.

d. Address operational challenges in mixed fisheries through tailored solutions

The complexity of implementing the LO in mixed fisheries must be fully acknowledged. The NWWAC/NSAC recommend developing case-specific, practical solutions, recognising that 100% gear selectivity is currently not feasible in such fisheries, although significant improvements are promised with new technologies (see NSAC/EAPO symposium on Innovative Fishing¹⁰). Furthermore, the rigidity of the Western Waters Multiannual Plan (WW MAP), including

¹⁰ <https://www.nsrac.org/projects/symposium-on-innovative-fishing/>

its failure to update target stock lists in response to environmental changes (e.g., cod in area VII e-k), undermines the adaptability needed for effective implementation.

e. Strengthen the harmonised implementation of Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) and clarification on the “high risk of non-compliance with the landing obligation”

Implementation of the LO must go beyond enforcement and instead adopt a more holistic, participatory and results-oriented approach. This includes supporting technical innovation, ensuring regulatory and technical flexibility, improving data collection, and strengthening alignment with other instruments such as the Technical Measures Regulation and multiannual plans. The excessive focus on control and enforcement gives a feeling that the study is biased towards measures and policies that support a pre-determined direction of the Commission, which is enhanced control, rather than meaningful engagement with the sector to find solutions that will ensure greater acceptance and improved compliance.

While monitoring and control are important, enforcement alone will not ensure success. A more balanced framework is needed, one that includes supportive and adaptive measures for fishers and fosters trust in the system. The NWWAC/NSAC reiterate, as in their joint advice with PelAC on the EU Fisheries Control Regulation (May 2025)¹¹, that the Commission should carry out the assessment and definition of the “high risk of non-compliance with the landing obligation”, in close collaboration with Member States and EFCA. The ACs emphasise the risk of a lack of achieving the harmonisation objective in the Control Regulation, if this assessment is carried out differently by each EU Member State, in that it may lead to fragmentation and fail in the long term to ensure a level playing field in the implementation of the measure across Member States.

f. Reconsider the current LO framework in favour of a more practical and adaptive mode

Given persistent implementation challenges – including those related to choke species, especially in mixed fisheries – the current design of the LO requires revision. The NWWAC/NSAC recommend shifting to an adaptive system focused on bycatch avoidance and improving selectivity, rather than mandating landings that may be impractical or counterproductive.

Choke risks remain a significant concern under the LO, particularly in the North Western Waters (NWW) and North Sea. The NWWAC has consistently provided advice on this issue, including a detailed spreadsheet identifying likely choke scenarios and possible mitigation measures¹². In the period leading up to full LO implementation, understanding of choke dynamics advanced significantly, and practical solutions were identified, such as gear modifications to improve

¹¹ <https://www.nwwac.org/publications/joint-nwwac-pelac-and-nsac-advice-on-the-implementation-of-the-eu-fisheries-control-regulation.5582.html>

¹² Please see the NWWAC advice addressing choke risk in the North Western Waters (NWW) for 2025, 2022, 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018; as well as the NWW choke species analysis for 2018 and 2017.

selectivity and avoidance measures informed by spatial distribution data for choke species and unwanted catches. The NSAC published its advice on NS Choke identification tool in 2021¹³.

The NWWAC/NSAC recommend to further assess the effectiveness of these existing measures before introducing new rules or adding complexity. Since its inception, choke species have been recognised as the main obstacle to LO implementation in the NWW, and measures in the current Discard Plan have played a valuable role in preventing choke situations. The NWWAC's 2021 advice on the Joint Recommendations of the NWW Member State Group remains relevant: priority should be given to avoidance measures that prevent unwanted catches from entering the gear, while long-term solutions to choke issues will depend on bringing all stocks to healthy status. Robust monitoring is essential to track progress, identify shortcomings (e.g., under the Technical Conservation Measures Framework), and provide the evidence base for adaptive management. remains relevant: priority should be given to avoidance measures that prevent unwanted marine organisms from entering the gear in the first place.

g. Invest in long-term solutions, data collection, and pilot projects

Long-term success requires rebuilding fish stocks, closing data gaps, enhancing monitoring, and expanding fully documented fisheries. Pilot projects under Article 14 of the CFP should continue to test and scale up practical bycatch reduction strategies, using best available scientific advice and involving relevant ACs. These projects have already stimulated research into more selective fishing methods and encouraged measures that prevent unwanted catches and improve survivability of fish escaping the net¹⁴.

h. Provide adequate financial support for innovation

Effectively addressing discards requires continued investment. Financial mechanisms should support the development of selective gear, innovations in catch handling, and operational and energy transition changes (also in support of in support of decarbonisation and energy efficiency)¹⁵.

i. Ensure coherence between the Landing Obligation and other EU regulatory frameworks

Regulation (EU) 2019/1241, the Technical Measures Regulation, has provided the framework needed to improve selectivity and contributes to the full implementation of the CFP. However, the ACs wish to point out that fishers have always been keen on their own initiative to collaborate

¹³ www.nsrac.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/02-2122-NSAC-Advice-on-Choke-Identification-Tool.pdf

¹⁴ Please review trials carried out by Board Iascaigh Mhara (BIM), for example “Reducing catches of small fish with T90 mesh”, “Reducing catches of small Nephrops through and increase in mesh size and survivability exemption”, “Reducing cod catches with the raised fishing line” ([link](#)); project carried out by ILVO, for example “Study of the impact of light on the species caught in pots” and “Development and improvement of fishing techniques” ([link](#)); AZTI “VarMer Project” on Northern Hake stock ([link](#)); research projects carried out for example by the Wageningen Marine Research ([link](#)), DTU Aqua ([link](#)), and Ifremer ([link](#)); among others in other National Research Institutes.

¹⁵ [NWWAC advice on the Energy Transition Partnership for EU Fisheries and Aquaculture](#)

with gear technologists and implement selectivity measures where possible. One of the reasons why the resulting innovations in fishing techniques and gears have encountered some difficulty in their implementation is the lack of flexibility in the Technical Measures Regulation, as well as regulatory uncertainties and the lack of clear direction and future vision for these fisheries. The NWWAC/NSAC advocate for Member States to make better use of the possibility for Joint Recommendations under the regionalisation principle, and for the legislation to be more flexible and receptive to such innovations, and to provide the necessary certainty for the future of demersal fisheries. Conflicts between the LO and the Technical Measures Regulation need urgent resolution to ensure legal coherence and workable implementation. The NWWAC/NSAC urge the Commission to clarify overlaps and contradictions to support consistent and effective fisheries management.

Part 2 – Landing Obligation Study Recommendations and NWWAC/NSAC input

Overall ACs' recommendations

- The NWWAC/NSAC do not support using enforcement as the sole means to achieve LO compliance; positive incentives and meaningful collaboration with fishers on data collection are more pragmatic and effective.
- The ACs stress that the current LO cannot be fully implemented due to well-documented operational, economic, and regulatory barriers, and call for comprehensive reform combining practical monitoring and enforcement measures.
- The ACs support enhancing economically viable gear selectivity, recognising that compliance depends on addressing operational, economic, and regulatory obstacles in a coherent and simplified framework.
- The ACs support continued use of exemptions, particularly in mixed fisheries, as a necessary measure to address current LO inefficiencies.
- The ACs emphasise improving data collection and analysis with active stakeholder involvement to capture local knowledge and ensure measure are reflected with the reality on the ground.
- The ACs advocate for expanded funding opportunities to promote gear selectivity, innovation, infrastructure development, and tailored regional solutions.
- The ACs recommend that available information from projects and measures should be reviewed and compiled in a publicly available searchable platform to ensure improved access and wider distribution of available information. (Please also see recommendation “g” – Part 1, page 7)
- The ACs reiterate that the primary objective of LO-related measures should be avoidance and minimisation of unwanted catches.

1. Effectiveness

Recommendations from Landing Obligation Study	NWWAC/NSAC input
Strengthen MCS: Member States should take the necessary measures to ensure the effective monitoring and enforcement of the landing obligation on all fishing vessels flying the flag of an EU country, including Outermost Regions and distant water fleets.	Refrain from using control efforts as the only way to ensure compliance. Positive incentives and meaningful collaboration with fisheries on their contribution to scientific data would be a more pragmatic and effective way forward.
Strengthen catch monitoring and data collection: The STECF FDI database should be enhanced, to include a link to the exemptions under which fishing activity is occurring, on a haul-by-haul basis.	Agree with catch monitoring. Reference to FDF – data collection as mechanism for improving scientific advice and reducing risk of infringements at the level of fleet segments. Risk-based approach to control and inspections is currently biased/skewed sampling as it focuses on fleet segments creating a perpetuating system of sampling risky segments.
Foster collaboration: Build trust with fishers through increased cooperation and shared ownership of solutions, fostering a collaborative approach to addressing landing obligation challenges.	Strongly agree.
Reduce reliance on de minimis exemptions: Critically assess the growing number of Joint Recommendations for exemptions to ensure they do not undermine the primary goal of reducing discards. Reducing exemptions in each region, particularly those related to de minimis, would enhance the overall effectiveness of the landing obligation.	Disagree, the growing reliance on exemptions points to ineffectiveness of a management measure which should therefore be rethought through engagement with fisheries. Exemptions are critically important for mixed fisheries viability. Reporting obligation and results-based management would be a better way forward. LO as indiscriminatory measure causes the need for increased exemptions.
Flexibility mechanisms: Ensure flexibility mechanisms (e.g. quota swaps) retain an incentive to create positive changes in behaviour to adopt more selective gear devices. This will ensure flexibility supports the transition to a catch-based system without compromising the landing obligation's core objectives.	Agree - adaptive management.
Provide additional financial support: Offer financial support (including compensation mechanisms) and incentives for the adoption of selective fishing gear and improved	Agree, however we believe that indiscriminate approach should be adopted for compensation to all fleets.

handling facilities, particularly for small-scale coastal fisheries, to encourage compliance and better practices.	
Adapt regionally: Develop region-specific strategies that consider the socio-economic and ecological context of different regions, ensuring more effective application of the landing obligation.	Partially agree. A comprehensive reform of the Landing Obligation should focus primarily on preventing and reducing unwanted catches.
Invest in infrastructure: Further development of supply chains for non-human consumption of fish, including investment in innovations in processing, market infrastructure, and consumer awareness for low-grade catches to enhance the value of bycatches and reduce waste.	Agree, see also Joint-AC Advice on valorisation of fisheries and aquaculture byproducts. ¹⁶ However, currently the LO prevents valorisation of undersized catch.
Promote informed decisions: Improve the dissemination of scientific data to stakeholders, helping them make informed decisions and foster greater compliance with the landing obligation.	Strongly agree, but this should go both ways – knowledge and measures should be co-created with fishers to improve compliance.

2. Efficiency

Recommendations from Landing Obligation Study	NWWAC/NSAC input
Integrate economic mitigation strategies: Establish clear compensation mechanisms to offset the economic costs of the landing obligation, including handling, storage, and disposal costs. This would improve compliance incentives and reduce economic pressure on fishers.	Partially agree. A comprehensive reform of the Landing Obligation should focus primarily on preventing and reducing unwanted catches.
Expand funding opportunities: Enhance access to funding programmes (e.g. EMFAF, Horizon Europe) and create targeted support for gear modifications and infrastructure upgrades that improve compliance and sustainability.	Agree.

¹⁶ <https://www.nsrac.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/12-2324-Joint-AC-Advice-on-Valorisation-of-fisheries-and-aquaculture-byproducts.pdf>

<p>Adapt policies to regional needs while maintaining clarity in implementation: Tailor landing obligation policies to local ecological, economic, and operational contexts, drawing from best practices in successful systems to ensure regional efficiency.</p>	<p>Agree. However, at present the current legal framework does not allow for proper regional approaches. While the framework regulation should provide a general direction of the management, implementation should be regionalised to account for local specificities. A comprehensive reform of the Landing Obligation should focus primarily on preventing and reducing unwanted catches.</p>
<p>Foster collaboration: Strengthen partnerships among Member States, fishers, and stakeholders to build trust, align objectives, and standardise practices for data collection, reporting, and monitoring, ensuring efficient implementation.</p>	<p>Agree.</p>
<p>Invest in infrastructure: Address gaps in port facilities and logistical support to improve the handling, storage, and processing of unwanted catches, reducing waste and improving operational efficiency.</p>	<p>It is hard to see how this would change the present situation/challenges.</p>
<p>Increase flexibility: Optimise the use of exemptions (e.g. de minimis) to strike a balance between ecological goals and economic realities, ensuring flexibility does not undermine the system's efficiency.</p>	<p>Strongly agree. A comprehensive reform of the Landing Obligation should focus primarily on preventing and reducing unwanted catches.</p>
<p>Enhance communication: Establish clear and effective communication channels to disseminate regulatory updates, funding opportunities, and address stakeholder concerns, improving transparency and coordination.</p>	<p>Strongly agree.</p>
<p>Promote regional cooperation: Encourage functioning of High-Level Groups like the Adriatica group to align strategies, enhance data sharing, and improve collective outcomes across regions, promoting greater efficiency in managing the landing obligation.</p>	<p>Agree.</p>

3. Relevance

Recommendations from Landing Obligation Study	NWWAC/NSAC input
Adaptable frameworks: <i>Develop adaptable regulations that consider fleet diversity and the unique needs of fisheries, particularly those of small-scale fisheries, ensuring that the landing obligation is relevant and feasible across varying contexts.</i>	Improved adaptability is currently possible with the legal tools in place, however, better use must be made of the existing opportunities. A comprehensive reform of the Landing Obligation should focus primarily on preventing and reducing unwanted catches.
Stronger enforcement: <i>Member States to ensure compliance of fleet with EMS requirements under amended Control Regulation (EU) No 2023/2842 to improve monitoring and compliance and invest in training national enforcement personnel to ensure effective implementation and adherence to the landing obligation.</i>	Agree but not as the only measure. A balance needs to be struck between resources spent on control of the LO and its effectiveness.
Financial support: <i>Increase funding for compliance costs, discard handling, infrastructure upgrades, and research into sustainable practices, ensuring that fishers are supported in meeting the obligations without undue economic burden.</i>	Agree.
Market development: <i>Promote the development of markets for unwanted catches through value-added processing and marketing initiatives, encouraging the use of unwanted catches and reducing waste.</i>	Agree, see also Joint-AC Advice on valorisation of fisheries and aquaculture byproducts. ¹⁷ However, currently the LO prevents valorisation of undersized catch.
Integrated sustainability: <i>Foster collaboration between the fisheries and aquaculture sectors to align the landing obligation with ecosystem-based management approaches and the EU Green Deal objectives, ensuring that the landing obligation contributes to broader biodiversity protection and sustainable fisheries management goals.</i>	The ACs do not understand the aim of this statement.

¹⁷ <https://www.nsrac.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/12-2324-Joint-AC-Advice-on-Valorisation-of-fisheries-and-aquaculture-byproducts.pdf>

Exemptions: <i>Reassess the exemption frameworks to ensure region-specific application of the landing obligation, with short-term flexibility to allow adaptation.</i>	Agree.
Workforce support: <i>Provide reskilling programs and economic support to help fishers transition to more sustainable practices, ensuring the workforce can adapt to evolving environmental and regulatory demands.</i>	Agree. The ACs fully support that EU fisheries and food supply must be protected.

4. Coherence

Recommendations from Landing Obligation Study	NWWAC/NSAC input
Enhance data accuracy and operational execution: <i>To improve coherence with the Technical Measures Regulation (EU) No 2019/1241, efforts should be made to enhance data accuracy and streamline operational execution, particularly in multi-species fisheries. This will support better decision-making and more effective implementation of selectivity measures.</i>	Agree.
Promote synergies with other EU regulations: <i>More emphasis should be placed on fostering synergies between the landing obligation and other EU initiatives like the Technical Measures Regulation (EU) No 2019/1241 and EMFF/EMFAF. Encouraging innovation in gear selectivity and bycatch reduction should be prioritised, moving beyond high survivability studies to practical solutions.</i>	Agree.
Improve infrastructure for bycatch management: <i>Increased investment in processing infrastructure, such as fishmeal factories, should be prioritised to reduce the inefficiencies in managing unwanted</i>	Agree, see also Joint-AC Advice on valorisation of fisheries and aquaculture byproducts. ¹⁸

¹⁸ <https://www.nsrac.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/12-2324-Joint-AC-Advice-on-Valorisation-of-fisheries-and-aquaculture-byproducts.pdf>

bycatch. This would help align the landing obligation with broader sustainability and waste reduction goals.	
Strengthen alignment with environmental strategies: The landing obligation should be more effectively integrated with environmental goals such as the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy and the MSFD. This would enhance its ecological benefits and contribute to the protection of marine species and habitats.	Agree. A comprehensive reform of the Landing Obligation should focus primarily on preventing and reducing unwanted catches.
Collaborate with international efforts: The EU should strengthen collaboration with regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) and international bodies to ensure that the landing obligation aligns more effectively with global sustainability efforts, particularly SDG 14.4 which aims to end overfishing.	Agree. A comprehensive reform of the Landing Obligation should focus primarily on preventing and reducing unwanted catches.

5. EU Value added

Recommendations from Landing Obligation Study	NWWAC/NSAC input
Flexibility and adaptation: Develop region-specific policies and crisis-response mechanisms that accommodate the diverse operational contexts of European fisheries, ensuring that the landing obligation is flexible and effective across different Member States.	Agree. A comprehensive reform of the Landing Obligation should focus primarily on preventing and reducing unwanted catches.
Enhanced funding: Expand and simplify access to financial support mechanisms, such as EMFAF, to help mitigate compliance costs, ensuring are not disproportionately affected by the landing obligation.	Agree.
Market development of low-value catches: Promote market opportunities for low-value catches by partnering with food industries, launching public awareness campaigns, and	Agree, see also Joint-AC Advice on valorisation of fisheries and aquaculture byproducts. ¹⁹

¹⁹ <https://www.nsrac.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/12-2324-Joint-AC-Advice-on-Valorisation-of-fisheries-and-aquaculture-byproducts.pdf>

supporting value-added processing initiatives to reduce waste and generate economic value.	
Improved monitoring and enforcement: <i>Strengthen discard management frameworks through technological innovations, such as EMS, and harmonise enforcement protocols across Member States to ensure consistency and effectiveness in the implementation of the landing obligation.</i>	Agree.
Alignment with sustainability goals: <i>Integrate landing obligation frameworks with EU sustainability objectives, such as biodiversity protection and the EU Green Deal, to maximise the environmental and economic benefits of the landing obligation and ensure it contributes to the EU's broader sustainability and climate goals.</i>	Agree. A comprehensive reform of the Landing Obligation should focus primarily on preventing and reducing unwanted catches.

6. Complementarity

Recommendations from Landing Obligation Study	NWWAC/NSAC input
Policy alignment: <i>Establish clear guidelines to integrate landing obligation initiatives with national fisheries policies, ensuring that these efforts complement existing management programmes, especially in regions like the Mediterranean and North Western Waters. This ensures consistency in objectives across different levels of governance.</i>	A comprehensive reform of the Landing Obligation should focus primarily on preventing and reducing unwanted catches. Consistency must be ensured across all European waters. Regarding progress made in the achievement of FMSY in line with the CFP in the North Western Waters, the latest results indicate a reduction in overall fishing mortality and a general increase in stock biomass in the North-East Atlantic (both EU and non-EU waters) over the period 2003-2023. Among the stocks which were fully assessed, the proportion of overexploited stocks (i.e. $F > F_{MSY}$) decreased from around 67% (2003-2008) to 20% in 2023 and fishing

	mortality rates decreased from 51% above FMSY to 41% below FMSY. ²⁰
Collaboration forums: Create Member State forums or task forces to facilitate the exchange of best practices, harmonise landing obligation efforts, and encourage cross-regional cooperation. These platforms would foster consistency in policy implementation and increase the overall effectiveness of the landing obligation.	Disagree. We should expand existing forums (Member States Group, Advisory Councils), consider enhancing engagement with MS and stakeholders. A comprehensive reform of the Landing Obligation should focus primarily on preventing and reducing unwanted catches.
Regional initiatives: Design and implement region-specific programmes tailored to the unique ecological and operational challenges of each area. These initiatives should provide targeted funding, technical assistance, and better alignment with national fisheries strategies, ensuring the measures are adaptable and locally relevant.	Agree.
Impact evaluation: Introduce mechanisms for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of landing obligation initiatives to assess their effectiveness and ensure they continuously align with the objectives of the landing obligation. Regular assessments will allow for adjustments and improvements over time.	There have been countless studies and evaluations of the LO which have all shown the policy in its current format to be deeply flawed. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation is important but only after the current policy has been adapted to make it workable and enforceable.

7. Sustainability

Recommendations from Landing Obligation Study	NWWAC/NSAC input
Enhance flexibility in policy design: Adapt the framework to account for regional ecological and operational diversity, especially in mixed fisheries and induced changes and multi-species fisheries, such as the Mediterranean.	Agree, as well as in other areas such as the North Sea and the NWW.

²⁰ COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Accompanying the document COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL Sustainable fishing in the EU: state of play and orientations for 2026 (COM(2025) 296 final)

<p>Increase economic support: Provide financial incentives and subsidies to mitigate the economic burden of adopting selective gear and transitioning to sustainable fishing practices.</p>	<p>Agree.</p>
<p>Reassess exemptions: Reevaluate provisions like high survivability and de minimis exemptions to ensure they do not undermine efforts to promote gear selectivity and reduce discards.</p>	<p>The ACs believe there is no need to reevaluate the exemptions per se in addition as to what is currently carried out in the Member States Groups. However, it would be beneficial to reassess the way exemptions are structured in the Regulation to ensure effective use without undermining efforts to promote gear selectivity and reduce discards.</p>
<p>Promote stakeholder engagement: Promote open communication with fishers and other stakeholders to address scepticism and highlight the tangible benefits of compliance, particularly in marine conservation and resource sustainability.</p>	<p>Strongly agree; meaningful participation through co-management</p>
<p>Expand pilot projects and training: Scale up successful initiatives, such as those in the Azorean small-scale fishery and French tropical tuna fleets, to demonstrate best practices and refine selective gear techniques.</p>	<p>Disagree. The ACs recommend that available information from projects and measures should be reviewed and compiled in a publicly available searchable platform to ensure improved access and wider distribution of available information. (Please also see recommendation “g” – Part 1, page 7)</p>
<p>Address challenges in mixed fisheries: Develop tailored strategies for complex fisheries where balancing bycatch reduction and economic viability is particularly challenging.</p>	<p>Agree.</p>
<p>Evaluate regional disparities: Assess the policy’s regional effectiveness and adapt implementation strategies to ensure equitable benefits across diverse ecological and economic contexts.</p>	<p>Agree.</p>

8. General recommendations

Recommendations from Landing Obligation Study	NWWAC/NSAC input
Strengthen monitoring and enforcement: <i>Implement REM onboard vessels as per the amended Control Regulation (EU) No 2023/2842. Address challenges of EMS to ensure effectiveness across all fleet segments.</i>	The study assumes that simply by strengthening monitoring and enforcement that the LO will be better implemented. The ACs would content this misses the point that the LO in its current format cannot be properly implemented given all the issues highlighted. Countless studies and reports have shown this to be the case. Fundamental reform of the LO is required which incorporates a suite of monitoring and enforcement measures that are effective and practical.
Enhance gear selectivity: <i>Offer quota-based incentives and economic support to promote adoption of selective gears. Look to address barriers to adoption, such as economic viability and lack of enforcement.</i>	Agree with economic viability, disagree with enforcement – cooperation and co-creation with fisheries should be a priority. Lack of long-term vision for demersal fleets is an important factor hampering adoption of innovation.
Improve data collection and analysis: <i>Ensure detailed data collection across all fleet segments to assess discard practices effectively.</i>	Agree.
Provide economic and operational support: <i>Ensure sustainability goals are balanced with economic viability by offering targeted financial support to fishers. Further use of EU financial instruments to fund gear selectivity, reporting systems, and de minimis exemption research.</i>	Agree.
Foster collaboration and targeted interventions: <i>Ensure regional adaptability of the landing obligation by tailoring measures to address specific regional needs. Strengthen cooperative efforts to close gaps in enforcement, economic support, and operational flexibility.</i>	Agree. A comprehensive reform of the Landing Obligation should focus primarily on preventing and reducing unwanted catches.

– END –