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# Parliamentary Briefing

## **FISHING OPPORTUNITIES FOR 2016 AND IMPLEMENTING THE DISCARD BAN: BRIEFING FOR THE ANNUAL FISHERIES POLICY DEBATE**

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December 2015

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### **CONTEXT**

WWF UK welcomed the outcome of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) reform, with the caveat that it will only be possible to gauge the true success of it when it is implemented. The current outlook for assessed northern European stocks is relatively positive, with trends of mortality decreasing and trends for biomass increasing. Of assessed stocks in the North Sea, the proportion which is sustainably managed is now over 50%. We are in the midst of CFP implementation and there are key decisions still needed to ensure that we avoid undermining this good progress and to support stocks in other sea areas where the outlook is less positive. Here we identify some of the elements that we believe it will be important to address.

### **SUMMARY**

- The implementation of the Landing Obligation (or discard ban) represents one of the biggest operational shifts in European fisheries. Governments and stakeholders need new approaches to fisheries management in order to incentivise behaviour that brings social, economic and environmental benefits. Effective implementation must include maximum use of selective fishing – how, where and when fishing occurs. Innovation will be key – in how quota is managed, how fisheries are supported through the transition, in securing effective monitoring and in control and accountable flexibility through the phasing period.
- Discussion is underway on how the new measures will be monitored and controlled on the water. WWF believes that it is vital to get this right if Member States are to meet sustainability targets. A new report commissioned by WWF (report included with this briefing) has found that to equip and install all fishing vessels in the over 10 metre UK fleet with Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) camera systems and undertake a review of 8% of video footage could cost less than is currently spent on traditional monitoring options in the UK (which account for only 0.1% of the hours fished by the fleet). WWF



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would like to see REM systems with cameras rolled out EU-wide, and our colleagues in network offices across Europe will be advocating to that effect.

- WWF urges the UK Government to undertake its own review of the most cost-effective means for effectively monitoring fishing activity at sea, including that of using REM with cameras and sensors, and would welcome the UK working with other Member States in order to deliver a level playing-field for fishermen.

## RECOMENDATIONS

**Autumn fisheries negotiations:** At the end of year negotiations, the UK should support strong science-based decisions that will continue to help us reap the benefits of the reformed CFP. This means achieving effective implementation of the discard ban, fishing at sustainable levels and helping to deliver Good Environmental Status, while retaining a profitable and sustainable fishing industry.

**Manage quota uplift/transfer effectively:** It is vital to get the issue of quota uplift/transfers right, and we welcome the European Commission's recognition that these should not increase fishing mortality rates or jeopardise the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) objectives of article 2.2 of the CFP. The UK administrations should work closely with industry and other stakeholders to ensure that quota uplift is targeted to those vessels that are subject to the discard ban in 2016, and that it avoids increased mortality. Any system adopted must be transparent and subject to clear criteria.

**Improve selectivity:** The UK's fishing fleets need to continue the active adoption of selective gears and spatial measures in order to minimise unwanted catches as much as possible and smooth the transition to meeting the Landing Obligation. 2016 sees what Defra is terming a 'gentle introduction' to the Landing Obligation with the requirement to land a limited number of demersal fish, including Haddock, Plaice, Sole and Nephrops. Boats will still be able to discard other species but should be readying themselves for additional species being introduced over the period 2016-19. While many vessels have adopted more selective measures, some have not. This must be addressed and the new European Maritime & Fisheries Fund (EMFF) should be used to support transition where finance is required.

**Effective monitoring and control:** One of the risks that the discard ban carries is that discarding could continue illicitly due to various pressures and this will result in unaccounted for mortality. This in turn would jeopardise sustainability as scientific confidence in stock estimates is undermined. It would constitute illegal activity on the water which poses not only a biological risk but a reputational one for the Government and industry both at sea and on land, and for the supply chain. It is this risk that must be managed in coming months and WWF believes that effective monitoring and enforcement are vital from the outset.

WWF has commissioned a report which compares the costs and effectiveness of the different modes of traditional monitoring and demonstrates that REM with cameras and sensors is the most effective and best value for money means of monitoring activity on the water, which is where any potential risks are likely to arise.

Key benefits of REM systems include:

- 100% coverage of fishing activity, and that they are capable of identifying non-compliance or problems with compliance which need attention;
- they provide high quality monitoring relatively cheaply – an estimated £4697 per vessel per annum or around £6.4 million for monitoring 10% of activity on all UK vessels of over 10 metres;
- they deliver a level playing-field across Member States if adopted at regional level;
- data can be used for multiple purposes including contributing to and improving confidence in stock assessment, or to demonstrate best practice.

REM with cameras and sensors represents a transparent, proportionate and risk-based approach to monitoring and control and we believe it should be adopted across Member States in order to deliver a level playing-field. It also provides a tool with which to support all the operators that are working responsibly and with integrity. Camera footage can be used to substantiate implementation problems, assisting skippers if there are insurmountable problems despite all best efforts. It monitors a snap shot of fishing activity – usually around 10% - and is equivalent to health and safety spot checks on land-based operations. In these days of budgetary considerations the costs are not prohibitive and can be covered by savings made when some levels of traditional monitoring (which would be covered by the new system) are scaled back.

What the UK, other Member States and fisheries stakeholders do over coming months and years will determine how successful the Common Fisheries Policy reform really is. WWF believes that effective introduction of the discard ban will be key to this success. There are clear gains to be achieved, the most obvious of which is more fish in the sea, which in turn will mean a more resilient, profitable industry and greater food security. But if implemented poorly the reforms carry clear risks. The challenge to all is how to get the process right.

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