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Press Briefing

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European Fisheries Quota 2009: How can Europe tackle the problem of discard?

As every year, the December Fisheries Council is preceded by a long and debated negotiation between the European Union and Norway to decide on total allowable catches (TACs) relating to seven stocks: cod, haddock, saithe, whiting, plaice, mackerel and herring. The seas covered are: North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat. This bilateral agreement is the single most important agreement the European Community has with a third party both in terms of exchange of fishing possibilities and in terms of joint management measures. The agreement is **adopted into Community Law** by the Council of Fisheries Ministers in December.

This year, the discards issue has shaped the negotiation between the EU and Norway, which failed to come up to an agreement after the first two rounds of talks in November. The discussion now moves to Oslo and starts on December 8.

Last year negotiations ended in November with an 11% increase in TAC for North Sea cod, accompanied by an EU-commitment to introduce measures to significantly reduce the cod discard rate (i.e. the proportion of the catch that is discarded) to 10% in the North Sea. However, this target has not been met, and discard levels of cod in 2007 and 2008 are substantially higher than in previous years¹.

As denounced in a WWF report², every year in the North Sea a third of the annual total catch of fish and other marine life is thrown or discarded over the side.

So far, only voluntary measures have been requested by the fishing industry to avoid unwanted bycatch of cod, but they have failed. **Therefore Norway is now asking the European Union to introduce a discard ban in its waters.**

WWF strongly recommends the EU and Norway to agree on a series of mandatory measures to reduce discards:

- Effective discard controls - e.g. mandatory use of "Eliminator trawl" (or measures of equivalent effectiveness, a recent WWF report³ lists technical solutions to avoid or mitigate bycatch)
- Ban on high grading in EU Waters
- Spatial and time closures to protect young cod.

These measures will become even more important in light of the EU plan to increase the TAC of cod in the range of 25-35% in 2009.

¹ JRC Scientific and Technical Report, 29th Plenary Meeting Report of the STECF, 3-7 November 2008, p.45.

² WWF Germany report "Marine Life is not waste", issued in German in November 2008:
http://assets.panda.org/downloads/studie_meerestiere_sind_kein_muell_.pdf

³ WWF Germany report: "Low Impact Fisheries Techniques", December 2008: http://www.wwf.de/fileadmin/fmwf/pdf_neu/wwf_low_impact_report_18112008.pdf



Measures for the effective reduction of cod discard: Norway leads

A recent WWF report⁴ has highlighted some key measures adopted by Norway in its sea areas to strongly reduce the problem of discard and illegal fishing. Norway controls very productive sea areas, and according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), three of the world's ten largest fish stocks have their main distribution within the Norwegian economic area, namely Norwegian Spring Spawning herring, blue whiting and capelin.

Norwegian fisheries have adopted a series of measures that have resulted in a better management of fish stock. Sorting grids are mandatory in the cod and shrimp trawl in Norway's economic zone and have produced a clear improvement through reduced unwanted catch of juvenile and fish under the minimum size. Since 1980s Norway have established a discard ban on the most commercially important species to ensure that the actual fishing mortality is reflected in the landings. They introduced an area closure system and this probably contributed substantially to the recovery of cod and haddock in the Barents Sea.

Cod quotas under negotiation

- Cod in North Sea, Eastern Channel and Skagerrak

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) assessed the Management Plan for Cod in the North Sea and judged this plan as not enough to guarantee the recovery of the stock. Repeating previous advice, **ICES recommended closing all North Sea fishing for cod until first signs of recovery would become evident.**

But, later this year, ICES evaluated two management plan proposals by the EU and Norway. The plans aim to reduce the fishing mortality in the first year by 25%. According to ICES, both plans 'have a high probability to lead to a stock recovery by 2015'. But, ICES highlighted that a TAC increase alone would not reduce the amount of discards, since this would not lead to less fish being removed from the sea.

In 2007 the Council of Fisheries Ministers increased North Sea Cod quotas by 11% without mandatory bycatch reduction measures in place. Subsequently, discards rates for cod have risen in the North Sea. The relatively strong recruitment of the 2005 year class of cod could have potentially led to the recovery of the stock. Unfortunately, due to the heavy discarding, this potential is slowly diminishing. Discarding of this year class has increased to 40% in 2007 and is expected to have remained high in 2008.

WWF recommends the introduction of mandatory measures that aim to reduce fishing mortality and protect juveniles. Without the implementation of such measures, WWF asks for the closure of the fishery.

- Cod in Kattegat

According to ICES, neither the stock abundance nor the fishing mortality can be assessed accurately given the lack of scientific data available. As trends suggest that this cod is at risk of being depleted, **ICES advises a**

⁴ WWF Norway report: "Management and Technical Measures in the Norwegian Cod and Groundfisheries", October 2008: http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/norwegian_cod_fishery_report.pdf



zero catch in 2009. Such a zero catch would also imply a zero cod removal as bycatch in all other fisheries, since bycatch is the main contributor for fishing mortality in the area.

In order to rebuild this stock, the Swedish Board of Fisheries made a proposal in June 2008 for the implementation of a permanent no-take zone covering the main spawning grounds, and of a seasonally closed area in the surrounding sector. WWF fully supports this initiative.

EU-Norway Negotiations leading up to EU-Fisheries Council, December 17-19

In December, European Fisheries Ministers will meet in Brussels to decide the 2009 quotas for the main fish species.

In light of the European Commission's decision to drop its legislative proposal on reducing discards, **WWF asks the EU to work towards a discard reduction** and commit to introducing a discard ban within the framework of the new Common Fisheries Policy by 2012 at the latest.

The table attached shows ICES and WWF recommendations for the different species.

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Table 1.0: Comparative table of ICES Advice and TACs & quotas set, Commission Proposal & WWF recommendations

Stocks	ICES advice 2006	TACs agreed 2006	ICES advice 2007	TAC agreed 2007	ICES Advice 2008	TAC Agreed 2008	ICES Advice 2009**	Commission Proposals	% Difference with ICES advice	WWF's Recommendation
Cod-Kattegat	Zero catch	1,000	Zero Catch	731	Zero TAC	673	Zero Catch	505	[∞]*	Zero Catch, implement measures to minimise bycatch in non-target cod fisheries (or minimum level bycatch quota)
Cod- Irish Sea	Zero catch	1,828	Zero Catch	1,462	Close fisheries until an initial recovery of the cod SSB has been proven.	1,199	Zero Catch	899	[∞]*	Zero Catch, implement measures to minimise bycatch in non-target cod fisheries (or minimum level bycatch quota)
Cod – North Sea, Eastern Channel & Skagerrak	Zero catch	23,205/	Zero Catch	19,957	Total catch limit 22,000 (including unaccounted landings and discards).	22,152	Zero Catch	pm	-	Zero Catch, implement measures to minimise bycatch in non-target cod fisheries (or minimum level bycatch quota)
Cod- West of Scotland	Zero catch	613	Zero Catch	490	Zero Catch, Recovery plan not consistent with precautionary approach.	402	Zero Catch	302	[∞]*	Zero Catch, implement measures to minimise bycatch in non-target cod fisheries (or minimum level bycatch quota)
Cod – Celtic Sea	No increase in effort	5,600	Zero Catch	4,700	Zero Catch	4,300	<2,600	5,404	+107.8%	Follow ICES advise, implement measures to minimise bycatch in non-target cod fisheries (or minimum level bycatch quota)
Haddock - North Sea	39,400	51,850	55,400	54,640	49,300 (including industrial bycatch)	46,444	44,700t	pm	-	Follow ICES advice in conjunction with observers-mandatory bycatch reduction measures
Whiting – North Sea	<17,300	23,800	<15,100	23,800	5,000	17,850	5,900	pm	-	Reduction in landings in accordance to ICES advice
Nephrops – North Sea	No increase in effort	28,417	Not more than 19227 FU 6-10 only	26,144	No increase in effort.same advice as last yr	26,144	No increase in effort, and recent average landings	23,609	-9.7%	Appropriate measures to deal with bycatch of cod, no increase in effort
Southern Hake	Zero Catch	6,661	Zero Catch	6,128	Zero Catch	7,047	Zero Catch	8,104	[∞]*	Zero Catch – additional technical measures
Plaice North Sea	48,000	57,441/ 55,820	32,000	50,261	<35,000	49,000	55,500t	pm	-	Follow ICES advice, implement measures to reduce bycatch and discards
Sole North Sea	11,900	17,470	10,800	15,020	<9,800	12,800	<14,000t	13,700	-2%	Follow ICES advice, implement measures to reduce bycatch and discards

* [∞] is used when the Commission proposed a TAC > 0 when ICES advised a zero TAC

** ICES advise 2009 is based on ICES publications up to the Commission proposal