



**The landing obligation and discards survivability.  
How to assess and improve discards survival?**

**26 June 2018 - European Parliament, Brussels**

This event was hosted by **MEP Ricardo Serrão Santos**, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Intergroup on “*Climate Change, Biodiversity, and Sustainable Development*”, and brought together policy-makers, the research community, private and NGOs’ sectors to discuss issues such as measuring discards survival, improving discards survival, and the improvements in selectivity based on both technical development and other measures, with a focus on fishing gear.

The panel also included:

- **Edward Schram, Wageningen Marine Research**
- **Luis Rodrigues, Regional Director Fisheries, Government of the Azores**
- **Evangelia Georgitsi, DG MARE, CFP and Structural Support Policy Development and Coordination Unit, European Commission**
- **Michael Andersen, Danish Fishermen Producer Organisation**
- **Sebastian Uhlmann, Co-Chair of the ICES Working Group on Methods for Estimating Discard Survival**
- **Dr Monica Verbeek Executive director, Seas at Risk**



The EU’s landing obligation (discard ban) is a major measure of the latest reform of the Common Fisheries Policy for EU fisheries. It aims to reduce unwanted catches in EU fisheries, by incentivizing improved selectivity and restoring fish stocks to levels that can sustain the

maximum production over time without harming the biodiversity and the capacity of future generations to obtain fish. However, banning discards inevitably induces diverse short- and long-term ecological, economic and social impacts, which may determine whether the landings obligation's objectives will be achieved. Since 2015, the landing obligation is being implemented on a gradual basis. Each fishery has its own specificities and differences which makes the implementation of the landing obligation a major challenge for fisheries management. Species for which scientific evidence demonstrates high survival rates are eligible for an exemption to the landing obligation.

**Edward Schram**, Wageningen Marine Research. *Discards survival probabilities of flatfish and rays in North Sea pulse-trawl fisheries.*

Mr Schram presented a study on survivability in which targeted plaice, sole, turbot, brill and thornback ray discards. Results obtained for sole were used to describe the main results of the study. The results show that the levels of survivability vary among species and among the nine sea trips. For example for sole survival ranged from 0% rate to a 50% among sea trips.. From a technical point of view, Mr Schram stressed that he experiment was a success. More than 90% of sampled discards are alive upon sampling, the mortality occurs mainly within 5 days. Improving fish condition would be crucial to increase survival. Some elements to make a difference in survival: water filled hopper, shorter hauls and knotless cod end were tested with variable success. Survival chances were established for sole and plaice. For the other species estimated chances are indicative.

The video, infographics explaining the research method for survival studies and the results for the Dutch study into survival of undersized flatfish and rays in the pulse fishery as well as the factsheets with further information are all available here: [www.wur.eu/fishsurvival](http://www.wur.eu/fishsurvival).

**Luis Rodrigues**, Regional director Fisheries Azores, Government of the Azores. *Supporting evidence on a high survivability of blackspot seabream (*Pagellus bogaraveo*) captured by bottom hook and line in Central North Atlantic Waters (ICES sub-area X).*

Mr Rodrigues presented some arguments for the exemptions of this species in the landing obligation: fishing industry in Azores is composed mainly for small scale fleet, the level of by catches and discards is low, and there is a high level of survivability (according to onboard observer data, 70% of individuals survive).



**Evangelia Georgitsi**, DG MARE, CFP and Structural Support Policy Development and Coordination Unit, EC.

Ms Georgitsi mentioned the policy overview for the landing obligation and stressed the Multiannual Plans and the discard plans as the main tools to implement it; and referred to articles in the Basic Regulation that covers discard survivability and the specific provisions for the exemptions. Ms Geortitsi also provided specific examples of high survival exemptions in different sea basins. The main challenge is the lack of sufficient scientific data to demonstrate high rates of survivability.

**Michael Andersen**, Danish Fishermen Producer Organisation. *What is high survival?*

Mr Andersen stated that high survivability should not be a matter of being above or below a certain percentage and expressed that it is a political decision, not a scientific question. He also reminded that some stocks do not seem to notice the discard practice according to ICES data, and stressed that a holistic approach should be taken. Some stocks are more vulnerable to discarding (roundfish) than others (flatfish) and fishermen should be involved in tackling this problem.

**Sebastian Uhlmann**, Co-Chair of the ICES Working Group on Methods for Estimating Discard Survival.

Mr Uhlmann stressed that a description of evidence is needed to propose exemptions. ICES guidelines have been considered in this process and are also used by STECF to evaluate “high survival” evidence. So far, there have been at least 20 studies in 11 Member States since 2013. For some species, recent empirical evidence may allow for a better scientific definition of the concept of “high survival”. Available survival estimates and new categories on how to register discards under the landing obligation, pose some challenges for ICES advice.

**Monica Verbeek**, Executive Director Seas at Risk. *Ecology and survivability.*

Ms Verbeek highlighted the questions whether enough is being done to reduce unwanted catches. She stressed that more than 40% of stocks are not covered by the landing obligation and despite scientific evidence being unclear, exemptions are still granted without knowing the effect on the stocks. Some options to reduce unwanted catches: more swaps between Member States, an improvement in selectivity, financial support, etc. There has to be a real will to overcome challenges.

#### **Discussion:**

Industry representatives expressed that the fleets have done everything they can to implement the discard ban, but there are problems that cannot be overcome, such as lack of quota for some choke species or improvements in selectivity. NGOs stressed that Member States should do more concerning swapping and that the finger cannot be pointed at a reduction in the scope of the landing obligation. Other participants raised issues such as catch documentation, the type of information that Member States submit to ask for the exemptions or the difference between monitoring and controlling.

#### **Closure:**

**Ricardo Serrão Santos MEP** expressed that discards are not a complete waste of food as they enter in the food chain in the sea and survivability, when it can be proved, should be taken into account.

[The presentations and meeting documents are available here.](#)