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To examine the feasibility of introducing policies to minimize or eliminate discards in NAFO

Exploratory memorandum

There are a number of reasons why discarding takes place. The fish might be undersized, of inferior quality or be of non-commercial species. The catch might be too large in comparison to the allocated quota. The vessel in question may not have a quota at all for the species caught as bycatch. Or more seriously it might be a result of high-grading. The list is not exhaustive.

The problem is that most species do not survive discarding and therefore discards of fish constitute a serious threat to sustainable management. Unfortunately, discards are very rarely reported, and unrecorded catches result in incorrect catch statistics. This disrupts the basis for the scientific assessments of stocks and as a consequence also the scientific advice on management and in particular on the outtake from stocks. We have experienced in NAFO the problems incorrect catch statistics lead to and would mention in particular the case of 3M cod.

Discarding contributes to stock decline and reduces the contribution from strong year classes. At the same time the industry faces reduced profitability and loss of potential income. In a world where food security is a major problem, throwing away valuable food is highly unethical.

And yet, practically all fishing nations continue to allow discards, although this practice constitutes an incentive to get rid of less valuable catch and an incentive to continue fishing in areas where the vessels concerned may catch fish for which they have no quota. Here in NAFO where there are so many stocks under moratorium, the issue of discards should be a major concern to us.

The countries in the North East Atlantic have adapted a discard ban and we understand that the EU is now gradually introducing such a ban as well.

In Norway a discard ban was introduced in 1987 and a general landing obligation in 2008. This has proved to be one of the most important management decisions we have made and we think it has been the main reason for ensuring sustainable management of our marine resources. Iceland has adopted similar measures.

The backbone of our discard ban, with supporting measures, is to protect juvenile and small fish to ensure that they are allowed to become reproductive, as a strong spawning biomass is necessary for the sustainability of the stocks and the basis for harvesting. Furthermore, it contributes to protect larger fish against high-grading and discards of bycatch, for example of species for which the vessel has no quota. In light of the results we have obtained, we think it is worthwhile to examine the feasibility of introducing policies to minimize or eliminate discards in NAFO.

However, as a stand-alone measure, a discard ban in itself is not enough. We should therefore probably start by identifying why discards occur in the various NAFO fisheries. This would then form



basis for considering the introduction of additional measures which will reduce the risk of getting unwanted catches (i.e. juvenile and small fish, bycatch of other species). This could entail i.a. the introduction of selective gears such as sorting grids, maybe closed areas, move-on provisions, bycatch regulations.

We do not think the task we are proposing will be easy, and we would not propose the adoption of any measures at this stage. But we would propose that we give STACTIC and the WG-BDS the task of looking into this as part of the instructions given to both groups for 2018.

Proposal

As a priority task, STACTIC and the WG-BDS shall each prepare separate plans for evaluating the feasibility of introducing policies to minimize or eliminate discards in NAFO. The plan for evaluation shall address the following, including identifying where other NAFO bodies may have a role.

The WG-BDS shall, taking into account the Action Plan in the Management and Minimization of Bycatch and Discards, consider the following:

- Reasons or objectives for eliminating discards,
- Performance indicators to be considered in evaluating the implications of eliminating discards (e.g., conservation and sustainability, ecosystem function, economic benefits, food security, reliability of scientific advice, cost of managing fisheries, public perception of fisheries and fishery management),
- Analysis of how well a policy to eliminate discards will perform relative to the objectives, and compared to alternative approaches for addressing the objectives, and
- Current or potential impacts of discards on quota management

STACTIC shall consider the following:

- Identification of the current discard obligations in the NAFO Conservation and Enforcement Measures,
- Compilation of existing relevant domestic legislation of the Contracting Parties and review the various policies implemented,
- Examination of possible measures to minimize or eliminate discards in the various NAFO fisheries, including measures such as selectivity requirements, incentives for fishermen not to discard, and/or bans on discarding, and
- Review the approaches to the control of the landing obligations implemented domestically by Contracting Parties, and identify best practices and challenges.

STACTIC and WG-BDS shall coordinate their plans, including realistic timetables, and present them to the Commission during the annual meeting in 2018.