

Discards ban 'will boost fisheries', says new research

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Banning fisheries discards in the North Sea will promote fish stock recovery and increase fishermen's incomes, according to new research by scientists at the University of York.

In the [North Sea](#) up to 75 per cent of fish are currently dumped after being caught, with the result that many [fisheries](#) are now badly overfished. In comparison, discards were banned in Norwegian waters in the late 1980s and their fisheries are now some of the most prosperous in the world.

The research, published in the journal *Reviews in Fisheries Science*, involved a comparison of long-term data sets on cod, haddock, saithe and herring in the North Sea with stocks of these species in the Norwegian North-East Arctic. Norwegian fisheries were in crisis when the discard ban was introduced, but have since rebounded dramatically. The researchers analysed catch rates in the Norwegian fisheries and the age structure of the fish stocks to demonstrate that much of this recovery was down to the discard ban. They also highlighted that current North Sea stocks have the potential to increase even more rapidly than their Norwegian counterparts did.

Lead author, Ben Diamond, who carried out much of the research during his MSc degree in the Environment Department at York, said: "Whilst widely regarded as both unethical and a waste of resources, the discarding of fish at sea has traditionally been considered a necessary evil to help conserve fishery resources. This research directly challenges

that view. When combined with other measures, a ban on discards has been shown to be a much more effective means of ensuring fisheries are managed sustainably".

Dr Bryce Beukers-Stewart, co-author and supervisor of the study added "I have no doubt that a ban on discarding in the North Sea will benefit both fish stocks and [fishermen](#). However, it will need to be introduced sensibly and with the support of all stakeholders. Closing areas with high numbers of young fish, and the use of selective [fishing gear](#) and [electronic monitoring](#) systems onboard fishing boats will be key tools in this regard. "

The issue of fisheries discards has gained increasing prominence this year with the launch of the Fish Fight campaign by the celebrity chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall. A series of television programmes in January launched a drive to secure a ban on discards through the current reform of the European Common Fisheries Policy and for consumers to dine on a wider range of fish species, many of which are currently discarded. The campaign has generated almost 700,000 signatories to date, sales of alternative fish species have soared, and the European Commission recently proposed plans to phase in a discard ban.

Welcoming these latest research findings Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall said: "This analysis provides a powerful argument for a seachange in the management of European fisheries. The banning of fisheries discards must be the first step in this process."

Nevertheless, some sections of the fishing industry are still critical of plans to ban discards, arguing that the measure will threaten fragile fishing communities by forcing them to land lower value fish.

But Dr Beukers-Stewart says: "Discards simply squander valuable resources. Our research demonstrates that while there may be some short-

term costs, a ban on discards is essential if European [fish stocks](#) are to become sustainable in the long term."

Provided by University of York

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