

EU fish discard ban agreed -- for 2019

June 13 2012



Greenpeace activists block the access to the Council building in Luxembourg during an Agriculture, fisheries and food council, on June 12. After 20 hours of talks into the early hours Wednesday, Europe's fisheries ministers finally struck a compromise deal to save the oceans from overfishing -- but which failed to satisfy environmentalists.

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The deal for a 2014 reform of the Common Fisheries Policy notably will ban the contested practice of discarding [dead fish](#) caught by accident, however not before 2019.

Ministers agreed that the European Union, the world's third fishing power, would tackle the problem of shrinking [fish stocks](#) in its oceans by limiting over-fishing by 2015 for some stocks, and 2020 at the latest.

Scientists say 80 percent of Mediterranean stocks are overfished -- meaning fish cannot reproduce quickly enough -- although the situation has improved in [Atlantic waters](#).

Though the deal outraged environmentalists as too little too late, the EU's Fisheries Commissioner Maria Damanaki, who had lobbied for more far-reaching reform, welcomed backing for "a real discard ban with clear end dates".

She also said the ministers made "a real step forward" by endorsing proposals to set so-called Maximum Sustainable Yields (MSY) -- the maximum amount of fish that can be caught without compromising ability to reproduce.

"These are great achievements," she said while adding that "it is a fact that the Commission proposal is more ambitious".

Damanaki, along with green groups, urged the [European parliament](#) to toughen up the ministerial compromise when the accord comes before it for debate.

"Governments choose to perpetrate the status quo, wasting the once-in-a-decade opportunity to put the fisheries sector on the road to recovery," said the [World Wildlife Fund](#). "We call on MEPs to keep working towards [sustainable fisheries](#)."

Dubbing the deal "highly disappointing", Ocean protection group Oceana said "ministers did not question the need to change [fisheries management](#), they just admitted they are not ready to do it now.

"It is now up to the parliament to lead and make the necessary and immediate changes required."

Environmental groups say discards waste 1.3 million tonnes of fish a year and wanted an immediate ban on the practice.

Britain, Germany, the Netherlands and Scandinavian nations favoured forcing fishermen to bring all catches to port and deduct discards from their quotas.

But France and Spain notably argued for a "realistic, progressive" ban.

The ministers also ditched the Commission's proposal to stop subsidies to the fishing fleet by 2013.

The Netherlands and Sweden were unhappy with the final outcome, saying it failed to protect the oceans while Malta, Portugal and Slovenia thought it too pro-environmental.

Britain and France deemed the compromise a step in the right direction.

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