

EU ministers reach deal on fish discards ban

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A fishing boat anchors at the fishing port of Isla Cristina, southern Spain, on December 15, 2011. EU fishery ministers agreed Wednesday to implement a ban on discards—the wasteful practice of dumping unwanted fish overboard—by easing quota limits, much to the anger of environmental groups.

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After talks Tuesday ran overnight to some 20 hours, ministers reached a "general approach" on the discard ban adopted in June last year as part of an overhaul of fisheries policy to put it on a more sustainable basis.

The key principle is that all fish caught will be landed, with none discarded, but fisherman will be granted leeway on existing quotas so that they can adjust over time to the new approach.

Under the accord, there will be a 9.0 percent exemption from quotas for the first two years, falling to 8.0 percent in the next two and finally 7.0 percent while some quotas may be transferable.

"These exemptions apply under strict conditions, in particular that all such catches should be fully recorded," a statement after the meeting said.

Ministers also agreed that some of the fish landed that otherwise would have been discarded could be used for charitable purposes.



Anchovy fishing boats arrive in the port of Saint-Nazaire, western France to obtain fishing quotas on July 10, 2007. EU fishery ministers agreed Wednesday to implement a ban on discards—the wasteful practice of dumping unwanted fish overboard—by easing quota limits, much to the anger of environmental groups.

The changes will be introduced from January 1, 2014 and be phased in through to 2019 depending on the [fish species](#) and the sea areas.

Irish Agriculture, Food and Marine Minister Simon Coveney, who chaired the talks, said ministers had wanted to see real change in how EU [fish stocks](#) are exploited and managed.

The accord would meet environmental concerns over stocks and sustainability, while ensuring that fishermen would still have a job in five to 10 years time, Coveney said.

EU Fisheries Commissioner Maria Damanaki said the deal represented "a major change" and promised help for the [fishing industry](#) as it adjusts to the new policy.

Environmental groups attacked the accord.

"France and Spain led a group of countries into dismantling a hard earned discard ban that was overwhelmingly passed through the [European Parliament](#) last month," the Oceana group said in a statement.

All member states agreed to the proposal, except Sweden which wanted a much more restrictive deal, and it now goes forward for further

discussion with the European Parliament.

After agreeing the discard ban last year, talks on implementing it proved technically very difficult.

Small and young fish, for example, could be removed by changing net sizes but multi-species fisheries proved much more difficult since there was no obvious technical answer to prevent unwanted fish being taken.

In this case, any accord had to resolve what to do with the unwanted catch until fishermen can adjust their methods to minimise the problem.

It has been estimated that up to a quarter of all [fish](#) caught in the EU is discarded, with virtually all dying as a result, making it a huge problem at a time when most stocks are under pressure from over-fishing.

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