

EU officials, lawmakers agree fisheries reform

May 30 2013, by Bryan Mcmanus



Fish pictured in a net on the boat near the port of Le Guilvinec, northwest France on September 9, 2010. EU officials and European lawmakers finally agreed a fisheries reform package on Thursday, winning a guarded welcome from green groups with a commitment to protect stocks and control the wasteful dumping of unwanted fish.

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of unwanted fish.

Irish Agriculture and Fisheries Minister Simon Coveney, who chaired all-night talks, said the accord "places [sustainability](#) firmly at its core."

Quotas will be set on the basis of Maximum Sustainable Yield levels to ensure that an underlying fish breeding stock is protected, Coveney said in a statement .

The current wasteful and damaging practice of dumping unwanted fish overboard will be banned, he said, but controversial exemptions will also be allowed.

Discards are estimated to account for up to a quarter, and perhaps more of the total EU catch, and the European Parliament had backed a total ban earlier this year.

The fishery industry, and especially Spain, balked, saying a complete ban was unworkable as [fishermen](#) inevitably catch unwanted or unsuitable fish even when trying not to.

An initial compromise allowed fishermen to discard up to 9.0 percent of their catch for two years, falling to 8.0 percent for the next two years and then finally to 7.0 percent.

Under pressure from [lawmakers](#) and environmental groups, this was reluctantly changed to 7.0, 6.0 and then 5.0 percent.



French fishermen leave the port of Quiberon, western France on October 30, 2012. EU officials and European lawmakers finally agreed a fisheries reform package on Thursday, winning a guarded welcome from green groups with a commitment to protect stocks and control the wasteful dumping of unwanted fish.

Ulrike Rodust, the rapporteur for the [European Parliament](#)'s fisheries committee, said accepting this regime "was a big concession by us" but noted that countries would now have to ask for this right to discard.

Recognising the industry's difficulties with a ban on discards, Rodust said: "I think that the compromise we have arrived at is a very good one."

Coveney also stressed the importance of the compromises made, highlighting how fisheries decisions will now be made on a local basis, and not in Brussels, with protections for sensitive areas such as fish

[breeding grounds](#) and juvenile stocks.

The accord, which goes to member states and then the full Parliament for final approval, establishes a "new model for the next 10 years ... which will protect fishing communities ... and ensure they will have stocks to fish," Coveney said.

The discard issue was "one of the most contentious and difficult to agree given the many different perspectives on how such a ban would work in practice," he added.

EU Fisheries Commissioner Maria Damanaki hailed the accord, noting that its provisions will also apply globally to EU fishing boats, not just in EU waters.

The Commission also released new figures showing that progress was being made in restoring stocks—39 percent of species in the Northeast Atlantic were now overfished, down from 47 percent in 2012 and 95 percent in 2005.

The EU is third to China and Peru in global fisheries rankings.

Environmental groups generally welcomed the accord as a considerable step forward, if still falling short of all it could be.

"For decades in Europe, fishing has been a story of decline," Greenpeace EU [fisheries](#) policy director Saskia Richartz said.

"The deal that is emerging today is good news, even if we are disappointed that ministers blocked a deadline for the recovery of fish stocks," Richartz said.

"For the first time, the EU has recognised the value of low-impact

fishermen by highlighting the need for social and environmental criteria in the allocation of fishing quotas."

The WWF said the accord "includes some positive elements but fails to end overfishing over the next generations."

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