

## Failure of EU fisheries talks would be 'disaster', Ireland says

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Irish Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Simon Coveney (R) talks to Spain's Minister for Agriculture Miguel Arias Canete prior to the start of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting held at the European Union Council building in Brussels, on May 13, 2013.

It will be a "disaster" if difficult talks on reform of the EU's under-pressure fishing regime fail to deliver an agreement, Ireland warned Tuesday, calling on all sides to compromise.

"It would be a disaster for everybody if (the [negotiations](#)) fall through," Irish Agriculture and Fisheries Minister Simon Coveney said, adding: "This is not an easy discussion."

Coveney, chairing the talks under Ireland's six-month EU presidency, is trying to reconcile the conflicting interests of member states with the hardline stance of the [European Parliament](#).

The key sticking point is Parliament's insistence that discards—the wasteful practice of dumping unwanted [fish](#) overboard—should be banned.

European [fishing boats](#) have long discarded fish, by some estimates up to a quarter or more of their catch, before entering port to ensure they meet strict EU quotas.

Simple in principle, in practice a discards ban poses real challenges for [fisheries](#) and quota management, as well as increased costs for the industry in key states such as Spain.

After Parliament approved the ban in February, Coveney worked out a compromise with member states based on the principle that in future all fish caught must be brought to land.

However, in the first two years of the new policy, [fishermen](#) would have the right to discard up to 9.0 percent of their catch overboard, falling to 8.0 percent for the next two years and then finally to 7.0 percent.

Many [lawmakers](#) and environmental groups attacked that as undermining the whole reform effort while Spain and other major fishing nations remained distinctly lukewarm.

Coveney said Tuesday that in an effort to meet [Parliament](#)'s concerns,

the talks were now looking at a discard regime of 7.0, 6.0 and then 5.0 percent for any fishery overall.

Individual boats on a single trip could opt for a 9.0 percent discard rate so as to allow some flexibility on both sides, he said.

"I am not going to come back to (ministers) again ... we don't have enough time," he said, adding that Lithuania, which takes over from Ireland in July, does not have room for the issue on its agenda.

Coveney stressed that the wider reforms he was pushing would put the EU's fishing industry on a sustainable, scientific basis.

"We are committed to fishing" on a Maximum Sustainable Yield basis—a regime meant to ensure an adequate breeding stock remains in place—and "everyone agrees that that is the objective," he said.

"If we don't get this agreed at the council of ministers now, it is hard to see when it is going to be agreed," Coveney added.

The talks are due to conclude Tuesday but could last well into the night.

Some 47 percent of fish stocks in the Atlantic and 80 percent in the Mediterranean are believed to be overfished.

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