

Big bang or a soft whistle? Expected changes to European fisheries under the Landing Obligation

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To reduce over-exploitation and unsustainable fishing practices, European fishers are now obliged to land unwanted catch at a cost to incentivize catching the 'good ones'. Undocumented 'discarding' of quota- or size-regulated animals at sea has, at least, technically, become history. The overall aim of this policy is to catch less but utilize more, and it challenges those fishers who used to throw away large portions of their catch dead or dying to become more selective. With the implementation of this "Landing Obligation" in full swing, the big question is whether this policy change will deliver, and so contribute to a recovery of European fish stocks, or whether it will do more harm than good? This presentation summarizes the recent release of a book published by Springer about the Landing Obligation which timely bundled relevant research results including evaluations of its impacts at economical, socio-cultural, ecological and institutional levels. In 20 chapters set into five sections, this book comprehensively compiles and profiles most of the up-to-date outcomes from multi-annual Horizon 2020 DiscardLess and Minouw projects, amongst others, and also provides viewpoints from policy makers, NGOs and fishing organization representatives. In a nutshell, some of this work suggests that, if fully complied with, a reduction of discarding will eventually lead to healthier stocks in the long run, at a fraction of costs for the fishing industry. Innovative, bottom-up initiatives to develop more selective fishing gears have received a boost from the Landing Obligation, as well as established and novel techniques to assess survival of discards and identification of species based on genetic fingerprinting. However, the policy's success may hinge on its fleet-wide enforcement. The uptake of innovations by fishers and a mindset to adapt to the required changes may take a decade or more to develop, as examples from countries such as Iceland and Norway, where similar policies have been implemented, have shown.

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