

SELF-SAMPLING: A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION?

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Most of the data on commercial catches, landings as well as discards, are collected during commercial surveys by seagoing observers. However, they can collect those data only during a few trips a year onboard of a few vessels. Fishermen on the other hand, can provide haul-based data on catch compositions and discard quantities or can collect biological information throughout the whole year. Thus, a Fisheries Science Partnership (FSP) programme i.e. a self-sampling programme, based on a strong co-operation between the scientists and the fishing sector, would allow a serious increase in spatial and temporal coverage and reduce problems of very large raising factors based on scientific observer data only. In other words, self-sampling could provide valuable information on the abundance and distribution of commercial species and improve the quality of the data available to scientists and managers. The ultimate objective of this FSP programme is two-folded: on the one hand to contribute to more accurate stock assessments and advice by ICES and on the other hand to complement and strengthen fisheries science programmes and engage the industry in the collection of fisheries data. On request and initiative of the Belgian fisheries sector, the Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research (ILVO), in close cooperation with the fisheries sector, started a self-sampling programme to identify the impact of the Belgian beam trawl fishery on the Celtic Sea (areas VII f and VII g) cod stock. Fishermen of several vessels are participating in the pilot project on a voluntary basis. The skippers and crew were trained by scientists of ILVO to follow a standard sampling protocol for collecting and recording data. This FSP Celtic Sea cod programme aims to gather robust, accurate and detailed information on catches (landings and discards) of cod and to promote a better relationship between scientists and fishermen.