

Live or let die: survival of discarded plaice

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The reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) does away with the practice of throwing back unwanted catch ('discarding') via the introduction of a 'landing obligation' (also called 'discard ban'). This will make it obligatory to bring ashore every individual of a certain species. It will be introduced gradually, between 2015 and 2019 for all commercial fisheries in European waters and applies to species with a total allowable catch (TAC) limit, and/or a minimum landing size. But, to reduce the risk of landing and killing large numbers of organisms that may have otherwise survived the capture-and-discarding process, several European member states have started research to assess how likely they are to survive this. If a species survives well, an exemption to the landing obligation can be granted by the European Commission. However, the condition of discards is influenced by many technical, environmental and biological factors and varies within and between species (Broadhurst *et al.*, 2006; Uhlmann & Broadhurst, 2013). A commonly discarded species that may be relatively robust to some of these stressors, is European plaice (*Pleuronectes platessa*). Thus, the aim of this project is to quantify discard mortality of plaice discarded under variable conditions from Belgian beam trawlers. The fate of a random selection of fish will be assessed just before they are thrown back overboard and additionally of 240 live fish held in three monitoring racks with 48 separate, 24-l containers will be monitored regularly for a period of between 4 and 21 days. Beyond mortality, responsiveness to innate action reflexes and presence and severity of external damages will be assessed to establish whether a relationship exists with mortality. If this is the case, then reflexes may be used to estimate discard mortality in the future (Davis, 2010) to complement more costly *in situ* assessments. Mitigating the effects of other potential influential variables (e.g. gear deployment duration, and air exposure on deck) may also further alleviate stress and fatalities of discards.

References

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