

# The North Sea Regional Advisory Council

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## Position Paper 4 (2012/13)

Lowri Evans  
Director General – DG MARE  
European Commission  
B-1049  
Brussels  
Belgium

19<sup>th</sup> December 2012

Dear Ms Evans

### **Re. Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on certain technical and control measures in the Skagerrak and amending Regulation (EC) No 850/98 and Regulation (EC) No 1342/2008 (COM(2012) 471 final)**

The NSRAC welcomes that the Commission, late August 2012, tabled the proposal implementing a discard ban in the Skagerrak as agreed between EU and Norway on 4 July 2012. Following discussions on the issue in the Skagerrak and Kattegat Working Group the NSRAC would like to make the following comments to the proposal introducing a new management model for the Skagerrak.

#### *Economic aspect*

The discard ban will be a major challenge for the fishing industry and the local communities where fishing in the Skagerrak is an important economic activity. In this respect, the NSRAC calls for an impact assessment of the Proposal. An impact assessment is essential to get a comprehensive picture of the possible outcomes of the discard ban and the new management model for the Skagerrak.

The discard ban may cause a significant reduction in income for fishermen. As part of the new management model for the Skagerrak the fishermen will have to use new and more selective gear than today. Furthermore, when also undersized fish must be landed and counted against the quota this will lead to a fast depletion of quota and reduced earnings because larger fish, on average, have a higher market price than smaller fish of the same stock.

Additionally, the practicalities and cost of handling and landing of all catches could be significant, especially in mixed fisheries. Many vessels will have to invest in handling gear and storing facilities. Today, many, especially small, vessels are not fit for or do not have the

facilities to store and handle all the catch. The costs of the technical alterations to vessels following the discard ban should not be underestimated.

In this respect, it is important to have agreed that these fundamental changes in the management system justifies increased TAC levels. The increases shall of course be guided by scientific advice from ICES but at the end of the day it is the responsibility of the Commission and Norway to finalise these calculations.

Having said this, the discard ban must be seriously monitored and evaluated not only with focus on the impact on the stocks but certainly also with focus on the development in the economy of the fisheries sector.

### *Handling of undersized fish*

The NSRAC agrees that it is undesirable if a discard ban leads to fishing targeting and increasing the landing of undersized fish. However, in the Skagerrak both Norway and the EU already have regulations in place like the RTC regulations to protect depletion of aggregations of juvenile fish. Furthermore, as part of the new management model for the Skagerrak the general minimum mesh size will be increased from 90 mm to 120 mm – this with the aim of improving the selectivity of the fishing gear to reduce catches of undersized fish.

The industry representatives in the NSRAC could consider different ways to make it less attractive to bring fish under a certain size to the markets, but find that it would be a mistake to restrict the use of caught undersized fish for reduction to fish meal, oil and pet food. Such a restriction is not justified by biological arguments and it places unnecessary economic burdens on the industry as the prices for fish used for meal, oil and pet food are low compared to prices for fish sold for human consumption. If the sale and use and of the landings is restricted, the costs of handling the catches - gutting, storing on board and on land - could easily exceed the earnings.

There must be an economic incentive for fishermen to land all catches. A way forward could be that the fishermen receive only part of the revenue of the sale of undersized fish to cover the costs of fishing, but that most part of the revenue goes to a fund to be used for scientific projects improving fishing selectivity. This should be a pilot project as part of the new management model for the Skagerrak.

We believe in a bigger perspective that it is ethically wrong to prohibit human consumption of fish below a certain size. This error is in itself almost as big as discards of fish.

### *Entry into force*

Having said this, the NSRAC considers it important that the time schedule for the introduction of the discard ban is realistic. The Council and the Parliament will not be in position to adopt the proposal before spring 2013. Also, EU and Norway still have work to do to wrap up the whole package on the Skagerrak management model. Furthermore, when adopted it has to be followed by implementing rules by the Commission and the relevant Member States – and it is certainly our understanding that there still is much work to do.

The discard ban will only work, if the industry has adequate time to adapt to the new regulations and are involved in the implementing process. Therefore, we encourage the Commission and the relevant Member States to do whatever it takes to finish the legislative process before summer 2013 and set the date for entry into force to the 1 January 2014.

### *A management plan for the Skagerrak?*

With all the new radical changes it seems logic to start working on a multiannual management plan for the fishing stocks in the Skagerrak. This will be the next step towards sustainable fisheries management in the Skagerrak and the fishing industry and other relevant stakeholders are dedicated to start working towards this next step.

### *Regionalisation*

For the NSRAC the process on the development of a new management model for the Skagerrak has been a somewhat disappointing experience. Though a major stakeholder, the NSRAC has not been invited to participate in the process leading to the EU-Norway agreement on a discard ban in the Skagerrak.

A lesson learned from this process is that though we might all agree that more regionalisation would be a benefit for the common fisheries policy, it certainly is a major challenge to put into practice when we have joint management of stocks with third countries. Furthermore, there will not really be any regionalisation in the North Sea before the existence and advice of the RACs/ACs is acknowledged by the Norwegian authorities.

Regards,



Niels Wichmann  
Chairman NSRAC