

“Adapt, improvise and overcome: fishermen’s responses to the Landing Obligation”

EDF-convened panel session – Industry and Policy Day

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Abstract

1.0 Overview and context

On 13th June 2016, as part of the dedicated “Industry and Policy Day” at the 18th biennial International Institute for Fisheries Economics and Trade (IIFET) Conference, Environmental Defense Fund Europe convened a unique panel of presenters – drawing on front-line expertise from fishing industry – in order to facilitate an open discussion on innovative responses to the Common Fisheries Policy’s Landing Obligation (LO).

Facing a changing policy landscape can challenge fishing businesses of all sizes, and the introduction of the Landing Obligation – which requires fishermen to land and account for all of their catch rather than discarding unwanted fish – is arguably the most significant policy change in a generation, when it comes to on-the-water fishing practices. In the face of this challenge, a growing constituency of active fishermen are adapting the way in which they fish, and seeking innovative solutions to eliminate quota discards.

Panel Chair Dr Erik Lindebo led a wide-ranging discussion of tools and approaches that are being applied across Europe to offer support in overcoming the challenges of the “discard ban”, as industry moves towards full implementation by 2019. The session explored the value of these

different collaborative, or industry-led, management approaches in ensuring long-term sustainability, profitability and industry compliance in a range of fisheries.

The in-depth dialogue on the subject, entitled “Adapt, improvise and overcome: fishermen’s responses to the Landing Obligation”, included small-scale fisheries, scientific perspectives and industry comment on the future of fishing under the LO. The important role of the processing sector was also underlined.

The panel discussed and was able to comment on:

- The importance of flexibility in technical measures, to encourage gear innovation and optimisation of fishing practices to reduce unwanted catches;
- The value of co-management approaches and quota flexibility in meeting LO requirements and mitigating choke situations;
- Applying these principles, and what best practice looks like, in small scale artisanal fisheries;
- Innovative partnership with seafood businesses; and
- The use of science collaboration in finding solutions to the LO.

The overall aim of the session was to provide a crucial platform for the exchange of knowledge from within fishing communities and to debate emerging new ideas, taking a practical, optimistic approach in an area which has been at risk of being dominated by negative discourse to date.

2.0 Dr Erik Lindebo, Environmental Defense Fund – Opening statement

Session Chair Dr Erik Lindebo opened the discussion by acknowledging that the Landing Obligation has represented a huge change in the European fishing landscape, and will continue to do so.

“But we’re surrounded by optimistic, pragmatic solutions that can make a difference, especially to mitigate some of the all-important choke problems.”

He asserted that the key now is to ensure fishing industry and policy are on the same page when it comes to fully utilising the management toolbox, allowing innovation and best practice to come to the fore via the simplest route possible.

3.0 David Stevens, Crystal Sea Fishing – Innovation opportunities and challenges for his fishing operation as highlighted by the UK Catch Quota Trial

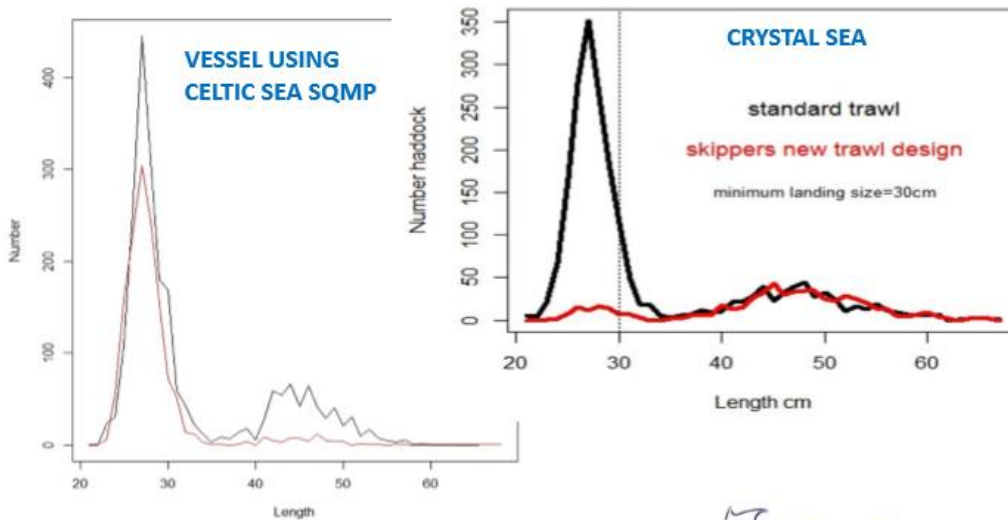
David Stevens skippers alongside his brother Alec on their 20-meter trawler, *The Crystal Sea*, fishing out of Newlyn. They were invited by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) in 2013 to take part in a “Catch Quota Trial” (CQT). The main aims of the trial were to:

- Successfully operate a Fully Documented Fishery by using Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) to verify skipper records; and
- Test and monitor selective gears to study how to avoid haddock becoming a choke species.

During Stevens’ presentation he detailed how Crystal Sea Fishing went on to work with Cefas on further selectivity trials and emphasised how worthwhile he finds the collaborative approach to be, in that everyone involved in the trials now understands the arguments and challenges on all sides – from a management, science, and policy perspective.

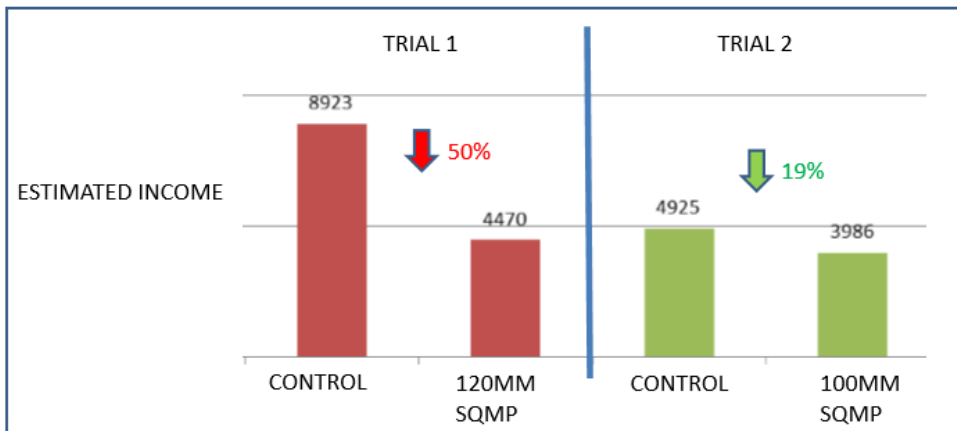
It took three years for Stevens to establish a Fully Documented Fishery, working to reduce catches of juvenile haddock by experimenting with mesh sizes. Stevens demonstrated the growth of standard selectivity in line with improved incentivised selectivity measures. Overall, Stevens and his brother have been averaging a 90-95% reduction in catch of juvenile fish as a result of their self-driven gear adaptation.

Standard selectivity against improved incentivised selectivity measures



However, Stevens stressed that this has not resolved the issue of choke species. Haddock is Crystal Sea Fishing’s single biggest choke, despite their owning 10-15% of the allocated quota within the UK. In his presentation Stevens stated the need for real-time data and a reconsideration of policy objectives in relation to the discard ban. He asserted that attempting to drastically reduce discards within the current policy framework is pushing fisheries towards economic collapse, even with improved selectivity through gear innovation. Stevens’ experiences with the CQT come with a stark economic warning: in achieving the discard efficiencies necessary to meet the LO, Stevens has been obliged to reduce his overall catch to the extent that his fishery is now operating at a 19% economic reduction in comparison to previous years..

Taking fisheries to economic tipping point



Too efficient reduction of discards =
economically unviable fishery

Stevens commented that one reason for the choke situation is the overarching policy of relative stability, particularly in the instances of hake in the North Sea and cod and haddock in South West. He asserted that these challenges could be tackled with better pairing of policy and science. He affirmed that improved policy incentives such as buffer quota, group TAC and a quota currency system, will go a long way in avoiding the race to fish. He also passionately advocated for the use of REM for real-time data that can encourage trust and transparency between industry and policy stakeholders by independently verifying skipper records. Stevens acknowledged that industry cannot push for flexibility, or a move away from the precautionary approach in estimating MSY, without increased transparency and accurate real-time data.

Stevens concluded his presentation by declaring the need for policy makers and other stakeholders to understand economics from an industry perspective. Fishermen do not want to discard and Crystal Sea Fishing has showcased the industry desire to protect juveniles, but they face serious economic challenges in adhering to the LO. Understanding and collaboration are required from the policy side in order to overcome such barriers.

“The collaborative approach to implementation is truly worthwhile. When you give fishermen the ability and incentive to deal with the issues themselves, they are able to come up with the best solutions. Fishermen need the freedom to take control of their fisheries.”

4.0 Peter Olsson, Swedish Fishermen’s Producer Organisation – Use of the co-management process to establish a new quota management system

Peter Olsson’s presentation focused on the specific challenges faced by Swedish fishermen under the Landing Obligation, and how the Swedish Fishermen’s Producer Organisation (SFPO) have been working to address these through engaging in a co-management process to establish effective quota management and selectivity solutions.

Swedish industry flagged the key issues of LO implementation early on, identifying choke species and weekly allowances inciting a “race to fish”, wherein several vessels can force the rest

of the fleet to stay in port by quickly fishing all the available quota. Olsson described how the industry is now designing and developing a new quota management system to tackle the above issues through co-management. The SFPO have established working groups for each key fishery, ensuring that both small- and large-scale fisheries are represented and striving for transparency and positive engagement.

Through their collaborative efforts the Swedish fishermen were able to identify and test a number of possible tools to enable effective LO implementation. In his presentation, Olsson discussed the benefits of annual vessel quota allocations, temporary transfer of quota, and quota for bycatch. In terms of selectivity solutions, Olsson detailed his fishery's experimentation with prawn grids in the nephrop trawler and use of Real Time Closures (RTC).

Olsson concluded by asserting that a fisherman must be able to take responsibility for his own future, and stating that "*It is possible to prosper with increased selectivity*". He believes that the LO can work if the right conditions are provided.

*"We just need to make use of the tools available. With the right combination of tools and policy measures we can create the right conditions for sustainability **and** strong businesses."*

5.0 Pam Ruitter, Environmental Defense Fund – Best-practice approaches in non-quota managed fisheries in Spain

As Senior Project Manager for EDF in Spain, Pam Ruitter was able to provide an insightful southern European perspective on the value of co-management in ensuring robust and effective fisheries management. She spoke about the on-going collaboration between EDF and WWF Spain and provided examples of fishermen addressing the challenges of the LO in Spain.

The key to successful LO implementation, Ruitter asserted, is committed participation and co-management leading to a combination of improved data collection and monitoring, and better control and enforcement.

6.0 Dave Parker, Young's Seafood – Engagement of the processing sector, including Trawlright

As part of the panel session's demonstration of the possibilities of gear selectivity solutions, Young's Head of Corporate Social Responsibility Dave Parker spoke about "Project Trawlright", an innovative approach to reducing discards developed by fishermen in conjunction with Young's Seafood.

Parker explained that as a seafood processor Young's feel they have a responsibility and a commitment to supporting sustainable fishing and waste reduction, and that they are currently concerned about the future supply of seafood in the advent of the LO. Young's want to both enable and empower fishermen to meet the challenging new legislation head on. He stated that there has been much talk on discards, but insufficient action and, for Young's, Project Trawlright seemed an obvious positive step to take.

The trials were carried out in October and November 2015, and February 2016. As part of the standard Cefas sampling protocol, there was a control rig and an experimental rig, and the Port and Starboard catches were separated. A camera was also used on board.

They employed charter vessel *The Providence* as an experimental platform for the project. With a twin rig and shelter deck of around 15m or above, the vessel is characteristic of the UK prawn fleet. Their target species are langoustine and scampi (*Nephrops norvegicus*).

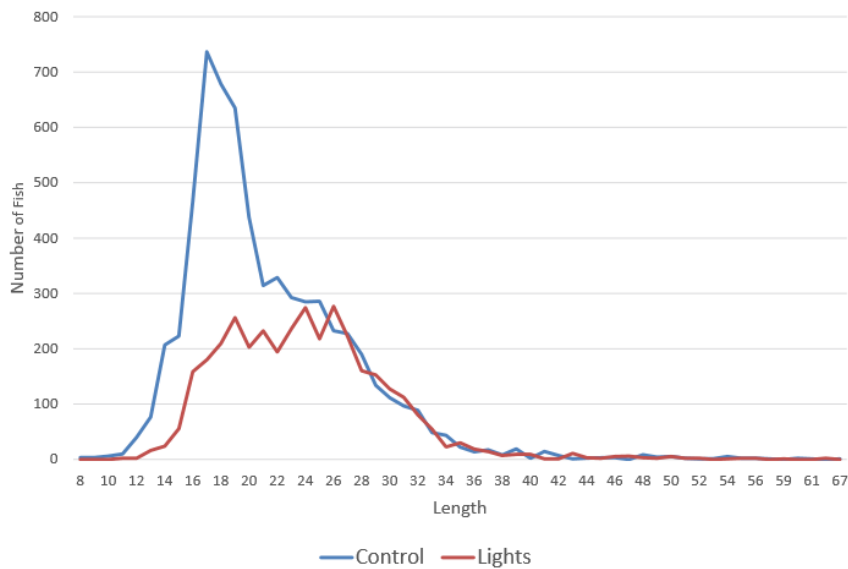
Trawlright gear, the design of which is now available to the public, is characterised by 90mm aperture light rings (x6) - bright LEDS which are bolted into the square mesh panel on the starboard side trawl. When the trawl is deployed, careful inspection highlights the glowing patches in the net which are clearly visible for a significant duration due to their brightness.

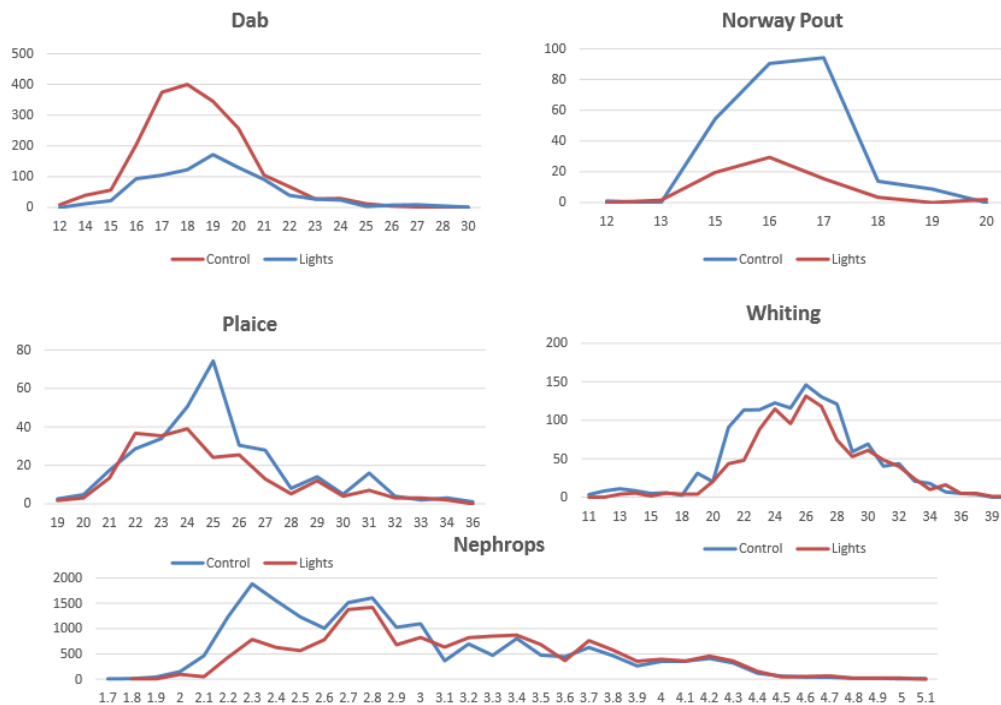
Once the net with the light rings was unloaded, the catch had to be rapidly decanted into containers for separation before the second net could be emptied and the trawl re-deployed. Subsamples of both the experimental and standard catches were then quickly recorded by Sam Elliot of Cefas who served as the independent science lead for the project, and also by Parker himself. This process allowed them to identify the effects of the experimental gear.

Using Trawlright gear *The Providence* achieved:

- A 53% reduction in the number of whiting at lengths below 15cm (MLS 27cm);
- 24% reduction in the number of whiting at lengths below 15cm (MLS 27cm); and
- 41% reduction in dab between lengths of 15-18cm (no MLS).

Total Number of Fish per Length for All Species Caught





Parker acknowledged that further work is needed to gather more robust data. There were a limited number of hauls in the experiment and they did not have a chance to swap the experimental and control rigs, or take into account a possible difference in ground gear. There was also a video footage failure at one point.

However fewer fish, especially small fish were caught overall in the experimental trawl, heralding an excellent start for the Trawlright Project and demonstrating the potential of ongoing selective gear experimentation.

7. Outcomes and lessons

Following the presentations from industry and EDF representatives Mike Park, of the Scottish White Fish Producers Association, and Clara Ulrich of DTU-AQUA, and EU project DISCARDLESS, also joined in the debate. They underlined the importance of taking a positive approach in searching out the best ways to deliver a secure fishing future for industry.

"It's clear that legislators need to listen and be sensitive to the testimonies of fishermen", stated Erik Lindebo in his [follow up blog on the event](#). Environmental Defense Fund feel that it is important to do this within the context of constructive and mutually respectful dialogue, and they intend to continue to find channels through which to encourage this, and to champion the examples of ambitious fishermen generating best practice ahead of the curve.

Closely examining real life examples is the first step on the path to discovering practical implementation solutions for policies that affect livelihoods as well as ecosystems. It allows us to assess the on-the-water effectiveness of increased selectivity, different forms of smart quota management, and everything else in the toolbox. Such scenarios also let us see the potential limitations of policies and the need for further innovation from the bottom-up, as well as increased flexibility from the top-down.

8. Useful Links

IIFET 2016 Scotland Conference Proceedings

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/catch-quota-trials-reports>
- <http://blogs.edf.org/edfish/2016/08/22/fishermen-lead-the-way-in-discarding-old-habits/>
- <http://www.fis.com/fis/worldnews/worldnews.asp?monthyear=&day=14&id=85725&l=e&special=&ndb=1%20target>
- <http://www.fis.com/fis/worldnews/worldnews.asp?monthyear=&day=14&id=85725&l=s&special=&ndb=1%20target>
- <http://blog.through-the-gaps.co.uk/2016/07/iifet-2016-industry-innovation-landing.html>
- <http://www.fiskerforum.dk/en/news/b/prospering-with-higher-selectivity?platform=hootsuite>