

# Measuring the social impacts of the North Sea Cod Recovery Plan

The CCRI undertook a small survey of fishermen in EU Member States bordering on the North Sea. The focus for the project was an exploration of the social impacts arising from the Cod Recovery Plan. The work provided input to the evaluation of multi-annual plans for Cod in the Irish Sea, Kattegat, North Sea, Eastern Channel, and West of Scotland being undertaken by the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF).

There were three specific objectives for the survey:

- Exploring the effects of the Cod Recovery Plan on different fleet sectors
- Identifying consequences of the Plan for each vessel and the business decisions being taken by each vessel operator
- Exploring likely outcomes for the vessel/operator if the plan does not change

## Ascertaining the effects of the Cod Recovery Plan

The target population of vessel operators/owners were surveyed using an on-line questionnaire and telephone interviews. Respondents from the UK, France and the Netherlands constitute a small 'representative' sample of current fishing effort in the North Sea. Interviews were conducted over a 3 week period during June and July 2011.

The focus of the research was on the social impacts of the Cod Recovery Plan on fishing vessel owners and operators. In terms of impacts on vessels, the most common responses to the Recovery Plan were increased time in port, and switching of target species. On this latter point, many fishermen commented that they were taking measures to actively avoid catching Cod.

Change in Activity	Number of Vessels
Spend more time in port	14
Switch target species	12
Switch gear	6
Invest in new gear	3
Other change	7

Actions to avoid Cod were primarily associated with the need to switch fishing areas in order to avoid catching Cod. Relatively few vessels were investing in new gear to reduce Cod catches, with some indicating that selective gear was only partially successful.

Discarding was a common occurrence due to skippers wanting to maximise returns from individual trips (through 'high grading'). Discards were not solely related to Cod but also occurred across a wide range of other species (eg Whiting, Haddock, Sole). Overall, respondents felt that they were fishing "harder" in order to make trips economic.



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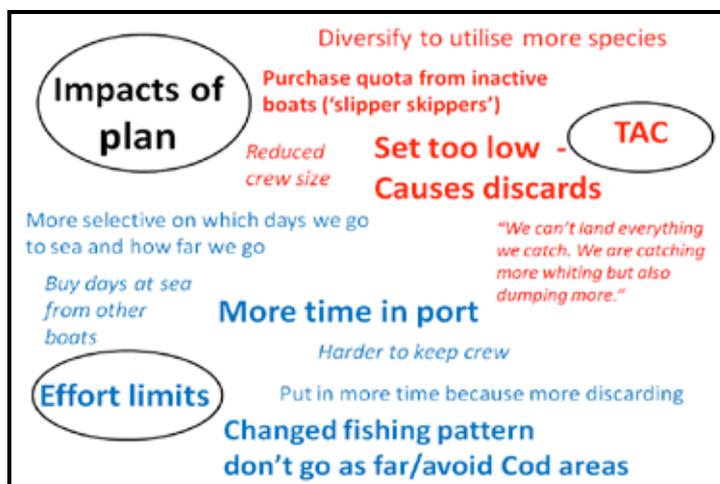
## Impacts of TAC and Effort Restrictions

The effects of Total Allowable Catch (TAC) and effort restrictions resulted in similar responses from interviewees. TAC resulted in an increase in discards for the majority of interviewees and high-grading in order to maximise profitability. Many respondents reported dumping significant amounts of marketable fish. Skippers also commented that they are buying-in quota, the price of which was increasing and further reducing profitability.

Figure 1 summarises the main findings: the red text relates to impacts from TAC limits and the blue text relates to impacts of effort limits. In each case the larger the typeface represents similar views from a larger number of respondents.

The key factor coming out of the data is that the TAC results in low quotas, which is causing higher levels of discards. The effort limits result in more time in port, changes in patterns of fishing activity, more time fishing due to catch composition rules, discarding, and knock-on effects which raise operating costs and make it harder to keep a crew.

Figure 1. Impacts of the restrictions



## Wider impacts on business operation

The impact of the Cod Recovery Plan on business decisions has been more influential. Figure 2 indicates that the main impacts are in terms of recruiting and keeping crews, investing in new equipment, and

planning for the future. Several vessels indicated the difficulties of recruiting crew when future incomes are so uncertain, in particular the difficulties of hiring young local people. Interviewees also expressed concern over difficulties of planning for the future when regulations are constantly changing and there is no guarantee of whether their enterprise could be profitable in future.

Several interviewees indicated little optimism that they would be able to remain in business under current conditions, which in turn is resulting in a knock-on impact in terms of reducing investments in new equipment and making operators much more careful in terms of purchasing supplies.

Figure 2. Impacts on business decisions

Impacts on business decisions	Number of Vessels
Recruit crew	7
Invest in new equipment	7
Buy supplies	3
Sell your catch	4
Think about the future	8
Planning fishing activity	3

## Summary

Perceived future impacts if the Recovery Plan remains unchanged were largely consistent across all respondents, with the majority indicating significant impacts for their business. A general air of business uncertainty, coupled with further decreased profitability would lead many to consider leaving the industry in the near future. Increasing operating costs (eg fuel prices, labour) were major associated considerations, leading in some cases to hiring of migrant labour.

The Cod Recovery Plan is creating financial difficulties through uncertainties associated with the future, and the quota and effort restrictions which limit time at sea.

The results of this sample are indicative of the views of fishermen operating under the Cod Recovery Plan. It is worth noting, however, that views and perceptions expressed by respondents tend to be consistent across the sample, whether they are from Scotland, Netherlands, England or France.



Note: It is important to keep in mind that the data presented here represents a snapshot from a small sample of fishing vessels operating in the North Sea.