

DISCARDING IN BEAM TRAWL FISHERIES: QUANTIFICATION AND REDUCTION (PRELIMINARY RESULTS)

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Since 2002, the European Union's Data Collection Regulation requires EU member states to collect discard data on commercial fishing vessels. In response, discard sampling in the Belgian beam trawl fishery is carried out by sea-going observers since 2003, but is mainly focused on commercially valuable fishes. From 2007, the research project TOETS prepares the extension of the data collection programme towards commercially unimportant fish species and non-fish organisms.

Four sampling trips were undertaken on Belgian beam trawlers in the TOETS framework so far (October 2007-January 2008). Both volume and composition of the discards were studied for different parts of the North Sea and the English Channel. In two trips, fishing gear type (among the various factors influencing the amount of discarded organisms in a catch) was manipulated on one side of the fishing vessel to evaluate potential reductions in discard yields through technical adaptations. The adaptations involved the use of square mesh codends and the incorporation of a benthos release panel.

The variability in volume and composition of discards (primarily changing with fishing vessel, geographic region and period of the year), and in commercial yield-to-discard ratios is illustrated. Furthermore, we compared catches of standard and adapted beam trawl nets to evaluate the alternatives' potentials to reduce fish and non-fish discards while commercial fish yield is retained (preliminary results).