
EU fishermen 'need flexibility, not micro-management'

March 22, 2013, 7:30 am

[Neil Ramsden](#)

Catch quota management and the ban on discards will be passed as part of the EU's common fishery policy reform, but for it to work, fishermen need to be given the control and flexibility to implement it.

This is the view Mogens Schou, former Danish ministers' adviser for fisheries and aquaculture and current chair of the EU Commission's standing committee on agricultural research for fish, gave *Undercurrent News* shortly after his presentation at the North Atlantic Seafood Forum.

Schou is also a partner in Aquamind, a firm which advises on designs and implementation sustainable fishing practices in line with EU law.

As part of this job Schou has worked with Danish fishermen to employ the catch quota management (CQM) system since 2008.

CQM is effectively the counting of all catches against quotas, which is in direct contrast to the current system in which the discarding of over-quota fish is standard.

CQM should lead to selective fishing, as well as much better data on the stocks of fish.

"The CQM scheme in Denmark has been used with full compliance and accountability for 140,000 fishing hours," he said.

"Aquamind's done some experiments with a few vessels fishing with a free choice of gear, and you can see, compared to selective gear provided by regulators, you can improve selectivity and improve fuel efficiency."

Put simply, his belief is that when CQM is in place, it is in the fishermen's interests financially to catch only what they should be – adult fish of the species they hold a quota for.

The most effective way to do that is to allow the fishermen the flexibility to choose gear, and fishing days, with which they can land the highest-value catch, as opposed to being micro-managed by strict regulations.

“My concern is that you do not remove micro-management once you introduce the CQM and the discard ban,” he said. “Failing to do so will entail a loss in wealth for society, and for the fisher who has to optimize within numerous rules instead of against the quota outtake alone.”

“There is no incentive among the legislators to remove this micro-management. The only chance I think to have it removed, is if the industry takes care of its own interests and demonstrates how it can be done.”

With that in mind, Schou is advocating large-scale trials of CQM in EU member states, where it can be judged by the relevant measures – value per catch unit, catch composition – and without the strict controls and regulations.

“It takes two hours to change fishing gear, but if you guys had to do it we would have to wait two years for Parliament and Council to act, and the situation would be quite different”

“Once the industry has demonstrated that this works it will be easier for the legislative powers to translate those terms of the trial into concrete EU legislation,” he said.

It is his hope that this trial can begin in early 2014, and align with the date of the discard ban entering into force in the pelagic fishery and in Skagerrak. Other areas will follow suit.

If the trial extends into the Baltic and the North Sea then the participating nations will have, in effect, established the discard ban prior to the date fixed by the EU, and without the micro-management, he said.

Aquamind and the Danish Technical University (DTU Aqua) are preparing for the large scale trial to begin Jan. 1 2014, and are waiting to find out if the European Fisheries Fund will be financing it, with a decision expected in August.

The best example of efficiency through flexibility is that of a fisherman Schou met during the CQM trial in Denmark.

A fisherman participating in the trial was altering his gear prior to a fishing trip, fixing a different mesh panel to it.

“The area I will fish in for the next two months has a lot of small cod,” he told Schou.

“Having to count all catches I will use the panel for that period to avoid the juveniles. It takes me two hours to change gear, but if you guys had to do it we would have to wait two years for parliament and council to act, and the situation would be quite different.”

“This is about optimizing the economy, optimizing the food output, and to do that it is necessary to be flexible and to adapt to circumstances, and you can not do that in the legislative system,” explained Schou.

Another part of Schou’s work with Aquamind is advising fishermen on what they can do with fish landed instead of discarded. There are some very interesting solutions for by-catch, he said.

“One would be converting the fish to silage aboard the vessel. By doing that it is easier to store more volume, and quicker,” he said. “We are working with DNA solutions to identify catch composition in silage.”

“There are some interesting markets for this silage product, and that way you can even use the offal. This counts for 15% of the material when cut at sea, so 15% of total catch can be added to valuable materials if it’s processed at sea.”

Schou is hoping that the EU Commission, Council and Parliament can be convinced by successful trials to hand control over to the fishermen.

“I’m optimistic, and the fishermen see this as the way forward. It’s an opportunity they should take advantage of.”

Read also:

<p>Pollock giants defend commitment to Russia MSC drive</p>	<p>SFP: Don't let Fish Fight scare you off Asian supply</p>	<p>Companies to showcase new DNA detection technology at Boston</p>
--	--	--

Copeinca bondholders
worried over China
Fishery takeover

Marine Harvest lawyer:
Jimenez made up to
\$10m from fraudulent
Chile sales

Netuno top exec in dark
on Nissui announcement