

NEAFC request on discarding in the NEAFC Regulatory Area

Service summary

NEAFC has a standing request for information on discarding in the NEAFC Regulatory Area (RA). After analysis of mackerel fisheries, ICES has continued with the second phase of the suggested procedure to potentially extend the analysis of discarding to other fisheries taking place in the NEAFC RA. ICES has identified a number of issues and data gaps that make the second phase of this work not feasible at this time. ICES, however, provides suggestions on future approaches to increase surveillance of discards in the NEAFC RA.

Request

NEAFC needs information concerning discards in the NEAFC regulatory area in order to address the calls and commitments set out on discards under the UNGA fisheries resolutions. Information regarding discards is included in the ICES single stock advice sheets; NEAFC would like to highlight which fisheries have high discarding issues and are interested in spatially relevant discarding info.

NEAFC requests ICES to compile and aggregate available data since 2015 on discards in the NEAFC regulatory area, i.e. spatially and temporally distributed, as well as per fishery, where conducted both in the regulatory area and in the EEZ (for instance herring, blue whiting and mackerel).

ICES should provide information on what precisely the issues are, i.e. where are there gaps, can ICES advise on the robustness of evidence in order to take management decisions.

Background

In 2021, following consultation, NEAFC suggested that a suitable pelagic stock with robust data series, such as northeast Atlantic mackerel, should be used in the first instance for a "trial run" as an example of how discard data availability can be explored and any problems highlighted. A second phase of work would then roll this approach out to other fisheries.

ICES explored the issue of bycatch and discards in the mackerel fishery operating in the NEAFC RA, leading to advice (ICES, 2021a) which recognized that data for fisheries in the NEAFC RA are only provided for some fleets from scientific observer programmes and that the total discards are underestimated. With this caveat, estimated discards represent less than 1% of the total ICES catch of northeast Atlantic mackerel. ICES advised that it could not quantify the discard rate of mackerel within the NEAFC RA.

In the course of preparing this work, the group conducting the analysis identified a number of issues and data gaps regarding the extension of this analysis to other fisheries taking place in the NEAFC RA.

Elaboration on the service

The requested service is quite extensive, and a full response would probably require a dedicated scientific study acknowledging any privacy concerns when collating observer and other fisheries relevant data.

| Issue/data gap | Description |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Identification of fisheries | <p>Discard rates are typically estimated on a fishery basis. For stocks assessed through ICES (including those fished in the NEAFC RA) this information is provided through routine data calls to provide input data to stock assessments. Discard information is not (typically) apportioned between national waters and the NEAFC RA.</p> <p>Work done in the process of providing the first stage of advice on this request identified a set of discrete fisheries, on the basis of the species and quantities in the daily catch report data.</p> <p>Taking the main species in the catch as the target, these were shown to be directed at the pelagic stocks (mackerel/herring and blue whiting, either alone or in some combination). Other significant groupings are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Pandalus</i> • Pelagic redfish • Demersal species • cod/redfish • flatfish (Greenland halibut and long rough dab) • capelin • deep-water species (grenadiers, smoothhead, skate, and black scabbardfish) • haddock <p>These are heterogeneous groupings and calculating discard rates at this level is likely to be associated with a large degree of uncertainty.</p> |
| Gear type | <p>Catches of unwanted species and sizes of fish are dependent on the gear, mesh size, and other selectivity-altering measures being applied. Information on gear type is available for some, but not all, vessels in the daily catch report data provided by NEAFC to ICES, although only on an annual basis, rather than trip-by-trip. Information on mesh size and use of selectivity devices is not provided in the NEAFC data.</p> |
| Discard data | <p>Although it is possible to report quantities discarded through the NEAFC daily catch reporting system, this is not mandatory, and it does not appear that any vessels report this information. Discard information may be available in logbooks; however, these are not provided to ICES. Observer data is available from some nations/fisheries (e.g. UK[SCO]) data for Rockall haddock); however, this provides limited temporal and spatial coverage, and applicability across the entire fleet prosecuting these fisheries in the NEAFC RA is questionable.</p> |

A lack of direct observations on discards in the NEAFC RA, together with a different management system, makes it impossible to extrapolate patterns of discards from areas covered by observer programmes to the NEAFC RA.

In light of these issues, and given that it was not possible to estimate discards for mackerel, which is the most data-rich fishery in the NEAFC RA, undertaking the second phase of this work was not considered viable at this time.

ICES suggests that discard reporting could be apportioned between national waters and the NEAFC RA and that a dedicated study is carried out on discarding behaviour including both national waters and the NEAFC RA.

Sources and references

ICES. 2021a. NEAFC request on discarding of mackerel in the NEAFC Regulatory Area. *In* Report of the ICES Advisory Committee, 2021. ICES Advice 2021, neafc.2021.13. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.8393>

ICES. 2021b. Working Group on Widely Distributed Stocks (WGWIDE). ICES Scientific Reports. 3:95. 874 pp. <http://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.8298>

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