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INDUSTRY STATEMENT / JOINT COMMITMENT ON THE LO

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The World Wildlife Fund, WWF, and representatives from the food industry call on the government to end the illegal discarding of fish

Since 1 January this year it has been illegal to throw fish back into the sea, despite this, the illegal practice risks continuing in Swedish waters. This jeopardises the sustainability of fish stocks as well as the trustworthiness of the fishing industry. The government must urgently take action and introduce CCTV/camera surveillance on board fishing vessels in order to control this illegal activity.

When the reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) entered into force at the start of 2014, the so-called “landing obligation” was a cornerstone of the legislation. This policy, which is also known as the “discard ban”, means that fishing vessels are obliged to bring to shore and land all the fish they catch, and the total weight of this catch is counted against the fishing quota for those species caught. When the landing obligation was adopted by the EU it was decided to have a phased in introduction with species introduced year after year and by 2019 the policy would be fully implemented. However, despite several years of progressive implementation Sweden has still not lived up to the landing obligation.

Every year large quantities of unwanted fish are thrown back into the sea. In a report by the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) from 2018 it was reported that between 2008-2015 an average of 5,700-9,200 tonnes of fish and shellfish were discarded every year.¹ This destructive practice must end.

¹ https://www.slu.se/globalassets/ew/orq/inst/aqua/externwebb/sidan-publikationer/aqua-reports-xxxx_xx/aqua-reports-2018_3_nv.pdf

If we do not end this unacceptable discarding of fish at sea we will not be able to achieve the goals of more sustainable fishing and instead we risk the survival of both species and ecosystems. In the long run the profitability of commercial fishing is also threatened. CCTV surveillance has proven to be a cost-effective tool for improving fisheries control and compliance at sea. Globally there are already 100 pilot projects working with CCTV on board vessels of which 19 are in Europe. The tests have shown that CCTV surveillance can be used in all types of fishing vessels and fleet segments, thus ensuring regulatory compliance and a level playing field while contributing to more accurate catch data.

It is often argued that this type of camera control risks the privacy of the fishermen, however this is a misconception. We already use camera surveillance in many Swedish workplaces, for example in grocery stores. Countries such as Chile have already equipped 150 fishing vessels with camera systems and in Australia, Canada and USA cameras are in use on approximately 1,000 vessels. Even our neighbouring country Denmark, is aiming to become a pioneer country for REM.

Compared to other methods of fishery control, CCTV surveillance is by far the most cost-effective according to a report commissioned by the Swedish government in 2014 which compared different strategies for controlling the Swedish prawn fishery. It concluded that CCTV surveillance was considerably more cost-effective than using observers aboard vessels, maritime patrol vessels or airplanes².

In order to reduce discards it is also necessary to continue the development and uptake of selective fishing gear. Sweden, with support of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, for example, has financed several projects to test new more selective fishing gears but the use of these new gears have so far been limited³. It is therefore important that this development continues, to reduce the negative impacts on species and the marine environment. Selective fishing gears are also needed to solve by-catch problems in fisheries and enable them to comply with the landing obligation.

Accordingly, we encourage the government and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management to:

- Install cameras on board commercial Swedish fishing vessels as a cost-effective and transparent form of control, underlining the regulatory compliance within the fishery.
- Provide investment for the further development of fishing gears that reduce by-catch and thereby ensure the implementation of the landing obligation.
- Conduct thorough evaluations of completed projects and facilitate the uptake selective fishing gears (which minimise unwanted catches) with has proven to achieve good results.
- Review the fishing quota allocation system in order to reward best practice and promote fishers using low impact selective gears.

² <https://www.kustbevakningen.se/globalassets/documents/hallbar-havsmiljo/rapport-ru---kontrollstrategi-rakfisketpdf>

³ https://www.slu.se/globalassets/ew/org/inst/aqua/externwebb/sidan-publikationer/aqua-reports-xxxx_xx/aqua-report-2016_8-selektivt-fiske_small.pdf