

UK vessels illegally threw away 7,500 tons of cod in North Sea, campaigners say

Exclusive: ‘It is incomprehensible and indefensible that such rampant non-compliance would be simply ignored’

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Campaigners have accused the government of ‘turning a blind eye’ to illegal discards. Cod fishing vessels have been accused of illegally dumping thousands of tons of fish into the North Sea in a bid to sidestep strict new European rules.

Official data collected by the UK fisheries body shows there were no unwanted, undersized cod caught between January and mid-November last year at all.

This result was branded “impossible” by campaigners from Our Fish, who said British fishers must have twisted the figures by **discarding at least 7,500 tons of smaller fish**. **(EXTRACT 1)**

Manipulating the data in this way would also have allowed them to land around a third over their quota of cod in 2018, according to the group.

Programme director for Our Fish Rebecca Hubbard said authorities in England and Scotland seemed to be “turning a blind eye” to this problem.

“The UK government appears to be aware that large-scale unreported, illegal fishing for an important stock like cod is taking place within its fishing fleet,” she said.

“It is incomprehensible and indefensible that such rampant non-compliance would be simply ignored.”

Our Fish has written to the European Commission, presenting the findings and requesting it takes at least 7,500 tons off this year’s UK cod quota to account for the alleged infringement.

North Sea cod were thought to be on the rise after a long decline, **(EXTRACT 2)** but scientists have now recommended a significant cut to 2019 fishing limits to help their stocks recover.

Soaring ocean temperatures have already **cut fish stocks by nearly 5%** **(EXTRACT 3)**

Under EU regulations introduced to curb overfishing, boats are no longer allowed to discard any undersized cod they catch.

Instead, the smaller fish – which cannot be sold for human consumption – must be taken back to land and count towards their overall quota.

The move is intended to encourage a shift towards better equipment and fishing practices that avoid catching young fish.

To help the fishers cope with the sudden burden of extra fish cutting into their margins, they were granted an additional 5,200 tons of extra quota for the first year of the new regulations.

(EXTRACT 4)

French and British fishing boats clash in scallop war skirmish

However, rather than filling this quota with their undersized fish, the vessels appear to have used it to fish for even more adult cod.

A freedom of information request by Our Fish revealed these figures, along with the total catch of 21,596 tons of adult cod. Based on these numbers, it predicted at least 7,500 additional tons of undersized fish would have been caught, bringing the true total to over 29,000.

The investigation came after industry reports that virtually no discards were being landed in UK ports, despite the EU's "landing obligation" covering cod from the start of 2018.

Responding to the figures, a spokesperson from the government's Marine Management Organisation, which governs activity in England, said they were "conscious that our role as a regulator includes educating the industry to new regulations".

They noted the final total for English cod landed below the minimum size by the end of 2018 was 19.9 tons.

A Scottish government spokesperson said the extrapolation carried out to arrive at the 7,500 tons figure was "fundamentally flawed", and that the fleet had been "working tirelessly" to avoid the capture of undersized fish.

"Furthermore, our compliance officers have not seen any significant levels of undersized codlings in any inspections," they said.

A recent House of Lords committee report concluded there was "little evidence" the UK industry had been following the new landing rules, and committee member Lord Krebs said the newly emerged figures supported this conclusion.

"Even using very selective gear you would expect to catch some unwanted fish, so in my view this is exactly the kind of evidence that should be scrutinised in terms of checking whether the landing obligation is implemented by fishermen," he said.

Both Lord Krebs and Our Fish said CCTV onboard vessels must be made mandatory so the true quantity of fish being landed could be assessed. **(EXTRACT 5)**

Barre Deas, chief executive of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations, said he agreed that "the landing obligation is a mess", but blamed the EU implementing it "with close to zero consideration of implementation issues".

He also said that CCTV monitoring was "not the panacea" suggested by the campaigners and Lords.

"There are a range of practical, ethical and legal issues that remain to be resolved," he said, noting that after Brexit there will be a chance for the UK to develop a more tailored, fishery-by-fishery approach.

A spokesperson from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said the government's new fisheries bill would seize the opportunity of Brexit to help "end the wasteful discarding of fish".

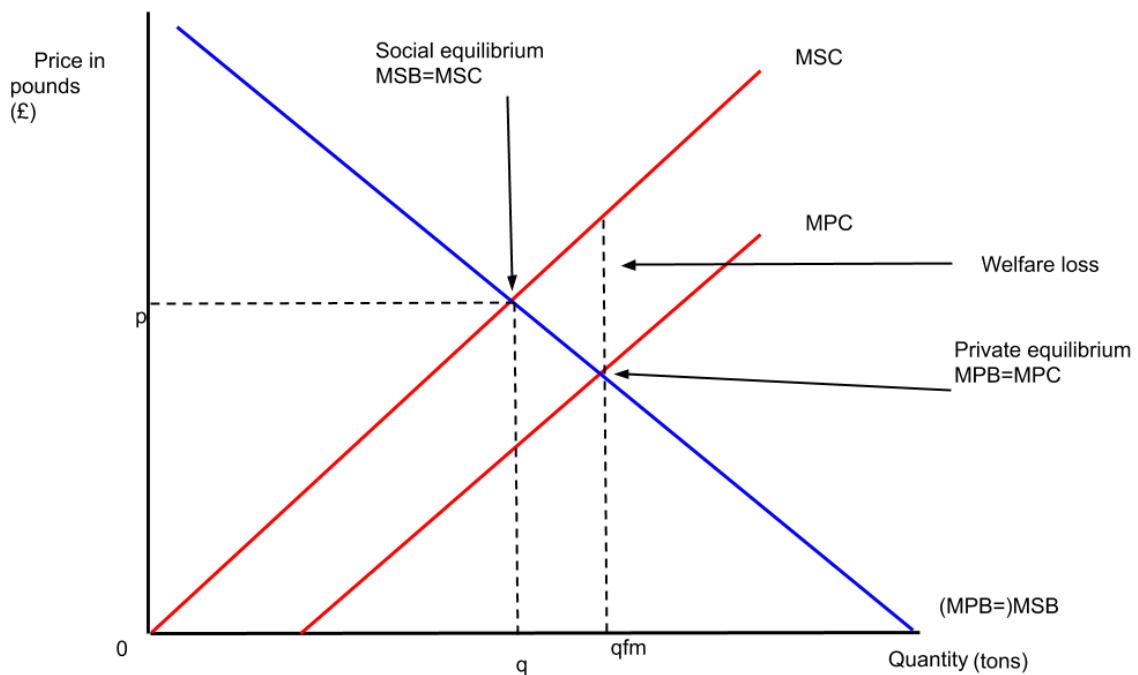
“The government remains fully committed to sustainable fishing. We are aware of the challenges posed to industry by the landing obligation, and will continue to work with the industry to address these,” they said.

Commentary:

This article talks about the Negative externality caused by the overfishing of cod fish as referenced in the news article. It also discusses the effects of the externality and possible short-term and long-term solutions to addressing the problem.

Negative externalities occur when production and/or consumption impose costs on third parties outside of the market for which no compensation is paid. In this case, we are talking about the negative externality that is being caused by overfishing by UK vessels of cod which is being thrown into the North sea¹. Overfishing is the removal of a species of fish from a body of water at a rate at which they cannot replenish in time. This is an externality because third parties are being affected. The overfishing of cod may result in unemployment as many jobs depend on fish stocks, for example; when Canada lost its cod in 1992, over 40,000 people became unemployed.

NEGATIVE EXTERNALITY OF PRODUCTION OF OVERFISHING IN THE UK



The diagram above illustrates the effect of the illegal disposal of a staggering 7500 tons of cod into the North sea². This externality will lead to a higher marginal social cost, costs for society and third parties as compared to the marginal private cost. With regard to the fishing

¹ See extract 1

² See extract 1

of cod, the MPC is the cost to producers and consumers, the external costs represent the decline in the overall cod fish stocks and MSC includes all these costs. Meanwhile, the MSB includes the health and all other general benefits to consumers, from eating cod. The dumping of thousands of fish by UK vessels has caused a negative externality of production. This means that the marginal social cost (MSC) is greater than the marginal private cost (MPC), as a result of external costs which are not included in the cost to consumers. Meaning that the socially desirable level of output at p_q , where $MSB=MSC$, will not be achieved. As a consequence, selling the fish caught in a free market will lead to supply being at q_{fm} where $MPB=MPC$, thus creating a Welfare loss. Cod is already on the low and this will make the situation worse³.

According to the article, the discarded tons of smaller fish were approximately 7500, this was fish that was supposed to be allowed to grow so as to replenish the fish that is normally caught and sold in the market. Currently, the demand for cod on the market is very high and once the consumers buy most of the cod, there will not be enough to meet the demand. Stocks are already low⁴ and this particular circumstance of illegally targeting smaller fish will only add to the pressure already on fishery companies to supply fish. Certain measures must be put in place.

One solution discussed is the installation of CCTV cameras on board ships in order to monitor and assess the quantity of fish⁵. This is a good solution as it will make people accountable for their actions but will have an overall low impact in reducing overfishing because cameras may become faulty and lead to misinterpretation of data.

A more effective solution is to reduce subsidies given to the fishing industry. Many governments subsidize the fishing industry, in an effort to keep the industry thriving. A lot of money goes to purchasing fuel, boats, fishing equipment and this only contributes to the issue. The problem is it incentivizes fishermen to continue to expand, meaning subsidies only end up contributing to the problem of overfishing as you will have too many boats chasing few fish. The more fishermen are on the sea, the more competition for fish, which means there will be more unsustainable fishing methods which lead to overfishing which is illegal and damaging to the health of the ocean as a whole. They not only distort the market for fish, but often disadvantage fishers who receive relatively less subsidies. A policy that cuts down subsidies will make the fishing industry more accountable, seeing as an injection in input is vital to the industry, low subsidies will require the firms to better preserve fish stocks.

This will lead to more counter measures to battle the issue of overfishing, because the industry will want to receive more money from the government. Some of these measures may include creating more marine protected areas, increasing pressure on fishers through smarter catch shares etc. It is evident that reducing subsidies not only reduces the competition for fish, but also in the long run produces more solutions to the problem.

Word count: 747 words

³ See extract 2

⁴ See extract 2

⁵ See extract 5

