

AS I SEE IT – AN OPINION

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

From Svend-Erik Andersen, Chairman of Danish Fishermen



Dear Commissioner Damanaki

SUSPEND THE DISCARD BAN FOR – AT LEAST - ANOTHER YEAR

Some of you will think: “ I have heard this before!”, and, yes, you have.

Exactly one year ago the Danish fishery faced the same situation as we are facing now.

We had a discard ban coming up but we had absolutely no further knowledge of the implications for the fishermen.

One year ago we discussed the discard ban for the Skagerrak area. This was planned for the 1st January 2014 (after it had already been postponed once). It was never implemented.

Now the proposed discard bans – or landing obligations, as it is branded – cover a range of fisheries in a number of fishing areas, and are planned to take effect from the 1st. January 2015 and then gradually year on year until (almost) all is covered by 2019.

When discussing the Skagerrak as far back as January 2013 I, as chairman of the Danish fishermen, demanded clear rules for the fishermen **at least 6 months prior to the introduction of the discard ban.**

As fishermen we need to know at least 6 months in advance how the new rules will be when introducing a discard ban in order to prepare our vessels, our crews and ourselves to the new conditions.

This precondition was not fulfilled in 2013 – and it has not been fulfilled either in 2014.

We now have exactly 6 months before the calendar shows the 1st. January 2015 – and we know as little as we did 6, and 12, and 24 months ago.

This is highly unacceptable.

From the 1st of January 2015 we have (a legislation prescribing) a discard ban in the Baltic Sea; for pelagic fisheries, and for fisheries for industrial purposes. These are fisheries covering more than 50% of the gross yearly turnover of the Danish fishery.

We have as yet to see the first piece of legislation detailing how the rules and conditions will be for the fishery in 2015.

We do not know how we are allowed to fish.

We do not know how to treat and store the fish which was previously discarded

We do not know how we are to operate on board the vessels, and how to operate at landing.

We do not know anything about quota uplift to compensate for previously discarded quantities

We do not know how to react to choke species (with a scientific world lagging behind the real world)

I could continue, and that is what we do every day in meetings locally, nationally and internationally!

To cut a long story short:

We are totally unable to judge the situation and prepare for the new situation in order to have a both efficient and viable fishery after the 1st. January 2015.

Instead we are faced with different views on how the new rules will be. There are neither head or tail in the information we receive. The most popular phrase at the moment is “learning by doing” – also amongst “experts” in the commission.

Tell that to the Norwegian fisheries control authorities!

Therefore we foresee – or fear is maybe a better word – that the fishermen will be criminalized because of conflicting legislation. On the one hand we have to land all catches, on the other we are forbidden to land some of the catch.

I will strongly underline that this scenario is not due to slowness on behalf of the fishermen. It is due to an already slow and cumbersome EU-system which has been made even more slow by the haggling over the Lisbon-treaty (who has the right to decide what?), by elections to the European Parliament and by the naming of a new Commission.

Therefore, as chairman of the Danish Fishermen, I now have to say that it is high time for political action and responsibility. The European Union must postpone the introduction of the discard ban.

It has been done before, the discard ban for the Skagerrak was postponed twice both in 2012 and in 2013. It is time to do it again for the other areas and fisheries.

It is all about one thing: To show respect for the European fishermen and their métier.

The fishery in Denmark and in the rest of the EU contributes in a number of ways to the society at large. We deliver nutritious, sound and safe food with much lower CO2 emissions than animal production and we create jobs in those areas of the EU where job creation is scarce.

This in itself is enough for politicians and fisheries managers to treat our reasonable demands seriously, so that we together can make the biggest change in the European Common Fisheries Policy for more than 40 years come to a happy end for all involved.

In view of the urgency of my request I would very much like to receive a swift - and hopefully constructive – answer to this letter.



Svend-Erik Andersen