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MSC

P.M.

Catch Quota Management in mixed fisheries

Relative stability and the use of catch quotas in mixed fisheries

The concept of catch quota management (CQM) entails, that once the quota has been taken, all catches - including discards, of the species has to stop. If the species is a component of a mixed fishery, the mixed fishery has to stop. It is the responsibility of the fisherman to plan for the best use of his fishing rights. The question is to what extent he has the opportunity to adapt his fishery or his quota allocation. The latter must be seen in context of national allocation policies and EU allocation (Relative Stability).

For the sake of comparison it should be mentioned that the answers to discards in mixed fisheries in the present system are far reaching and with little leeway for the fisher to adapt. They may reach from fixing quotas on basis of the weakest species in a mixed fishery over detailed gear rules to limiting the number of days a vessel could fish.

Below is a checklist of management options addressing the objective of balancing the catch opportunities for one stock while avoiding excess catches of the other stock in a CQM and in respect of Relative Stability.

EU level

- Fishermen may move to another Member State with a more attractive quota balance of the species.
- Member States may exchange quotas to optimize the species composition (art 20.5). E.g. Denmark exchanged quotas for a value of app. 35 million € in 2008. The quota exchange can be arranged on a long term basis (Denmark and Holland have done so for plaice in the Skagerrak/North Sea).
- Member States may allow fishermen to exchange quotas directly with fishermen in another MS (art 20.5 will still have to be used). Denmark is applying such a possibility, which is feasible in context with an ITQ-like system. EU could facilitate the use of this possibility further.
- EU could improve year to year flexibility (fishing the incoming year class next year instead of this year is in reality a strong selective catch measure)

At national level

If a Member State is stuck with an in optimal quota balance the following options could be considered in order to avoid stopping mixed fisheries due to “one-species exhaustion”.

- National management could induce instruments for optimal use. An ITQ-like system will improve the flexibility (Denmark has a market for fishing rights that enables a willing seller and buyer to make a quota transfer on the spot).
- A “buffer quota” could be established on national basis for the use in certain mixed fisheries
- MS could interfere in the quota allocation – requiring that a certain amount should be used in mixed fisheries (advisable only in extreme situations)
- MS could support research in fisheries management systems (Dutch vision no 7). The system consist of a vessel based registration of catches (E-log) combined with registration of data on e.g. temperature, salinity, depth of fishery etc. The objective is to establish a self-improving model regarding species and size compositions in fishing areas (some fisher’s are doing this on individual basis already)

The individual fisher

The combination of the quota allocation, the fisher’s “knowledge base – or choice machine” and his ability to fish selectively on the spot are decisive for the result. Fishermen have already begun using this approach. The following could be considered:

- Fisher’s should improve knowledge and ability to plan, knowledge about fishing techniques an about gear behaviour
- User driven development of fishing techniques supported by public research and the Fisheries Fund
- More fundamental changes in fishing methods

Conclusion

The present system is based on horizontal rules restricting the fisherman by detailed regulation – often not considered legitimate and leaving him with an incentive to break the rules in order to make his economy work. The catch quota principle leaves the fisher with one legitimate restriction – the outtake, and a strong incentive to plan and develop techniques for the best utilization of that.