

News release

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Seafish asks Fish Fight campaigner to next discards meeting

Seafish, the authority on seafood, fully supports the Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall Fish Fight campaign and is urging the campaigner to meet with industry representatives by attending their next Discard Action Group meeting in February.

The group was set up by Seafish three years ago in light of the many initiatives being adopted by the fishing industry to address this issue. It acts as an ‘issue forum’ playing a pivotal role in mediating a common approach to discard issues affecting the whole seafood supply chain – from the fishing industry, government, NGOs and processors, through to the retailers and food service sector. The group meets three times a year to discuss and communicate on how the fishing industry is addressing this problem.

The group next meets in early February and has extended an invitation to Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall to discuss face-to-face with key industry representatives, how industry is already addressing the problem and the positive steps that have been taken.

“This is not a new problem. We are all aware that discarding represents a terrible waste of our precious natural resources and also undermines our efforts to fish and manage stocks responsibly. If discarding was an easy problem to sort out, it would have been done by now,” said Phil MacMullen, Head of Environmental Responsibility at Seafish.

“Historically we have had to clear a number of hurdles in order to introduce new technical measures into the fleet. But the climate is now changing rapidly

and we are seeing fantastic initiatives from the fishing industry and our government.

“The catch quota trial currently taking place is just one example. Twenty three vessels, six in England and 17 in Scotland, are taking part in a trial where they account for all they catch (including discards) and in return are given increased catch quotas. Participating vessels have agreed to make use of closed circuit television cameras (CCTV), connected to a system of sensors, that record all fishing and processing activities on board the vessels. Initial signs from the trials suggest this scheme changes fishermen’s behaviour and results in clear conservation benefits. It provides incentives to fish in a way that optimises the catch.

“Project 50% in 2009 looked at reducing discards in the Devon beam trawl fleet. This was an innovative partnership with scientists aimed at helping to protect fish stocks, and has led to skippers reducing the amount of juvenile fish discarded overboard by an overall 57 percent.

“This is all good news. Encouraging technical developments and a radical shake-up of the Common Fisheries Policy can do a lot to address the root causes of discarding: regulatory aspects, over-quota catches, high grading, and so on, and it will also help us to know exactly how many fish are being discarded.

“We hope Hugh will accept our invitation to find out more about what industry is doing,” said Phil.

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Notes to editor:

Seafish, the authority on seafood, was founded in 1981 by an act of parliament and supports the seafood industry for a sustainable, profitable future. Our services range from research and development, economic consulting, market research and training and accreditation through to account management and legislative advice for the seafood industry. www.seafish.org