AT A GLANCE

Requested by the PECH Committee

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Increasing selectivity in EU fisheries – State of play and best practices

The selectivity of a fishing method reflects its ability to select the desired species and sizes of individuals from the ecosystem in which the fishery operates. Fishing selectivity can be increased, for most gears, by modifying the fishing gear configuration and/or the way it is operated. Increasing the selectivity of EU fisheries is a high priority of the Common Fisheries Policy, and is considered a key factor in the progress towards sustainable fisheries. The implementation of the EU landing obligation has provided a strong incentive to increase selectivity in EU fisheries.

Main observations

A wide diversity of measures to increase selectivity has been developed and tested in recent years, wirth a view to reducing unwanted catches and ultimately to avoiding discards. These measures concern in particular the use of more selective fishing gears and the implementation of temporal and spatial closures.

The study

gives an overview of the current state of play in selectivity developments and identifies best practices to promote increased selectivity.

Among the selectivity measures involving **gear technology**, the study reviews the measures developed for active and passive gears, describing the modifications tested and discussing their effectiveness. The research effort has been particularly intense on trawls, leading to a wide range of measures, from the simplest to the most complex ones, several of which were effective in reducing bycatch while maintaining commercial catches. As regards purse seines, the measures mostly aimed to identify the catch composition, in order to allow the release of unwanted catches before crowding and to limit illegal slipping mortality. Overall, increasing the selectivity of passive gears has attracted less research attention, as they are generally considered more selective, even if some fisheries can generate high bycatch of vulnerable species. For entangling nets, selectivity devices mostly aimed at reducing damaged catch and avoiding interactions with marine mammals. The use of ights looks promising for reducing the bycatch of vulnerable megafauna. In longlines, the bait type is one of the most efficient factors affecting species selectivity, whereas the bait size mainly affects size selectivity. Research on pots has mostly focused on developing alternative, more selective fisheries using pots, rather than trawls or gillnets.

Research has been less intense on **tactical measures** to avoid unwanted catches, which include fishing closures, real-time measures, fishers' avoidance strategies, decision-support tools, depth-based, time-based and soak-time approaches.

The **best practices** identified to improve selectivity include strong collaboration with fishers, building trusting transparent and long-term relationships, promoting bottom-up initiatives, and providing the right incentives for such initiatives. Measures should be adapted to local specificities, "fishers friendly" and balance simplicity vs complexity. Optimizing the testing of new measures, performing rigorous testing, giving a large visibility to existing measures in an easy-to-understand way and communicating widely about them are also key. Making best use of existing datasets and further advance knowledge on fisheries, species ecology and behaviour, promoting international data sharing and performing an ecosystem evaluation of the broad impacts of selectivity measures, should be broadly

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applied to identify the best way to implement fishing selectivity.

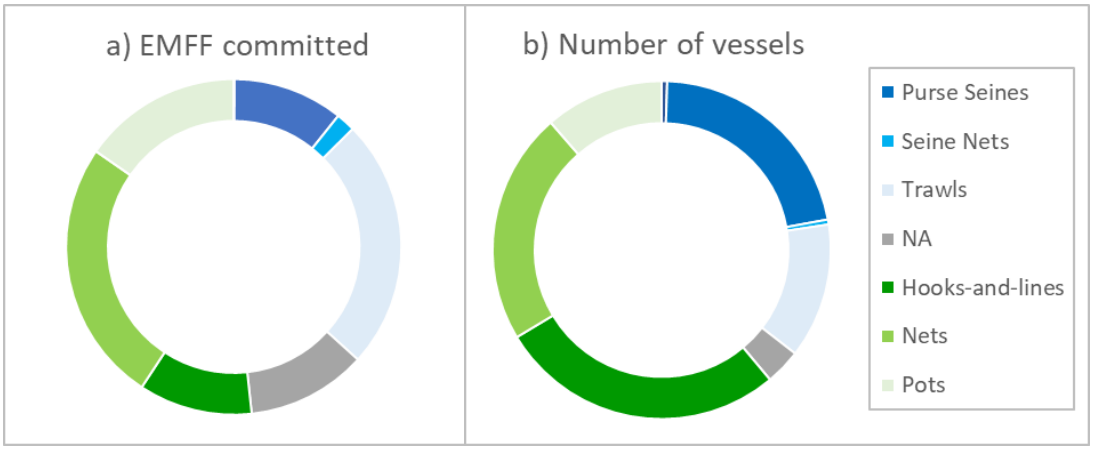
The study performed an analysis of how Member States used **EU financial support to increase gear selectivity**. Over the period 2014-2023, 1493 vessels from 10 Member States have benefitted from EUR 12.47 million of European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). Large differences exist between Member States in funding amounts (ranging from EUR 30 000 to 2.83 million), number of vessels (2–793) and distribution among gear types. The operations for passive gears accounted for the largest part (EUR 6.4 million or 51.7% of all committed funding, 912 vessels or 61.1% of all fishing vessels), while active gears received EUR 4.6 million (36.7% of amount) for 530 vessels (35.5% of vessels, see Figure).

Policy recommendations

Based on these findings, the study suggests a series of policy recommendations on potential actions to increase the selectivity of EU fisheries:

- Fishing selectivity can concern many ecosystem components. The **management objectives** aimed to be achieved with increased selectivity and their priorities should be clearly defined.
- **Collaborations** among stakeholders and **bottom-up approaches** should be further promoted and incentivized. Publicising good behaviours and regulatory trade-offs are likely to help.
- Reinforcing **regionalization** and increasing **flexibility** in management frameworks would promote uptake.
- Data collection is fundamental, and fully documented fisheries should be effectively implemented. A **results-based approach** ensuring the implementation and compliance with fully documented fisheries, while promoting an easier access and sharing of fisheries dependent data, would help to confirm that measures are suitable to achieve the objectives.
- Fishing selectivity should be integrated into broader management objectives, in particular in the **ecosystem approach to fisheries management**, and monitoring should assess the broad ecosystem impacts of selectivity measures.
- Despite important progress in the development of selectivity measures, none of them could enable perfect fishing selectivity and the landing obligation could result in strong negative impacts. **Using the landing obligation as a lever**, by granting an exemption to fishers using selective measures under catch documentation for example, could be a promising way to further incentivize the development and use of selective measures.

Distribution of the EU financial support to increase gear selectivity by main fishing gear (total EMFF amount committed and number of vessels)



Data source: FAMENET

The present note is based on the study *Increasing selectivity in EU fisheries – State of play and best practices*, authored by: Laurence FAUCONNET (Institute of Marine Sciences - OKEANOS, University of the Azores; Fundação Gaspar Frutuoso), published in: February 2024
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