

Statutory guidance

Landing obligation general requirements

Updated April 2023

Contents

The Landing Obligation (LO) applies to all fishing vessels, including those under 10 metres in length. It does not apply to recreational fisheries.

All quota species must be landed and counted against quota unless exemptions apply. View a list of [stocks for which a total allowable catch \(TAC\) is set](#).

The LO applies to all sizes of fish so it is important to minimise catches of undersized fish which will use up quota.

Please be aware that further changes may be made, especially for fish stocks where there is a high risk of [choke](#). These changes could apply as a result of further negotiations.

1. Landing Obligation rules do not apply to non-quota species

The LO only applies to species which are managed by quota limits.

2. Fish that must be discarded

You must continue to discard all prohibited species which should be released unharmed.

Please also note;

Bass.

Bass is not subject to a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) and therefore is not subject to the LO. Catches of bass in excess of landings limits and all undersized specimens must be discarded.

Bluefin.

Bluefin tuna must be released unharmed and any dead specimens must be reported to the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) for advice on disposing of specimens ashore.

Spurdog over 100cms in length.

Following ICES advice that the Northeast Atlantic Spurdog stock is recovering and can support a significant level of landings for 2023 and 2024, the UK EU agreement allows for a Spurdog fishery to commence in UK and EU from April 1st 2023. However it is prohibited to retain, tranship or land Spurdog above 100cm in length.

See Spurdog guidance for latest information

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-spurdog-guidance>

3. Fisheries that are not affected by the landing obligation

If you use:

- Pots, traps and creels, the LO rules will not affect you. You can continue to discard fish and shellfish caught using these gears
- Beam trawls to fish for brown shrimp in the southern North Sea (IVb and IVc), the LO rules will not affect you.

Discards in this fishery are monitored through fisheries surveys

4. Fisheries that have limited exemptions

If you use:

- scallop dredges, or longlines, the only quota species which you may continue to discard are skates and rays

You must record and land all other species that are subject to quota limits

5. Catch composition

All quota species must now be landed, however, these will no longer be taken into account when enforcing catch composition rules.

Catches of quota species are no longer subject to catch composition rules because they can no longer be discarded. For example all cod catches must be landed regardless of the mesh size of a trawl and the 5% bycatch rule in scallop dredging will no longer apply to quota species.

Although catch composition rules no longer apply to quota species, minimum mesh sizes set out in technical conservation rules must still be respected.

6. Quota limits

Quota species are not allowed to be discarded. You will need to adjust your fishing pattern, avoid unwanted catches and make use of the exemptions available in order to remain within quota limits.

Quota limits must still be respected although the MMO will take account of the LO rules when determining appropriate action where breaches of quota limits occur in line with the [MMO compliance and enforcement strategy](#).

MMO quota managers will work with industry, and the [Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs](#) to reduce the risk where running out of quota for one species prevents other quotas being caught. This situation is known as a [choke](#).

7. General exemptions

You may choose to discard certain species for which there are exemptions.

There are general exemptions across all fisheries for:

- fish damaged by predators
- fish damaged by disease or parasites
- contaminated fish unfit for human consumption
- fish released during regular vessel tasks e.g. those stuck in the net when cleaning gear
- fish offal from processing e.g. fish guts and Nephrops heads

8. Fishery specific exemptions

Exemptions apply to fish species that are proven to have a good chance of survival and, in some cases, where it is accepted that unwanted catches of certain species are unavoidable and costly to handle.

You should deploy selective nets and trawls in order to avoid catching unwanted species as far as possible. The current technical conservation rules should be followed and you will be notified of any revisions to these rules.

9. Fishing gear

The detailed guidance provides information on new technical gear requirements that are mandatory in the Irish Sea and Celtic Sea. Some exemptions can only be used where conditions on gear selectivity are met. Vessel operators are encouraged to use innovative gear designs to avoid unwanted catch.

10. Recording catches

You must record, in your fishing logbook, all discards of fish, of any quantity, that are included in the LO exemptions.

If you discard fish that are not included in the LO, you must record, in your fishing logbook, the estimated weight of each species of fish discarded if there are more than 50kg of each species discarded in a trip. This means that if you have a 2 day trip and discard 30kg one day and 25kg the next (55kg in total), you must record those discards.

11. Recorded discards (where permissible) will not count against your quota.

Undersized fish that has to be landed under the landing obligation must be recorded in your logbook as a separate entry for each species.

You must record the exact weight of all undersize fish on your landing declaration. Your landing declaration must be submitted within 24 hours of landing, if electronic, or 48 hours, if paper.

12. Storing catches

12.1 Vessels of 12 metres length or longer

Undersize fish must be stored separately from those above the minimum allowed size in a separate, marked container.

Different species of undersize fish may be stored together unless it is a recovery species. For example, you must store Hake caught in ICES Areas IV, EU Waters of Vb and VIa and Area VII separately and mark them on your stowage plan.

12.2 Vessels under 12 metres length

You do not have to store undersize fish separately. If you have a fishing logbook, you must sort, estimate their weight and record their details.

12.3 Undersize fish landed under the Landing Obligation

You are responsible for handling the undersize fish until they are transferred to a third party for sale. The person who buys or sells your fish should provide the MMO with a sales note – even if it is going to be used for bait.

Any undersized fish landed must not be sold for direct human consumption. They may be sold for other uses including bait, fishmeal and cosmetics.

Personnel working in ports, harbours and fish markets may make reference to the document '[Handling Undersize Fish under the LO Guidance](#)'.

13. Enforcement

The MMO will work with the fishing industry to ensure compliance. We want to make sure that you:

- understand the new rules as they come in and can easily get the correct information
- know the benefits of fishing selectively and avoiding unwanted catches

If you break the demersal or pelagic LO rules, the MMO will take a proportionate and appropriate approach to enforcement. If action is required it will be in line with the [MMO Compliance and enforcement strategy](#).

Current methods of enforcement and surveillance, including inspections at sea, will be used to educate and check compliance.

14. Further enquiries

Enquiries should be directed to the local office of the MMO or your fisheries administration.