



PRESS RELEASE

SELECMER Program: Improving trawl selectivity - Some positive results and already prospects for future improvement

French professionals fishing in the Channel and in the North Sea have been put a lot into the improvement of their trawl selectivity for more than ten years. In partnership with scientists (Ifremer) they were involved in several projects: the SAUPLIMOR program in order to reduce catches of undersized cod and plaice, a study to assess the impact on catches of the use of the compulsory square-mesh panel in 80mm (EC regulation - 2001) and recently the SELECMER program.

The aim of this program, started in March 2008, is to significantly improve the selectivity of the French standard trawl to reduce catches of undersized whiting (<27cm). Two phases were planned:

- Trials with square-mesh panels with different characteristics (mesh size, position...);
- Trials with grids.

The selectivity trials made up 9 fishing trips, 36 days at sea and 140 validated hauls. Fishing trips were associated with trials in tanks, observations in situ with submarine videos and several exchanges and discussions with fishermen in order to adjust selective devices.

The objective was to improve the escape rate of undersized whiting while minimizing commercial losses on whiting and on other species.

If the use of a square-mesh panel (120mm mesh-size) positioned in the extension allows an escape rate of whiting inferior to 27cm between 13% and 40% (in abundance) by comparison with the standard trawl, it entails the reduction of other species discards (mackerel, horse-mackerel). Nevertheless it involves significant commercial losses of strategic species like whiting, mackerel and red mullet (more than 20% in biomass).

Trials were also conducted with an additional square mesh panel of 80mm but no escape of whiting through the second panel was observed.

The grid system leads to an escape of whiting inferior to 22cm of 16% in abundance or 30% depending to the space between the bars by comparison with the standard trawl. Moreover the use of the grid does not involve security problems or waste of time. The fabrication of the grids in polyurethane was also very interesting. However it was not possible to conclude regarding the impact of this device on the escape of strategic species like red mullet.

Those results are globally positive as regards the reduction of undersized whiting discards, but devices should be improved to reach higher escape rate. Furthermore, it is essential for costs (commercial losses, purchase and maintenance...) to be assessed to conclude about the economic sustainability of the implementation of such devices.

One of the fishermen's priorities is to continue the trials. To date, on-going discussions are led between stakeholders and scientists to develop selective device based on the association of grids and square-mesh panels with two objectives: to let escape the biggest sizes of cod and also undersized whiting. That would be an opportunity to continue the Selecmer project while trying to meet the objective of avoidance plan for cod.

For further details:

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