



Ms. Charlina Vitcheva
Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
European Commission
Rue Joseph II, 99B-1000
Brussels, Belgium

Dun Laoghaire, 05 June 2026

Dear Ms Vitcheva,

Re: NWWAC Advice on persistent Choke Species challenges in the context of the Landing Obligation

The North Western Waters Advisory Council (NWWAC) has long identified the issue of *choke species* as a persistent obstacle to the effective implementation of the Landing Obligation. In this context, the NWWAC has undertaken extensive work to identify key choke species and assess potential mitigation measures beyond those provided for in Article 15 of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Since 2018, the NWWAC has presented its views on choke species on an annual basis, with the most recent advice submitted to the European Commission on 13 January 2025¹ to which the NWWAC is still awaiting a response from the Commission. The NWWAC wishes to reaffirm that the main challenges still exist:

- Implementing the Landing Obligation based on single species TACs in the absence of accurate mixed fisheries advice (e.g. cod, haddock, whiting 7b k) and coverage of non-target species (e.g. Cod 6b, Plaice 7hjk);
- Zero catch advice leading to the setting of bycatch quotas at very low levels;
- Stocks for which Member States have no or low quotas but have known bycatch;
- Highly depleted stocks with low rebuilding potential due to other impacts than fishing effort, such as climate change (e.g. West of Scotland and Celtic Sea cod);
- Lack of data, particularly on unwanted catches;
- Unintended consequences of management measures, (e.g. displacement of effort; early closure of fisheries)
- Incongruence with the Technical Measures Regulation, for example in relation to Article 27 on catch compositions.

In addition, the NWWAC outlined in detail likely choke scenarios per geographical area and corresponding mitigation measures. A range of practical solutions were identified, including gear modifications to improve selectivity and avoidance measures based on spatial distribution data for choke species and unwanted catches. The analysis from the 2025 advice remains valid:

- Celtic Sea: 9 high risk stocks, 3 moderate and 3 low risk stocks
- West of Scotland: 2 high risk stocks, 2 moderate and 10 low risk stocks
- Channel: 4 moderate and 7 low risk stocks
- Irish Sea: 2 high risk stocks, 2 medium and 2 low risk stocks

¹ [NWWAC advice Addressing Choke Risk in NWW after exemptions](#) (13 January 2025)





Furthermore, in its recent “Joint NWWAC/NSAC Advice on the European Commission study supporting the evaluation of the Landing Obligation”², the NWWAC reiterated that persistent implementation challenges related to choke species – particularly in mixed fisheries – demonstrate that the current design of the Landing Obligation requires a comprehensive reform. This is especially relevant in the context of the ongoing evaluation of the CFP. In this regard, the NWWAC considers that continued reliance on landings, rather than catches to implement the landing obligation may, in certain fisheries, prove impractical and potentially counterproductive.

The NWWAC recommends to further assess the effectiveness of existing measures before introducing new rules that add complexity and costs. The NWWAC also recommends a shift towards a more adaptive management framework, placing greater emphasis on bycatch avoidance and improved selectivity, rather than on the obligation to land all catches irrespective of operational realities. In this context, the NWWAC’s previous advice relating to the Joint Recommendations of the NWW Member State Group³ remain relevant: priority should be given to avoidance measures that prevent unwanted catches from entering the gear, while long-term solutions to choke issues will depend on bringing all stocks to healthy status. Robust monitoring is essential to track progress, identify shortcomings (e.g., under the Technical Conservation Measures Framework), and provide the evidence base for adaptive management.

In conclusion, the NWWAC acknowledges that the measures included in the current Discard Plan have played an important role in preventing choke situations to date. NWWAC members are poised to provide more detailed advice in due course, noting that the Discard Plan for 2028 is still under discussion and development within the NWW Member State Group. In this context, the NWWAC reiterates its full commitment to supporting the development of the Discard Plan, with a view to ensuring that local knowledge is adequately considered and that stakeholder input and involvement contribute to the design of practical, realistic methodologies and measures. Finally, the NWWAC would be grateful to be kept informed of any developments, including any requests by the Commission for adjustments, and stands ready to contribute where appropriate.

Yours sincerely,

Alexandra Philippe
NWWAC Chair

² [Joint NWWAC/NSAC Advice on the European Commission “Study supporting the evaluation of the landing obligation”](#) (18 December 2025)

³ [NWWAC advice on the Joint Recommendation Discard Plan 2022](#) (3 June 2021); [NWWAC advice on the 2022 Joint Recommendation Discard Plan](#) (27 April 2022); [NWWAC advice on the 2023 Joint Recommendation Discard Plan](#) (17 April 2023)

