

Fish bycatch and discarding in Nephrops trawlers in the Firth of Clyde (west of Scotland)



Nephrops norvegicus (Norway lobster or prawn) is an important target species in demersal fisheries of the north-east Atlantic. Trawling for *Nephrops* is wasteful when many small fish are caught and discarded in the process. Here, data from 106 commercial fishing trips, sampled between 1982 and 1998 as part of the Scottish discard sampling programme, are used to investigate the fish bycatch and discards of *Nephrops* trawlers in the Firth of Clyde (west of Scotland). A large proportion of the fish caught in the Clyde is discarded, the discards mainly consisting of small demersal fish (mean length about 19 cm), particularly young whiting (*Merlangius merlangus*). Within the study period, annual estimates of total fish discards ranged from 318 to 3027 tonnes, with a mean of 1761 tonnes. Fish landings and discards biomass per unit effort both decreased over the study period. However, the decline in landings per unit effort was greater than that in discards per unit effort, corresponding to an increase in the discard rate over time. In recent years, discards have comprised about 70 % of the fish bycatch. The mean length of discarded fish was positively

related to mesh size.

Auteurs du document : Yorgos Stratoudakis, Robert J. Fryer, Robin M. Cook, Graham J. Pierce, Ken A. Coull

Obtenir le document : EDP Sciences

Mots clés : bycatch, fish discards, trawling, Firth of Clyde

Thème (issu du Text Mining) : MILIEU NATUREL

Date : 2001-09-15

Format : text/xml

Source : [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0990-7440\(01\)01135-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0990-7440(01)01135-4)

Langue : Anglais

Télécharger les documents : [https://www.alr-journal.org/10.1016/S0990-7440\(01\)01135-4/pdf](https://www.alr-journal.org/10.1016/S0990-7440(01)01135-4/pdf)

Permalien : <https://www.documentation.eauetbiodiversite.fr/notice/fish-bycatch-and-discarding-in-nephrops-trawlers-in-the-firth-of-clyde-west-of-scotland0>

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