

Session Partnerships: April 11th 15.45 hrs

4s1: The circular food systems network: exploring opportunities for food security by circularity in different regions in the world

Let them eat fish! Exploring the possibility of utilising unwanted catch in food bank parcels in the Netherlands

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The new EU Common Fisheries Policy aims to curb the practice of discarding accidentally caught fish at sea. It does this through the introduction of a landing obligation wherein fishers are obliged to land most of their unwanted catch. However, little attention is paid to what happens to the catch once it is landed. Through this mixed methods study, we have explored whether unwanted catch that is safe for human consumption could be donated to Dutch food banks instead of using it for non-food applications or simply discarding it. The Dutch food banks, which deliver critical food aid to over 160,000 individuals annually, struggle to provide all dependant clients with nutritionally balanced food parcels. Fish is rarely included in the parcels and recipients are known to not be able to meet national dietary guidelines for fish consumption. Therefore, donating unwanted catch to the food banks could not only improve the nutritional quality of the food parcels but also reduce food waste from fishing industry. By analysing qualitative data from in-depth interviews with relevant stakeholders together with quantitative input from surveys answered by food bank recipients, we explore the potential for sustainably utilising unwanted catch while improving food security.

Results from the study indicate that the food bank and its recipients are willing to utilise this fish if it is safe to consume. However, various factors such as existing infrastructure, lack of economic incentive to donate, competition from non-food and black markets, and the fishing industry's conflict with the landing obligation might pose as barriers to this kind of valorisation. The dissonance between fisheries, food, and sustainability policies is discussed and identified as a limiting factor as well. To bridge the differences between these policy areas, we propose public-private partnerships and voluntary agreements as a private governance tool. In conclusion, to achieve circularity in the fisheries sector, legislators, policymakers, and private actors must agree on the common goals of discarding less and improving food security and work together to achieve them.

Keywords: unwanted catch, landing obligation, food waste, food security, food banks