

Initial cost of pulse trawl ban to Dutch fishing industry approximately €25m

By [Dan Gibson](#) Feb. 28, 2019 09:28 GMT



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The Dutch fishing industry is set to incur significant financial losses as a result of the ban on pulse trawling [imposed by the European Council on Feb. 13](#).

A report published by the pulse research team at Wageningen University in the Netherlands has indicated that the initial loss of capital incurred by the pulse ban will be in the region of €25 million, or €250,000 - €350,000 per cutter.

This value does not include the loss in operating costs that will also be caused by the switch back to the slower, less efficient method of beam trawling, which for large cutters is estimated to cut the salaries of its staff by roughly €11,000 per crew member.

While the cost will vary depending on the size of the trawler in question, the Wageningen report estimates that large cutters will see a net decrease of €50,000 per vessel per year, which when combined with the decline in total partial salaries will see a loss of labor revenue by €118,000 per year per cutter, with a net result of €488,000.

On the other hand, smaller cutters will see a loss of labor revenue of roughly €100,000 per year, reducing them to a net result of €234,000 per year.

The report also states that the switch back to the more fuel-demanding technique of beam trawling will see annual CO2 emissions per cutter rise by 585 metric tons for smaller cutters, and by 1,935t for their larger counterparts.

Pim Visser, chief executive of the Dutch fishing body VisNed, told *Undercurrent News* that the ban brings with it a great deal of uncertainty for the Dutch fishing sector.

"The effects of the ban differentiate over the sectors, with the inshore sector coming into a loss situation," Visser said. "The small-scale trawlers will be hit hardest, while the larger flatfish trawlers now will all have to change."

"Some of them will buy the mesh gear for plaice, and others will continue to use the light beam trawl on sole, but nobody knows. They've been fishing for ten years with this gear, and they don't know the catches or the grounds, among other things."

While, at this stage, it is uncertain whether all the vessels currently engaged in pulse fishing will return to the old-fashioned beam trawling method following the ban, the quota requirements make it challenging to switch to alternative techniques.

	Eurokotter		Great cutter		Difference	
	Basic pulse	Back to beam	Basic pulse	Back to beam	beam minus pulse	beam minus pulse
Supply						
Plaice (x 1,000 kg)	52	77	24	308	451	143
Tongue (x 1,000 kg)	76	67	-9	125	110	-15
Yields						
School of plaice (x 1,000 €)	85	124	39	518	755	237
Baking tongue (x 1,000 €)	835	737	-97	1,378	1,215	-163
Total revenues (x 1,000 €)	1,337	1,279	-58	2,351	2,425	74
Cost						
Fuel costs (x 1,000 €)	110	182	72	308	552	244
Partial wages (x 1,000 €)	406	354	-52	624	556	-68
Other costs (million €)	538	509	-29	881	829	-54
Total costs (x 1,000 €)	1,054	1,045	-9	1,813	1,937	124
Result						
Net surplus (x 1,000 €)	283	234	-49	538	488	-50
Labor income (x 1,000 €)	689	588	-101	1,162	1,044	-118
remaining						
Subsidy per crew member (x 1,000 €)	101	88	-13	104	93	-11
Gas oil consumption (x 1,000 t)	24	543	218	908	1,632	723
CO ₂ emissions (Ton)	868	1,453	585	2,430	4,366	1,935
One-time extra investment (euro)		75,000			100,000	

📷 Credit: pulsefishing.eu

"They'll most likely all go back to beam trawling, at least 90%," Visser said. "Most fishermen don't have otter trawl licenses, so they'll have to go to beam; it'd require a huge refit of their boats to go into otter trawl. And besides, with otter trawling, you don't catch sole, and their individual quota is linked to their mode of fishing -- they have been targeting sole."

The Wageningen report estimates that the return to beam trawling will lead to an uptick in plaice catches from 18,300t to 26,800t. Meanwhile, sole catches should decrease by roughly 1,000t, from 8,500t down to 7,500t.

Visser fears what the long-term effects on the Dutch fishing sector will be now that a significant financial incentive has been removed.

"There's a question about the continuity of the companies," the VisNed chief told *Undercurrent*. "It's all family companies, which means fathers are now in doubt whether it's responsible to transfer the company to their sons, and sons are in doubt whether it is even worthwhile to take over the companies from their fathers or not."

Full terms of the ban still not decided

The decision by all three branches of the EU to impose a full ban on the practice of pulse fishing on Feb.13 has left the Dutch industry in a position of disarray.

Pulse trawling, a practice whereby electrodes are used to generate an electric current on the seafloor and induce a cramp response from flatfish such as plaice or sole, has become a contentious issue between its adopters in the Netherlands and artisanal fishermen and NGOs from other European countries.

Advocates of the method have noted the reduced fuel consumption, by-catch and ocean damage it generates relative to the traditional method of beam trawling.

However, [opposition spearheaded by the French environmental NGO Bloom](#) maintains that the practice is inhumane and that its efficiency reduces whole areas of the seafloor to a desert -- while the effect of the electrical current on juveniles and fish eggs is also poorly understood.

The Dutch originally obtained derogations for 5% of its flatfish fleet to use pulse gear, ostensibly for research purposes, in 2006. Fast-forward 12 years and the practice has received 84 exemptions, of which 79 vessels have adopted the gear following extensive investment in the technology by the fishing sector.

According to the report, which was compiled last year, the Dutch fleet comprises 280 cutters, meaning that 30% currently use pulse gear. It remains unclear how many will be able to continue pulse trawling until the full implementation of the ban on June 31, 2021.

Initial reports suggested it would be a 50/50 split, with 42 of the 84 pulse-rigged vessels given exemptions to continue the practice. However, those in the Dutch industry are uncertain whether that number will be reduced further to the original 5% exemptions, which would allow just 14 vessels to continue using pulse gear during the transition period.

"It's still not known for certain because that is yet to be decided, but what we want -- what we demand -- is a transition for the existing pulse vessels until 2021, so that they have a viable period to adapt themselves," Visser told *Undercurrent*.

While a final decision has not yet been reached and discussions with the European trilogue are ongoing, Visser estimated that there should be a decision on the matter within the next three to four weeks.

Visser also said he was "disappointed" at the announcement by the UK Parliament to ban pulse fishing prior to its departure from the EU.

"They have simply not checked the facts and said they will ban it as soon as they are an independent coastal state," he said. "The Cefas research is underway, the results are not yet known, and all the politicians in Westminster have already taken a decision."

Other issues, such as whether university research into pulse techniques can continue after the ban, are also unclear -- although the VisNed chief executive said that most projects were drawing to a conclusion anyhow.

"The research is almost finished. We do have to continue some research also on a project of full-documented fisheries, selectivity and the landing obligation which is with pulse gear, and that should all continue," he said.