

Annex 1: On Council Regulation fixing the fishing opportunities and associated conditions for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks applicable in the Baltic Sea for 2013 (COM(2012)458 final)

At the upcoming meeting on 22–23 October, the Fisheries Council will agree on fishing possibilities in the Baltic Sea for 2013.

The EU, as a signatory to the UN Fish Stocks Agreement and the Johannesburg declaration has agreed to manage its fisheries at MSY by 2015, wherever possible. In addition, the Commissioner for Fisheries and Maritime affairs, Maria Damanaki, has often stated that “scientific advice needs to be at the root of decision-making”¹ and also talked about the need to put Long Term Management Plans (LTMP²) in place. Currently, only the cod fishery in the Baltic is covered by a LTMP. A management plan for Baltic salmon has been proposed (COM(2011)470), and a proposal for a multispecies plan most likely covering cod, herring and sprat is underway.

The Commission proposal for Baltic stocks (COM(2012)458) is largely in line with scientific advice and in general we are supportive of the proposal. However, for salmon the Commission fails to follow the ICES advice, and a far more restrictive Total Allowable Catches (TACs) should be adopted.

BALTIC SEA TACS AND QUOTAS IN 2011

We have divided our comments into sections by species, starting with cod stocks, continuing with pelagic stocks and ending with salmon stocks. Recommendations are given at the end of each section.

Cod in the Western Baltic (22–24)

The Baltic cod stocks are covered by a joint management plan that was agreed in 2007³. Since then, the Western cod stock has been recovering slowly but concerns regarding the population size remain, with the biomass in recent years hovering just above the precautionary level with a slight increase in recent years. According to ICES, the fishery is largely based on recruiting year classes⁴. Cod discards are estimated to 2 million individuals (12 %) or 780 tonnes (5 % of total landing weight)⁵. Also, recreational catches of cod in the Western Baltic are estimated to be high, and these are not included in the assessment or the effort reduction scheme.

Fishing mortality (F) has been going down somewhat since the adoption of the management plan and the target value has now been met. However, the current management target which aims for a fishing mortality of 0.6 is well above that calculated for $F_{MSY} = 0.25$. The planned revision of the

¹<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEX/10/0902&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

²<http://www.fishsec.org/article.asp?CategoryID=1&ContextID=581>

³EC No 1098/2007 establishing a multiannual plan for the cod stocks in the Baltic Sea and the fisheries exploiting those stocks

⁴ICES Advice 2012, Book 8, Pg 4.

⁵WGBFAS report 2012. Pg 3. Available online at:

<http://www.ices.dk/reports/ACOM/2012/WGBFAS/Sec%202002.3%20Cod%20in%20Subdivisions%2022-24.pdf>

management plan has been much delayed, resulting in a mismatch between the target in the plan and the internationally agreed target to reach MSY by 2015.

For this stock ICES provides its advice as three options: 1) fishing mortality at MSY in 2013, 2) transition towards MSY by 2015 and 3) fishing opportunities in line with the management plan. The application of either of the MSY options would require a substantial reduction in the TAC. If the transition scheme towards MSY is to be followed, a maximum of 12 700 tonnes could be landed – a reduction of 40 % in TAC. This illustrates the size of the current mismatch of management targets and the closer we get to 2015, the greater the necessary reductions to meet MSY would be.

The Commission proposes a TAC for 2013 of 20 800 tonnes (a 2 % reduction), which is in line with the management plan. Without the expected timely revision of the management plan, chances of reaching the MSY target by 2015 are rapidly diminishing.

For the Western Baltic cod stock we therefore call on Ministers to follow the transition towards MSY, resulting in a TAC of 12 700 tonnes, in order to align management with international targets.

Cod in the Eastern Baltic (25–32)

The state of the Eastern Baltic cod stock has improved significantly in the last few years. This is due to favourable spawning conditions in 2003 and 2005 (a little above average), as well as management actions such as the long-term management plan and improved fisheries control. The stock biomass is currently on a level comparable to that in the mid-1960s and fishing mortality is already below the estimated F_{MSY} . However, according to ICES, the Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB) has been continuously overestimated in the last three years⁶.

If the Baltic Sea environment continues to deteriorate⁷, spawning conditions for cod will worsen and climate change will most likely bring new challenges. It is therefore very important to ensure that fishing limits remain cautious over the coming years and that current improvements in control and compliance continue.

According to the ICES advice, the total landings corresponding to the TAC should be decreased by 11 %, resulting in a TAC of 65 900 tonnes (including Russia) which is also consistent with the management plan. The Commission proposal for a TAC of 61 565 tonnes (excluding the Russian TAC) is in line with both the management plan and the scientific advice.

For the Eastern Baltic cod stock, we ask Ministers to support the Commission proposal and ensure that the management plan is followed, resulting in a TAC of 61 565 tonnes.

Pelagic stocks

The major pelagic stocks in the Baltic Sea lack defined biomass reference points, making a full scientific evaluation of them difficult. As they constitute a major part of the Baltic Sea ecosystem, they significantly influence the food web dynamics, for example through interactions with cod. It

⁶ICES Advice 2012, Book 8, Pg 2.

⁷Baltic Sea Environment Proceedings No. 122. Ecosystem Health of the Baltic Sea. HELCOM's initial holistic assessment. pg 19. Available online at:

<http://www.dhigroup.com/~media/Publications/News/2010/BalticSeaEnvironmentProceedingsNo122.ashx>

is therefore very important that we move towards ecosystem-based management of these stocks, in line with the objectives set out in the basic Regulation of the CFP⁸.

For 2013, ICES recommends applying the MSY target straight away and the Commission proposal is in line with this. The Commission therefore proposes increases for western and central Baltic herring, as well as for sprat. However, for herring in the Gulf of Riga and the Gulf of Bothnia reductions in TACs by 10 and 7 % respectively are needed.

We therefore call on Ministers to ensure that fishing limits for Baltic pelagic stocks for 2013 are in line with MSY, as proposed by the Commission. This implies TACs of 25 800 tonnes for western Baltic herring (+23 %), 85 155 tonnes for herring in the central Baltic (+9 %), 27 640 tonnes for Gulf of Riga herring (-10 %), 99 100 tonnes for herring in the Gulf of Bothnia (-7 %), and finally 249 978 tonnes for sprat (+11 %).

Salmon in the main basin (22–31)

ICES has during the past years consistently delivered TAC advice for the Baltic salmon stocks in line with the MSY target, stating time and time again that the quotas must come down as the amount of fish at mature age has been in decline since 2004. This is partly due to fishing pressure, but largely caused by the diminishing survival rates for salmon during its first year in the sea. Since the fishery to a large degree takes place at sea on mixed stocks, ICES also states that the fishing pressure must be lowered in order not to threaten the weaker stocks.

Baltic salmon is relatively well studied and the MSY target for salmon stocks has been set at 75% of the potential smolt production capacity (PSPC) of each river. ICES estimates that in order to reach this target by 2015, the TAC must come down to 54 000 individual salmon in 2013⁹. The Scientific Technical and Economic Committee of Fisheries (STECF) agrees with the ICES advice¹⁰. In the proposed management plan (COM(2011)470), however, a fishing mortality target of 0.1 has been suggested.

The Commission's proposed TAC of 108 762 individual salmon is based on the suggested $F = 0.1$ management target, rather than the scientific advice on fishing opportunities for 2013. The TAC at this fishing mortality ($F = 0.1$) has been calculated by the STECF on request from the Commission, and is based on the assumption that unreported catches – currently at 40 % of total catches – has been reduced to zero¹¹. However, the proposed TAC is not in line with MSY management under the current conditions, and it must be noted that this target has not yet been agreed upon since the management plan has not been adopted. A fishing mortality of 0.1 in 2013 will lead to total catches far beyond sustainable levels.

Illegal and unreported fishing continues to be a problem in the salmon fishery. ICES has stated several times that if it was dealt with, the TAC could be higher, but as long as this is not the case the Commission proposal for 2013 cannot be supported.

We call on Ministers to agree on a TAC in line with MSY at 54 000 individual salmon, in line with the ICES and STECF advice, and to phase out the fishery on mixed stocks.

⁸Council Regulation (EC) No 2371/2002 of 20 December 2002 on the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources under the Common Fisheries Policy.

⁹ICES advice 2012, book 8, pg 1.

^{10, 11}Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) Opinion written by procedure Review of scientific advice for 2013 – part I Advice on stocks in the Baltic Sea (STECF-OWP-12-04) Pg 23 & 24. Available at: http://stecf.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/43805/55543/12-06_STECF-OWP+12-04+-+Baltic+Advice+2012_JRCxxx.pdf