



POSITION PAPER

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WWF Briefing - Baltic Sea TACs and Quotas 2007

Introduction

WWF supports management decisions based on an ecosystem approach, for which the scientific advice provided by ICES constitutes the basis.

A collapse of the eastern Baltic cod stock is close. The ICES advice clearly indicates that the eastern cod stock is at historically low levels and there is no indication of increase in the spawning stock biomass. Therefore, ICES recommends zero catch for the eastern cod stock for 2007. WWF supports this advice and continues to believe that the closure of the eastern stock of the cod fishery would be the most effective method to ensure rapid recovery of the stock. WWF remains firm its belief that the EU should base their management decisions on scientific advice and make every effort to achieve the recovery of cod stocks, and the sustainability of this important fishery. Previous attempts have not only been fruitless, but have resulted in further declines of the stock.

The proposed multi-annual plan for the cod stocks reflects the EC's compromise position and is not based on scientific advice. The proposed plan is a compromise and a result of the lack of political will to accept a zero TAC. After a careful review of this plan, WWF must conclude that the proposed gradual approach in reducing TAC for cod and effort will not be sufficient for the recovery of the stock. WWF urges the EC to adopt effective recovery measures in the short term and an ambitious long term management plan to be implemented when the eastern stock has recovered. The long term management plan must include measures to improve monitoring, control and enforcement and the proposed closed areas must be permanent and for all fisheries. In addition, WWF proposes to increase the minimum landing size for cod and correspondingly increase the mesh size for the fisheries targeting cod to more effectively contribute to the recovery of stocks. WWF also stresses the importance of having all elements of the plan duly implemented and followed.

WWF remains extremely concerned by the threat posed by IUU fishing in the Baltic to the sustainability of Baltic fisheries. WWF urges the Member States of the EU to swiftly address this critical threat, including measures to improve harmonized monitoring, control and enforcement, which will provide a strong foundation for future management decisions.

Regarding the fact that the condition of wild salmon stocks in the Gulf of Finland is poor, WWF believes that salmon catches should not increase. A Salmon fishery should only be permitted at sites where there is virtually no chance of taking wild salmon. A management plan for Salmon (a revised Salmon Action Plan) should be implemented.

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ICES advice compared to the TACs agreed upon for 2006 (Baltic Sea)

Stocks	TAC agreed for 2006	ICES advice for 2007	WWF position
Herring Gulf of Riga	40,000 tonnes	33,900 tonnes. Full reproductive capacity. Harvested sustainably	33,900 tonnes
Herring Sub-divisions 25-29 and 32 (excl. Gulf of Riga)	128,000 tonnes	164,000 tonnes Harvested sustainably.	164,000 tonnes
Herring in Division III a and Sub-divisions 22-24	47,500 tonnes for Subdivisions 22 – 24	99,000 tonnes for Sub-div. 22 -24 and Div. III. State of the stock unknown	99,000 tonnes
Herring in Sub-division 30 Bothnian Sea and Sub-division 31 Bothnian Bay	91,600 tonnes	Sub-div. 30: 83,400 tonnes Full reproductive capacity. Harvested sustainably. Sub-div. 31: 4,700 tonnes. State of the stock unknown.	Sub-div. 30: 83,400 tonnes Sub-div. 31: 4,700 tonnes
Sprat in Sub-divisions 22-32	468,000 tonnes	477,000 tonnes Full reproductive capacity. Harvested sustainably	477,000 tonnes
Salmon in the Gulf of Finland	17,000 fish	Catches should not increase. Conditions of wild stocks poor. Fisheries should only be permitted at sites where there virtually no chance of catching wild salmon. National conservation programmes to protect wild salmon should be enforced.	Catches should not increase. Conditions of wild stocks poor. Fisheries should only be permitted at sites where there virtually no chance of catching wild salmon. National conservation programmes to protect wild salmon should be enforced.
Salmon in the Main Basin	460,000 fish	Catches should not increase. Long-term benefit for smaller stocks expected from a reduction of fishing mortality. For unit 5 special stock rebuilding measure needed.	Catches should not increase. For unit 5 special stock rebuilding measure needed.
Cod eastern stock (sub-divisions 25-32)	49,220	Reduced reproductive capacity. Harvested unsustainably. Overexploited. Fishery closure	Implementation of multi-annual plan for the cod stocks
Cod western stock (western stock 22-24)	28,400	20,500 tonnes Full reproductive capacity. Overexploited	Implementation of multi-annual plan for the cod stocks
Sea trout	Stocks in the Main Basin good. Stocks in the Gulf of Finland and Gulf of Bothnia poor	Urgent need to decrease fishing mortality for some stocks.	Urgent need to decrease fishing mortality for some stocks. Management plan should be established.

Salmon

General comments

Until 2005, the annual TACs for Salmon were fixed in accordance with the long term management objectives laid down in the IBSFC Salmon Action Plan. A new Long Term Management Plan (a revised IBSFC Salmon Action Plan) should be established and implemented. The new Plan should focus on the protection and recovery of wild salmon stocks and should include:

- measures to improve the assessment of the smolt production potential of individual rivers (sustainable production level revised in accordance with the latest ICES assessment);
- measures concerning habitat restoration / or improvement on a river by river basis, taking note of the fact that individual rivers may need different measures to reach the target of at least 50% wild salmon production (some rivers with weak stocks require specific measures for stock recovery - river specific action plans);
- measures to reduce the dioxin levels in the Baltic Sea (initiate an EU dioxin reduction plan for the Baltic);
- measures to ensure that fishery is directed on reared salmon (e.g. fin-clipping and terminal fishing);
- measures to decrease the exploitation of salmon during migration (especially eastern main basin stocks). Such measures should be aimed at rebuilding of the stocks, including habitat restoration and removal of physical barriers; and

- measures to manage the increased impact from longlining when the driftnet ban comes into force in 2008, incl. increasing size selectivity in longlining for salmon (number of hooks and minimum size of hooks).

WWF recommends the adoption and implementation of a revised Salmon Action Plan with updated objectives for the entire Baltic Sea. The objectives should take into account the need for maintaining the genetic diversity of salmon stocks.

Issues related to the control of the salmon fishery in the Baltic – strengthened controls of the salmon fishery are needed.

The fact that salmon and sea trout stocks are exploited in a mixed fishery should be taken into account. It is not easy to distinguish and separate salmon from sea trout during landings in ports. There is no TAC and no minimum landing size for sea trout and therefore salmon can easily be landed as sea trout. Therefore, more effective measures to control landings of salmon should be implemented.

Salmon in the Gulf of Finland

According to ICES, the condition of the wild stocks is poor and wild smolt production has been very low in recent years. For 2007, ICES recommends that the catches should not increase and that the salmon fishery should only take place at sites where there is virtually no chance of taking wild salmon from the Gulf of Finland stock along with reared salmon.

WWF recommends that the fishery should only be permitted at sites where there is no chance of taking wild salmon. WWF strongly recommends enforcement of national conservation programmes to protect wild salmon in the Gulf of Finland. In accordance with the ICES advice, overall catches of salmon should not increase.

Salmon in the Main Basin

WWF recommends the adoption and immediate implementation of an effective long-term salmon management plan, including the introduction of specific recovery measures in rivers with weak salmon populations with special attention given to the restoration of natural habitats in rivers. The overall catches of salmon in the Main Basin and the Gulf of Bothnia should not increase in 2007.

Long-term benefit for smaller stocks is expected from a reduction of fishing mortality. Attention should be drawn to the fact that the main salmon migration route from the Main Basin to the Bothnian Bay rivers goes along the Finnish coast in the Bothnian Sea. Additional measures are needed in order to avoid the fishing of wild salmon during migration.

Herring

Herring in the Gulf of Riga

ICES classifies the Gulf of Riga herring stock as having full reproductive capacity and as being harvested sustainably. ICES recommends that these stocks be managed according to the precautionary limits and proposes that the landings in 2007 should not exceed 33,900 tonnes.

Herring in Sub-division 30 Bothnian Sea and Sub-division 31 Bothnian Bay

ICES classifies this stock as having full reproductive capacity and as being harvested sustainably. ICES recommends that the TAC be set equal or below 83,700 tonnes, in line with the precautionary approach.

In the absence of an analytical assessment and defined reference points, the state of the herring stock in Sub-division 31 cannot be fully evaluated. However, this stock is a minor part of the TAC set for the management unit consisting of Sub-divisions 30 and 31. Due to uncertainties in the state of the stock, the TAC for 2007 should not exceed 4,700 tonnes.

Herring in Subdivisions 25-29 and 32 (excl. Gulf of Riga)

In the absence of defined biomass reference points, the state of the stock cannot be fully evaluated. Based on the most recent estimates of fishing mortality, ICES classifies the stock as being harvested sustainably. And ICES advises catches of less than 164,000 tonnes.

Herring in Subdivisions 22-24 and Division IIIa

In the absence of defined reference points, the state of the stock cannot be fully evaluated. Current fishing mortality has led to stable SSB and, accordingly, the fishing mortality should not be allowed to increase. Therefore, the TAC for 2007 should not exceed 99,000 tonnes.

WWF recommends that the TAC for all herring stocks be set at the level recommended by ICES.

It should be noted that the amount of reported landings is uncertain as herring is mostly caught in mixed fisheries together with sprat. In the past, a substantial discrepancy existed between the agreed TAC for herring and the reported catches. In recent years when the herring TAC became more restrictive, there has been an incentive to misreport herring as sprat. Although the extent of such misreporting is not known, it is possible that it has influenced the quality of the catch statistics and consequently the assessment. Efforts should be made to intensify the control of landings in order to determine the species composition in this mixed pelagic fishery.

Sprat

ICES classifies this stock as having full reproductive capacity and as being harvested sustainably. ICES recommends landings of less than 477,000 tonnes. Strong recruitment and low predation contributed to the current high spawning stock biomass of sprat. ICES draws attention to the fact that the exploitation rate on sprat may have to be reduced if the cod stocks recover.

WWF recommends that the TAC for 2007 for the entire Baltic should follow the scientific advice and should not exceed 477,000 tonnes.

Attention should be drawn to the fact that sprat is taken mostly as part of a mixed sprat-herring fishery and that the species composition of these catches is very imprecise in some fishing areas/periods. Polish fishermen highlighted (Pelagic RAC meeting in June 2006) the fact that they were not experiencing the very positive stock situation described by ICES. In recent years Poland had not been able to catch its quotas. They consider the mortality of juvenile catch to be too high and therefore suggest the introduction of protective measures such as closed areas, restriction of size/power of vessels fishing for pelagic species and improved control of industrial fisheries. Regional differences in environmental condition, such as water temperature, could be the reason for lower abundance of sprat in the Polish Fishery Zone.

WWF recommends that a long-term management plan be developed to secure the long-term sustainability of Baltic pelagic fisheries. Such a plan should include protective measures such as closed areas, restriction of size/power of vessels fishing for pelagic species and improved control of industrial fisheries.

Cod

General comments

The Commission has now prepared a proposal for a long-term management plan for Baltic cod. The proposal consists of a plan to rebuild and manage the cod stocks in the Baltic according to the CFP. To achieve its objectives, it is proposed to reduce the exploitation of the cod stocks (annual 10% reduction) to levels that with high probability ensure rebuilding stock biomass to sustainable levels and at the same time provide stability in TAC levels and high yield. The proposed fishing mortality rates are based on scientific advice from ICES and are aimed at allowing the stocks to recover.

In implementing the long-term management plan, WWF strongly recommends the amendment of the recommended fishing mortality rates in light of any new scientific information. The set gradual quota reductions for the overexploited stocks must be accompanied by a gradual increase in minimum landing size on cod and increase in mesh size and selectivity. Measures to improve the quality of landing statistics must follow.

Cod in Sub-divisions 25 – 32

The ICES advice clearly indicates that the stock is at historically low levels and there is no indication of increase in the spawning stock biomass.

A collapse of the eastern Baltic cod stock is close. Notwithstanding the measures aimed at reducing the fishing effort (i.e. fleet reduction) fishing capacity is still far in excess of the level needed in order to secure a sustainable cod fishery. Very high fishing pressure has also resulted in significant reductions in the mean landing size. Environmental factors have also negatively impacted the successful reproduction capacity of the stock. IUU fishing compromises the sustainability of this fishery by undermining legal catches and the basis for scientific advice. The existing technical measures have not been sufficient to solve the problem of unsustainable fishing levels.

ICES recommends zero catch for the eastern cod stock for 2007. WWF supports management decisions based on scientific advice and since previous management initiatives clearly have been fruitless, WWF believes that a closure of fisheries on the eastern cod stock is the only option left. The fishery is not to be open until the stock has recovered and before monitor, control and enforcement structures have been reformed and harmonized.

The proposed closed areas must be permanent and for all fisheries. In addition, WWF proposes to increase the minimum landing size for cod and correspondingly increase the mesh size for the fisheries targeting cod to more effectively contribute to the recovery of stocks.

Cod in Sub-division 22 – 34

Based on the most recent estimates of SSB, ICES classifies the stock as having full reproductive capacity, with the spawning stock biomass being slightly above the precautionary limits. However, the current fishing mortality exceeds the IBSFC fishing mortality point (1.0).

The EC has recently developed a proposal for a multi-annual plan for cod stocks in the Baltic. The plan is to be implemented in 2007.

WWF recommends that the TAC should follow the principles of an annual 10% reduction of fishing effort and mortality. At the same time, WWF strongly advocates the implementation of more effective control measures with regard to the cod fishery.

Improvement of control and enforcement

IUU fishing of cod in the Baltic Sea has been identified as a real threat to sustainable fisheries - as it undermines the management measures established to conserve the fish stocks. Therefore, more effective controls should be implemented in the Baltic Sea cod fishery. As part of the reform of the CFP, the European Commission proposed an Action Plan for the eradication of IUU, however, the steps taken so far have been inadequate. To be effective, enforcement of control mechanisms must include measures to reduce the relative benefits and to raise the costs of IUU fishing. Penalisation of IUU must be severe.

WWF recommends that the EU Action Plan to reduce IUU fishing is given rapid effect in the Baltic. Increased co-operation between authorities in the region must be introduced.

Eel

The European eel population has declined drastically since the late 1970s, and today glass eel recruitment is lower than ever. Oceanic factors such as climate change might be contributing, but factors such as pollution, diseases, parasites and loss of habitat have also had a negative impact on the eel population. Furthermore, the mortality rate in all of the eel life stages remains high. Based on these trends, eel biologists are of the opinion that the population will not be able to recover unless immediate action is taken. In 2005, the European eel was classified as critically endangered.

ICES has repeatedly recommended that the European Commission urgently develop an international eel recovery plan and that, until such a plan can be implemented, all anthropogenic impacts should be reduced to as close to zero as possible.

WWF recommends that conservation measures such as restoring and maintaining good habitats, restoring migration paths, as well as improving water quality and strengthening fisheries regulations in suitable ways are urgently needed if the eel population is to have any chance of avoiding extinction and making a recovery.

Sea Trout

Stocks in the Main Basin are in good condition whereas those in the Gulf of Bothnia and Gulf of Finland are in poor condition.

ICES finds that there is an urgent need to decrease the fishing mortality for some stocks and to establish a management plan.

WWF stresses the need for international co-operation regarding the management of sea trout stocks. There is a need to decrease the fishing mortality for some weak stocks in the Gulf of Finland and Gulf of Bothnia. With the existing regulations (seasonal closures adopted at national level) the status of weak populations has not improved.