



for a living planet



WWF Recipe for Legal Fish in the Baltic Sea

STOP ILLEGAL FISHING



Traceability – an important part of the solution

1. Summary and recommendation: Improve traceability

The cod fisheries in the Baltic Sea have gained notoriety for non compliance with fisheries regulations. This is commonly referred to as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, or, IUU fishing. IUU fishing is seen as the major contributor to the unsustainable exploitation of the cod stocks, particularly in the Eastern Baltic, so much so that this stock is now threatened with collapse.

The WWF Baltic Ecoregion Programme's research demonstrates that: improved traceability of cod would make a major contribution to reducing IUU fishing in the Baltic Sea.

By traceability we mean: ensuring that a fish can be traced from being harvested from a legitimate source, in a legitimate way, through the stages of distribution and processing, to the consumer.

Introducing such a system for Baltic Sea cod holds great potential because it can:

- Help close the market for illegal fish
- Provide fishermen with an incentive to remain legal

- Give businesses and consumers greater confidence in the legitimacy of the fish or fish product that they, respectively, sell and buy

WWF supports those in the fishing industry who are willing to invest in ensuring the fish they trade in is legitimate. WWF also calls upon Member States and the European Commission to create, fund and implement an effective legal framework for the fishing industry to secure full traceability and help ensure their long term future and that of the Baltic Sea cod.

2. Illegal fishing and the problems it creates

Significant sums of public money are spent assessing how much fish are in the

sea and how much we remove. IUU fishing limits and corrupts this information. It also distorts and devalues information from compliant (non-IUU) fishing.

Due to increasing doubts surrounding the reliability of the information, scientists are more cautious in their assessments. Subsequently, confidence in fish stock assessment drops and fisheries managers are left to make decisions that are often based more on political considerations than facts.

Fishermen involved in IUU fishing are stealing from those that comply with the rules. Furthermore, legitimate fishermen are penalised twice - not only do they land less fish but also the value of their fish is reduced by the existence of illegal fish on the market.

Consumer confidence in a fish product can also be affected. This was starkly demonstrated in Sweden some years ago when, overnight, the consumption of cod was significantly reduced after a TV programme revealed that large quantities of IUU cod and cod products were on sale in supermarkets.

While this demonstrated consumer power it showed that uncertainty could

The following diagram shows a simple supply chain for a fish:



Fishing boat



also lead to a consumer boycott of legal fish, causing financial losses to all those involved in the supply chain – retailers, processors, distributors and fishermen.

And, of course, fish stocks suffer. In the Eastern Baltic it is estimated that 35-45% more cod is landed than reported; estimates for the last 5 years suggest that unreported landings average about 20,000 tonnes. This means that quotas, designed to reduce overfishing, are significantly exceeded leaving the Eastern Baltic cod stock unable to replenish itself and heading toward collapse.

So how can this downward economic and environmental spiral be broken?

3. Knowing where the fish on your plate comes from

WWF advocates the need for measures that enable the origin of fish and fish products to be known and validated. Various catch phrases are used to describe and promote this concept: “fish to fork”; “from the sea to the table”. But what we really mean is being able to ensure that a fish can be traced from being harvested from a legitimate source, in a legitimate

way, through the various stages of distribution and processing, all the way to the consumer – this is called traceability. See illustration below.

Large fish processors use traceability systems, e.g., paper audits, bar codes, electronic tags, to ensure product quality and hygiene standards are maintained as fish enters and leaves their processing facilities. However, within the Baltic Sea cod supply chain there is very limited traceability before the cod reaches the processors. This means it is very difficult for processors to validate that their fish comes from a legitimate source.

Examples from other food producers, such as the beef and egg sector, clearly demonstrate that complete supply chain traceability not only ensures human health, safety and hygiene but can restore and maintain consumer confidence.

4. An EU framework for fish traceability exists – but it doesn't work

European fisheries regulations are in place and provide the framework for a traceability system. But, despite these

regulations, IUU fishing continues at high levels. The existing framework for traceability fails because the initial links in the supply chain are not effectively monitored and validated. This is a challenge which Member State fisheries control authorities have so far not been able to meet.

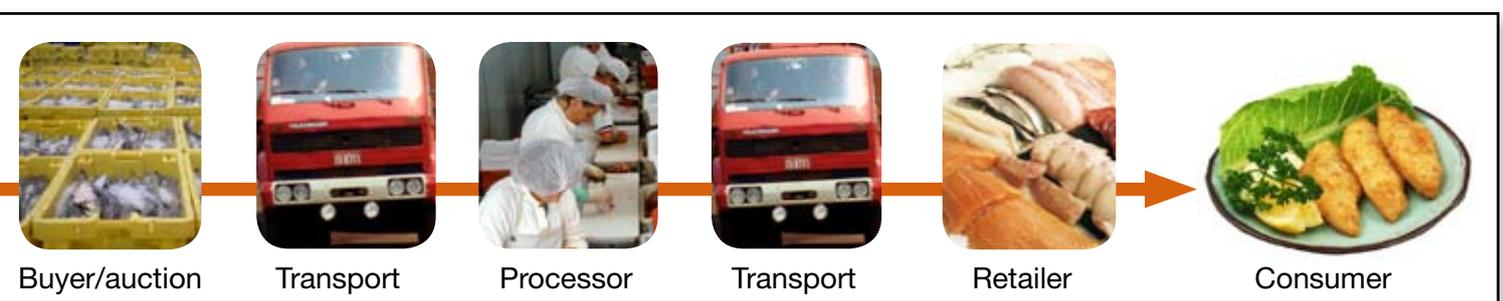
5. Help the fishing industry to help itself

WWF considers that the fishing and processing sectors can do more to reduce IUU fishing. Examples exist where the catching and processing sectors have invested and introduced systems that confirm where their fish comes from and that it has been caught from the permitted area, in the right way and within the quota levels.

In the South Georgia Patagonia Toothfish fishery the use of a range of at sea and onshore technological solutions has resulted in a significant reduction in IUU fishing. These include real time catch recording, vessel monitoring systems, bar coding, fish box identifiers and readers, combined with tougher administrative procedures. Similar measures in a Scottish Nephrops fishery have resulted in, among other things, improved quality, higher value landings and less incentive to illegally fish.

Although these measures come at a financial cost, the cost of a consumer boycott or the collapse of the cod stock would be significantly higher.

WWF supports those in the fishing industry who are willing to take these extra steps in ensuring the fish they trade in is legitimate. WWF also calls upon Member States and the European Commission to support fishermen, the major buyers and sellers of Baltic Sea cod and the catching sector by creating, funding and implementing an effective legal framework to secure full traceability. This will help ensure their long term future and that of the Baltic Sea cod.





Production: Odelius #3905, 2007. Photo: Page 1: WWF-Canon / Hartmut Jungius (sea), WWF-Canon / Quentin Bates (boat); pages 2-3: Alle Tidens Læsø (fishing boats), Valey Buzun/BFN of SPNS (boat and people), Camilla Bollner/azote.se (cod), Dave Broadway (fish in box), WWF-Canon / Mauri Raukari (transport), WWF / AFMA (processing), Christopher Wilken (fish) and Gene Lee (plate).

WWF is one of the world's largest and most experienced independent conservation organisations, with almost 5 million members and supporters and a global network active in some 100 countries.

WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by:

- conserving the world's biological diversity
- ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable
- promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.



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