



Landing the blame: Overfishing in the Baltic Sea

Uncovering the countries most responsible
for overfishing in EU waters

Fisheries ministers risk damaging our natural resources beyond repair by consistently fishing over and above the limits recommended by scientists. This is the first in a series of briefings to identify which countries are standing in the way of more fish, profits and jobs for European citizens

Food for an additional 160 million EU citizens. An extra €3.2 billion in annual revenue. 100,000 new jobs across the continent.¹ Far from being a pipe dream, this could be a reality if we properly managed one of Europe's most significant natural resources – our seas. If EU waters were properly managed – with damaged fish stocks allowed to return to their maximum sustainable yield (MSY) – we could enjoy their full potential within a generation.

Fishing limits vs. scientific advice

Every year fisheries ministers have an opportunity to make this a reality when they agree how much fish should be caught in EU waters – the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for each commercial fish stock. Scientific bodies like the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) provide information about the state of most stocks and recommend maximum catch levels.

But for many years scientific advice has not been given the attention it deserves. Between 1987 and 2011 TACs were set higher than scientific recommendations in 68% of decisions; and 33% above scientifically recommended levels on

average.² In 2012, 15 out of 69 stocks had TACs which were above scientific advice (ICES)³ rising to 30 out of 58 in 2013.⁴

The reformed Common Fisheries Policy that entered into force in 2014 aims to restore and maintain populations of fish stocks, with the ultimate goal of reaching their maximum sustainable yield (MSY). The MSY objective is to be achieved by 2015 where possible and by 2020 at the latest for all stocks. Following scientific advice is essential if we are to achieve this goal, end overfishing and restore fish stocks to healthy levels.

Agreements behind closed doors

Ministers negotiations at the Fisheries Council are not public, only their outcomes. This lack of transparency means it is not possible to identify those ministers that ignore scientific advice and give priority to opaque short-term interests risking the health of fish stocks for future generations.

This new briefing series will reveal which member states and ministers are behind decisions that go against the EU public's

collective interest. We do this by analysing the outcome of the negotiations, estimating which member states end up with a higher share of stocks fished above scientific advice. We can assume these countries are the main drivers of overfishing either because they are actively pushing for fishing limits to be set above scientific advice or by failing to prevent it.

Baltic Sea results

In the October 2014 Council, ministers agreed fishing limits for ten Baltic Sea stocks including herring, cod, salmon, plaice, sprat. For five stocks these were set at above scientific recommendations. Eight nations will have access to these stocks: Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Sweden.

Table 1. Baltic Sea stocks with fishing limits above scientific advice

Fish stock (ICES fishing zone)	Scientific advice (tonnes)	TAC agreed by ministers (tonnes)	Difference (tonnes)	Difference (%)	Countries with largest share
Cod (25-32)	29,085	51,429	22,344	76.82	Poland (26%), Sweden (23%), Denmark (23%)
Cod (22-24)	8,793	15,900	7,107	80.83	Denmark (44%), Germany (21%), Sweden (16%)
Plaice (22-32)	3,249	3,409	160	4.92	Denmark (72%), Poland (15%), Germany (8%)
Salmon (32)*	10,703	13,106	2403	22.46	Finland (90%), Estonia (10%)
Sprat (22-32)	199,622	213,581	13,959	6.99	Poland (29%), Sweden (19%), Latvia (14%)

* Catch for Salmon is expressed in number of individuals

The Overfishing League table

Poland, Denmark and Sweden top the ranking of overfishing nations in the Baltic because they have the highest share of stocks

that will be fished above scientific advice. The contribution of each member state to overfishing of Baltic Sea stocks is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. The overfishing league table

Country	Minister	Quota above scientific advice (tonnes)
Poland	Mr Marek Sawicki	10,838
Denmark	Mr Dan Jørgensen	9,727
Sweden	Mr Sven-Erik Bucht	8,976
Germany	Mr Robert Kloos	4,444
Latvia	Mr Jānis Dūklavs	4,097
Estonia	Ms Keit Pentus-Rosimannus, Mr Ivari Padar	2,169
Lithuania	Ms Virginija Baltraitienė	2,122
Finland	Mr Petteri Orpo	1,184

Notable exceptions

It is worth highlighting that the fishing limit for two stocks of herring and one of salmon was set 13–16% below scientific advice. As a result, Finland and Sweden – the countries with the largest share in these stocks – will see their fishing opportunities reduced in tens of thousands of tonnes.

Seeing member states accept catches lower than the maximum ceiling advised by scientific bodies is a very positive step and will help accelerate fish stock recovery and the realisation of economic benefits.

Critical decisions ahead

Fisheries ministers will meet again in November 10–11 and December 15–16 to agree 2015 fishing limits for the majority of commercial fish stocks in European waters. NEF will keep a close eye on the negotiations and will replicate this analysis to identify which nations are working in the public interest versus those that are willing to continue shooting themselves on the foot.

ANNEX

Baltic TACs compared to scientific advice				Quota above scientific advice (tonnes)							
Fish stock (ICES fishing zone)	Scientific advice	TAC agreed by ministers	TAC change from advice	Denmark	Germany	Estonia	Finland	Latvia	Lithuania	Poland	Sweden
Herring (30-31)	186,534	158,470	28,064	0	0	0	-23,009	0	0	0	-5,055
Herring (22-24)	22,220	22,220	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Herring (25-27, 28.2, 29 & 32)	188,520	163,451	25,069	-552	-146	-2,816	-5,498	-695	-732	-6,246	-8,384
Herring (28.1)	38,780	38,780	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cod (25-32)	29,085	51,429	22,344	5,133	2,042	500	393	1,909	1,257	5,910	5,200
Cod (22-24)	8,793	15,900	7,107	3,102	1,517	69	61	257	166	830	1,105
Plaice (22-32)	3,249	3,409	160	115	13	0	0	0	0	24	9
Salmon (22-31)*	113,796	95,928	17,868	-15	-2	-2	-18	-9	-1	-4	-20
Salmon (32)*	10,703	13,106	2,403	0	0	1	9	0	0	0	0
Sprat (22-32)	199,622	213,581	13,959	1,377	872	1,599	721	1,931	699	4,098	2,662
Net contribution to overfishing per country				9,160	4,296	-649	-27,342	3,393	1,389	4,612	-4,483
Quota above scientific advice (tonnes)				9,727	4,444	2,169	1,184	4,097	2,122	10,838	8,976

* Advice and TACs for salmon are expressed in number of individuals.

Endnotes

- <http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/entry/jobs-lost-at-sea>
- <https://www.york.ac.uk/environment/our-staff/callum-roberts/>

- http://www.seafish.org/media/Publications/SeafishSummary_TACs2012_ICESAdvice_201201.pdf
- http://www.seafish.org/media/764975/seafishsummary_tacs2013_icesadvice_201302.pdf

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Herring (*Clupea harengus*), Cod (*Gadus
morhua*) and Sprat (*Sprattus sprattus*)

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