



Commission proposes Baltic Sea fishing opportunities for 2016: more stocks than ever to be fished at sustainable levels

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The European Commission today tabled its proposal on fishing opportunities in the Baltic Sea for 2016. This is the annual proposal for the amount of fish that EU fishermen may catch from the Baltic Sea's 10 main commercial fish stocks, also known as Total Allowable Catch (TAC). For 7 of the 10 stocks, the available data from the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee on Fisheries (STECF) and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) has allowed the Commission to propose catch limits at sustainable levels, or within what is known as the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY), for more stocks than ever before. The EU aims to achieve MSY for all fish stocks by 2020 at the latest.

Based on today's proposals, the Total Allowable Catch for all stocks, except salmon, would decrease by about 15% compared to 2015. It would be set at approximately 565 692 tonnes. The catch limit for salmon, which is measured in pieces rather than tonnes, would increase by 6%, to 115 874.

More specifically, the Commission proposes to increase the catch limits for herring in the Western and Central Baltic, as well as for Baltic Main Basin salmon, and plaice. Decreases in the remaining Baltic Sea fish stocks either reflect the natural fluctuations within the MSY range or are linked to the improved perception of stocks' status as a result of recent data revision.

The Council will discuss the Commission's proposals with a view to their adoption at its October meeting. If adopted, the proposals will apply from 1 January 2016.

Herring

Under the Commission's proposals, all four Baltic herring stocks would continue to be fished at MSY levels, as was already the case in 2015.

A continuing improvement in Western and Central herring stocks has allowed the Commission to propose increased catch limits for both stocks. The quota for Western herring would increase by 12% to 24 797 tonnes, and for Central herring by 9% to 177 505 tonnes.

In contrast, *Bothnian* Sea herring would experience the biggest overall TAC decrease in 2016: a drop of -35%, to 103 254 tonnes. This reduction reflects ICES' decision to change the way this stock is assessed. The Commission expects that this change will improve the quality of ICES' assessment of fishing stocks in the coming years.

The Commission also proposed to decrease the TAC for *Riga* herring by -21%, to 30 623 tonnes.

Cod

In line with ICES' advice, the Commission proposed to decrease the TAC for Eastern Baltic cod by 20%, to 41 143 tonnes.

Data shows that Western cod stocks are overfished and have fallen below sustainable biological limits. The Commission expects Member States within the Council to agree on effective and adequate additional measures in order to improve the status of this stock. As the Commission is still awaiting additional data from ICES, it has not yet proposed a quota for this stock.

Salmon

The Commission proposed to increase the TAC for Baltic Main Basin salmon by 10%, to a total catch of 105 850. This is in line with the MSY approach.

Following ICES' advice, the Commission proposed a decrease of -2.4% for salmon in the Gulf of Finland, corresponding to a quota of 10 024 for this stock.

Sprat

This year ICES has updated fishing mortality rates for sprat. As a result, catch limits will decrease by 14%, to 184 336 tonnes. This proposal is also in line with MSY.

Plaice

The Baltic plaice stock experienced the biggest proposed TAC increase: +18%. The increase is the result of the conservative TAC setting practice in the past, but also of an improved stock assessment methodology that allowed the Commission to propose a quota in line with the MSY approach.

Background

The present proposal will be discussed by Ministers at the Fisheries Council in Luxembourg on 22-23 October. It is based on scientific advice from the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee on Fisheries (STECF) and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES). The Baltic Sea Advisory Council (BSAC) has also been consulted on this proposal, on the basis of the Commission's Policy Statement (COM (2015) 239 final) and the advice received from ICES.

More information:

- [MEMO/15/5564](#)
- TACs and quotas (with link to the proposal):
http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/fishing_rules/tacs/index_en.htm
- Scientific advice on managing fish stocks:
http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/fishing_rules/scientific_advice/index_en.htm
- Website of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES):
<http://www.ices.dk/Pages/default.aspx>

Table: Overview of TAC changes 2015-2016 (figures in tonnes except for salmon which is in number of pieces)

Stock	ICES fishing zone; subdivision	Adopted TAC for 2015	Basis for 2015 TAC	TAC proposal for 2016	Basis for TAC proposal 2016
<i>Eastern Cod</i>	25-32	51429	Consistent with the data limited approach	41143 (-20%)	Consistent with the data limited approach
<i>Western Cod</i>	22-24	15900	MSY by 2016 in two equal steps (the reduction applied to the fishing mortality)	-	-
<i>Western Herring</i>	22-24	22220	MSY	24797 (+12%)	MSY
<i>Bothnian Herring</i>	30-31	158470	MSY	103254 (-35%)	MSY
<i>Riga Herring</i>	28.1	38780	MSY	30623 (-21%)	MSY
<i>Central Herring</i>	25-29, 32	163451	MSY	177505 (+9%)	MSY
<i>Plaice</i>	22-32	3409	Consistent with the data limited approach	4034 (+18%)	MSY
<i>Main Basin Salmon</i>	22-31	95928	Consistent with the management plan	105850 (+10%)	MSY
<i>Gulf of Finland Salmon</i>	32	13106	Consistent with the catch quota levels	10024 (-24%)	Precautionary considerations
<i>Sprat</i>	22-32	213581	Consistent with MSY	184336 (-14%)	MSY

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