

BS RAC RECOMMENDATION ON A SALMON MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE BALTIC SEA

May 2009

General

In February 1997, the IBSFC adopted a Salmon Action Plan (SAP) in order to avoid a collapse in wild salmon rivers in the Baltic Sea. The SAP was agreed upon for the period 1997-2010. The present action plan is coming to an end, and the European Commission has started work on a new management plan.

In 2007 the BSRAC gave its first opinion on the contents of the future management plan (1st March 2007) and this still forms the basis for BS RAC views on the future salmon management plan.

The European Commission has presented its consultation paper dated 13.02 2009 (MARE D(2009) 1460 (Annex) and has started a public consultation period which ends on 1st May 2009.

A stakeholder meeting will be held in Brussels on 28th April 2009.

The Baltic Sea RAC has discussed the contents of a future plan for the management of Baltic salmon and proposes the following.

Main goals

Salmon stocks in the Baltic Sea and its rivers shall be managed and protected within safe biological limits and the genetic variability should be safeguarded.

Fishermen (commercial and recreational angling) in the Baltic Sea and its rivers shall be able to utilize the fishing possibilities arising from the positive results of a sustainable management of the Baltic salmon stocks.

Science and research on salmon and sea trout shall be further developed in cooperation with the stakeholders in order to safeguard a sustainable utilization and management of the Baltic Sea salmon. The WG would, however, like to stress that the lack of specific research should not hinder the development of progressive management of salmon in the Baltic Sea and the implementation of the EC Baltic Salmon Management Plan.

The management plan

A management plan for the Baltic Sea salmon is needed to safeguard weak populations, to support a further recovery of the salmon stocks to a sustainable level, and to increase the fishing possibilities which follow from an improved situation.

A plan is needed to create a holistic view of necessary action, to coordinate transnational and national activities, and to create a management framework which is relevant for the whole Baltic Sea region.

It is also stressed that spatial planning shall support the management plan in fisheries dependant areas.

The challenges of a management plan are that it includes both exclusive EU competences, or ditto MS competences, or a mixture of both. Actions under inter alia the Baltic Sea TAC are to be decided commonly, and actions under fishing regulations in coastal waters and rivers are within the competence of Member States (MS). Actions under science and fisheries control are also mostly decided at MS level, as are also water court decisions.

In order to create an efficient management plan with clear areas of responsibility, the European Commission should be able to clarify which of the proposed actions are clearly within the competence of individual MS and which are within the competence of the European Commission.

For its implementation the management plan needs financial support for science, control and other common activities. A structure for the financial aid to support and implement required common action needs to be developed. Actions under the CFP or other EU funding regulations are directed to MS, but are not for common action.

The new management plan for salmon relates also to the future new strategy for the Baltic Sea region. Common action should be financed by common financial structures.

Outcome of discussion on matters concerned

The Commission has raised several questions in its consultation paper and many of them will find their answers in the earlier BSRAC recommendation. Others are commented on below.

River inventories (to distinguish between strong and weak populations)...

A further improvement of salmon stocks, especially in weak rivers, demands renewed inventories. The inventory should inter alia identify all problems that hamper successful spawning or the further development of the salmon populations in the rivers concerned. If needed, the new inventory should also include a revision of the assessment goals. The inclusion of environmental concerns and habitat restoration stresses also the need to designate lists of salmon rivers based on these inventories.

On top of this, salmon river management plans are needed (proper monitoring of spawners, migrating activities, smolt protection of habitats...).

Overall TAC...

The salmon lifecycle, with its migration between the sea and rivers, requires a proper management with control of fisheries activities both in open-sea, coastal areas and rivers, and therefore an overall TAC should include all salmon fishing activities. Recreational fishermen shall be registered and be responsible for catch reporting systems to the same extent as commercial fisheries today. When including these in the TAC, their estimated unreported catches should be added to the TAC.

New control schemes shall cover all user groups.

A condition for an overall TAC is also that the allocation between user groups is based on the method of historical records, and the allocation key should remain the same. The aim is to maintain a balanced sharing of existing fishing possibilities.

Production targets...

Setting up any new targets has to involve a corresponding road plan and the appointment of needed funds. Restored rivers with higher production levels and increased fishing possibilities are in the interest of all user groups.

A realistic approach to the time frames is needed in order to avoid creating wrong assumptions and expectations on the further development of salmon rivers and salmon populations. Since the proposals include restoring the disturbed rivers, habitats as well as weak populations, current planning, permission to restore, restoration activities and all improvement processes will be time consuming.

Against this background a time frame of five years is very short. A more realistic time frame for the big rivers could be by 2020.

Targets for the minimum number of spawners per river...

The EU should require MS to set up clear goals for the minimum number of spawners per river for all wild salmon rivers in the Baltic region. As the socio-economic study has indicated, a further reduction in fisheries effort would not be the most cost efficient enhancement of salmon reproduction in rivers, and that is why emphasis should, in this case, be on other threats, e.g. on improving post smolt survival.

Additional technical measures...

Existing minimum landing sizes shall be kept. Returning female wild spawners above the landing size of 10 kg (e.g. second cycle spawners) should be released in inland waters and rivers with wild salmon. The target is to safeguard individuals carrying most of the genetic diversity of the population.

To support the return of all genetic forms with different homing schedules, all inland and river fisheries shall have closed periods e.g. seven days per month across the whole season, and be organized in an appropriate way.

The Baltic salmon management plan should include requirements for coherent harvest management schemes in different parts of the Baltic Sea. That will ensure a better escapement of migrating salmon to native rivers in this area.

Improving fishways...

One of the most important actions to improve this situation would be to enhance the proper functioning of fishways. The EU should with reference to the Habitats Directive, require MS to guarantee that at least 50 % of the returning native stock that has entered the river will have a chance to enter across obstacles in order to reach breeding areas.

Improvement of control measures...

To prevent further mismanagement of catch reporting pertaining to existing differences in the minimum landing size, further efforts must be made to clarify and distinguish between salmon and sea trout.

Rearing techniques....

Improvements in rearing techniques or an intensified campaign to restore genetic diversity are needed. These actions could have considerable benefits for increased post-stocking survival, but since they can also be connected to increased costs, a cost-effective approach needs to be adopted.

Voluntary releases of salmon in rivers...

In the case of weak populations, where there are no other alternatives for stock recovery, the practice of restocking can be accepted if it does not threaten the recovery of wild salmon populations.

Original genetic composition with high diversity should be guaranteed in all kinds of release activity. As early a life stage as possible should be used in releases, as this will promote needed lifeskill adaption to the natural environment and put the stocked fish under natural selection instead of hatchery selection.

Other research areas...

The EC should initiate a scientific assessment of the pros and cons of all salmon release programmes in the Baltic Sea (inter alia socio-economic and biological factors) in relation to the survival of all wild salmon populations in the coming 25-100 years.

Evaluate and develop the potential of sustainable salmon fisheries in terminal areas, where the acceptable proportion of native salmon is limited to a few percent.

Governance...

In order to make the new management plan for salmon a success, the management plan should clearly deal with the governance issue. As a general remark, one can say that the knowledge on how to improve the salmon stocks in the Baltic Sea is already there, but a clear division of responsibilities should be made and mentioned.

Priority activities need responsible lead parties, and some even require common action between national authorities and other stakeholder groups.

Restricting commercial fisheries was a main issue in the old SAP. The new plan should involve much more of the real stakeholders who can contribute to a relevant improvement of the salmon stocks; inter alia experts on rearing activities and genetics, experts on habitat restoration, the involvement of stakeholders who have had a clear negative impact on water quality in river basins, the involvement of recreational fishermen, who were never included in any administrative control system or catch reporting system, or official control systems.

Separate sea trout management plan needed...

In order not to delay the finalisation of the salmon plan, a management plan for the sea trout should be done separately.

Further involvement of the Baltic Sea RAC

The Baltic Sea RAC and its Working Group on Salmon and Sea trout appreciates its role as a regional advisory body to the European Commission and the Member States. In this role it sincerely hopes that the viewpoints expressed by the advisory body are considered and taken into account when the Commission works with a new management plan. Continuous consultation is anticipated, and the Baltic Sea RAC should preferably be involved in the monitoring of the implementation of the plan.

The BSRAC thinks that the future follow-up of the salmon management plan needs a surveillance group. The BSRAC, strengthened with inter alia scientists and representatives from the member states, could be the right body on a macro regional level and serve this purpose well.