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**Third Annual Report of the
Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council
May 2009**

Background and general information

The Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council (BS RAC) was set up in March 2006 in line with a decision by the EU to create so-called Regional Advisory Councils in the fisheries sector (Council Decision 2004/585/EC). The main aim of the BS RAC is to prepare and provide advice on the management of Baltic Sea fisheries, so as to contribute to the successful running of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy. Membership of the BS RAC comprises representatives from the fishing sector and other interest groups affected by the Common Fisheries Policy. These include fisheries associations, producer organisations, processors, market organisations, environmental NGOs, aquaculture producers, consumers, women's networks and recreational and sports fishermen.

The BS RAC has a General Assembly, an Executive Committee and 3 Working Groups (demersal fisheries, pelagic fisheries, and salmon and sea trout). The working groups were set up to assist the Executive Committee in its work.

This annual report gives an account of the activities of the BS RAC's third year which covers 16th March 2008-15th March 2009.

Full reports and minutes from the BS RAC activities and recommendations can be found on the BS RAC website: www.bsrac.org.

To improve awareness of the activities and objectives of the BS RAC amongst the members, a Polish website has been created and is maintained by the Pelagic WG chairman, Ryszard Malik. www.bsrac.pl

A regular newsletter is now produced by the RAC secretariat and uploaded onto the website. Website link for newsletter here:

<http://www.bsrac.org/ooizzCMS/DA/weeklynewsletters>

A summary of the newsletter is translated into Polish and put on the Polish website.

Priorities and results 2008-2009

The BS RAC work programme for 2008-2009 stated a number of priorities. These priorities, as well as outcomes or results, are listed below:

Recommendation on the long-term management of pelagic species.

The Commission's a recommendation on the long-term management of pelagic species did not emerge during the RAC year 2008-2009. It is expected during the RAC year 2009 - 2010. In June 2008 the BS RAC put forward its first position on the long-term management of pelagic species in the Baltic Sea. This was prepared by the Pelagic WG and approved by the Executive Committee at its meeting on 17th June 2008 in Riga. It was sent to the Commission on 24th June 2009.

In cooperation with ICES and national institutes find ways on how the BS RAC can contribute to better fishing data and improvement of the biological assessment of cod.

The BSRAC has been represented at meetings held by ICES to discuss, among other things, better data compilation and stock assessments. Scientists from national institutes have participated at BS RAC meetings during the year in connection with this subject. The BS RAC has also considered the Commission's consultation paper on unwanted bycatches, and on 24th June 2008 sent a response agreeing by consensus on the comments in the consultation paper.

Follow up on the BS RAC recommendation on a salmon management plan for the Baltic

The consultation process and Commission's proposal for a salmon management plan have been delayed. The consultation procedure began in the early spring 2009. The BS RAC held one WG meeting on 10th March 2009 to take onboard information on the consultation process and to plan its further work.

Follow up on the BS RAC conference in March 2007 on control and compliance in the Baltic cod fishery and on the BS RAC statement of 25 October 2007 on compliance and the sustainability of the Baltic cod fishery

In May 2008 the BS RAC produced a paper presenting the views of the BS RAC on the objectives presented in the Commission's consultation paper on the reform of the Control system. This was forwarded to the Commission on 9th May 2008.

Initiate a BS RAC discussion on spatial planning in the Baltic, by organising a workshop on this subject.

The BS RAC held a workshop on maritime spatial planning (MSP) in Tallinn on 19th-20th of February 2009. The aim of the workshop was to improve knowledge among BS RAC members on a variety of issues related to maritime spatial planning, to identify which aspects are relevant to the BS RAC and to help the ExCom decide on how the RAC should deal with MSP.

Short-term fisheries management (TACs and quotas for Baltic Sea fish stocks in 2009)

The BS RAC produced recommendations on the fisheries for Baltic Sea fish species in 2009 and sent these to the Commission on 4th July 2008.

All the recommendations produced by the BS RAC since it started can be found here:

<http://www.bsrac.org/ooizzCMS/DA/statementsandrecommendations>

Meetings 2008 -2009

The BSRAC and BS RAC representatives have held or taken part in the following meetings during the year:

Demersal WG 30th April 2008 (biological assessment/fishing data), Copenhagen

The Demersal Working Group met at ICES. At the meeting there were 22 participants from the fishing industry, WWF and Baltic fisheries administrations. The meeting dealt with the Commission's consultation paper on control and discussion of RAC input, the Commission's consultation paper on discard, and technical rules for the fishery, including the 8% rule. It was agreed to produce a draft response from the BS RAC on both consultation papers.

Joint Demersal, Pelagic and Salmon/Sea trout WG (Management of fisheries in 2009), 3rd - 4th June, Hamburg

This meeting took place at the Federal Institute for Fisheries Research in Hamburg. 42 participants from the fishing industry, the environmental organisations, the Baltic fisheries administrations, ICES and the European Commission participated. The subjects dealt with were the Commission's Policy Statement on fishing opportunities for 2009, the WG position on the management of fisheries in 2009, the Commission's Consultation paper on discard, and a discussion on a RAC response to the long-term management of pelagic species in the Baltic. At the meeting a draft position paper on the long-term management of pelagic species was presented, based on the outcome from the Pelagic WG meetings of 24th October 2007 and 21st October 2008. The recommendations on the long-term management of pelagic stocks were later approved by the ExCom in June 2008, and sent forward to the Commission, which replied positively.

Executive Committee, 17 June 2008, Riga

The ExCom took place at the Ministry of Agriculture, in Latvia. There were 36 participants at the meeting. The meeting decided on recommendations regarding the fisheries for Baltic fish species in 2009 and adopted a recommendation on the long-term management of the pelagic species in the Baltic. The meeting adopted a draft letter on the low survival of reared salmon smolt to be sent to those member states, which release reared salmon into the Baltic Sea (Finland, Germany, Latvia, Poland, Sweden). The meeting adopted the BS RAC comments to the Commission's consultation paper on discard. The meeting decided on a procedure to be followed in situations where there are not sufficient members present at meetings (at least 2/3) for it to carry out its functions. The meeting approved the draft programme for the workshop on spatial planning and provided the steering group with a mandate to continue their work along the lines presented in the draft programme for the workshop.

RACs' seminar on long-term management, 11th-12th September 2008, Nantes

This joint RAC seminar took place at the Hôtel de Région Pays de la Loire, Nantes. It was organised by the BS RAC, North Sea RAC, North Western Waters RAC, Pelagic RAC, and SWW RAC. RAC representatives, the European Commission, ICES, and a number of other organisations took part. The seminar discussed how long-term management plans could help to achieve the political objective of moving depleted fish stocks towards Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY), in line with the EU commitment at the Johannesburg Summit in 200 and whether long-term management plans would provide a management framework for each fishery over a longer period than at present. There was a general consensus that long-term management plans were good. However, it was still early days, and a considerable amount of work remained, both to develop specific plans, and to develop the processes through which they are developed, implemented and evaluated. There was unanimous agreement that the RACs have an important role to play in developing long-term management plans, and concerns were expressed about the workload that this could place on them.

Executive Committee, 20 October 2008, Copenhagen

This meeting was held in Copenhagen at Forsikringenshus, Amaliegade. There were 40 participants from within the RAC, DG Mare and research. The meeting was held after a long summer break, during which a new Executive Secretary was selected. Her appointment was confirmed at the ExCom. The Work Programme for 2008-2009 was adjusted to take into account the wish by the ExCom to hold the next General Assembly at the beginning of the new BS RAC year, followed immediately by an ExCom. The Commission was subsequently informed of the updated work programme. At the meeting there were updates on the activities of the three working groups, and information on the outcome of the TACs and quotas for 2009. The Commission gave a presentation of the review of the functioning of the RACs, and the ExCom agreed to provide input to a BS RAC position, and to consider input to the process of the review of the CFP. An update was given on the planned workshop on spatial planning. In connection with this, a representative of the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, gave a PowerPoint presentation of the results of the EMPAS project and of the Natura 2000 conference in Stralsund. The ExCom was informed of the aim to hold a BS RAC conference in the autumn of 2009 to address such issues as fisheries, environment and science. The ExCom agreed to recommend to the General Assembly an increase in membership fees of the BS RAC for the next RAC year.

Workshop on Spatial Planning, 19th and 20th February 2009, Tallinn

The BS RAC members and invited speakers took part in a workshop on maritime spatial planning (MSP) at the Hotel St. Olav, in Tallinn. There were 47 participants in all. The aim of the workshop

was to improve knowledge among BS RAC members on a variety of issues related to maritime spatial planning, to identify those aspects which are relevant to the BS RAC and to help the ExCom decide on how the RAC should deal with MSP. During the first part of the workshop, invited speakers gave presentations which addressed the issue of MSP in the context of fisheries. The speakers covered a range of topics which could have an influence on the fisheries sector. The second day of the workshop was devoted to plenary discussions on how the BSRAC could deal with MSP. It was acknowledged that maritime spatial planning is already taking place on a broader scale and that increased uncertainty and increasing competition for marine space are making maritime spatial planning increasingly important. The discussions also drew attention to the challenges and benefits of MSP. It was agreed that since MSP is a new area for the BS RAC, it needs to define its role in relation to it, and to identify the right arena where MSP should be pursued. Given the importance and complexity of the issue, and the strong implications of MSP for the members of the BS RAC, there was agreement to reflect further on the issue and to have an initial discussion on how to move forward with MSP at the next ExCom meeting on May 8, 2009, in particular with respect to the issue of funding. It was also agreed to invite a representative from Nord Stream to a forthcoming ExCom to discuss further the proposed gas pipeline across the Baltic.

Executive Committee, 20th February 2009, Tallinn

This meeting was held straight after the workshop on MSP. There were 29 participants. The meeting confirmed the need to give MSP further reflection with a view to further discussion at the next ExCom in May 2009. The ExCom looked forward to the arrival of the Green Paper of the review of the CFP and agreed to concentrate on matters relating to the Baltic, and include further reflections on the functioning of the RACs. It was agreed to write to the Commission and inform that the BS RAC was happy with the cooperation with the Commission. There was an extensive discussion on selectivity, based on the Commission's report on selectivity of the trawl fishery for cod in the Baltic and the conclusions drawn from it, and the scientific request to ICES. There was an exchange of views on the need for specific trials and studies into selectivity. The ExCom agreed to a short-term project on this subject. The ExCom received reports from the chairmen of the WGs of the BS RAC. There was an update on the planning of coming meetings in the BSRAC: Science workshop in May 2009 and BS RAC conference autumn 2009. The Secretariat presented the draft work programme and budget for the coming RAC year 2009 –2010, and there were no comments. It was agreed to recommend to the General Assembly an amended wording to cover the consequences of non-payment of membership fees.

Salmon Working Group, 10th March 2009, Copenhagen

The meeting was held in the offices of the Danish Fishermen's Association on H.C. Andersens Boulevard. There were 18 participants. The aim was to inform the WG members on current work for

a new salmon management plan and to discuss the possibility of making contribution from the WG and the BS RAC. Representatives from the socio-economic science group of ICES presented their contributions. Representatives from DG Mare presented a consultation paper to support the development of a Baltic salmon management plan and explained the consultation process, which aimed towards the presentation of a Commission proposal during the autumn 2009. The WG agreed to meet again on 2nd-3rd April 2009 to work on drafting a recommendation on a salmon management plan.

Other meetings where the BS RAC has been represented

Commission workshop on Discards 27th - 28th of May 2008, Brussels.

This workshop brought together specialists, practitioners and all stakeholders in order to exchange views, experiences and best practices in discard mitigation measures. It also discussed several policy options proposed in the recently released consultation paper on the implementation of the policy to reduce unwanted by-catch and eliminate discards in European fisheries. The chair of the BS RAC ExCom and the executive secretary took part in this workshop.

RAC coordination meetings with the Commission, Brussels

The chair of the BS RAC ExCom and the executive secretary have participated in two coordination meetings with the Commission: on 29th May 2008 and 24th November 2008. Commission representatives provided updates and information on matters relevant to the RACs. Before and after these meetings, the RAC secretariats held inter-RAC meetings to keep each other mutually informed and provide support on areas of common interest.

Commission EU Maritime Spatial Planning: Kick-off Conference, Brussels

The Commission invited stakeholders to this conference on 26th February 2009. The vice chair of the BSRAC ExCom, Ewa Milewska, Otilia Thoreson, (WWF) and Peter Breckling, (Union of German Cutter Fishery), represented the BSRAC at this conference.

ICES benchmarking 16th – 23rd January, Copenhagen



Michael Andersen (Danish Fishermen's Association and chair of BS RAC demersal WG) represented the BSRAC at this meeting, which dealt with data compilation, and the benchmarking of cod.

ICES-RACs Contact Meeting 26th-27th January 2009 Copenhagen

Michael Andersen ((Danish Fishermen's Association), Vesa Karttunen (Federation of Finnish Fisheries Organisations), Jenny Fors (Fisheries Secretariat), Irina Jakovleva from the Lithuanian Ministry and the BSRAC secretariat represented the BSRAC at annual meeting between all RACs and ICES. Discussions focussed on how to improve cooperation between ICES and the RACs.

ICES Evaluation of management plans 28th – 30th January, Copenhagen

The ICES and STECF Workshop on the Development and Evaluation of Fishery Management Plans aimed to establish best evaluation practises. Michael Andersen represented the BSRAC.