

Draft BS RAC recommendation for the fishery of pelagic species in the Baltic Sea in 2010.

On 15th June 2009, the BS RAC Pelagic Working Group was presented with the ICES advice for the fishery of the Baltic pelagic stocks for 2010. The presentation was made by Steen Christensen. Peter Hopkins of the Commission presented the Communication from the European Commission on fishing opportunities for 2010.

The ICES advice confirmed the good state of the pelagic stocks. The BS RAC fisheries representatives also confirmed the very good state of all the pelagic stocks. This year will also see the recommendation of a long-term management plan for the Baltic pelagic stocks. The fishermen look for stability in the fishery and for the correct spawning stock biomass levels for the pelagic stocks when the long-term management plan takes effect. The fisheries representatives expressed a strong wish for cooperation with the scientists, and recommended the creation of a reference fleet and observation programmes in order to provide as much information as possible for the scientists. The monitoring of stocks should must be an important role for the scientists, and fast reactions will be needed.

On the basis of the discussions in the working group, the following recommendations are put forward for approval by the Executive Committee.

Herring in Subdivision 22-24

ICES advice is not yet available for this stock.

The pelagic Working Group recommends roll-over of the TAC for 2009 of 27 175 tonnes.

Herring in Subdivision 25-29 and 32 (excluding Gulf of Riga herring)

The ICES advice for the herring TAC is 103 000 tonnes.

The Pelagic Working Group recommends a roll-over of the TAC for 2009 of 143 609 tonnes .

Herring in Subdivision 28.1 (Gulf of Riga)

The Pelagic Working Group recommends a roll-over for 2009 with a TAC of 34 892 tonnes.

Herring in Subdivision 30-31 (Bothnian Sea)

The Pelagic Working Group proposes that the TAC for herring in the Gulf of Bothnia, should be 109 600 tonnes, in line with ICES advice.

ICES advice for herring in SD 30 + 31 is a TAC of 109 600 tonnes. ICES points out that the stock is being harvested sustainably. ICES also maintains (see section 8.3.3.1b) that there has been a decreased mean weight-at-age in the stock, caused most likely by climate induced changes in the food web, as well as stock density dependent effects which have impacted the value of the catch. This could also increase the dioxin content of the fish caught. (The Finnish representatives have put these the points forward earlier.) ICES concludes that reduced growth rates caused by density dependent effects are likely. The exceptionally large year class of 2002 and the large new year class identified for 2006 will increase the effects of the large numbers of herring individuals. This would allow for an increase in fishing and a decrease of the density. The spawning stock biomass would still remain at a very high level. The justifications for such a proposal and a slight deviation from the maximum change rule of 25 % (Category 1 stock exploited at the maximum sustainable yield in Annex II of Commission's Consultation on fishing opportunities for 2010) are more than solid. The element of density-dependence should be catered for in the rules for setting TACs.

Sprat in Subdivision 22-32 (Baltic Sea)

The ICES advice for the TAC is 306 000 tonnes.

The Pelagic Working Group recommends a rollover of the 2009 TAC of 399 953 tonnes.

The Pelagic working Group recommends that the TAC for sprat should be at least maintained at its current level of 399 953 tonnes, and not reduced as proposed by ICES to 306 000 tonnes. The main reasons for this are to be found in the ICES response (8.3.3.1d) to the requests on ecosystem effects of a reduction in the size of the sprat stock. The modelling performed by ICES and current knowledge indicates that increased sprat fishing would:

- 1) decrease sprat SSB to an on average stable level and increase sprat growth and improve their condition;
- 2) slightly increase the SSB of cod (naturally also dependent on cod fishing and environmental conditions);
- 3) increase herring SSB and growth and improve their condition, and
- 4) increase total summer zooplankton and decrease phytoplankton biomass (algal blooms).

These effects would all be beneficial both for fish stocks and the marine environment (in-line with the cod management plan and the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan). Although there are many sources of uncertainty, there is sufficient knowledge and indications for a decision to maintain the sprat TAC at its current level. This would only reduce the sprat SSB slightly towards a stable level that in the scientific literature has been identified for cod dominance.