

# HELSINKI COMMISSION

Baltic Marine Environment  
Protection Commission



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via e-mail

Ms. Ilona Jepsena  
Head of Unit  
Fisheries conservation and control  
Baltic and North Sea  
Maritime Affairs and Fisheries DG  
European Commission  
Brussels

Mr. Claude Rouam  
Head of Marine Unit  
DG Environment  
European Commission  
Brussels

Dear Ms. Jepsena and Mr. Rouam,

Please find attached a note from the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (the Helsinki Commission – HELCOM) on the issue of discards in the Baltic Sea.

The issue of discards was discussed by the HELCOM Baltic Fisheries and Environmental Forum at its Third Meeting held in Copenhagen on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October 2009, prior to EU's Fisheries Council meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October. Through this note HELCOM would like to manifest its support to the ongoing process to eradicate the discards of juvenile cod in the Baltic Sea.

The HELCOM Baltic Fisheries and Environmental Forum was established in 2008 to facilitate the successful implementation of the fisheries related actions in the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) and to contribute to a management of the fisheries that is compatible with the environmental objectives of the BSAP. The Forum is a regional platform for communication and collaborative action, where the competent Fisheries and Environmental authorities of the Baltic Sea area, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and other invited scientists, the Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council (BS RAC) and other non-governmental organizations in the fields of fisheries and nature conservation are invited to exchange views and experiences in best practices for sustainable management of fisheries, to discuss and agree on joint activities.

Looking forward to future cooperation,

Igor I. Maydanov  
Chairman of the Helsinki Commission

Attachment: Note by HELCOM: A discard-free fishery in the Baltic Sea



## Note by HELCOM

Subject: **A discard-free fishery in the Baltic Sea**

The implementation of the EU cod recovery plan in the Baltic Sea, in combination with beneficial environmental conditions, is expected to give positive results in the form of the strong cod year-classes (2005 and 2006). As the strong year classes enter the fisheries there is an increased risk for high-grading and discarding. In this situation, ICES has recommended to implement measures to improve the selectivity of fishing gear.

The reduction and ultimately eradication of discards is seen as a priority both within the European Common Fisheries Policy and the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP)<sup>1</sup>.

The European Commission's proposal for a Council Regulation that fixes the fishing opportunities for the European Member States for 2010 for the commercially most important fish stocks in the Baltic Sea<sup>2</sup> has a provision relating to discards. Article 7 of the proposal prohibits the practice of high-grading.

In the BSAP the Contracting Parties of HELCOM<sup>3</sup> agreed on the target to "by 2015 discards of fish are close to zero (<1%)". To reach the target the BSAP "urges the competent fisheries authorities in cooperation with the Baltic RAC and HELCOM to take immediate actions for introduction of additional fisheries management measures based on the best available scientific evidence to achieve:

- that all caught species and by-catch which cannot be released alive or without injuries are landed and reported, by 2012;
- continued designation of additional/improved spatial and/or temporal closures of sufficient size and duration for fisheries to prevent capture of spawning and juvenile fish;
- the designation of additional permanent closures of sufficient size for fisheries to prevent capture of non-target species to protect important reproduction and feeding areas and to protect ecosystems, by 2012;
- the urgent adoption of measures to minimise by-catch of undersized fish and non-target species by 2012"

The discard of fish in general and cod in particular, is an unwanted reality both for the fishermen and the society in general. The process to reach the 2015 target of a discard-free fishery in the Baltic Sea has already started. The issue has been the theme for discussions in 2009 at a series of meetings in the Baltic Sea region. The process has generated a constructive debate and concrete proposals that go beyond the prohibition of high-grading. As a part of the process, the BS RAC has put forward to the European Commission a proposal for a project on selectivity in the cod fishery.

On 1 October 2009, the Ministers responsible for fisheries in the Baltic Sea Member States, that are also Member States of the European Union, and the European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries signed The Stockholm Declaration. In the Declaration the Ministers agreed "to take urgent measures to protect the strong young year classes of the Baltic Sea cod by improving the selectivity of the fishing gear used in the cod fisheries in the Baltic Sea". The Declaration calls for close collaboration to develop selective gear with the aim of eliminating discards in the Baltic Sea fisheries and decide to develop a roadmap in 2010 to eradicate discards in the Baltic cod fishery, *inter alia*, through the adoption of a discard ban as appropriate.

Through this note, HELCOM would like to communicate to the European Commission its support to The Stockholm Declaration and the ongoing process for the eradication of cod discards in the Baltic Sea.

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<sup>1</sup> The BSAP was adopted by HELCOM's Contracting States and the European Commission in Krakow, on 15 November 2007.

<sup>2</sup> COM (2009) 439 final: Council Regulation on fishing the fishing opportunities and associated conditions for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks applicable in the Baltic Sea for 2010

<sup>3</sup> Denmark, Estonia, the European Community, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Russian Federation and Sweden