

An initiative from the municipalities of Klaipeda, Ustka and Simrishamn may now become reality!

## **The Baltic Sea Fishermen's Network to enhance dialogue and cooperation on practical issues**

**A report from the conference Baltic Sea Forum 2009  
October 15<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> 2009 Marine Centre, Simrishamn, Sweden**

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### **Abstract**

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of October 2009 a group of fishermen from Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden signed a proclamation in Simrishamn stating that they, as individual fishermen, support the idea of having a continuous dialogue and cooperation as a base for an overall development of the fishing technology and practical issues. The fishermen agreed that there is no need to create a new organisation. Rather, they found that the proposed activities should constitute a more flexible and easier formable "network." According to the fishermen, participation in the network should be an option for all commercial Baltic Sea fishermen, regardless of what fleet segment or nation they represent. Furthermore, they highlighted that participation should be on voluntary basis only. During the second day of the meeting focus was set on the network and its future activities. Among other things there was an intense and very professional debate on trawl size-selectivity. At the closing of the meeting the only major question remaining, despite strong objections from the participating fishermen, was the question regarding the date for the next meeting. According to the initiators because the Conference Declaration had now been signed, the objective of the initial phase was met, and the next phase would be the actual planning of a detailed work program and activities. However, the next step now, before entering this realization phase, is to find a potential financier or suitable way of financing the various activities within the network.

### **Three major fishing ports behind the initiative - why?**

Despite an intensive striving to restore the balance between fishing fleet and marine resources, the international authorities have failed to fully convince the fishing industry and the local decision makers about a better future. A question that local politicians find themselves asking more and more often is whether investments in the fishing industry will pay off in the future or not? For the city of Simrishamn, the initiator of this process, the fishing sector is more than crucial - it is a "life line". Therefore, at the beginning of this year (2009) the authorities in Simrishamn decided to contact Klaipeda in Lithuania and Ustka in Poland to find out how other similar fishing centres, particularly along the east coast of the Baltic Sea, experienced the present situation. A meeting for representatives of the three fishing centres accompanied by a small group of commercial fishermen was arranged at short notice in Ustka. One issue was raised above all others: the lack of dialogue and cooperation between fishermen on practical and technical issues. The unanimous outcome of the meeting was to recommend a process where fishermen in various parts of Baltic Sea were consulted if they shared this view. Soon after the initial contacts two meetings were set to be held during the coming fall (2009). The outcome of the first meeting in Klaipeda (August 25<sup>th</sup> - 26<sup>th</sup>) was a strong recommendation for the process to continue. For more details, watch a video on YouTube. Find the link in appendix 2. This report summarizes the second and for the time being last of the two scheduled meetings held in Simrishamn on October 15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>.

### **A short summary of the “Baltic Sea Forum” day one**

Basically the two-day conference in Simrishamn was divided into two entities. During the first day the aim was to summarize the results obtained so far for those participants not present at the first meeting in Klaipeda. Because the number of countries represented had increased from three to five, and the number of participants from 13 to nearly 40 there was an apparent need to allow the new members to express their personal and national views as well (appendix 1; list of participants). One of the absolute highlights of the first day was when Reine Johansson, the chairman of the Baltic Sea RAC (=BS RAC), gave a general interpretation of the present, extremely challenging political situation of the fishery and how the BS RAC intended to act upon various potential scenarios. He ended his very sincere and interesting speech by warmly welcoming the idea of an enhanced international dialogue and cooperation between fishermen. The last speaker before the beginning of the day-one outdoor program was Peter Funegård, representative of the Swedish National Board of Fisheries. He enlightened the listeners about the activities to be launched within the newly founded international cooperation named “Baltic Sea Strategy,” This action aims from a broad perspective to improve the environment of the Baltic Sea as well as to enhance human activities that promote from an ecological point of view a more sustainable development in the Baltic Sea region. Sweden is coordinating the activities within the task “sustainable fishery” where one possible element in terms of international projects may be “an enhancement of international dialogue within the industry.”

After this informative part of the meeting the participants were offered a chance to visit a private agency for Volvo Marine Engines and a Swedish control unit for commercial landings, both subjects located in the Port of Simrishamn. The guided visit to a Swedish cod trawler, SIN59 Kungsö, was rescheduled to take place on day two in connection with the discussions concerning further improvement of selectivity properties of cod bottom trawls.

Unfortunately, due to extreme weather conditions many of the ferry lines between Poland and Sweden were forced to cancel their evening departures from Polish harbours on October 23<sup>rd</sup>. Therefore the Polish delegation, including 3 fishermen and one net manufacturer, was only able to attend the second day of the conference.

There is also a video available on YouTube summarizing the Simrishamn conference. Find the link in appendix 2.

### **Baltic Sea Forum day two - focus on the future of the initiative**

The first day was followed by more of “a working day” with the floor left open merely for the fishermen and net manufactures. The aim of day two was to focus on further discussions regarding the actual physical platform on which the network would be standing, and the way the future work within the initiative and interaction with other surrounding institutions should be carried out.

Next follows a short summary of and a discussion of the raised issues at the conference. Observe that the presentation is not in chronological order, meaning that the issues are not listed in the order they were brought up in the discussions, but instead in a way so that they compose appropriate entities.

### **Fishermen more motivated and prepared**

Compared to the first meeting held in Klaipeda on August 15-16<sup>th</sup> the fishermen who participated in Simrishamn were more motivated and prepared to discuss issues related to the proposed enhancement of dialogue and cooperation. Obviously, there are several reasons behind these differences. For example, the fishermen in Klaipeda were not as versed in the fundamental objective of the initiative as those in Simrishamn. In the end, however, perhaps the most important thing

profoundly different in Simrishamn compared to Klaipeda was that many of the fishermen meeting in Simrishamn were in fact “acquainted” and therefore somewhat personally involved in each other’s situations. Furthermore, they knew that despite differences in cultural backgrounds, fishermen generally have a very similar view on many practical and technological issues. Clearly, the awoken awareness of how the entire fishing sector could benefit from an intensified cooperation and that a cooperation is indeed possible, helped the fishermen to handle the issues raised throughout the entire meeting in a very pragmatic and professional way.

### **“The core of activity should be in practical issues”**

Despite a larger, but most of all internationally more versatile gathering of fishermen present in Simrishamn, one of the key results obtained during the Klaipeda meeting remained unchanged. If this initiative, as the fishermen hope, will contribute to an intensified and more focused international cooperation between fishermen and net manufacturers, practical issues should be the core of activity. Seen from today’s perspective there are a number of practical problems that should be solved. Unquestionably, it would be enormously beneficial to have a wider and more heterogeneous technological and fishing strategic platform in managing this task. The only way to establish such a platform is to enable a dialogue and cooperation among fishermen. There was a short but intense discussion regarding the present technological regulatory measures and as well as rules, which from a fisherman’s point of view was considered to lack an appropriate context. Apparently, the reason behind impractical rules is a poor technological knowledge base. Therefore it was emphasized that the network and the fishing sector would benefit from some kind of dissemination or distribution apparatus. Exactly how the information transfer from network to surrounding stake holders would be managed was not discussed.

### **“There’s no need for a new organisation”**

Due to the obvious need to cover an extremely broad and varying field of issues, a proposal was made aimed at establishing a light, flexible and easily comfortable way of working. Instead of having a permanent administrative organisation, or a central institutional body, the fishermen would rather see the future activity as a constantly accommodating workflow, for example, in terms of a network consisting of several parallel projects or initiatives. In this context (see end of previous chapter) the issue of having some kind of representation was brought up again. There is a need for something that can act on behalf of the network e.g. during RAC meetings or meetings with other stakeholders. The representative from the Marine Centre in Simrishamn, Madeleine Lundin, suggested a specific “Forum” as an embodiment of the network as one possible solution. This Forum would be featuring e.g. as a platform for the annual Baltic Sea Fishermen’s Network conference, where the ongoing as well as new potential activities of the Network would be discussed, obtained results disseminated and which in a way would be in charge of public relations in general. She suggested that instead of having a permanent location, the site of the forum should be alternated among all the participating countries.

There was a consensus among the fishermen about the importance of cooperating with the BS RAC. A couple of the fishermen participating in the Simrishamn meeting are statutory members of the BS RAC. According to them there is no risk of crossing interests between the network and BS RAC because the network would be working merely with practical and in part very detailed issues. In fact seen from the RAC’s perspective the proposed network would actually be an extremely good complement because it is not possible to raise very detailed technical or practical issues during RAC meetings. In an optimal situation the network could become a useful complement and an additional forum for the RAC, where important practical issues would be dealt with by professional, skilled and sufficiently experienced “specialists.”

### **Focus on fishery from a “fisherman perspective”**

Even though the network primarily would be created for fishermen dealing with issues they themselves find important, naturally all interested organisations, institutions and private actors would be welcomed either as observers or to participate in the discussion. Many of the fishermen felt that it would be necessary for the door to remain open to everybody. Members of the Polish delegation suggested that the network would be named “The Baltic Sea Fishermen’s Network.” The proposal was unanimously accepted.

### **Fishing gear selectivity - still issue number one**

Generally the fishermen present in Simrishamn were inclined to support the preliminary list of potential issues (see appendix 3) that was put forward by the fishermen attending the Klaipeda meeting. The decision became, on one hand, to maintain the list as presented, but on the other hand, the fishermen felt it necessary to point out that there was a need for prioritization. Clearly, due to the most recent development both regarding the improved stock situation of Baltic cod as well as the new administrative plans with e.g. a discard ban, the need to improve fishing gear selectivity from a practical point of view was perhaps more necessary than ever. Therefore the fishermen agreed to set the short-term focus on *fishing gear selectivity* and *ghost nets*.

### **Fishing gear selectivity can be useful - but in some cases harmful**

Before going into a more detailed discussion on how to increase selectivity in fishing gears, the fishermen wanted to point out that according to them there seemed to be a very good cause to clarify the preconditions *when fishing gear selectivity can be or should be used as a management tool*. Namely, that selectivity despite the fact that it can be a very powerful tool in preventing juvenile fish from getting caught e.g. in the cod fishery, may in some fisheries turn out to be extremely harmful. For example one case where selectivity should absolutely not be utilized is in the pelagic trawl fishery targeting herring and sprat. Despite the fact that both scientists and fishermen know for sure that only a minority of escaping herring and sprat survive, administrators still seem to think that there is a need to define a minimum mesh size for these fisheries. Fishermen cannot understand why small herring and sprat should be allowed to escape when everybody seems to know that almost all of them die and sink to the sea bottom turning into organic waste, contributing with additional oxygen absorption.

When speaking about discrepancies in fisheries legislation contributing with confusion and dissatisfaction among fishermen, this is a very good example of an illogical rule that lacks proper context. This kind of rules should absolutely not exist, but unfortunately there are quite a lot of them. In addition, they are completely useless and also undermine the credibility of the management system.

### **Selectivity should take place only while towing**

A more technologically oriented discussion on fishing gear selectivity was kicked off by a Polish representative. He stressed that recent Polish research shows that up to almost one third of all escapements take place while hauling. This observation suggests that many of the cod that in experiments are defined as “escapees” in fact do not manage to exit the trawl until the towing is stopped and the vessel is heaving the trawl up to the surface. This in turn means that many of these individuals will get lethal physiological injuries due to a rapid and abnormal change in water pressure. The Polish results bear witness to a significantly lower survival rate than e.g. the experiments that were carried out during the Bacoma project (1997-99).

After a very professional, pragmatic and in every way interesting debate on the reasons behind the different results, fishermen could agree that the most likely reason for different selectivity and

survival rates was the way vessels are hauling their gears. The vessels that participated in the Polish experiments were side trawlers (main trawl drum is located on the long side of the vessel). When side trawlers are take their trawl onboard they have to come to a complete stop. While standing still, the trawl is left without drag and the meshes will open up allowing fish to more freely find their way out of the gear. Naturally if escapement takes place closer to the surface, the escaping fish will be injured and many will die. The Swedish fishermen knew that in the Bacoma experiments all the escapees were collected during the fishing operation, meaning that the gear was still at the fishing depth. In the Bacoma experiments the survival rate was over 95%. Therefore, if fishing gear selectivity is to be used as a management tool, the first criteria must be to secure that selectivity takes place only during towing.

As an interesting remark in this context can be mentioned a statement that was made during the above referred discussions. The fishermen acknowledged that one possible reason for the somewhat higher discarding rate within the Swedish fleet may in fact be a result of the dominance of stern trawlers. Stern trawlers can be considered as a more modern vessel type in that they require a smaller crew and due to among other things the location of the main net drum they are more efficient in operation. This in turn means that when the entire Baltic trawler fleet will successively be modernized, leading to an increasing number of stern trawlers. One consequence of this may become a marked reduction in selectivity in this particular fleet segment. The only way to compensate for this future development is to secure that future fishing gears are more selective than the present ones.

### **Codend selectivity alone - perhaps not enough anymore**

Until today, when discussing means to improve trawl size-selectivity, the focus has been entirely on selectivity that takes place in the terminal end of the trawl gear, the so called "codend." One of the likely reasons behind an approach where selectivity is concentrated to the codend is a way to guarantee that the selective windows or panels are in the right spot, in others words, where the caught fish most likely are to be found. Until somewhere around 2004-2005 this approach probably guaranteed enough technological possibilities to secure that the majority of caught undersized fish that enter the codend were provided with a fairly good chance to escape. Gradually, after 2005, the most modern and efficient Swedish cod trawlers have been experiencing a huge increase in their average catch per unit effort. It is not unusual that an experienced skipper onboard a modern trawler with the latest electronic instrumentation is capable of catching his two-week quota (around 14 tonnes) in just 1.5 sea days. High catch per unit effort (=cpue) means in practice a lot of fish entering the codend per time unit. At the end of the 1990's and the beginning of 2000 cpue was rarely over 500-700 kg/hour, whereas today the figure is almost three times that high. High cpue means big catches, which in turn means that e.g. the 3.5m long Bacoma panels becomes easily blocked. Fishermen estimate that with catches exceeding 2.5 - 3 tonnes, the Bacoma panels are completely blocked.

Some of the net makers expressed their worry regarding the practical problems that high catch rates have caused in terms of decreasing selectivity properties. There were even those that suspected that the magnitude of improvement in the efficiency of codend selectivity needed to cover today's catch levels may turn out impossible. In a situation where tonnes of fish are packed into the codend every hour and in case a great deal of them are smaller than the targeted size classes, the present codends might just not be big enough to provide the physical prerequisites to build selectivity devices that can handle big catches quickly enough. Perhaps we should start to investigate other, additional ways of enhancing size-selectivity in cod bottom trawls. Actually, the sooner we succeed in ensuring that the unwanted fish escape, the better survival probability they will have. The idea of elaborating the front part of the trawl to enhance selectivity at an earlier stage of the catching

process was not objected to, but some fishermen expressed their concern that this might lead to decreased catching efficiency, in particular among the larger, targeted size classes.

### **Ghost nets - an international problem so it requires an international solution**

The Polish delegation informed the listeners that the WWF in Poland is planning to start a project aiming at solving the problem of ghost nets in Polish waters. However, ghost nets are not just a Polish or any other nation's single problem. Ghost nets are typically an international problem and therefore in fact just the type of technological-strategic issue that could be handled in a proper manner by the Baltic Sea Fishermen's Network. The Swedish fishermen agreed with the Polish delegation and emphasized that the work they have been carrying out since 2003 to eliminate this problem has shown that it is above all a local problem and that spatially it may even be a reasonably big problem. However, based on the experience that Swedish fishermen have gained during lost net retrieval campaigns, they are absolutely convinced that the industry can play a very crucial role in coming projects. With the help of fishermen the potential host areas hiding eventual lost nets can be efficiently located, even though their spatial distribution would be changing from one year to another. Maybe the network could act as a consulting party in future projects, but also provide technological assistance when needed.

### **Undisputable success - fishermen signed a proclamation**

As a festive end to the process and as an undisputed proof of its success, five fishermen, one from each participating country signed a proclamation where they agreed to enhance both international dialogue as well as cooperation between fishermen, with "sustainable fishery" as a common goal (see appendix 3).

Very soon after the Simrishamn conference BS RAC added a separate link to the "Baltic Sea Fishermen's Network" on their web site, under the heading Selectivity. This can be seen as a clear indication of a positive reaction toward this initiative.

## Appendix 1. List of participants in Simrishamn.

List of participants Baltic Sea Forum 15-16 October 2009			
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## Appendix 2

Video summarizing the Klaipeda meeting can be found at following address:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZsnvhGk46W0>

Video summarizing the Simrishamn meeting can be found at following address:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Qqwu7D77IM>

The preliminary list of potential issues to be raised within the network compiled in Klaipeda.

1. Developing more selective fishing gears
2. To aim at solving the problem with “ghost nets” (“removing and preventing”)
3. Promoting a development toward more environmental friendly and cost effective vessel engines
4. Inventory and mapping of the Baltic Sea cod stock
5. Promoting subsidies for modernization
6. Defining the economic boundaries of a profitable commercial fishery
7. Mapping marine areas where fishery should be prohibited

**Appendix 3.** A copy of the original conference proclamation.



**Baltic Sea Forum**  
**Sustainable fishery – from theory to practice**  
Simrishamn 15-16 October 2009


**CONFERENCE DECLARATION**

Our common goal is a sustainable future for the Baltic Sea fishery.


To reach this goal, we have decided to:

- create an international forum for Baltic Sea fishermen in which to meet, exchange experiences and discuss common problems and future solutions
- move from theory to practice by coming together and cooperate to solve technological problems
- work to elaborate concrete projects that will contribute to the development of a sustainable Baltic Sea fishery.


Simrishamn  
15-16 October 2009



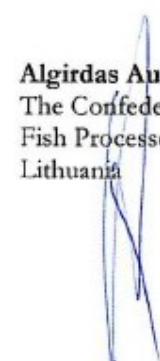
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**Kim Kær Hansen**  
Danish Fishermen's Association  
Denmark



**Lothar Fischer**  
German Cutter- and Coastal  
Fishermen's Association  
Germany



**Algirdas Ausra**  
The Confederation of Fishermen and  
Fish Processors of West Lithuania  
Lithuania



**Olle Viberg**  
Swedish Fishermen's Federation  
Sweden