

## **Technical Working Group to eradicate discards in the Baltic Sea fisheries**

### **Questions for discussion**

#### **1. MEASURES TO AVOID CATCHING UNWANTED COD**

##### *1.1 Revision of the borders for the present three closed areas?*

The cod fisheries in the Western Baltic (subdivisions 22-24) are regulated by a seasonal closure, from 1st to 30th of April in 2009. The cod fisheries in the Eastern Baltic (subdivisions 25-28) are regulated by a seasonal closure during 1 July to 31 August to protect spawning fish.

Area closures are enforced from 1 May to 31 October for all fisheries since 2008 in three specific areas of the Bornholm Deep, the Gotland Basin and the Gdansk Deep aimed at reducing fishing mortality and protecting spawners.

The question is whether the physical borders should be reviewed, either by changing and/or increase the area, or if the period should also be changed and/or increased.

##### *1.2 Further seasonal or permanent closed areas?*

Is there any scientific evidence of the benefit of further closures to decrease discards? Any evidence from the fishing industry?

##### *1.3 Further effort restrictions?*

Effort restrictions (days absent from port) have been in place for both cod stocks, associated to the reduction of fishing mortality to the targets specified in the management plan. While the fishing mortality continues to be higher than the target, fishing effort will be reduced annually by 10%.

The question is whether further effort restrictions, either by reducing the number of days absent from port or to make a restriction on fishing of a day per week for example, can reduce discards?

#### **2. MEASURES TO REDUCE FISHING MORTALITY OF UNWANTED COD**

##### *2.1 Increase in mesh size entering into force in 2010?*

At the 2009 October Council, it has been agreed to increase the mesh size and the length of the BACOMA window and the mesh size of T90 trawl, from 1 January 2010 in subdivisions 22-24 and from 1 March in subdivisions 25-32. Is there any available data to indicate that the increase in mesh size is reducing discards, or will reduce discards? Has the exploitation pattern of the gears changed, i.e. has L50 and L25 increased?

##### *2.2 Further increase in mesh size/selectivity?*

ICES concluded, in its latest advice regarding ways to improve selectivity of Baltic cod fisheries, that there is strong evidence from the earlier analysis by ICES and from additional work carried out mainly in Poland and Germany, to conclude that both BACOMA windows and T90 codends correctly fish according to current regulations, as

both give an L50 of 38–40cm, equivalent to the Minimum Landing Size (MLS) for cod of 38 cm, with narrow selection ranges. Considering this latest advice will a further increase in mesh size reduce discards? If so what will be the expected exploitation pattern, i.e. what will be the expected L25?

### *2.3 New technical changes to the present gear?*

ICES was not able to advise on a particular change to improve selectivity. ICES concluded that technically there is a large range of options that can have an effect on the selectivity of Baltic cod fisheries, but it was not possible to identify a particular change that will drastically improve the exploitation pattern. There is a range of gear designs that all meet the requirement of an L50~41 cm and an L25>38 cm.

Is L25>38cm an appropriate target to reduce discards? Is there a (set of) common design modifications of the present trawl gears that can reduce discards? In relation to other fisheries that may have increased cod bycatch with increase cod abundance, are there any selectivity improvements possible?

### *2.4 Prohibition of codend buoy?*

In the recent proposed amendment of Appendix 1 and 2 to Annex II of Council Regulation (EC) No 2187/2005 that sets specific technical measures for the conservation of fishery resources in the Baltic Sea, the Belts and the Sound; the use of codend buoys was prohibited as it decreases codend selectivity. However, both Member States and the industry contest this statement and argue that codend buoys are needed for security reasons.

It was agreed in the latest fisheries committee to discuss this prohibition in this meeting and thus the question remains: do codend buoys decrease selectivity of trawl gears and thus increase the probability of discarding?

### *2.5 New gear development and/or implementation of one new gear as suggested by the Baltic Sea RAC?*

Finally, any gear modification agreed should be tested. The Baltic Sea RAC project can be an ideal candidate to include the possible agreed changes. Furthermore, during the proposed amendment to the appendixes of the Baltic technical measures regulation several aspects have surfaced that can also be considered in a future project: testing for knotted nets in T90 or a different mounting ratio for the BACOMA window, for example?