

Conclusions from the Conference

The Conference concluded that the most important issues to be addressed in the Baltic Sea fisheries are as follows:

1. Discards

The conference agreed that the problem of discards needs to be addressed urgently, with the main task to protect young year classes and eliminate unnecessary waste, and to ensure the long-term stability of cod stocks.

The views on the approach differed. Some indicated the need to introduce a total discard ban as soon as possible; others felt that a gradual approach was more suitable. A ban on high-grading should be the first and immediate step to reduce discards. In addition to that, urgent action to improve cod gear selectivity is required. Thus, support was given to the project proposed by the BS RAC. A roadmap should be prepared for a group of experts in the field of gear technology, with a task to evaluate all available research and experiments in the area, as well as practical experience of the fishing industry. The results of the evaluation should be presented in a report which would serve as a basis for a decision on more selective gears to be used in the cod fishery.

2. Regionalisation and decision-making process

There was general agreement that the current top-down approach to decision-making in both political and technical matters was untenable. Moreover, participants seemed to agree that there are useful lessons from the past, which may be instrumental in improving the current decision-making process. It was indicated that because of past experience, the Baltic Sea could be an excellent ground for building a role model for other EU regions in this regard. The conference was encouraged by the openness of the European Commission to initiate a regional technical body providing recommendations to the EU-level decision-making system. It was emphasised that the composition of this body should comprise RAC members, fisheries administrations, science and representatives of EU Institutions. The conference emphasised that transparency is essential in building mutual trust between all the actors involved.

The conference considered that the Baltic Sea Strategy was an important regional initiative, also from the point of view of fisheries, by giving it a broader perspective within an integrated EU maritime policy. The conference felt that this matter needs further examination and action at political level.

The need to strengthen cooperation and mutual understanding between science and the fishing industry was highlighted in order to create a positive interface and a common language.

3. Relative stability

The Commission reiterated its idea that relative stability could be made more flexible by introducing elements of a market-based approach in fisheries management on a supranational level. The conference felt, however, that relative stability remained a cornerstone of the CFP. A number of interventions pointed out the usefulness and simplicity of quota swap

mechanisms. Some participants felt that a separation of relative stability from a host of CFP reform-related matters was useful.

4. Rights – based management systems

The conference noted with interest the initiatives by several Member States to gradually introduce rights-based management systems into their fisheries. A view was expressed that decision regarding their implementation should remain within national competence, with full account taken of differences regarding i.a. legal systems and fisheries profiles. The conference was presented with detailed information on the ITQ system in Danish fisheries, which was considered an interesting example.

5. Overcapacity

Many participants shared the view that overcapacity still exists in Baltic cod fisheries. The introduction of rights-based management was generally viewed as a means of dealing with this matter. An interesting question was posed as to how overcapacity in a given fleet should be identified and measured.

6. Control and enforcement

The conference was informed about the progress made in establishing a culture of compliance since the Copenhagen Conference organized in 2007 by the BS RAC and the Danish administration. A number of interventions showed the potential of transparent control activities to help in building mutual trust between industries from different Member States. The conference was informed about initiatives taken by processors to ensure that the consumer is supplied not only with good quality healthy fish, but also fish coming from legal fisheries. It was pointed out that certification schemes for particular fisheries can be instrumental in improving their economic performance.

7. Social aspects in small-scale fisheries/coastal areas

The point was made that it was important to preserve local fisheries-dependent communities because of their importance in preserving their traditional social and economic fabric.

8. External threats: eutrophication, regime shifts and climate change

These are considered the major threats to long-term sustainability of the Baltic fisheries.