


# Baltic Sea Technical Rules

## Introduction



Fisheries management in the Baltic Sea became much simpler on 1 January 2006. After broad consultation with all the parties concerned, the Council adopted a Regulation in November 2005 streamlining and updating the rules governing fisheries in the Baltic. The new rules are simpler and better harmonised, which will facilitate the task of fishermen who have to comply with them and of inspectors who have to monitor their enforcement.

The primary aim of the new Regulation is simplification. Before 2006, anyone wishing to consult all the many different rules applicable to fishing activity in the Baltic Sea had to consult a complex body of European regulations and IBSFC recommendations.

With its proposal, the European Commission sought to summarise all this legislation in a [single legislative text](#) [  ~348 Kb]. All the technical measures currently applicable in the Baltic Sea are presented in the new text, from measures on gears to those on target species, by-catches, minimum landing sizes and geographical and seasonal restrictions. In drafting the Regulation, special attention was paid to defining measures clearly and precisely, the aim being to make them easy to apply and easy to monitor.

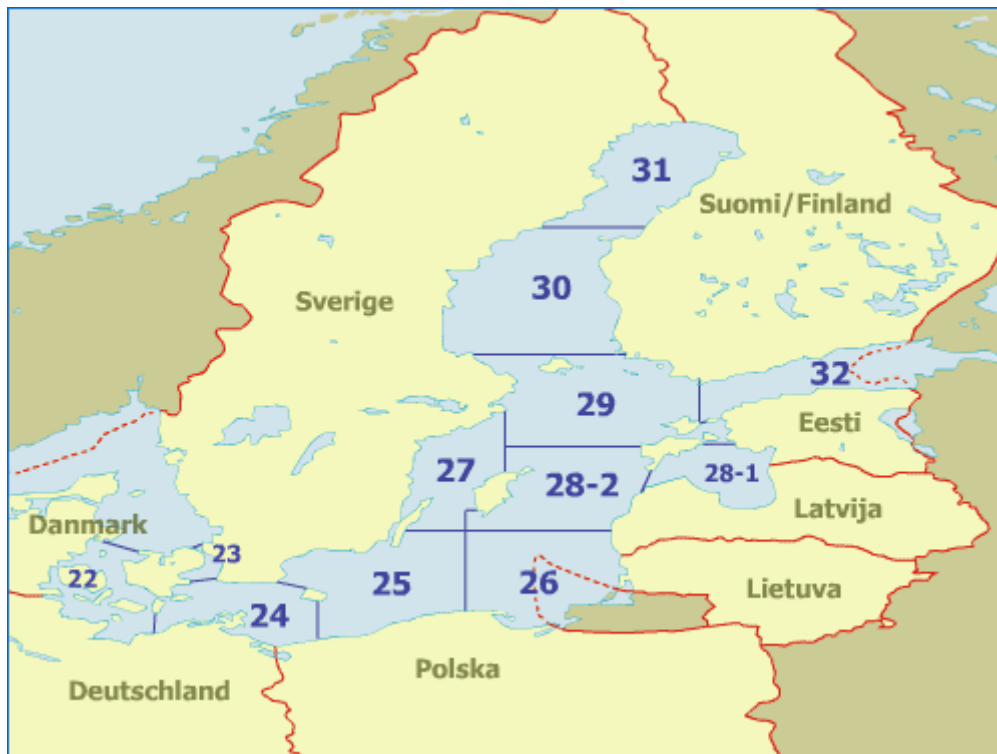
Naturally, in addition to technical measures there are management measures proper, which are extremely important in a sea which, like all European waters, is suffering from the depletion of its main commercial stocks. All the measures on annual catch possibilities, together with long-term management plans for certain species, must therefore be considered alongside those detailed here.

### The IBSFC





Until the end of 2005, the international aspects of Baltic Sea Fisheries were managed multilaterally by the bordering States within the International Baltic Sea Fishery Commission, or IBSFC. Following enlargement of the EU in 2004, the number of parties has now dropped to two (the European Union and the Russian Federation) and discussions can therefore take place bilaterally. The IBSFC, having become redundant, ceased its activities on 31 December 2005.

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## Map of fisheries zones



Baltic sea and ICES Areas

-  ICES Fishing Areas
-  European Community Waters (approximate)
-  European Union Countries
-  Non European Union Countries

Geographical Data Source: DG Fish and Maritime Affairs / EUROSTAT  
Geographical Projection System: WGS84

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## Fishing gear



This is the heart of the policy on conservation of resources. The European Union's aim is to establish targeted and selective fisheries in the Baltic Sea, which can limit by-catches and mortality of young fish. Technical rules on fishing gear contribute to that objective. In this context, the European Union has drawn up a number of detailed measures, to prevent operators from distorting this basic philosophy.

For each area of activity and each target species, the Regulation describes in detail the types of gear, minimum mesh sizes and the tolerated proportion of by-catches.

In general terms, there are two types of gear that need to be considered:

- Active gear, which has to be moved by a vessel. In the Baltic Sea, this mainly means trawls and Danish seines.
- Passive gear, which is set in the water and hauled up later. In the Baltic Sea, passive gear consists mostly of gill nets, entangling nets, trammel nets and drift nets.

In passing, it is worth noting that the use of dredges is prohibited in the Baltic Sea except for the collection of molluscs and of *furcellaria lumbricalis*, a seaweed that tends to proliferate wildly in areas suffering from eutrophication.

### Sub-regional differences

Although the Baltic Sea is a geographically coherent body of water, the state of stocks varies appreciably in different areas. Cod stocks, for example, are in a much more precarious state in the eastern than in the western Baltic. There are two reasons for these differences:

- The first is geographical. Salinity, temperature, winter freezing periods and environmental conditions vary widely from the Belts in the north to the Gulf of Botnia, leading to differences in the behaviour and resistance of stocks depending on their location.
- The second concerns management. Some Member States put management measures in place a number of years ago and these have helped protect stocks closest to their shores.

Fishing traditions also vary from one area to the next: different species are caught with different types of gear using different vessels.

All these criteria had to be taken into account when developing the technical rules. That is why the rules on fishing gear and by-catches (as well as those on landing sizes) vary depending on where the fishing activity takes place.

- [Minimum mesh sizes](#)
- [Provisions on active gear](#)
- [Provisions on passive gear](#)

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## Mesh size and by-catches

This part of the Regulation aims to reduce catches of young fish. Indeed, it is essential to allow as many juveniles as possible to reach maturity, because the regeneration of resources depends on breeding stocks. That means mesh size has to be such that adult fish can be caught while young fish are able to escape.

The minimum mesh openings authorised in the Baltic Sea are determined according to three factors:

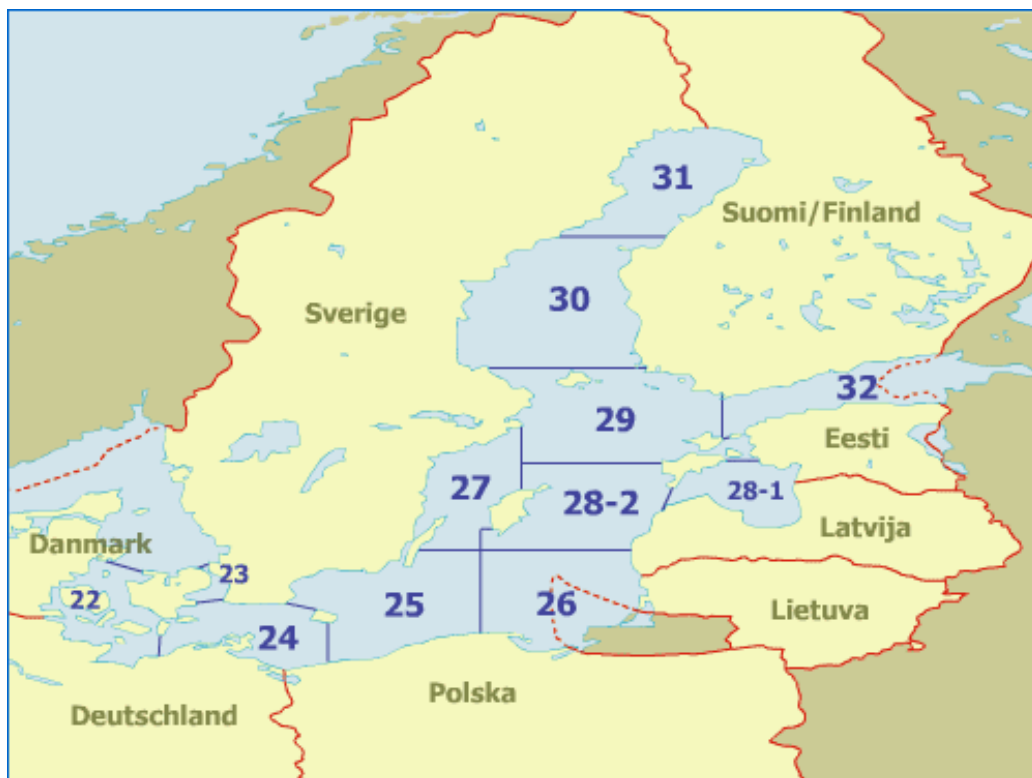
- the type of gear used
- the area of activity
- the target species

### Limits on by-catches

The Regulation aims to prevent any distortion of its provisions, such as the catching of large species using gear designed for smaller species (e.g.: fishing for salmon with gear designed for cod and then falsely representing the salmon as by-catches).

To that end, by-catches are strictly limited. For each category of mesh (see table below), the authorised species must make up at least 90% of the catch retained on board (100% for large mesh sizes). Surplus by-catches must be thrown back into the sea immediately. The only exception to this rule is for industrial fishing for sand eels and sprat, where there is an allowance for by-catches of herring and whiting.

N.B.: only the species listed in the Regulation (see tables) are concerned by these limits. By-catches of non-listed species – for example, freshwater fish found in areas where the water is not very salty – are not subject to limits and are not included when calculating authorised catches.



### Baltic sea and ICES Areas

- ICES Fishing Areas
- European Community Waters (approximate)
- European Union Countries
- Non European Union Countries

Geographical Data Source: DG Fish and Maritime Affairs / EUROSTAT, Geographical Projection System: WGS84

- [Subdivisions 22-23 \(until 30 june 2006\)](#)
- [Subdivisions 24-27](#)
- [Subdivisions 28-32](#)

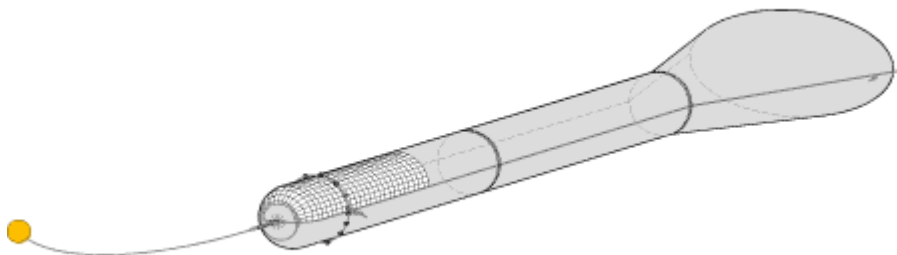
## Mesh size and by-catches -Subdivisions 22-23 (until 30 june 2006)

### Trawls, Danish seines and similar gear

Mesh size	min % of authorised species	authorised species
0-15 mm	90%	sandeel
<i>By-catches of cod may not exceed 3%.</i>		
16-31 mm	90%	sandeel, sprat
<i>By-catches of cod may not exceed 3%. The catch retained on board may consist of up to 45% herring.</i>		
32-89 mm	90%	sandeel, sprat, herring
<i>By-catches of cod may not exceed 3%. The catch retained on board may consist of up to 40% whiting.</i>		
90-104 mm	90%	sandeel, sprat, herring, sole, plaice, whiting, brill, dab, flounder, lemon sole, turbot
<i>The use of beam trawl is prohibited.</i>		
105 mm and greater	100%	sandeel, sprat, herring, sole, plaice, whiting, brill, dab, flounder, lemon sole, turbot, cod
<i>The use of beam trawl is prohibited.</i>		

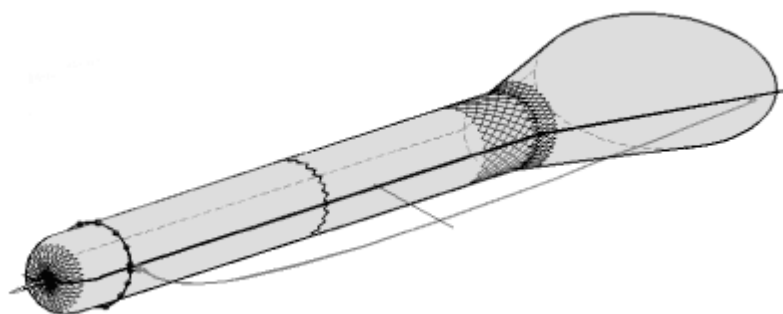
For mesh size greater than 105 mm, the gear must be fitted with:

- a Bacoma exit window



For authorised use, trawls fitted with a Bacoma exit window must meet a set of strict criteria: twine thickness, size of window, specifications for mounting, joining, etc. These criteria are described in detail in Appendix 1 of Annex II of the Regulation.

- a T90 codend and extension piece



For authorised use, trawls, Danish seines and similar gear fitted with a T90 codend and extension piece must meet a set of strict criteria: twine thickness, size of window, specifications for mounting, joining, etc. These criteria are described in detail in Appendix 2 of Annex II of the Regulation.

#### Gill nets, entangling nets and trammel nets

Mesh size	min % of authorised species	authorised species
32-89 mm	90%	sprat, herring
<i>By-catches of cod may not exceed 3%.</i>		
90-156 mm	90%	sprat, herring, sole, plaice, whiting, brill, dab, flounder, lemon sole, turbot
157 mm and greater	100%	sprat, herring, sole, plaice, whiting, brill, dab, flounder, lemon sole, turbot, cod, salmon

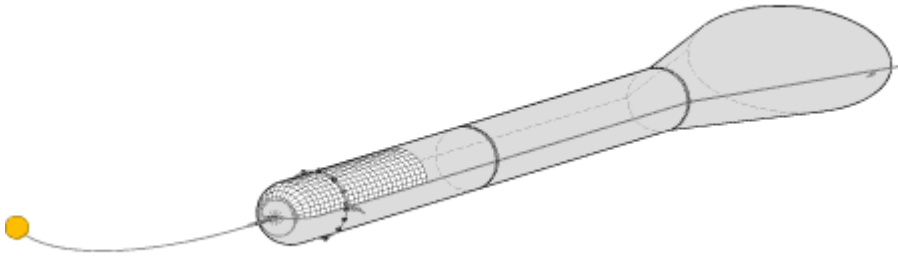
#### Zones 22-23 (from 1 July 2006)

##### Trawls, Danish seines and similar gear

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0-15 mm	90%	sandeel
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16-31 mm	90%	sandeel, sprat
<i>By-catches of cod may not exceed 3%. The catch retained on board may consist of up to 45% herring.</i>		
32-89 mm	90%	sandeel, sprat, herring
<i>By-catches of cod may not exceed 3%. The catch retained on board may consist of up to 40% whiting.</i>		
90-104 mm	90%	sandeel, sprat, herring, sole, plaice, whiting, brill, dab, flounder, lemon sole, turbot
<i>The use of beam trawl is prohibited.</i>		
105 mm and greater	100%	sandeel, sprat, herring, sole, plaice, whiting, brill, dab, flounder, lemon sole, turbot, cod
<i>The use of beam trawl is prohibited.</i>		

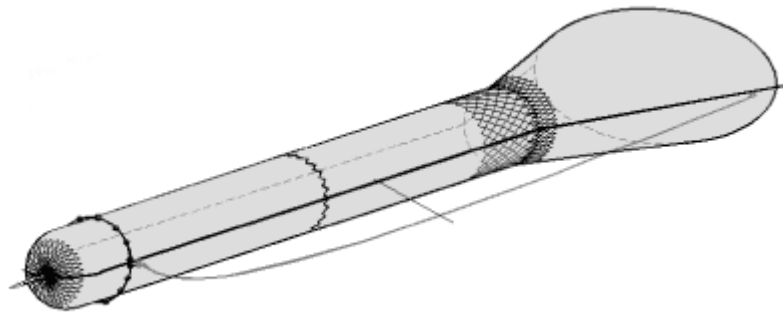
For mesh size greater than 105 mm, the gear must be fitted with:

- either a Bacoma exit window



For authorised use, trawls fitted with a Bacoma exit window must meet a set of strict criteria: twine thickness, size of window, specifications for mounting, joining, etc. These criteria are described in detail in Appendix 1 of Annex II of the Regulation.

- or a T90 codend and extension piece



For authorised use, trawls, Danish seines and similar gear fitted with a T90 codend and extension piece must meet a set of strict criteria: twine thickness, size of window, specifications for mounting, joining, etc. These criteria are described in detail in Appendix 2 of Annex II of the Regulation.

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Mesh size	min % of authorised species	authorised species
32-109 mm	90%	sprat, herring
<i>By-catches of cod may not exceed 3%.</i>		
110-156 mm	90%	sprat, herring, sole, plaice, whiting, brill, dab, flounder, lemon sole, turbot, cod
157 mm and greater	100%	sprat, herring, sole, plaice, whiting, brill, dab, flounder, lemon sole, turbot, cod, salmon

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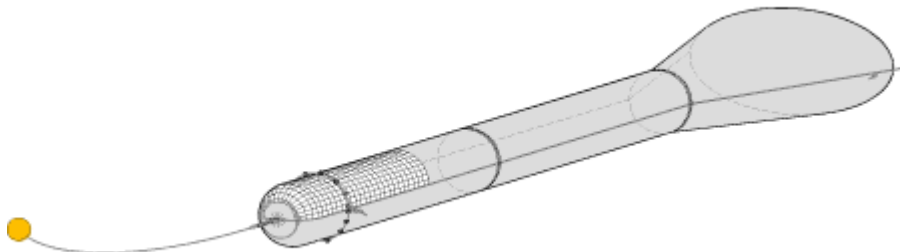
## Mesh size and by-catches - Subdivisions 24-27

### Trawls, Danish seines and similar gear

Mesh size	min % of authorised species	authorised species
0-15 mm	90%	sandeel
<i>By-catches of cod may not exceed 3%.</i>		
16-31 mm	90%	sandeel, sprat
<i>By-catches of cod may not exceed 3%. The catch retained on board may consist of up to 45% herring.</i>		
32-104 mm	90%	sandeel, sprat, herring
<i>By-catches of cod may not exceed 3%. The catch retained on board may consist of up to 40% whiting.</i>		
105 mm and greater	100%	sandeel, sprat, herring, sole, plaice, whiting, brill, dab, flounder, lemon sole, turbot, cod
<i>The use of beam trawl is prohibited.</i>		

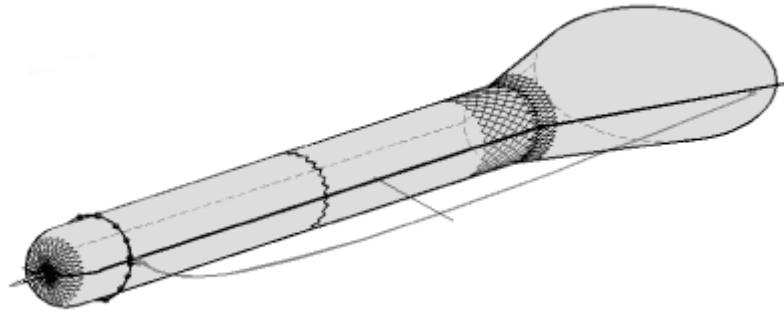
For mesh size greater than 105 mm, the gear must be fitted with:

- either a Bacoma exit window



For authorised use, trawls fitted with a Bacoma exit window must meet a set of strict criteria: twine thickness, size of window, specifications for mounting, joining, etc. These criteria are described in detail in Appendix 1 of Annex II of the Regulation.

- or a T90 codend and extension piece



For authorised use, trawls, Danish seines and similar gear fitted with a T90 codend and extension piece must meet a set of strict criteria: twine thickness, size of window, specifications for mounting, joining, etc. These criteria are described in detail in Appendix 2 of Annex II of the Regulation.

**Gill nets, entangling nets and trammel nets**

<b>Mesh size</b>	<b>min % of authorised species</b>	<b>authorised species</b>
32-109 mm	90%	sprat, herring
<i>By-catches of cod may not exceed 3%.</i>		
110-156 mm	90%	sprat, herring, sole, plaice, whiting, brill, dab, flounder, lemon sole, turbot, cod
157 mm and greater	100%	sprat, herring, sole, plaice, whiting, brill, dab, flounder, lemon sole, turbot, cod, salmon

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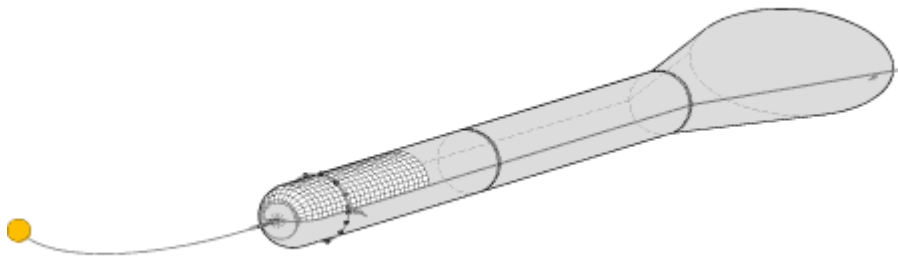
## Mesh size and by-catches - Subdivisions 28-32

### Trawls, Danish seines and similar gear

Mesh size	min % of authorised species	authorised species
0-15 mm	90%	sandeel
<i>By-catches of cod may not exceed 3%.</i>		
16-104 mm	90%	sandeel, sprat, herring
<i>By-catches of cod may not exceed 3%.</i>		
105 mm and greater	100%	sandeel, sprat, herring, sole, plaice, whiting, brill, dab, flounder, lemon sole, turbot, cod
<i>The use of beam trawl is prohibited.</i>		

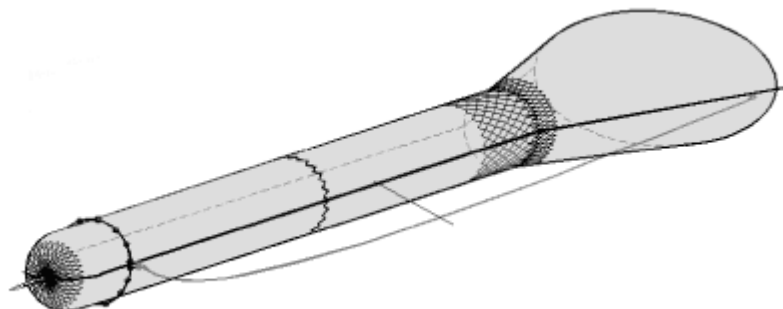
For mesh size greater than 105 mm, the gear must be fitted with:

- either a Bacoma exit window



For authorised use, trawls fitted with a Bacoma exit window must meet a set of strict criteria: twine thickness, size of window, specifications for mounting, joining, etc. These criteria are described in detail in Appendix 1 of Annex II of the Regulation.

- or a T90 codend and extension piece



For authorised use, trawls, Danish seines and similar gear fitted with a T90 codend and extension piece

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#### Gill nets, entangling nets and trammel nets


Mesh size	min % of authorised species	authorised species
16-109 mm	90%	sprat, herring
<i>By-catches of cod may not exceed 3%.</i>		
110-156 mm	90%	sprat, herring, sole, plaice, whiting, brill, dab, flounder, lemon sole, turbot, cod
157 mm and greater	100%	sprat, herring, sole, plaice, whiting, brill, dab, flounder, lemon sole, turbot, cod, salmon

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## Characteristics of active gear

The general philosophy of rules on minimum mesh size is to help protect fish resources in the Baltic by sparing as many young fish as possible. All technical adjustments which would enable gear to be used in breach of this general philosophy are therefore prohibited.

The Regulation attaches particular importance to the configuration of active gear used in the Baltic Sea, namely trawls, Danish seines and similar gears.

For detailed information on the technical specifications described below, refer to the [Regulation](#) [ 340 Kb], section II, Articles 5, 6 and 7.

The codend is defined as being the last eight metres of the trawl.

The codend of these gears must meet very strict criteria. They must:

- be cylindrical or tapering in shape;
- have square or diamond mesh (for mesh size equal to or larger than 32 mm);
- be sewn at their front part into the body of the trawl (for mesh size equal to or larger than 90 mm);
- have a circumference of between 40 and 100 diamond meshes, with the exception of the joining or selvedge meshes (for mesh size equal to or larger than 90 mm).

The following are strictly prohibited:

- any codend whose diameter increases from the front end to the rear end;
- any extension piece in which the circumference at any point is smaller than the circumference of the foremost end of the codend to which the extension piece is joined;
- any codend where the stretched length of the top half is not approximately equal to the stretched length of the bottom half.

The Regulation also bans in general any device which obstructs or otherwise diminishes the mesh in the codend. Some devices meant to facilitate fishermen's work are nonetheless authorised:

- protective devices to prevent or reduce wear in the lower half of the codend;
- strengthening bags, but only for mesh of less than 90 mm and provided the mesh size of the strengthening bag is at least twice as large as that of the codend and in no case less than 80 mm;
- flappers;
- sensors to measure the volume of catches;
- round straps and lifting straps for mesh size smaller than 90 mm;
- lifting straps for mesh size equal to or larger than 90 mm;
- floats attached to the two lateral selvedges of the codend;
- back straps, attached at a distance of no more than 50 cm from the codline.

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## Characteristics of passive gear

Specific rules are laid down for gill nets, entangling nets, trammel nets and drift nets.

The aim is to find solutions to the two main problems created by the use of passive gear:

- they deliver an important fishing effort that may be excessive if not limited;
- they take a large volume of by-catch.

To reduce fishing effort, the European Union has decided to limit the length of gears and their immersion time.

### Length

The authorised length of gears depends on the vessel towing them:

- Vessels measuring up to and including 12 m in length may use nets of no more than 9 km.
- Vessels measuring more than 12 m may use nets of no more than 21 km in length.

### Immersion time

Immersion time for all nets may not exceed 48 hours.

The only exception is for fishing under the ice cover, in which case immersion time is not limited.

The problem of by-catches of non-commercial species is being studied. All types of passive gear are undergoing a scientific assessment to determine their impact on cetacean mortality. The findings of this study should be available by the end of 2007. The European Union has nonetheless already taken the precaution of banning the use of drift nets in the Baltic Sea as of 2008.

- [Banning drift nets](#)

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## Fishing gear - Characteristics for passive gear - Banning drift nets

In March 2004, the European Union introduced a number of technical measures accompanied by a scientific observation programme to combat by-catches of small cetaceans (dolphins and porpoises). One of the most urgent problems was the risk created by certain fishing activities for populations of common porpoises in the North Sea, the English Channel and the Baltic Sea. In the Baltic, one of the solutions identified to counter this phenomenon is the prohibition of drift nets from 1 January 2008.

As from that date, any use of a drift net in the Baltic Sea must be duly authorised by the national fisheries administration. Indeed, the authorities must issue permits in such a way as to achieve a gradual reduction in the number of users of this gear:

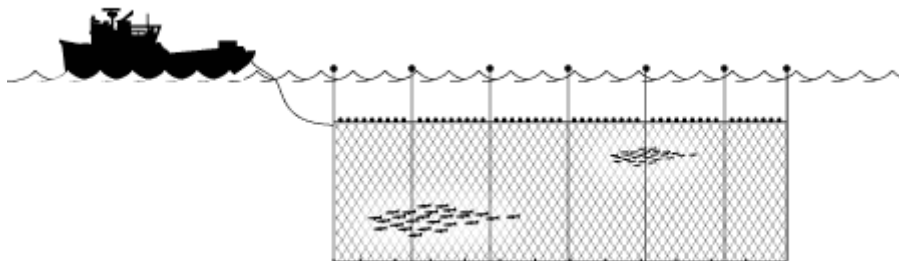
- In 2006, the number of users must have dropped by at least 60% compared to the reference period 2001-2003.
- In 2007, the number of users must have declined by at least 80% in the western Baltic (subdivisions 22-24) and will have to be maintained at 60% in the eastern Baltic (subdivisions 25-32) compared to the reference period.

The skippers of vessels authorised to use a drift net must also keep a log in which they carefully record:

- the total length of the net brought on board;
- the length of the immersed net during each fishing operation;
- the quantity of incidental catches of cetaceans, with the date and position of the net at the time of catch.

### The reasons for the prohibition

Drift nets, used in the Baltic Sea mainly to fish for salmon, are huge. They are immersed vertically and the biggest nets descend to a depth of up to 30 metres. The upper edge is maintained on the surface (or just below it) by floats and the lower part is weighted to keep it under water. The nets can be up to several kilometres in length. So for animals approaching them, they take the form of a huge wall of mesh.



There are two problems connected with the use of such gear. First, the nets are not selective because they catch all species moving around near the surface of the water. Second, due to this lack of selectivity, they are responsible for a large number of by-catches of non-commercial species. The main victims in the Baltic Sea are marine mammals, and specifically common porpoises, whose snouts get caught in the mesh, thus preventing them from resurfacing to breathe. These populations are already very vulnerable as a result of certain kinds of deterioration of the marine environment, the disappearance of their natural habitats, chemical pollution, heavy metals and underwater acoustic nuisances.

The problems related to the use of large drift nets are not limited to the Baltic Sea. In the early 1990s, following the warnings issued by scientists, the United Nations adopted a resolution calling for a worldwide general moratorium on the use of large drift nets.

Further to that resolution, the European Union banned the use of drift nets in Atlantic and Mediterranean tuna fisheries, a measure in force since 1 January 2002. The nets are nonetheless still authorised in the same waters for small pelagic species (anchovies, sardines), because the small mesh size is more selective (big fish bump up against the net but do not get caught) and the nets take fewer by-catches (dolphins and porpoises cannot get their snouts caught in it). A similar derogation would make no sense in the Baltic, because local small pelagic species (sandeels, sprat and herring) are generally caught with trawls.

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## Minimum landing sizes



In order to try and protect young fish, the Regulation establishes minimum landing sizes. Any fish smaller than the minimum size set for its species must be returned immediately to the sea after being caught. It cannot be retained on board or be transshipped, landed or sold.

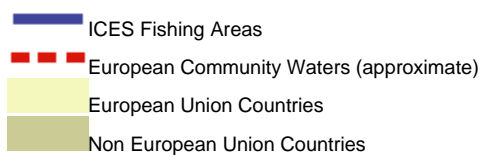
The only exception is for industrial fisheries, whose catches are not used for human consumption. This activity targets small species using nets with small mesh size and does not sort its catches. It is therefore not obliged to take minimum sizes into account for by-catches, as these are considered to be limited.

In the case of fish caught for human consumption, however, minimum sizes must be scrupulously respected. The fish is measured from the tip of the snout, with mouth closed, to the extreme end of the tail fin.

These minimum sizes vary according to the catch area because they take into account the state of the stocks concerned.



Baltic sea and ICES Areas



Geographical Data Source: DG Fish and Maritime Affairs / EUROSTAT  
Geographical Projection System: WGS84

- [Subdivisions 22-25](#)
- [Subdivisions 26-28](#)
- [Subdivisions 29-30](#)
- [Subdivision 31](#)
- [Subdivision 32](#)

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### Minimum landing sizes - Subdivisions 22-25

Species	min. size
Cod	38 cm
Flounder	23 cm
Plaice	25 cm
Turbot	30 cm
Brill	30 cm
Eel	35 cm
Salmon	60 cm
Sea trout	40 cm

### Minimum landing sizes - Subdivisions 26-28

Species	min. size
Cod	38 cm
Flounder	21 cm
Plaice	25 cm
Turbot	30 cm
Brill	30 cm
Eel	35 cm
Salmon	60 cm
Sea trout	50 cm

### Minimum landing sizes - Subdivisions 29-30

Species	min. size
Cod	38 cm
Flounder	18 cm
Plaice	25 cm
Turbot	30 cm
Brill	30 cm
Eel	35 cm
Salmon	60 cm
Sea trout	40 cm

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### Minimum landing sizes - Subdivision 31

Species	min. size
Cod	38 cm
Flounder	18 cm
Plaice	25 cm
Turbot	30 cm
Brill	30 cm
Eel	35 cm
Salmon	50 cm
Sea trout	40 cm

### Minimum landing sizes - Subdivision 32

Species	min. size
Cod	38 cm
Flounder	18 cm - South of 59°39'N
Plaice	25 cm
Turbot	30 cm
Brill	30 cm
Eel	35 cm
Salmon	60 cm
Sea trout	40 cm

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## Restrictions on fishing



Protected areas and the temporary closure of certain fisheries are an integral part of resource management.

The Baltic Sea includes a prohibited fishing area and several closure periods for certain fisheries.

### Prohibited fishing area

All fishing activity is banned throughout the year offshore from the mouth of the Oder.

### Closure periods

- Fishing for **salmon** and **sea trout** is banned in summer from 1 June to 15 September throughout the Baltic, except in the Gulf of Finland (subdivision 32), where the dates are slightly different (15 June to 30 September). These species may nevertheless be fished with trap-nets during this period. The prohibited area during the closed season is beyond four nautical miles.
- **Eel** fishing with any type of active gear is banned throughout the year.

### Designated ports for industrial fisheries

The catches of industrial fisheries for sand eels and sprat do not have to be sorted. As a result, this activity is not subject to the rules on minimum landing sizes for by-catches of species for human consumption. To ensure better statistics on the impact of such catches on resources, however, the Member States are obliged to set up sampling programmes to monitor unsorted landings. Vessels engaging in industrial fisheries are therefore required to land their catches only at ports where such a sampling programme is in operation.

- [Prohibited fishing area](#)

## Restriction on fishing effort in the Gulf of Riga



A special scheme to limit fishing effort applies to the Gulf of Riga. The brackish waters of this Gulf, which are particularly rich in herring and occasionally in salmon, wash the shores of Estonia and Latvia. Prior to the 2004 enlargement, only these two Baltic States held fishing rights in the area. So as to preserve a zone of activity for the development of their small-scale coastal fishing, these two States sought to keep the Gulf from being opened up to all Community vessels after their accession.

The Gulf of Riga is therefore covered by a special scheme that limits access to its waters but also restricts fishing activity, given the critical state of most of the stocks found there.



The European Union's plan to restrict fishing effort is based on the number of vessels and their engine power. The scheme consists of four measures:

- **A special permit** – Vessels fishing in the Gulf of Riga must hold a special permit and must be included in a list made publicly available via an Internet website.
- **Limit on engine power of individual vessels** – The total engine power of each vessel authorised to fish in these waters may not exceed 221 kilowatts. This limit also applies in the case of the replacement of an engine or vessel by the owner.
- **Total engine power** – Each Member State concerned must ensure that the total engine power of vessels it authorises to fish in the Gulf of Riga does not exceed that observed in the years 2000-2001. Here too, any replacement vessels or engines must comply with this limit.
- **Restriction on trawling** – To protect young fish living in the shallows, trawling is prohibited in depths of less than 20 metres.

14°0'0"E

14°30'0"E

15°0'0"E

**Prohibited Fishing Area  
Baltic Sea  
as defined in Council Regulation (EG) Nr. 2187/2005,  
Article 16**

Geographical Data Source: DG Fish and Maritime Affairs EUROSTAT



CHAPTER IV

RESTRICTIONS RELATING TO CERTAIN AREAS, TYPES OF FISHERIES OR LIVING AQUATIC RESOURCES

Article 16

Prohibited areas

It shall be prohibited throughout the year, to fish with any active gear in the geographical area enclosed by sequentially joining with rhumb lines the following position, which shall be measured according to the WGS84 coordinate system.

1. 54° 23' N, 14° 35' E
2. 54° 21' N, 14° 40' E
3. 54° 17' N, 14° 33' E
4. 54° 07' N, 14° 25' E
5. 54° 10' N, 14° 21' E
6. 54° 14' N, 14° 25' E
7. 54° 17' N, 14° 17' E
8. 54° 24' N, 14° 11' E
9. 54° 27' N, 14° 25' E
10. 54° 23' N, 14° 35' E

55°0'0"N

55°0'0"N



54°30'0"N

54°30'0"N

54°0'0"N

54°0'0"N

53°30'0"N

53°30'0"N

14°0'0"E

14°30'0"E

15°0'0"E



Note: Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information on this map, DG Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, takes no responsibility or is not liable whatsoever for any errors or omissions. The boundaries shown on this map are illustrative purposes only. Many of these boundaries represent claims made by coastal countries and have not been agreed with neighbouring states. For further information users should consult with national fisheries authorities. This map is not to be used for navigational purposes.

Map Reference: 060113\_baltic\_closure