

## BALTIC SEA 2020'S VISION OF THE MANAGEMENT OF THE BALTIC

Today's fishery management is based on the environmental quality and production capacity of the Baltic Sea, rather than financial considerations supporting the fishing industry. The Baltic Sea Region is a leading region in Europe and has established an integrated management which on the one hand enables people to use what the ecosystem produces and on the other ensures that all species, habitats and structures are protected and exist at sufficient levels so that they survive for the foreseeable future). The opportunity for the fish stock to regain its characteristic structure, function and productivity has increased considerably and thereby increased the stock's resistance to environmental damage. Cod stocks have grown and are once more large enough to control prey fish, mainly sprats.

The Baltic Sea Region has worked determinedly to protect the ecosystem and brought together different users of the sea's resources for joint discussions on problems, effects and measures. A regional forum comprising representatives of governments in the region, fishermen, researchers and environmental organisations is working to constantly adapt management to the chains of events and changes taking place in the environment and the world around us. This has been achieved through management plans spanning several years and by introducing measures such as:

- Reducing overcapacity in the fishing fleet and introducing measures to adapt capacity to the balance of resources (including trade in fishing rights)
- Abolishing fishing subsidies
- Banning discards and high-grading

Working together on controls in the Baltic Sea Region has succeeded in preventing illegal fishing at the same time as consumers are demanding legally caught fish. Global quality schemes such as the MSC have been crucial in creating traceability and so increasing the value of fish.

Agricultural use of fertiliser and cultivation methods shift depending on the area and the season to minimise leaching of nutrients to the Baltic Sea. The impact of chemicals and shipping, for example, is effectively regulated to safeguard the quality and productivity of the ecosystem.

### **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

In today's system there is a peculiar distinction drawn between fish, fishing and the marine environment – it is almost like saying “fish don't live in the sea”. Fish are seen as a resource which must be harvested but the ecosystem of which fish are a part and are also a cornerstone is not included in the assessment of how much should be harvested. This distinction has brought us to the situation we are in today. The complicated web of the marine environment that links together species and habitats must be an essential element of fisheries management.

Given ordinary common sense, most people understand that the lack of cod in the Baltic is an environmental issue, in other words the result of overfishing affecting the Baltic environment. It goes without saying that fish are an important part of the Baltic environment and that fishing affects this environment. Too many cod have been taken out of the sea and the relationship between species in the food chain has been changed as a result; when cod has been fished out, sprats have increased, leading to reduced amounts of animal plankton, contributing to an increase in plant plankton.

If the ecosystem is allowed to count as a scientific basis for decision making, it will help those managing fishing and marine resources to reach decisions which take into account regime shifts between species and in the food web.

The Baltic environment is in poor condition and because of many years of overfishing the environment which produces fish must be given a role worth protecting. The economic benefit from Baltic fishing is limited, which further indicates that social and economic considerations are secondary. If the environment cannot maintain production of the resource, the economics of fishing become completely unworkable. A good marine environment is essential if we are to have fish at all.

**Baltic Sea 2020 thinks that it is of vital importance that the reform of the fisheries policy guarantees ecological sustainability as a prerequisite for fishing.** This means in turn a shift to catches regulated by “maximum sustainable yield” and the precautionary principle. For this to succeed, the barriers separating environmental management and fisheries management must be broken down.

### **THE CONTROL REGULATION**

The control regulation that is being drawn up by the Commission is of course welcomed – we need to combat illegal and unreported fishing! However, it is remarkable that the link to reform of the CFP is not clearly stated. It is hoped that the reform will be as progressive as the Commission expressed. **Baltic Sea 2020 considers that the IUU Regulation could clearly be linked to the CFP, e.g. the regulatory framework should be adapted by 2014 to reduce any delay in new measures.**

### **MARKET-ADAPTED FISHERIES INDUSTRY**

The gap between fishermen, researchers and administrators is currently too large. Decisions on technical regulations are made by ministers far away from fishing villages and it is almost impossible to effectively and quickly amend rules to change environmental conditions or stocks. Also the industry is stimulated by an extensive system of subsidies making it impossible to adapt production, goods and services to the market.

**Baltic Sea 2020 considers that subsidies must be abolished.** The current system, with its consequent capacity level harms the environment and is hard to defend as an economic system. When subsidies are abolished, there is an “automatic” adjustment of the capacity of the fleet, based on supply and demand. Subsidies should

be abolished over a transitional period of – we suggest – 5 years. Baltic Sea 2020 considers that the only support imaginable would be a time-limited subsidy for scrapping vessels. Also application in other countries shows that trade in fishing rights can ease the process of adapting capacity to fish resources.

## **REGIONAL MANAGEMENT**

To strengthen the obligation to take responsibility and increase involvement, a regional management system should be set up. Decision making should be delegated from the Council of Ministers to this forum. A regional management forum would be an extension of the RAC and should include representatives of – governments in the region, fishermen, researchers and environmental organisations. HELCOM, responsible for environmental monitoring and environmental measures in the Baltic Sea should be given a particular role in the work of drawing up data to provide a clear picture of the environmental position.

The goal of the regional management organisation should be to replenish overfished stocks and to implement measures which will be adapted to changes in the ecosystem of the Baltic on an ongoing basis. This demands management plans spanning several years and the implementation of measures such as:

- Reducing overcapacity in the fishing fleet and introducing measures to adapt capacity to the balance of resources (including trade in fishing rights)
- Abolishing fishing subsidies
- Banning discards and high-grading
- Controls and monitoring of the entire production chain must be guaranteed with the help of traceability and labelling systems such as MSC, for example.