



Document title	Swift action required on the HELCOM Roadmap on fisheries data in order to assess incidental bycatches and fisheries impact on benthic biotopes
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Background

The HELCOM draft *Roadmap on fisheries data in order to assess incidental bycatches and fisheries impact on benthic biotopes in the Baltic Sea* as set out in document 4-18 Rev.1 has been approved by HOD 57-2019 and submitted to HELCOM 41-2020 for adoption. By the time of the FISH 11-2020 Meeting it may be adopted by HELCOM. Under Agenda Item 6 – HELCOM data interests the Meeting is invited to note that HOD 57-2019 further agreed that initial follow up on the implementation of the Roadmap should be reported to HOD 59-2020. In order to follow-up and implement the actions identified in the Roadmap swift action is required when sufficient bycatch data is expected to be available in time for HOLAS III.

The EU Technical Measures Regulation puts emphasis on regional cooperation under the Common Fisheries Policy regionalisation which allows for the development of specific solutions for the Baltic Sea (under the Baltic Sea Fisheries Forum BALTFISH) including optimisation of PETS bycatch monitoring. The Roadmap identified which of its possible actions need to be addressed to BALTFISH as the main decisive body.

In order to speed up the process a list of concrete actions identified in the Roadmap has been compiled. The list specifies as precisely as possible how BALTFISH can contribute to fulfilling obligations to assess bycatch of PETS.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to:

- consider whether a list of specified actions needed to fill data gaps to be shared with BALTFISH accompanying the Roadmap; and
- comment on the list of specified actions provided in this document.

Regional cooperation under the Common Fisheries Policy regionalization

Issues to be addressed by BALTFISH concerning the improvement of monitoring of Protected, Endangered and Threatened Species' (PETS) bycatch and fishing effort in relevant métiers in the Baltic Sea.

REQUIREMENTS for enabling bycatch assessments in HOLAS III:

1. Increase of bycatch monitoring of PETS on vessels <15 m; improvement of spatio-temporal PETS bycatch data

The problem: due to vessel size specifications in EU Regulation 2019/1241 current bycatch monitoring focuses on vessels ≥ 15 m which are mainly trawlers with a low risk of PET bycatch. Monitoring of small gillnet vessels <15 m is not sufficient to allow bycatch assessments in the frame of the MSFD, Birds and Habitats Directive and HELCOM BSAP.

- In implementing EU Regulation 2019/1241¹ on a regional scale, co-ordinated efforts within BALTFISH (and between BALTFISH and the RCG Baltic) should be made to increase the number of vessels monitored in the following métiers which are currently undersampled: fyke nets (FYK), trammel nets (GTR), set gillnets (GNS), set longlines (LLS), pots and traps (FPO). This could be achieved in a cost efficient way by the use of remote electronic monitoring (REM) in a certain fraction of the fleet, especially on vessels <15 m for the entire Baltic Sea, or establishing so called “reference fleets”, which is a selection of vessel representative for parts or the whole fleet. In this context, possible incentives for fishermen who use REM on a permanent basis, or regularly take observers on-board could be discussed (such as additional commercial or scientific fishing quota).
- Co-ordinated efforts should be made by BALTFISH for increased use of logbooks on smaller vessels (<10 m) than required by the Control Regulation which is currently under revision, preferably electronic logbooks. These should allow for fishermen’s self-reporting of bycatch by containing fields for more precise data on fishing effort and also fields for recording bycatches of protected species.
- Co-ordinated efforts should be made by BALTFISH for increased use of vessel tracking systems (e.g., AIS or mobile phone apps e.g. Mofi-App) on all vessels regardless of size as a regional specification of the requirements of the Control Regulation.
- Co-ordinated efforts should be made by BALTFISH for ensuring better control of compliance with relevant legislation concerning bycatch monitoring and mitigation (Regulation 2019/1241), for the entire Baltic Sea.

2. Improvement of spatio-temporal data on fishing effort in gill and entangling nets in the Baltic Sea and PETS bycatch, regardless of the vessel size;

The problem: total bycatch numbers of PETS cannot be extrapolated from bycatch rates found in at-sea monitoring programs because effort is reported in various metrics and at varying precision and spatio-temporal scales.

- BALTFISH should take steps to harmonise reported units of fishing effort across different métiers and all size classes of vessels. For relating bycatch rates to effort, this should be done in a meaningful and precise metric such as soak time of nets in kilometre hours for static gillnets. It must however be ensured that effort is also recorded in Days at Sea to

¹ REGULATION 2019/1241 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on 20 of June on the conservation of fishery resources and the protection of marine ecosystems through technical measures, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1967/2006, (EC) No 1098/2007, (EC) No 1224/2009 and Regulations (EU) No 1343/2011 and (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 894/97, (EC) No 850/98, (EC) No 2549/2000, (EC) No 254/2002, (EC) No 812/2004 and (EC) No 2187/2005

allow comparison with older data held by ICES WGBYC. Other relevant parameters e. g. mesh size, net drop or other gear characteristics need to be documented;

3. ***Ensuring proper financial contribution on a regional level for further development of scientific programs for bycatch monitoring of PETS,***

The problem: Current at-sea sampling programs focus on fleet segments with a large share of the cod quota, namely trawlers. Sampling of smaller vessels is more difficult due to limited space on board and provides less biological fish data relevant for fisheries. The programs do not suit the need of a dedicated PETS bycatch monitoring in relevant métiers. Additionally, resources for scientific monitoring in the EMFF for years 2014-2020 are limited. However, an increasing amount of tasks for bycatch monitoring of PETS, defined under EU Delegated Act no 2019/910 (with special reference to table 1D), needs substantial financial resources to fulfil required demands for data.

- BALTFISH should take steps to increase the EMFF and national financial contribution to bycatch monitoring of PETS to a certain level (BALTFISH EMFF working group).

JUSTIFICATION:

Currently, several EU directives and Commission decisions oblige Member States to monitor bycatch of PETS or to set threshold values for bycatch, including EU Regulation no 2019/1241², and 2017/1004³ as well as EC Decision no 2017/848⁴, 2019/910⁵ and EC Communication COM(2012) 665 final⁶. Due to Art. 12 (4) Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), Member States shall establish a system to monitor the incidental capture and killing of the animal species listed in Annex IVa. In addition, US Marine Mammal Protection Act requires that all countries that export their fish products to the United States, carry out bycatch monitoring of marine mammals, assess the bycatch rate for different populations of marine mammals and implement bycatch mitigation measures. Lack of providing relevant data, will result in import prohibitions in the United States for the fish and fish products from that fishery beginning in January 2022.

The aim of these obligations is to assess the impact of fisheries on the marine environment, and especially PETS. This is needed to determine how fisheries affect the favourable conservation status of PETS. In the case they do so, a set of suitable measures must be implemented, to improve the situation. However, currently, as stated by ICES Advice (2017)⁷ bycatch observations “*are insufficient to enable any assessment of the overall impact of EU fisheries on [marine mammals]*”. Therefore, it is of a vital importance to improve monitoring of PETS’ bycatch and collect complete effort data in the Baltic Sea, in order to fulfil the relevant obligations to assess the population status of PETS and pressures affecting them.

EXPECTED RESULTS:

By making the proposed efforts, in consultation with the European Commission and Regional Coordination Group Baltic (under DCF) and by ensuring relevant financial resources for enhanced fisheries monitoring,

² REGULATION 2019/1241 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on 20 of June on the conservation of fishery resources and the protection of marine ecosystems through technical measures, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1967/2006, (EC) No 1098/2007, (EC) No 1224/2009 and Regulations (EU) No 1343/2011 and (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 894/97, (EC) No 850/98, (EC) No 2549/2000, (EC) No 254/2002, (EC) No 812/2004 and (EC) No 2187/2005

³ REGULATION (EU) 2017/1004 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 May 2017 on the establishment of a Union framework for the collection, management and use of data in the fisheries sector and support for scientific advice regarding the common fisheries policy and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 199/2008 (recast)

⁴ Commission Decision (EU) 2017/848 of 17 May 2017 laying down criteria and methodological standards on good environmental status of marine waters and specifications and standardised methods for monitoring and assessment, and repealing Decision 2010/477/EU

⁵ Commission Delegated Decision (EU) 2019/910 of 13 March 2019 establishing the multiannual Union programme for the collection and management of biological, environmental, technical and socioeconomic data in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors

⁶ COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL Action Plan for reducing incidental catches of seabirds in fishing gears

⁷ ICES 2017 ICES Advice (Ecoregions in the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent seas Published 29 August 2017). Bycatch of small cetaceans and other marine animals – review of national reports under Council Regulation (EC) No. 812/2004 and other information. 4 pp.

either from EMFF (future perspective) or from national resources, Baltic Sea countries should be able to implement efficient and cost effective PETS' bycatch monitoring and collect relevant data necessary for the performance of several assessments at the National, European and global level.