



Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature
Conservation

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Note that the document was submitted after the established deadline. It will be decided by the Meeting if the document can be discussed or postponed to the next meeting.

Status of the Baltic Cod stocks and related actions in BSAP

The BSAP preamble states: *"..that the ecosystem approach is based on an integrated management of all human activities impacting on the marine environment and, based on best available scientific knowledge about the ecosystem and its dynamics, identifies and leads to actions improving the health of the marine ecosystem thus supporting sustainable use of ecosystem goods and services;"*

It is clear that the status of the western cod stock is not a simple fisheries matter any longer but now a question of conservation and protection of a species and ecosystem. If current trend continues the cod status will deteriorate further, the BSAP biodiversity targets can't be achieved, Good Environmental Status (GES) will not be reached and the status of cod on the Red list will need to be downgraded back to "Endangered" as the stock is at lowest ever recorded level. We also know about the example of Kattegat cod still being classified as CR, Critically Endangered, and that only strict MPA closure might help a recovery of that stock. The recently HELCOM Recommendation 37/2 must be revisited in light of the cod stock status.

The EU Council of Ministers decided on 10 October 2016 to set Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for 2017 at 5597t for the Western Cod stock and at 30 857t for the Eastern Cod stock, [both stocks red listed \(as Near Threatened and VU - Vulnerable\)](#) respectively) by HELCOM. The 2017 TAC is set dramatically above the scientific advice and in the case of the Western stock ([ICES area 22-24](#)), it's 6 times higher than ICES advice of 917t. Also agreed was to try and limit the recreational fishing by introducing a bag limit per day of 5 fish or 3 fish during spawning season. Finally the Ministers agreed to prolong the current spawning closure from now to cover 2 full months, February and March with exemptions for vessels less than 15 meters.

The results from this insufficient TAC's cut and bag limits for recreational fishing will be seen next year but according to ICES, regarding the western cod stock, such TAC will not lead to a SSB above the values set as the lowest acceptable value. The B_{lim} value in the Baltic management plan is 27400t and ICES states that this catch level will result in a SSB of ca 26300t. The stock is not within safe biological limits and the TAC decision is not in line with scientific advice or the EC's proposal, both based on best available scientific knowledge.

CCB is aware that the red list is a tool for categorization underlining the information and status of a species is not to be used a firsthand management tool. However a degrading of a species on the list is a strong and clear signal that the species is at risk. As the major top predator in the Baltic Sea the cod has intrinsic value beyond food, but rather for the ecosystem. HELCOM must react to the situation by stressing the need to prioritize cod in management efforts and by means such as extending new or existing MPAs for the protection of cod. Furthermore linking the topic to MSFD fulfillment of GES and the BSAP and ecosystem based management and the commitment that *"... all commercially exploited fish species are within safe biological limits, reach Maximum Sustainable Yield and are distributed through their natural range, and contain full size/age range."*

The deteriorating status of the cod has links to the work of HOLAS II and the assessments for the next cycle of MSFD and this must now be taking into account immediately.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the worrying situation and

- consider revision of the HELCOM Red list based on current status of the Baltic cod stocks <http://www.helcom.fi/Red%20List%20Species%20Information%20Sheet/HELCOM%20Red%20List%20Gadus%20morhua.pdf>,
- consider the implications for the HOLAS II work and links to MSFD assessments to be done 2018 and review the [HELCOM Recommendation 37/2](#),
- urgently consider the need to establish new or extend existing management in MPAs to safeguard threatened species including the cod stock.