

# Oceana's recommendations on fishing opportunities for 2017

## Baltic Sea Stocks



### General recommendations

In advance of the Fisheries Council decision in October on fishing opportunities in the Baltic Sea, Oceana releases its recommendations for setting total allowable catches (TACs) for 2017, in line with the most recently available scientific advice and aimed at ensuring Baltic fisheries recover from overfishing before 2020.

The end of overfishing is necessary not only to guarantee the sustainable exploitation of fish resources at present but also for the future in order to recover the profitability and social prosperity of fishing activities. Achieving good environmental status (GES) of the oceans is also a main goal of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)<sup>1</sup>, which shares a 2020 deadline.

EU Member States must therefore ensure that TACs are in line with scientific advice and guarantee stocks are above biomass levels that are able to provide the highest long-term average catch (MSY). However, historical disregard of this premise has led EU and Baltic stocks into a dire situation - granting short-term benefits to the fishing industry but putting an enormous economic impact in the mid-term. A clear example of this is Western cod, put to the brink of collapse by mismanagement resulting in the closure of the fishery as the only viable option left.

**Oceana urges EU Member States to turn the tide without delay, adhere to science when setting quotas and warns that after 2020 overfishing EU stocks will become illegal under the EU law.**

To ensure the long-term stability of Baltic Sea fisheries, the EU Council of Ministers must:

- Follow scientific advice when setting fishing opportunities, prioritising stock recovery and putting an end to overfishing;
- Stop all directed cod fisheries in areas 22-24;
- Set a TAC for the eastern cod stock ensuring long-term recovery.

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<sup>1</sup> Directive 2008/56/EC (Marine Strategy Framework Directive)

## Cod in peril

Cod is a highly important fish species in the Baltic, both environmentally and commercially, and its recovery should be a top priority for decision makers and stakeholders.

In recent years the most worrisome and problematic stock is the western cod. Although the TAC has been reduced for a number of years (by a total of -40% since 2012) the cuts were not nearly high enough. Last year ICES recommended a hefty 51% reduction of the annual TAC but decision makers chose to ignore the problem. The European Commission has continually failed to present a proposal for the western cod stock to avoid controversy stating it required more data from ICES. The Council of Ministers has decided on a vastly inadequate 20% reduction despite warnings from several conservation and science organisations that it only delays the inevitable. Unsurprisingly, the stock continues to give severe cause for concern.

In just 10 years, the commercial catches of the western cod stock have dropped by half, while the eastern stock remains in a fragile state and needs careful management. The western stock suffers from very limited recruitment and there are hardly any juvenile fish left. The eastern stock even despite signs of improvement has a low count of larger fish. The current juvenile fish will become the future spawning stock biomass which underpins a stock's productivity and stability therefore it is of utmost importance to ensure the preservation of juveniles.

European fisheries ministers simply cannot keep wasting their words and neglect the plight of Baltic cod. In 2014, Denmark, Germany, Finland, Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, Estonia and Sweden officially agreed to reach a sustainable fishing level for the western Baltic cod by 2016. However, the TAC agreed last year was still far too high to achieve it and even the additional measures are insufficient to restore the stocks on time.

## Oceana's recommendation for 2017 TACs

**Cod in the western Baltic Sea, Subdivisions 22-24:** This year ICES recommends an extremely large 93% cut to the fishing limits, which would result in a TAC of no more than 917 tonnes in 2017.

The western cod stock is in a very poor condition. It has been suffering from a fishing mortality well above sustainable levels and the biomass has been below the  $B_{lim}$  reference point (which means that the stock is at a high risk of suffering from reduced recruitment, a state that should be avoided at all cost) for several years now. Recruitment has been low since 1999 and is currently estimated to be the lowest in recorded history.

Additionally in recent years, recreational fishing pressure has been relatively large in relation to the commercial fishing pressure. Even if the TAC were set to 0 tonnes in 2017, the stock would still not reach sustainable biomass levels in 2018. **Therefore, Oceana calls for a complete closure of all directed cod fisheries in areas 22-24 to ensure the recovery of the stock.**

**Cod in the eastern Baltic Sea, Subdivisions 25-32:** While the eastern cod stock is showing certain signs of improvement, it remains in a fragile state due to recent drastic declines in a number of larger and older fish. ICES have reported that fish larger than or equal to 30 cm have decreased between 2011 and 2014. There have also been a number of concerns regarding the stock assessment *i.e.* the inability to determine age. Therefore, the ICES framework for category 3 stocks was applied, which means that the available knowledge is insufficient to apply the ICES MSY approach and the advice rule is therefore based on the precautionary approach instead.

Decision makers and stakeholders must ensure that the long-term health of the ecosystem becomes the highest priority when managing this stock. It is crucial that the precautionary considerations laid down by ICES are followed by the Council of Ministers. **This means that the Baltic TAC for the eastern cod stock in subdivisions 25-32 should not exceed 26,994 tonnes.**

**Table 1: Oceana's fishing limits proposal for Baltic Sea stocks**

Quantities in tonnes, except for salmon, which is expressed as a number of individuals.

Brackets show TAC difference in % to the previous year, i.e. negative % indicates a reduction; positive % indicates an increase in the TAC.

| Species   | Fishing area | TAC 2016 <sup>2</sup> | ICES advice 2017**                   | Stock Status                                    | Oceana's proposal 2017                                |
|---|--------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| <i>Cod</i><br>( <i>Gadus morhua</i> )             | 22-24        | 12,720 (-20%)         | 917                                  | Below MSY $B_{lim}$ , $F > F_{MSY}$             | Close fishery   |
| <i>Cod</i><br>( <i>Gadus morhua</i> )             | 25-32        | 41,143 (-20%)         | 26,994                               | Unknown   | 26,994 (-38%)**                                       |
| <i>Herring</i><br>( <i>Clupea harengus</i> )      | 22-24*       | 26,274 (+18%)*        | 56,802                               | Above MSY $B_{trigger}$                         | 28,401 (+8%)  |
| <i>Herring</i><br>( <i>Clupea harengus</i> )      | 25-29 & 32   | 177,505 (+9%)         | 216,000                              | Above MSY $B_{trigger}$                         | 191,705 (+8%)   |
| <i>Herring</i><br>( <i>Clupea harengus</i> )      | 28.1         | 34,915 (-10%)         | 27,429                               | Above MSY $B_{trigger}$ , $F > F_{MSY}$         | 27,429 (-21%)   |
| <i>Herring</i><br>( <i>Clupea harengus</i> )      | 30-31        | 120,872 (-24%)        | 140,998                              | Above MSY $B_{trigger}$ (30),<br>undefined (31) | 140,998 (+17%)<br>(134,556 in SD 30 & 6,442 in SD 31) |
| <i>Sprat</i><br>( <i>Sprattus sprattus</i> )      | 22-32        | 202,320 (-5%)         | 314,000                              | Above MSY $B_{trigger}$ , $F > F_{MSY}$         | 314,000 (+55%)**                                      |
| <i>Plaice</i><br>( <i>Pleuronectes platessa</i> ) | 24-32*       | 4,034 (+18%)*         | 2,587 (SD 24-32)<br>8,333 (SD 21-23) | Undefined (data poor stock)                     | 7,862 (+95%)  |
| <i>Salmon</i><br>( <i>Salmo salar</i> )           | 22-31        | 95,928 (0%)           | 116,000                              | N/A   | 89,320 (-7%)  |
| <i>Salmon</i><br>( <i>Salmo salar</i> )           | 32           | 13,106 (0%)           | 11,800                               | N/A   | 9,000 (-32%)<br>No targeted fishing for wild fish     |

\* The ICES advice area and EU management area do not match

\*\* Including Russian share of the TAC

<sup>2</sup> Fishing opportunities in the Baltic Sea for 2016, Council Regulation (EU) 2015/2072 (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32015R2072>)