

To:

BSAC General Assembly
DG Mare Director General and Commission services
BALTFISH Member States
The Fisheries Council of the European Community,
The European Parliament,
The European Fisheries Control Agency EFCA
ICES
HELCOM

Ref: BSAC 2020-2021/3

Copenhagen Tuesday 20th April 2020

**Re: BSAC statement on the need for a responsible approach to fisheries
and fisheries management in the Baltic**

The Baltic Sea Advisory Council was unable to hold its Executive Committee on Tuesday 17th March 2020, due to developments with the COVID-19 virus. In a written procedure a draft BSAC draft statement on cod fisheries and the need for a responsible fishery in the Baltic was sent to BSAC ExCom members on 17th March 2020. The draft was finalised on Friday 17th April 2020 and the Executive Committee was informed on Monday 20th April 2020.

Please find attached the BSAC statement, which is sent to BSAC General Assembly members, DG Mare, BALTFISH Member States, the Fisheries Council of the European Community, the European Parliament, the European Fisheries Control Agency, ICES and HELCOM

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Esben Sverdrup-Jensen', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Esben Sverdrup-Jensen, BSAC Executive Committee chair

Monday 20th April 2020

BSAC statement on the need for a responsible approach to fisheries and fisheries management in the Baltic

The Baltic ecosystem is faced with dramatic changes which have a particular negative impact on the eastern Baltic cod stock.

The outlook for the eastern Baltic cod continues to be uncertain and restrictions on the fisheries can be expected to stay in place in the coming years. This already has and will continue to have a significant negative impact not only on fishermen and their communities, as well as anglers and consumers, but also on the industry servicing them, and the fish processors.

As the cod stock has been severely reduced, it becomes even more important to avoid bycatches of cod in non-directed fisheries. Avoiding bycatches of cod is already a challenge for the flatfish fisheries such as plaice and flounder, which are becoming an increasingly important source of earnings for Baltic fishermen.

The BSAC encourages the adoption of the new selective gears that have been tried out and developed and that have been proven to reduce the bycatch of cod in the flatfish fishery.

Fishing is just one of the factors that are having an influence on the cod stocks. Several other challenging developments are occurring at the same time. Scientists need better knowledge to predict the future development of the stocks, their reproductive success and the ecological interactions.

We need to continue our dialogue with the scientists and experts to find out more about the factors affecting in particular the Baltic cod, for example lack of food, temperature, oxygen and salinity conditions as well as seals, and the impacts of the fishery.

We also need to continue our discussions and cooperation with managers and work towards and agree on the most appropriate management measures in a way which makes it possible to overcome the present difficult situation and that ensures a positive effect on the cod stocks and the environment.

Apart from short term financial support, any long-term solutions need to be identified and effectively implemented.

Although the major responsibility for the future of the Baltic fisheries is with the Member States and the European Commission, a significant role is also in the hands of fisheries organisations and the fishermen themselves. A dialogue is essential and the BSAC therefore recommends the creation of a taskforce focused on the recovery of the eastern Baltic cod and emphasises the need for responsible fisheries. The BSAC is an essential part of this task force.

On 28th March 2007, the BS(R)AC hosted conference on control and compliance in the Baltic cod fishery – working towards a culture of compliance.¹ It brought together over 140 participants: BSAC members, ministers and their representatives, control authorities and Commission representatives, and stakeholders. The aim of the conference was to identify the drivers and consequences of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in the Baltic Sea cod fisheries; the difficulties and shortfalls in control and compliance; and to find possible solutions to reducing IUU fishing. It culminated in a declaration on combating unreported cod fishery in the Baltic Sea, signed by ministers and the EU Commission. The declaration welcomed the initiative taken by the BSAC in arranging the conference; it recognized the threats posed by IUU fishing; expressed a commitment by Baltic Member States to implement measures to tackle it; and acknowledged the role of both the EU Commission and the European Fisheries Control Agency in this work.

Later that year, 25th October 2007, the BS(R)AC Executive Committee met to discuss again the problems concerning control and compliance in the Baltic Sea.² Also present at the meeting were representatives of the European Commission, the Community Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) and a large group of observers. As a result of the discussions, it adopted a statement on compliance and the sustainability of the Baltic cod fishery, recognizing that non-compliance is still a serious problem in the Baltic and encouraging a culture of respect for and compliance with Community fisheries legislation. The BS(R)AC urged fisheries organisations, as well as downstream sectors to take a role in this and assume responsibility. It urged Member States to implement a level playing field and establish sanctions in proportion to the infringements, and urged Member States to increase the powers of the Commission and EFCA. The BS(R)AC also committed itself to continue to work on this.

Thus, in view of the present situation, a strong appeal is made by the BSAC to all the commercial and recreations/sports fishers in the Baltic to comply with the legal requirements, including the landing obligation. The BSAC also appeals for management decisions that are proportionate and pragmatic.

¹ <http://www.bsac.dk/Meetings/BSAC-meetings/28-29-3-2007-Conference-on-Control-and-Compliance>

² <http://www.bsac.dk/Meetings/BSAC-meetings/25-10-2007-Executive-Committee>