

Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council

In order to have an influence on the formulation of fisheries policy and other measures that affect fishing stocks and the natural environment of the Baltic Sea, the Fisheries Secretariat is a member of the Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council (BS RAC). Together with representatives of the fishing sector and other interest groups we will give advice and submit proposals to the EU Commission and Member States around the Baltic Sea.

The creation of Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) was one of the pillars of the 2002 reform of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The decision to set up regional councils was taken following pressure from various stakeholders who found it difficult to exert any influence on the decisions that shape the way the fisheries sector is managed.

A total of seven RACs are to be set up in the EU, of which BS RAC is one. Four of them have already been established: the North Sea RAC (active since November 2004), the Pelagic RAC (active since August 2005), the North Western Waters RAC (active since September 2005) and the Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council (established 15 March 2006). In the case of the Mediterranean, the South Western Waters and the Long Distance (waters outside EU which the EU fishing fleet has access to) advisory councils, negotiations for their establishment are still taking place between the various interest groups. The North Sea RAC was the first to be set up and has in many ways served as a model for the work of the others.

Many different groups must co-operate

The RACs consist of a mix of different interest groups. Two-thirds of the members must be representatives of the fishing sector: various fishing organisations, the processing industry and representatives of harbours and markets, for example. The remaining third must consist of "other interests": environmental organisations, consumer organisations, water users, sports fishermen and others who are affected by the Common Fisheries Policy. The boards of the RACs are known as Executive Committees and can consist of up to 24 people. The same proportions again apply to membership, so out of 24 places, the fishing sector has 16 and other interest groups have eight places.

Work is conducted on the consensus principle – which means that the fishing sector and other interest organisations must co-operate if the councils are to work as intended. Researchers and representatives of the national authorities can only attend the meetings of the councils as invited experts or observers.

It is the task of the RACs to draw up recommendations and proposals concerning fishing in the relevant area and submit these to the EU Commission and/or relevant national authorities. This can be done on request from the authorities or on the initiative of the RACs themselves. In order to carry out the work that is expected of the councils, the Executive Committees can call on the assistance of working groups that focus on various specialist subjects.

Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council now formally established

Following a number of preparatory meetings the Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council was formally established on 15 March 2006. The secretariat is located in Copenhagen and its work is directed by the Secretary, Tobias Kern-Jespersen. The former Chairman of the Swedish Fishermen's Federation, Reine Johansson, is Chairman of the Executive Committee for a period of three years.

Three working groups have been formed under BS RAC: one for demersal fishing (demersal = bottom-dwelling fish) with the emphasis on cod, one for pelagic fish (pelagic = belonging to the open sea) which focuses mainly on herring and sprats, and one for salmon and sea trout. One of the most important issues in 2006 is the long-term recovery plan for cod in the Baltic Sea that was presented by the EU Commission in July 2006. Other proposals, such as advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) on fishing quotas for 2007, will also be considered. BS RAC is also holding a conference on illegal fishing in Copenhagen on 28–29 March 2007.

The Fisheries Secretariat is a member of the Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council, and is one of the eight representatives in the “other interest group” that sit on the Executive Committee. The Fisheries Secretariat co-ordinates the activities of environmental, angling and consumer organisations within the advisory council. It is our hope that alongside other stakeholders and the fishing sector we can reach agreement on initiatives to preserve fish stocks and the natural environment in the Baltic Sea.

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