

BSAC members: Michael Andersen and Nils Höglund

Meeting: WKBALTCOD2 - ICES benchmark on Baltic cod, CPH February

A meeting well attended with more than 40 scientists. After a plenary, where the status of the two stocks was discussed, the meeting split in two groups – one for each stock. In these groups, scientists discussed the details of the assessments of the stocks and suggested ways forward. On several occasions the plenary was reconvened and results from the subgroups presented and discussed. Although there was not absolute agreement on all issues, the general conclusions and recommendations were taken by consensus after long discussions.

The results and conclusions will be used when the assessment working group for the Baltic stocks meets in mid-April, but will not be formally agreed upon until ACOM uses them as the basis for the advice which will be released on May 29th.

For the Eastern stock a surplus production model was used to give an absolute estimate of SSB and F. A biomass reference point was identified and Blim was set at 98.000 tonnes. This corresponds to a Bpa of 124.000 tonnes. Production in this stock is so low, that it was not possible to identify a fishing mortality that would lead to an increase in SSB. In other words, even in the absence of fishing, the stock would continue to decline. Even reducing Blim to 53.000 tonnes did not allow for a forecast with a less than a 5% possibility of falling below Blim. Consequently, a value for Fmsy could not be identified. The most likely consequence of this sad situation is an advice of zero for next year's fishery.

For the Western area a lot of time was spent on discussion as to how to split catches and allocate them to the relevant spawning stocks. This is an issue that will be closely monitored in the coming years, as it is likely to change because of the decrease in East.

For the Western stock recreational data from Denmark and Sweden will now be included in the stock assessment as well as in the advice. It was agreed to reduce Blim from 27.400 tonnes to 14.500 tonnes, based on the average of four years where good recruitment has been shown at low biomass. This will most likely result in an MSY Btrigger of 21.876 tonnes (probably rounded to 21.900 tonnes). Fmsy for this stock remains unchanged. The revision has changed the perception of the absolute biomass, reducing it in comparison to the assessment performed in 2018, and recruitment has been very low in both 2017 and 2018.

Michael Andersen and the report fully supported and endorsed by Nils Höglund