

## **Discussion Post: “The fishing lobby misleads elected officials about the socio-economic importance of cod fishing.”**

**Baltic Sea cod is not only a staple for the fishing industry; it also plays a crucial role in the marine ecosystem. Writes Conrad Stralka, Executive Director of the BalticSea2020 foundation.**

There is a regrettable conflict regarding what elected officials should take into consideration: environmental protection goes head to head with the fishing industry’s pursuit of profit. When in July, the EU Commission introduced an emergency suspension of cod fishing in the Baltic until the end of the year, the conflict between the environment and fishing reached its peak.

Peter Ronelöv Olsson from Sveriges Fiskares Producentorganisation (The Swedish Fishermen’s Producer Organisation) and Krishan Kent from Fiskbranschens Riksförbund (the Federation of Swedish Fish Industries and Trade) are of course on the side of the fishermen ([Current affairs 8/78](#)). We are in agreement that the Baltic Cod needs to be protected. However, their arguments do not hold water.

**Professions and industries** are in a constant state of change. There are many reasons why some disappear and others emerge. In particular, the increased concern being paid to the environment has created new preconditions for professions, products and companies. For this reason, it is a little strange that, as Peter Ronelöv Olsson and Krishan Kent assert, fishermen should be an exception; especially since commercial fishermen use a resource that belongs to everyone in Sweden – the fish in the sea. Baltic Sea Cod is not only a natural resource for the fishing industry, it also plays a crucial role for the marine ecosystem. For decades, large-scale trawl fishing has resulted in shrunken cod stocks in the Baltic. Historically, cod fishing has landed approximately 150,000 tonnes per year. However, over the past 20 years the figure has fallen dramatically. In 2018, barely 20,000 tonnes were fished.

Peter Ronelöv Olsson and Krishan Kent argue that fishing for Baltic Sea cod has socio-economic significance and that 1,000 jobs are threatened if cod fishing is suspended. However, that figure does not match the reality. There are not that many full-time cod fishermen in the Baltic Sea, and each fisherman does not create jobs for five people on land, as they assert.

**If each fisherman** were to create five jobs onshore, 1,000 jobs on land would mean about 200 cod fishermen, which is an unrealistic calculation since the financial value of the cod caught and taken ashore annually has been only a few tens of millions of kronor.

The number of cod fishermen who have licences and vessels is far fewer than the 200 that Peter Ronelöv Olsson and Krishan Kent claim. In addition, commercial fishermen do not engage in cod fishing full time. Cod is only fished a few months a year.

That each fisherman creates exactly five jobs onshore is also an exaggerated figure. There is no reciprocity between a person’s ceasing fishing cod and that person’s ceasing going to the barber or the dentist. The report presented by the Danish economic consultancy company Copenhagen Economics last spring, which Peter Ronelöv Olsson and Krishan Kent refer to, shows that every employee in the fishing industry employs just over one person on land. This is something quite different from stating that each fisherman creates five jobs onshore. Neither is the Swedish fish processing industry especially dependent upon Swedish cod fishing in the Baltic Sea, as three-quarters of the raw materials it uses are imported.

Swedish cod fishing in the southern Baltic Sea employs so few people that it lacks any significant socio-economic importance.

The fishing lobby, represented by Ronelöv Olsson and Kent, is misleading elected officials concerning the socio-economic importance of cod fishing by claiming that the foundational support for schools, health care and social services would be threatened by a cessation in cod fishing.

Peter Ronelöv Olsson and Krishan Kent represent the large-scale, industrial fisheries whilst simultaneously trying to hide themselves behind sustainable, small-scale, coastal fishing.

Large-scale bottom trawling has been so intensive on the cod stocks that cod has almost completely disappeared from the Baltic Sea coast. It is not only the small-scale fishing industry that has been impacted, but also a much larger industry – recreational fishing and marine tourism. If we talk about employment and local income, marine tourism accounts for some 30,000 jobs along the Swedish Baltic Sea coast, while 1.5 million Swedes report that they are recreational fishermen. This data comes from HAV, the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management.

**The fishing lobby is extremely** involved in the crisis that has befallen Baltic Sea cod. Instead of short-sightedly defending the system that created the problems in the first place, Peter Ronelöv Olsson and Krishan Kent could contribute to a long-term solution where small-scale, sustainable fishing and marine tourism form an important part of living and vibrant coastal communities.

**Conrad Stralka**, Executive Director of the BalticSea2020 foundation, which funds research and projects for a healthier Baltic Sea.

The original article can be found in the Sydsvenskan newspaper [here](#).