



First Annual Report of the Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council



April 2007

Introduction

The Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council (BS RAC) was set up in March 2006 in line with a decision by the EU to create so-called Regional Advisory Councils in the fisheries sector.

The creation of Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) was one of the pillars of the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, carried out in 2002. They came about as a response to calls from stakeholders in the fisheries sector who wanted to be more involved in the way fisheries is managed in the EU.

The main aim of the BS RAC is to prepare and provide advice on the management of Baltic Sea fisheries in order to achieve a successful running of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy.

This annual report provides a presentation of the activities of the BS RAC during its first year. The report has been approved by the General Assembly in April 2007.

You can also access information about the BS RAC activities and recommendations on the website: www.bsrac.org

General Assembly, 15 March 2006, Copenhagen, Denmark

The first General Assembly of the BS RAC took place in the North Atlantic House in Copenhagen.

The Danish Minister of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, Hans Christian Schmidt, welcomed all the participants to the meeting. He thanked the Baltic Fishermen's Association and all the organisations and interest groups for their work in making the establishment of the RAC possible.

Mr. Jörgen Holmquist, Director General for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, also addressed the meeting with an opening speech.

Chris Karppinen from Federation of Finnish Fisheries Associations was elected by consensus Honorary Chairperson of the BS RAC General Assembly and Reine J. Johansson from the Swedish Fishermen's Federation was elected by consensus Chairperson of the Executive Committee.

The General Assembly adopted the Statutes and the Rules of Procedure, the strategic plan, the first year budget and the lists of members of the BS RAC and the BS RAC Executive Committee.

Executive Committee, 16 March 2006, Copenhagen, Denmark

The first Executive Committee meeting of the BS RAC was held at the offices of the Danish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries. Discussions at the meeting focused mainly on the establishment of working groups. It was agreed to establish 3 working groups: a working group on fisheries for demersal species (Demersal WG), a working group on fisheries for pelagic species (PelagicWG) and a working group on fisheries for salmon and sea trout (Salmon/sea trout WG). It was also agreed that the working groups should have a wide focus in order to allow for the inclusion of issues related to control and enforcement, social and economic aspects etc. The decision on the chairperson and rapporteur for the three working groups was postponed until the next Executive Committee meeting.

At the meeting, Katarina Veem from WWF was appointed Vice Chairperson of the BS RAC and Tobias Kerrn-Jespersen was appointed Secretary.

Demersal WG, 25 April, Hamburg, Germany

The first meeting of the demersal WG was held at the offices of the Federal Research Institute for Fisheries.

Owing to fog disrupting peoples travel arrangements, the number of participants was restricted to thirteen.

In the absence of an elected Chairman it was agreed that Lothar Fischer (German Cutter and Coastal Fishermen's Association) and Michael Andersen (Danish Fishermen's Association) would co-chair the meeting.

It had been the intention of the meeting to review the European Commission's draft management plan for Baltic Sea cod. However, owing to the delay in its publication the opportunity was taken to review and discuss the Commission's "non-paper", released in August 2005, on the long-term management plan for cod stocks in the Baltic Sea.

Discussion of the key points took place in an open and constructive manner and provided participants the opportunity to present, listen and discuss alternative management approaches and their possible repercussions.

Given that a revised management plan had been drafted and was in the process of inter-service consultation within the Commission it was agreed that the WG would wait until it had had the opportunity to review and consider the new draft before making any recommendations to the Executive Committee

Salmon/Sea trout WG, 29 May 2006, Copenhagen, Denmark

The first salmon/sea trout WG meeting was held at the offices of the Danish Seafood Association. The meeting was more or less an introductory meeting to organize the WG. Mr. Gunnar Asplund from the Swedish Fishermen's Federation was proposed as chairman for the WG and Mr. Kjell Nybacka from the West Finland European Office was proposed as rapporteur for the WG.

The objective of the meeting was to build a common foundation for later discussions on the management of salmon and sea trout. In order to sum up the situation before the abolishment of the IBSFC and, in order to present the current state of play, three guest speakers were invited: Dr. Walter Ranke, former Secretary of the IBSFC, Peter Funegård from the Swedish Board of Fisheries and Atso Romakkaniemi from ICES.

The meeting agreed to focus its discussions on salmon and to postpone discussions on sea trout to a later date.

This meeting had an initial discussion on the future management of Baltic salmon and conditions for the development of the Baltic salmon fishery and agreed to ask the Executive Committee for a mandate to continue its work and to prepare a position paper regarding the future management of the Baltic salmon.

Pelagic WG, 13 June 2006, Gdynia, Poland

The first Pelagic WG meeting was held at the offices of the Marine Research Institute of Gdynia. In light of new scientific advice from ACFM the meeting discussed the management of the pelagic fisheries..

The WG discussed possible reasons behind the different views on the stock situation for the pelagic species. Regional differences in environmental conditions such as water temperature could explain why less sprat was caught near Poland than in other parts of the Baltic. Moreover, because the sprat moves quickly and over long distances, the size and power of the vessels could have an influence on the possibility of reaching sprat shoals. The scrapping of part of the Polish pelagic fleet was also discussed, but this was not considered to have a major influence on Polish catches of herring and sprat.

The WG discussed possible ways of disseminating information about the stock situation and the fisheries among fishermen in the Baltic. It was suggested that a paper be produced on how the fishery was conducted in different parts of the Baltic. It was also suggested that a questionnaire be produced in order to find out how fishermen saw the stock situation from one year to another.

The WG reached a preliminary agreement on recommendations regarding the TACs for the western and the central Baltic herring stocks and to consider further the recommendation on the TAC for sprat. The WG also agreed to propose to the Executive Committee the election of Ryszard Malik from the Association of Fishermen's of Sea- PO as WG Chairman and Tobias Kern-Jespersen as rapporteur.

Demersal WG, 19 June 2006, Copenhagen, Denmark

The meeting was held at the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) offices.

The WG discussed the new biological advice on cod in the Baltic Sea from ACFM. In the absence of their own biological data the WG did not feel they were in a position to criticize the ICES assessment. However, some group members considered the proposed low TAC for the western cod stock and the zero TAC for the eastern cod stock were not in-line with the biological advice.

The WG discussed the potential benefit of closer cooperation between ICES and the fishing industry. Many participants offered their support for closer working relations.

Stefanie Schmidt from the European Commission provided the working group with an update on the Commission's proposal for a long-term management plan for Baltic Sea cod. The plan had been further delayed by continued discussions within the European Parliament and Commission Working Groups. The Commission did not expect the proposal to be adopted by the Council before the beginning of 2007.

The WG agreed to seek a mandate from the Executive Committee to prepare a response to the Commission's proposed management plan as soon as was reasonably possible after its publication.

The WG agreed to nominate Michael Andersen (Danish Fishermen's Association) as the Chair and Paul Knapman (the Fisheries Secretariat) as rapporteur, and seek confirmation from the Executive Committee.

Executive Committee, 20 June 2006, Copenhagen, Denmark

The second Executive Committee meeting was held at the ICES offices. The main focus of the discussions was the outcome of the first meetings of the three WGs and the way forward.

Michael Andersen from the Danish Fishermen's Association was appointed Chairman of the Demersal WG and Paul Knapman from the Fisheries Secretariat was appointed rapporteur. Gunnar Asplund from the Swedish Fishermen's Federation was appointed Chairman of the salmon/sea trout WG and Kjell Nybacka, West Finland European Office, was appointed rapporteur. Ryszard Malik from the Association of Fishermen's of Sea - PO was appointed Chairman of the Pelagic WG and Tobias Kern-Jespersen was appointed rapporteur.

The Demersal WG and the Pelagic WG were given a mandate to prepare position papers on the management of the demersal and pelagic stocks in the Baltic for the next Executive Committee meeting.

It was agreed that the Baltic RAC should invite the NS RAC to form a joint, informal WG and cooperate on issues to do with the European eel.

Procedures for the preparation of Executive Committee meetings were discussed, and it was agreed that the Agenda should be accompanied by annotations to the agenda, in order to prepare the participants for the meeting. Decision items in particular, but also other items, should be accompanied by an Annex with background information and a proposed text for decision, as appropriate.

Katarina Veem, WWF informed the meeting that she would have to step down as the Vice Chairperson of the Executive Committee, owing to her appointment to a new position outwith WWF. The Executive Committee agreed to consider the nomination of new candidates.

Demersal WG, 22-23 August 2006, Klaipeda, Lithuania

The two day meeting was held at the Seafarers Centre and organised by the Lithuanian Fish Producers Organisation.

The meeting was opened with an address by the Lithuanian Minister of Agriculture. Representatives from ICES and the European Commission participated in the meeting.

The meeting focused on the European Commission's recently published long term Baltic Sea cod management plan. The proposed multi-annual plan was reviewed article by article. The working group made eight recommendations to the Executive Committee. These sought changes and clarification to the proposed plan.

Non compliance of existing fisheries regulations was seen as a significant impediment to implementation of the proposed plan. In an attempt to seek ways to tackle the problems of non-compliance the working group agreed to request that the Executive Committee seek access to the European Commission's 2005/06 evaluation report on the implementation of Baltic Sea fisheries regulations.

The WG also proposed, via the Executive Committee, to seek regular meetings with the European Commission and representatives from the Member States control and enforcement agencies to discuss the findings and how improvements might be made.

Pelagic WG, 23 August 2006, Klaipeda, Lithuania

The second Pelagic WG meeting was held as a half day meeting at the Seafarers Centre in Klaipeda.

The meeting focused its discussion on the TACs for pelagic species in 2007. The WG agreed on advice on the TACs for herring in Sub-divisions 22-24, herring (52,500 tonnes), herring in Sub-divisions 25-27, 28.2, 29 and 31 (147,200 tonnes), herring in Sub-divisions 30-31 (105,340 tonnes) and Sprat in Sub-divisions 22-32 (538,200 tonnes)

The TAC for herring in Subdivision 28.1 was not discussed because there were no representatives from the Estonian and Latvian fishery sector.

Executive Committee, 28 August 2006, Stockholm, Sweden

The third Executive Committee meeting was held at the offices of the Swedish Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer affairs. The main issue at meeting was the adoption of BS RAC recommendations concerning the management of demersal and pelagic species.

The Executive Committee decided on a set of recommendations with respect to the proposed cod management plan.

It was also agreed to organise a conference on how to combat IUU fishing in the Baltic. It was proposed that the conference should take place in the spring of 2007. It was agreed that an ad-hoc planning group would be set up to organise the conference.

The recommendations from the pelagic WG were approved and it was agreed to reflect the Estonian and Latvian position on the fishery in the Gulf of Riga in the position paper from the RAC to the Commission and Member States.

It was also agreed to recommend to the Commission that a management plan for salmon be developed as soon as possible and to inform the Commission that the RAC is prepared to play an active role in this work.

The Executive Committee agreed on a revised budget. In order to cover an expected liquidity gap at the end of the RAC year due to the modality of payment of the Commission grant, it was agreed that participants at the BS RAC meetings would not be reimbursed for their travel and hotel costs before the end of the RAC year.

Salmon/Sea trout WG, 21 November 2006, Copenhagen, Denmark

The second meeting of the salmon/sea trout WG was held at the ICES offices in Copenhagen. There was some concern regarding the absence of a number of representatives. The lack of attendance was not thought likely to have been due to the cost of attending, since the travel expenses would be reimbursed by the RAC.

The WG agreed on the need for a management plan rather than an "action plan." It was also agreed that a surveillance group was necessary in the future to control, amend, analyse and implement the salmon management plan and that the BSRAC and its WG should play an active role in the surveillance work.

DG FISH informed the meeting about the Commission's work programme regarding Baltic Salmon. The Commission intends to evaluate the present Salmon Action Plan (SAP), taking into account its strengths and weaknesses and in particular new goals and needs. The

Commission will initiate the revision of the SAP at the start of 2007 with the intention of providing a management proposal by the end of 2007. The regulation of Baltic salmon is not simple as it involves different national and Community competences outside the Common Fisheries Policy. When drafting a plan the experience from the IBSFC SAP from 1997 will be taken into consideration. It is still to be decided whether the new management plan should be combined with a management plan for sea trout.

The WG began work on a future management plan.

Demersal WG, 23 January 2007, Warsaw, Poland

23 participants, from 6 Member States, representing the fishing industry and environmental organisations and a representative from the European Commission participated in this 4th meeting of the WG.

Clarification and agreement was reached on a procedural matter regarding the sending of advice/views/opinions to the Commission and other external organisations. The WG agreed that all points of view should be reported back to the Ex Com. It was then the role of Ex Com to agree and clearly articulate what detail and level of any information should be forwarded to the Commission and any other external bodies.

There was a debate regarding effort limitation. Polish fishermen confirmed that a “days at sea” system had been adopted in Poland, despite this contravening the existing Council regulation.

The Commission representative confirmed that, within the on-going deliberations for the proposed multi-annual plan, all aspects, including effort limitation were open for debate and urged that the WG provide detailed views to the Commission.

Following a further review of the draft plan, it was agreed that the next WG meeting should focus on the detailed elements of the plan. Participants were invited to prepare their view and any alternative suggestions in good time so that they could be circulated prior to the meeting.

The need for better quality scientific advice was discussed. Some fishing industry representatives expressed their concern that the scientific advice did not reflect what they saw at sea. Some industry representatives made offers of help and assistance in providing data for the scientific assessments.

It was agreed that the WG would ask for a meeting with ICES to discuss their scientific advice and how it might be improved with the help of fishermen.

Executive Committee, 24 January 2007, Warsaw, Poland

The 4th Executive Committee meeting was held at the offices of the Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The main issue at meeting was the discussion of a possible advice on a management plan for Baltic salmon and the preparation of the General Assembly.

The Executive Committee had a lengthy discussion on the problems of the current management of Baltic salmon and on aspects to be taken into consideration in a BS RAC recommendation on a future management plan. It was agreed to try to finalise the advice on the management of salmon at the Salmon/Sea trout WG meeting 27 February 2007.

The provisional plan for General Assembly meeting 28 February 2007 was approved and the Executive Committee agreed on proposals for next year work programme, next year budget

and amendment of the statutes so the auditor is elected by the General Assembly and not the Secretariat.

Ewa Milewska from WWF was appointed Vice Chair of the BS RAC.

Salmon/Sea trout WG, 27 February 2007, Stockholm, Sweden

The third meeting of the salmon/sea trout WG was held at the offices of the Fisheries Secretariat in Stockholm.

After the last meeting in November 2006 the Chairman and the rapporteur had further elaborated a background paper for the meeting. This was based on the proposal from the November meeting and changed due to feedback from members of the working group.

A general introduction to this so called non-paper proposal was thereafter given before the WG started a detailed discussion on the paper.

After a lengthy discussion the WG agreed upon a proposal to a position paper. Four points were disputed and it was agreed that the chairman and the rapporteur should distribute the new version to the WG members the following day. Disputed points should be highlighted.

The members of the WG expressed the opinion that a further input from the WG will be needed when the European Commission starts elaborating a salmon management plan.

The members of the WG expressed their strong wish to closely follow up to future development of the salmon issue.

General Assembly, 28 February 2007, Stockholm, Sweden

The second BS RAC General Assembly took place in the Swedish Parliament building in Stockholm.

The Swedish minister of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Affairs Eskil Erlandsson addressed the meeting. He underlined that the fisheries and the ecosystem in the Baltic were of interest to many people. It was crucial to find an appropriate balance between industry interests and environmental interests. This was where the RAC had an important role to play and why the EU needed the advice from the RAC.

Emilio Mastracchio, Director of Resources and Relation with Stakeholders in DG Fisheries and Maritime Affairs gave a status report on the functioning of the RACs and the challenges for the future.

He concluded that in the Commission's view, the experience of the BS RAC and the other RACs had so far been very positive and constructive. There was willingness from all sides, including from Member States and from the Commission, to continue along this path. He encouraged the BS RAC to carry on with its good work.

Ole Tougaard, Advisor to the Community Fisheries Control Agency, gave a presentation of the Control Agency. He explained about the structure and the task of the Agency as well as the possibility of the RACs to influence the work through their representation on the Advisory Board and the Administrative Board. He underlined the wish of the Agency to have a close working cooperation with the RACs.

The three WG chairmen and the BS RAC Secretary gave a presentation of the BS RAC activities during the first RAC year.

The General Assembly agreed to approve the annual report and the annual accounts by email correspondence as soon as possible after the end of the first RAC year. The proposed work programme and budget for next year were approved. It was decided to amend § 28 of the statutes, so the auditor is elected by the General Assembly and not by the Secretariat.

Executive Committee, 1 March 2007, Stockholm, Sweden

The 5th Executive Committee meeting was held at the SAS Radisson Viking hotel in Stockholm.

The meeting adopted a recommendation on a salmon management plan for the Baltic Sea. Coalition Clean Baltic was unable to support this recommendation.

It was decided to establish a focus group on Baltic fisheries research and agreed on the terms of reference for the focus group. The focus group shall in particular deal with invitations to the BS RAC to propose studies or research projects, to actively participate in projects, to lend support to projects and to participate and make presentations at conferences, workshops etc. on Baltic fisheries research.

The meeting also decided to use funds from the first year translation/interpretation budget to translate core BS RAC documents into Polish. It was agreed to discuss a BS RAC policy on translation and interpretation at a later date.

Demersal WG, 14-15 March 2007, Copenhagen, Denmark

Day 1 of the two day meeting provided opportunity to meet with representatives from ICES and discuss their scientific advice with respect to the Baltic Sea cod stocks. 20 participants, from 6 Member States, representing the fishing industry and environmental organisations participated in the meeting. Steen Christensen and Henrik Degel were present in their capacity as members of the ICES Baltic Sea Working Group.

Following a presentation on the background to ICES advice there followed a question and answer session. There was a general agreement that scientific advice is flawed and needs improving. It was recognised that the fishing industry has a significant role to play in improving the situation.

Three specific areas were seen as offering potential in helping to establish this:

1. The development of “reference fleets” for the different métiers within the cod fishery.
2. Retrospective analysis of fishermen’s data with the intention of better matching scientific advice with first-hand experience of fishermen.
3. Research into how ‘local ecological knowledge’ is used elsewhere in the world to support fisheries management and to consider whether similar approaches could be effectively applied within the Baltic Sea.

It was recommended to ask ExCom to write to ICES indicating the catching sectors willingness to develop the three areas identified above and seek guidance on how they might be initiated and developed.

Day 2 provided a final opportunity for the WG to discuss the European Commission’s proposal for a Council Regulation for a multi-annual plan for the Baltic cod fisheries. Stefanie Schmidt represented and participated on behalf of the Commission.

Prior to the meeting papers from WWF, FISH/CCB, the Swedish Fishermen's Federation, the German Fishermen's Federation and the Danish Fishermen's Federation were submitted to the Chairman, clearing stating each organisations position regarding the proposed plan.

The Commission provided an update on how aspects of the plan were progressing within the Council WG. The WG then proceeded to work through the proposed plan article by article providing everyone with an opportunity to express their opinion and debate any relevant points.

Following a constructive meeting it was clear that opinions had not changed since the Klaipeda meeting.

The meeting concluded by confirming that the WGs recommendations agreed at the Klaipeda meeting in August 2006 remained unchanged.

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