

**Speech to the General Assembly of The Baltic Sea Advisory Council (BS - AC),  
15 May 2019, Axelborg, Axeltorv 3, 1609 Copenhagen V, 09.00 hours**

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Good morning everyone,

Honorary chair, Steve Karnicki,  
Participants,

My minister, Eva Kjer Hansen, was originally invited to address the BS-AC General Assembly today.

But, as you may know, we're in an election period, and for the ministers, this means limited political activities, except for campaigning for re-election!

I bring with me best regards from Eva Kjer Hansen, who wishes you a successful meeting and every success with your future work.

I'm very pleased to step in and have the chance to be here and say a few words.

It's just over a year ago, last May, when I was last here and the BS-AC was wrestling to find a replacement for the outgoing chair of the Executive Committee, Reine Johansson.

The BS-AC finally managed in November to agree unanimously on a new chair. In the interim period, Steve Karnicki worked skillfully to keep the BSAC on the right track. I'm convinced, Steve, that your efforts were highly appreciated.

Esben, you were elected new chair of the BS- AC. I've already congratulated you, but once more I'd like to congratulate you here on your home ground at Axelborg and in the presence of all the BS-AC members. Congratulations!

I've had a close look at the agenda for today, as well as yesterday's, including a review of your work programme.

I'd like to focus on one issue: cod, which has really been in the media over the last months, especially since ICES published in March the results from its benchmark exercise.

It's no secret, and it's of serious concern that cod in the eastern Baltic is in an extremely bad condition. Many different actors across the Baltic are calling for action – immediate action – to find ways forward to improve the stock.

I recall that this was already on the BS-AC's agenda back in January when you dealt with issues facing cod, including the increasing number of grey seals, which are also having an effect.

You came back to the eastern Baltic cod yesterday, at the Ex-Com meeting, and you discussed how to address the letter from the Commission calling on proposals for possible new measures already this year.

With respect to the seals, the BALTFISH Presidency recently arranged a symposium on seal-fisheries interactions. And in June, HELCOM FISH will also hold a workshop on seal-fisheries interaction.

In Denmark, my Ministry and the Ministry of Environment are in close contact on many aspects of seal-fisheries interaction and are equally concerned about the situation in the Baltic.

I mention this to illustrate that - despite their different approaches and scope, - how important it is for these three bodies – the BSAC, BALTFISH and HELCOM - to work closely together, to learn from each other, and to integrate knowledge from their different experiences and processes in order to find the best solutions in every respect.

Coming back to the cod, the Commission sent an identical letter to the Swedish BALTFISH Presidency calling for suggestions on possible new measures already for this year, and the BALTFISH presidency is in the process of collecting information from MS to find out whether MS together can agree to do something.

And again, only a few days ago, the Commissioner sent a letter to MS urging them to find solutions as soon as possible.

About three weeks ago, my minister sent out a press release informing that Denmark is prepared to cut its 2019 quota by 70 %. Hopefully, BALTFISH and the BS-AC can support this approach.

It's not only fishing activities that are affecting the cod. Many more elements are having an impact – most of them negative - on the stock development. I've already mentioned the growing number of grey seals. We need to establish a much more

comprehensive understanding of the interactions that are going on in the water in order to find appropriate solutions.

I know I've spoken at length about the situation for cod, but I believe it's important that we find a way forward, and I am sure that cod will also be a big issue again when we start to discuss fishing opportunities for 2020 in the Baltic Sea.

I know you're also looking at the situation for western Baltic herring. This is also a stock of great concern and will most likely continue to be so for some years ahead.

Having focused on these two stocks, I'm sure that you all understand the difficult and challenging situation that our traditional fisheries are facing today.

In parallel with this development, it has become increasingly important for Denmark to focus on new fisheries and to investigate and develop such new fisheries. I just want to signal that Round Goby and Signal Crayfish are the two species we have in mind.

Going beyond fishing opportunities, I note that the BS-AC is addressing a wide range of issues. Just to mention a few:

Ecosystem based management, - which in your context also includes seal and fisheries interaction, - the annual ICES advice, spotlight on eastern Baltic cod, the EU's control regulation, as well as the technical measures regulation and selectivity.

And I note that for your own internal housekeeping, you're going through and revising your rules of procedure.

I've had a look at your work programme for the next year and it indicates to me that the BS-AC is dedicated and prepared to focus on issues of immediate importance. And as for future actions, I see you are way ahead of all the others, since in early September, you'll initiate discussions on the future CFP.

I've already said it, but I want to reiterate it today: it's very, very important that all parties cooperate in a constructive way, seeking compromises and bridging the gaps when necessary. Your contribution is essential in the regionalized process in order to achieve the goals set out in the CFP.

I strongly believe in regional cooperation, and it's very important that regional solutions are found to solve regional problems, which in turn facilitate the implementation of the CFP.

I'd also like to say a few words about what has kept my administration busy over the last year.

More precisely, what I refer to is the technical measures and allowing fishermen to use that fishing gear which gives improved selectivity. Improved selectivity is also one of the corner stones of the CFP. I'm pleased to note that it's now allowed to use the so-called Swedish gear when fishing for cod in the Baltic Sea.

You may recall that at the BALTFISH Forum meeting last June, Denmark gave a short presentation of the results from using 110 mm in the T90 codends and in the BACOMA window.

The joint recommendation was sent to the Commission last October. But in February this year, the Commission sent its reply to the BALTFISH Presidency and stated that the Commission – quote: -“was not in a position to issue a positive opinion” – unquote - to take this Joint Recommendation forward to a Delegated Act.

I have to say that the reply from the Commission disappointed me. So now, together with Germany, we're looking into how we can take this recommendation forward.

And a few more words on Delegated Acts. I can inform you that Denmark has drafted a Joint Recommendation to exempt plaice from the landing obligation in the Baltic. BALTFISH will discuss the draft at its meetings in early June. And of course, it will be circulated to the BS-AC for comments.

Thank you.