

Copenhagen 29th January 2019

Conclusions and recommendations from the BSAC Executive Committee theme meeting on eastern Baltic cod¹

On Tuesday 29th January 2019, the Baltic Sea Advisory Council Executive Committee hosted a theme meeting on the eastern Baltic cod. It is grateful to the scientists and experts who came to present their latest information and data on the stock status and ecosystem conditions and challenges facing the eastern Baltic cod stock. In their presentations, they made clear that the eastern Baltic cod is stressed by multiple factors.

The latest Baltic International Trawl Survey confirmed reduced catches by size and area, as well as reduced oxygen levels. The cod is experiencing reduced growth and reduced biomass. There is continued discarding, in particular of cod below minimum conservation reference size, despite the introduction in 2015 of the landing obligation, and there is a need for an improved management of the cod fisheries. Changes in hydrology were noted as having an increased negative affect. Seal worm are affecting the liver of the cod, and seals are causing damage to and predating on the cod. Thiamine deficiency was highlighted as another potential stress factor.

The meeting reinforced the accumulated knowledge that the eastern Baltic cod is in an acute critical state.

The BSAC supports the scientists in their work to improve our understanding of the factors at play. The ICES stock assessment has developed since 2014 and the BSAC anticipates the results from the ICES benchmarking meeting 4th to 8th February 2019 to go through all the available data towards developing a quantitative assessment of the stock.

The BSAC supports all research projects which can bring together the necessary knowledge and data in order to make the necessary management decisions. The BSAC will play an active part in coming up with suggestions.

¹ **These BSAC conclusions and recommendations** were drafted by the Secretariat and the Management Team on the basis of the presentations and the discussion held at the meeting on 29th January 2019 and a draft presented to the meeting. They were subsequently sent to the ExCom for comment and adoption.

The BSAC calls on BALTFISH Member States and the Commission to take the matter seriously, to make it the primary priority, to make available the necessary resources for further research and react to the situation. **All possible measures must be explored in establishing an emergency plan for eastern Baltic cod.**

The call is to make use of the information gained in order to help us to work together on this, to exchange information and increase dialogue. The BSAC is fully committed to facilitating this work.