

BSAC Pelagic Working Group
Monday 24th January 2022
10.00 – 13.00 (CET)
REPORT
Virtual by Zoom

1. Welcome by the Pelagic WG Chair Jarek Zieliński

Jarek Zieliński, the Pelagic Working Group Chair welcomed all the participants and wished them a good and fruitful year. He stated that this meeting was the first meeting of the Pelagic Working Group since a long time. It will deal with the pelagic quotas for 2022 and 2023, as well as an update on stickleback trial fishery, an information item on fishmeal and fish oil production and the importance of Baltic fisheries and raw material supplies, as well as status on implementation of the technical measures in the demersal fishery, which had been raised during ExCom meeting on 17th January 2022 with a request to be dealt with as soon as possible.

2. Formalities for the start of the meeting

The list of participants and apologies is on the web site¹.

The BSAC Secretary informed on the apologies from Nils Höglund, Peter Breckling as well as Antoine Kopp from DG Mare who had taken another job at DG Mare and will have very little time to give to the Baltic. The BSAC had been invited to send any questions to the European Commission by mail.

The agenda was adopted without changes.

3. The pelagic quotas in the Baltic Sea for 2022: review and exchange of views

The WG Chair recalled the BSAC recommendations and the Council decisions on pelagic TACs for 2022. He referred to the protocol from the Council meeting in October. With regard to the western spring spawning herring, he referred to the joint statement by the Commission, Denmark, Germany, Poland and Sweden which had recognised the critical state of the western herring stock, the need to set only a bycatch TAC as well as the need to implement a rebuilding plan.

He invited the participants to comment.

A fisheries representative underlined that the rebuilding plan for western herring should cover Norway and the UK, as the western spring spawning herring migrates through Division 3A to the North Sea. The stock is complex and covers different management areas. Any management decisions should be applied to its entire distribution range.

¹ [BSAC - BSAC PelagicWorking Group](#)

The decisions taken with respect to western Baltic herring should be taken into account in the negotiations between Norway, UK and the EU.

The ExCom Chair said that the management of western herring is very complicated, and it is extremely difficult to find agreement on the measures to be applied. The BSAC had on several occasions flagged the need to establish a rebuilding plan and asked ICES for advice. Science was not able to help find the right management tools for this complex stock. The BSAC will bring this issue up again at the MIAC meeting in June 2022 (postponed from January 2022) and will again ask ICES to advise on the rebuilding plan for western herring.

A representative of the OIG stated that representatives of the BSAC should take part in the work carried out by Norway, the EU and UK on North Sea herring, because this stock mixes with western Baltic herring.

The WG Chair proposed to ask the European Commission to give the BSAC an update of the work of on the North Sea herring.

Henrik Mosegaard, DTU Aqua stated that he is an independent expert to the trilateral Norway – UK- EU working group on North Sea herring. The working group is composed of managers, supplemented by scientists, members of ICES Herring Assessment Working Group. Norman Graham from DG Mare is the chair. The working group carries out a thorough evaluation of management measures for herring and collects contributions from sub-groups. It is expected to finish the work in spring 2022 and publish a report.

An observer from Low Impact Fishers of Europe referred to the fact that the BSAC recommendations are often set at levels above the ICES advice and asked whether the Pelagic WG under his chairmanship is planning to follow the advice with regard to the recommendations on the TACs for pelagic stocks in the future.

The WG Chair stated that the role of the Working Group Chair is to moderate the work and not to highlight his personal opinions. He underlined that the BSAC formulates its recommendations after careful consideration of the scientific advice and takes into account different positions of the stakeholder groups. He informed that the recommendations for fishing opportunities for 2022 of the recently established Baltic Sea Working Group of the European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO) had largely overlapped the BSAC recommendations.²

A fisheries representative stated that the wide ranges of FMSY values given in the ICES advice are the basis for recommending the TAC. He underlined that the NGO recommendations do not always follow the ICES advice to increase fishing opportunities. He drew attention to the fact that 14 fisheries organisations from different Member States had supported a 2022 TAC for sprat at the FMSY upper value of 335.590 t.

² <http://eapo.com/UserFiles/EAPO21-37%20BSWG%20Recommendation%20TAC%202022.pdf>

<http://eapo.com/UserFiles/Reply%20MS.%20Vitseva%20to%20EAPO%20on%20Baltic%20FO%202022.pdf>

Another fisheries representative agreed with the previous speaker and added that the Council also decides on lower TACs than those advised by ICES, as in the case of the TAC for herring in the Central Baltic for 2022³. He underlined that reductions in the TACs seem to be the measure most often applied by the decision-makers. The decision-makers do not take into account socio-economic consequences of their decisions for the Baltic fishery. In his view, decreases of the sprat TAC could be foreseen in 2023, due to the fact that sprat is caught in the mixed fishery with herring. Any decrease of the fishing opportunities will have severe consequences for the fishing industry. He stated that at present, the sprat stock is in such a good condition that it has a negative impact on other fish stocks. The current TAC set for sprat enables further increase of the stock, and this fact will have a negative impact on biodiversity. Therefore, the catches of sprat should be maximised.

A representative of the OIG drew attention to an error in the final table with the BSAC recommendations on the fishing opportunities for sprat for 2022. The joint NGO recommendation⁴ for the sprat TAC for 2022 (262.337 t.) should be shown in the minority column.⁵ She provided the joint NGO position on Baltic TACs in 2022.⁶

An observer from Low Impact Fishers of Europe stated that the BSAC should come up with a policy or position on how to move forward with the management of the western Baltic herring stock, taking into account the need for a rebuilding plan for western herring and the mixed herring and sprat fishery in the Baltic.

A representative of anglers referred to concerns related to different sub-populations of herring in SDs 30-31. These sub-populations are very important for coastal ecosystems as well as for commercial fishermen and anglers. In his view, ICES should be asked to include more advice on the management of these sub-populations.

A representative of Latvian fisheries association provided a written statement after the meeting.⁷

³ ICES advice in the range 52.443 – 87.581 t., Council decision 49.751 t.

⁴ <https://www.wfbaltic.org.cdn.triggerfish.cloud/uploads/2021/06/final-joint-ngo-recommendations-baltic-tacs-2022.pdf>

⁵ Corrected in the table on the website for meeting

⁶ <https://www.wfbaltic.org.cdn.triggerfish.cloud/uploads/2021/06/final-joint-ngo-recommendations-baltic-tacs-2022.pdf>

⁷ We are following the changes in the TAC very closely. As most of our fisheries in the Baltic Sea are MSC certified, any change in TAC will have an impact on catches. At present, there is some concern about herring in the Gulf of Riga, as a small amount of central herring flows into the Gulf of Riga according to ICES advice. We do not understand how this could be separated, but more and more questions arise as to whether the Central Baltic herring TAC will not affect the Gulf of Riga herring TAC in the future.

Fishermen expected a larger increase in the sprat TAC for 2022, but a 13% increase in the TAC is significant given that the sprat limit was reduced in previous years. It is still unclear about the central herring. Given that this is a by-catch in the sprat fishery, we follow the catch data closely and compare it with the bycatch from previous years.

The Working Group Chair concluded the point and regretted that members had not provided input ahead of the meeting in order to facilitate an exchange of views. For 2023, the Working Group needed to address the discrepancy between recommendations from the BSAC and the Commission's proposals for TACs.

4. The pelagic quotas in the Baltic Sea for 2023: exchange of views

The Working Group decided to discuss the pelagic quotas for 2023 at the next meeting of the Working Group.

5. Stickleback

The WG Chair referred to the BSAC recommendation to encourage a trial fishery for stickleback in the Baltic,⁸ adopted in January 2021. He invited the experts to give presentations and provide information on the research and trials going on in Denmark, Sweden and Estonia.

Henrik Mosegaard and Eva Maria Pedersen from DTU Aqua presented the research fishery on stickleback⁹. The research is conducted by DTU Aqua, DFPO and DPPO. Henrik Mosegaard presented the biology and distribution of stickleback in the Baltic. Adult stickleback occur in fresh water, estuaries and coastal waters. They form schools. They reach a maximum length of 11cm. He gave information on the stickleback abundance in the Swedish BIAS survey area of the Baltic Sea, 2001-2014. He referred to the growing interest of fishermen to develop a fishery for the growing resources of stickleback. There is concern about its negative impact on the ecosystem. The new fishery requires defining the legal aspects such as bycatch regulation, fishing rights, as well as sustainable management measures, taking into account the ecosystem and market considerations. He presented the criteria for developing the fishery, starting from localising the resources, taking into account fishermen's knowledge and biology, and how to catch stickleback, considering the time of the year and day, water depth, gear development. Mesh size is an issue. A small mesh with large openings is preferable. The optimal towing speed must be chosen. Sustainable utilisation of the resource based on the MSY principle should be the goal. More knowledge is needed on the ecosystem considerations including predator-prey relationships, top-down processes, bottomup processes, complex food web interactions, influence of and on habitats and population and recruitment trends. This information may be gathered through surveys. The observed increases in abundance of stickleback are by some scientists attributed to declines in piscivorous predators. There is a hypothesis that the scope for individual and population growth might increase at temperatures above 15°C and that the stickleback scope for growth increases in the offshore zones. The market considerations include the transportation costs and the prices for fishmeal industry.

⁸ <http://www.bsac.dk/BSAC-Resources/BSAC-Statements-and-recommendations/BSAC-recommendation-on-a-trial-fishery-for-stickle>

⁹ [PowerPoint Presentation \(bsac.dk\)](#)

The experimental fishery started in 2021 by getting the fishermen's interest and acquiring the permits. The purpose of the experiment is to estimate catch rates of stickleback in various areas of the Baltic Sea and to clarify conditions that can minimise bycatch of herring and sprat, so that a future profitable and sustainable fishery for stickleback can be opened up. Two fishing vessels took part in the trials conducted in December 2021. A sandeel gear, codend < 16 mm was used. An application for a project to support the development of the fishery will be made under the Danish Green Development and Demonstration Programme (GUDP).

A fisheries representative asked whether the survival rate of stickleback passing through the meshes had been estimated during the research.

Henrik Mosegaard replied that the trials had only lasted for a week and due to the time constraints, the escapement rates had not been estimated.

An observer from Low Impact Fishers of Europe referred to the smaller mesh sizes used in the trials. He stated the pelagic trawls with a mesh size of 9-10 mm recommended in the BSAC recommendation¹⁰ for stickleback trial fishery will generate a higher bycatch of herring and sprat.

The question on why the 9-10 mm mesh size was recommended by the BSAC was also asked by **a fisheries representative**¹¹.

A fisherman representing the Danish Fishermen PO stated that the DFPO collaborated in the project. Stickleback could be a potential species for a new fishery. The trials should be continued. Fishermen who took part in the trails should be interviewed to acquire their knowledge and relevant information that could be used in a targeted fishery for stickleback. He referred to the bycatch of sprat and herring. There is practically no bycatch of herring and sprat if the fishery is conducted close to the surface, because sprat and herring stay deeper in the water column during daytime.

A fisheries representative commented that a reduced mesh size makes bycatch more likely. This is not a problem, as long as it is counted against the quota. He referred to the BSAC proposal to merge and delete specific mesh sizes for the pelagic fishery because of high mortality of pelagic fish after being released from the gear¹².

The ExCom Chair stated that bycatches of herring and sprat are very low if trawling is conducted at low speed.

¹⁰ <http://www.bsac.dk/BSAC-Resources/BSAC-Statements-and-recommendations/BSAC-recommendation-on-a-trial-fishery-for-stickle>

¹¹ Note from the Secretariat: In the BSAC recommendation, the 9-10 mm mesh size was made as a first proposal, was based on an existing rule for sandeel fishery, used under permitted mesh size regulations.

¹² [BSAC - BSAC meeting on the Technical Measures Regulation](#) There was no consensus on this proposal. Secretariat has added more on this at the end of the report

Ulf Bergström, Katja Ringdahl and Johan Lövgren from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) presented the ecological effects and potential for a stickleback fishery¹³. The life cycle and interactions with other species were presented. The stickleback population has increased in the open sea. SLU presented updated biomass estimates for 2015-2019. There is a regime shift in the coastal ecosystems, due to the loss of predatory fish. Hence, the stickleback population has grown. The interactions between stickleback and other species in the open sea are being studied by SLU. There is a large overlap in the diet with herring and sprat. Cod and large herring eat stickleback. Can decreases in these predators explain the increase in stickleback? The causes of stickleback increase are being investigated, and loss of predatory fish seems to be a strong factor, as well as climate change causing increased reproduction of stickleback. The presentation highlighted potential positive effects of a large scale fishery for stickleback. Stickleback can be used for fishmeal production. This fishery can contribute to the restoration of coastal ecosystems and higher growth rate of herring and sprat. SLU had performed a risk analysis.¹⁴ Fishing would be performed with fine-meshed trawl. Salmon, trout and cod are sensitive bycatch species (PSA analysis). There is also a risk of bycatches of herring and sprat and less food for birds and predatory fish. They gave information on the work done so far in their trials. The Swedish authorities requested observers onboard while carrying out the trials and gave a derogation from the technical measures in order to do the trials and learn more. The work was done under time pressure and met with some technical problems. Work will continue in the spring. The trials should gather information on the bycatches associated with a stickleback fishery and to what extent these bycatches can be avoided.

A fisheries representative asked to what extent warm water in the Baltic has influenced the increase of the stickleback stock.

Ulf Bergström, scientist from SLU stated although the stickleback population certainly benefits from warm water, the main reason for the increase in stickleback is the loss of predatory fish.

Lauri Saks from the University of Tartu Marine Institute, Estonia gave a short update on the trial fishery for stickleback with commercial vessels, using 16 mm mesh size, conducted in December 2021¹⁵. The results obtained were similar to those from the trials conducted in Denmark and Sweden. There were no bycatches of herring and sprat in the trials conducted during daytime. Some bycatch of herring and sprat took place at twilight. A fishery for stickleback is possible. They can achieve minimum bycatch when there is daylight and when there is strict separation of herring and sprat. Estonia does not have a project running. They need more background data.

¹³ [BSAC - BSAC PelagicWorking Group](#)

¹⁴ From SLU Riskbedömning av kommersiellt fiske efter storspigg i östersjön (risk analysis of sandeel fishery in the Baltic) In Swedish, 20 pages, provided to the BSAC Secretariat. We can summarise, if needed.

¹⁵ [BSAC - BSAC PelagicWorking Group](#)

A fisheries representative presented the results of the Finnish experimental trials carried out in Finland in 2020¹⁶. The trials took place in the Bothnian Sea. The results were similar to those obtained by other Member States. There were no bycatches of sprat and herring in the trials conducted during daytime.

A fisheries representative asked about the trawling speed required when targeting stickleback.

The representative from DFPO explained that more trials are needed to determine the optimal speed when targeting stickleback. However, experience from the trials shows that a lower speed than in the pelagic fishery could be used.

A representative of anglers informed that during the post-spawning season salmon feed on juvenile stickleback. This fact should be taken into account during the targeted fishery for stickleback in order to avoid bycatches of salmon, as well as trout. He also stated that ringed seals eat stickleback.

The scientists from SLU and Estonia confirmed that ringed seals feed on stickleback. **The Estonian scientist** referred to a study carried out on a scientific vessel in the Gulf of Riga with a drastically smaller mesh size. Bycatch of 10 species, including white fish had been recorded.

An observer from Low Impact Fishers of Europe stated that more research is needed before starting a commercial fishery for stickleback, in order to avoid any negative effects from this fishery.

The WG Chair referred to the letter of intent signed by fisheries associations from Denmark, Lithuania and Poland.¹⁷ All parties declared their intention to contribute to the development of the stickleback trial fishery in a controlled and responsible manner, following the BSAC guidelines for a trial fishery. All impacts of the stickleback fishery on the ecosystem will be taken into consideration and recorded. He underlined that this planned cooperation is an example of a responsible approach of the industry. The organisations engaged in the trial fishery will exchange the data and methodology in order to implement the BSAC guidelines in the best possible way and will report on the results.

The scientist from SLU underlined that all impacts of the stickleback fishery on the ecosystem should be taken into consideration when developing a targeted stickleback fishery. He stated that since there are indications that the growing stickleback population could disturb the ecosystem, a targeted fishery could have a positive effect, but it needs to be performed in combination with measures aimed at restoring predatory fish.

A fisheries representative agreed that a targeted fishery for stickleback needs to be implemented in a responsible manner, on the basis of scientific research.

¹⁶ In Swedish: <https://www.luke.fi/sv/nyheter/bestand-tillstand-och-tathet-nya-forskningsron-om-stromming-och-vassbuk-i-ostersjon/>

¹⁷ Made available to the Secretariat and sent to the WG participants.

Another fisheries representative stated that the trials should not be delayed and should be conducted in a responsible manner in cooperation between fishermen and scientists.

The WG Chair concluded that the fishermen will have to provide the data. He thanked everyone for the discussions.

6. Information: fishmeal and fish oil production and importance of Baltic fisheries and raw material supplies (*Søren Anker Pedersen European Fishmeal and Fish Oil Producers which has taken over the seat of Marine Ingredients on General Assembly*)

Søren Anker Pedersen from the European Fishmeal and Fish Oil Producers introduced the European Fish Meal and Fish Oil Producers¹⁸. EFFOP represents the European fishmeal and oil producers from Denmark, Faroe Islands, Iceland, Ireland, Norway, the UK, Estonia and Spain (EFFOP has 8 producing member countries and 12 non-producing associated members¹⁹, in total 31 factories). In the Baltic, EFFOP's members are based in Denmark, Germany and Estonia. Denmark is the biggest producer of raw material. Fish meal and oil are produced from small pelagics and trimmings. Fishmeal is a dried marine powder that holds several nutritional qualities, which makes it very attractive as a protein supplement in feed for aquaculture and agriculture. Fish oil is 100 % marine oil with a high content of the essential omega 3 fatty acids. Fish oil is mainly used for the production of feed for farmed fish and as refined fish oil for human consumption (fish oil capsules). He presented the production process. Marine Ingredients in the global food system: fish account for 17% of total animal protein and 7% of all proteins. Fish meal is used for aquaculture, poultry, pigs etc. The marine ingredients sector has a role to play in the mitigation of climate change, by producing five times more farmed fish. He presented the share of the Baltic fishery in the production of fish meal and oil. Mostly herring and sprat are used. In 2021, 30.000 tonnes of fish meal and 9.000 tonnes of fish oil were produced from Baltic raw materials. The fishmeal and fish oil factories have facilities to clean the fish oil for dioxins and PCBs.

Stickleback could be a potential resource for the fish meal and oil production. Landings are generally mixed with sprat. Stickleback can clog in tubes during the production phase, so there is a need to develop a method for handling stickleback. He will follow up with more information on stickleback.

With reference to a question asked by a **small scale fisheries representative, Søren Anker Pedersen** answered that one kg of raw material will produce 5 kg of farmed fish.

¹⁸ [European Fishmeal \(effop.org\)](http://effop.org)

¹⁹ <https://effop.org/about-european-fishmeal/members-of-european-fishmeal/>

Stickleback has less oil and protein content than sprat, but this might be subject to seasonal variations²⁰.

The WG Chair commented that the fishmeal and fish oil industry plays a role in the Baltic, using not just whole fish, but also waste and trimmings as raw materials. In relation to stickleback, the factories can help with data issues.

7. Technical measures in the demersal fishery – status on implementation

The WG Chair recalled that the implementation of technical measures had been raised during the ExCom meeting on 17th January 2022 with a request to be dealt with as soon as possible, hence it was put on the agenda of the Pelagic Working Group.

A fisheries representative referred to the provisions included in the Implementing Regulation to the Regulation 2019/1241²¹ on technical measures. The draft provisions may lead to several misinterpretations of the existing technical rules. Consultation of the BSAC on the implementing provisions²² has not been sufficient and they should be discussed by the BSAC. He underlined the importance of this discussion and the need to set aside adequate time for it. Therefore, he proposed to discuss the matter in the Demersal Working Group meeting on 8th March 2022.

The Working Group decided to discuss the implementation of the Technical Measures Regulation at the meeting of the Demersal Working group, hopefully in the presence of a representative of the European Commission.²³

8.AOB

The WG Chair referred to the on-line meeting of the BSAC Management Team with EFCA representatives on 18th January 2022, concerning the joint EFCA- BSAC workshop on the implementation of the on monitoring, control, and enforcement the implementation of the landing obligation, organised at request of BALTFISH under the Latvian Presidency. The meeting is scheduled for 7th March 2022 and will be held on-line.

²⁰ More information on the nutritional values of stickleback, as well as any specific data will be provided at a later stage.

²¹ Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on the conservation of fisheries resources and the protection of marine ecosystems through technical measures, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1967/2006, (EC) No 1224/2009 and Regulations (EU) No 1380/2013, (EU) 2016/1139, (EU) 2018/973, (EU) 2019/472 and (EU) 2019/1022 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 894/97, (EC) No 850/98, (EC) No 2549/2000, (EC) No 254/2002, (EC) No 812/2004 and (EC) No 2187/2005

²² The Commission's Implementing Regulation is still in the pipeline. Raised most recently by the BSAC in Commission Consultation on the Action Plan: http://www.bsac.dk/getattachment/c88907a6-bfa4-429b-8443-5b699d7f4eeb/BSACreplytoActionPlanConsultation21_22_30.pdf.aspx?lang=en-GB

²³ The BSAC Secretariat has written to the Commission representative to recall the work on technical measures, and questions raised by the BSAC at earlier meetings.

He also informed that EFCA is willing to host the BSAC in Vigo in the second half of 2022 if the COVID situation allows.

The WG Chair thanked all the participants for good discussions and the invited experts for their presentations. He informed the Working Group that he intends to hold regular meetings of the group in 2022, focusing on particular items and he asked the participants to send their input prior to the meetings.

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From the Secretariat about technical measures and discussion on minimum (or no) mesh size for pelagic fisheries

We recall that this started at a Joint WG 31.8.15 - report here:

<http://www.bsac.dk/archive/Dokumenter/JointWGs/JointWG31082015/ReportJointWG310815Final.pdf>

A recommendation was made on technical measures, sent 29.9.15 – to amend the old regulation 2187/2005 see here:

http://www.bsac.dk/archive/Dokumenter/Recommendations/2015/Letter_techmeasuresDG Marexx092015.pdf

See page 3 where it was suggested to “Merge columns 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 to cover the specification of gears used in the pelagic fishery (mesh size range from 0 to 90 mm).” And here came the footnote 3 “The organisation Darłowska Group of Fish Producers and Shipowners does not support the deletion of the mesh size reference” And in the text itself, page 3: The Finnish Association for Nature Conservation, the Fisheries Secretariat and WWF cannot endorse the recommendation to merge Annex II columns 1 to 5 due to the increase in mesh size and the concern for substantial underwater mortality. However, all organisations fully support continued discussion towards a maximum mesh size and support the remaining points of this recommendation.

There was a technical WG 16.8.16 where it came up again – report here:

[http://www.bsac.dk/getattachment/Meetings/BSAC-meetings/BSAC-technical-working-group/ReportTechnicalWG160816Final-\(2\).pdf.aspx?lang=en-GB](http://www.bsac.dk/getattachment/Meetings/BSAC-meetings/BSAC-technical-working-group/ReportTechnicalWG160816Final-(2).pdf.aspx?lang=en-GB)

And again at a WG on technical measures 15.12.16 - report here:

<http://www.bsac.dk/getattachment/Meetings/BSAC-meetings/Working-group-on-technical-measures/BSACWGtodealwithtechnicalmeasures15122016Outcome.pdf.aspx?lang=en-GB>

Recommendations from 13.2.17 (which were kind of a culmination of the above work) suggested to merge the column for pelagic fisheries (but not to remove minimum mesh size) 5mm – 105 mm:

http://www.bsac.dk/getattachment/BSAC-Resources/BSAC-Statements-and-recommendations/BSAC-recommendations-on-technical-measures/BSACRecommendationsonTMFExc25_31FINAL.pdf.aspx?lang=en-GB

Then came the BSAC reply to COM questionnaire on technical measures sent 15.2.21

<http://www.bsac.dk/BSAC-Resources/BSAC-Statements-and-recommendations/BSAC-reply-to-the-Commission-questionnaire-on-the>

Note what was written on page 2:

Fisheries representatives pointed out that most of the statements and amendments to the previous Baltic Regulation 2187, presented in the BSAC recommendations from 2015 and 2017 are still valid and should be implemented. They referred specifically to the BSAC recommendation to merge and delete specific mesh sizes for the pelagic fishery because of poor selectivity and high mortality of pelagic fish after being released from the gear.