

BS RAC RECOMMENDATION ON A SALMON MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE BALTIC SEA 1 March 2007

General

In February 1997 IBSFC adopted a Salmon Action Plan (SAP) in order to avoid a collapse in wild salmon rivers in the Baltic Sea. The SAP was agreed upon for the period 1997-2010. The Baltic Sea RAC has discussed the need of a future plan for the management of Baltic salmon and proposes the following:

- an evaluation of the outcome of the present SAP should be done as soon as possible
- the present SAP should without delay be followed by a renewed management plan building on the successful experience and elements of SAP

Results and experiences from SAP

1. “The status of the wild salmon in the Gulf of Bothnia and the main basin has improved remarkably as a result of measures taken by the IBSFC (i.e. low TACs), measures taken by the coastal states (closed periods) and a lowered M74 mortality (“Guö declaration”). “The total wild smolt production has increased a fourfold since the SAP was adopted in 1997 and is now estimated to be two-thirds of the potential smolt production” (ICES, 2006).
2. “The increase in smolt production is not uniform among rivers and particularly low in the ‘potential’ rivers where salmon were extirpated and are now being introduced” (ICES, 2006). “The status of less productive wild stocks, especially in the southern Baltic Sea area is poor, and even a negative trend in smolt production has been observed within these rivers” (ICES, 2006) “That means the Long Term Objective for 2010 was most probably set too optimistic from a biological point of view.” (“Guö declaration”). Efforts should be made to establish an extended and revised Salmon Action Plan including measures to improve the assessment of the smolt production potential of the individual rivers and measures concerning habitat restoration /or improvement on a river by river basis, where appropriate, taking note of the fact that the individual rivers may need different measures to reach the goal (“Guö declaration”).
3. In recent years there has been a low proportion of reared salmon in the catches and very low recaptures indicating that there is a low initial survival of the reared smolts, probably due to inappropriate new rearing technique. The shift in proportions between reared and wild salmon could also be due to the increased abundance of wild salmon.
4. Poor environmental conditions (i.e ruined spawning areas and migratory obstacles) still have a devastating effect on wild stocks.

Other background

5. The total ban of drift nets in the entire Baltic Sea and other fishing restrictions in countries such as Finland and Sweden have resulted, and will even further result, in lower fishing pressure which has raised a socio-economic concern within the fishing communities. EU regulation concerning dioxin level in salmon has also hampered fishing in certain areas, e.g. in the Southern Baltic Sea and the Belts.

6. Since the late 1980s the seal population has increased significantly and has an impact on salmon stocks and fisheries.
7. Angling for salmon and sea-trout as well as fishing tourism has increased in certain areas during recent years. Recreational fishing and fishing tourism was not recognized in the IBSFC SAP.
8. ICES has pointed out that there is a misreporting between salmon and sea-trout in landings.

Main goals

- A. Salmon stocks in the Baltic Sea and its rivers shall be managed and protected within safe biological limits and the genetic variability should be safeguarded. .
- B. Fishermen (commercial and recreational angling) in the Baltic Sea and its rivers shall be able to utilize the fishing possibilities arising from the positive results of a sustainable management of the Baltic salmon stocks.
- C. Science and research shall be further developed on salmon and sea trout in cooperation with the stakeholders.

Elements of the future management plan for salmon

Safeguard and develop salmon stocks by identifying following groups of salmon rivers; (classification in A-C refers to the Guö-declaration and the ICES advice 2006)

- I.
 - A. with successful salmon production; i.e. expected to reach at least 50% of their estimated potential by 2010, within safe genetic limits (List A)
 - B. with a positive trend in salmon production, but still not expected to reach at least 50 % of their estimated potential by 2010 (List B),
 - C. with weak and threatened salmon populations, that are in need of emergency action programmes, to safeguard the naturally spawning populations (List C)
 - D. with extirpated wild salmon populations with the potential to reintroduce salmon and/or rivers with reared and released salmon (List D)
 - E. with *inter alia* physical obstacles or other environmental hazards which will impact further development of salmon rivers (List E).

Production goals

- II. The production of wild salmon should gradually increase to attain by 2020 in the salmon rivers (List A) a production of wild Baltic salmon of at least 75 % of the estimated potential and reproduction of at least 50% in Salmon rivers of list B.

Fishing regulations

- III. Large scale and general fishing regulations, like TAC, early summer ban and other closed periods shall be introduced and maintained in order to obtain objectives for rivers in List A.
- IV. After a close analysis of the obstacles for rivers not likely to reach 50% of the estimated potential, river specific measures and suitable fishing regulations, including closed local areas and periods, shall be introduced and maintained in order to obtain a positive trend in salmon production for these salmon rivers (Lists B and C).
- V. Weak wild salmon populations (List C) shall be safeguarded as a first priority action and individual goals for potential salmon production in these rivers should be developed as soon as possible.
- VI. Naturally spawning salmon populations shall be re-established in salmon rivers with extirpated salmon stocks (List D).

Fishing and monitoring activities

- VII. Develop a format in order to introduce individual salmon management plans for each salmon river, both on the coast and in the full length of the rivers, with due consideration to both angling for recreation and fishing tourism, and commercial fisheries.
- VIII. The coastal fisheries should be developed and the level of professional fishing should be maintained as high as possible in order to be able to catch the agreed quotas. Management plans for recreational fishing and fishing tourism in wild salmon rivers should be developed.
- IX. A separate management plan for Baltic sea trout should be developed.

Science

- X. The initial survival of reared salmon shall be increased to previous levels, no later than 2010. Rearing of salmon smolts shall copy the natural development cycle, i.e. of sexual maturity and growth development. The national authorities shall enjoin the salmon rearing stations not only to consider the quantity, but also the quality of reared salmon smolts.
- XI. Establish a network of Baltic Sea Index rivers, in every ICES salmon assessment unit, with reliable monitoring of returning spawners, parr densities and smolt migration back to the Baltic Sea. The rivers should be a representative of each respective unit.
- XII. A fin clipping programme for all farmed and released salmon shall be introduced to gain knowledge of migration patterns, and eventually for future management measures. Community Funds, i.e. the Fisheries Fund and/or the Research Framework program should be made available for this purpose.

Environment

- XIII. The interaction between environmental degradation and salmon stocks and production potential should be analysed and taken into consideration.
- XIV. Local and national authorities shall be enjoined to restore spawning areas and migratory obstacles to an optimized standard in accordance with the Habitats Directive for salmon protection.
- XV. The interaction between seal populations and salmon stocks should be closely analysed. The conflict between protection of seal populations and salmon fisheries needs an extended management plan following the successful results of the Interreg project "The Grey Seal in Kvarken.". Financial support is required for seal safe fishing gear!

Socio-economic aspects of a management plan for salmon

- XVI. A socio-economic study to evaluate the linkage between management measures and their effects on different fishing sectors should be performed.
- XVII. An evaluation of the driftnet ban should be carried out. Socio-economic, stock management and conservation aspects such as effects on salmon stocks, coastal and river fisheries and by-catch of marine mammals and birds need to be included.

General comments on position paper on a salmon management plan

Further involvement of the Baltic Sea RAC

The Baltic Sea RAC and its Working Group on salmon and sea trout appreciate its role as a regional advisory body to the European Commission. In this role it sincerely hopes that the viewpoints expressed by the advisory group are considered and taken into account as soon as the Commission starts its work with a new management plan. Continuous consultation is anticipated and the Baltic Sea RAC should preferably be involved in the monitoring of the implementation of the plan.

Full commitment of different stakeholders

The future management of the salmon stocks in the Baltic Sea is still a very complex issue due to the varied needs of action in different parts of the Baltic Sea. A strong involvement of international, regional and national stakeholders is vital for the future management to be successful.

Science

The importance of science in this process should not be underestimated. Together with the stakeholders, tasks can be identified. These includes migration patterns, which stocks different fisheries are exploiting, better survival of reared smolts, monitoring techniques, production potential, socio-economic effects and effectiveness of different management measures and secure level of genetic variability in different rivers. The management plans for salmon rivers should include measures for habitat improvement, effective fish-ways for returning spawners and downstream migration of smolts, minimum number of returning female spawners to safeguard the genetic variability and regulation of fishery activities.

Management of the fishing possibilities

With the strong development of certain salmon stocks contradictory user demands have developed. The coastal commercial fisheries, recreational angling sector and fishing-tourism all have a growth potential. Professional fisheries have been heavily regulated during the last decades and to such an extent that fishing has to be stopped in certain areas. Recreational fisheries have developed, but still lack catch landing reporting and control. A thorough discussion to solve the conflict, problems and possibilities related to the situation is needed. Management plans and development of the commercial coastal fisheries and angling sector in the rivers should be developed securing healthy and viable fish stocks enabling future sustainable fishing and value to society. It is essential that ongoing decrease of the survival of the reared and farmed salmon will be stopped, and again increase, in order to minimize the conflict.

The role of stakeholders outside the fisheries sector

The threatened naturally spawning salmon stocks in the Baltic Sea have been of great concern to many governmental institutions, fishermen and other stakeholders for many years. With the strong improvement in many salmon stocks the continued environmental degradation has become a major concern and an obstacle for further development. The future management of

salmon will not reach its goals unless also other sectors than the fisheries sector become involved.

Green book on Maritime Policy

To further strengthen salmon stocks, major environmental considerations and actions are required. Improvement of the physical environment for salmon in the sea and the rivers is needed. The EC Maritime Policy document could provide and enable a holistic approach and could also provide the instruments to deal with these problems. In the case of the salmon management policy it is understood by the Baltic Sea RAC that the fisheries sector alone cannot safeguard the salmon stocks in the future. Other economic activities endangering the quality of the physical environment or degrading its quality must also be involved.