

BSAC Focus Group on energy transition for the for Baltic Sea fisheries sector

Monday, 4th September 2023

Arlanda Airport, Stockholm

13:00 – 17:00 (CET) HYBRID

Report

Present in person: Peter Breckling (Union of German Cutter Fishery) **Focus Group Chair**, Jarek Zieliński (BSAC ExCom Chair), Christian Tsangarides (Low Impact Fishers of Europe), Nils Høglund, Guillaume Carruel BSAC (Executive Secretary).

On-line: Marek Waniewski (Fish Producers Organisation Bałtyk), Niklas Rönnerberg (Finnish Fishermen's Association FFA), Florian Stein (DAFV), Mart Undrest (Estonian Fishermen's Association), Klavs Skovsholm (BSAC Secretariat), Ewa Milewska (BSAC rapporteur).

Apologies: Malin Skog (Swedish Pelagic Federation PO).

1. Welcome by FG Chair, Peter Breckling

The FG Chair welcomed all participants, present in person and on-line, to the third meeting of the Focus Group (FG). He underlined that the aim of the FG is to make good progress in preparing the BSAC recommendation on energy transition. In this context, he referred to the fact that the BSAC ExCom Chair had been invited by the European Commission to the Our Baltic 2.0 Conference on 29th September 2023 in Palanga, to deliver a statement on energy transition and the concrete steps foreseen for unlocking the barriers to energy transition in the fisheries. Therefore, the Focus Group should aim at delivering the draft recommendation to the Executive Committee for adoption in due time before the Conference.

2. Information since the last Focus Group of June (invitation to Our Baltic Conference)

The Focus Group discussed the possible way forward and decided that in view of the limited time of the ExCom Chair's intervention at the Conference, the FG should agree on key speaking points to be presented by the ExCom Chair.

The FG Chair referred to the Launch of Energy Transition Partnership for EU fisheries and aquaculture, held on 16th June 2023 and the message conveyed by Commission to urgently address all challenges in the energy transition process aimed at reducing CO2 emissions in the fisheries sector. The Commission clearly indicated the need to start working on concrete solutions to the problem. Therefore, possible solutions that can facilitate reductions in emissions should be identified and implemented as a priority. Any recommendations from the BSAC should take account of the specific situation in the Baltic. The FG Chair informed the FG that in Germany, 5% of taxes paid by wind farms constructors will be available for projects related to environmentally friendly fisheries. This is an opportunity to start pilot projects linked to energy transition. He underlined that in the

Baltic pilot projects on energy transition engaging small scale vessels should be prioritised. Therefore, clear recommendations from the BSAC are needed to support such projects.

A fisheries representative from Finland pointed to the fact that the present fishing opportunities in the Baltic are very limited and some fishing fleets will be severely reduced through permanent decommissioning schemes. The BSAC recommendation on energy transition should reflect concerns about the future of Baltic fisheries.

A representative of the OIG emphasised the need to reduce dependency on fossil fuels and move to renewable and low-carbon energy sources as quickly as possible.

A small-scale representative stated that in view of the fact that a majority (92%) of the Baltic fleet composed of vessels under 12 m may have a restricted access to funding due to the eligibility criteria in the EMFAF, aimed at preventing overcapacity, pilot projects engaging small scale vessels should be prioritised.

The FG agreed that pilot projects should be the first step to energy transition in the BSAC recommendation and should primarily engage small-scale vessels.

Progress on the draft recommendation

3. Written comments received from FG members on the draft recommendation (REV8) to be considered

4. Tentative compromise text presented by the secretariat (REV9)

The FG Chair referred to the NSAC advice on decarbonisation of fishing fleet¹ and relevant comments on the need to improve energy efficiency. He underlined that the BSAC should also put focus, in the short term, on improving the energy efficiency of the existing fleet with the objective of reducing fossil fuel consumption. He drew attention to the fact that according to green technology experts, energy efficiency cannot be increased uniquely by replacing the engines. Other ways to enhance energy efficiency in fisheries include changes to the vessels, the fishing gear and fishing patterns. There is a need for clear ideas on how to construct a vessel under the principles of energy efficiency.

A representative of the OIG referred to the progress made in improving energy efficiency in the shipping sector and underlined that energy efficiency can be improved to a limited extent on existing vessels. Only new vessels can bring real change. He stated that not all Member States are ready to invest in new vessels. He also underlined the need for diversification (multi-functionality) in the fisheries sector in view of the limited fishing opportunities.

The FG Chair underlined that capacity ceilings are one of the main challenges of energy transition.

The ExCom Chair stated that information on how the Member States manage their capacity ceilings could be obtained directly from relevant national authorities.

A fisheries representative from Finland noted that CO₂ emissions can be decreased by introducing alternative fuels. The technology for such adaptations is available. However,

¹ [17-2122-NSAC-Advice-on-decarbonisation-of-fishing-fleet.pdf \(nsrac.org\)](#)

high investment and operational costs of adopting certain energy-efficient or low-carbon propulsion technologies and fuels need to be compensated. There is a need to have a realistic approach to what solutions are possible for all fleet segments.

A fisheries representative from Estonia referred to the complex situation with regard to the fishing capacity under the current fishing opportunities in the Baltic. He drew attention to the fact that in Estonia small-vessels owners keep their vessels in a “passive mode”, in order not to lose the gross tonnage and engine power after vessel decommissioning. Some others target other fish species than the species regulated by quota. He also underlined that in reality there are no fishing opportunities outside the Baltic for Baltic fishing vessels.

The ExCom Chair drew attention to the fact that vessels above 24 metres in overall length are excluded from the EMFAF support for the energy transition as well as scrapping. This has to be seen in the context of the average age of Baltic fishing vessels. These vessels are old and most of them are Baltic locked and have no possibility to seek the fishing opportunities outside the Baltic.

A fisheries representative from Finland underlined that the majority of the fishing vessels used in the Baltic are neither designed nor equipped to fish outside the Baltic. It is not realistic to consider building new vessels in all Member States. He underlined that in Finland there is an interest and use the available fishing capacity.

A small-scale fisheries representative underlined the need to strengthen the resilience of the sector. Differences between fleets in different Member States are acute. The fleets, especially in the eastern part of the Baltic are old and inefficient. The efficiency of the fleet must be balanced against fishing opportunities and capacity.

A representative of the OIG referred to the need to include a statement in the recommendation, under the state of play, referring to the current situation in the Baltic.

After some discussion, **the FG agreed** to include the following statement: *It is fundamental to point out that any spending on greening an industry must be based on a solid and viable future for the business and company at hand. The Baltic Sea ecosystem is experiencing a regime shift and several of the fish stocks are in a state of decline, and to invest funds at this stage is a risky venture. BSAC notes that under the current regulation, fisheries only have access to fundings if the targeted stocks are above MSY Btrigger. This affects among others the Baltic locked vessels. Overcapacity, albeit based on old vessels in need of modernisation, will likely increase since fishing opportunities will at best stay low or even be reduced to almost nothing at worst.*

A representative of the OIG underlined the need to attract a new generation of fishers who can help to push the sector into a sustainable future. At the same time, in view of the fact that the fishing capacity of some fleet segments in the Baltic are not in balance with the available fishing opportunities, the BSAC should recommend appropriate exit schemes for fishers who wish to leave their profession.

A fisheries representative from Estonia pointed out that according to recent studies carried out in the Gulf of Riga, capacity reductions have no positive effect on the stock. He underlined that, according to the observations made by Estonian fishers, there are some optimistic developments related to the herring stocks.

The Focus Group discussed whether the existing fleet capacities are optimised in terms of energy efficiency. The ITQ was also mentioned in relation to capacity management.

Different opinions were expressed on the effectiveness of ITQ system. **The FG agreed** that capacity reductions are one effective way to reduce the emissions, especially in segments below 12 m and above 24 m overall length. In the opinion of some participants, fishers should be asked whether they want to stay in the profession. Lack of fishing opportunities as well as difficulties to attract young people to the sector were mentioned as barriers to energy transition. Therefore, socioeconomic incentives should be provided to fishers (boat owners as well as crew members) to make them stay in the sector, as well as to attract young people to the profession. A broad exit schemes should be offered to those fishers who want to leave the sector. Different approach in this respect should be considered for the three fleet segments: small-scale fleet, vessels between 12-24 m in overall length and large vessels above 24 m. Antifouling practices and underwater noise created by propellers should be investigated in the framework of pilot projects.

The FG Chair asked the participants to provide further comments and amendments to the recommendation after the meeting.

The Focus Group terminated its work in relation to its objective to produce a draft BSAC recommendation.

The FG decided that a new terms of reference will be needed to continue its work.

5. Answers from the Member States: summary of answers received and next steps

- In the context of the energy transition, is your **EMFAF operational programme** allowing for funding possibilities for vessels and/or engine renewal? What about funding of other aspects allowing for fisheries to be accompanied in the energy transition? Under which conditions are they available?
- Applicable solutions for low or zero carbon emissions of fishing vessels are developed everywhere around the globe. We would like to be informed of **research project on the topic but specific to the Baltic Sea**.

The Executive Secretary informed that feedback had been received from Estonia, Denmark, Germany and Sweden. He will address the Member States which had not answered to the request of the BSAC Secretariat to reply to the questions.

6. Next step until Our Baltic conference

The Executive Secretary informed that the Secretariat will send reviewed draft recommendation and a proposal for the speaking points for the ExCom Chair at Our Baltic Conference on 29th September 2023.

7. Energy Transition Partnership²: taking part and survey operationalisation

² new European partnership for a climate-neutral, sustainable and productive blue economy, due to start in 2023, will take the shape of a public initiative co-funded by the EU, national governments and national research funding agencies. (p13, COM(2021) 240 final) [Energy Transition Partnership](#)

The Executive Secretary referred to the Energy Transition Partnership and encouraged the FG members to take part in the survey organised by the European Commission³.

8. Information about the European Blue Forum⁴

The Executive Secretary shared the links to the two Deep Dive workshops organised online by the European Blue Forum⁵, on 25th September and 16th October 2023.

³ https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/Expression_of_Interest_ETP#page0

⁴ create a Blue Forum for users of the sea to coordinate a dialogue between offshore operators, stakeholders and scientists engaged in fisheries, aquaculture, shipping, tourism, renewable energy and other activities. It will develop synergies between their activities and reconcile competing uses of the sea (p5, COM(2021) 240 final)

⁵ [External Meetings - Baltic Sea Advisory Council \(bsac.dk\)](#); [External Meetings - Baltic Sea Advisory Council \(bsac.dk\)](#)