

Speech for the Executive Committee Chair - Our Baltic Conference 2.0 – 29/09/2023

Commissioner, Ministers, ladies and gentlemen,

I'd like to warmly thank the Commission for inviting me to briefly present the Baltic Sea Advisory Council's views on *promoting sustainable blue economy development in the Baltic Sea while protecting the Baltic Sea environment*.

The Baltic Advisory Council makes recommendations to the Commission and to the Baltfish - the regional organization of eight Member States- on matters relating to the management of Baltic fisheries, and to the Baltic Sea environment.

My intervention will be from the angle of what the Baltic Sea Advisory Council perceives as the first steps necessary to enable energy transition of the Baltic fishing fleets.

But before I do that, let me start with something which might be obvious: fishery, in the Baltic Sea, is part of the newest concept of the blue economy, but its roots and socio-economic importance, for the local societies, is historical.

We welcome the Commission's communication on energy transition.

The Baltic Sea Advisory Council is studying the communication and will shortly address a full set of recommendations to the Commission and Member States.

Today, allow me to sum up what the Baltic Sea Advisory Council members find most relevant, and what will be presented, in detail, in our forthcoming recommendations.

Baltic fisheries must, like everyone else contribute, to reducing emissions and this should happen throughout the entire value chain.

In other words, not only the fishing boats and fishing activities contribute to emissions.

All sorts of related on land activities also do, and they must be included into the big picture.

I will not gloss over the situation of fisheries in the Baltic.

The sad reality is that the economic situation for fisheries is depressed due to adverse environmental conditions, both geographical and manmade, and especially recently due to fishing opportunities in the Baltic Sea limited even to zero.

The vast majority of the Baltic fishing vessels, are "locked" in the Baltic, and can go nowhere else to make a living. Hence any investments in new technologies onboard the vessels would be considered, by the fishing fleet operators, as risky. As a result, such investments would be limited to mature technologies.

Investments on board vessels are not enough. If we are considering, for instance, liquid gas, hydrogen or electrically powered vessels, Member States must assist with the necessary land-based infrastructure and funding for new technologies.

In the current difficult situation in the Baltic Sea, the Commission and Member States should adjust the access rules to the EMFAF and other public funds, to make public funding more accessible for the sector.

I recall that more than 90 percent of fishing vessels in the Baltic are small fishing vessels, so there are especially good opportunities to work with small scale fleet segments and to gather experience in coastal waters, without excluding any segment of the fleet.

Large Baltic fishing vessels operators should have possibility to test new technologies, too.

Many members of the Baltic Sea Advisory Council, stakeholders in the Baltic Sea, perceive the existing rules relating to overcapacity and capacity ceilings as a major challenge to energy transition.

We therefore urge the Commission to take a good look at these rules to ensure they are not a barrier to energy transition.

Also, it has to be said that many stakeholders think that, for some fleet segments, exit schemes could be the most cost-efficient way to reduce emissions.

Diversification of activities will play a role in overcoming existing challenges. Most obvious and available for fishers are tourism and services provided for offshore windmill farms operators.

Young fishers are more likely to rise to this challenge. We need younger hands in the sector, but they will only come if we manage to create conditions where they can make a living and would bring them especially financial satisfaction.

Commissioner, Ministers and ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for listening to me, and in closing words, let me just recall that regional Advisory Councils are responsible for various geographic areas or activities and are set up, under the Common Fisheries Policy to create fora where the actors in the fishing industry and actors of other interest groups, mostly environmental groups or consumer groups, can come together and discuss questions pertaining to their area.

One could say, Advisory Councils are meant to provide “bottom-up” input to the fisheries management at EU level. They are inclusive organisations because both fishers and other interest groups have their say. The Baltic Sea Advisory Council is also therefore a platform for exchanging ideas.

We are ready to exchange the ideas from our members- stakeholders of the Baltic Sea with you.

Thank you