

BSAC Demersal Working Group
25th February 2025
10:00 – 13:00 (CEST) online through Zoom

Report

1. Welcome by the Demersal WG Chair Teija Aho

Teija Aho, the Demersal Working Group Chair welcomed all the BSAC members, the European Commission, representatives of the Member States and all other observers.

2. Formalities for the start of the meeting

Apologies, AOB, and adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted without any additional item under the AOB.

3. AER questions from BSAC to Raúl Prellezo:

The BSAC Secretariat asked members to provide questions to the Baltic chapter of the 2024 Annual Economic Report on the EU fishing fleet (AER). The report was presented at the ExCom in Helsinki ¹.

The Demersal WG Chair informed that unfortunately Raúl Prellezo who presented the Baltic chapter of the 2024 Annual Economic Report on the EU fishing fleet at the BSAC ExCom in Helsinki was not able to attend the WG meeting. She asked the members to provide any outstanding questions on the report to the BSAC Secretariat. The BSAC will consider inviting Raúl Prellezo to tackle any outstanding questions on the report at another occasion.

A fisheries representative from Poland repeated the question he had asked in 2022 and 2023 on the Baltic chapter of AER, on the possibility to calculate the break-even point for different species and different fleet segments, to estimate how much fish need to be caught to reach the break-even point, taking into account the operational costs, including the fuel costs. Such analysis would show the decision makers what is the minimum quota needed to sustain the fleet.

A small-scale fisheries representative referred to the questions he had asked in the past. He pointed out that the fishing effort of the small scale fleet used in the 2023 AER is still calculated in 2024 AER using days at sea, giving place to misinterpretation. He recalled his previous comment that one day at sea for a small-scale vessel does not equal one fishing day of a trawler. In his view, the matrix used for calculating fishing capacity is unreliable and gives useless results. He addressed a question to Raúl Prellezo referring to what is being done to sharpen up the calculations of the fishing capacity in the AER².

¹ Presentation [Past Meetings - Baltic Sea Advisory Council](#); Report [STECF 23-07 - AER 2023.pdf](#)

² The BSAC has recommended in 2023 that the STECF should revise the unit used to measure the fishing effort to better adapt the fishing effort calculations to different fleet segments. As the Chair of the 2023 AER recognised, the current

A fisheries representative from Poland pointed out that the need to take account of the differences between fishing capacity and fishing effort had been raised by the BSAC at several occasions. He pointed to the need to measure the fishing capacity in terms of vessel tonnage and engine power, and the fishing effort as the product of capacity and actual fishing activity. Fishing capacity is defined as the ability of a vessel or a fleet to catch fish, fishing effort is generally defined in terms of the time spent searching for fish. He gave an example of two vessels for which the fishing capacity will be the same, but due to the different time they spent to get to the fishing grounds, the fishing effort will differ.

A fisheries representative from Denmark agreed that the methods used for calculating the fishing capacity in the AER are problematic and the inaccuracies in the calculations affect the economic picture of the respective fleet segments. Such inaccuracies could easily lead to stating an overcapacity of different fleet segments.

The WG asked the BSAC members to send questions to the AER to the BSAC Secretariat. **The WG** decided to continue the discussion on the Baltic chapter of AER at a later stage, in the presence of a representative of STECF.

4. Salmon

- **Climate change and salmon, Valerie Ouellet from the Atlantic Salmon Federation.**

The WG Chair informed that according to the 2025-26 work programme, salmon will be dealt with by the Demersal and EBM WGs.

Valerie Ouellet, Head of Research of Atlantic Salmon Federation, based in Canada presented "Is the World too Hot for Atlantic Salmon"³.

Thermotolerance is the ability of an organism to survive high temperatures. Different organisms have specific thermal tolerances. It is quite complicated to illustrate thermal tolerance in the case of fish. Each life stage of Atlantic salmon has specific tolerances and within the thermal tolerance range, there is a preferred range where fish thrive better. Water temperature affects egg development, growth, survival, migration time, maturation and overall fitness of Atlantic salmon. Valerie Ouellet presented a summary of what happens when thermal conditions change. Cold water patches are critical to salmon survival.

North Atlantic salmon populations have generally shown a decreasing trend since the 1980s, both in productivity and abundance. Declines have been more severe for fish that spend more time in the marine environment (i.e., multi-sea-winter fish), including those that migrate longer distances. Salmon is a cold water fish. In freshwater, direct and indirect threats on Atlantic salmon include prolonged thermally stressful. Species range changes in warm water. There are potential negative impacts such as more competition for resource and habitat and more predation. In Canada, there are restrictions on angling due to warm

unit used to measure the fishing effort is not fully satisfactory, in particular in the case of small-scale fleet (for instance, one day at sea for a small-scale vessel does not equal one fishing day of a larger vessel with a trawl). The BSAC welcomes that STECF is looking at how to better measure fishing effort and highlights the importance of this to better assess the current situation. [\[Modtagerfelt\]](#)

³ BSAC website

water. In the ocean, a constant warming is observed with an acceleration over the last few years. Since the 1970s, temperatures at seas have been getting warmer.

In the Baltic the annual warming trend for the Baltic Sea basin is about 0.08°C/decade. This is higher than the worldwide trend which is about 0.05°C/decade. This warming trend can be observed as a decrease in the number of very cold days during winter as well as a decrease in the duration of the ice cover and its thickness in many rivers and lakes, particularly in the eastern and southeastern Baltic Sea basin.

Valerie Ouellet presented combined effects of warming on Atlantic salmon. Net primary productivity declines by 4%–11% (depending on scenarios) and entire food web is affected. Marine copepod species have declined in abundance since the 1980s, while euryhaline or limnetic species have increased.

Warming waters mean changes in current circulation and habitat distribution, with associated changes in hydrography, nutrients, and primary production. The warmer oceans favour smaller zooplankton, less lipid-rich. Changes in freshwater food webs and productivity still being assessed. As a result of warming, salmon smolts leave rivers 2.5 days earlier per decade and enter the ocean at unfavourable conditions. Adult salmon return 1-2 months earlier in some places (as compared to 1970s). Overall thermal stress across the life cycle has unknown cumulative consequences for Atlantic salmon. If other human activities are added up, such as fisheries, this results in an overall disturbance of the food webs. Changes in oceanic trophic interactions seem to prevent the rebound of Atlantic salmon populations.

Changes in occupation area are to be expected in both the freshwater and marine phases. Conservation actions need to be increased in terms of pace and range. Conservation actions should prioritize cold water habitats, with the goal of protecting thermal heterogeneity. Genetic diversity must be protected for the fish to face the changes. Migration corridors also need to be protected. There is a need for more holistic approach (multi-species and multi-ecosystems approach is needed) as species and ecosystems are connected!

The WG Chair thanked Valerie Ouellet for her interesting presentation.

A small-scale fisheries representative asked whether the pink salmon is more adaptive or resilient to temperature increase as its populations have been increasing.

Valerie Ouellet replied that pink salmon have different reproductive cycle and are less impacted by temperature. As a result of their reproductive success they colonise new habitats very fast. Atlantic salmon is more sensitive to thermal regime. She underlined the need to remove migration barriers to improve upstream and downstream passage of fish and thus improve access to their habitats.

The BSAC EBM WG Chair agreed that the effects of climate change pose a threat to salmon populations in the Baltic. He noted the need to identify and protect genetic diversity of salmon, as well as mapping freshwater thermal landscape as very useful to minimise the impact of warming on Baltic salmon. He referred to the current situation of poor and declining numbers of returning spawners, and very high levels of post-smolt mortality.

Valerie Ouellet stated that the thermomapping of river should be done as soon as possible in the Baltic in order to prioritise conservation areas and actions to enhance/preserve cold water habitats, with the goal of protecting thermal heterogeneity. She underlined that rises

in water temperature also cause changes in prey availability. The effects of the rise in water temperature are cumulative. The feeding stage from parr to just before migration are most vulnerable to the rise in water temperature.

A representative of the OIG underlined that climate change has huge impact on salmon stocks in the northern hemisphere.

A fisheries representative from Poland drew attention to the main problem of the coastal fisheries is the predation of seals. He referred to the fact that growing populations of seals (approx. 80-90.000 grey seals in the Baltic) heavily affect fishers in the estuary of the Vistula river. They eat up to 2-3 tonnes of fish per year. Salmon is among the preferred prey.

A fisheries representative from Denmark agreed that seals and cormorants have a major impact on the fish stocks and the fisheries in the Baltic.

Valerie Ouellet stated that the same concerns about the impact of the seal predation exist in some areas Canada. The predation of seals is monitored in some areas and fish are tagged to estimate the impact of seals. Researchers are also looking into the entire food web, to estimate the impact of other predators such as sharks on fish stocks and better understand the predation. She underlined the need to apply a multi-species approach.

The BSAC EBM WG Chair referred to the fact that in some areas in the Baltic seals mostly predate on released salmon smolts. He underlined that according to observation salmon is not growing the way it should and there are a lot of small salmon in rivers and in the sea. He asked whether any changes with respect to the feeding behaviour of seals and the size of salmon have been observed in Canada.

Val Ouellet confirmed that in many Canadian rivers smolts are getting slightly smaller.

A representative of the OIG asked about the reaction from fisheries management with respect to climate changes. He underlined that despite the impact of natural factors on salmon populations, anthropogenic factor should also be considered as very important.

Val Ouellet replied that salmon anglers are receptive and understand the measures implemented to protect salmon. Such measures as fishing closures are discussed beforehand with fishers and anglers to make them understand the objectives. Commercial fishers do not easily accept closures and restrictions because their livelihood depends on fishing. Compensations are paid for restricting fishing during longer periods.

The WG Chair thanked Val Ouellet for her presentation. She agreed that continuous dialogue on the impact of predators is also needed in the Baltic.

5. BSAC Science Focus Group

The Executive Secretary informed that the BSAC Executive Committee⁴ decided in June 2024 to explore interest to set up a Focus Group (FG) that would work on the preparation of a “BSAC science workshop”. This workshop’s objectives would be to allow BSAC membership to reach more consensus on any outstanding questions referring to fisheries science, in order to make better use of science in fisheries management. The Executive Committee held in Helsinki on 29th October asked the BSAC members to join the Focus Group. He informed that the FG has now 9 members. A doodle has been set up by the

⁴ [\[Modtagerfelt\] Past Meetings - Baltic Sea Advisory Council](#)

Secretariat to set the first meeting. The first meeting will draft the Terms of Reference for the group. The tentative date of the first meeting was set on 17th March. .

A representative of the OIG stated that considering substantial uncertainties in the ICES advice, the FG should discuss the need to include a risk assessment in the headline advice. Another OIG representative supported the need to discuss how to improve scientific advice.

A fisheries representative from Poland emphasised that the FG should discuss the need to analyse the stock structure and identify weaknesses in the scientific advice.

A small-scale fisheries representative recalled the BSAC Rules of Procedure stating that the FG is supposed to facilitate the work of a Working Group. To this end, the FG could facilitate reaching consensus on the allocation of the fishing opportunities prior to the Joint Working Group meeting in June.

A fisheries representative from Poland underlined that consensus has high value but difficult to reach on matter related to the fishing opportunities. It should be a rule that any alternative proposal submitted by any member should include a justification. The FG should discuss how to improve the credibility and relevance of scientific advice and resulting management decisions.

A representative of the OIG stated that in her view the FG should discuss both management issues as well as what kind of science do we need to achieve policy allowing to have sustainable fisheries.

A fisheries representative from Denmark underlined the need to separate science from management in the discussion of the Focus Group.

A fisheries representative from Poland stated that not only ICES representatives but also scientists from the Baltic Member States should be invited to attend the discussions on science held within the BSAC.

A small-scale fisheries representative from Poland proposed to discuss the need to evaluate all the measures implemented to protect cod spawning areas, in particular, the depth for the derogations and by-catch levels for each specific fishery. He expressed the view that extending the exemption limiting fishing to a maximum of 20 m depths for small-scale vessels to 30 m in coastal waters, far away from the cod spawning grounds, would present no threat to cod recovery, and at the same time allow the fishery to continue⁵. In his view, cod spawning grounds should be defined on the basis of scientific research and evaluation. He asked the FG to deal with this matter.

A small-scale fisheries representative supported the need to discuss the measures implemented to protect cod spawning areas, in order to eliminate science-based mismanagement and improve the legislation. He underlined that there is no scientific evidence that expanding the derogation to areas deeper than 20m would carry any threat to

⁵ In 2023 the BSAC Demersal WG agreed on the need to evaluate all the measures implemented to protect cod spawning areas. In particular, the depth for the derogations and by-catch levels for each specific fishery should be considered. The Working Group agreed that a level playing field should be implemented across the different Baltic sub-divisions and exemptions from any protection measures should be granted in a fair way. The Working Group agreed that the lack of adequate scientific data and expertise should be addressed by the Member States and respective national scientific institutes. [\[Modtagerfelt\]](#)A letter to BALTFISH was sent asking for test fishing [BSAC-letter-codclosures-23-24-28.pdf](#)

spawning cod. Due to rising water temperature flatfish move to deeper waters. Thus the fishing rules must be adapted to the changes in natural conditions. He recalled that BALTFISH had agreed to carry out scientific test fishing however, such test fishing should be conducted for 2-3 years. The BSAC should therefore discuss how to implement new rules legislation.

The Secretariat informed that during the 2025 MIAC meeting, the ACOM Chair had accepted the invitation to join a meeting of the FG.

The Working Group asked the Secretariat to draft the Terms of Reference for the Focus Group and set the date for the first meeting. The draft ToR will be submitted to the members for input.

6. Cod recovery plan: *Discussion on which components it should include, what is the BSAC role in promoting such plan and BSAC advice*

The WG Chair opened the discussion on the cod recovery plan.

A small-scale fisheries representative informed that he had proposed to add to include discussion on a recovery plan for cod in the work plan for the Demersal WG in 2025-26. He justified his proposal by drawing attention to the fact that cod fishery has been closed for the last 6 years and no actions have been taken by the Commission and BALTFISH to implement other measures that could lead to opening the fishery. He stated that the biomass of cod is now larger than in the year 2000 and its age and size structure have changed. The MAP does not cover plaice and discarding of cod has increased. In his view, there is now room for several measures and small-scale fishers will come up with proposal.

A fisheries representative from Poland pointed out that the long term management plan for eastern cod introduced in 2007 had resulted in permanent decommissioning of cod fishing fleet in several Baltic countries. He also noted that the management plan had never been evaluated. In his view, the Focus Group could discuss the major components of a recovery plan, including the analysis of the stock structure (size, age and sex, results of the TABACOD project) and identify the shortcomings in the management measures and with this knowledge start to build a recovery plan. He insisted that the BSAC should identify potential advice requests that could feed into the cod recovery plan.

The WG Chair proposed to discuss a cod recovery plan in the framework of the Focus group on science.

A fisheries representative from Denmark proposed to hold an in-person meeting to discuss the components of the recovery plan for Baltic cod. In his view, the impact of seal and cormorant predation should be looked at. The discussion should be held after receiving the latest ICES advice for cod on 28th May 2025. He recalled that the last advice western cod advice had been published in 2023, since it is now being provided biennially.

A small-scale fisheries representative proposed to discuss a cod recovery plan separately to the discussions on TACs and quota. The first proposals/components of such plan could be identified in the framework of the Focus Group on science and more structured discussions could be held in a Working Group.

The BSAC EBM WG Chair stated that a cod recovery plan should include an EBM approach in fisheries management. He informed the WG that the EBM WG will work on streamlining the BSAC position on EBM and will aim at developing practical guidance. He proposed to create a workplan and proceed to discussing the plan in a joint Working Group.

A representative of the OIG supported the idea to discuss a cod recovery plan in the framework of a joint Working Group.

Another representative of the OIG appreciated the initiative to discuss a cod recovery plan, put forward by the small-scale representative. She referred to the Return of the Cod project⁶ which included an extensive review of the science behind the decline of cod in the Baltic Sea. This knowledge will be used to develop a proposal for a rescue plan for Baltic cod and could feed into the work of the BSAC on this issue. She supported a BSAC in-person meeting on a cod recovery plan in the autumn 2025.

Some fisheries representatives were of the opinion that a cod recovery plan should be discussed in the Demersal WG. They agreed that ecosystem considerations should be included in a recovery plan by obligation.

The Working Group decided to recommend to the ExCom that a joint BSAC WG could meet in person in the autumn to discuss the cod recovery plan. The structure and components of such plan could first be discussed in the Focus Group on Science.

7. Information point on the scheduled NSAC Workshop on predators, 20th March 2025

The WG Chair informed on the Workshop on predators on 20th March 2025, in Luleå, Sweden. The workshop will be prepared in collaboration with NSAC and BSAC members, including industry representatives and other interest groups, to ensure that all stakeholders are engaged and aligned in addressing the issue. In person participation with possible exception for speakers is planned. The **‘Workshop on Cormorants and Seals in relation to fisheries across the North and Baltic seas’** aims to examine the issue fishers experience in interactions with seals and cormorants, the current state of best available knowledge regarding seal and cormorant populations in the North Sea, Skagerrak, and Kattegat, other impacts on fish natural mortality, and how this is reflected in scientific advice for and management of commercial stocks. It will also explore the legal background and existing national management measures to address these challenges.

The Executive Secretary informed that a preparatory meeting of the NSAC and BSAC Secretariats is planned for 28th February 2025. He presented the preliminary agenda for the meeting⁷. He encouraged the BSAC members to register to the meeting.

The WG took note.

8. New selective gears to reduce incidental catches of cod in the Baltic:

COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING REGULATION (EU) 2024/3094⁸

The WG Chair informed that the European Commission had adopted Delegated Regulation (EU) 2024/3093 to make the flatfish fisheries in the Baltic Sea more selective by reducing incidental catches of cod, a heavily depleted stock, with the use of more selective gears. When fishing for flatfish in ICES subdivisions 22-26, the use of a roofless selection device is mandatory together with the current baseline gears or with two new

⁶ [Return of the cod – a rescue plan – FishSec](#)

⁷ BSAC website under external/past meetings

⁸ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202403094

gears that are also more selective: a modified T90 codend and a square mesh codend. Alternatively, in part of the western Baltic (ICES subdivision 24) and the south-eastern Baltic (ICES subdivisions 25 and 26), operators will also be able to use the modified T90 codend without the roofless selection device.

The modified T90 codend and the square mesh codend are characterised by having larger meshes. The roofless selection device is a new adaptation of the trawl gear. It is based on removing a section of the top panel, allowing the cod to escape. According to the STECF, the roofless device releases the majority of cod, irrespective of their size.

Operators will have until 9 April 2025 to adapt their fishing gears to the new rules. They will be able to draw funds from the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF).

A fisheries representative from Poland expressed disappointment that the BSAC had not been properly consulted on the Delegated and Implementing Acts despite the fact that the BSAC had at several occasions requested proper consultation on the implementing rules for new gears. He underlined that fishers who use the gear should be consulted at an early stage of drafting the legislative acts to avoid any misinterpretations, which could have serious consequences. He recalled that during previous discussions in the BSAC on the new gear devices he had already referred to the operability of the proposed gear modifications and referred to the trials conducted in Poland with an amended construction of the trawl and a 120 mm mesh size had proved to significantly reduce the bycatch of cod in flatfish fishery. Given these results, in his view, there was no need to increase the mesh size to 125 mm⁹. He asked the representative of the European Commission why the gear options proposed by the German Institute had only been taken into account.

The representative of DG MARE explained that all the gear options proposed in the legislation (Delegated¹⁰ and Implementing Regulation¹¹) had been adopted through the process of regionalisation based on a Germany-led joint recommendation from BALTFISH. In accordance with this process, the Commission can only accept or reject joint recommendations as a whole, but not autonomously amend them. BALTFISH proposed the Joint Recommendation on technical measures for Baltic Demersal Trawl fishery to reduce cod bycatch and protect cod stocks following a consultation with stakeholders, including the BSAC¹². Upon STECF assessment, the Commission decided to adopt legislation with the gear options proposed by BALTFISH. He underlined that the BSAC had been consulted on the new gears by BALTFISH. During the consultation phase, the

⁹ BSAC ExCom June 2022 [[Modtagerfelt](#)]

¹⁰ [New selective gears in the Baltic to help rebuild cod stocks - European Commission](#)

Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2024/3093 of 13 October 2022 amending Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards specific technical measures to reduce by-catches of cod in the Baltic Sea [Delegated regulation - EU - 2024/3093 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

Implementing Regulation [Implementing regulation - EU - 2024/3094 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

¹¹ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202403094

¹² BSAC reply to the BALTFISH consultation [[Modtagerfelt](#)]

Commission also encouraged the stakeholders to provide comments to the proposed gear options to the national administrations¹³.

A fisheries representative from Poland stated that in his view, the gear options included in the Regulation are different from the options that had been consulted by BALTFISH with BSAC in 2021.

A fisheries representative from Denmark referred to the fact that fishers find it difficult to accept new gear options introduced on a compulsory basis. The new gears do not work for all vessels and in all areas. The fishers now face a mandatory use of the new gear in all areas of the Baltic Sea, including in subdivision 22 where it has never been tried. The Danish fishers had complained in 2023 and called for testing the proposed gear options.

A small-scale fisheries representative asked whether the Commission foresees an evaluation of the implementation of the new gears, given very low sampling coverage from cod fishery and poor growth rates of flounder.

The representative of DG MARE explained that since the new gear options are just entering the implementation phase, it is too early to plan the evaluation of their implementation. The Member States are responsible for increasing the sampling and will be asked to do so by the Commission.

An representative of the OIG asked about the BSAC intervention on the Ocean Pact presented at the High Level Roundtable meeting on 21st February.

The Executive Secretary informed that the BSAC ExCom Chair attended the meeting and had a 2.5 minute intervention, referring to the Ocean Pact, like all the other AC Chairs. In his intervention, he has signalled that the BSAC recommendations on the Ocean Pact will be sent to the Commission on 17th March 2025. He informed the meeting that draft recommendations had been sent to the ExCom for adoption.

The WG Chair thanked everyone for good discussions. She also thanked to the interpreters for their excellent work.

¹³ Besides the consultation of BSAC on the joint recommendation by BALTFISH, the Commission also organised in June-July 2023 a public consultation on the draft Implementing Regulation following which BALTFISH and the Commission decided to adjust two elements of the Delegated Regulation