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BSAC input on the Vision 2040

The Baltic Sea Advisory Council welcomes the announcement by the European Commission of a forthcoming Vision for Fisheries and Aquaculture 2040. The BSAC believes that this initiative would provide strategic direction for the fisheries sector and allowing to shape a long- term vision for sustainable fisheries and aquaculture sectors for 2040.

The Vision for Fisheries and Aquaculture 2040 should contain concrete proposals or commitments specifically aimed at the fisheries and aquaculture sectors:

- Sustainability, modernisation, competitiveness, and food security should be central pillars of the Vision.
- A healthy marine environment is a fundamental prerequisite for fisheries, aquaculture and blue food production more broadly. The Vision 2040 should therefore promote inclusive, multispecies, and multisectoral governance based on ecosystem-based management, responsive to climate change and land-based pressures.
- Several factors affect the environment in the Baltic Sea, and it is essential that even the sectors that are responsible for the land-based pressures are covered by measures. Eutrophication remains one of the most significant problems in the Baltic Sea, although its impacts vary sub-regionally. It is neither reasonable nor successful to focus solely on fisheries management.
- Fisheries management should be accompanied by an overarching approach and ambitious restoration measures across the entire catchment area. Authorities on all levels, be they fisheries, environmental or agricultural, should coordinate their efforts even more to allow the Baltic Sea to overcome the serious degradation it has already suffered in many places.
- Rebuilding of depleted fish stocks to healthy biomass levels, must be a priority. The catch structure must reflect the population age and size structure. Given the limited progress so far, new approaches and strategies are needed to actively support stock recovery, to respond to the dynamic changes occurring in the Baltic Sea. These strategies should set clear, time-bound recovery targets. They must address all key pressures on fish populations and include additional measures, such as the protection and restoration of essential habitats.
- It is necessary to adopt a broader approach to fisheries and marine management by moving away from considering single-stock yields and by adopting more comprehensive management strategies, including interdependence between fish

species and the role of non-fish species predators such as seals¹ and cormorants². Further, the contribution of predation to natural mortality must be better reflected in scientific advice so that it can be accounted for and actively managed.

- A holistic approach is needed to ensure that interactions between land-based and aquatic food production are complementary rather than competitive, supporting a balanced and sustainable development of both sectors. In the context of stock recovery, it is crucial to ensure a balanced application of the objectives set out in the Common Fisheries Policy. Management decisions, including the setting of fishing opportunities, must take into account not only biological considerations but also the socio-economic consequences for the fishing sector and coastal communities. A predictable, stable and proportionate management framework is essential to ensure long-term viability and investment security in the fishing industry. It is also essential to ensure that the precautionary approach is applied in a consistent and predictable manner.
- BSAC underlines that achieving good environmental status in the Baltic Sea requires concrete and effective measures across all sectors affecting the marine environment. It is essential to ensure that fisheries are not disproportionately burdened, and that other sectors, particularly those contributing to land-based pressures, are subject to equally ambitious and enforceable measures.
- Circular solutions in fisheries and aquaculture should be developed in a way that takes specific circumstances into account. Their aim should be to reduce waste, improve resource efficiency, and support the food system that minimize environmental impacts.
- Greater policy coherence and coordination across EU institutions and Member States is needed to prevent contradictions and regulatory overlap. Harmonization of rules across countries is essential to ensure a level playing field.
- Socio-economic resilience of coastal communities must be prioritized, recognizing fisheries' vital role in livelihoods and local economies.

In this context, it should be emphasized that article 2.f in Regulation 1380/2103 states that the CFP aims to contribute to a fair standard of living for those dependent on the fishing industry, taking into account coastal fishing and socio-economic aspects.

Therefore, fisheries management under the CFP must explicitly recognise that ecological, economic and social objectives are not always aligned. Where trade-offs arise, decision-making must be transparent and balanced, ensuring that socio-economic consequences for coastal communities and the fishing sector are properly

¹BSAC RECOMMENDATIONS ON SEALS <https://www.bsac.dk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/BSACrecomendation-on-seals.pdf>

²BSAC RECOMMENDATIONS ON CORMORANTS <https://www.bsac.dk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/BSACrecommendation-on-cormorants.pdf>

taken into account while the sustainable management of resources allows for stability and prosperity for the sector. Active work is needed to ensure generation shifts in fisheries.

- The next MFF should maintain a dedicated EMFAF to ensure sustainable funding for the sector and support EU food security and ecosystem recovery.-A proportion of the EU budget should be earmarked in the fund for the fisheries industry.
- By 2040, the EU should improve the existing tools to ensure full transparency in fisheries decision-making, including public access to catch and effort data through an EU-level database. Member States should report on allocation of fishing opportunities and quota use, which is fully available to the public. Catch and effort data should be aggregated at an appropriate level to protect fishers' integrity and ensure safe operations. Transparency measures must not undermine competitiveness or create distortions between Member States, ensuring a level playing field across the EU fleet.

With regard to the objective of fully monitored fisheries by 2040, the BSAC recognises the importance of effective control, compliance and traceability in ensuring sustainable fisheries management. However, it is essential that any future requirements for electronic monitoring, including remote electronic monitoring (REM) systems, are implemented in a proportionate and risk-based manner. Support should be given to those parts of the fleet that are unable to finance the measures or requirements that are being implemented. BSAC expects that new digital tools will become available by 2040 and recommends close dialogue with stakeholders, such as advisory councils, to ensure that the best available technological solutions are found and adopted

- Fisheries governance should be strengthened through participatory and inclusive decision-making, embedding social objectives, indicators, and local environmental knowledge, while ensuring a fair and socio-economically sustainable transition for fishers. By 2040, EU fisheries should be fully monitored, transparent, and free from illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, with all seafood sold in the EU being fully traceable, legal, and responsibly sourced. Consumers should have access to clear and reliable sustainability information. It is important that there is transparency and control even after the fish has been landed by the commercial fisherman. The traceability system should be fully implemented in the whole value chain.
- The EU should invest in and expand innovative monitoring technologies to improve compliance, stock assessment, and ecosystem monitoring.
- By 2040, full transparency of fisheries data should include public access to catch data, fishing effort and quota allocation.
- Small-scale fisheries (SSF) play a crucial role in coastal communities in the Baltic Sea, supporting local economies, and preserving cultural heritage. To ensure that this segment can continue to contribute to society in a positive way, its conditions should be analysed and measures taken to improve the sector's profitability. The Vision 2040 must therefore place small-scale fisheries at its core, especially in the Baltic Sea - both as a solution to current structural challenges and as a foundation for the future of Europe's coastal communities and blue economy.

The BSAC underlines the importance of ensuring coherence between the proposed Vision for Fisheries and Aquaculture 2040 and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Any future approach must remain grounded in inclusive, transparent governance, with the Advisory Councils playing a central role in stakeholders' engagement.

The BSAC further emphasises the importance of maintaining legal certainty, predictability and long-term stability in fisheries management. Frequent and abrupt changes in fishing opportunities or regulatory frameworks undermine investment capacity, generational renewal and the long-term resilience of the sector. A key solution to ensure stability in fisheries management is to recover fish stocks and the marine ecosystem, which would allow fishers to benefit from more long-term sustainable and stable fisheries opportunities.

The BSAC stands ready to contribute actively to the development of the Vision for Fisheries and Aquaculture 2040 and looks forward to continued dialogue with the European Commission on this important matter.
