

The Baltic Sea Cod stocks and ICES recommendations

Each year, the Council of Ministers issues quotas for the Baltic Sea cod stock. During the last 25 years the quantity of cod and the size of the catch has been steadily decreasing, but there are signs of improvement. The Baltic Sea cod consists of two stocks, a western and an eastern stock.

THE WESTERN STOCKS

During the 1970s, catches from the western stock were relatively stable and during the first half of the 1980s it reached 40 000-50 000 tons. Thereafter, however, it started to decrease and in one decade it was halved. This has been followed by large variations in stock recruitment. Since the middle of the 1990s there has been a certain increase in the stock, albeit from very low levels. During the past ten years the size of the population has been just above the safety level.

THE EASTERN STOCKS

The eastern stock, which is the largest, has had a significantly more negative development than the western. During the 1980s, the stock increased considerably from 150 000 tons to 300 000-400 000 tons, followed by record levels of up to 700 000 tons. However, since the middle of the 1980s, the recruitment has been very poor which has minimized the stock and the catch has significantly decreased. Recently, however, the eastern cod stock has improved and has increased to 300 000 tons. During the past 5 years quite few good year classes have emerged, most recently in 2008, which replenish the stock. Fishing mortality has decreased, and encouragingly, the spawning biomass has risen above the safety level.

THE COUNCIL HAS TO ADHERE TO THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The reason for the decreasing stocks has been weak recruitment levels and high fish mortality due to overfishing. This is well-documented in scientific reports and in published literature. In the annual recommendations of the maximum-allowable catch of cod ICES always considers the sustainability of the cod population. Before the cod management plan was in place, the Council of Ministers did not adhere to the ICES advice and quotas were frequently set above the scientific recommendations. Today, it is apparent that the good year classes, in combination with the management plan which limits the fishing pressure, has contributed to a favorable increase. It is of utmost importance that the Council has sufficient political courage to stick to the management plan which would ensure the rebuilding of a sustainable and high yielding cod stock.

	ICES RECOMMENDATION	THE COMMISSIONS RECOMMENDATIONS	THE COUNCIL'S QUOTAS
2003	E: 0 tons W: 23 400 tons		E: 42 632 tons W: 24 700 tons
2006	E: 14 900 tons W: 28 400 tons		E: 49 220 tons W: 28 400 tons
2007	E: 0 tons W: 20 500 tons	E: 38 522 tons W: 24 140 tons	E: 40 805 tons W: 26 696 tons
2008	E: 0 tons W: 13 348 tons	E: 31 561 tons W: 17 930 tons	E: 38 765 tons W: 19 221 tons
2009	E: 48 600 ton W: 13 700 ton	E: 44 580 tons W: 16 337 tons	E: 44 580 tons W: 16 337 tons
2010	E: 56 800 tons W: 17 700 tons	E: 51 267 tons W: 17 700 tons	E: 51 267 tons W: 17 700 tons

E= Eastern stock

W= Western stock