

FISHERIES

BalticSea2020

THE BALTIC SEA – A MODEL FOR REGIONAL
FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

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Summary

The Commission proposal for a reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) includes measures as regards regionalization, however without explicitly encouraging member states to cooperate in a region. This paper gives an outline of a model for regional fisheries management in the Baltic.

In summary the benefits are:

- a more active involvement by member states will increase the efficiency of the operational implementation of the CFP
- the competence in the regional institutions can be better used in collaboration with ICES
- the BSRAC can be more involved in management, e.g. assessment, technical development
- management plans can be operationalized through a harmonized approach between member states also encouraging the move to multiple stock approach
- area based management can be used as a tool to operationalize the ecosystem approach in fisheries management
- new management approaches that include quality aspects can be addressed in a regional framework
- new approaches to monitoring and control can be taken to encourage better follow-up and culture of compliance

The implementation should build on the present structure and responsibilities of the EU institutions. The Commission should involve member states in all aspects of the management as appropriate including e.g. negotiations with Russia who shall be encouraged to participate in the regional management. A prerequisite for success is that the member states share the same objectives and ambitions. The coordination mechanisms should be efficient and not contributing to increase the level of bureaucracy. One starting point could be BALTFISH, a flagship project under the Baltic Sea Strategy.

Background

In July 2011 the Commission submitted a proposal for a reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) which is expected to enter into force in 2013. This followed after an extensive consultation process with member states and various stakeholders based on the Commission Green Paper from 2009. According to the Commission sustainability is at the heart of the proposed reform. This means fishing at levels that do not endanger reproduction of stocks and that provide high long-term yields. In other words fishing at sustainable levels that produce “**maximum sustainable yield**”.

If stocks were exploited at “maximum sustainable yield” this would, according to the Commission, increase stock sizes by about 70%. Overall catches would increase by about 17%, profit margins could be multiplied by a factor of three, return on investments would be six times higher and the gross value-added for the catching industry would rise by almost 90%.

The provisions in the proposal relating to conservation of marine biological resources fall under the exclusive competence of the European Union. The Commission proposes however measures as regards **regionalisation**. EU legislation should focus on objectives, targets, minimum common standards and results and delivery timeframes. Member states will have the flexibility to adopt, for example, the desired mix of technical conservation measures and anti-discard measures. The proposal does not explicitly encourage member states to cooperate in their national implementation of the regulation, but on the other hand it does not prevent such initiatives. A regional initiative for fisheries management could serve as an **example and model for the future**.

Why the Baltic?

The Baltic ecosystem is comparatively well defined being a semi-enclosed sea area. It has a gradient from being an almost freshwater body in the north to marine conditions on the border to Kattegat. It has a long history that includes commercial fishing where cod, herring and sprat are the most important species.

The cod population has gone up and down due to natural factors such as salinity and oxygen and the increasing fishing pressure. All time high was in the mid 1980s with a total catch of around 400 000 tons. This was followed by another peak in the 1990s and since then there was a decline in population until around 2008. A few good year-classes in combination with a more responsible management has now turned the trend resulting in a positive development.

One of the important factors for the decline in stock has been the **IUU fishing**. This unreported fishing is by nature difficult to assess, but in 2006 ICES estimated it to be in the order of 35% for cod which most probably was on the conservative side. The newly established RAC for Baltic Sea recognized this to be a major problem and at their first General Assembly in 2006 they invited the responsible ministers around the Baltic to make concrete commitments to address IUU fishing. In 2007 the problem still remained and The Commission took formal steps or planned to do that against certain member states. The improvement is reflected in the ICES estimates of IUU fisheries that are now down to 6%. In summary one can say that a combination of external pressure from the Commission and willingness to take action from the regional actors has led to that this is not a major issue now.

Probably the most important factor for the cod recovery is that the Council in 2008 decided to follow the ICES advice and implement the **management plan for cod** that they had decided on. This may seem quite obvious, but history had shown that the Council decisions on TACs in general had been much higher than ICES had recommended. Also in the following years the Council has followed ICES

recommendations and the management plan with the support from the Baltic member states. It is now hard to see that there can be a future deviation from this approach.

The latest management plan for cod is from 2008 and is a good example of a close interaction between the Commission, the Baltic member states with input from the BSRAC. The plan provides for annual evaluations by the Commission from 2010. While we now have a well functioning management plan for cod we are still **lacking adopted plans for herring, sprat and salmon**. The draft plan for salmon that the Commission recently presented has been long awaited for by those who are involved in management of the salmon population. Early comments however indicate that experts in member states have not been sufficiently consulted in the process to develop the plan.

To summarize:

- the Baltic is a well defined ecosystem with few but important commercial fish species
- EU member states have taken a responsible approach to management of the key species cod since 2008
- the frequency of IUU fishing has been significantly reduced since 2007
- management plans for the other key commercial species herring, sprat and salmon are under way

How can a regional fisheries management be developed?

First of all it is clear that a regional management approach has to be developed within the **present structure and responsibilities of the EU institutions**. It is therefore not on the agenda to propose any new body that has decision making power. It may not even prove to be desirable as we are not looking for new bodies but more efficiency in the implementation of fisheries management at the operational level. Regional fisheries management should be considered an option for regions that want to assume a more clear responsibility.

Since 2004 the Baltic is bordered by 8 countries that are members of EU and Russia. So far Russia has had only a minor part of the TACs in the Baltic. **The responsibility for negotiating with Russia is with the Commission**, a procedure that will remain. The member states should however be more involved in the preparation of the EU-positions and models can possibly be sought e.g in the negotiations with Norway in the North Sea. The Commission and the EU member states should take all opportunities to **involve Russia in the regional management** in a suitable manner.

The member states should play a **more active role in the work with the management plans**. This includes initiatives to revise an existing plan or proposal for development of a new plan for a certain fisheries. It is only natural that experts from member states are involved in the work with the plans, thus providing knowledge and expertise. In the same way the follow-up and evaluation

requires participation of expertise from the member states. The same reasoning applies, where applicable, also for the **Baltic Sea Advisory Council (BSAC)** as it is called in the CFP proposal.

The Commission proposal provides for **member states to assume responsibility for conservation and technical measures**. What this will include in practice needs to be further elaborated. It is however clear that a regional approach will require that all the eight member states will have the same objectives and ambitions vis a vis conservation and technical measures. This is probably one of the key factors for success or failure with regional management.

The challenge is to develop an efficient coordinating mechanism without any formal decision power. This is of course possible but will require clear commitments from all member states. All efforts should also be made not to increase the level of bureaucracy in the fisheries management. A well designed regional approach could be made more efficient both for member states and the Commission than the present practice. **One starting point could be BALTFISH**, which is a flagship project under the Baltic Sea Strategy.

A regional management approach will at least initially require resources for involvement of a reformed BSAC and regionally initiated projects. The **future EU financial support** should be geared to support such initiatives.

As the implementation of the proposed CFP is an important contribution to the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) it is important that coordination is established between the responsible ministries and other government institutions in the member states. HELCOM has a key role in the implementation of MSFD in the Baltic and a responsibility to coordinate the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP). A regional approach to fisheries management will probably encourage **new ways for coordination with HELCOM**.

To summarize:

- regional management should build on the distribution of responsibilities between Commission, Council, Parliament and Member States
- the Commission should involve the member states in the preparation for negotiating with Russia who will be encouraged to participate in the regional management
- the member states should play a more active role in the work with the management plans in collaboration with the BSRAC
- the member states should strive to have the same approach to conservation and technical measures
- efforts have to be made to develop efficient coordinating mechanisms between member states and with others based on existing models
- resources will be needed initially for coordination and projects

- strong national coordination with the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive will be needed and new ways to coordinate with HELCOM have to be developed

Which are the benefits?

Fisheries management has to be based on knowledge and sound science no matter where decisions are taken. The Baltic states have a long tradition to provide such data and the **research institutions** have a long history of collaboration. Most of this is channeled through the ICES procedures. With a regional management approach this collaboration can be deepened and broadened. More focus could be on concrete follow-up of management decisions. But it could also be to provide evaluation of possible pathways for future management measures. The research institutions could furthermore give support to the development of technical measures, e.g. increased size selectivity in trawl fishing for cod. With a regional approach the collaboration between the research institutions and the fishing sector should be developed. Experience shows that only hands on cooperation and the recognition of the fishermen's practical knowledge can build the necessary trust.

The **Baltic Sea Advisory Council** could be given a new developed role as advisors in a regional management structure. The knowledge that the members of the BSAC can provide can be used in a more proactive manner. They could for example give support to the research institutions in the follow-up of management decisions. They could also be involved in developing technical measures. A more proactive role for the fishing sector will inevitably lead to a culture of involvement, responsibility and compliance.

According to the CFP-proposal the **management plans** to be proposed by the Commission will be more focused on providing the general framework for the management on a more strategic level. The member states are then expected to make the plans more operational through conservation and technical measures for example through improved selectivity in fishing gear and the elimination of discard. This could be one cornerstone for a regional management providing for eight synchronized operational plans that in practice can be read as one plan. One condition is that the member states share the same objectives and view on level of regulation. If member states are coordinated they could also prepare a first draft or outline for a management plan as a basis for a Commission proposal to the Council and the Parliament.

A more active involvement of member states in **operationalizing the management plans** will make it natural to involve them also in the preparation or revision of plans. This in turn will facilitate the acceptance of plans when they are formally proposed by the Commission. With a more open process also other stakeholders can provide input reducing the risk that proposed plans are considered "desk products". With a regional management approach member states may also advise the Commission on strategic issues related to management plans. One such issue is the necessity to move from a single stock to

a **multiple stock approach**. It is already now time to do this for herring and sprat and cod taking into account the strong links between the herring/sprat populations and the cod populations.

Fisheries management should contribute to the implementation of the ecosystem approach and the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). The question is how this can be operationalized and which tools can be available. One such tool is the concept of **area based management** based on the fact that the area dimension is a distinct feature of both the ecosystem approach and the MSFD. The purpose of area based management is to bring together all relevant tools that would enable a broader resource-management scope, including species not covered by long-term management as well as sensitive habitats. It could also include area-specific social and economic aspects and fleet policy targets.

An active involvement of member states in the regional fisheries management will automatically raise the level of competence in all regional organizations involved. This in turn will lead to development of new management approaches. They could be focused on quantitative aspects as well as quality aspects. There are many different possibilities and one example is the concept of **length optimized management**. Studies show that changing the size range of harvested cod can largely increase the revenue compared to the present regime. At the same time the stock would consist of a greater proportion of large and older individuals.

The actions taken to reduce IUU fishing have proved to give results and there is a strong awareness that this is a key aspect for the credibility of the industry. The MSC certification will raise the bar even further. Different initiatives have been taken in the Baltic, one being the fully documented fisheries with CCTV onboard. Another one is documented traceability from catch to consumer using modern techniques. A more administrative approach is the possibility to condition an ITQ with certain requirements in a contract that can be revoked in case of severe violation. A regional cooperation in **fisheries control** can help to move beyond the command and control approach in the present regulation.

To summarize:

- the competence in the regional institutions can be better used with a regional approach in collaboration with ICES
- the BSRAC can be more involved in management, e.g. assessment, technical development
- management plans adopted by Council/EP can be further operationalized through a harmonized approach between member states
- this could pave the way from a single stock to a multiple stock approach
- area based management at regional level can be used as a tool to operationalize the ecosystem approach in fisheries management
- new management approaches that include quality aspects can be addressed in a regional framework

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- new approaches to monitoring and control can be taken to encourage better follow-up and a culture of compliance

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