

FISH, CCB, WWF, EAA and FANC recommendations on 2012 TAC:s in the Baltic Sea

The Fisheries Secretariat (FISH), Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB), WWF, the European Angler's Alliance (EAA) and the Finish Association for Nature Conservation (FANC) give the following recommendations on the 2012 TAC:s in the Baltic Sea:

Demersal stocks

Cod

The organisations are of the opinion that the management plan should be followed for both stocks as it has been considered precautionary by ICES.

Western Baltic cod, area 22-24: Follow the management plan, meaning a TAC of maximum 21 300 t (+13%).

Eastern Baltic cod, area 25-32: Follow the management plan, meaning a TAC of maximum 74 200 t (+15%).

Plaice in division 22-32: No increase in catches according to the ICES precautionary advice meaning a rollover of last year's TAC.

Pelagic stocks

In the absence of a pelagic management plan the organisations recommend that the ICES advice on a transition towards MSY is followed. The EU is committed to achieve MSY by 2015 and the pelagic management plan is therefore likely to include target fishing mortalities based on MSY. Deviations from the MSY transition scheme in terms of setting TAC:s that are above what is recommended within the transition scheme are likely to result in higher cuts in coming years as the year 2015 is approaching. The organisations therefore recommend that the ICES transition towards MSY is followed where it exists and the MSY advice for the other stocks.

Herring in area 25-29 and 32 (excluding Gulf of Riga): Follow the ICES MSY transition advice meaning a TAC of less than 92 000 t (-23% compared to 2011).

Herring in area IIIa and 22-24: Follow the ICES MSY advice meaning a TAC of maximum 42 700 t (-3%).

Herring in the Bothnian sea, area 30: Follow the ICES MSY advice meaning a rollover of last year's TAC.

Herring in the Bothnian bay, area 31: No increase in catches according to the ICES precautionary advice, meaning a rollover of last year's TAC.

Herring in the Gulf of Riga, area 28.1: Follow the ICES MSY transition advice meaning a TAC of maximum 25 500 t (-22% compared to 2011).

Sprat in area 22-32: Follow the ICES MSY transition advice meaning a TAC of maximum 242 000 t (-25% compared to last year).

Salmon and sea trout

In summary, we support the reductions of TAC and other recommendations proposed in the advice by ICES, but also suggest the following measures as a summary of the deliberations given in more detail below:

- A) The misreporting of catches and illegal fishing must be halted as far as practically feasible,
- B) Post-smolt survival is at such a low level that stringent measures are called for to prevent extinction of populations, both in short and longer terms,
- C) It is vital that management of salmon and sea trout are linked, which is important for the genetic survival of numerous sea trout populations and which will raise the awareness that better data is warranted to manage sea trout populations in the future,
- D) Inadequate data is the major obstacle to most evaluations of current problems and possible improved management.

ICES TAC advice for Salmon and Sea trout 2012

ICES advice suggests that no more than 54,000 salmon be caught in 2012 (according to the MSY approach) in the Main Basin. This means a 50 % TAC reduction compared to the advice given in 2010. In the Bay of Finland ICES propose that there should be no change relative to the figure given for 2011. For sea trout no specific advice is given (no TAC) but it is stated that “ICES advises that immediate fishing restrictions...be enforced in the Gulf of Bothnia and the Gulf of Finland, to safeguard the remaining wild sea trout populations in the region.”

It may seem that this reduction of fishing effort would suffice to change the trend for the declining stocks of salmon and sea trout but there are issues that have not been properly addressed or needs to be underlined. We summarize them as follows:

- 1) According to ICES there is a misreporting of salmon caught in 2010 by some 70,000 fish, which makes up close to 37 % of the catch in the Main Basin and some 24 % of the total catch. This IUU catch is completely unacceptable. Improved control of poaching is acutely needed.
- 2) Post-smolt survival (i.e. survival of the young growing fish at sea) has declined to a level of some 10 % (both for wild and reared salmon). This figure is approaching the level of extinction for salmon, and probably also for sea trout, if the reason cannot be found and corrected. This survival rate is almost equal to the worst scenarios of the M74 disease which was once considered a major threat to salmon survival in the Baltic. A direct result of this decline also explains the low number of spawners returning to their native rivers.
- 3) The TAC figures given have little relevance to the actual catch. Preliminary data for 2010 indicate that coastal fisheries have decreased by 31 %, and in river fisheries by some 39 % compared to 2009. In total, only half of the salmon TAC was utilized in 2010, even though the

offshore fishery increased by 39 % in the same period. In addition, catch data have only marginal importance for the problem caused by mixed offshore fisheries (longlines) where management of small wild populations of both species is impossible and threaten to drive them even faster toward extinction.

- 4) As far as possible, salmon and sea trout populations must be managed on a river by river basis, and that is particularly important for the vast majority of small river populations where there is no trend toward recovery. These small populations are also particularly vulnerable to poaching in the rivers and river mouths in addition to the lack of environmental measures to improve the quality of their migration routes and spawning areas in the rivers. These conditions combined with high post smolt mortality and the lower returns in the number of spawning salmon to rivers indicate that the recent strong increase in the longline fishery, which now approaches the combined harvest rate of the previous longline and driftnet fisheries, must decrease.
- 5) Most of the problems that face salmon also face sea trout, but trout biology is more varied than that of salmon and obviously more difficult to handle on a general level. Sea trout of some populations, normally in rather big rivers, may migrate almost as far as salmon populations, whereas most populations from small rivers and brooks tend to migrate only close to the river mouths (up to some 150 km from the home river) before they return to spawn. The average size of sea trout also differs among populations, but enforcing a minimum legal size of 65 cm, as advocated by ICES experts, would certainly allow all female fish to spawn at least once. Also, this legal size limit would ensure a better management option than the so far non-existing TAC.
- 6) We find it imperative that a new management plan for salmon and sea trout be formulated and enforced. If we are to protect against deterioration of genetic variability in salmon and sea trout, hence changing the trend of decreasing biological diversity, we may not require a TAC for both species separately or combined, but an instrument whereby each population will be managed better both in its freshwater and marine habitat, and ensure its survival in a longer time period.
- 7) In a long term perspective we suggest that artificial rearing of salmon and sea trout be phased out, so all rivers can be rated according to their natural production of wild smolt, and river specific populations can be managed in a biologically sound manner and also harvested in direct proportion to their production of wild smolt. This goal and measure may also help release funds now bound to production of reared smolt to instead improve river habitat.
- 8) We propose, as a consequence of item 7 (above), that a cost/benefit analysis be performed where the production costs of all reared smolt are calculated and other costs by society, like compensation for damage to fish in gear from seals, are included.