To:

- His Excellency, Georges Friden, Extraordinary Ambassador and Plenipotentiary, Presidency-in-Office for the Council
- MEP Jaroslaw Walesa, Vice-Chair Fisheries Committee, rapporteur Baltic Sea multiannual plan
- Bernhard Friess, Director, Baltic Sea, North Sea and Landlocked Member States

Your Excellency
Dear MEP Walesa
Dear Mr. Friess

This is to follow up the Expert Hearing of the Fisheries Committee of the European Parliament, held in February 2015 with the participation of representatives of the Commission and attendance by several Member States, where we and several other international fisheries scientists applauded the reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) of the EU and firmly agreed that future fishing opportunities in waters under the jurisdiction of the European Union and applying to fishing vessels flying flags of EU Member States, should be less than the rates that would theoretically provide Maximum Sustainable Yields (MSY). The sustainable catches thus ensured would be only slightly lower than the MSY yield, with profitability to the industry much greater, which would provide much improved living for fishers. Further, such a restrained intensity of fishing would have much less potentially deleterious impact on the 'health' and biodiversity of marine ecosystems.

The attached 'Comment' to this letter expresses our concern that in determining Fishing Opportunities in 2016 for the Baltic Sea, decisions have been taken that are contrary to the newly revised management policy regarding fishing. That declared policy was in accord with the progressive and economically and socially beneficial principles proposed by the European Parliament. It is, basically, that the fishing mortality rates of fish stocks in those waters must be substantially less than the rates that would theoretically provide MSY.

We are also concerned about the high fishing mortality rates being discussed in the context of the Baltic Sea multi-annual plan.

Furthermore, we fear that the opportunity to greatly improve the fishery situation elsewhere in EU waters, such as in the North and Celtic Seas, by similar restraints on the intensity of fishing, will be lost if the agreed management policy of rational restraint is not implemented during the next few years.

We write this as an 'open letter' in the sense that the addressees and the authors are free to send copies to persons of their choice. We hope that is acceptable to you.

Please accept assurance of our highest consideration.

(signed)

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c.c.
European Council: Marc Kreis, Fisheries Attaché, Luxembourg
European Commission.: Ilona Jepsena, Head of Unit, Fisheries conservation and control Baltic and North Sea
European Parliament:
MEP Ulrike Rodust - Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats Group
MEP Marek Grobarczyk - European Conservatives and Reformists Group
MEP Nils Torvalds - Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
MEP Anja Hazekamp - Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left
MEP Linnea Engström - Greens/ European Free Alliance Group
MEP Marco Affronte - Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group

A comment by scientists, Dr Sidney J. Holt and Dr Rainer Froese on management of European fisheries for high sustainable yields, in particular in the Baltic Sea

Paciano, Italy and Kiel, Germany
1 November 2015

As scientists who have spent most of their working lives conducting studies of fish population dynamics and the application of that discipline for the rational management of sustainable fisheries, it is extremely disheartening to see the authorities of the European Union setting fishing opportunities for the Baltic Sea which will impede a speedy recovery of the mostly depleted stocks, with a high risk of collapse for the western Baltic cod, which will be fished in 2016 at more than twice the F_{MSY} rate. This decision violates the management policy formally agreed by the basic organs of the Union: the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and the Commission. That policy requires that fishing opportunities be derived from establishment of a fishing mortality rate (F) less than that required to provide Maximum Sustainable Yields (F_{MSY}), so that stock sizes are rebuilt to and maintained above levels that can produce the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) as required by the reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

Further, the Council and Commission have proposed a range of F-values for the proposed multi-annual plan for Baltic stocks that largely exceed F_{MSY}. There is no provision in the CFP permitting higher fishing mortalities than F_{MSY}, except for narrowly defined cases during a transition period until 2020.

The Commission had asked ICES to provide estimates of ranges of plausible values around F_{MSY}, but without indicating the conditions governing those ranges. Many assumed – wrongly – that when the ICES Advisers subsequently referred to 95%, that these figures had something to do with statistical confidence limits of the estimates, but that is not so. No such limits have been calculated or approximated. In fact the ICES suggestions were not for 'best' estimates of F_{MSY} values but for best estimates of the F-values resulting in catches no less than 95% of MSY. The selection of the 95% MSY limit is arbitrary (as ICES itself points out) and obscures the fact that the resulting F-ranges are highly asymmetrical, that is, the upper F value resulting in sustainable catches of 95% of MSY may exceed F_{MSY} by far, resulting in drastically increased costs of fishing, reduced catch per effort, and stock sizes well below the level that can produce MSY, thus being incompatible with the CFP. Instead, the lower value of F resulting in 95% of MSY may be a more reasonable and CFP-compliant management target.

The reasons for setting limits of F less than F_{MSY} are twofold. Firstly, it cannot be validly assumed that a fishery managed to provide MSY will be economically worthwhile – that it will be profitable by virtue of the market value of the catch being more than the cost of taking it. An F less than F_{MSY} would enhance the likelihood that the regulated sustainable fishery would be profitable. Secondly, a lower F will have a lesser impact on the productivities of the ecosystems being

exploited and so contribute to enhanced conservation status of living marine resources.

Parliament has suggested that F should be set within the range $F = 0$ to F_{MSY}, with a target of F=0.8 F_{MSY}. The Commission has to date offered no guidance as to an optimum value within these ranges based on social and economic considerations that would be in conformity with the CFP, nor has it asked ICES for scientific advice as to the implications of various options within that range. Instead, ICES advice continues to offer several options for continued overfishing ($F > F_{MSY}$) which are incompatible with the CFP. One of these options, namely fishing Western Baltic cod in 2016 at 2.6 F_{MSY}, has just been chosen by the Council.

At the Annual Scientific Conference of ICES, held in Copenhagen in September 2015, one of the authors of this letter (SJH) presented calculations of the consequences, for sustainable catch, of various fishing mortality rates, and catch rates (catches-per-unit-effort, that determine profitability), specifically for rates at 50% of the F_{MSY} level, for all known sets of values of the basic dynamic population parameters. The calculations show that with such fishing rates the sustainable catches would be between about 99% and 90% of the MSYs observed in fishes. This range of results depends mainly on the selectivity of each fishery – i.e. whether fish begin to be caught when they are young and small or much later, as adults and even as mature adults, which would lead to a more natural age structure and higher catches. In all cases the catch rates and the resulting profits will be nearly double what would be given by fishing at F_{MSY}. (The results of those calculations will be published in the ICES Journal of Marine Science.)

We suggest that until such time as comprehensive analyses have been made by ICES and by the Commission of optimum rate of catch per unit effort and gear selectivity resulting in high yields and profits with low impact on the ecosystem, it would be sensible to consider adopting a provisional value of $F = 0.5F_{MSY}$.

We realize that in some stocks, implementation of this policy may lead to strongly reduced catches in the first year, which will, however, be more than compensated by continuous higher catches and profits in subsequent years. Stakeholders should be involved in finding the most acceptable transition path from the current high-cost-low-catch to the future low-cost-high-catch situation.