

The Daily Catch

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Breaking! EU Fisheries Ministers End Overfishing

Luxembourg (October 15th): As bizarre as it sounds, instead of staying up all night horse-trading and dreaming up creative new ways to deplete European fish stocks, EU fisheries ministers gathering at the AGRIFISH Council meeting in Luxembourg today actually set Baltic fishing quotas according to scientific advice, and then went straight to bed, leaving journalists and environmental campaigners gobsmacked and bewildered.

“Well, that was easier than we thought” said one bleary-eyed Minister, who didn’t wish to be named, as he was still in his pyjamas. “In a moment of craziness, we just looked at what the scientists were saying and the projections for fish stock increases, and reckoned, why not try this sustainability thing? Why didn’t someone tell us before how good it will feel to wake up after having done some good for the Baltic marine environment, its fisheries and the communities that depend on them?”

Sources inside the meeting had suggested that the decision to end overfishing of Baltic fish stocks occurred because of a growing awareness that EU member states had not lived up to the legal and moral commitment to end overfishing in European waters by 2015, and were not moving quick enough to meet the 2020 final deadline. Some activists were sceptical, blaming a potential clerical mistake, or a typographical error, while some government officials were quick to downplay any re-

sponsible behaviour by their EU ministers, stating that it was all a “very fortunate accident”.

Whatever the reason, after several years of stumbling bleary-eyed around a Luxembourg conference room into the wee-hours, sipping tepid coffee, backslapping and mumbling political promises, fisheries ministers last night agreed to be realistic about fishing limits for Baltic fish stocks. They finally set total allowable catches (TACs) for all fish stocks in line with - or even below - what scientists have been telling them (over and over) are the maximum sustainable yield limits.

After only four hours of deliberations - that ended just in time for a lavish banquet to celebrate the EU’s new reasonable catch approach, EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council ministers agreed to set Total Allowable Catches (TAC) for western Baltic cod at 6,716 tons, which is a lower figure than recommended by scientific advisers. Was this motivated by an unprecedented precautionary approach to sustain the western Baltic cod recovery?

Thankfully fisheries ministers didn’t listen to European Commission proposal on Eastern Baltic cod TAC which was significantly higher than scientific advice. Instead, Eastern Baltic cod was set at 13 224 tons, in accordance with ICES advice. In another unexpected move, the Council agreed to follow ICES advice of a zero catch for western Baltic herring and promised the fishermen to

support them during the following year.

“After years of ignoring the limits of nature and science, EU fisheries ministers today displayed a surprising - and somewhat unexpected clarity of thought - that will deliver sustainable management for all Baltic fish stocks today”, said Our Fish Programme Director Rebecca Hubbard, surprisingly fresh from not having to stay up all night waiting for ministers to get their act together.

“In former years, these late night AGRIFISH meetings demonstrated a dangerous culture, with EU fisheries ministers treating the law as flexible, making decisions behind closed doors, and cherry picking which fish would be the winners and losers, instead of ending overfishing of all fish stocks as required by Common Fisheries Policy. But today everything changed; and let’s hope this decision can drive change throughout EU waters,” Ms Hubbard concluded.

“But one of the biggest problems still remains! Despite a landing obligation coming into force in the Baltic Sea in 2015, discarding isn’t sufficiently controlled. When discarding isn’t controlled and top-ups are incorporated into total allowable catches, fish stocks are still not safe”, commented K.V, Commissioner DG Mare. “This is the next important challenge the EU ministers will have to face. Today’s farsightedness nourishes my hope that we will end discarding just as we have ended overfishing in the Baltic today.” ■

Weather forecast

Today we can expect mostly sunny weather, as the sun shines over



EU fisheries ministers who have finally ended all overfishing of Baltic stocks. Morning temperatures will be around 8°C, reaching a maximum of 20°C during the day. No ill winds blow as fish stocks are sure to rise.

Horoscopes



Capricorn (22 Dec - 20 Jan)

You will sense an oceanic wave of gratitude from a growing fish biomass (and fishermen).



Aquarius (21 Jan - 19 Feb)

You will sense an oceanic wave of gratitude from a growing fish biomass (and fishermen).



Pisces (20 Feb - 20 Mar)

You will sense an oceanic wave of gratitude from a growing fish biomass (and fishermen).



Aries (21 Mar - 19 Apr)

You will sense an oceanic wave of gratitude from a growing fish biomass (and fishermen).



Taurus (20 Apr - 20 May)

You will sense an oceanic wave of gratitude from a growing fish biomass (and fishermen).



Gemini (21 May - 21 Jun)

You will sense an oceanic wave of gratitude from a growing fish biomass (and fishermen).



Cancer (22 Jun - 23 Jul)

You will sense an oceanic wave of gratitude from a growing fish biomass (and fishermen).



Leo (24 Jul - 23 Aug)

You will sense an oceanic wave of gratitude from a growing fish biomass (and fishermen).



Virgo (24 Aug - 22 Sept)

You will sense an oceanic wave of gratitude from a growing fish biomass (and fishermen).



Libra (23 Sept - 22 Oct)

You will sense an oceanic wave of gratitude from a growing fish biomass (and fishermen).



Scorpio (23 Oct - 22 Nov)

You will sense an oceanic wave of gratitude from a growing fish biomass (and fishermen).



Sagittarius (23 Nov - 20 Dec)

You will sense an oceanic wave of gratitude from a growing fish biomass (and fishermen).