



# Our Fish

## Is Western Baltic Herring Essential for the Euro-Baltic Fish-Processing Plant?

*Our Fish Briefing, October 2019*

### Summary:

- **Western Baltic herring is heavily overfished and is on the on verge of commercial collapse – ICES scientists advise zero fishing quota for 2nd year in a row**
- **Both Germany and the EU Commission do not support the scientific advice, and are instead looking for a quote of 2751 tonnes western Baltic herring for 2020.**
- **Fish processing plant on Baltic coast is used by Germany’s Fisheries Minister to justify why Germany wants to set fishing limit above scientific advice**
- **Processing Plant currently takes 90-100% of its herring supply from North Sea**
- **Even if Baltic herring limits are set higher than scientists advise, it won't help supply the plant - there simply isn't enough western Baltic herring.**
- **But the fishing company that catches all the quota is a huge profitable multi-national from Netherlands, who has already received millions in subsidies - public money to build the plant in the first place**
- **Smaller fishers are unable to sell their herring catches to the plant**
- **Providing subsidies that support overfishing perpetuates a vicious and irrational cycle of inefficient, unprofitable and destructive fisheries management, which destroys marine biodiversity and undermines the oceans capacity for resilience in the face of climate breakdown**

### Western Baltic Herring Stock

For the second year in a row the advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) is for a zero catch of western Baltic herring; - the population size remains below safe biological limits. In October 2018, the EU Commission and Council ignored ICES advice, and in October 2019, the Commission is again ignoring that scientific advice, by supporting a fishing limit of 2751 tonnes for 2020. Germany will also support the Commission’s proposal – apparently because the Federal Ministry for Food and Agriculture (BMEL) needs a supply of herring to keep the Euro Baltic Fish Processing Plant in Sassnitz running.

The warning signals from ICES are clear e.g. “Recruitment has been low since the mid-2000s and at a historic low for the last four years”.

The European Commission Proposal for Baltic Sea fishing Total Allowable Catches:

[https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/press/baltic-sea-commission-proposal-aims-improve-long-term-sustainability-stocks\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/press/baltic-sea-commission-proposal-aims-improve-long-term-sustainability-stocks_en)

NGOs recommendations on Baltic fishing opportunities for 2020 are available at:

<https://www.fishsec.org/2019/06/10/joint-ngo-recommendations-on-baltic-sea-fishing-opportunities-for-2020/>

ICES advice on western Baltic Herring Published 29 May 2019

[http://ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication Reports/Advice/2019/2019/her.27.20-24.pdf](http://ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2019/2019/her.27.20-24.pdf)

## **The Euro-Baltic Fish-Processing Plant**

The Euro-Baltic fish processing GmbH was founded in 2001 by Parlevliet van der Plas, a major fisheries company based in the Netherlands.

Euro-Baltic is a good example of how large scale companies with sufficient capital for large-scale investments can acquire public funding on an even larger scale.

The fish processing plant of the same name opened in October 2003 in Sassnitz, on the island of Rügen, in the Baltic Sea. The plant's managing directors are Dirk Jan Parlevliet, Dr. Uwe Richter and Anton van der Plas. In early press reports it is mentioned that not only herring, but also cod, flounder and sprat can be filleted, marinated and flash frozen at the Sassnitz plant. Today, only herring is processed. The plant started with a processing area of <sup>2</sup> 14,000m<sup>2</sup> and an annual capacity of 50,000 tonnes of fish. Within 24 hours, 500 tonnes of fish can be filleted. It also has highly automated sorting, filleting and freezing facilities and a cold store for 20,000 tonnes of fish.<sup>1</sup>

The plant has an automatic sorting system, which can handle 35 tonnes of fish products and has its own fishmeal production facility and water treatment facilities which pumps treated water directly into the Baltic Sea. The number of employees was estimated at up to 150 during the first years of operation.

By 2007, the plant was expanded to include new buildings as well as freezing and water treatment plants. At the time of the expansion, press releases indicated that capacity would increase to more than 70,000 tonnes. However, according to recent statements, the plant's capacity remains at 50,000 tonnes. The number of employees was expected to rise to about 200.<sup>2</sup> The number of employees varies according to different sources, with the highest number cited at around 200. In the profile of the factory on the website of the fish magazine, an industry publication, the number of employees is given as 122.<sup>3</sup>

The cost of constructing and commissioning the fish processing plant was estimated at approximately €100 million. 55% of this was financed with EU funding. The expansion of the

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1 dpa, "Euro-Baltic Startet Fischverarbeitung," *DIE WELT*, October 5, 2003, accessed August 22, 2019, <https://www.welt.de/print-welt/article264198/Euro-Baltic-startet-Fischverarbeitung.html>.

2 "Euro-Baltic Fish Processing Centre Expansion."

3 "Fischmagazin.de - Euro-Baltic Fischverarbeitungs GmbH."

plant cost about €35 million, of which 30% was financed by Germany.<sup>4</sup> Another source points out that these figures are not reflected in the accounts of Parlevliet and van der Plas' subsidiaries. Funding may have been given to construction companies and other contractors, so they cannot be understood as direct payments.<sup>5</sup>

## Support for the Eastern-German Region?

To date, the fish processing plant uses its capacity of 50,000 tonnes of herring. The amount and origin of the processed herring varies in different sources. However, it seems that this information is used to put pressure on decision makers and the public.

On 17 January 2019, plant director Uwe Richter was quoted by German radio station NDR1 as saying that 40,000 tonnes of herring (80% of the Euro-Baltic plant's processing capacity) were fished in British waters.<sup>6</sup> On July 8 2019, Uwe Richter was quoted by the Schweriner Volkszeitung newspaper, that 45,000 tonnes of herring (90% of the capacity of the Euro-Baltic factory) were caught in British fishing grounds. He also stated that 5,000 tonnes were brought to the factory from the western Baltic Sea<sup>7</sup>. Since the herring quota for Germany in the western Baltic Sea was 4,966 tonnes, all of it had to be processed at Euro-Baltic.

On September 9 2019, Uwe Richter was quoted by the German press agency DPA, saying that 100% of the herring catches of the Doggerbank fishing company were caught in British waters. He also stated 100% of the herring processed in the Euro-Baltic factory were caught in British waters<sup>8</sup>. However, it is unclear whether Richter increased the significance of herring from British fishing grounds to emphasize the request for financial support in case of a hard Brexit, or if he used the herring from the western Baltic to highlight the significance of the plant for the region.

In a written text by Uwe Richter in 2011, he claims that in 2010 the German authority (BLE) reduced the North Sea herring quota of Doggerbank Seefischerei GmbH (Parlevliet & Van Der Plas Group) by 1,000 tonnes without substitution and swapped it for Baltic herring. A plea to deliver these Baltic herring catches to the Euro-Baltic plant was ignored largely by the benefiting Baltic fishers. Richter writes of a 'moral obligation', that most of the fishers did not comply with. As a response, an unspecified deal was made to force fishers to deliver to the Euro-Baltic, a 'win-win' situation as Richter describes it.<sup>9</sup>

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4 "Euro-Baltic Fish Processing Centre Expansion."Ibid."Euro-Baltic Fish Processing Centre Expansion."

5 Jan Willem van Gelder, "Direct and Indirect EU Support for the Members of the Pelagic Freezer-Trawler Association (PFA)."

6 NDR, "Fischwirtschaft in MV fürchtet Brexit," accessed September 12, 2019, /nachrichten/mecklenburg-vorpommern/Fischwirtschaft-in-MV-fuerchtet-Brexit,brexit418.html.

7 Birgit Sander, "Fangquote: Verbot Für Dorsch Aus Östlicher Ostsee Schon Im August | Svz.De," Svz, accessed September 12, 2019, <https://www.svz.de/regionales/mecklenburg-vorpommern/verbot-fuer-dorsch-aus-oestlicher-ostsee-schon-im-august-id24621857.html>.

8 "Deutsche Hochseefischer: Furcht vor unregelmäßigem Brexit," accessed September 12, 2019, <https://www.cnv-medien.de/news/deutsche-hochseefischer-furcht-vor-ungeregeltem-brexit-1.html>.

9 Uwe Richter, "Einige Bemerkungen Zur Frühjahrsheringssaison 201 1 Und Neues von Der Euro-Baltic Fischverarbeitungs GmbH," 2012, <http://www.rostocker-hochseefischerei.de/aktuelles/dokumente/fischmarkt.pdf>.

By 2018, all herring products of the Euro-Baltic plant had been MSC certified. A correction to the guide value for sustainable biomass stocks of herring in the western Baltic Sea in the summer of 2018 led to a removal of the MSC certification from corresponding products. The guide value has been raised from 90,000 tonnes to 120,000 tonnes. The current herring stock in the western Baltic Sea is around 105,000 tonnes, below the revised guideline value.<sup>10</sup> In a TV broadcast by NDR<sup>11</sup>, Richter stated that without MSC certification, the Euro-Baltic company would not buy the catches, or only pay lower prices. Fishing associations were cited as preferring to sell their catches to other buyers in this case.

## Fishing, Processing, Selling

Comparing herring quotas given to Germany's pelagic high seas fleet, which is effectively the Parlevliet fleet (54,000 tonnes according to their CSR report in 2017, 53,000 tonnes according to Minister Backhaus), with the capacity of the Euro-Baltic plant built in 2009 (50,000 tonnes annually), it is apparent that the plant was built for one specific reason: to process the herring caught by Parlevliet fleet in British waters in a plant owned entirely by Parlevliet, and financed as much as possible by European and German tax money.

This strategy to control the whole value chain of herring products is heavily threatened by the threat of a hard Brexit. If the British government does not join agreements for fishing after leaving the EU, 90%-100% of the plant's processing capacity would be unused. According to the Minister of Agriculture of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, the jobs of 250 primary fishers, 200 additional fishers and more than 200 employees are dependent on the plant.<sup>12</sup> Uwe Richter himself mentioned Norwegian fishing grounds as an alternative to the British ones.<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusion

Germany's fisheries ministry appears to be presenting the potential lack of supply of herring and subsequent job losses and economics impacts for the Euro-Baltic plant, as a justification for fishing above the scientific advice for western Baltic herring.

Our Fish's position is that Nature's limits cannot be negotiated. The ICES advice for a zero quota for western Baltic herring is an unambiguous statement on the dire state of this fish population. Suggesting a 2020 fishing limit anywhere above this – never mind the 2751 tonnes supported by European Commission, backed by Germany – is a reprehensible triumph of irrational political opportunism at the expense of long term sustainability. The only pathway towards rebuilding EU fish populations is to observe the limits recommended by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea. Nature's limits cannot be negotiated.

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10 NDR, "Ostsee-Hering verliert MSC-Nachhaltigkeitssiegel," accessed August 22, 2019, [/nachrichten/mecklenburg-vorpommern/Ostsee-Hering-verliert-MS-Nachhaltigkeitssiegel,fischerei204.html](https://www.ndr.de/nachrichten/mecklenburg-vorpommern/Ostsee-Hering-verliert-MS-Nachhaltigkeitssiegel,fischerei204.html).

11 NDR, *Ohne MSC-Siegel: Wer kauft den Ostseehering?*, n.d., accessed September 13, 2019, <https://www.ndr.de/fernsehen/sendungen/nordmagazin/Ohne-MS-Siegel-Wer-kauft-Ostseehering.nordmagazin55940.html>.

12 "Brexit-Folgen - Fish and Chips in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern."

13 NDR, "Fischwirtschaft in MV fürchtet Brexit."

## About Our Fish

Our Fish works to ensure European member states implement the Common Fisheries Policy and achieve sustainable fish stocks in European waters.

Our Fish works with organisations and individuals across Europe to deliver a powerful and unwavering message: overfishing must be stopped, and solutions put in place that ensure Europe's waters are fished sustainably. Our Fish demands that the Common Fisheries Policy be properly enforced, and Europe's fisheries effectively governed.

Our Fish calls on all EU Member States to set annual fishing limits at sustainable limits based on scientific advice, and to ensure that their fishing fleets prove that they are fishing sustainably, through monitoring and full documentation of their catch.

For more information, contact [press@our.fish](mailto:press@our.fish)

<http://our.fish>

[https://twitter.com/our\\_fish/](https://twitter.com/our_fish/)

## German Fisheries Contacts

Michael Schütt (Could answer the question why the Baltic fishers could not sell their herring to that plant!)

Geschäftsführer

Fischereigenossenschaft

"Peenemündung" Freest e.G.

Dorfstrasse 29

D-17440 Kröslin/OT Freest

Tel.: +49 (0) 38370 258-0

Fax: +49 (0) 38370 258-21

Email: [info@fischerei-freest.de](mailto:info@fischerei-freest.de)

Web: [www.fischerei-freest.de](http://www.fischerei-freest.de)

Walter Dübner, Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft

Referat 614

"Seefischereimanagement und -kontrolle, IWC"

Ministerialrat Dübner

Telefon: 02 28 / 9 95 29 38 08, Fax: -40 84

[614@bmel.bund.de](mailto:614@bmel.bund.de)

Dr. Uwe Richter

Euro-Baltic Fischverarbeitungs GmbH

Im Fährhafen Sassnitz

D-18546 Sassnitz-Neu Mukran

TelefonTelefon: 0383 / 926330

eMailE-Mail: [info@eurobaltic.de](mailto:info@eurobaltic.de)

<https://www.northdata.de/Richter,+Uwe,+Rostock/lvc>