

Brussels – 16 March 2016

“Baltic Plan” gives hope to seabirds but fails to end overfishing

The just agreed “Baltic Plan” includes badly needed measures to stop the incidental by-catch of seabirds but fails to slam the door on overfishing.

Brussels [16 March]: Yesterday the European Parliament ^[1], the Council and the European Commission finalised the negotiations on the multiannual plan for the management of the Baltic Sea cod, sprat and herring stocks – the so-called “Baltic Plan”.

The “Baltic Plan” is the first plan under the European Commission’s Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) which aims to ensure that fishing are environmentally, economically and socially sustainable.

During the 10 months negotiations ^[2], between the European Commission, the Council (Member States) and the European Parliament, there had been disagreements in how to ensure that fisheries management would end overfishing. Despite the efforts of the European Parliament, the final agreement fails to ensure an end to overfishing. The final deal leaves room for loop holes that could still allow fishing quotas to be set at too high levels and hence fail to allow stocks to recover and be maintained above levels that could produce a Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY).

On the other hand the European Parliament did manage to include in the final agreement measures to minimise the impacts of fishing on the marine environment, including reducing the accidental catching of seabirds, dolphins, and sea turtles. These specific and important measures had not been included in the original proposal by the European Commission.

The Baltic Sea is a well-known hotspot for bycatch of seabirds with about 76 000 seabirds ^[3] (mainly marine diving ducks) drowning in fishing nets every year.

Ariel Brunner, Senior Head of Policy at BirdLife Europe ^[4], stated: *“The important progress in tackling seabird bycatch does not compensate for backtracking on fishing quotas. It is shocking that the first plan implementing the new Common Fisheries Policy is already betraying to promise to end overfishing.”*

Member States are now tasked to put in place regional technical measures for the Baltic. BirdLife Europe will closely follow the process to ensure they don’t use the freshly provided loopholes when setting the annual catch limits in October. We hope that the upcoming fisheries management plan for the North Sea does not make the same mistakes as the Baltic plan. **ENDS**

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Notes:

[1] The European Parliament's press-release on the agreement is available to view here:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20160315IPR19403/Baltic-Plan'-Agreement-reached-on-the-first-long-term-fishing-plan>

[2] BirdLife Blog – European Seabirds: The Baltic Fisheries Plan Is About More Than Just The Baltic <https://europeanseabirds.wordpress.com/2015/09/21/the-baltic-fisheries-plan-is-about-more-than-just-the-baltic/>

[3] The incidental catch of seabirds in gillnet fisheries: A global review
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0006320713000979>

[4] BirdLife Europe is a Partnership of nature conservation organisations in 47 countries, including all EU Member States, and a leader in bird conservation. Through its unique local to global approach BirdLife Europe delivers high impact and long term conservation for the benefit of nature and people.