



Commission proposes Baltic Sea fishing opportunities for 2016: more stocks than ever to be fished at sustainable levels

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The European Commission today tabled its proposal on fishing opportunities in the Baltic Sea for 2016. This is the annual proposal for the amount of fish that EU fishermen may catch from the Baltic Sea's 10 main commercial fish stocks, also known as Total Allowable Catch (TAC). For 2016, the Commission proposes catch limits at sustainable levels, or more stocks than ever before. The European Commission's proposal is based on the latest available data from the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee of Fisheries (STECF) of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES).

Based on today's proposals, the Total Allowable Catch for the Baltic Sea will be about 15% compared to 2015. It will include a 20% increase for salmon, which is measured in pieces.

More specifically, the Commission proposes to increase the TAC for Central Baltic, as well as for Baltic Sea fish stocks either reflect the natural improvement of stocks' status. The Council will discuss the Commission's proposal at its meeting. If adopted, the proposals will be implemented from 2016.

Herring

Under the Commission's proposals, herring catch limits will be increased to 103 254 tonnes, as was already the case in 2015.

A continuing improvement in Western Baltic herring stocks has led the Commission to propose increased catch limits for both Western and Central Baltic herring to 24 797 tonnes, and for Central Baltic herring to 103 254 tonnes.

In contrast, Bothnian Sea herring would experience the biggest overall TAC decrease in 2016: a drop of -35%, to 103 254 tonnes. This reduction reflects ICES' decision to change the way this stock is assessed. The Commission expects that this change will improve the quality of ICES' assessment of fishing stocks in the coming years.

The Commission also proposed to decrease the TAC for *Riga* herring by -21%, to 30 623 tonnes.

Cod

In line with ICES' advice, the Commission proposed to decrease the TAC for Eastern Baltic cod by 20%, to 41 143 tonnes.

Data shows that Western cod stocks are overfished and have fallen below sustainable biological limits. The Commission expects Member States within the Council to agree on effective and adequate additional measures in order to improve the status of this stock. As the Commission is still awaiting additional data from ICES, it has not yet proposed a quota for this stock.

Salmon

The Commission proposes to increase the TAC for salmon to 105 850. This is a 20% increase compared to 2015.

Following ICES' advice, the Commission proposes to increase the TAC for salmon in Finland, correct for the loss of salmon in the Baltic Sea.

Sprat

This year ICES proposes to increase the TAC for sprat to 184 000 tonnes, a 14% increase compared to 2015.

Cod

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8.3.3 Cod (*Gadus morhua*) eastern Baltic stock in Subdivisions 25-28 (Eastern Baltic Sea) and Subdivision 24

ICES stock advice

ICES advises that when the precautionary approach is applied, catches in 2016 for the eastern Baltic cod stock should be no more than 29 220 tonnes.

Stock development over time

Catch per unit effort (CPUE) from the Baltic International Trawl Survey (BITS) of fish ≥ 30 cm has decreased between 2011 and 2014. There has been a steep decline in harvest rate between 2004 and 2009, followed by a slight increase.

ICES stock advice

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Figure 8.3.3.1 Eastern Baltic cod stock in Subdivisions 25-32 and Subdivision 24. Upper panel: catches in Subdivisions 25-32 (in thousand tonnes), divided in official landings and estimated discards, and catches of the eastern Baltic cod stock taken in Subdivision 24. Lower left panel: stock size indicator, calculated as cpue (kg hour⁻¹) of fish ≥ 30 cm from the 1st and 4th quarters, from the BITS survey in Subdivisions 25-28. Lower right panel: harvest rate (catches of the eastern Baltic cod stock/SSB proxy).