

## **BSAC Report on the Roundtable meeting with Commissioner**

**05/12/22**

***Present from BSAC:** BSAC Executive Committee Chair, Jarek Zielinski; EBM WG Chair, Nils Höglund (standing in for BSAC Executive Committee Vice-Chair Glann Doulas); drafted by BSAC secretariat*

**The Commissioner** opened the meeting by welcoming the participants.

He declared that this is the first meeting in this new formula of his direct consultations with ACs which play significant role in the decision-making process

He thanked the ACs for their contributions to the Commission Communication on the functioning of the CFP and the 2023 Fishing Opportunities. He explained that the EU-Norway and EU-UK-Norway negotiations were ongoing. The Commissioner recognised the impact of Covid, Brexit, the environmental challenges, and energy price increase linked to war in Ukraine. He underlined the need for structural changes to further increase resilience. The Commission will stand behind the sector and will not forget the long-term objectives of sustainability. Finally, he clarified that this meeting was for the Commission to listen to the ACs and gave the floor to the ACs representatives.

**The Chair of Executive Committee** thanked the Commissioner for organising the meeting. He explained that the BSAC is mostly interested in the October Council but still has recognised some relevant issues to be discussed in the December Council, including negotiations with Norway. A document with the BSAC input to this meeting had been prepared and will be sent to the Commissioner. See attached.

Two topics were particularly relevant for the upcoming Council: **Western Baltic Spring Spawning Herring and eel.**

For western Baltic herring:

The Baltic MAP only applies in the Baltic, SDs 22-24 and not in adjacent waters. Director General Charlina Vitcheva recalled the important intermixing of western Baltic herring with NSAS herring in the Skagerrak and eastern North Sea and the need for strong action from all parties involved.

The EU Baltic Sea MAP plan has not been adopted by Norway and therefore is not used as basis of the advice for this shared stock.

The BSAC recommends a twofold approach to the management of this stock. In the short term, the BSAC agrees that the Multi Annual Plan for the Baltic Sea should be used as a rebuilding plan for the western Baltic spring spawning herring. In the midterm, the BSAC recommends that a specific rebuilding plan be prepared and discussed with the third countries.

In her reply to the BSAC, Director General declares that the EU will continue to base its long-term strategy for western Baltic herring on the EU MAP for the Baltic Sea, OR on any future rebuilding plan that may be developed in collaboration with the Members States and the sector.

In the context of this declaration, the BSAC reiterates its recommendation that a specific rebuilding plan be prepared in cooperation with Norway. ICES work through its workshop guidelines and methods for the evaluation of rebuilding plans could be useful for this purpose.

**The EBM WG Chair** added that dealing separately with the TACs in the Baltic and in the North Sea is unfair and resulted in a zero TAC for Baltic being applied to only part of the distribution area of the stock.

Regarding **eel**, **the EBM WG Chair** highlighted that BSAC did not discuss the new proposal of the Commission on eel. We have discussed eel for many years but unfortunately there is no consensus on eel in the Baltic. The sector has issues with the 0-catch advice of ICES.

However, BSAC agrees as a whole on a few things. There is clear agreement that the population is not in good shape and that more pressure should be put on Member States to take measures upstream, to mitigate the impact of hydropower plants and dams, habitat restoration, etc ... Coordination is needed through BALTFISH, and HELCOM to maximise effects of measures taken.

In the Baltic Sea marine areas, unlike in other sea basins, there is an adult eel fishery, not a glass eel fishery.

He expressed that a lot of IUU fishing occurs and yearly, hundreds of illegal traps are found by coast guards and fisheries control. As long as there is a legal fishery, a strict documentation system should be in place with tagging of individual eels generalised, making controls and sales easier.

Some countries have banned recreational fishing. Most of the BSAC members support a stronger approach when it comes to recreational fishing and a generalisation of the ban and limitations on fisheries. In some Member States, reduction of commercial fishing has happened without equal changes to the upstream recreational fisheries, and this is not acceptable.

As a closing remark, **the Chair of Executive Committee** added that eel fishery is one of few fisheries remaining open especially for the small scale coastal fisheries, and the decision taken will affect especially these particular fishers.

There was consensus among the BSAC members on western Baltic herring, and this should be taken into account when negotiating with Norway.

Other ACs representatives presented their positions prior to the December Council, and thanked Commissioner for the meeting and invitation.

**The Commissioner** concluding the meeting referred to the legal obligations of the Commission and also recognised the difficulties for the sector when efforts made by the fisheries are not followed by stock recovery. Not everything can be resolved only by reducing the fishing pressure.

The consequences of Brexit in the North Sea and the fisheries in general was recognised.

The challenges of the negotiations with third countries was highlighted and the Commission will make sure that EU interests are put forward. The TCA with the UK needs to be implemented properly and the Commission will insure it is. In all these negotiations, there is good progress in discussions, but they will be pushed to the last night as with all negotiations.

The Commissioner thanked especially the BSAC representatives for showing the improvement and possible way forward for western Baltic herring. It was too late for the year 2023 but the Commission will consider the proposed improvements for the next year.

Regarding eel, he explained that he was pessimistic that any agreement could be reached before the complete collapse of eel. ICES advised for 0 catches, and he noted that he cannot see any other end to the discussions but a closure of the fishing. A solution has to be found to also limit other factors affecting the stock. This will be discussed at the Council, but important discussions have to happen as the situation is getting worse and worse. Further solutions have to be found.

He added that significant changes have to happen to limit fleet dependence on fuel. The Commission is taking into account socio-economics aspects too.

He finally encouraged ACs representatives to take back these messages to the organisations and fishers they represented.