

From the BSAC Executive Committee 29th June 2017
BSAC recommendation for technical measures in the demersal fishery

Encouraged by the occurrence of a very strong 2016 year class of cod from the Western Baltic area, scientifically verified in the latest advice from ICES¹, the BSAC would like to take the opportunity to reiterate its recommendation to give fishermen increased flexibility and better possibilities to modify the fishing gear used in demersal fisheries, whilst at the same time ensuring full accountability of what the fishermen catch.

This recommendation dates as far back as 29th September 2015 when the BSAC proposed amendments to the existing technical measures regulation for the Baltic.² It has unfortunately been completely ignored, despite the unanimous support from all members of the Executive Committee of the Advisory Council.

The recommendation was:

The Working Group recommended the following amendments to Regulation 2187/2005 for the conservation of fishery resources through technical measures in the Baltic Sea, the Belts and the Sound:

One specific recommendation was to propose **amendments to Annex II of the Regulation:**

Delete Footnote 2 and in consequence Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, which refer to the specifications of the Bacoma and T90 gears.

Since then, the BSAC has repeatedly called for changes to be made to the technical rules prevailing in the Baltic Sea. In particular, it is concerned about the mismatch between the introduction of the landing obligation and the strict rules which stipulate that when targeting cod in the Baltic, fishermen must use either Bacoma or T-90 with a mesh size of 120 mm.

¹ <http://ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2017/2017/cod.27.22-24.pdf>

² <http://www.bsac.dk/BSAC-Resources/BSAC-Statements-and-recommendations/2015-01-01-BSAC-recommendations-on-technical-measures>

Several scientific studies have documented that these gears are suited to the present stock situation, and that substantial reductions in catches of fish below MCRS can be achieved, if fishers are allowed to modify their gear.

The MINIDISC project from 2015 by DTU Aqua in Denmark³ has shown that reductions of up to 32.7% were reached under “free” choice. Trials by the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences have shown that decreasing the minimum mesh size in the T-90 cod-end to 115-118 mm, whilst increasing the number of meshes in the circumference to 80 (presently 50), has the potential to reduce catches of cod below MCRS by 75% (from 24% to 6%). A new project by DTU Aqua, building on the Swedish experience, shows promising results with T-90 with a 110mm mesh size and a circumference of 100 meshes, and indicates further reductions in unwanted catches.

Moreover, trials in the German fishery show that other modifications, such as reducing the roof of the trawl can also have positive effects. There are also other designs which have been tested scientifically and should be introduced without delay.

The BSAC is concerned that the potential benefits of the 2016 year class can be seriously hampered unless fishers can benefit from using alternative and improved fishing gear than that legally accepted today. The BSAC repeats its call for an immediate change of the technical regulations governing the demersal fishery in the Baltic. The sooner this is done, the more undersized cod will be saved.

In particular, the BSAC recommends that its recommendation from September 29th 2015 is implemented, preferably taking effect already this year.

By removing these specifications, fishermen would be able to use a mesh size and gear design that best matches their fishing area and quota, provided they use a mesh size of minimum 105 mm.

Fishermen should be allowed to use modified gears that have been tested in the Baltic with a resulting indication of reduced bycatch.

³ Reducing discards without reducing profit: free gear choice in a Danish result-based management trial, ICES Journal of Marine Science 2017, attached to this paper.

At the very least, the mandatory use of knotless netting in the Bacoma window must be abolished, whilst at the same time allowing the use of mesh sizes from 110 mm in both Bacoma and T-90. This would resolve many of the problems that fishermen currently experience, leading to alleged manipulation of gears, which again leads to higher levels of illegal discards.

Knots in a square mesh have little, if any, effect on the selectivity of those fish species that have an elliptic shape in cross-section. The added benefit of abolishing the obligation to use knotless netting is the reduced cost of shifting to larger meshes when prevailing conditions make this feasible. With the present obligation to use a component that gives a monopoly to one overseas manufacturer, as well as the long and costly procedure involved in shifting the Bacoma window, fishermen see no incentive in increasing their mesh size to correspond with observed changes in the cod stock. It would be a very positive signal, as well as beneficial for the exploitation pattern, if fishers could profit from using one mesh size in the spring and another in the autumn when the cod get fatter, or when a large proportion of the stock is just around the MCRS, without them having to invest large amounts of time and money.⁴

⁴ BSAC recommendations on technical measures 2017

<http://www.bsac.dk/BSAC-Resources/BSAC-Statements-and-recommendations/BSAC-recommendations-on-technical-measures>

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