

To:

EU Baltic Member States  
BALTFISH Presidency  
EU Commission DG Mare

Ref/BSAC/2015/7

Copenhagen 27th November 2015

With this letter the BSAC wants to express its deep concern regarding the decision taken by ministers at the Fisheries Council on 22<sup>nd</sup> -23<sup>rd</sup> October 2015 to lengthen the closed fishing period in the Western Baltic. Our concern is that this decision was taken late in the day and without scientific rationale or careful consideration of the consequences for the fishery – in particular for the small-scale fishers in the Baltic.

After the Council meeting, Commissioner Vella, in his press release of 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2015,<sup>1</sup> praises the fundamental recognition of the principle of “sticking to the science.” He also states that the objective of the closure is to protect spawning aggregations of cod. Contrary to this statement, STECF (SGMOS 10-06) clearly concludes that spawning in February/March only occurs in Subdivision 22 and that the closure of Subdivision 24 will have no obvious benefits for the cod stock.

The BSAC shares Commissioner Vella’s view concerning the importance of science, and therefore concludes that closures to protect spawners should only be applied if there is a scientific recommendation to do so. There is no such scientific recommendation for Subdivision 24.

The BSAC is convinced that the closure of Subdivision 24 will have an effect which is contrary to the objective of protecting the Western cod stock. If vessels in this important cod area are prevented from fishing during their most profitable period, they will very likely allocate their effort – once the closure is lifted on April 1<sup>st</sup> – to the area where the value per unit effort is the highest – i.e. Subdivision 22. If, on the other hand, they are allowed to fish in Subdivision 24 during the spawning closure in Subdivision 22, they are likely to exhaust their TAC by the beginning of April and will leave the area to take part in other fisheries – as they traditionally do. At the same time, those North Sea vessels which traditionally fish in the Western Baltic during the first quarter of the year can still do so, since it is of little consequence to them whether they fish in Subdivision 22 or 24. In conclusion, repealing of the closure in Subdivision 24 will most probably lead to a further reduction in fishing pressure on cod in Subdivision 22.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/vella/announcements/statement-press-conference-agrifish-baltic-fishing-opportunities-commissioner-karmenu-vella\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/vella/announcements/statement-press-conference-agrifish-baltic-fishing-opportunities-commissioner-karmenu-vella_en)

Also in his press release Commissioner Vella recognized "...the need to make it easier for local fishing communities to adjust to these sizable cuts, by taking their socio-economic effects into account..." However, the closure of all demersal fishing activities in an area of such crucial importance to the small-scale fishery stands out as being in direct contrast to taking socio-economic effects into account.

It is primarily the small-scale fleet that will be affected by the closure, and small boats are not well suited for fishing far away from ports in the Baltic during February and March. Weather conditions can get pretty tough for such vessels.

Moreover, the BSAC would like to point to the Commissioner's principle of sticking to the science, as well as to STECF's assessment that spawning only occurs at depths greater than 20 metres. The BSAC therefore suggests that the prohibition of fishing in Subdivision 22 from 15<sup>th</sup> February to 31<sup>st</sup> March only apply to activities at depths greater than the 20 metre depth contour. In this way, the small-scale fishery can continue its fishery for flatfish species and the financially very important spring fishery for lumpsucker.

The BSAC urges you to reconsider the closures in the light of the issues presented above and recommends in the strongest possible way that Member States and the Commission address and agree at the December Council on these two points<sup>2</sup>:

1. To repeal the closure of SD 24. The closure is not supported by scientific advice and there is no spawning in SD 24. Moreover, this closure will be counter-productive because it will lead to increased fishing pressure in SD 22 during the rest of the year.
2. With respect to SD 22 to limit the ban on fishing in waters deeper than 20 metres where spawning actually takes place.

Kind regards,



Reine Johansson  
Chair of the BSAC Executive Committee

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<sup>2</sup> Attached to this letter in Appendix is a minority statement from three organisations from the Other Interest Group of the BSAC.

## Appendix

Minority statement from Coalition Clean Baltic, the Fisheries Secretariat and the World Wildlife Fund:

We consider the new spawning closure for western Baltic cod relevant in principle, but we see problems with the closure's breadth and timing as a full moratorium on all commercial fishing activity. Passive gear fishers, by the nature of their gear types, have substantially less impact on spawning cod than active gears. These fishers are limited in their mobility to exploit alternative fisheries beyond the closure area, specifically the financially important fisheries for flatfish and lumpsuckers. We propose derogations for low impact passive gears in this closure.

Closures intended to protect spawning cod should occur when cod are spawning. Spawning in SD 24 does not occur at the proposed time of the new closure but in the summer months where a closure already exists. In addition, we must underline that a temporary closure, without accompanying TAC reductions in line with scientific advice for a stock below precautionary biomass levels, will have a limited effect on the recovery of western Baltic cod.