

BSAC Executive Committee

16th May 2024 9:00-16:00 CEST

Axelborg, Axeltorv 3, 1609 Copenhagen V, Denmark, in person only

Report

1. Welcome by the BSAC ExCom Chair Jarek Zielinski

a. Apologies, quorum, AOB, and adoption of the agenda

Jarek Zieliński, the ExCom Chair welcomed the newly appointed Executive Committee. He also welcomed the observers from the European Commission and Member States. There was a quorum for the meeting.

The Executive Secretary presented the agenda.

The agenda was adopted.

Under AOB was noted a point by the Secretariat on the postponed release of ICES advice on herring in SDs 30 and 31.

b. Adoption of the [report from the last ExCom meeting](#) (24th January 2024) and review of the action items

The Executive Secretary informed that comments to the report had been provided by a representative of German small-scale fishers, as well as representatives of the Commission and the Danish Ministry. **The Executive Secretary** presented the past action items and their current status. Progress was noted with respect to most actions.

The ExCom adopted the report of the ExCom and the action points from 24th January 2024. The report was uploaded to the BSAC website.

c. Two ExCom members to check the minutes

Teija Aho (Swedish Fishermen PO) and Florian Stein (German Angling Association) agreed to check the minutes.

2. From the Secretariat

a. Brief status on expenditure and admin. for 2024-2025

The Executive Secretary presented brief status on expenditures from 1st April 2024 until 30th April 2024 (4.4% budget consumption). He informed that the European Commission had not yet officially approved the grant application from the BSAC and the BSAC is running on money from members payments, member states payments and reserve. The BSAC will get the money once the internal Commission's procedure is finalised.

The ExCom took note.

b. Presentation of draft annual BSAC report, final report for DG Mare and draft financial statement for 2023-2024

The Executive Secretary informed that the annual BSAC report and the financial statement had already been validated by the General Assembly. The BSAC report presents the work done in the 18th year of operation of the BSAC.

He presented the financial statement for 2023-23. He informed that 82% of the budget had been spent last year. The expenditures had been approved by the auditor and after adoption by General Assembly, these documents will be sent to the Commission before the end of the month in order to claim the final payment of the grant.

The ExCom Chair thanked the Lithuanian and Polish BALTFISH Presidencies for cooperation. He looked forward to cooperating with the German administration during their BALTFISH Presidency.

The ExCom took note of the Annual Report and Financial Statement.

c. Draft work programme and draft estimated operating budget 2024-2025

The Executive Secretary informed that both the Work Programme and the draft estimated operating budget for 2024-2025 had been validated by the General Assembly on 16th May. He reminded that the ExCom had already approved the work programme and the draft budget in January 2024. These documents were sent to the Commission to apply for the new grant money.

The ExCom took note.

3. Renewal of the Executive Secretary approval by Executive Committee

The ExCom Chair recalled the provisions of the Rules of Procedure related to the Executive Secretary. The Executive Secretary is appointed by the Executive Committee to lead the Secretariat, with the annual approval of the Executive Committee, in the first instance for three years, and does not have a vote. Guillaume Carruel has been approved in the first instance for 3 years in May 2022. But since the Executive Committee has been reappointed this year and the Chairs have aligned their mandates, the ExCom Chair has proposed to renew the approval this year already to align with the renewal of the ExCom.

The Executive Secretary stated that during the last 2 years in this position he had learned a lot about functioning of the Secretariat and had focused on ensuring smooth functioning of the BSAC. His duties included administrative tasks and accounting, organising meetings, inviting speakers, drafting recommendations and cooperating with the Commission, BALTFISH, HELCOM, as well as other ACs, but above all, with the members. He asked for feedback from the members to further improve the functioning of the Secretariat.

The ExCom Chair expressed satisfaction with the performance of the Executive Secretary and recommended to extend his contract.

The EBM WG Chair fully endorsed the prolongation of the contract of Executive Secretary. He commented that the number of recommendations and therefore the workload in 2023-24 had been extreme. In his view, the number of recommendations should be kept at a reasonable level. He appealed to the members to reply to the calls for input and opinions sent by the Secretariat.

Another representative of the OIG praised the work done by the Executive Secretary in preparing recommendations and meetings.

The ExCom renewed the approval of the Executive Secretary for a new mandate of one year.

4. Appointment of the Working Group Chairs for 2024-2027

The ExCom Chair gave a brief introduction: according to the Rules of Procedure, the Chair of each Working Group is appointed by the Executive Committee for a renewable term of 3 years, but not for more than 3 terms. All current incumbents have expressed their interest to continue and can be reappointed for another term of office.

Teija Aho, Chair of the Demersal Working Group informed that under her chairmanship the Demersal WG will focus on the fishing opportunities, management of seals and cormorants, species interactions and climate changes affecting the Baltic, selectivity and technical measures. She noted increased attendance in the meetings, but less active participation. She appealed to the members to be more active and take part in the discussions.

Lise Laustsen, Chair of the Pelagic Working Group thanked the BSAC members for their support and trust in the last two years. She presented the upcoming work under the Pelagic WG and encouraged the members to consider their role in the WG. She underlined that the quality of the recommendations depends on the input from BSAC members. She expressed the hope that the BSAC members would show more commitment, propose interesting topics, and engage more in the discussions.

Nils Höglund, Chair of the Ecosystem Based Management Working Group stated that he was very happy to have been working as Working Group Chair, and was ready to continue for one more term of office. He underlined that the input from members on crucial topics is essential to make things better. His intention is to bring all members into discussion.

The ExCom appointed Teija Aho as Chair of the Demersal Working Group for the next three years.

The ExCom appointed Lise Laustsen as Chair of the Pelagic Working Group for the next three years.

The ExCom appointed Nils Höglund as Chair of the EBM Working Group for the next three years.

5. Discussion on the Commission's planned evaluation of the CFP

The ExCom Chair informed that recently, the Commissioner had announced an evaluation of the CFP.

The Executive Secretary referred to the meeting of DG Mare and the Advisory Council held on 7th May 2024 on the CFP evaluation¹. The representatives of DG Mare explained that the Commission is committed to the “evaluation first” principle, to make sure any policy decision takes account of lessons learned from the past. There are 5 evaluation criteria to help with the assessment of the CFP over the last 10 years: effectiveness to meet objectives, efficiency - cost effectiveness and cost benefits, relevance with current and emerging needs, coherence within the regulation and externally with other EU policies, EU

¹ See BSAC report from the meeting [External Meetings - Baltic Sea Advisory Council \(bsac.dk\)](https://www.bsac.dk)

added value and specific results that could not be achieved by MS alone. A study will support the evaluation and will be launched before summer 2024 and will include a stakeholder consultation that will take place before December 2024. The evaluation will be finalised before summer 2025 along with the Commission Staff Working Document. The document will feed into the decisions of the next Commission on the next step (revision or not). The Commission is planning to come to each AC to have a more targeted discussion after the summer.

A small-scale fisheries representative asked whether there is a downward trend in the number of employees at DG Mare.

The representative of DG Mare replied that DG Mare is a small team and there is no indication that it will be further decreased. He noted that any reductions or increase in the staff numbers are driven by political priorities.

A fisheries representative from Denmark thanked the Commission for launching an evaluation of the CFP which may lead to a possible revision. He underlined that this is a positive step, and Danish fishers look forward to engaging in discussions.

The EBM WG Chair underlined that the BSAC should be ready to establish a Focus Group to work on the CFP evaluation.

A fisheries representative from Germany underlined that, taking into account the current situation in the Baltic, the input from science to clarify the state of the resources is needed before developing any future policy concepts.

A fisheries representative from Poland reiterated his request from the previous ExCom meeting held in January 2024, addressed to the Commission, to provide full information on the requests submitted to ICES in the last years. He noted that the advice provided by ICES in reply to the Commission requests had not contributed to improving the state of the resources. Therefore, it would be good to know what the Commission had asked for, in order to verify the quality of these questions. He underlined that the BSAC members should take an active part in formulating the requests to ICES, as these requests result in an advice which has direct consequences on the fisheries management. He pointed to some essential issues which are not included by ICES in the advice, such as species interrelations and which should be part of the Commission's questions addressed to ICES.

A fisheries representative from Denmark stated that scientific advice is based on a political agreement. In requesting ICES advice, the Commission is restricted by legal obligations towards the existing legislation. He agreed that in reply to the requests, the ICES advice should give alternatives, so there would be more freedom of negotiations in setting the fishing opportunities. He underlined that the discussion on requests should be part of the discussions on the revision of the CFP.

The representative of DG Mare stated that recurrent requests follow the general principles of the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Commission and ICES, and are published on the ICES webpage². This is the framework agreed with ICES for advice.

The Executive Secretary referred to the BSAC White Paper published in 2021 and stated that this file could be re-opened during the discussions on the CFP evaluation.

² https://www.ices.dk/about-ICES/Documents/Cooperation%20agreements/EU/2023_Grant_DGMARE-ICES_web.pdf

The ExCom took note.

6. Presentation of reports on the future of the fishery

a. In Denmark, Peder Andersen -Copenhagen University- and Poul Degnbol *[Report in Danish](#), [Unofficial summary translation in English](#)*

Poul Degnbol and Peder Andersen, formal members of the Fisheries Commission presented the final report of the Danish Commission³.

Poul Degnbol stated that in December 2021 the Danish Parliament decided to establish an expert committee for fisheries (Fisheries Commission) to develop proposals for addressing the structural, economic, and environmental challenges of fisheries post-Brexit. It was a technical commission and the members came mainly from research environment, and were not directly involved in fisheries decisions today. The terms of reference included: providing recommendations on how the Danish fishing industry can develop after Brexit based on the following objectives: maximize socio-economic benefits of fishing within environmental limits; minimise impact on ecosystems and climate. Two specific questions were added: on coastal fishers scheme and a possible prohibition of bottom trawls in the Belt Sea. The final report was published in December 2023. The English summary⁴ does not contain all sub-recommendations. The institutional recommendations included a comprehensive reform of CFP and other EU rules and establishment of a Danish Council of the Sea. The Fisheries Commission recommended that Denmark develops a negotiation proposal ahead of a future reform of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy. A reform of the EU's fisheries policy is necessary to grant fishers greater flexibility in organising fishing activities, including gear selection, to ensure the best environmental and economic outcomes. The report includes also recommendations aimed at achieving maximum societal benefits, recommendations for local communities and development, recommendations on the improved marine environment, nature and fisheries regulation, recommendations for climate transition, recommendations for the coastal fishing scheme and recommendations on trawl-free zone in the Belt Sea. This last recommendation refers to a very hot issue in Denmark, debated due to strong political pressure.

A fisheries representative from Germany asked whether the proposal for the fisheries sector to make contributions to financing fishery-specific services, such as biological advice, had been agreed with the sector. In his view, biological advice and fisheries control should be paid from taxes as there are issues of general interest.

Peder Andersen replied that biological advice and fisheries control are closely linked to fisheries and as such should be paid by the fishing sector. Therefore, the Fisheries Commission recommended introducing user fees for certain aspects of biological advice and fisheries control like other industries which contribute to a significant extent to public expenses which are closely linked to services for the industries.

A representative of the OIG congratulated the Danish Commission for good work. He asked whether the Danish Commission had recommended maximising socio-economic

³ [Past Meetings - Baltic Sea Advisory Council \(bsac.dk\)](#)

⁴ [Unofficial translation of the summary \(pages 9-21\) of the report of the Danish Fisheries Commission 2022-2023 — Aalborg Universitets forskningsportal \(aau.dk\)](#)

benefits including recreational benefits or just maximising profits. In his view the recommendations aim at renationalising fisheries.

Peder Andersen replied that the Danish Commission had taken into account that the CFP is the background of all recommendations. The very first recommendation is that the Danish government and Danish fishers should come up with ideas ahead of the reform of the CFP. Such reform is necessary to grant fishers greater flexibility in organising fishing activities, including gear selection, to ensure the best environmental and economic outcomes. He referred to the terms of reference (ToR) and the need to maximise socio-economic benefits of fishing within environmental limits and minimise impact on ecosystems and climate. Social benefits include all benefits to human well-being, including the value of the sea for recreation. However, the ToR puts strong focus on economic aspects of fisheries, which operate under a set of restrictions. The Commission had to face difficult challenge of the trade-offs.

Poul Degnbol added that the report recommends stronger emphasis on common fish resource in the EU, but less interference in detail. Fishers should take more responsibility, but the requirements must be set at European level. The report does not recommend any nationalisation scheme.

The ExCom Vice-Chair asked whether any benefits for recreational fishing had been included in the report.

Poul Degnbol answered that recreational fisheries had not been part of the ToR. He underlined that especially in the Baltic, recreational fishing is part of societal benefits and should be taken care of. **Peder Andersen** underlined that more empirical evince is needed in this regard.

A fisheries representative from Denmark underlined that the report contains a vision, and is a good starting point. However, from the Danish fishers' point of view, the underlying problem is the current situation in the Baltic. Scientific advice had not been the optimal way to manage the resources, as it failed to grasp what is going on in the Baltic, leading to the present situation. The situation in Baltic will not change depending on who pays. An optimal way to manage the resources needs to be found.

Peder Andersen underlined that it is important that political decisions to improve profit also includes political decisions of resource taxation– and such decisions need to be taken in advance before an increase in profit is capitalized.

A representative of German anglers referred to the Danish angling strategy that covers the benefits of recreational fishing, which are not included in the report.

A small-scale representative from Denmark stated that Article 17 of the Basic Regulation⁵ is not implemented in Denmark. In his view, the small-scale fishers pay the taxes and should not pay for anything else. As to the recreational fishing, it brings no benefits for consumers.

⁵ Article 17 of the Basic Regulation (EU Regulation 1380/2013) requires that Member States allocate fishing opportunities using “**objective and transparent criteria, including those of an environmental, social and economic nature**”, and calls on Member States “**to endeavour to provide incentives to fishing vessels deploying selective fishing gear or using fishing techniques with reduced environmental impact.**”

Poul Degnbol stated that recommendations regarding payments for public services and for the usage rights to the common resources are more relevant to commercial fisheries and less so to small scale fisheries. The extent which should be covered by small-scale fishers is debatable.

Peder Andersen underlined that conflicts could be reduced by providing clear information on what is going on.

A small-scale representative from Germany was of the opinion that the CFP should not be paid for, as it had not proved to be an effective policy.

The ExCom Chair thanked Poul Degnbol and Peder Andersen for their presentation.

b. In Germany, Bernd Söntgerath – BMEL

[Report in German with English summary](#)

Bernd Söntgerath presented the report of the German Commission on the Future of the Baltic Sea Fisheries, established in spring 2022. The Commission is tasked with developing in a participatory process a vision for the future of the German Baltic Sea fisheries. It is also tasked with proposing concrete measures whose implementation will contribute to achieve this vision in the best possible way. Bernd Söntgerath referred to the difficult situation in German coastal fisheries, caused by decreasing fishing opportunities, increasing costs and competition for space at sea. He also referred to recreational fisheries, increasingly integrated in fisheries management.

The future of the Baltic Sea fisheries should occur in a sound Baltic Sea ecosystem in which the fisheries sector plays an active role achieving and maintaining such an ecosystem status. In order to secure a future for fishing businesses, particularly given the currently limited fishing opportunities, it is also important to identify and establish new alternative sources of income in the maritime sector, also outside fishing.

The final report produced by the Commission included a vision for the future of German Baltic fisheries, in a time horizon of 30 years: “Sustainable commercial fisheries as well as recreational fisheries are – as a part of the coastline – socially recognised user groups of a healthy ecosystem in the Baltic Sea and are part of a knowledge-based, transparent and efficient management system that pursues the ecosystem approach”

To implement the vision for the future of the German Baltic Sea fisheries, the Commission recommends the fulfilment of a 9-point action plan, including measures for fisheries management and marine nature conservation with the aim of harmonising fisheries and marine nature conservation better than before. The 9-point action plan is based on a large number of individual measures, some of them very specific, which the commission has compiled in the course of its work, not least through a workshop with young fishers. Attracting young people to the profession of fishermen / -women – one of the main issues. The Commission ended its work in December 2023. A second National Commission on the Future of German Fisheries was established in March 2024, with a much broader context. The Commission will focus on North Sea and Baltic fisheries as well as recreational fishing. Substantial funding will be available from the Wind-energy-at sea-act in 2024 for fisheries component, to support sustainability.

A representative of the OIG stated that the Danish and German reports put a lot of pressure on other Member States to start discussing the future of fisheries and produce

similar reports. He hoped that the discussion on the future of fisheries will also take place in the BSAC. He asked whether the German Commission had also concluded that there is a need to change the EU legislation or focused more on the national layers.

Bernd Söntgerath stated that decisions on whether problems should be dealt with at the EU or national level need to be taken on a case-by-case level.

A fisheries representative from Denmark underlined that both the Danish and German reports are trying to solve the problems caused by the fisheries management and not by fishers and aim at returning to the state of the resources from the past. He underlined that cod should not be expected to resurrect in 5-10 years. He pointed out that there are still fishing opportunities in the Baltic, such as for example plaice. However, the present management prevents fishers from fishing the available resources. In the future, fisheries management needs a more realistic, rather than deterministic approach.

Bernd Söntgerath stated that the Commission is fully aware that the situation in the Baltic has changed. The productivity of the stocks has decreased. The Commission had therefore decided to look at different approaches and to make all efforts to maintain the profession.

A small-scale fisheries representative underlined that there is a need to manage fisheries so as not to lose any more resources. We lost cod. We are losing sprat, with the lowest recruitment ever. He referred to high turbot discard rates in trawl fishery targeting plaice. The Baltic fisheries cannot afford to lose more resources and requires a wise approach. In this context, he stated that fishing mortality for several species should be lowered. In this context, he quoted a comment made by the expert panel at the BSRAC seminar on EBM⁶: low F (below F_{MSY}) is an investment for the future, not lost profit! Referring to fleet transformation, he welcomed measures aimed at decarbonisations of the fisheries sector, but pointed out that small-scale fisheries is discriminated by having no access to investment funds from EMFAF. Large vessel segment has access to a larger variety of fish species and to the funding.

A fisheries representative from Sweden expressed the opinion that the construction of offshore wind farms is responsible for degradation of western herring stock in SDs 22-24. He asked whether the money coming from wind energy auctions in Germany will support the fisheries sector in other Baltic countries to compensate substantial losses incurred in western herring fishery.

Bernd Söntgerath did not agree with the opinion that offshore wind farms caused problems with western herring stock.

A fisheries representative from Poland regretted that the Danish and German reports had not referred to the ineffective scientific advice and management. He underlined that enormous money are spent on the advice and the recipients expect a comprehensive reply in return. He stated that it is wrong to attribute the present situation in the Baltic solely to climate change.

Bernd Söntgerath underlined that the German report mentions other impacts on the Baltic ecosystem apart from climate change, such as eutrophication and fisheries.

⁶ BSRAC seminar on ecosystem based management, Gdynia, 25-26 September 2012

<https://www.bsac.dk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/121023-BSRAC-ESM-Seminar-Final-Report.pdf>

A fisheries representative from Estonia asked whether the impact of seals and cormorants on coastal fisheries is included in the German report as these predators need to be managed, otherwise there will be no coastal fishery left in the near future.

Bernd Söntgerath stated that the German Commission is aware of the impact of seals and cormorants. However, handling the problem is a challenge.

The ExCom Chair recalled that the BSAC workshop on predators, held in October 2023 had gathered various data on the impact of seals and cormorants. He informed that a second workshop on predators will be held in the autumn 2024, and will focus on concrete management measures. He expressed the hope for a large representation of scientists, as well as Member States in the second workshop. He found the discussion on the future of the Baltic fisheries in the context of the Danish and German reports also relevant for the BATFISH as well as national administrations.

He stated that more discussions on the reports can also be expected in the framework of the Working Groups.

A representative of the OIG underlined the need to harmonise management measures in border areas, such as Western Pomerania and asked whether the issue was discussed in the German Commission.

Bernd Söntgerath stated that the Commission had focused mostly on German coastal waters in SDs 22-24.

The ExCom Chair thanked Bernd Söntgerath for his presentation.

7. Presentation of the ICES advice on a roadmap for possible conservation measures for central and Gulf of Bothnia herring, Dorleta Garcia, ICES ACOM Vice-Chair

Dorleta Garcia, ICES ACOM Vice-Chair presented the ICES advice on a roadmap for possible conservation measures for central and Gulf of Bothnia herring that was published in March 2023⁷. ICES advises⁸ a number of actions in the short and long term to further investigate the potential drivers of the observed changes in age and size structure and condition of central Baltic and Gulf of Bothnia herring stocks. Over the past years the condition of Bothnian and central Baltic herring has deteriorated, and there are less old and larger herring (i.e. decline in weight-at-age). At the AGRIFISH Council of October 2022 the Commission, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden therefore signed a joint statement expressing their concern about the size and age structure of central Baltic Sea herring and Gulf of Bothnia herring. The Commission committed to request ICES to: (i) conduct scientific analyses of the size and age structure of those stocks, and of the reasons for the observed reduced number of larger-sized herring, and (ii) identify possible measures to address this issue. In order to identify reasons for reduced number of larger-sized herring and explore possible management measures to improve the condition of

⁷ [Past Meetings - Baltic Sea Advisory Council \(bsac.dk\)](#)

⁸ ICES advice on improving age/size structure for central Baltic and Gulf of Bothnia herring.

<https://ices->

[library.figshare.com/articles/report/EU_request_to_establish_a_roadmap_for_possible_conservation_measures_for_central_Baltic_and_Gulf_of_Bothnia_herring/25435741](https://ices-library.figshare.com/articles/report/EU_request_to_establish_a_roadmap_for_possible_conservation_measures_for_central_Baltic_and_Gulf_of_Bothnia_herring/25435741)

these stocks, ICES was requested establish a roadmap for further research needs to feed into potential advice. The roadmap should describe mechanisms for the delivery of data, implementation of a simulation model, or a battery of models, and expertise for six potential evidence needs: demographic and individual size structure in medium term for future scenarios of total fishing mortality, spatial (area) closures, temporal closures, combined spatial (area) and temporal closures, gear modifications, including the selectivity of trawls used to catch herring, as an option to improve the individual size and age structure of herring, the coherence of herring fisheries with the objectives of safeguarding food webs, biodiversity and habitat integrity (as described in the marine strategy framework directive). Dorleta Garcia described the reasons for reduced condition and size of central Baltic and Bothnian herring, among other fishing pressure, food availability, abiotic factors. The weight-at-age of herring stocks in ICES subdivisions 25–29 and 32 excluding the Gulf of Riga and in subdivisions 30 and 31 (Gulf of Bothnia) has declined in the past and has remained low in recent years. The decline in mean weight-at-age in central Baltic herring started in the mid-1980s and lasted over a decade to the late 1990s, whereas the decline in Gulf of Bothnia herring started around 1990 and continued until the mid-2000s (ICES, 2024b). The two stocks show a similar sudden decline in weight-at-age in 2021 followed by a recovery in 2022 for the central Baltic herring and in 2023 in the case of Gulf of Bothnia herring. Furthermore, the SSB of both stocks is currently at low levels, and the fishing mortality has been high (central herring) or increasing (Bothnian herring). This has resulted in a lower proportion of old herring in the populations for both stocks. The reasons for changes in weight-at-age and in age structure are likely to be multifactorial and while several possible causes have been suggested, their relative contributions are yet to be established.

ICES has identified several actions to be accomplished to address the evidence needs. It is not a high priority to explore gear modifications. The use of gear-based technical measures for the size selection of small pelagic species is unlikely to offer an effective means of adjusting the exploitation pattern. ICES has identified several short- and long-term actions. Short term actions include: population simulations with varying F scenario reductions, compilation of high spatial-temporal resolution catch, effort, and biological data to parameterize a spatial-temporal simulation model), coordinated sampling programme on herring genetics to allocate commercial and survey catches to stock components, prey data compilation from national monitoring programmes, analysis of annual changes in weight-at-age and growth. Long term actions include: identifying stock structure in catches and surveys across the Baltic area, spatial-explicit management strategy evaluation, reference points and management strategy evaluation, ecosystem models.

A fisheries representative from Poland disagreed with the conclusions made in the ICES roadmap, quoted by ACOM Vice-Chair, referring to the lack of evidence of the impact of selectivity on small pelagic fish and the fact that selectivity had not been considered as a priority by STECF in improving herring age and size structure⁹. He referred to several

⁹ Advice p. 4: The use of gear-based technical measures for the size selection of small pelagic species is unlikely to offer an effective means of adjusting the exploitation pattern/.../ Thus, unless more results on the role of technical measures

scientific studies, proving huge impact of selectivity on the age, size and gender structure of pelagic fish. According to these research, high mortality of small herring escaping through meshes could have a huge influence of the condition of the pelagic stocks. He also asked whether the competition for food between herring and sprat for copepods has been taken into account, as well as predation of pelagic species on cod eggs and larvae. He regretted that the advice does not take account of selectivity and mortality of small pelagic fish escaping through meshes, that have a substantial influence on the stock dynamics and are well documented in the relevant literature.

Dorleta Garcia referred to the STECF report on technical measures.¹⁰ The experts concluded that the use of gear-based technical measures for the size selection of small pelagic species is unlikely to offer an effective means of adjusting the exploitation pattern. Thus, unless more evidence becomes available, an improvement of the herring size and age structure through selectivity is not considered a priority. She underlined full trust in the opinion expressed by the experts from STECF, who base their knowledge on the best available science and literature. With regard to the competition for food and the condition of fish, she underlined that ICES had done a lot of work to identify the drivers of the decline in the condition of fish. She promised to provide this literature to the BSAC Secretariat after the meeting.

A representative of the OIG asked whether some short-term actions from the roadmap are already on the way.

Dorleta Garcia replied that the short-term actions are either ongoing or could be carried out in the near future. The expertise is generally available. However, long-term actions related to the compilation of special data or evaluating temporal closure will involve a special request from the Commission, as well as dedicated resourcing.

A small-scale fisheries representative referred to the request to further investigate the potential drivers of the observed changes in age and size structure and condition of central Baltic and Gulf of Bothnia herring and underlined that the decline in the condition of other Baltic stocks, among them sprat, cod and plaice indicate that the problems are much wider, and it is a Baltic-wide issue. He asked whether applying a much lower F of 0.2 FMSY could

in pelagic fisheries becomes available, exploration of the impact of gear modifications in the improvement of herring age and size structure is not considered a priority.

¹⁰ Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) – Technical Measures part III (STECF-15-05). 2015. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, EUR 27223 EN, JRC 95832:

<https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC95832/lb-na-27223-en-n.pdf>

The effectiveness of TCMs management tools aimed at regulating or contributing to overall exploitation pattern is predicated that escaping fish survive the process. If escape survival is shown to be low, then the efficacy of TCMs is limited as a management tool and could present a significant source of unaccounted mortality. Several studies have shown that escape mortality for demersal species is relatively low /.../ It is noted that there is a general paucity in the available information. However, studies conducted on small pelagic species have shown low levels of escape survival. Suuronen et al (1993) observed that the survival rate of Baltic herring escaping from the codend has been estimated at 10-15%, and that of fish escaping through a sorting grid at 15-25% (Suuronen et al., 1993) EWG 15-01 consider that the use of gear based technical measures for the size selection of small pelagic species are unlikely to offer an effective means of adjusting the exploitation pattern. This is on the basis that there is some doubt whether many of the fish escaping from trawls through selectivity devices survive. Therefore, the use of size selective gears may simply transfer fishing mortality from the discard fraction to the escapee fraction.

be the most effective measure. He referred to the fact that the allowed mesh sizes for central herring and Bothnian herring differ in the central Baltic and Bothnian Bay. He asked the representative of DG Mare whether the mesh sizes used in pelagic fisheries could be harmonised across the Baltic.

Dorleta Garcia replied that environmental drivers affect the condition of several stocks in the Baltic. She stated that a much lower F could help, but fishing mortality is not the only driver influencing the stock dynamics. It is up to the managers to decide whether to change the technical rules.

The representative of DG Mare stated that any amendment to technical measures could be considered by the Commission following a joint recommendation from BALTFISH.

A fisheries representative from Denmark stated if the lack of growth of fish is caused by starvation, reduction of fishing mortality may have an adverse effect. The decision to change technical measures should be built on knowledge and science. Lowering the fishing mortality by increasing the mesh size in the case of herring may not be beneficial to the stock. He recalled that in the past the BSAC recommended a decrease of the mesh size to lower the mortality of the escapees.

The ExCom Chair took note of the declaration from the Commission of the readiness to consider amendments to technical measures.

A fisheries representative from Sweden underlined that more flexibility should be given to fishers in choosing the mesh sizes in pelagic fisheries. Catching big herring for consumption requires the use of 32 mm mesh, but at the same time, if there is no market for consumption herring, a 16 mm mesh size should be used to get the necessary volume of fish used for other purposes.

A fisheries representative from Germany noted progress made with respect to identifying the potential drivers of the observed changes in age and size structure and condition of herring stocks and expressed the opinion that if there are size at age problems or problems related to the condition of fish, a revision of the stock size reference points and investigation of the carrying capacity of the ecosystem should be considered.

Dorleta Garcia stated that one of the long-term actions in the roadmap includes ecosystem models, that are relevant to address evidence need relating to the advice on the coherence of herring fisheries with the objectives of safeguarding food webs, biodiversity and habitat integrity. She underlined that lot of work is needed in this respect.

The ExCom Chair thanked the ACOM Vice-Chair for her presentation and for taking part in the discussion.

8. Update on the questions to the Commission on the Control Regulation

[Outstanding questions from BSAC members](#)

The Executive Secretary recalled that the BSAC members had asked questions to the Commission on the new Control Regulation before the InterAC meeting in February 2024. Some questions were still pending. He informed that some other ACs have reiterated their interest in holding an in-person workshop with DG Mare the Commission on the new Control Regulation. They had asked the BSAC would like to co-sign the request addressed to the Commission.

A representative of anglers informed that the European Anglers Alliance will contact the Commission regarding the outstanding questions.

A representative of the OIG underlined that the workshop with the Commission on the Control Regulation would certainly be useful provided sufficient time is given to AC interventions and that more than one ACs representative is allowed to take the floor.

The ExCom agreed to join other ACs in calling for a workshop with DG MARE on the Control Regulation.

9. Update on the topic of stakeholder involvement in the Commission's advice requests to ICES and STECF

The Executive Secretary referred to the stakeholder involvement in the Commission's advice requests to ICES and STECF. The topic had stemmed from [the NSAC advice on stakeholder engagement](#) and further discussed at the meeting with the Commission held on [29th February 2024](#)¹¹. **The** NSAC had proposed to start working on draft guidelines for stakeholder engagement for the Commission. Following a request from the ExCom Chair, the Executive Secretary informed other ACs on the BSAC interest to take part in the [guidelines drafting group](#), composed of other ACs secretariats. The document produced by the drafting group will be presented to the ExCom for validation. The Executive Secretary stated that the process of drafting the document might be quite long.

A representative of the OIG underlined that drafting a joint document with other ACs is time-consuming. He expressed the opinion that such guidelines are needed quickly and the advice process should not be politicised, for the benefit of swift replies from ICES to any advice requests. He underlined that requests for advice to ICES and STECF should be published to ensure the transparency of the process.

A fisheries representative from Poland underlined that the BSAC members should have the possibility to know the precise questions asked by the Commission to ICES and STECF. The Memorandum of Understanding does not provide precise questions. He underlined that the advice has direct consequences on the fisheries management and stakeholders expect to get precise answers. He called for more transparency in formulating requests for scientific advice.

The representative of DG Mare stated that the general framework of the annual stock advice is agreed in the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Commission and ICES, and is published on the ICES webpage¹². The process of formulation of non-recurrent advice requests is more complex and the questions are more precise. The annual stock advice does not cover these questions. ICES is asked to provide advice in response to special questions, related to the specific topics where scientific grounds are needed in order to identify proper solutions.

¹¹ [BSAC position for 19th February meeting with the Commission:](#)

- ask the Commission for [more transparency in requesting scientific advice](#). For ex: share draft requests, provide a platform to discuss those
- [recommend that ICES and STECF proactively engage with the BSAC](#) and its members. Stakeholder engagement can bring quantitative and qualitative input of the highest quality possible.
- Based on the respective capacity of the different stakeholders, it is important that the [process is inclusive and ensures balanced representation](#)

¹² https://www.ices.dk/about-ICES/Documents/Cooperation%20agreements/EU/2023_Grant_DGMARE-ICES_web.pdf

A small-scale fisheries representative stated that a BSAC science focus group will be the right forum to tackle this matter of stakeholder engagement in requests for advice.

The ExCom decided to ask the Secretariat to continue working on the draft stakeholder engagement guidelines with other ACs and inform ExCom of further progress.

10. Update on the EFCA report on monitoring and enforcement of the Landing Obligation in the Baltic Sea in 2019-2021

The ExCom Chair informed that the BALTFISH Control Expert Group met on 15th May 2024 to consider the EFCA report on monitoring and enforcement of the Landing Obligation in the Baltic Sea in 2019-2021.

The representative of the Polish BALTFISH Presidency stated that she will inform on the meeting of the BALTFISH Control Expert Working Group during the next virtual coffee meeting.

The Executive Secretary informed that after validation by the Control Expert Group, the report will be adopted by the High-Level Group. Then, it could be made public and discussed in a joint BALTFISH-EFCA-BSAC workshop. This document is also important in the context of the evaluation of the Control Regulation and evaluation of the landing obligation. The Commission had launched an evaluation of the LO with a survey in the previous week. He asked the ExCom members to provide input to the LO evaluation to the survey¹³.

The ExCom decided to ask the ExCom members to provide input (in bullet points) to the Secretariat within 2 weeks after the meeting. The secretariat will prepare a draft paper in due time before the ExCom meeting on 27th June 2024. The ExCom will be asked to validate the BSAC recommendation / reply to the questionnaire.

11. Cooperation with BALTFISH

The representative of the Polish BALTFISH Presidency thanked the ExCom for their warm welcome to her first meeting of the BSAC. She informed that the last meeting under the Polish Presidency will take place on 18th and 19th June 2024 in Gdańsk. A formal invitation will be sent soon.

The representative of the BALTFISH Presidency informed on the BALTFISH work on harbour porpoise bycatch mitigation measures. One of the technical meetings took place on 19th January 2024 and a second meeting on 16th April 2024. Sweden presented information on high bycatch risk areas in Swedish waters, including information on fishing effort in static nets. BALTFISH believes that additional bycatch mitigation measures could be considered in this area. Denmark presented a tool box on mitigation measures, with pros and cons of different deterrent devices. This information is useful for decision-makers when discussing additional measures. The next steps include drafting of the additional joint BALTFISH recommendation for harbour porpoise. It is to be ready before the end of June. She hoped to be able to present more information at the next ExCom meeting.

¹³ A survey for the study supporting the evaluation of the EU landing obligation (open until 30th June):

https://deloitte.nl.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6rP0t9n51RQrm6j

The ExCom Chair looked forward to continuing good cooperation with the upcoming German Presidency.

The Executive Secretary informed that the Commission Delegated Regulation 2024/1296 of 28 February 2024 was published in official Journal.¹⁴ The Regulation includes an exemption from the application of the landing obligation as regards salmon with high survival rates in the Baltic for the period 2024 - 2026. The BSAC was consulted on the joint BALTFISH recommendation in February 2023 and June 2023¹⁵.

The ExCom Chair noted that this is an example that the advice of BALTFISH and BSAC can be taken into account and implemented.

12. Discussion on follow up action on the reply [letter of the Commission on various subject received 15/04/2024](#)

The Executive Secretary presented the follow-up letter to roundtable meeting received from the Commission on 15th April 2024. The letter covers different topics, among others stakeholder engagement in advice requests, analysis of socioeconomic impact of the Commission's fishing opportunities proposals requested by the BSAC, Marine Action Plan, Joint Special Group, eel. In the context of western Baltic herring, the intention of the BSAC to invite the Norwegian authorities to discuss the management of western herring was welcomed by the Commission. However, the Commission underlined that they are solely responsible for negotiating with third countries and that so far, Norway has been reluctant to take further actions for the management of that stock.

The Pelagic WG Chair informed that the Norwegian authorities had been invited to join a BSAC meeting to present their position.

The ExCom took note and decided to pursue the matter.

13. Proposed AC letter on the Fishers of the Future project

The Executive Secretary referred to the Fishers of the Future project, launched by the Commission. It is an EU-wide participatory project that will examine the future role of fishers in society up to 2050. He informed that a survey had been shared with members, with a deadline on 1st March 2024. The first meeting on 19th March 2024 marked the start of a debate on fishers of the future. The final workshop will be held online on 6th June 2024, 13:00 – 17:00. The BSAC WG Chairs expressed concerns regarding the survey content. Some other ACs (NWWAC, LDAC, MAC) had come up with a proposal to draft a joint letter, reporting what are believed to be serious shortcomings of the project work to date. He asked the ExCom to comment the survey and to decide whether the BSAC should co-sign a joint letter.

The ExCom Chair proposed to draft a BSAC letter, focusing on the profiles of Baltic fishers.

¹⁴ [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1296 of 28 February 2024 supplementing Regulation \(EU\) 2016/1139 of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning an exemption from the application of the landing obligation as regards salmon in the Baltic Sea for the period 2024-2026](#)

¹⁵ [Advice & Recommendations - Baltic Sea Advisory Council \(bsac.dk\)](#)

A fisheries representative from Denmark criticised the fact that the project had presented fisheries as an environmental hazard. He welcomed the proposal to draft a BSAC letter addressed to the Commission on the project.

The ExCom Vice-Chair drew attention to the fact that the survey does not mention recreational fishing. He also welcomed the proposal to draft a BSAC letter.

The EBM WG Chair underlined that the key problems faced by fisheries are missing in the survey, such as climate change, collapsing fish stocks, deteriorating state of the sea, massive expansion of windmills etc.

The ExCom took note and decided that the BSAC will not sign the joint letter from all ACs. The Secretariat was asked to draft a BSAC letter to be submitted to the ExCom for written comments and validation before sending to the Commission.

14.AOB

The ExCom Chair informed that BSAC members will be asked by mail whether they are interested in English translation of the key recommendations included in the German and Danish reports on the future of the fisheries.

The Executive Secretary informed on the postponement of the ICES Advice on herring in subdivisions 30 and 31 (Gulf of Bothnia) to mid-September 2024, due to the need to revise the biological reference points for this stock.

The Executive Secretary informed on a fitness check of the EU rules on trade in seal products, launched by the Commission until 7th August 2024¹⁶. He will circulate a link the next day. The fitness check comprised a questionnaire and call for documents.

The ExCom decided to ask the Secretariat to share the survey of the EU rules on trade in seal products with the members. **The ExCom** asked the members to give input by 31st May 2024, in order to potentially prepare a first BSAC reply depending on the answers received.

The ExCom Chair thanked all BSAC members and observers for taking active part in the meeting.

Action items ExCom

Topic	Details	Action
Draft annual BSAC report, final report for DG Mare and draft financial statement for 2023-2024	Adopted	to be sent to the Commission by 31/05/2024
Draft work programme and draft estimated operating budget 2024-2025	Adopted	

¹⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14031-Trade-in-seal-products-fitness-check-of-EU-rules_en.

Renewal of the Executive Secretary approval by Executive Committee	Renewed for a year	
Appointment of the Working Group Chairs for 2024-2027	Appointed for a 3 rd mandate Nils Höglund (EBM WG), and for a 2 nd mandate Teija Aho (Demersal WG) and Lise Laustsen (Pelagic WG)	Secretariat to prepare letter to the elected Chairs and Vice Chairs
Commission's planned evaluation of the CFP	BSAC will start working on this based on the White Paper and when consulted by the Commission	
Presentation of reports on the future of the fishery	Danish and German reports	Secretariat to ask the members whether they would like the reports to be translated into English.
ICES advice on a roadmap for possible conservation measures for central and Gulf of Bothnia herring, Dorleta Garica, ICES ACOM Vice-Chair	Some members asked questions about the advice taking into account or not: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - age, size and gender structure of pelagic fish - the competition for food between herring and sprat for copepods survival rates of escapees from nets 	ICES ACOM Vice Chair was to clarify with the scientists who took part in the advice whether this was taken into account. ICES ACOM Vice Chair already circulated the STECF reference used regarding the estimation of survival rates from escapees from nets
Questions to the Commission on the Control Regulation	EAA informed that they will deal with the Commission regarding the outstanding questions. ExCom decided to join other ACs and ask for a dedicated workshop on the Control Regulation	BSAC secretariat circulated the other ACs letter where BSAC will be mentioned as joining the call for a dedicated workshop on the Control Regulation. Deadline for validation 24/05/2024.
Stakeholder involvement in the Commission's advice requests to ICES and STECF		Secretariat to circulate latest MoU between the Commission and ICES. Secretariat to continue working on Draft stakeholder engagement guidelines with other AC secretariats.
EFCA report on monitoring and enforcement of the Landing Obligation in the Baltic Sea in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report to be shared after Baltfish HLG validation - Commission opened survey 	Secretariat to share the report when available and set up workshop with BALTFISH and

2019-2021	on evaluation of the LO	EFCA Secretariat to share the survey of the Commission and ask members for input by 31/05/2024 in order to prepare a first BSAC reply
Cooperation with BALTFISH	Confirmed the dates of the next BALTFISH meeting on the 18/19 th June	BSAC will be present there and will request a coffee meeting with the upcoming and outgoing Presidencies.
Discussion on follow up action on the reply letter of the Commission on various subject received 15/04/2024	ExCom discussed the invitation of the Norwegian authorities	ExCom agreed that we should try to pursue this.
Proposed AC letter on the Fishers of the Future project	There was a proposition to join an AC letter to explain the issues with this project.	BSAC will not sign the joint letter. Secretariat to draft a BSAC letter to be submitted to ExCom for written comments and validation before sending to the Commission.
AOB: EU Rules on Trade in seal products	Secretariat informed that the Commission opened a consultation on the topic	Secretariat to share the survey of the Commission and ask members for input by 31/05/2024 in order to prepare a first BSAC reply