

## EU Council of Ministers Urged to Take Decisions to Counter Baltic Sea Crisis

*Brussels, 31 August 2020:-* Responding to [the publication of the European Commission's proposal for Baltic Sea fishing limits for 2021](#), NGOs today called on EU Baltic state governments to adopt most of the Commission's proposed measures - and to go a step further by putting a stop to overfishing of Baltic herring [1].

NGOs WWF, Oceana, Seas At Risk, Coalition Clean Baltic and Our Fish welcomed the European Commission's proposal of Baltic fishing limits for 2021, which includes increased food web considerations and an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management, along with additional measures to protect fish populations. However, the proposed fishing limit for Western Baltic herring is a "stinging disappointment": it remains far too high and provides the overfished population with no chance to recover.

In light of the critical status of key stocks and of the poor state of the Baltic Sea ecosystem, NGOs are calling for coordinated and decisive action by all Baltic countries to urgently address this environmental and socio-economic crisis.

"Fishing mortality based on Maximum Sustainable Level (MSY) has finally been recognised by the Commission as a limit and not a target", said Ottilia Thoreson, Director, WWF Baltic Ecoregion Programme. "A sprat TAC proposed at a level lower than the sustainable threshold is a clear signal that the European Commission takes into account wider ecosystem considerations in their decision. In this case setting a lower TAC for this pelagic species would help provide food availability for the endangered Eastern Baltic Cod population which is in shortage. We hope EU fisheries ministers will approve this reasonable proposal which is fully in line with Common Fisheries Policy requirements."

"After several years of bad decisions, there are no easy choices left. We call on EU Member States to save the Baltic Sea and to adopt the necessary reductions in catch limits, as well as the additional measures proposed by the European Commission. Key stocks are in a critical state and the Baltic needs urgent action after decades of negligence. All countries sharing this sea basin must get together and find a solution to the crisis at the Our Baltic conference at the end of September. This must be a real tipping moment to initiate the recovery of the Baltic Sea," said Vera Coelho, Senior Director of Advocacy at Oceana in Europe [2].

Andrea Ripol, Fisheries Policy Officer at Seas At Risk said: "While this year's proposal by the Commission is a promising positive sign for several fish stocks in the Baltic, it is disappointing to see how Western Baltic Herring will continue being overfished in 2021, ignoring for the third year in a row scientific recommendations to close its fishery. Ending overfishing as soon as possible is a first step towards the goal of making the ocean healthy by 2030, as requested by over 100 NGOs in the [Blue Manifesto](#), and was reiterated as a commitment of the EU under the Biodiversity and Farm to Fork Strategies. We call on the Fisheries Council to live up to the challenge, end overfishing for all stocks as required by the Common Fisheries Policy and stop favoring short-term socioeconomic gains over the long-term recovery of the Baltic Sea marine environment".

Nils Høglund, Fisheries Policy Officer at Coalition Clean Baltic, said: “The Commission’s strong proposal shows the urgency of the situation in the Baltic. Unfortunately, even with strong proposals and reduced fishing opportunities this is not enough, as EU member states sadly have a track record of pushing fishing limits upwards. We must refocus on the real prize, of reaching for good environmental status for the ecosystem as a whole, and to stop looking at fish as something we can just harvest without invoking far-reaching impacts. Eastern Baltic cod is a case in point - the fishery is broken and will not show signs of recovery for many years. We cannot accept this spreading to other fish stocks, and the warning call this collapse represents could not possibly be louder”.

Our Fish Programme Director Rebecca Hubbard said: “This year we are pleased to see Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius, who hails from the Baltic region, take a stronger stance in favour of protecting its marine biodiversity. Unfortunately, the proposal to continue overfishing Western Herring still plays to the rich, industrial-scale fleet of the German fishing industry [3], which is a stinging disappointment for this suffering iconic fish population and Baltic Sea health. Overfishing is draining the lifeblood of the ocean, which we need to be in full health now more than ever, in order to mitigate and respond to climate change. Ending overfishing is an urgent and necessary response to the biodiversity and climate crises, and it is now down to EU fisheries ministers to end its devastating impact in the region”.

The EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) requires sustainable exploitation of EU fish stocks by 2020 at the latest, in order to rebuild their populations, and the application of an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management [4]. Member States are also legally-bound to the sustainable exploitation of fish stocks by 2020 under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive [5]. Each year, ICES provides scientific advice for fishing limits in EU seas [6], which the European Commission uses as the basis for its proposal for fishing opportunities. The EU AGRIFISH Council will discuss the Commission proposal and decide on the 2021 Total Allowable Catches (TACs) for Baltic fish stocks at the AGRIFISH Council meeting on 19-20 October.

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**Notes:**

[1] European Commission, 28 August 2020: Fishing opportunities in the Baltic Sea for 2021: improving long-term sustainability of stocks

[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_1522](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1522)

[2] EU Our Baltic Conference, Sunday 27 - Monday 28 September, Palanga, Lithuania

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/events/our-baltic-conference-Palanga-Lithuania\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/events/our-baltic-conference-Palanga-Lithuania_en)

[3] Chapter 8. *Fishy business: How the fishing industry gets first class treatment from the German Government in Tainted love: corporate lobbying and the upcoming German EU Presidency*  
[https://our.fish/publications/fishy-business\\_gets\\_first\\_class\\_treatment\\_from\\_german\\_government/](https://our.fish/publications/fishy-business_gets_first_class_treatment_from_german_government/)

[4] Common Fisheries Policy. Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and the Council on the Common Fisheries Policy.

[5] Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32008L0056&from=EN>

[6] ICES advice for fisheries: <http://ices.dk/advice/Pages/Latest-Advice.aspx>

**OTHER BACKGROUND:**

29 May 2020: Baltic Sea Fish Stocks Remain in Crisis – NGOs Call for Closures of Herring and Cod stocks <https://our.fish/press/baltic-sea-fish-stocks-remain-in-crisis-ngos-call-for-closures-of-herring-and-cod-stocks/>

June 2020: Joint NGO recommendations on Baltic Sea fishing opportunities for 2021  
<https://eu.oceana.org/en/publications/reports/joint-ngo-recommendations-baltic-sea-fishing-opportunities-2021>