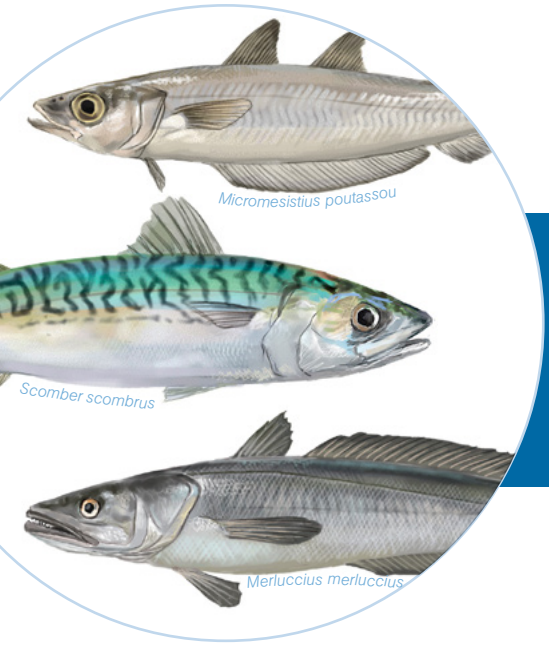

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Landing the blame: overfishing in the Baltic Sea 2016

Uncovering those countries most responsible for setting EU fishing quotas above scientific advice

Fisheries ministers risk damaging our natural resources beyond repair by consistently setting fishing limits above scientific advice. This is our second year running a series of briefings to identify which countries are standing in the way of more fish, profits, and jobs for European citizens.

Food for an additional 89 million EU citizens. An extra €1.6 billion in annual revenue. Over 20,000 new jobs across the continent. Far from being a pipe dream, all of this could be a reality if we paid more attention to one of Europe's most significant natural resources – our seas.[1] If EU waters were properly managed – with damaged fish stocks allowed to return to population levels that could support their maximum sustainable yield (MSY) – we could enjoy their full potential within a generation.[2]

Fishing limits vs. scientific advice

Every year, fisheries ministers have an opportunity to make this a reality when they agree how much fish should be caught in EU waters – the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for each commercial fish stock. Scientific bodies, like the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), provide information about the state of most stocks and recommend maximum catch levels.[3] But for many years, this scientific advice has not been respected.

Earlier this year, our analysis of agreed TACs between 2001 and 2015 concluded that on average 7 out of every 10 TACs were above the limits advised. While the percentage by which TACs were set above advice declined throughout this period (from 37% to 11%), the proportion of TACs set above advice did not.[4]

The reformed Common Fisheries Policy that entered into force in 2014 aims to restore and maintain populations of fish stocks above levels capable to produce MSY. The corresponding exploitation rate is to be achieved by 2015 where possible and by 2020 at the latest for all stocks.[5] Following scientific advice is essential if we are to achieve this goal, end overfishing, and restore fish stocks to healthy levels.

Agreements behind closed doors

The negotiations over TACs at the Fisheries Council are not public, only their outcomes. This lack of transparency means it is not possible to identify those ministers who ignore scientific advice and give priority to opaque short-term interests, risking the health of fish stocks for future generations. This briefing, a continuation of NEF's *Landing the Blame*

series[6] will reveal which member states and ministers are behind decisions that go against the EU public's collective interest. It analyses the outcome of the negotiations and estimates which member states end up with a higher share of stocks fished above scientific advice. The working assumption is that these member states are the main drivers of overfishing either because they are actively pushing for fishing limits to be set above scientific advice or they are failing to prevent it.

Baltic Sea results

In the October 2015 Council, ministers agreed fishing limits for ten Baltic Sea stocks of herring, cod, salmon, plaice, and sprat.[7] Eight of these stocks were set above scientific recommendations with some of the excess TAC going to all eight Baltic fishing nations: Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, and Sweden.

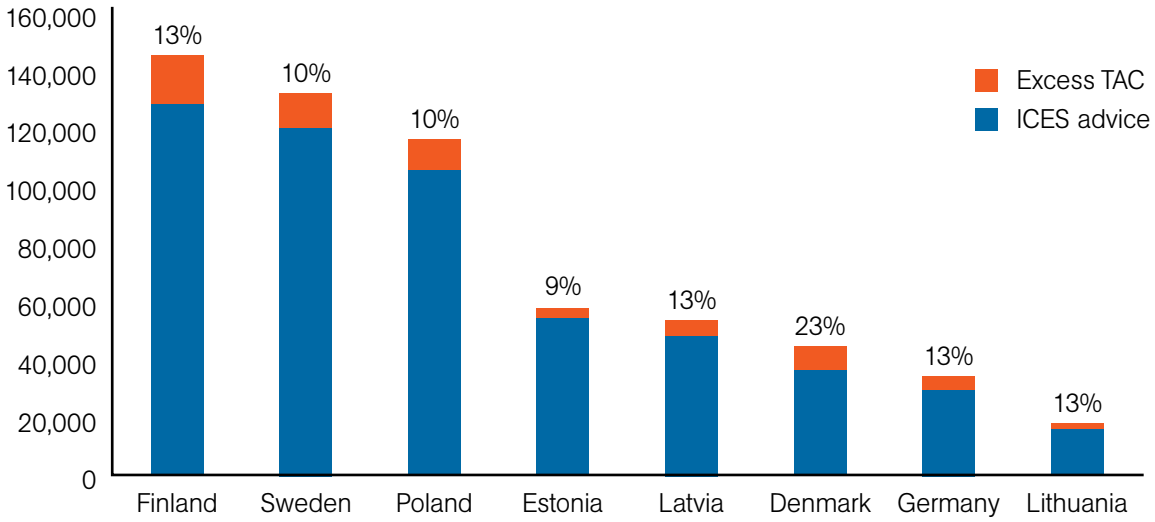
Table 1 show three groups of member states by performance. Denmark, largely due to the decisions reached for the two cod stocks, both with large Danish shares of the quota, tops the league table with 8,535 tonnes of excess TAC. This represents an increase on scientific advice by 23%. Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland follow behind with all four member states holding excess TAC of 13%, despite fishing different stocks. Poland, Sweden, and Estonia hold the lowest amounts of excess TAC as a percentage (10%, 10%, and 9%, respectively).

While Poland and Sweden have a large amount of excess TAC, they are also two of the three largest fishing nations in the Baltic, so this may be expected. Overall for the EU, the excess TACs were set at 12%, showing no improvement from last year.[8]

Table 1. The overfishing league table

Member State	Minister / representative	Excess TAC Tonnes	%
Denmark	Eva Kjer Hansen	8,535	23%
Germany	Robert Kloos	4,112	13%
Latvia	Mr Juris Štālmeistars	6,532	13%
Lithuania	Lina Kujalytė	2,048	13%
Finland	Kimmo Tiilikainen	16,683	13%
Poland	Kazimierz Florian Plocke	11,240	10%
Sweden	Sven-Erik Bucht	12,694	10%
Estonia	Marko Pomerants, Clyde Kull	5,004	9%

Figure 1. Excess TAC by EU member state



Discussion

The excess TAC results do not bear any clear relationship to the size of the overall TAC (Figure 1). Any geographic link is weak, although Denmark and Germany are the two most western member states fishing in the Baltic, reflecting the trend observed in *Landing the Blame: Overfishing in EU Waters 2001–2015.* In contrast to the findings of that report, the TACs that are shared with third countries (here, Russia) had lower amounts of excess TACs (10% vs 22%). The data from this analysis is made available for independent analysis in NEF's *Landing the Blame* downloadable database.

It should be noted that the amount of fish caught is rarely 100% of the agreed quota. For economic and biological reasons fishing may fall under the quota whereas illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing may push fishing pressure above the agreed limit. Rather than analysing fishing pressure, this series of briefings specifically analyses the policy intent of the Council of Ministers.

A lack of transparency and data limitations

A lack of transparency, not just in closed-door Fisheries Council meetings, but also in the provision of data, complicates this analysis. One particularly difficult issue is that as Russia also fishes in the Baltic Sea but is not an EU member state, Russian catch limits must also be compared against ICES advice. In many instances, the EU and Russia come to a joint agreement but these decisions are not published and as such Russian catch limits could only be estimated. Using data compiled from *Landing the Blame: Overfishing in EU Waters 2001–2015*, the Russian share of TACs was calculated by taking an average of the difference between total TAC and EU TAC in years where both were reported.

Changes from the 2016 series

A couple methodological changes made for this briefing differ from last year's report *Landing the Blame: Overfishing in the Baltic Sea*. For one, the results are now reported as excess TAC in tonnes of fish, as before, but also as a percentage. This is to account for the fact that some member states are much larger fishing nations, so the result in tonnage may not reflect what is said in the Council meetings. The quantity of tonnage is still important, as the amount of fishing above advice is the ecological issue at hand.

Another change in this year's series, although not relevant given the Baltic TACs set for 2016, is that the results are only presented as an excess above TAC with no 'net' amount or positive deductions because of TACs set below advice. This is because ICES advice should be interpreted as an upper limit rather than as a target that *should* be reached. These two changes were also applied, and described in more detail, in *Landing the Blame: Overfishing in EU Waters 2001–2015*.

Critical decisions ahead

Fisheries ministers will meet again from 14 to 15 December to agree 2016 fishing limits for the majority of commercial fish stocks in European waters. NEF will keep a close eye on the negotiations and will replicate this analysis to identify which nations are working in the public interest versus those that are willing to continue shooting themselves, the fishing sector and the public in the foot.

Endnotes

1. Carpenter, G & Esteban, A. (2015). *Managing EU fisheries in the public interest*. London: New Economics Foundation. Retrieved from: http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/entry/managing-eu-fisheries-in-the-public-interest
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ANNEX – Baltic TACs compared to scientific advice (tonnes)

Baltic TACs compared to scientific advice				Excess TACs by Member State							
Fish stock (ICES fishing zone)	**Scientific advice (EU share)**	**TAC agreed by Council**	**Excess TAC**	**Denmark**	**Estonia**	**Finland**	**Germany**	**Latvia**	**Lithuania**	**Poland**	**Sweden**
Cod (22–24)	5,239	12,720	7,481	3,265	72	64	1,597	270	175	874	1,163
Cod (25–32)	26,649	41,143	14,494	3,330	324	255	1,325	1,238	816	3,834	3,373
Herring (22–24)	26,274	26,274	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Herring (25–27, 28.2, 29 & 32)	173,262	177,505	4,243	93	477	930	25	118	124	1,057	1,419
Herring (28.1)	30,600	34,915	4,315	0	1,993	0	0	2,322	0	0	0
Herring (30-31)	103,254	120,872	17,618	0	0	14,444	0	0	0	0	3,174
Plaice (22–32)	4,034[e,f]	4,034[f]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Salmon (22–31)[a]	394[c]	432	37	8	1	10	1	5	1	2	10
Salmon (32)[a]	40[b,c]	59[d]	19	0	2	17	0	0	0	0	0
Sprat (22–32)	183,680	202,320	18,640	1,839	2,135	962	1,165	2,579	933	5,473	3,555
Total	**553,426**	**620,274**	**66,848**	**8,535**	**5,004**	**16,683**	**4,112**	**6,532**	**2,048**	**11,240**	**12,694**

[a] Advice and TAC converted to tonnes using a weight of 4.5 kilograms.
[b] The ICES advice is for 0 wild salmon.
[c] Measured as wanted, reported catch.
[d] Recreational catches removed.
[e] Area 21 (North Sea) removed.
[f] Measured in landings.

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Illustrations: Toni Llobet – **www.tonillobet.com** drawings of Blue whiting (*Micromesistius poutassou*), Mackerel (*Scomber scombrus*) and European Hake (*Merluccius merluccius*)