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CCB, FISH and WWF considerations for Priority area 9, project 4: “Baltfish”

The EU strategy for the Baltic Sea (the Strategy), encompassing much more than fishing, represents a possibility to lay the foundation for a change in the current management perspective towards regional, ecosystem-based management. According to the Action Plan, the aim of Priority area 9 is to reinforce sustainability of agriculture, forestry and *fisheries* in the Baltic Sea. Four specific projects have been outlined in order to increase the sustainability of Baltic fisheries, and project number 4 is focused on developing and improving coordination and cooperation between EU Member States in the region.

The proposed regional forum for taking this project forward, currently going under the name Baltfish, may be the vehicle needed for the creation of the alternative management approach outlined above.

The Strategy operates at different levels, and for the Baltfish forum the two most important are most likely the policy level and the implementation level. How they are dealt with will determine whether NGOs and the “grass root level” will be willing to take part in the work with the strategy and its goals for the region. For civil society, it is important to be able to contribute to both policy development and implementation processes.

We support the general ideas for work with the Strategy and the Baltfish forum, but would like to emphasise the importance of participation, openness and transparency. The following are key steps for a regional fisheries management process with high accountability:

Management

- The ecosystem-based management approach needs to be the base of the work within Baltfish.
- Any regional fisheries management structure has to deliver on the overarching objectives and targets of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and the EC Marine Strategy Framework Directive.
- We believe that Baltfish should advocate integrated sea use management.

Rules of procedure

Openness and transparency need to be taken into account throughout the process. We find the HELCOM structure, with equal representation of stakeholders and full transparency, of interest as model. The experience of HELCOM shows that allowing observers and other actors to join the Member States' meetings does by no means have to result in unmanageable meetings. On the contrary, in the HELCOM process, the participation and contributions of observers has also lead to a greater understanding and support of HELCOM plans. The working procedures in HELCOM, i.e. how documents are handled, provide a good example to follow.

- The major part of the biannual meetings should be open to observers under equal representational rules.
- The biannual meetings should be organized with one open and participatory part including government officials as well as other stakeholders (can contain workshops etc) and, if need be, one closed part for MS and authorities/officials. When stakeholders are invited to the high-level meetings, special care should be taken to make this input representative and balanced.
- Observer status should be formalized and Baltfish should give equal status to all observers including fishermen's organisations, scientists, producer organisations, environmental NGOs, anglers, boating organisations, as well as regional/international structures such as ICES, HELCOM and BS RAC.
- Attention should also be given to achieving a geographical representation of stakeholders.
- All agendas and documents should be presented openly according to set principles and time-frames both before and after meetings.
- Create clear guidelines for how and when to give input and comment on the work of Baltfish, as well as the other projects under the Strategy Action Plan.
- Make it clear how all written documents sent to Baltfish will be handled and published.
- The proposed internet-based network forum should also be open to stakeholders participating in the process, but could have a restricted section for administrations only.

CCB, FISH and WWF look forward to future cooperation in the BaltFish forum!