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TAC setting for Baltic salmon 2012 and the current situation for returning salmon spawners in the Baltic Sea region

Decline in Baltic salmon returning spawners also in 2011 season

Coalition Clean Baltic described last year's situation for Baltic salmon as a dramatic year because of the declining numbers of returning spawners. Many referred to the hard winter being part of the explanation but we can now see the same trend this year. It is hard to explain the situation only as a natural variation, and there is an acute need to respond to the situation. The TAC discussions in the Council this fall must reflect this. The Commission proposal for 2012 fishing opportunities and ICES advice should be followed, and this is especially evident this year. ICES has advised to reduce fishing to quota of 54 000 individuals in the main basin (120 000 last year). The Commission has suggested to follow the ICES advice and CCB supports this.

Of the total Baltic smolt production of roughly 2,5 million smolts, 91 % stems from the Bothnian Bay and 75 % from the two biggest rivers Tornio river and Kalix river. Tornio river alone produces 47 % of the total smolt production in the Baltic Sea and a reduction in smolt production here has a very big impact. The numbers of returning salmon spawners in 2011 (not yet final) give an indication that the amount of returning spawners is still far from 2009 numbers.

Returning salmon spawners 2011 season

(final numbers and up to 2011-09-13 for comparison)

Year	2009 (final)	2010 (final)	2010 (sept 2010)	2011 (2011-09-13)
Byske	1976	1734	1702	989
Kalix	6173	3475	3429	2308
Piteå, Sikfors	1048	521	491	571
Åby	180	82	70	58
Swe.Torneälv	33 000	16 211	16 211	20 311
Rickleån	--	47	44	13
Simojoki (Fin)	1150	721	721	874

CCB proposals

The numbers of returning salmon spawners show a strong negative trend in several important rivers and we urge Baltic region governments to apply a precautionary approach to salmon fisheries for 2012. A lower recruitment in the years to follow is evident because of these negative trends.

There is a large unknown and unregulated removal of salmon from the sea every year, and also substantial discarding. ICES estimates show that the mode values in number of salmon are 32 000 fish discarded and 107 000 fish unreported. ICES also estimates that around 200 000 juvenile and adult fish are by-caught in the pelagic fishery, unintentionally by unaware fishermen. This removal, larger than the TAC means that the bigger share of removal is unregulated and outside control.

The views expressed above and the ICES appraisal there is a large unknown removal or natural mortality of salmon in the Baltic Sea call for that the TAC must be lowered to match the Commission proposal of 53 000 in the main basin and 11 000 in the Gulf of Finland in 2012.

Regardless if there is a large Polish misreporting of salmon or not, the data shows a dramatic decline in the stock. If misreporting is not present in the scale that ICES reports then the natural mortality must be even higher than estimated to explain the drop in fish abundance. The fact remains, the fish is gone and the TAC must be heavily reduced.

- A) The TAC for 2012 must be 53 000 salmon in the main basin and no more than 11 000 salmon in the Gulf of Finland
- B) The misreporting of catches and illegal fishing must be halted as far as practically feasible
- C) Post-smolt¹ survival is at such a low level (only about 10% survival) that immediate measures are called for to prevent decrease in all weak salmon populations.
- D) The TAC regulation should include technical rules for hook size and hook type in the longline fishery
- E) Inadequate data and too many unknown removals of salmon is a major obstacle to evaluate the current problems and to the possible improvements of the management.

¹ Juvenile salmon that migrate out to the sea. Average size 13-25 cm and smolt age is normally between 1-3 years