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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations

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Subject:	Proposal for a COUNCIL REGULATION fixing the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks applicable in the Baltic Sea for 2026 and amending Regulation (EU) 2025/202 as regards certain fishing opportunities in other waters - Comments from Finland, Latvia and Lithuania
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Delegations will find attached comments from Finland, Latvia and Lithuania on the abovementioned proposal.

Written comments on the Commission's proposal for TACs in the Baltic Sea for 2026

General comments

The Commission's proposal is still being scrutinized in Finland and official positions on the proposal can only be given in early October. Preliminary views are however given below.

The scientific advice, the MSY objective and the setting of TAC:s in accordance with the Baltic multiannual plan and where relevant its Article 5 forms the basis for the Finnish positions.

Specific comments

The herring in the Gulf of Bothnia is of large importance since Finland is the major shareholder with 82 % of the TAC. Finland cannot agree with the Commission proposal for a 62 % cut in the TAC based on Article 4.6. The Council has already rejected the Commission's interpretation of the five percent rule and instead applied the ICES headline advice and a TAC within its Fmsy ranges and remedial measures based on Article 5. The same must be done for the 2026 fishing opportunities to avoid unjustified socio-economic losses. The use of Article 4.6 has led to unacceptable large variations in the TAC proposals, which causes uncertainty and negatively affects the investment conditions.

Since the herring in the Gulf of Bothnia has shown increased size and much better condition and there have been ample herring catches in the coastal areas, there is justification for setting the TAC based on the Fmsy range value of 62 684 tons.

For the Main Basin herring stock and for the sprat stock the appropriate response is also to apply the ICES headline advice and a TAC within Fmsy ranges. The Commission's proposal for using Article 4.4 as a basis for the setting of the TAC is not appropriate, since the main rule is to use the Fmsy ranges, which are available.

On the salmon stocks for the two management areas Finland is of the view that the scientific advice by ICES and the Commission proposals should be followed. The Main Basin salmon TAC figure should however be increased with 50 salmon to correct a calculation error.

Finland is satisfied over the proposed continuation of directed salmon fishing north of 59.30 degrees in sub-divisions 29N, 30 and 31. ICES advises that this can be undertaken in May to August, hence the Commission proposal to restrict it to June – August in SD 29N is not justified or acceptable.

Finland is in favour of a by-catch TAC for both cod stocks. The by-catch TAC:s should however be set at a sufficient level so that they do not create serious choke situations for Member State. Cod by-catches are in any case not the reason for the worrying state of the cod stocks. Setting the eastern cod TAC based on catches in 2024, as proposed by the Commission, would give Finland 3 tons of cod in the eastern area. That would create major risks of choking the pelagic trawling. Possibilities for quota exchanges would simultaneously be eliminated, since quotas would be limited for all Member States. Therefore, a rollover bycatch TAC needs to be adopted.

Finland is furthermore in favour of the ICES advice concerning the western herring stock.

Based on these and more detailed official positions Finland is together with its partners in BALTFISH working for a common position concerning all the Baltic TAC:s and other effective management measures.

Latvia's written commentaries on the Proposal for a COUNCIL REGULATION fixing the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks applicable in the Baltic Sea for 2026 and amending Regulation (EU)2025/202, as regards certain fishing opportunities in other waters

Latvia thanks the Commission for the proposal and its timely presentation, but at this stage we could not support most of Commissions' suggested TAC levels and draft Regulation in general, therefore we have the following very important commentaries to make.

General commentaries:

- When setting of TACs for fish stocks, Commission should consider the best allowable values given by ICES advice, which are based on a carefully developed and clear methodology and already ensure strict adherence to the precautionary principle. The Commission should not further manipulate or freely change the advice provided by science, as well as double the precautionary approach, and at the same time use the contradictory reference to the legal basis of its proposals in the understanding of the Member States, without considering all the provisions of the relevant legal act (Baltic Sea MAP) in their entirety.
- For stocks whose condition is improving with the arrival of new, more productive year classes, including herring in the Central Baltic Sea, and especially sprat, only one type of argument related to environmental aspects should not be taken into account. The issue should be viewed comprehensively, paying special attention to the socio-economic circumstances of the impact of the decisions taken, which is one of the cornerstones of the Common Fisheries Policy. These decisions should not be destructive to the industry, moreover, according to scientific assessment, they only have a small impact on stock and spawning stock biomass changes. [REDACTED]

- Latvia cannot accept and strongly opposes the practice applied by the Commission, which is inconsistent with the real situation of fish stocks and fishing and at the same time discredits the carefully conducted independent work of international scientific institution, as a result of which scientific recommendations on permissible fishing opportunities have been clearly defined and should be provided for use in fisheries.

- Considering all the circumstances, Latvia would like to emphasize that the poor ecological situation in the Baltic Sea today is very little influenced by EU fishermen, [REDACTED]

Latvia's commentaries regarding specific stocks.

Sprat

Latvia strongly insists on the necessity to significantly increase fishing opportunities for the sprat stock in 2026, given that ICES advice allows an increase of at least 22%, which in accordance with the scientific advice is within the level of Sustainable Yield (F_{MSY}). The spawning stock biomass of this stock is in a safe situation; science does not indicate even a slight risk that negative changes could occur if the recommended fishing opportunities are applied. A new, much more productive generation is coming in the sprat fishery, which also has been confirmed by this year's stock assessment data and catch analysis conducted by Latvian scientists in our waters.

Herring in the Central Baltic Sea

Latvia believes that there is a clear scientific justification for an adequate increase in fishing opportunities for this stock in 2026, given that ICES advice allows an increase of up to 39%, which according to scientific advice is at the level of Sustainable Yield (F_{MSY}). Latvia sees no reason for dismissing scientific advice and seeking additional precautionary factors and arguments, as the Commission does in its proposal.

Herring in the Gulf of Riga

Latvia believes that a smaller reduction would be appropriate for this herring stock, which is the pelagic stock in the best condition in the entire Baltic Sea. TAC could be set between the figure proposed in the Commission's proposal and the highest point of the fishing opportunities framework provided by ICES. The stock would still remain in the best condition of all herring stocks, with all its positive indicators and positive stock development dynamics. Applying a less radical reduction (for example, 12% instead of 17%) the stock would continue to increase the spawning stock biomass, which is already in a high state. This is particularly important for the making a balance in the small pelagic fishing segment, in case when the Commission proposal is extremely restrictive compared to scientific advice for other available pelagic stocks (Central Baltic herring, sprat).

Eastern Baltic cod (and Western Baltic cod)

Latvia does not support the Commission's proposal to further reduce the already too low by-catch volume for these stocks, making it critical, because it will destruct and create a devastating choke species effect in coastal fisheries. We predict that such further reduced by-catch figure will be several times less than what is necessary to cover the inevitable by-catch of cod in mixed coastal fisheries with various species. In addition, the proposed tiny by-catch volume completely prevents Latvia from

initiating any allowable flounder fishing beyond the coastal waters. This additionally creates the discriminatory conditions for Latvia by blocking the fishing opportunities for species allowed to be fished. Latvia insists that the previous by-catch quota volume and regulatory conditions for cod stocks must be maintained. Latvia cannot support any further reduction in the by-catch quota for cod and this is a very important issue for Latvia. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Salmon in the Baltic Sea

Latvia can agree to the Commission's proposal on the reduced by-catch quota, as Latvia can fit into it with the existing, unavoidable by-catch volume. However, Latvia would like to maintain the previous rules regarding the possibilities of salmon obtaining in recreational fisheries (allowing to keep one fin clipped salmon), rather than imposing a complete ban on salmon catches, as proposed by the Commission. The imposition of a complete ban would be an excessive burden for ensuring adequate control measures to monitor compliance with the ban. This would not be able to cover the very fragmented recreational fishing activities along the entire coast more than 400 km in length. In addition, recreational fishing with nets then will have to make mandatory discards of by-catches of salmon with a questionable chance of survival of individuals. The uncounted and not registered catches will also reduce the information available to science for a better assessment of the state of salmon populations. Therefore, the positive or negative impact of such a ban should be first seriously assessed, as salmon will in any case end up in recreational fishermen's catches (including nets) as unwanted by-catch.

**Lithuanian written comments on the
Proposal for a COUNCIL REGULATION fixing the fishing opportunities for certain
fish stocks and groups of fish stocks applicable in the Baltic Sea for 2026 and amending
Regulation (EU) 2025/202 as regards certain fishing opportunities in other waters
COM/2025/458 final**

General remarks

Lithuania notes that the proposal is still under review and reserves the right to provide further comments as consultations with stakeholders continue and as the latest scientific data are analyzed.

Lithuania fully acknowledges that scientific advice, the MSY objective, and the Baltic Multiannual Plan (MAP) should form the basis for setting fishing opportunities. However, Lithuania is concerned that the Commission's proposal does not sufficiently reflect the most recent ICES advice, nor does it ensure a balanced approach between the environmental, socio-economic, and food security objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

Lithuania stresses the importance of addressing the external dimension of fisheries management in the Baltic Sea. [REDACTED]

Eastern and Western Baltic cod (bycatch quotas)

Lithuania fully supports the precautionary approach and recognizes the ongoing challenges facing both cod stocks. While acknowledging the need for continued restrictions and additional measures, Lithuania cannot accept either the proposed basis or the further reduction of bycatch quotas for either stock.

Sprat and Central Baltic herring

The 2026 ICES advice for sprat and herring finally offers some relief for the pelagic sector after several years of significant quota cuts. Lithuania emphasizes that failure to fully apply ICES recommendations and to set TACs at the highest levels allowed under the MAP would put the fleet at imminent risk of bankruptcy, with irreversible structural consequences even if the stocks recover in the future.

As the sprat stock remains stable and an FMSY-based catch is both within the MAP and scientifically justified, and since, according to ICES, the spawning stock biomass of Central Baltic herring is currently at its highest level since 1989 and expected to increase further under the FMSY scenario, Lithuania's priority is to set the highest quotas for sprat and Central Baltic herring recommended by ICES and allowed under the MAP.

Salmon in the main basin

Lithuania is open to showing flexibility on salmon, but maintaining the status quo remains the preferable option. While supporting necessary conservation measures and recognizing the vulnerability of the stock, Lithuania stresses the importance of maintaining limited recreational fishing opportunities under strict conditions.

Final remarks

Lithuania will support fishing opportunities that are fully justified by scientific advice, compatible with the MAP, and reflective of the broader geopolitical, environmental and economical context in the Baltic Sea.
