

The commercial fishing in the Baltic Sea

By Annastiina Turunen

The Baltic Sea is one of the world's most unique marine environments. The Baltic Sea is only 55 meters deep and therefore, very vulnerable to different causes of pollution.

The Baltic Sea is surrounded by nine countries and a total of 85 million people live in its the river basins. Many problems occur in the area, such as overfishing, land-based pollution, eutrophication, oil spills and, particularly high levels of nutrients that are caused by agriculture.

Overfishing is the main threat to Baltic fish stocks since 70% of Europe's fish stocks are overfished. There are damaging fishing practices which lead to degradation of the ecosystem in the Baltic Sea, such as high levels of by-catch, and illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing. It's The Council of the European Union that decides about the Baltic Sea fishing quotas. The Commission prepares the proposals, based on scientific advice on the stock status from advisory bodies such as ICES (The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea). Total allowable catches (TAC) are set annually for most stocks by the Council of Ministers for Fisheries. TACs are shared between the EU countries in the form of national quotas.

Each littoral country that surrounds the Baltic Sea has a different view on the fishing quotas in the area. Opinions of fishing quotas vary a lot between different parties. Policy-makers should have respect for researchers' advice. The EU has its own Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region which was designed to ensure the sustainability of Europe's fish stocks but it has gone to the wrong direction. The biggest problem seems to be that the coastal states do not cooperate together well enough. There are many things we could do to ensure the sustainability of our fisheries. Instead of focusing on our benefits, we should think of putting the environment first. I believe we could make our common Baltic Sea more sustainable and still create a more profitable fishing industry. The Baltic Sea area is protected by different agreements and goals. I think there's should be even more co-operation and supervision.