

Östersjölaxälvar i Samverkan

Statement

Date
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Receiver
BALTFISH

Statement concerning exemption from the landing obligation for salmon caught in trap nets in the Baltic.

The Baltic salmon rivers association (Östersjölaxälvar i samverkan) and its associated river management organisations consider that the proposed derogation from the landing obligation for salmon caught in pontoon trap-nets, including those with a knot-less net bag modification (vittjanpåse) should not be granted.

The Baltic salmon rivers association are a non-profit organization- a cooperative body that gathers fifteen of Sweden's total sixteen remaining wild salmon rivers. Wild salmon rivers from Mörrum in the south to Lainio and Muonio in the north are connected to the organization. These, in turn, organize more than 12,000 fishing rights owners. Our main goal is healthy, strong and resilient salmon and sea trout stocks in the Baltic rivers. We actively work local, regional, national and international political levels for sustainable and long-term salmon and sea trout management.

The Baltic salmon rivers association do not believe that fishing with pontoon traps should continue for other species when the quota for salmon is exhausted. Today we have a worrying disease situation for the Baltic salmon and this makes handling of fish extremely problematic.

With large numbers of pontoon gears placed successively along salmon migratory routes at coast, estuary and rivers it is probable that salmon may be caught multiple times and face an unnecessarily high rate of mortality. Earlier results, ex. Siira *et al.* (2006), show multiple catch of individuals occurs and with the increased development of a selective fishery we can expect this risk to grow.

Based on the results of Östergren *et al.* (2020) we believe that pontoon gears should, without exception, be removed after the salmon quota is caught.

Detailed Position

The Baltic salmon river association has since its inception and with the help of our membership of local river organisations followed closely the development of the commercial fishery at coast, estuary and river. We have been pleased to see many changes within the fishery that have been beneficial to both small scale fishermen and our wild stocks. Several measures applied by the EU and member states have allowed wild salmon stocks to recover to more stable status, all be it from very low levels. We would like to point out that reduction of the TAC, the closure of the Finnish and Swedish longline fishery at sea and the continued work against IUU fishing have been key to allowing for a stabilisation and return of wild salmon stocks.

The Baltic salmon rivers association has witnessed the development of commercial fishing gears from the previous combi-gear to the now almost exclusive usage of pontoon gears. Pontoon gears are a new development in response to the growing number of seals along our coasts and are also safer and easier for commercial fishermen to empty. Safer and more ergonomically correct gears are especially important as the number of salmon caught in pontoon traps has increased within the last years from a few individuals to often more than 20 - 30 salmon in one gear. Due to such safety and workload issues we therefore question if the usage of a knotless bag modification (vittjanpåse) is a wise recommendation and would be accepted by fishermen.

The Baltic salmon rivers associations members have many times accompanied fishermen and seen the emptying of pontoon gears. Therefore, the results of Östergren *et al.* (2020) with extremely high mortality of released fish (48% even with the usage of a vittjanpåse) are of no surprise to us. Pontoon gears have an important place in a modern salmon fishery but not as a selective gear.

Our members are extremely concerned about the current health of salmon in the Baltic and have witnessed how salmon returning to our rivers are in a very weakened state. Some stocks such as the Vindel river are once again threatened and these health issues are highlighted in Östergren *et al.* (2020). The current disease problem is especially concerning and must be an important factor when we now decide if salmon should be caught and released, potentially multiple times, in gears that evidentially have a very high mortality rate.

The Baltic salmon rivers association are pleased to note the growth of a more river specific fishery within compensatory released rivers such as the Luleå river. These kinds of fisheries are almost exclusively based upon compensatory released fish and therefore remove the need for using inappropriate gears such as pontoon traps in an unsuccessful selective fishery. We also see the development of modern DNA studies (Whitlock *et al.* 2015), as important associated tools to allow for a more stock specific fishery. River specific fisheries also remove the potential risk of IUU fishing that would occur if pontoon gears were to be

used as a selective gear. The Baltic salmon rivers association therefore strongly encourage the growth of such river specific fisheries based upon compensatory released fish.

The Baltic salmon rivers association note that Baltic salmon is one of very few current success stories for fisheries management in the Baltic and we are aware that this is due to the EU and member states previously making hard decisions. We believe the current issue of a derogation for pontoon gears is just such a critical point in the continued recovery of Baltic salmon. We therefore strongly recommend that pontoon gears are not granted a derogation from the discard ban and salmon are not subjected to an unsuccessful selective fishery. Such a derogation and growth of a selective fishery with pontoon gears will risk all past gains and once again lead to a situation where Baltic salmon are at threat.

För Östersjölaxar i Samverkan



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Chairman

References:

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