

Dumb as a Cod Part II: The Case of IUU in the Baltic Sea

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In a previous issue, we reported on fisheries in the Baltic Sea (Rossing and Zeller, 2008) and on our collaboration with the Baltic Sea 2020 Foundation in undertaking catch reconstructions for the nine coastal countries surrounding the Baltic Sea: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden. The purpose was to obtain time series of total catch estimates, including so-called Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fisheries catches (IUU), and compare these to officially reported statistics. The aim of the Baltic Sea 2020 Foundation is to stimulate concrete measures to improve the environmental quality of the Baltic Sea. In order to derive such policy measures for fisheries, one has to have an understanding of the scale and magnitude of the IUU problem. Our work, now completed (Rossing *et al.*, in press) and will soon be freely available at www.fisheries.ubc.ca/publications/reports/fcrr.php, provides a baseline of total fisheries catches, compared to officially

reported statistics from 1950 to the present. The basic approach to, and philosophy behind, catch reconstructions is described in Zeller *et al.* (2006; 2007). In essence, we utilize all data- and information-sources available (including grey literature, media sources and expert knowledge) to derive time-series data on reported and IUU catches (including discarded and recreational).

The Baltic Sea is often referred to as one of the most studied seas in the world (Kononen *et al.*, 2001). Ironically, relatively little seems to be known about the magnitude of IUU catches, and even less of that information is readily available to the interested public. While the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), with responsibility for advising the European Commission on Total Allowable Catches (TACs) for the main commercial species caught in the Baltic Sea, does include its own estimates for unreported landings and discards in its annual stock assessment

working group reports, these data are not transparent to the public, and therefore the reports avoid identification of countries and individual magnitudes involved.

Our study clearly illustrated this practice (for 1950-2007), as our total reconstructed catches for the Baltic Sea were around 30% larger than the official statistics reported publically by ICES on behalf of its member countries (plus Russia). When the total reconstructed catches peaked in 1997, total catches were likely 43% higher than the reported statistics, while for the most recent period (2000-2007), total catches were around 35% higher than the reported data. All coastal Baltic Sea countries were implicated, but our analysis suggests that the top three offenders were those with the largest share of the TAC: Poland, Sweden and Denmark. Respectively, these countries represented 36%, 13% and 14% of our total reconstructed IUU (unreported landings,

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discards and recreational catches). Poland's large share of the IUU was driven by unreported cod catches estimated to be up to 300% higher than reported landings for some years, making it the main culprit during this period.

Without exception, unreported landings were the most serious IUU fishing activity, followed by discarding. For example, our estimates of unreported cod catches for 2000-2007 were 5 times higher than the unreported landings data used by ICES stock assessment working groups. It was not possible to determine which country data were driving this discrepancy, as ICES unreported landings data are not reported in a transparent manner. This seems to illustrate the problem of non-transparent data use by these

assessments, which is bound to influence management advice and policy decisions. Overall, the magnitude and preponderance of unreported landings by all countries strongly suggests considerable management and enforcement failures.

Discarding was also substantial, and is an entirely wasteful practice. Given the move to ecosystem-based management, such practices need to be phased out. The EU should seriously consider a discard ban on all fisheries, an approach successfully attempted by Norway. Such a move would require comprehensive observer coverage (ideally 100% and utilizing video system approaches) to ensure compliance and fairness.

Until recently, IUU issues have often been considered primarily a problem for developing countries (but see Coleman *et al.*, 2004). However, as the present study illustrates, IUU fisheries happen even in the most developed and richest countries, confirming that these highly developed countries with their substantial resources and well-established scientific, administrative, legal and management institutions have so far failed to address IUU issues in a transparent and comprehensive manner.

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