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Advice concerning sustainable fishing in the Wadden Sea

summary

The Wadden Sea Council is submitting a solicited advice to the State Secretary for Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries concerning sustainable fishing in the Wadden Sea. This outline vision begins by sketching the lines along which sustainable fishing for all forms of fishing in the Wadden Sea can develop. Maintaining the biodiversity and meeting the requirements that the Wadden ecosystem sets for physical and chemical processes in the area form an important precondition for achieving sustainable fishing in the Wadden Sea.

The conditions for ecologically-sustainable fishing must first be met before there can be any question of economically-sound fishing. This approach is substantiated in the vision by indicating which forms of fishing and fishing intensity are possible within the primary function of nature, so that the subsequent elaboration per species can address the way in which appropriate fishing activities can take place in an economically responsible manner. The complexity and intense dynamics of the Wadden ecosystem call for a large measure of flexibility when it comes to setting the catch quantities and interpreting fluctuations in the scope of the size of populations of indicator species. As well as quantitative criteria, there is also a need for qualitative criteria to make a good assessment of the current state of the Wadden ecosystem. Adopting a flexible approach to catch quantities and fishable species calls for flexible entrepreneurship on the part of fishers, and a regulation that facilitates this.

One of the instruments that can be used to achieve sustainable fishing is the use of co-management. The State Secretary will (actively) have to re-establish the collaboration process between the government, the sector and the interest groups. What is being called for in this regard is a plan-based approach that takes concrete form in respect of the time frame, the responsibilities of the participating parties and the perspective that is ultimately being sought. Co-management can ultimately result in considerable simplification of legislation.

The reservation of food for birds must be reviewed after 10 years. The starting point is that birds which normally forage in the Wadden Sea must in principle be able to find sufficient food in the Wadden Sea. Stable mussel banks and *Spisula* in the North Sea coastal zone form fall-back options for extreme situations. The geographical spread of the food supply must be guaranteed. Not enough is known about the requirements that many bird types set for the food supply. More clarity on this subject will have to be quickly gained. A more flexible approach can be taken to the food reserve for oyster catchers and eider ducks by concentrating more on the size of populations.

The current fishing activities are largely compatible with or can be made to fit in with the main objective for the Wadden Sea provided that certain conditions are met. In more concrete terms, measures will have to be put in place that result in creating and protecting sub-littoral mussel banks. Fishing of the littoral banks will again be possible as soon as the overall surface area is larger than 4000 ha. of stable mussel banks or a surface area that is deemed to be realistic and adequate on the basis of EVA II. Opening the entire Wadden Sea for seed mussel fishing in a situation with an optimum acreage of littoral and sub-littoral banks will only be possible if the objective referred to above is achieved and once it has become clear that fishing according to the Jan Louw principle yields results that are satisfactory for the ecosystem and seed mussel fishing. As soon as both conditions have been met, where seed mussel fishing is concerned a choice can be made to interweave functions in the sense that, regarding the possible fishing of mussel

banks, the question of where and how mussel banks can be fished is reviewed and laid down in an annual fishing plan.

Regarding cockle fishing, the permitted catch quantity of 10 million kg of cockle meat will have to be reduced to a level that allows a considerable increase in older, fully-grown cockles throughout the Wadden Sea. It will also be necessary to steer a fishing process that focuses exclusively on economically attractive, fully-grown cockles. If it turns out that the quantity of cockles thus made available for mechanical cockle fishing is structurally less than 5 million kilograms of cockle meat a year, the State Secretary will have to rationalise part of the sector by buying it out.

Because of its small scale, manual cockle fishing matches up well with the conditions that the Council is setting for the fishing activities in order to achieve sustainable fishing. The smaller-scale fishing, including fishing with fixed fishing tackle, would be served by more flexible regulations in order to fish throughout more of the year, depending on the stock levels.

Regarding the shrimp fishing and the fine that was imposed by the Netherlands Competition Authority (Nma), clarity must be gained regarding the question of whether and how producer organisations can in the short term return to controlled fishing by working according to a collective fishing plan, for instance. Finally, further agreements will have to be made immediately with the European Commission regarding the maintenance of controlled fishing for all European, non-quota fish types.