Herring stock collapse

requires emergency action

Catches of herring in the Gulf of Bothnia have collapsed. Large-scale, industrial fishing must be limited and the MSY target must be fundamentally changed. The Gulf of Bothnia Producer Organization believes that the situation is an emergency and risks becoming an environmental disaster.

Since the early 1990's, herring stocks in the Gulf of Bothnia have fallen by more than 50 per cent and the trend continues downward. In the last year, the Gulf of Bothnia Producer Organization has raised its voice on the emergency situation through the media and in meetings with both the government and authorities. The lack of herring means that the small-scale, inshore fishery will disappear unless management changes and actions are taken to save herring in the Gulf of Bothnia. Despite the alarming signals, the actions are glaring with their absence.

A strong contributory factor is the current management model, which is based on quotas based on maximum sustainable yield (MSY). Which do not take into account the size of the fish, and instead only look at the total weight of the population.

In parallel with the fact that the fish are both smaller and fewer in number, industrial trawling has intensified greatly and accounts for over 90 percent of the catch in the Gulf of Bothnia. Industrial trawling is also concentrated in the areas and periods from January-June when the herring gather in large schools to first spend the winter and then head in toward the coast to spawn.

"We believe that the quota calculation based on the MSY target must be supplemented with requirements for spawning stock size, its age structure and size composition. In the short term, we see an urgent need for recovery measures in the most vulnerable areas," said Carl-Åke Wallin, Chairman of the Gulf of Bothnia Producer Organization.

ICES quota recommendations for the Gulf of Bothnia in 2023 total 102,719 tons, while both fishermen and the industry raise the alarm that herring have disappeared.

Actions required by the Gulf of Bothnia Producer Organization:

* That a protected area be established in the Gulf of Bothnia.
* To reduce quotas and change the MSY target.
* To evaluate through research the impact of industrial fishing on herring stocks and the Gulf of Bothnia ecosystem, as well as its ability to recover.

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