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02.12.2008

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**A Joint Swedish - Danish proposal to protect and  
rebuild the Kattegat cod stock**

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The Kattegat cod stock has been subject to a number of management measures during the past years such as TAC reductions, technical measures and the cod recovery plan for the North Sea (Council Reg. 423/2004). However, no signs of recovery of the stock have hitherto been observed. On the contrary there are indications that there has been a fivefold decrease of the stock since 1970 and that the standing stock biomass (SSB) has been at a historically low level since the early 2000s. The recruitment has steadily declined since 1970 and has in recent years been the lowest in the time-series.

The exact level of fishing mortality is highly uncertain. Fishery independent information indicates that removals from the stock are substantially higher than reported landings. (ICES 2008)

The assessment does not indicate a major decline in fishing mortality in the latest five years, although the TAC has been reduced to a third during 2003–2007. This indicates that TAC-reductions as a management measure has not been sufficiently effective in terms of achieving a major reduction in fishing mortality. The recovery of the stock as well as a future viable cod fishery in the area is ultimately depending on a significant reduction of fishing mortality.

The above described situation has resulted in a joint initiative by the authorities of Sweden and Denmark. The intention of the two authorities is, thus, to adopt more efficient measures in order to achieve recovery of the cod stock in Kattegat. The governments have agreed to initiate the following measures by 1 January 2009.

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1. Establishment of a joint working group to evaluate existing fishing gears and develop new gears to improve selectivity and reduce cod mortality in mixed fisheries.
2. Introduce a spatial protection by limiting fisheries in key areas and during spawning season.
3. Strengthening the collaboration on fisheries control in the Kattegat area.

More detailed information on the three measures follows below.

This Swedish-Danish proposal has been subject to consultations in the respective countries. These consultations have shown that there seems to be, in large, agreement by most stakeholders, that the cod mortality should be decreased. However, views differ regarding what measures should be used to meet that objective.

#### **Proposed measures more elaborated**

1. Establishment of a joint working group to evaluate existing fishing gears and develop new gears to improve selectivity and reduce the cod mortality in mixed fisheries.

A working group will be established with terms of reference jointly adopted by the Danish and Swedish Ministries responsible for fisheries. The working group will consist of representatives from scientists, managers, producers of selective gears and the industry. There is a need for a rapid process and the group will be obliged to report back to the Ministries some time during summer 2009.

2. Introduction of spatial protection by limiting fisheries in key areas and during spawning season.

The major spawning grounds for the Kattegat cod are situated in the south-eastern part of the Kattegat. In this area a three zone closure is proposed. The zones are presented below as is the map showing the location of the zones.

#### *Seasonal closure (encircled by broken red line)*

This zone will be seasonally closed from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January until the 31<sup>st</sup> of March. During this period it will, however, be allowed to use gears that have been scientifically acknowledged not to catch cod or that reduces catches of cod to a minimum, e.g. pots and selective trawls with sorting grid targeting Norway lobster, and recreational fisheries not targeting cod. The northern Sound is included in the seasonally closed area with two months (February and March) in addition to the April closure already agreed according to existing decision for that

area , since cod migration takes place between the two areas. The cod fishery in January will however be fixed in order to limit the catches in the western Baltic regulatory area.

*Closure Zone 1 (green)*

In the northern part of the Kattegat cod spawning ground a closure to all fisheries except pot fishery for Norway lobster are proposed from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January until the 31<sup>st</sup> of March. After the spawning season i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> of April until the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, this zone will also be opened for other fisheries using gears that have been scientifically acknowledged not to catch cod or that reduces catches of cod to a minimum such as selective trawling for Norway lobster with sorting grid, and recreational fisheries not targeting cod.

*Permanent closure Zone 2 (red)*

In the southern part of the proposed area (the red area) a permanent closure to all fisheries is proposed. A year round closure encompasses a complete prohibition for all kinds of fishing, including recreational fisheries.

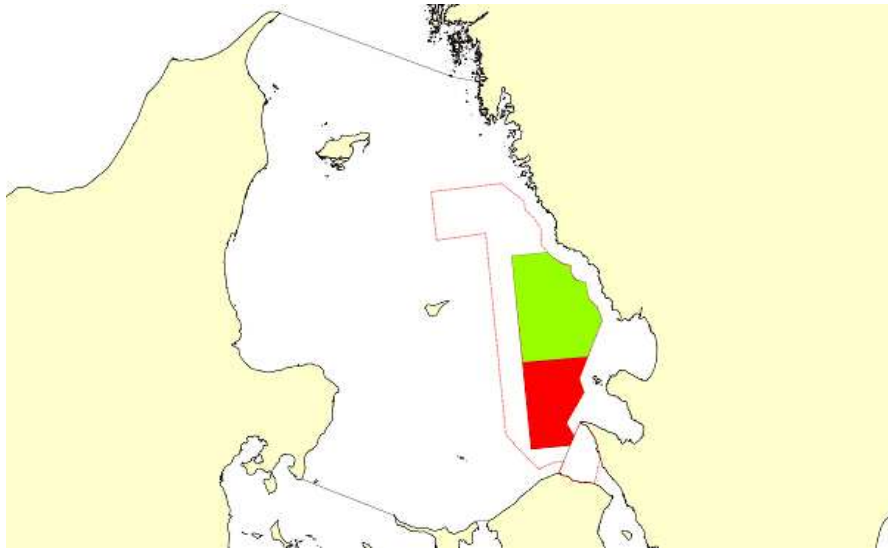


Fig. 1. Proposed area for spatial protection

The proposal will protect the local cod stock in the Kattegat and reduce the overall fishing mortality in the Kattegat cod management unit as the suggested closures will obstruct all fisheries on the cod stock resident in the south eastern Kattegat. The proposed measure will also strengthen the chances for the Kattegat cod stock to rebuild as the most important spawning areas will be protected during the spawning season and throughout the year. The effect on other economically important fisheries such as Norway lobster, sole and

plaice, will be limited, since most of these fisheries can operate outside the permanent closure and after the seasonal closure.

It should be made clear that the intention is to reduce cod mortality without a disproportionate effect on other fisheries.

The proposed closures (i.e. spatial protection) as outlined above will initially be in force for a period of three years. Thereafter an in-depth evaluation based on continuous monitoring regarding the effect on cod mortality and socio-economic effects will be carried out jointly by the appropriate Swedish and Danish authorities. Such evaluation will be outlined in a jointly agreed evaluation plan.

The necessary legislative provisions for putting these closures in place will be provided for in respective national legislation.

### 3. Strengthening the collaboration on fisheries control in the Kattegat area.

Sweden and Denmark has continuously collaborated in order to strengthen and to harmonise the fishery control in the area. I.e. measures have been adopted to avoid misreporting between areas which could explain some of the discrepancies between landings and total removals. This collaboration will be continued and enhanced when ever possible.

#### Additional aspects

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A key challenge for Kattegat is to reduce discards in the mixed fisheries. The above proposal will most likely lead to a reduction of discards as the already limited quota will be made more available to by-catches of cod in the mixed fishery. Nonetheless, further collaboration between Sweden and Denmark is needed to more effectively address the discard problem in the long term.