

Studying fisheries sustainability

FLAG: Esko

South Finland

Project overview

In cooperation with WWF and using MSC methodology, the ESKO FLAG coordinated a study for small-scale fishermen into the sustainability of their fishing activities.



Questions had been raised in recent years about the sustainability of fishing activities in the Gulf of Finland. Indeed, WWF’s annual consumer guide blacklisted the main types of fish caught in this area, especially salmon and whitefish, as species to avoid buying. This, added to the general crisis in the fisheries sector, was contributing to increasing difficulties to maintain traditional small-scale fishing activities locally.

However, small-scale fishermen believed their way of fishing was sustainable and contacted the WWF to discuss the problem. After meeting the local fishermen, the WWF suggested they assess their practices using the MSC (Marine Stewardship Council) standards for sustainability and the FLAG agreed to coordinate this.

A research project, based on the widely-accepted MSC method, was carried out by a third party organisation and led by a steering group including fisheries representatives, environmental organisations (WWF) and a leading research institute. It covered all the fishing methods used in the area (nets and traps) and all 6 usual fish species (perch, pike, pikeperch, whitefish, salmon and roach). The report was published at the end of February 2014, presented in the same way as official MSC reports following the MSC standardised assessment tree. A conference was also organised in April 2014 to present and communicate its findings.



Key lessons

- › **Relevance to FARNET themes:** fisheries and the environment, sustainability of small scale fisheries.
- › **Results:** The study shows that there are different stocks of whitefish and salmon in the Baltic Sea and that, following MSC standards, the stocks targeted by the local fishermen are harvested at sustainable levels and therefore not threatened. The same can be said for the other stocks (roach, perch, pike, pikeperch...) targeted locally. The conclusion of the study is that professional small-scale coastal fishing operations in the ESKO area could reach MSC certification if they were to apply for it (with a possible exception for some parts of the net fisheries).

In the course of the study, the WWF moved whitefish from the red (“avoid”) category to the yellow (“eat with caution”) category, given that other stocks of whitefish can still be considered as endangered elsewhere in the Baltic. Even though other factors are likely to have influenced the WWF decision, the study can be considered as one of the elements which would have played a key role in this reclassification.

- › **Transferability:** Small-scale fisheries in many FLAG areas face similar challenges to demonstrate the sustainability of their operations. FLAGs can play an important role in developing partnerships with other actors involved in environmental management (NGOs, local government, civil society associations...) to evaluate the impact of local fishing practices.
- › **Final Comment:** Despite WWF’s suggestion that the Gulf of Finland’s small-scale fishery apply for MSC certification, in light of the costs associated with the process, the decision was made not to apply, even though the MSC standards were followed for the purposes of this study. This highlights the fact that this and other certification methods are geared more towards large-scale fishing and big companies and are far too costly for individual small-scale fishermen. However, there is just as much need to research sustainability in small-scale fishery areas. For this reason, ESKO FLAG is encouraging the MSC and other environmental certification organisations to start developing more suitable certification methods for smaller fisheries, locally caught fish and local fish markets.

Total cost and EFF contribution

Total project cost: €17 200 (€16 200 for the study + €1 000 for the steering group meetings)

- › EFF Axis 4: €6 654,40
- › National co-financing: €8 824,60
- › Sepra Development Association (own private money): €1 720,00

Project information

Title: Studying fisheries sustainability

Duration: 13 months (March 2013 – April 2014)

Case study date: May 2014

Project promoter

Sepra Development Association (ESKO FLAG)

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[Esko FLAG factsheet](#)

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