



Polish small-scale fishers are efficient in their protest against the situation in the Baltic Sea

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At 10:00 am, the protest of small-scale fishermen started next to the Prime Minister's Office. They came to Warsaw very numerously, mainly from Darłowo, Łeba, Ustka and the Puck Bay region. There are about 200 protesters, a very large number for a small-scale fleet - in Poland it consists of about 650 fishing boats with a length of less than 12 m. This part of the fishing fleet uses only passive fishing gears, which have a significantly lower impact on marine environment than, for example, trawls - and allows to offer very high-quality fish, hitherto almost unheard of in everyday trade in places such as Warsaw.

The 500 km travel from their home towns to the central authorities in Warsaw was caused by a multi-pronged crisis: the situation of Baltic cod, the situation in coastal zones - the main catching grounds of small-scale fishermen, as well as the impact of the ever-growing population of grey seals on fish stocks and thus fishery. The basic demand of the fishermen was the protection of fish stocks and coastal ecosystems - habitats without which fish, the *raison d'être* of fisherman's profession, have no chance of survival.

Fishing for cod in the coastal zone has deteriorated drastically this year - many fishermen have not yet caught a single cod or only a few individuals, and this fish has traditionally been the basis of their existence. Although scientists also see this drastic problem in many respects¹, political decision-makers have not yet taken real action to give a chance to reverse the situation, despite proposals from, among others, LIFE². One of the basic and still unresolved problems indicated by fishermen is the availability of food for cod, i.e. pelagic fish, sprat and to a lesser extent herring. They are intensely caught in Polish waters (and in the entire Central Baltic) by large pelagic vessels, mainly intended for fishmeal, an important component of many feeds. The closure of the 6-mile zone for these fisheries is insufficient for fishermen and they want them extended to the entire 12-mile zone.

As fisheries are managed to a large extent by the European Union, the protest also had a regional and EU dimension. The basic problem raised by fishermen was the shape of the new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund for 2021-2027, and in it - the issue of the **definition of small-scale fisheries**, for which the European Commission offers particularly favorable financing conditions. The latest information shows that in negotiations in the European

¹ [http://www.bsac.dk/Meetings/BSAC-meetings/BSAC-Executive-Committee-meeting-\(4\)](http://www.bsac.dk/Meetings/BSAC-meetings/BSAC-Executive-Committee-meeting-(4))

² <http://lifeplatform.eu/action-plan-for-eastern-baltic-cod/>

Parliament, supporters of extending this definition to cutters up to 24 m are getting the advantage, which in practice will deprive small-scale fishermen the all-important preferential access to EU funds. LIFE and many other organizations are strongly in favor of retaining the current definition of small scale fisheries - boat length below 12 meters and using only passive fishing gear³.

The problem for fishermen, especially small-scale fishermen, is also the fast-growing population of grey seals in the Baltic. Many of these very intelligent animals have specialized in using passive fishing gear as the proverbial "Swedish table". Large local significance, especially for protesters from the Puck Bay region, is attributed to the deteriorating ecological situation of its waters - caused by the level of pollution that has been growing in recent years.

Along with the very bad cod situation and the impact of industrial pelagic fishing, all the above factors cause **an existential threat to small-scale fisheries - not only in Poland but throughout the Central Baltic Sea.**

The central authorities in Warsaw responded to the protest constructively and with understanding. Head of Chancellery of Poland's Prime Minister, Michał Dworczyk went out to talk with the protesters. In addition, a delegation of protesting fishermen went to talks with the Minister of Maritime Economy and Inland Navigation Marek Gróbarczyk in the building of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister – the parties agreed on a preparation of a rescue program for Polish small scale fisheries and the more proactive work of the administration in other aspects, including the enhanced protection of the 12-mile zone. Further negotiations and a meeting at the end of March are planned.

LIFE will make every effort to ensure that the proposals of small-scale fishermen are accepted in to reality – both in Poland and in relation to EU law. We thank our member organizations for their commitment!

³ <http://lifeplatform.eu/vote-on-the-2021-2027-emff/>