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Minutes

Of BISAC Working Group 4 meeting

/8 July 2020/

Topic: "Fishing for rapana, turbot and Black Sea shark, present and prospects. Fishing opportunities for EU and third country vessels in the 12-mile zone, in the 24-mile zone and after 24 miles in the waters of Bulgaria and Romania. Official controls, catch development, related data, markets, fishing gear, by-catches "

On July 8, 2020 in Pomorie, Grand Hotel Pomorie, a meeting of BISAC Working Group 4 took place, with the following agenda:

1. The opening of the event, the presentation of the participants - the leader of the group Dr. Yordan Gospodinov - president of BISAC.
2. Presentation of data for catches of rapana, turbot and shark in the Black Sea - Dr. Gospodinov;
3. Rapana- Distribution of rapana. Environmental problems in the Black Sea. - Mr. Anton Antonov - Researcher of benthic aquatic organisms;
4. Fishing opportunities for EU and third country vessels in the 12-mile zone, in the 24-mile zone and after 24 miles in the waters of Bulgaria and Romania - NAFA, ANPA data, discussions with authorities;
5. Official control, catch development, related data, markets, fishing equipment, by-catches - data from NAFA, ANPA, discussions with scientists and authorities;
6. Conclusions, preliminary text for recommendation

Participants: Mr Marian Paiu, Mr Vasil Raichinov, Mr Dimitar Kanariev, Mrs Lyubov Georgieva, Mr Danko Penev, Mr Alexander Trapchev, Mr Plamen Kamburov, Mr Kiril Zheghev, Mrs. Dimitrina Kostova, Mr. Buhai Dragos, Mr. Gabriel Sidorencu.

The meeting was attended by Dr. Violin Raykov, Institute of Oceanology, Varna, Mr. Anton Antonov - Researcher of benthic aquatic organisms, Mr. Yani Yanulov member of the Association " MENA ".

A representative of the EC from DG MARE Unit D 1, - Ms. Pinelopi Belekou, joined via video link as and Mr. Gabriel Popescu from ANPA Constanta.

Item 1: The meeting was opened by the President of BISAC, Mr Yordan Gospodinov. Participants and guests greet BISAC members.

Items 2, 4 and 5: Mr Yordan Gospodinov made a presentation on the subject: Rapana, turbot and Black Sea shark fishing, present and perspectives. Fishing opportunities for EU and third country vessels in the 12-mile zone, in the 24-mile zone and after 24 miles in the waters of Bulgaria and Romania. "Catches of commercially fish and crustacean species were presented, with a focus on catches of rapana, Black Sea shark and turbot.

Mr. Gabriel Popescu from ANPA Romania similarly provided information on rapana catches: for 2017, 2018 and 2019 there are 9,245 thousand tons, 7,3 thousand tons, respectively 6.8 thousand tons. Turbot catches for 2017 are 43 tons for 2018. - 57 tons, for 2019 - 53 tons. Catches of Black Sea sharks for 2017 are just under 2 tons, for 2018 - 520 kg, for 2019 - 576 kg.

Item 3 on the agenda: Mr Anton Antonov, a researcher with extensive experience in benthic aquatic organisms, was given the floor. The beginning of the occurrence of rapana in the Black Sea is in the 70s of last century. It spread is incredibly fast, and for 30 years, rapana has been caught industrially. This spread continues today beyond the borders of the Black Sea, the rapana is already found in the Mediterranean, off the coasts of France and Spain. It crosses the Atlantic Ocean and settles along the coasts of Brazil and Argentina, as well as in the Chesapeake Bay in the United States, where there is a campaign to clean up the Gulf of rapana.

The Black Sea, due to its low salinity, allows the development of zooplankton, which is food for rapana, and rapana larvae eat the larvae of bivalves. It is believed that the oyster in the Black Sea was destroyed by the rapana. Rapana starved to death in the 1980s, but for a very short period of time, and after the recovery of the black mussel population, rapana recovered immediately.

The next victim of rapana is the black mussel, because it destroys mussel reefs and leaves behind empty rocks. Now, a new species of green algae is located on these rocks and this is why the mussel cannot attach on the rocks. Mussel reefs used to be full of life, but now they are deserts.

After the black mussel population has dropped dramatically, the rapana begins to feed on white sand mussels, and when there is not enough food, it feeds on shrimps. Currently, the reproduction of the rapana is in all sizes, but before being fished commercially, it was only in large specimens. In the Black Sea, rapana has no natural enemy and is a serious environmental problem. Scientists need to pay serious attention to this and look for ways to populate the natural habitats of black mussels, as they are a filter of the sea.

Discussion:

Mr. Dimitar Kanariev: The environmental problem caused by rapana is a subject that I have often raised. On the European Maritime Day of 2018. there was a discussion about rapana being a resource of economic importance, with the tendency to keep it. He hopes the EC will understand that this specie is causing an environmental catastrophe in the Black Sea. It is good to have a broader discussion on the conclusions of Mr Anton Antonov and to look for solutions on how to restore mussel fields.

Mr. Kiril Zheglev: Fishermen have been talking about rapana for years. Rapana is indeed a strategic resource, but the question is whether to preserve rapana or preserve the Black Sea? The EC must understand that the problem is really serious and we can only hope that the changes that have taken place on the coasts of Bulgaria and Romania as a result of the destruction of mussel fields are not irreversible. After the drastic reduction of black mussels, white mussels are still in good status.

Mr. Danko Penev: We have been talking about rapana for three years and nothing is happening. For now, commercial fishing is the best way to combat rapana. We are also waiting for a resource assessment. Instead of giving fishermen incentives to catch it, more and more restrictions are being imposed. The speed with which things happen is very important. For example, in the samples made in Romania with "hidrodraga", the buried rapana were taken out of the sand, biting the mussels. When buried, rapana does not hibernate, as previously thought, but continues to feed.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Violin Raykov: Rapana is established as a supreme predator and breeds in huge numbers. In the Black Sea, it has found comfortable habitats and many victims to feed with. It has long been debated whether this is just an invasive species or a resource, but it should be noted that it also creates problems in the field of fishing. It is obvious that the black mussel has reduced its population to a critical minimum. This is due to both rapana and other contaminants. To the question of whether the Black Sea ecosystem can return to its original state - the answer is - no. There are a number of bivalves that have completely disappeared due to pollution, fishing and the large mass of rapana. The income from catching rapana is temporary, because in the Black Sea there are not so many species that rapana feeds on, and its reserves will inevitably decrease. The opinion of scientists is rather to work for the development of aquaculture and not only with black mussels. Microbiotopes should be created in NATURA 2000 areas where mussel stocks can be restored.

Mr. Kiril Zheglev: Could the construction of such areas become food banks for the recovery of rapana?

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Violin Raykov: You could say that. The idea is to monitor in the long run how the ecosystem itself responds to conditions. The result is not clear, but global experience shows that such experiments are beneficial to the ecosystem. But as for rapana - it is clear that it is a voracious predator that needs to be fed.

Ms Mihaela Mirea: Returning to yesterday's discussion on the Marine Strategy Framework Directive on the state of the marine environment. New measures 15 and 16 have been developed under the program, which can be linked to the current discussions. Measure 15 - to define trawl fishing areas and to monitor its long-term impact and then to change the conditions of the use of trawlers if necessary. Measure 16 - financial incentives for fishing and collecting molluscs in an environmental friendly way. She asks Prof. Raykov - is there research on techniques that are more environmentally friendly than Beam trawling?

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Violin Raykov: The experiments with baskets were done in Turkey and Russia, but the quantities caught are very small.

Mr. Yordan Gospodinov: Rapana is an predator of important species in the Black Sea and has as its biological enemy only man. At the same time, it provides a livelihood for many fishermen and processors, but the sector is in danger as the Black Sea rapana stock declines.

Mr. Alexander Trapchev: Since 1992 I have been catching rapana, first with divers, then with beam trawls. The sector is facing a financial collapse because the size is smaller and its purchase price is low. The diving method is an extremely expensive and unprofitable method. It is prudent to consider subsidizing the purchase of small size rapana.

Mr Todor Georgiev, representative of the Bulgarian Black Sea Association: undersized rapana is not bought, so we should consider launching tools for financial support for fishermen to reduce the rapana population.

Discussions about the Black Sea shark followed:

Mr. Vasil Raichinov raises the question of why it is forbidden to catch sharks in the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean and is allowed in the Black Sea.

Conf. Violin Raykov: There is only one species of shark in the Black Sea - the Black Sea shark. It is a supreme predator and an important part of the food chain. Its population is declining worldwide, the Black Sea is no exception. Of the Black Sea countries, only Bulgaria catches this species. There is a proposal to introduce a ban on fishing, taking into account the breeding season. All scientific estimates show that stocks have fallen sharply.

Mr. Kiril Zheglev: If the Black Sea shark population is declining, given that it is only caught in Bulgaria, it means that fishermen are not the only reason for that. The shark lives in deep water and it has sometimes happened that when a shark is caught at the border with the hydrogen sulfide area in the Black Sea, the caught fish is boiled. And this may be the reason for the population decline.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Violin Raykov: It would be interesting to initiate a pilot project with fishermen to monitor this phenomenon in the Black Sea and to track with GPS the movement of sharks.

Item 6: The following proposal for a recommendation to the EC emerges from the discussion on the Black Sea shark:

- Conducting a pilot study on the distribution and behaviour of Black Sea sharks;
- Based on the study, specific measures will be proposed to the authorities aiming at the conservation of the species;
- Based on the proposed measures, specific actions will be decided, not only for Bulgaria, but for the entire Black Sea.

About rapana:

- Carrying out a large-scale study initiated by the EC and GFCM, which will show the state of the resource, the operational stock and the ecological situation.

As for the Black Sea turbot - with this kind of thing they are clear: there are quotas, periods of prohibition and the stock of the resource is known.

Ms. Pinelopi Belekou: Since 2016, the EC has been paying close attention to fishing in the Black Sea. A ministerial declaration was signed in Sofia in 2018 and is very important, as it is a comprehensive government-wide document for the entire Black Sea region. The EC considers that only joint efforts can be effective in the Black Sea. Based on the Sofia Declaration, the Black Sea Working Group has drawn up a very detailed plan and concrete results be achieved only through the GFCM. In the case of turbot - a multi-annual action plan was adopted in 2017 and we have already passed the first three years of implementation and it can be concluded that it is successful. Everyone knows about the increase in the quota for Bulgaria and Romania and this is a clear message about how the measures work. Following the EC initiative, a two-step approach was applied - in the first 2 years the research result is applied and the quotas are determined on the basis of a precautionary approach, and in the next 2 years a new plan with increased quotas is applied. Regarding rapana: all the views and statements of the participants in the working group are very interesting. It is true that in the GFCM there are long discussions and different opinions on how to consider this species - as invasive or as a commercial resource. The prevailing opinion is that rapana is already part of the Black Sea ecosystem. GFCM considers that rapana has a commercial capture capacity and is registered as a species of commercial interest. The EC is preparing a regional action plan under the GFCM, with the main objective of developing the little information available on stocks. A key element is the interaction of the rapana with the environment and its interaction with other species. To ensure that the plan is successfully implemented, offshore research is needed to supplement the data.

About the shark: The Black Sea Working Group has decided to improve the roadmap for data collection. Due to COVID-19, the 2021 Georgia Black Sea Conference is postponed. and this was the next step after the Sofia Declaration.

Mr Todor Georgiev: It is very sad that the EC did not understand that the Black Sea ecosystem would be destroyed. People born here know what it's all about. It was proposed that those involved in capturing the small rapana to be subsidized.

Meeting was closed.

Minutes was realized by Mrs Elena Peneva

Chairman of BISAC - Dr. Yordan Gospodinov