



**VIRGINIJUS SINKEVIČIUS**  
Commissioner for Environment  
Oceans and Fisheries

Brussels,  
*Ref. Ares(2023)10681893*  
18.10.2023

Mr Esben Sverdrup-Jensen  
President of the European Association of fish Producer Organisation

Dear Mr Sverdrup-Jensen,

Thank you for your letter of 5 October 2023 to the BaltFish presidency and myself in which you draw attention to changes in this year's ICES advice for central Baltic herring.

You disagree with the changes operated by ICES and argue that the Commission should not have based its proposal for setting fishing opportunities for 2024 on some of the elements of the ICES advice, most notably on the new biomass reference points which in conjunction with article 4(6) of the Baltic MAP have led the Commission to propose to close the targeted fishery for central Baltic herring. You rather suggest to roll-over the 2023 TAC and to keep the targeted fishery open. Furthermore, you also suggest that ICES undertakes a new benchmark for this stock.

Regarding the Commission's relation with ICES, as you know ICES is an independent international organization of which neither the EU nor the Commission are a member. The Commission does not interfere with ICES' internal procedures nor its work, including the production of advice and the organization of benchmarks.

As you also know, the Commission is bound to base its proposals on the most recent ICES advice. The latest advice for central Baltic herring indicates that even with no fishing at all the probability for the stock's biomass to recover above  $B_{lim}$  in 2025 is estimated to be lower than the threshold set in the Baltic MAP. As this is a legally binding threshold, the Commission had to propose a closure of the targeted fishery for central Baltic herring.

In order to not choke other fisheries for healthy stocks, such as sprat, the Commission proposed to set a quota for unavoidable by-catches. The Commission asked ICES for further information, but ICES was unfortunately not in a position to provide more. The Commission

therefore based its proposal on its internal assessment of the existing information. Your suggestion that the Commission proposes a roll-over the 2023 TAC level for central Baltic herring is not in line with legal requirements , because such a TAC would even be above the upper point of the  $F_{MSY}$  range.

I am looking forward to exchanging views with you on this and other topics on 18 October.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'V. Sinkevičius', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Virginijus Sinkevičius