

## FLAGS' Trans-national Cooperation Project Plan

### **BALTIC SEA SEAL AND CORMORANT TNC-PROJECT**

#### **Saving the Endangered Baltic Sea Coastal Fisherman – finding sustainable solutions to deal with growing seal and cormorant populations**

## PROJECTPLAN

### Summary

Baltic Sea seal and cormorant TNC is a cooperation project between a large partnership of Baltic Sea FLAGS (Fishing Local Action Groups). The aim is to find new solutions together for sustainable small scale coastal fishery to continue and coexist with increasing seal and cormorant populations. Seals and cormorants cause a lot of obstacles for traditional fishing using equipment like gillnets and traps. The fishermen claim that the increasing populations of seals and cormorants are the biggest obstacles to keep the fishery industry alive. New methods have to be developed and tested. Since this concerns small scale fishery industry in Northern Baltic Sea, it is reasonable to cooperate closely on these issues.

Therefore the concerned FLAGS/partners are going to collect and summarise results from research in the participating countries regarding the impact of seal and cormorant on small scale coastal fishery in the Baltic Sea Region. The aim is to bring a common message from these fishermen to decision makers at local, regional, national and European level to find ways to decrease the negative impact of this predation. As a result a network and platform for exchange of experiences and best practice will be formed for FLAGS and their stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region.

Most interested of these common cooperation have been Flags from northern Baltic Sea, Estonia, Finland and Sweden, where the problems are most actual. But also single Flags from Latvia, Poland, Germany and Denmark have shown interest.

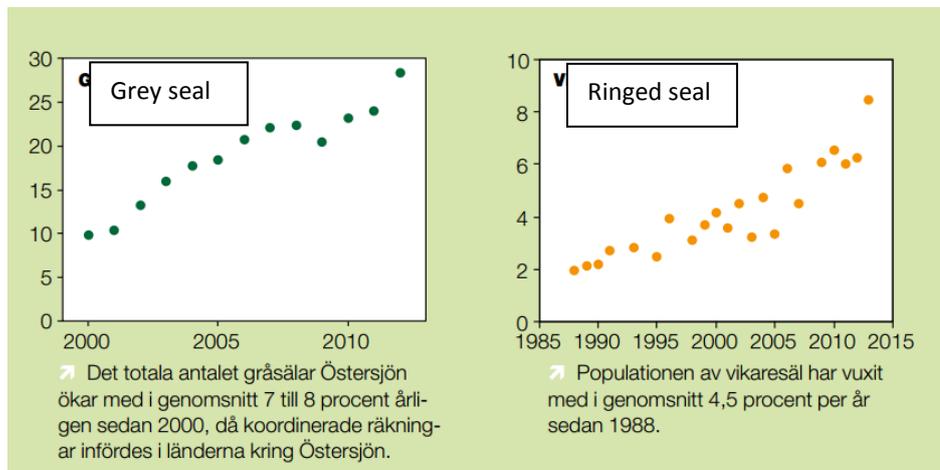
### Context

Around the Baltic Sea there are an estimated **6400 coastal fishermen** who fish using traditional methods, with boats less than 12 m in length. In 2009, their total declared fishery activity was 87.600 tons. The most commonly used methods are fishing with nets, hoop nets and different types of traps.

In the Baltic Sea area, fishing with vessels over 12 meters accounts for the majority of the fishing activity, 1.865.000 tons. The most common fish are herring, sprat and cod. **The share of small scale coastal fisheries in the total fishing activity in the Baltic Sea is approximately 12% (2009).** These small-scale fisheries compare favorably with other segments of the fleet in terms of selectivity and energy efficiency. Since they fish in local waters, they are also strongly integrated in the coastal economies. Thus, small-scale fisheries play an important role in ensuring sustainable development of coastal areas around the Baltic. Even if the income from fishing is declining, this sector remains a key factor in the viability of nearly all coastal villages and communities, providing a basis for their economies, culture, traditions and a large part of the local diet.

However, the future of this fishery segment is very uncertain in most countries around the Baltic Sea. The biggest problem is declining profitability, caused by a number of factors such as rising costs, declining catches, competition from imported fish, and more recently also by **threat from fish-eating species such as seals and cormorants.**

Grey seal population has increased dramatically in recent decades. **Studies show that the population has increased eight times higher since the 1980s**, and the number of grey seals in the Baltic Sea is officially estimated to be 28.000. However, according to other estimates this number can be as high as 54.000. In addition, there are about 25.000 Ringed seals in the Bothnic Bay. In some areas and for some species the seals and the commercial fishing are equal in the way they impact the mortality of fish.



Tero Härkönen, Olle Karlsson, Britt-Marie Bäcklin & Charlotta Moraeus, Naturhistoriska riksmuseet

The population of ringed seal has increased with an average of 4,5% per year since 1988

The total number of grey seals in the Baltic Sea is increasing yearly with 7-8% since 2000, when coordinated counting between the Baltic Sea states was introduced

The cormorant has also recently become a major problem for commercial fisheries. Previously, small number of cormorants from the Atlantic Ocean visited the Baltic Sea during winter, but in the past decades the cormorant has expanded from Central Europe to the Baltic Sea and **has grown from single colonies to an estimated 160.000 pairs** in 2001. Based on studies of how much fish these animals consume (seals: 5-7 kg of fish per day, cormorants: about 0.5 kg of fish per day), an estimation of the consumption per day and year is:

	Population individuals	Consumption, kg		Ton
		Indiv/day	Popul/day	Popul/year
Seal	50000	5	250000	91250
Cormorant 160 000 pairs	320000	0,5	160000	58400

Moreover, research data show that both species also affect fish population in other ways, as their presence scares away fish stems from their natural breeding and growth areas. It is also important to point out that seals and cormorant are living and eating in the coastal waters so their predation is almost entirely affecting the small scale coastal fishery.

This declining profitability and other emerging problems make it difficult to recruit young fishermen to the small-scale coastal fishing. **The average age of fishermen is high – in some countries it is higher than the average retirement age.** As a result, the viability of communities around the Baltic Sea and their local economies are at risk.

**Objective**

The main objective of this project is to:

- Summarize a number of research reports to express a common view from the Baltic Sea FLAGs regarding the impact of seals and cormorants on coastal fishery.
- Communicate this common view to decision makers at local, regional, national and European level.
- Find ways to achieve a balanced management of the seal and cormorant population and in that way minimize the negative effects for coastal fishery.

- Establish a permanent platform form Baltic Sea FLAGs to meet and exchange experiences, knowledge and good practice.

In order to ensure a sustainable development of the Baltic Sea and its coastal communities, **it is important that the impact of seals and cormorants on the fish stocks and on the livelihood of the small-scale fisheries is estimated and taken into account in policy decisions.** A large number of studies already exist, but many of them present primarily the point of view of the environmental organizations, while the voice of other stakeholders is seldom heard, partly due to the lack of organization of the small-scale fisheries. Newly emerging concerns such as the ecosystem impact of seals and cormorants, as well as unforeseen consequences such as spreading of parasites, until now largely absent from the discussion, should also be taken into account.

The FLAGs can make a significant contribution to the seals and cormorants issue because:

- they are multi-sectoral partnerships which take a broader view of their territory and thus can help reconcile a variety of interests, environmental, economic and social;
- they have experience in working with the fishing sector and in-depth knowledge of the small-scale fisheries; in many areas they help in the organization of the sector and provide it with a “voice”; most FLAGs also have good contact with sports fishermen who are another important stakeholder in the project;
- many FLAGs also regularly cooperate with research organizations;
- through national and transnational networking they are a good platform for exchange of solutions and good practices, and they have the capacity to carry out coordinated awareness-raising activities.

It is therefore proposed to carry out a cooperation project involving FLAGs from countries of the Baltic region, on the impact of seals and cormorants on fisheries communities and fish stocks in the Baltic Sea, and on potential solutions. This is the first cooperation project involving a significant number of Baltic FLAGs (up to now cooperation projects have been carried out mainly between FLAGs from the same country or on a bilateral basis).

***Objectives in the short term:***

- 1) to collect and analyze existing studies and documents concerning seals and cormorants in the Baltic Sea region, to explore their impact on the fisheries sector, including fishing tourism, game fishing and aquacultures, and the range of alternative solutions. This will be done by collecting the results of central seal and cormorant studies in each participating country. The leading research centres are among the key stakeholders of the project. The existing studies mostly focus on the impact of seals and cormorants on the fish stocks – here the focus will be broader, and the impact is evaluated on the whole fisheries industry as well as profitability on the fisherman level. The information gaps will be identified on the local, national and Baltic Sea area levels.
- 2) to help develop higher quality population management plans of seals and cormorants and a joint message on the problems and solutions concerning seals and cormorants on fisheries communities, taking into account the result of the studies and the needs and expectations of various stakeholders,
- 3) to disseminate this message among stakeholders and regional, national and European level civil servants and decision-makers, e.g. creating a platform for opinion exchange and sharing the information, including influencing the ban of seal products in the EU area and other related EU policies,
- 4) to create a platform of exchange between stakeholders, including fishermen, fisheries communities and researchers, as well as environmental stakeholders, with a view to identify, exchange and promote good practices and innovative solutions of the seals and cormorant issues.

- 5) to build a joint evaluation framework to be used on the local level to measure concrete losses that seals and cormorants cause to fishermen. This will be complemented by interviewing about 20 professional fishermen on each FLAG area with the same, joint questionnaire in cooperation with the FLAG. The aim is to get more than 200 replies from the fishermen on the whole Baltic Sea area. In addition the specific focus will be on:
- impact of presence of seals and cormorants on the catch
  - impact of seals and cormorants on the fishing effort, is there a need to work extra days?
  - impact of seals and cormorants on the fishermen's revenue and business profitability
  - impact of seals and cormorants on the supply of locally caught fish, demand of local fish and the whole fisheries sector and local/regional economy

***Objectives in the long term (as a result of achieving the short term objectives):***

- 1) to create a permanent system of exchanging, analyzing and disseminating information about seals and cormorants and their impact on the livelihoods of coastal communities, including good practices of addressing this issue in an effective and acceptable manner;
- 2) to carry out awareness-raising activities aimed at decision-makers and the general public on the impact of seals and cormorants on fisheries communities;
- 3) to strengthen cooperation between FLAGs around the Baltic and their local stakeholders, to help them develop joint solutions, stimulate various forms of exchange (including e.g. commercial links between businesses in FLAG areas) and create basis for further joint projects.

It is common agreed in discussions between Flags and national network units that the project starts when several Flags from the northern area in different countries are making their final decisions. The first stage of the cooperation project will involve the following activities involving all participating FLAGs:

- 1) Prepare practical information and activity so Flags have possibility to sign contract for participating
- 2) establishing the project Steering Group and expert group
- 3) identification of studies and other sources of information
- 4) analysis of existing information, identification of gaps
- 5) disseminating information to the fisheries sector and communities, identification of good seals & cormorants related practices and facilitating exchange (e.g. study tours) between fisheries stakeholders from FLAG areas
- 6) preparing information material and formulating conclusions and recommendations concerning seals and cormorants' impact on fisheries communities
- 7) disseminating the conclusions and recommendations.

The role of the participating FLAGs will be essential to drive forward the project activities, to ensure the involvement of the small-scale fisheries sector and to help in adapting the messages to the different types of audiences. The cooperation with environmental NGOs will be essential and it will be sought right from the start of the project.

The following key outputs are envisaged:

Output	Source of verification
- collecting studies and documents on seals and cormorants and their impact on Baltic fisheries from at least 10 organizations and institutions;	key expert's (incl. grassroots level) report
- analysis of the existing information about the impact of seals and cormorants on Baltic fisheries sector and communities, identification of knowledge gaps and ways to address them;	key expert's (incl. grassroots level) report, Steering Group reports
- raising awareness of approximately 80 local stakeholders from FLAGs around the Baltic and establishing exchange of good practices, using video clips in doing this;	reports from workshops, evaluation forms, joint actions undertaken
- development of key conclusions and recommendations in formats adapted to at least the following target groups: decision makers, researchers, local fisheries stakeholders, general public	publishable versions of documents approved by Steering Group
- dissemination of key messages (printing of reports, discussion papers, leaflets; articles, video clips and programs in media; presentations at events); at least 5 different types of documents will be published; joint seminar on the results related to EU Strategy of Baltic Region & declaring a common statement there	publications and other printed material, videos, TV and radio recordings etc.
- developing the scope and contents of the second phase of the project.	new project proposal developed and endorsed by interested FLAGs

The goal and benefit for the project is:

- get real costs and effects of the damage seals and cormorants cause to the fishery and single fishermen, calculated, measured and presented of authored research institutes
- get better understanding and professional information material for the effects and problems on local, national and EU-level, and therefore
- get better understanding and acceptance for needed solutions to avoid damage, for example
  - o real and better compensation for damage
  - o possibility to use hunted seal and cormorant
  - o possibilities to use better methods to hunt seal and cormorants near traps
- get information about different seal-and cormorant solutions which already are used in other parts of Baltic Sea, more possibilities for changing information
- get possibility to arrange local, national and transnational seminars and informing happenings
- get change in the atmosphere of handling the problems

## 5: Monitoring & Follow up

The Project Leader and the other aforementioned members,

1. Shall make all the necessary arrangements to ensure that any audits or documents or otherwise that may be required by the duly authorized, Regional, National and Community Authorities are carried out.
2. Undertake, in the case of an audit carried out by any duly authorized national or community authority, to present all the justification documents (such as minute approval, nomination of chair, secretary,

record of attendance at meetings) that they shall keep for 10 years following the last payment.

## **6: Organisation of the Trans-national Partnership**

For the successful management of the partnership and completion of the project, all the members of the partnership have decided on the following organizational methodology.

The transnational *Seals and Cormorants – sustainable management of the common fisheries issue in the Baltic Sea area* project is a consortium of individual FLAG projects on the basis of the EC rules for LAGs'/FLAGS' transnational projects. The project implementer can be the FLAG directly or a fisheries-related expert organisation operating on the FLAG territory.

Each participating FLAG is responsible for:

- the administrative and financial transactions it directs within its own local project;
- the establishment of project financing for the inherent part it is concerned
- assisting the Lead partner FLAG to the reporting activities by providing on time information requested
- immediately informing the Lead partner FLAG of any event likely to cause temporary or permanent discontinuing or any other deviation of the co-operation;
  
- the preservation of all records justifying the expenditure incurred and showing evidence of the nature of public co-funding;
- providing all necessary documents to a control or an audit by the competent authorities.

South Finland Flag ESKO operates as a Lead partner.

The responsibilities of the Lead Partner are:

The Lead Partner FLAG/LAG performs the following functions:

- leading and coordination of the joint activities
- financial and administrative coordination of the project joint activities
- coordination and practical arrangements of the Steering Committee meetings:

The transnational project is led by the Transnational Steering Group, where all partner territories can nominate maximum one member per partner and maximum 3 member per country.

The group will have four meetings during the project, and also in the beginning several internet-meetings. The steering group have also as tasks to decide for more detailed activities according to the project plan. The partner areas may establish territorial level steering groups for the project implementation locally too if they wish.

## **7: Communication and Publicity**

The Project Leader and the aforementioned members,

Undertake to inform the beneficiaries of completed actions of the Community's participation. This information shall also be mentioned in any communications' operations disseminated or transferred whether internally within or external to the Trans-national partnership. Information and publicity will be implemented in accordance with the European Commission Regulation on information & publicity.