BSAP Fund

Baltic Fish Project

John Nurminen Foundation

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1. Executive summary of the project

A variety of sustainable fish products is now available in Sweden and minced bream has been tested in many institutional kitchens in the Åland Islands. The Baltic Fish project, led by the John Nurminen Foundation and co-financed by the Baltic Sea Action Plan Fund, managed to raise interest, and establish market-based management fishing of cyprinids, namely bream, roach, and ide. By eating cyprinids and other sustainably caught, underutilised fish from the Baltic Sea, consumers can significantly reduce the impact of their diets on the eutrophication of the sea and inland waters as well as their climate footprint.

The goal of the Baltic Fish project (2019−2021) was to create shared rules for sustainable fish stock management and develop a market-driven food production chain that uses cyprinid fish sustainably in Sweden and Åland Islands, as well as to increase the demand for cyprinid fish in Sweden. The targets were achieved in Sweden but establishing a permanent production chain in Åland proved to be a challenge, partly due to the COVID pandemic.

During the project 52 tonnes of cyprinids were fished in Sweden and 2 tonnes in Åland. This means that the fishing activities carried out under the project removed about 400 kg of phosphorus from the sea.

Commercial production chain for cyprinid fish products was established and demand for these products was created in Sweden. However, the goal of the project, establishment of production chain in Åland Islands, was not achieved. The biggest challenge in Åland was to involve the potential processors of the fish and create a dialogue in the business chain (fishermen, fish industry, wholesalers, chefs) where all the actors are truly cooperating with each other. It would have been beneficial to have a producer as a project partner. The pandemic made things more difficult, too. In general, it seems that the Guldhaven model which combines fishermen, making of fish mass and products seems to be more sustainable than the Finnish model with separate actors and many vulnerable linkages.

In general, fishing activities went well, the fishermen were easily found, and suitable gear was already available in Åland and was purchased with project funding in Sweden. Finding suitable fishing waters proved difficult in Sweden due to the ownership structures of water areas. Lack of fishing waters reduced catches. Special requirements and rules required in the salmon areas of the northern Sweden increased paperwork.

In Sweden, rules for fishing were created together with stakeholders and updated during the project. Cooperation with SLU, the authorities and other stakeholders will continue after the project to agree on long-term management fishing for cyprinid fish. In Åland, local authorities did not see the need for separate fishing rules, but the size of stocks must be monitored if fishing increases.

Attitudes of the potential buyers, like municipalities, restaurants and consumers have mainly been positive even though elderly people might be more familiar with cyprinids. People are still worried about dioxins, and emerging substances (PFAS) may cause future challenges for all fish from the Baltic Sea and inland lakes. Another small setback was that in Sweden, coastal bream was given yellow colour in September 2020 in the WWF Fish Guide, when in Finland it is marked green. More data has been gathered on the bream and the size of its stocks, so that the reassessment would turn the colour green in the next update of the WWF Sweden Fish Guide.

Good products of bream and ide have been made for the Swedish markets, for which there is demand. There is potential for new products as well. No actual fish products could be created in Åland, but minced fish meat was marketed to institutional kitchens and tested in many kitchens. Major reasons for the problems were the lack of a committed fish producer in Åland and the Covid pandemic.