

Seminar on European Practices in Recreational Fishing

Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Sirkka-Liisa Anttila

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Distinguished Guests, Dear Friends of Fishing,

It is my great pleasure and honour to bring the Finnish Government's greetings to this Annual Meeting. We are most pleased that the European Anglers Alliance chose Finland as the venue for the meeting this year. Such a high-level international meeting and Seminar, with particular focus on recreational fishing, is most welcome for us this very autumn. Your expertise will make a significant contribution and give fresh international perspectives to the overhaul of the fishing legislation, which is currently under way in Finland. Also in terms of the timing holding this meeting here in Finland was just perfect.

In 2008 there were about 1.8 million recreational fishermen in about one million households in Finland. 44 per cent of men and 24 per cent of woman engaged in fishing in one way or the other. The most common tackle was the hook and line. The total catch amounted to 33 million kg and the value of the fish catch, estimated according to the prices paid to professional fisherman, was 54 million euros. This shows that recreational fishing is highly significant in our country - it would be quite difficult to find a Finnish citizen who had never gone fishing in his or her life. Fishing is part of the Finnish lifestyle. It provides us with both recreation and nature experience, and abundant, diverse and pure food to complement our diet.

Because fishing is such an important leisure activity for so many Finns, there is obviously quite a lot of discussion on the overhaul of the fishing legislation. Our aim is that the new Fishing Act will allow ecologically, socially and economically sustainable use and management of fish resources in Finland. In this work we have found strong support in the EIFAC Code of Practice for Recreational Fisheries. So we are very happy that this document will also be presented here in this Seminar

As I already said, recreational fishing is practised widely in Finland and with a variety of equipment, which is why research into the impacts of fishing is also very important. Sustainable fishing must be founded on solid scientific information about its ecological, social and economic impacts. We also need a vigorous group of various kinds of actors to prepare and implement the strategies and laws. The organisations in the fisheries sector have a very important role to play in this work.

In recent years the development of several Baltic salmon stocks has shown quite a positive trend. The number of migrating salmon smolts has increased, in particular those originating from certain big northern rivers, such as the Tornionjoki and Kalix Rivers, to mention a couple. Similarly, the number of spawning adults and their offspring in the rivers has been growing.

As to the observations made this summer, the catches of Baltic salmon by professional fishermen in the coastal areas have fallen by almost a half. The same applies to the number of salmon individuals ascending the Tornionjoki River. So far the observations have been based on two sources, echo sounding on migrating salmon in the Torniojoki and Simojoki Rivers as well as salmon catches by recreational fishers in the same rivers.

We all know that there is considerable natural variation in the size of fish stocks. Therefore we cannot assess the status of Baltic salmon stocks only on the basis of preliminary data from one year alone. Nevertheless, in view of the information we have at the moment, I would like to encourage both scientists and fishermen to focus on collecting best possible, reliable data for further analyses and conclusions.

The role of long-line fishing should be carefully examined. After 2008, when drift-net fishing was fully banned in the Baltic Sea, fishing efforts with long-lines have increased manifold. This has been possible as the closed season, when long-line fishing of salmon is prohibited, has been reduced from seven and a half months to just three. Finland warned at the EU Council session in 2005, where this decision was taken, that long-line fishing in the autumn will take more undersized fish than fish of the landing size, with a ratio of three to one. Undersized fish have to be discarded and thus they are wasted resources.

I strongly urge the experts to draw attention to and thoroughly examine this aspect.

The EU Commission has drafted the second Salmon Action Plan to establish Community guidelines for managing salmon stocks in the Baltic Sea, especially in the main basin and the Gulf of Bothnia. Member States are really looking forward to this proposal, which for the moment is being scrutinised by the legal services of the European Parliament and the Commission. To my understanding this proposal should be presented sometime during this autumn. I hope that the processing of the plan under the co-decision procedure both in the EP and in the Council will not take too long. Personally, I am counting on having a close cooperation amongst the relevant parties.

Salmon is an important target species for small-scale coastal fisheries and a major attraction for fishing tourism especially in the rivers. Personally, I consider that the Baltic salmon stocks constitute a common resource which should allow successful harvesting in both marine areas and in rivers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finnish abundant and diverse waters offer excellent opportunities for fishing. Here you can fish from the sea, lakes, rivers or streams, in highly varying natural environments. I truly hope that you will also have the time and opportunity to go fishing and enjoy our beautiful late summer.