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EAA position on recreational fishing for Western Baltic cod in 2026

Position statement by the European Anglers Alliance (EAA) for Western Baltic cod in 2025. The EAA is a pan-European organisation for recreational angling, defending the interests of approximately 25 million European anglers.



**DEUTSCHER
ANGELFISCHER-
VERBAND e.V.**



Sportfiskarna

The position statement was written by three EAA members that have a particular interest regarding fishing opportunities for Cod in the Western Baltic Sea: Deutscher Angelfischerverband e.V. (Germany), Sportfiskarna (Sweden) and Sportfiskerforbund (Denmark).

The European Anglers Alliance suggests the following regulations and actions concerning Baltic cod for 2026:

- **Recreational fishing opportunities for cod must be preserved.**
- **Consider a combination of management measures that ensures equivalent protection at simultaneous higher anglers' satisfaction: introduce a maximum landing size for anglers, increase the minimum landing size and combine both with seasonal closures and bag limits¹; intensify the dialogue between the interest groups, science, and politics.**
- **No dedicated fishing activities on spawning cod.**
- **Improvement and obligatory use of selective gear to reduce bycatch of cod in commercial fisheries is urgently needed.**
- **Adoption of the *Framework towards development of a European Management Plan for the Great Cormorant*² to reduce the impact of cormorant predation on cod stocks^{3,4,5}.**

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) published its [catch recommendations for western Baltic cod](#)⁶ (*Gadus morhua*) on May 28 2025, for the years 2026 and 2027. Current scientific information shows that the western Baltic cod stock suffers from both environmental factors affecting reproductive success, a previous history of overfishing and that selective commercial fishing gears that could reduce bycatch of small cod have not yet been utilised.

Within the framework of the EU management plan, ICES has recommended zero catch for cod in the western Baltic Sea for 2026.

Recreational fishing vs commercial fishing – a totally different approach

While commercial fishers want to get their permitted catch, the so-called quota, as quickly as possible with as little effort as possible, recreational fishers prefer a different approach. Profit is not a motive for recreational anglers as the sale of recreationally caught fish is forbidden. With a daily harvest limit the angler is given a daily maximum catch and whether they reach this or not, is not the primary reason to fish from the coast or to venture out onto the Baltic Sea. Just the experience of fishing together with the chance of catching a fish is what drives most anglers. The ability to perhaps take home a fish and not just the size of the daily harvest limit is often seen as a goal and not, as in commercial fishing, as the sole motivator for going fish⁷.

Recognize the added value of recreational anglers!

Total economic impact of marine recreational fishing alone amounts to 10.5 billion euro, supporting almost 100 000 jobs in Europe⁸. (Inland recreational fishing we have estimated to be at about the same value). The largest share of this expenditure is on boats, fishing tackle, travel, and overnight stays. Anglers are therefore an important source of income for tourism in coastal regions, especially in the off season.

Anglers live for the enjoyment of fishing and the chance of catching a fish, not for the amount caught

The so-called bag limit (daily harvest limit) has been in effect for recreational cod fishing in the western Baltic Sea and Öresund region since 2016. This means that the daily catch allowed for all recreational fishers is limited to a certain number of fish. In 2023 the daily harvest was limited to 1 fish per angler and fishing day. However, science has proven that equivalent protection at simultaneous anglers' satisfaction can be reached if a higher bag limit is combined with alternative management measures: a maximum landing size to protect big super spawners which are of exceptional importance for the stock productivity⁹; increased minimum landing size and seasonal closures¹.

The European Anglers Alliance has recognized that, as protectors and users of the stock, anglers have made their contribution to the recovery of the stock and will continue to do so in the future. In Germany, for example, the introduction of the bag limit in 2017 reduced the removal of cods by recreational fishery by 1 722 t in the following year¹.

¹ Haase K, Weltersbach MS, Lewin W-C, Zimmermann C, Strehlow HC (2022). Potential effects of management options on marine recreational fisheries – the example of the western Baltic cod fishery, *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, **79**(3): 661–676, <https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fsac012>

² Cowx IG, Jepsen N, Van Anrooy R (2025). Framework towards development of a European Management Plan for the Great Cormorant. Draft – May 2025. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/ae045ae8-df8e-47d9-b733-b062cfd4a83c/content>

³ Jepsen N (2022). Cormorants and fish population – Documentations of effects. Public hearing on Cormorant problematic affecting EU fisheries and aquaculture, 11 May 2022. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/248202/01%20Niels%20Jepsen.pdf>

⁴ Pietrock, M, Sternberg N (2021). Analyse von Speiballen zur Ermittlung der Nahrungszusammensetzung von Kormoranen in den Gebieten Plöner Seen, Untertrave und Schlei. Bericht im Auftrag des Ministeriums für Energiewende, Landwirtschaft, Umwelt, Natur und Digitalisierung des Landes Schleswig-Holstein. Institut für Binnenfischerei e. V. Potsdam-Sacrow, 90 pp.

⁵ EIFAAC (2022). Impact of cormorant predation on fish and fisheries in Europe. EIFAAC Advisory note: 1/2022

⁶ ICES (2025). Cod (*Gadus morhua*) in subdivisions 22-24, western Baltic stock (western Baltic Sea). In Report of the ICES Advisory Committee, 2025. ICES Advice 2025, cod.27.22-24. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202560>

⁷ Gundelund, C, Arlinghaus R, Birdsong, M, Flávio H, & Skov C (2022). Investigating angler satisfaction: The relevance of catch, motives and contextual conditions. *Fisheries Research*, **250**, 106294. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fishres.2022.106294>

⁸ Hyder K, Radford Z, Prellezo R, Weltersbach MS, Lewin WC, Zarauz L, Ferter K, Ruiz J, Townhill B, Mugerza E, Strehlow HV (2017). Research for PECH Committee - Marine recreational and semi-subsistence fishing - its value and its impact on fish stocks. IP/B/PECH/IC/2016-131. European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies: Brussels. ISBN 978-92-846-1604-6. 136 pp.

⁹ Barnett LA, Branch TA, Ranasinghe RA, & Essington TE (2017). Old-growth fishes become scarce under fishing. *Current Biology*, **27**(18), 2843-2848.