

Below you can find a translation of our debate article "Rädda Sillen med en Beredskapskvot" originally published in the Swedish newspaper Svenska Dagbladet 13:th of July 2025.

Save the herring with an emergency quota

We must have the capacity to manage our food supply in times of crisis. With an emergency quota we can strengthen both our preparedness and the ecosystem of the Baltic Sea, says the representatives of the Baltic Sea Call to Action.

We need an emergency quota of herring as a living food reserve in the Baltic Sea to rely on in times of crisis or war. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has also increased the threat level for more countries, including Sweden. We have joined NATO and we are now strengthening our military and civil defence. We must have the capacity to manage on our own needs during times of crisis, including our food supply.

During World War II, herring was not rationed and was easy to obtain, even if one could not fish themselves. It was an important source of nutritional and delicious food, and it could be again today, if only there were enough herring in the Baltic Sea. Unfortunately, today there is far less herring available for human consumption in the Baltic Sea than there was during the World War II. The amounts of herring ready to spawn has declined drastically since the mid 1950s (see the accompanying figure), and has since then more or less continuously been below the limit for a sustainable population (B_{lim}), the biological emergency value where there is a high risk that the population will collapse. The current proposal from the marine research organization ICES, on May 28, to further increase the catch quotas, now for the second year in a row, has led to that many are deeply concerned about that herring populations in many parts of the Baltic Sea may collapse. The population of herring in the western Baltic Sea has already collapsed and had been on the limit on what can be sustainably tolerated since 1995, and scientists had also warned of the risk for this collapse many years ahead. Politicians in the countries around the Baltic Sea ultimately bear the responsibility for this through the fisheries management plan they have decided on.

To increase the herring population and secure a sustainable level well above the B_{lim} (the critical lower limit with a risk for collapse) and to fill our pantry ahead of a possible crisis, we propose that an emergency quota of herring should be introduced. This quota is stored as free and living fish in the Baltic Sea. With the current situation this will mean that the catch must be drastically reduced, to save on the capital. Thereafter the fisheries management should be reformed, so that the catch is only done on the interest, and not on the capital. We suggest that 50–75% of the Swedish herring quota be allocated to our emergency quota until a sustainable and resilient population is established again in the Baltic Sea. We also want to encourage our neighbouring countries around the Baltic Sea to look into this strategy ahead of the upcoming negotiations on catch quotas this autumn, as it should also be in their interest to fill their pantries in these troubled times.

From July 1 this year, Sweden will hold the presidency of Baltfish, a regional organisation with members from all the EU connected countries around the Baltic Sea, whose opinion is also highly regarded in decisions about next year's fishing quotas. Sweden thereby has a

fantastic opportunity to influence the decision together with the other EU countries surrounding the Baltic Sea.

Part of our preparedness must also be to prioritize the local coast fisheries and its infrastructure. In times of a crisis situation it is better to trust in more and smaller vessels than a few easy targeted large industrial trawlers. It is therefore also logical that the emergency quota is taken exclusively from the pelagic quotas and not from the coastal quotas. The coastal fisheries must be prioritized, with some reservation that the herring under certain times of the year may need extra protection in certain locations to secure spawning sites along the coast.

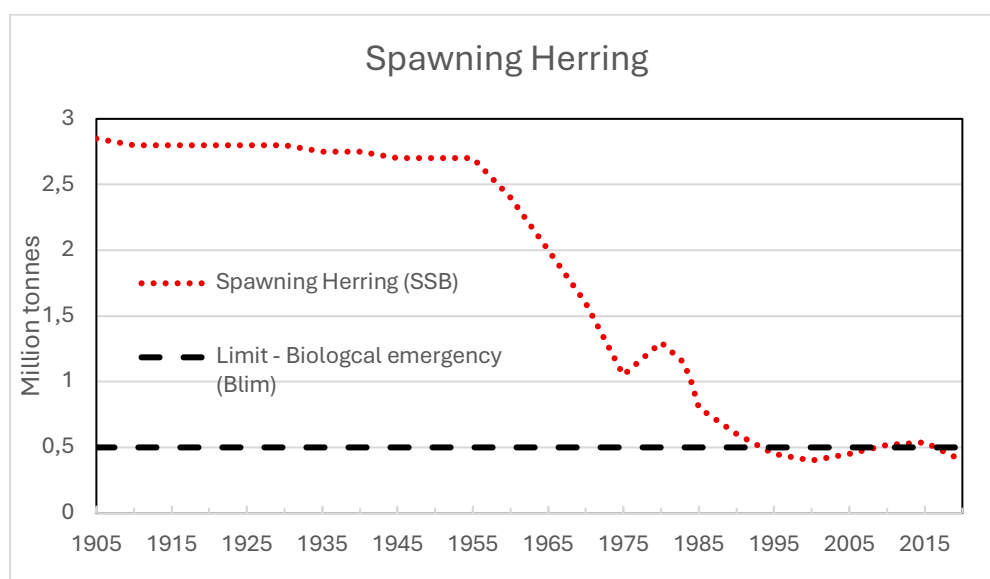
The current fragile ecosystem of the Baltic Sea will be strengthened with the suggested emergency quota. Herring is central in the Baltic Sea's relatively species-poor ecosystem, as food for cod, salmon, seal and birds, and a consumer of animal plankton and stickleback. Thus, an increase in herring will build a more resilient ecosystem in the Baltic Sea able to better handle disturbances. The decline of the herring population has in many places already caused a large increase in stickleback, and as a consequence of this an overgrowth of algae, which is in turn a large threat to the survival of egg from other species, including herring and salmon.

Two recently published scientific papers in the highly ranked Science journal show that the current fisheries management accelerates the risk of collapse of herring in the Baltic Sea*. In another scientific paper, Swedish, Danish and Finnish scientist show that the best increase in growth of a fish population, including herring in the Baltic Sea, can be achieved if the catch is less than 50% of the maximal sustainable quota, the value (MSY) used by ICES to recommend the yearly fishing quotas**. The herring population in the western Baltic Sea has already collapsed, and all scientific data points towards that we must reduce the catch of herring to avoid the risk of collapse in the rest of the Baltic Sea. Introducing an emergency quota would therefore be very beneficial for the growth of the herring population.

Introducing an emergency quota strengthens both our own preparedness and the Baltic Sea ecosystem.

*) Edgar et al. Science 2024; Froese et al. Science 2025

***) Moesgaard Albertsen et al. Fish and Fisheries 2024



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