

# EU draws fire for allowing 'overfishing' of Baltic cod

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European Union ministers have agreed to cuts in Baltic cod catch quotas for next year that fall well short of calls by scientists worried about the stock's eventual collapse.

The fisheries ministers agreed overnight Monday to reduce catches of

western Baltic cod by 56 percent in 2017, despite calls by scientists for a 90-percent cut they say is needed to sustain stocks in Danish and German waters.

EU fisheries commissioner Karmenu Vellu said the commission, the bloc's executive, had proposed a reduction of 88 percent "to bring back the stock to sustainability as soon as possible," but had to accept a compromise to reach a deal among all member states.

Listening to the potential impacts on the different fishing fleets, Vellu said: "I have accepted a lower reduction that is still well above the lower limit of the scientific advice."

Vellu said the quotas would be accompanied by other measures to "protect this vulnerable species," including limiting recreational fishing to catches of five cod per day per person and three per day during the spawning season.

But conservation groups like Oceana were still concerned.

"Today's agreement seems to cover the bare minimum for legal requirements but lacks ambition to restore the heavily overfished Western Baltic cod back to healthy levels," Oceana's Europe director Lasse Gustavsson said in a statement.

"By deciding to continue overfishing, ministers not only risk environmental collapse but also ignore the potential growth for all fishing communities along the Baltic coast that depend on this iconic fish," he said.

The 56 percent reduction for 2017 represents a total allowable catch (TAC) of 5,597 tonnes of cod, compared to the commission's proposal of 1,588 tonnes.

In 2016, the TAC was set at 12,720 tonnes.

Tough quotas have encouraged a rebound in badly-depleted cod fisheries in the North Sea and Canada.

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