

Research for PECH Committee - Åland Islands

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Graphic overview

The Åland Islands (*Ahvenanmaa* in Finnish) is an archipelago province at the southwest of Finland. The archipelago is located in the Baltic Sea, bordering the Gulf of Bothnia. Its closest neighbour is Sweden. The Åland Islands consists of more than 6700 islands. 65 of these islands are inhabited, whereas the remaining islands are uninhabitable skerries or desolate rocks. In 2016 the Åland Islands counted 29 214 inhabitants (ÅSUB, 2016). The majority of these inhabitants reside in the capital of the archipelago, Mariehamn (ÅSUB, 2018).

Figure 1: Geographical location of the islands - Map of Finland



Source: shutterstock

1.2. Political system and current situation

The Åland Islands is an autonomous, demilitarised, Swedish-speaking region of Finland. The archipelago has its own government and parliament. The latter, in line with the basic principles of a democratic state, appoints the regional Åland government, supervises their work, passes laws in competent areas, and has budgetary powers. Finnish state law applies to those areas wherein the Åland parliament does not have the competence to pass laws.

The areas wherein the Åland parliament has the competence to legislate are laid down in article 18 of the Act of the Autonomy of Åland (1991/1144). All business related to internal affairs fall under the competence of the Åland parliament according to this treaty. National fisheries policy is considered as an internal affair and is therefore prepared by the Finance, Industry, Trade, and Agriculture Committee of the Åland parliament.



The autonomous status of the Åland Islands is also laid down in this Autonomy Act, even though Sweden and Finland had a dispute whether to recognize the new autonomous legal status of the Åland Islands after the publication of the Autonomy Act. The matter was namely referred to the Council of the League of Nations in 1921 which decided that the archipelago should be recognised as an autonomous region of Finland, but at the same time enjoy a special status under international law. All legal business related to the autonomy of the Åland Islands and international treaties are now executed by the Legal and Cultural Committee of the Åland parliament. When Finland joined the EU in 1995 it thus had to have the consent of the Åland parliament. The current relationship between the Åland Islands and the EU is regulated in the Åland protocol, thus confirming the special status under international law.

1.3. Economic overview in a regional context

The Åland Islands is a small society with an open economy that is dependent on trade with its neighbouring regions, notably Southern Finland and the Stockholm region which are both economic centres. The Åland Islands is sensitive to economic fluctuations of these two neighbouring markets. The economy of the Åland Islands itself is dominated by the service sector. Overall, the income levels are in line with the average of the mainland of Finland. The fishing sector in the Åland Islands is small and localised in comparison with neighbouring regions. The number of employed persons in the fishing sector in the Åland Islands amounted approximately 88 persons in 2016. Such statistics highlight the small size of the fishing sector.

2. FISHERIES SECTOR IN ÅLAND ISLANDS

2.1. Catches and landings

The evolution of the total fish catches by the archipelago (2004 - 2016) is reflected in figure 2. 100% of the catches landed in Finnish ports originated from Finnish vessels (Åland Islands included). The statistics on the yield of fishing, provided for by the government of Åland, indicates that Baltic herring and sprat are the most commonly caught species. Other popular fish includes perch, whitefish, and crayfish. Catches of perch and cod have decreased significantly.

Figure 2: The yield of fishing 2004-2016 (catch, tonnes)

Fish	Catch, tonnes												
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total	3.300	2.258	2.433	3.390	2.485	2.090	3.415	4.216	2.442	4.333	10.491	13.728	15.898
Perch	134	135	156	144	114	81	69	84	95	84	96	62	44
Bream	14	11	16	9	11	15	16	15	15	23	19	8	9
Flounder	3	3	6	11	1	38	13	4	39	15	1	5	3
Pike	34	38	38	28	15	16	11	14	13	13	15	12	10
Pike-perch	39	26	33	28	16	11	11	14	9	9	17	15	12
Trout	1	1	4	3	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Burbot	4	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	0
Salmon	101	70	29	37	13	10	10	20	17	6	8	11	12
Rainbow trout, wild	1	1	1	0	3	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Whitefish	108	93	91	76	65	54	43	63	50	58	55	54	44
Baltic herring and sprat	2.541	1.707	1.484	2.328	1.734	1.355	2.686	3.346	1.124	3.769	9.952	13.195	15.627
Cod	320	170	528	668	505	468	521	610	1.033	332	305	354	68
Other species	0	1	45	57	5	34	34	43	43	20	21	12	17
Crayfish, pcs	26.819	22.139	15.901	16.167	25.850	24.580	29.704	17.713	17.787	15.117	13.761	11.718	7.420

Note: The figures also include fish sold outside Åland

Source: The Government of Åland, Office of Fisheries

Updated 6.2.2017

Source: The Government of Åland, Office of Fisheries

2.2. Trade volume and values

Finland

In 2015, Finland was EU's 12th largest producer of fisheries and the 14th largest producer of aquaculture products. The consumption of aquaculture products in Finland amounted 23,3 kg/per capita in 2015, a 9% decrease from the previous year. In 2017 Finland imported a total amount of 119 000 tonnes of fish with a value of 524 million euro (figure 4). The most popular consumed species were herring, salmon, rainbow trout and canned tuna, of which salmon and trout are the main commercial species imported by Finland. The top 4 countries from which Finland imports (in value, 2017) fish are Norway, Sweden, Estonia and Denmark. The main commercial species for export are salmon, trout and herring. The main countries of destination (in value, 2017) are Estonia, the UK, France and Poland. Finland exported an average of 78 000 tonnes of fish (value: 152 million euro) to neighbouring countries in 2017 (figure 5). Finnish fish exports to neighbouring countries increased from 61 000 tonnes in 2009 to 78 000 tonnes in 2017.

Åland Islands

The Åland Islands caught a total amount of 15.898 tonnes of fish in 2015. The total gross value of the fish industry, taking into account import and export, in the archipelago region amounted 3.847 000 euro in 2016 (figure 3). The most important species landed, in terms of value, at the Åland Islands are Baltic herring, sprat, perch and cod.

Figure 3: The yield of fishing 2004-2016 (gross value, 1,000 EUR)

The yield of fishing 2004-2016

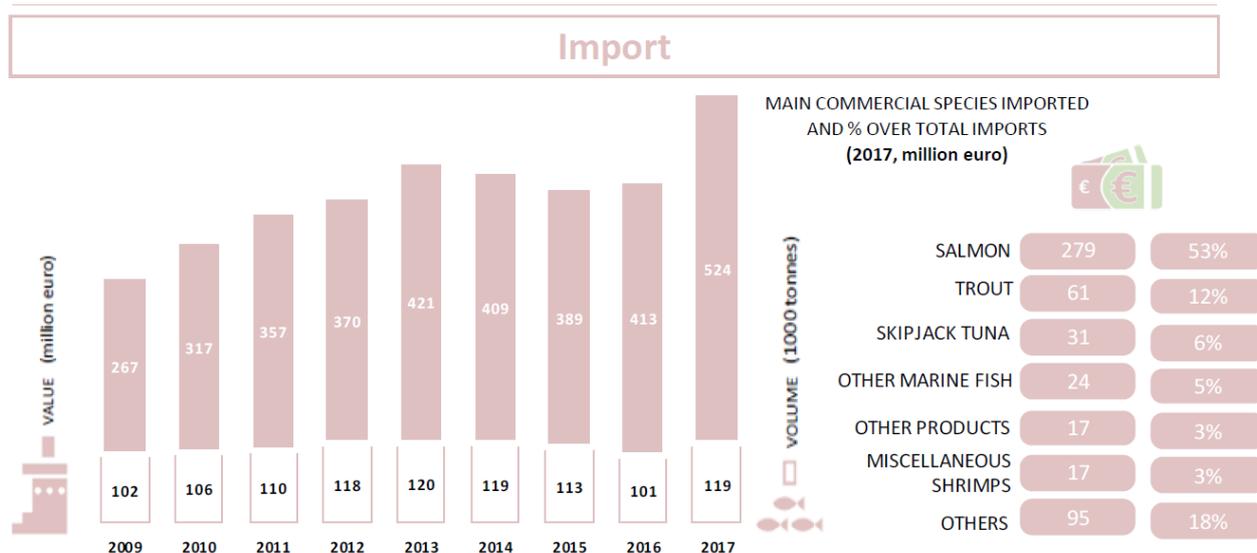
Fish	Gross value, 1 000 EUR												
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total	1.838	1.457	2.292	2.888	2.130	1.716	2.503	3.713	2.436	2.059	3.232	3.564	3.847
Perch	155	192	243	247	232	206	194	282	296	226	322	274	247
Bream	4	3	6	4	3	7	7	9	9	14	13	3	5
Flounder	6	4	7	12	5	28	13	8	40	12	3	7	8
Pike	34	42	52	46	29	29	22	28	26	26	27	21	17
Pike-perch	152	108	173	136	80	80	83	103	59	65	108	116	92
Trout	2	3	12	10	5	8	5	4	4	6	4	3	4
Burbot	13	8	8	5	7	8	4	3	4	3	3	2	1
Salmon	322	222	126	171	52	44	55	119	96	38	50	67	71
Rainbow trout, wild	1	2	1	1	5	7	0	1	2	0	0	1	0
Whitefish	455	401	391	352	366	332	274	355	203	273	261	304	234
Baltic herring and sprat	181	111	260	530	345	293	967	1.775	244	836	1961	2.193	2.845
Cod	447	292	960	1.299	902	611	805	983	1.400	524	447	543	148
Other species	0	5	17	33	13	7	16	3	14	3	2	2	5
Crayfish, pcs	65	64	37	45	85	57	59	40	40	32	31	30	20

Note: The figures also include fish sold outside Åland

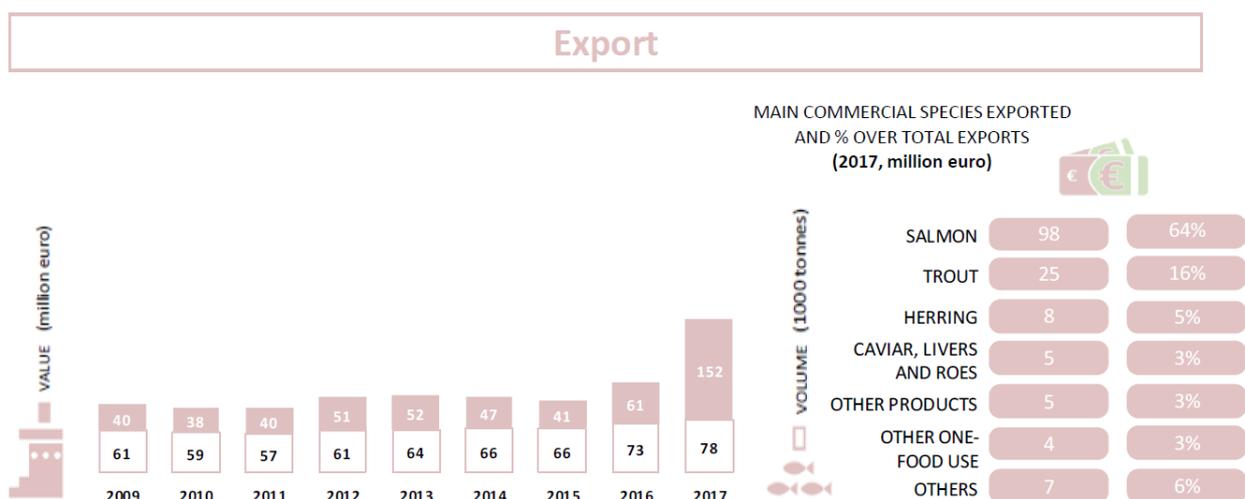
Source: The Government of Åland, Office of Fisheries

Updated 6.2.2017

Source: The Government of Åland, Office of Fisheries

Figure 4: Main commercial species imported and % over total imports (2017, million euro)

Source: EUMOFA - Finland in the world and in the EU (2015, FAO and Eurostat)

Figure 5: Main commercial species exported and % over total exports (2017, million euro)

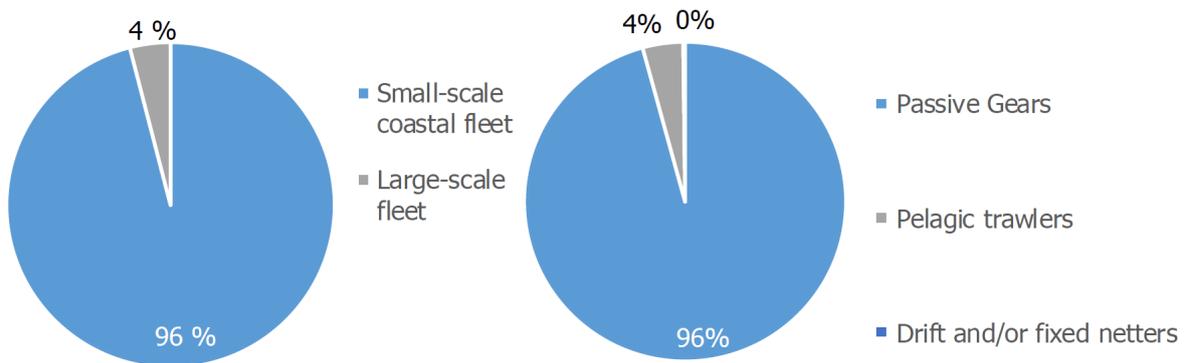
Source: EUMOFA - Finland in the world and in the EU (2015, FAO and Eurostat)

2.3. Fishing vessels

The EUMOFA vessel data for Finland includes the vessels from the Åland Islands. According to their 2015 statistics the Finnish fishing fleet is mainly comprised out of a small-scale coastal fleet (vessels less than 18 metres long). Only 4% of the Finnish fishing fleet is regarded as a large-scale fleet. The Finnish fishing fleet mainly uses pelagic trawls to catch herring. Offshore Finnish vessels mainly fish for cod with bottom trawls. According to the EU fishing fleet register Finland counted 3.274 active vessels in 2018.

Figure 6: The Finnish fishing fleet and gear composition

The Finnish fishing fleet and gear composition:



Source: EUMOFA - Finland in the world and in the EU (2015, FAO and Eurostat)

3. FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE POLICY FRAMEWORK

Currently, fish consumption in the EU is on a constant rise, while captures are decreasing due to depleting fish stocks. Consequently, overexploitation of marine resources has become a pressing issue in the EU. Aquaculture could be the answer to tighten this gap between supply and demand.

The Åland Islands mainly produces farmed fish for the mainland of Finland. The main commercial species farmed in the Åland Islands are salmonids and (rainbow) trout. In 2017 the Åland Islands had 6 aquaculture facilities operating and 94,5 people were employed in the aquaculture sector that same year. The total aquaculture production amounted 5 997 997 kg, with a value of 37 130 000 euro, in 2015.

EU cooperation in the aquaculture sector

Efficient, transparent and predictable management of aquaculture, improved cooperation, and increased competitiveness are to be maintained via cooperation on the Baltic Sea level. To this end, the Member States bordering the Baltic Sea participate in EU funded projects to achieve these strategic guidelines. Previous flag-ship EU funded projects, in which the Åland Islands participated, included AQAFIMA - Integrating Aquaculture and Fisheries Management towards a sustainable regional development in the Baltic Sea Region -, and AQUABEST. In addition the Åland Islands follows the recommendations made by HELCOM's Action Program for the Baltic Sea aquaculture sector, which focusses on reducing the net load and to create a nutrient neutral aquaculture sector using Baltic raw material in fish feed for fish.

National framework for the aquaculture sector

The Åland Islands has developed its own regional policy objectives, apart from Finland, in accordance with the Autonomy Act for its aquaculture sector. According to the aquaculture multiannual national plan of the archipelago the islands focus on research and development, cooperation between the government and industry, improved physical planning, marketing and information on aquaculture products, and cross border cooperation with neighbouring countries. National legislation mainly focusses on strict environmental control to achieve sustainable, environmental and economic management of the Åland Islands aquaculture sector.

National framework for capture fisheries sector

The Finance, Industry, Trade, and Agriculture Committee of the Åland parliament is responsible for all internal business related to fisheries, according to section 18 of the Åland Autonomy Act. It was furthermore agreed by the Finnish 1982 Fisheries Act that private owned water areas, where most of the Finnish fishing activities takes place, falls under the responsibility of their owners. These private water areas owners are represented in Finnish fisheries associations. All private owned waters are divided into fisheries

regions which are under municipal division or governmental administrations. The fisheries authorities of the Åland islands execute and monitor structural and market oriented activities which are financed by the EU. The national Employment and Economic Development Centres are responsible for the supervision of EU funds and the implementation of some local fisheries policies in the Åland islands.

Regional and International fisheries cooperation

The overarching instrument regulating international ocean governance is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Finland ratified this Convention, as well as other international instruments such as the FAO conference resolution 15/93 and the UN agreement of 1995 (Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks).

Regional ocean governance in the Baltic Sea Region, with support of and contributions from the European Commission, includes EUSBSR and HELCOM. HELCOM is a member of the BSAC, which advises the European Commission and the EU Member States on the management of fisheries in the Baltic Sea.

EUSBSR can be regarded as the regional cooperation model for this region. This strategy helps to mobilise all relevant EU funding and policies and coordinate the actions with the EU, EU member states, pan-Baltic organisations, financing institutions and NGO's to promote a more balanced development of the Baltic Sea Region. The objectives in this strategy closely corresponds to the work of HELCOM, a regional seas convention (RSC) governing the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, of which all Baltic coastal states are a member. There is no regional fisheries management organisation, RFMO, in the Baltic Sea Region.

The activities of HELCOM are laid down in the BSAP. Activities of HELCOM include the establishment of HELCOM-FISH, a working group for ecosystem-based sustainable fisheries, and coordinating and implementing fisheries policies between Russia and the EU.

4. FISHERIES RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, CONTROL AND ENFORCEMENT

4.1. Status of fish stocks in the Baltic Sea Region

Nine nations operate in the Baltic Sea, including Finland. Commercial fishing activities in the Baltic Sea Region is centred on cod, herring, sprat, and flatfish, whereby the Finnish commercial fishing industry mainly focusses on pelagic fish stocks, such as herring and sprat, and small sized fresh water species such as perch. TACs and quotas are set for Baltic cod, herring, salmon, sprat, and plaice for Finland. The Finnish Fishing Act 286/1982 and CFP regulate commercial fishing activities in the Baltic Sea Region in a sustainable manner to prevent overexploitation.

The European Parliament and the Council established a multiannual plan for the stocks of cod, herring and sprat in the Baltic Sea and the fisheries exploiting of those stocks in 2016. In May 2018, the European Parliament adopted the resolution regarding fishing mortality ranges and safeguards levels for certain herring stocks in the Baltic Sea.

Recreational fishing is very popular activity in Finland, where angling, jigging, ice fishing and fishing Baltic herring with a rod is allowed without a fishing permit for recreational purposes. Each year, around 16 million people fish for recreational purposes in Finnish waters. Statistics from the Natural Resources Institute Finland even conclude that such fishing activities in Finland account about 1/3 to 1/2 of the total fish catch (Natural Resources Institute Finland, 2017). Perch, pike, whitefish, and roach are considered to be the most often caught fish during recreational activities.

The Finnish management of commercial fisheries activities are monitored and enforced by the Southwest Finland Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, the provincial government of Åland and the Finish boarder guard. They jointly control the landings of fish and monitor the fishing activities of the commercial fishing vessels.

ACRONYMS

BSAC	Baltic Sea Advisory Council
BSAP	Baltic Sea Action Plan
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy
EUMOFA	European Market Observatory for Fisheries and Aquaculture
EU	European Union
EUSBSR	EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
HELCOM	Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission
RFMOs	Regional Fisheries Management Organisations
RSCs	Regional Seas Conventions
TACs	Total Allowable Catches
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

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