

## Dutch Shellfish Industry Launches New Fisheries Management Plan

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The Dutch cockle and mussel fishermen have launched a joint management plan for the shellfish fisheries in the Wadden Sea and Eastern Scheldt. The objective of the plan is the integration of fisheries and nature through tangible agreements. The plan was presented to the State Secretary for Fisheries, Mrs. G. Faber, on 29 March.

In 1993, the first management plan was made in co-operation with the government and nature conservation groups. The government and the shellfish industry agreed on a permanent closure of respectively 26% of the tidal flats in the Wadden Sea and 14% in the Eastern Scheldt. In years when shellfish stocks are low, 60% of the mean food requirement in shellfish for birds is reserved. In those years, the fishery is subject to quota restrictions, or even closure. In addition, the fishermen have taken measures to minimize potential disturbance of seals and birds and to protect eelgrass beds and stable mussel banks. Each year, the agreements in the management plan are translated into a fishing plan. To control compliance with the fishing plan, a black box is installed on all mussel and cockle vessels. This computer registers all fishing positions and activities.

Along with the launch of the first management plan in 1993, a scientific evaluation program was started to study the effects of the measures taken on nature conservation. On the basis of the evaluation, it was concluded that the policy strategy of integration of fisheries and nature has clearly been fruitful. Undesirable effects of the shellfish fishery on nature conservation values have been reduced significantly. Despite economic losses resulting

from the implementation of the management plan, the fishermen strongly support the measures taken and were complimented for the way they have taken on their co-managing responsibility. However, despite the management plan, the expected recovery of stable mussel beds and eelgrass fields in the Wadden Sea has lagged behind. According to the evaluation report, this was strictly due to natural factors. Therefore, the State Secretary for Fisheries deemed extra measures necessary.

In the new management plan, new management measures are included in addition to the existing agreements. The mussel and the cockle fishermen have closed respectively an additional 10% and 5% of the intertidal areas in the Wadden Sea. These areas are selected on the basis of a so-called habitat map, showing the statistical probability of the formation of stable mussel banks in the intertidal areas. The mussel fishermen have agreed to spare the remaining open intertidal areas as much as possible and to concentrate the seed fishery in the sublittoral areas. The cockle fishermen will not fish in open, intertidal areas where mussel seed was found. The government committed itself to explore whether or not the extra closure of important fishing grounds can be compensated for elsewhere.

The new management plan covers the period 1999-2003. A second scientific evaluation program has already started to measure the impacts of the existing and new management measures. In 2003, the State Secretary for Fisheries will prepare a policy decision on the future of the shellfish fishery in the Dutch Wadden Sea.

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