

Fisheries Improvement Project – status

There is a great demand for Greenland halibut products on the European market. This is especially significant when it comes to products from the coastal fishery for Greenland halibut in West Greenland. Retail chains are increasingly demanding MSC-labeled products, and therefore, in September 2018, Sustainable Fisheries Greenland (SFG) launched a so-called Fisheries Improvement Project (FIP), which in the course of 2-3 years is aiming to prepare the coastal fishery for Greenland halibut for MSC certification.

During the first period of the project, a so called MSC pre-assessment report has been prepared and meetings have been held with the local fishermen in several regions. The aim of the meetings was partly to present the FIP project's purpose and content, and partly to discuss the issues that the fishermen would wish in relation to the Greenland halibut fishery. It is essential for the project's success and future MSC certification that the local fishermen are involved and thus become familiar with the project.

Status April 2019

In November 2018, meetings were held with the fishermen in Upernavik and Ilulissat. A meeting with the fishermen in Uummannaq was unfortunately postponed due to bad weather but will be held in 2019. In December 2018, the MSC pre-assessment report was completed. The report highlights a number of points where it is necessary to take action before an actual MSC assessment can begin. Based on this a number of working-groups have been established in order to work on the topics that prevent an MSC certification.

Goals for the fishery

The fishery for Greenland halibut in the coastal areas in West Greenland is special, as the Greenland halibut spawns very limited in these areas. Therefore, it is important to manage the intensity of the fishery in order to optimize fishing either in relation to the landed quantity (tonnes), or the average length of the Greenland halibut (cm).

Regardless of the approach chosen, there is a great need to define a target for the fishery and set a framework for how the stock's status can be assessed. This including whether the fishing intensity is too high or low.

The working group is aiming towards establishing a method for calculating reference points and for assessing the intensity of the fishery. As soon as there is a correct age determination of the Greenland halibut, the assessment method or model can be improved, and it will at the same time be possible to determine the fishery pressure both currently and previously. It is particularly important to assess how the size of the Greenland halibut is affected by the current fishery and by different scenarios.

Management

MSC certification requires a fishery strategy which is formulated in a management plan that deals with both the target species and the by-catch. In addition, it is a requirement that the TAC is set in accordance with scientific advice.

The non-quota areas will pose a major obstacle to an MSC certification. A working group under the FIP has worked to illustrate the consequences of a possible removal of the non-quota areas. The main conclusion is that the removal of these unregulated areas most likely won't have a significant impact, as the total catches in the individual management areas are of approximately the same magnitude as the quotas allocated for smaller fishing areas.

Gear

Lost gear is a challenge at many levels and for many stakeholders. This was especially evident during our meetings with the local fishermen and the FIP project wants to highlight this.

The challenges lie in the fact that lost gear may accumulate on the seabed and may destroy fishing grounds. In addition, lost nets can continue fishing (ghost fishing) and the degradation of lost gear contaminates the sea with nylon (microplastic) and lead.

Thus, a group outside FIP has been established (GN, KNAPK, SFG), which seeks external funding for a project that must document the extent of the problem and prepare proposals for procedures for future handling of lost tools.

Next period

The FIP working group will meet in June, where the results of the working groups will be discussed.

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