

Germany North Sea Saithe Trawl



© Marnie Bammert / MSC



DATE CERTIFIED 8 October 2008

SPECIES Saithe (*Pollachius virens*)

FISHING METHOD Demersal otter trawl

COUNTRY Germany

LOCATION



The North Sea, mostly in deep water near the Northern Shelf and the Norwegian Deep, between southern Norway and north-east Scotland

FISHERY TONNAGE 9,700 tonnes

“Four years ago, the question we kept asking ourselves was: ‘How can we be different?’ The only way to get a label, saying to consumers and customers that you are better than others, is through MSC certification”

Jörg Petersen, general manager, Kutterfisch-Zentrale GmbH processors

“IN THE END, we must look at everything from a commercial point of view – but we also have to bear in mind long-term perspectives,” says Jörg Petersen, general manager of Kutterfisch, the German company that processes the saithe from the North Sea fishery. In his view, the two are complementary: forward-looking measures to protect the oceans often result in cost cutting.

Minimizing environmental impacts

Without that observation, one might have assumed his company’s investment in the fleet was all about environmental zeal. “We’ve conducted trials with soft-bottom trawl doors,” he says, referring to a new type of gear that has little or no contact with the seabed, minimising ecosystem impacts. Then there is the issue of mesh size, which determines the size of saithe caught. “For years, even before certification, our minimum mesh size was 125mm when the EU requirement was 100mm,” he says. “Our guys said, ‘We don’t want to catch small fish. They’re the next generation and we’re throwing them away. With a bigger mesh, we’ll catch only mature fish.’”

In fact, discarding saithe is “relatively rare”, according to the MSC certification report, because juveniles tend to be distributed inshore (where trawlers do not fish) until they are three years old. Nevertheless, this and the trawl-door issue show how environmental and commercial interests overlap.

Trawl doors are pairs of heavy metal boards that keep the mouth of the net open when it is towed. “There are different angles you can use, and the length of cable attaching them to the net is adjustable,” Petersen says. “You can make them travel 1m or 2m off the seabed, so the net is touching the bottom from time to time, or not at all.” Hence the name soft-bottom trawl doors.

Environmental measures save production costs

Made by Thyboron in Denmark, this type of equipment requires other changes to the fishing gear. Due to lower friction with the seabed, less power is needed for

towing the doors. “In addition we introduced a type of net made from a different yarn, which is 30 per cent lighter than conventional material,” says Petersen. “We found it reduced fuel consumption by 20 to 30 per cent.”

Using a larger mesh size also paid commercial dividends. “Catching smaller fish brings a bigger workload and higher processing costs,” say Petersen. “To supply 10kg of fish, you may need 100 fillets. With larger fish, you may need only 60. Larger fillets of 150-200g are a lot easier to sell than 100g fillets.”

Action plan to improve environmental performance

In its assessment, the fishery scored highly against the MSC standard and, as a result, few conditions were attached to the certification decision. Trials were already under way with trawl doors and lighter gear, for example, and bycatch was put at only two per cent. “However, the MSC conditions of certification meant we had to implement an action plan to improve the environmental performance of the fishery,” Petersen says, “and we agreed we would try to reduce the impact of bottom trawling.” That is why gear is refined almost continually, fulfilling the condition but also improving the business.

Economic benefits

The reward has been in the marketplace – not in the form of a consistent price premium, but in access to new product areas. “We are now getting freezing contracts for fillets,” Petersen says, “because the frozen market is looking for MSC fish.” The big demand is coming from discounters such as Aldi and Lidl, which are in turn seeing increased demand from customers.

“It’s a very positive development for us,” Petersen says, “because it gives us a second leg to stand on. Now, we are not so dependent on the fresh fish market where auction prices vary from day to day. It gives us a more stable base – and that definitely would not have happened without the MSC logo.”

“Germany is the world’s biggest market for MSC labelled products, an important contribution to sustainable fisheries. Through the MSC certification of its saithe fishery, Kutterfisch-Zentrale from Cuxhaven is the first German fishery to prove that economic success and the protection of marine ecosystems are compatible. My wish is that consumers support this by choosing sustainable seafood”

Bart van Olphen, Managing Director, Fishes Wholesale BV



© Marnie Bammert / MSC