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Climate change alters the fishing industry

Effects already noticeable | Central topic at fish international

Tuesday, 5th of May 2022 • Climate change is not an abstract construct, it has already arrived on our doorstep and is affecting fish stocks in the North and Baltic Seas. But this is not the only reason why climate protection is the order of the day and an important topic for the fishing industry: Anyone who invests in climate protection in their own company can possibly reduce their operating costs - and also send important signals to their customers. At fish international at MESSE BREMEN (September 4 to 6), the topic of climate protection will therefore also be examined from various perspectives in presentations and discussions.

The North Sea and Baltic Sea are becoming warmer and warmer. Since the 1980s, the average annual temperature of the water off the German coasts has increased by up to 2.0°C. The effects are already being clearly felt. "For example, cod in the North Sea, which are accustomed to colder water, are migrating north; species that tend to prefer warmer waters, such as squid, sardines and anchovies, or mullet, are moving in from the south," says marine biologist and head of the Thünen Institute of Sea Fisheries in Bremerhaven, Dr. Gerd Kraus. The consequences in the Baltic Sea, which is largely enclosed by land, are even more serious: "Fish such as cod cannot move further north there, productivity decreases and stocks decline."

fish international with solutions for a more climate-friendly fishing industry

As a consequence, climate change naturally also affects fisheries. North Sea fishermen may still be lucky because they will find new species of commercial fish to replace those that are increasingly migrating. Simply following the old species may not be possible: they are also moving into the waters of other fishing nations such as Norway and Iceland, which - as was once the case with redfish - are insisting on their fishing rights in the 200-nautical-mile zones. "The tried and tested European system of relative stability of fishing quotas may thus be undermined," warns Dr. Kraus. In the Baltic Sea, the development is even more dramatic: "There, there are currently such drastic cuts in the herring stock in the western Baltic that many businesses are being deprived of their economic basis."

These noticeable changes are slowly but surely creating greater awareness in politics and society. "More and more people are realizing that knowledge about climate change must be followed by action to protect the climate," says Silvia Freeborn, who advises companies in the food sector on climate protection issues at the non-profit initiative myclimate. Both business partners and consumers increasingly expect information from food manufacturers about the climate aspects of their products. The desire to act is also growing in the fishing industry itself. But: "Those responsible in small and medium-sized enterprises in particular are asking themselves what they can do in practical terms to protect the climate," says Sabine Wedell, MESSE BREMEN project manager for fish international. That's why she has given the topic a lot of space in the program of the industry get-together, which is unique in Germany, and has attracted renowned speakers for specialist presentations and discussions.

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Reducing the carbon footprint: adding value through co-products

The benchmark for climate impact is the "carbon footprint" of a company or its product. "When evaluating a product, you have to look at the climate impact of its entire life cycle and thus take into account, above all, how much energy is consumed at which point," says Prof. Norbert Reintjes, summarizing the principle. For the footprint of a fish fillet, for example, the fuel consumption of the fishing vessel must be taken into account, as well as the electricity required for processing and cooling the product, right through to transport and the refrigerated counter at the point of sale. This overall picture is not easy to generate, knows the scientist, who teaches industrial ecology at the University of Technology: "Depending on the reference with which you compare products, the result can be highly different." For example, when comparing fish species, "it can be relevant whether the reference point is the fresh weight, the weight of the fillets or the protein content."

The carbon footprint, created with the help of expert consultants, can lead to important course-setting in the company. "The CO2 footprint can usually be reduced by optimizing the relevant energy consumption," says Reintjes. But it could also be reduced by making better use of the raw material: "If you turn as many other parts of the fish as possible into products in addition to the fillet, the climate impact of fishing and processing is shared among these products."

Currently, Reintjes is pursuing such projects in Iceland. The "Ocean Cluster" there is a network of companies that use leftovers from fish processing for new products. One successful example is a company that has developed a medical product from fish skin for treating severe skin injuries. "After just a few years, sales are now already in the double-digit millions," Reintjes reports.

Consulting under the motto "do the best, offset the rest".

The myclimate team supports companies seeking advice in the complex task of determining their carbon footprint. Together with them, the climate protection professionals then develop ideas, concepts and measures to reduce the climate-damaging footprint. In addition, the non-profit institution offers companies educational programs for trainees, employees and, of course, the management of companies: "Knowledge is also the prerequisite for action in climate protection," emphasizes Silvia Freeborn.

True to the motto of myclimate "do the best, offset the rest", CO2 emissions should not be created in the first place, but avoided. However, since the most important thing for the climate is that global emissions decrease in total, unavoidable emissions can also be offset. For emissions that cannot be avoided or have not yet been reduced, myclimate also offers the possibility of offsetting in high-quality carbon offset projects. Classically, these are projects such as forest conservation projects or reforestation measures that ensure that a certain amount of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide is bound. "But these also include programs right here in Germany," says Silvia Freeborn.

For the fishing industry, the entry point to practical measures for climate protection is via the myclimate stand at fish international: "We are available as a contact throughout the trade fair," Silvia Freeborn emphasizes. Sabine Wedell also knows that knowledge subsequently leads to action: "Together with myclimate, we are developing a climate concept for fish international and our other events." The motivation here is the same that should drive the fishing industry: "It's in our own interest and expected of participants and partners."

More information: www.fishinternational.de/en

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On fish international

Founded in 1988, the fish international in the MESSE BREMEN exhibition halls is the only German trade fair for fish and seafood. Every two years, it attracts a good 11,000 visitors from the fish industry, fish wholesalers, food retailers and the hospitality industry. Here they find some 300 suppliers from around the world and use this opportunity to find out the latest information and discuss current topics in the business.