



To: Staatssecretaris van Economische Zaken, Landbouw en Innovatie  
Mr. Henk Bleker  
Postbus 20401 - NL-2500 EK Den Haag

January 24, 2011

Dear Mr. Bleker,

First let me introduce ourselves: The North Atlantic Salmon Fund (NASF) is an organisation devoted to the conservation of Atlantic salmon and one of the leading forces to prevent the commercial fishing on the so-called mixed salmon stocks. Mixed salmon stocks exist where salmon from several different rivers congregate and may include salmon from rivers which have 'threatened' populations and cannot spare any exploitation.

The unique Waddensea – stretching along the North Sea coast of the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark – is such an area where salmon from many rivers congregate before they enter their rivers of origin. Here salmon from North German rivers like the Eems (Ems), Oste, Weser and Elbe as well as salmon from Danish rivers like the Sneum-Aa, Ribe-Aa and Varde-Aa congregate. Even salmon destined for the Rhine and Meuse (Maas) rivers pass by the Waddensea.

Thanks to the restoration programs in these rivers, the numbers of salmon are increasing and indeed the by-catches of salmon by hobby-fishers with nets in the Waddenarea have increased during recent years. This information can also be found on several Dutch websites. These developments are of serious concern to those involved in the important salmon restoration programs taking place, especially because there is little control over these so-called 'recreational fishermen' fishing with professional fishing gear.

Luckily your government stepped in. For many good reasons, but mainly as part of the Dutch national eel recovery plan, two years ago your former minister for fisheries, Ms. Gerda Verburg, came with a plan to ban all the fishing with professional gear by non-commercial fishermen along the Dutch coast.

Unfortunately, this plan was met with an huge uproar, especially from hobby fishermen and communities in the Dutch 'Waddensea region'. They claimed that this kind of fishing was an age old tradition in this region. Politicians from islands, towns and villages in this region started an intensive lobby in your national Dutch parliament to preserve this 'cultural heritage'. The minister was asked to make an exception for the hobby fishers in the Wadden region, but she refused. Nevertheless the Dutch parliament still wanted to make an exception for the 'hobby-fishers' in the Wadden area. The minister then promised to investigate if such an exception was possible and desirable from a conservation perspective.

It seems that a short time ago a report surfaced that said that no exception for the Wadden-region should be made, but instead the ban of all hobby net-fishing along the whole Dutch coast should be withdrawn!

This is a terrible development, considering the Waddensea is an area where salmon from many rivers congregate and where the chances of by-catch of salmon are apparently very high. Fishing with gillnets and fykes by hobby fishermen creates a situation where unlawfulness is just waiting around the corner. If you allow this group to fish with nets it will be impossible to prevent the catch of protected species like sea trout and salmon.

Again: The increasing number of salmon caught in the Wadden area is a consequence of the growing success of the many reintroduction programs for salmon in Germany and especially Denmark!

Although salmon and sea trout are protected by law in the Netherlands, some entrepreneurs even shamelessly publicise on the Internet trips to the Wadden region in which "you can smoke your own net-caught salmon yourself"! (see attachment).

NASF therefore urges you to stick to the original ban of the use of professional gear by 'hobby-fishermen' along all of the Dutch coast and certainly to make no exceptions for the Waddensea area.

With kind regards,

Orri Vigfússon

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