Introducing a voluntary assessment scheme enabling transition towards a more sustainable fishery

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Abstract
The Belgian fishing fleet, mainly composed of beam trawlers, has faced numerous challenges in the past decade (high fuel prices, low market prices, additional rules and regulations, outflux of crew…). Consequently the number of fishing enterprises decreased considerably. Due to the nature of the fishery, fishermen could not get MSC certified unless they made drastic adjustments. As a result, all the main stakeholders agreed on the need to assess and monitor the sustainability of the Belgian fishery and to set targets to become a sustainable fishery by 2020. This led to the development of a sustainability assessment tool called ‘VALDUVIS’ that was commissioned and supported by these stakeholders (Kinds et al., 2016). The tool would in a first instance be able to measure progress made to reach these goals. A second objective was to render this progress visible and to communicate it to the market. A participatory approach involving fishers and their representatives, government officials, NGOs, fish auctions, distributors, processors, retailers and researchers remained a strong focal point throughout the process. The aim has been to apply a step-by-step approach with progressively increasing thresholds for participation and to gradually convince and prepare fishers to change their current practices. This would enable the entire fleet to evolve in a more sustainable direction that would benefit everyone in the long-term. We explore the participatory process that shaped the tool and its subsequent applications and assess its effectiveness as a new governance framework for the Belgian fishery.

Keywords: Participation, Fisheries Improvement Plan, sustainability, governance
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Need for a sustainability assessment in Belgium
- Ecological impact of beam trawl
- Increasing demand for sustainably caught fish

From 2012, ongoing
Development VALDUVIS
Multi-stakeholder process

What is VALDUVIS?
VALDUVIS is a tool using 11 indicators to score and visualize the ecological, social and economic sustainability of fishing activities.

- Fish stock
- Season
- Bottom impact
- Fuel consumption
- Adaptation: low impact fishery
- Safety & Health
- Animal welfare
- Remuneration
- Profitability: total assets
- Fishing effort
- Financial stability

LEARNING TOOL
MONITORING TOOL
INFORMATION TOOL

Val du Vis sustainability star

2017-2019
Majority Belgian vessels involved!

Market recognition for vessels with:
- Minimum score
- Commitment to improve sustainability score

Future challenges
- Keep fishermen motivated to improve their sustainability score
- Keeping system up-to-date with new scientific and policy developments

Want to know more?
www.valduvis.be