

BELGIAN SEA FISHERIES: COMPILING HISTORICAL FISHERIES DATA

Lescrauwaet Ann-Katrien, Heidi Debergh, Francisco Hernandez and Jan Mees

Vlaams Instituut voor de Zee, Flanders Marine Institute, VLIZ – InnovOcean site

Wandelaarkaai 7, 8400 Oostende, Belgium

E-mail: ann-katrien.lescrauwaet@vliz.be

Belgian sea fisheries represent 18,680 tonnes (€79,4 million) and amount to approximately 0.04% of the national GDP; it gives direct employment to about 500 full time equivalent (FTE) (Anon., 2008). It is generally assumed that historically fisheries occupied a more important role in terms of employment and socio-cultural value at the coast. However a search on the Internet reveals that the historical (before 1980) component of sea fisheries in Belgium is practically absent in publications, reports and policy documents. Recovering the historical context of our fisheries is necessary to restore the cultural heritage of our coastal society and to tackle the issue of 'shifting base-lines' in an ecological context. An integrative approach in data rescue is the first requirement to address this question.

(Value of) landings in Flanders (Belgium) are reported as early as the 18th century. However, the focus of the present exercise is to reconstruct time series at the lowest taxonomic level, based on sources from systematic and consistent reporting. Literature screening indicates that structurally embedded reporting of fish landings in Flanders starts in 1929 with an acceptable degree of consistency and continuity ever since then. Historical data (before 1980) are only available in hard copy (paper) and none of the data or time-series have been made available electronically before in the public domain. Sources of data on the (value of) landings are inventoried, described and digitized. The present project demonstrates the feasibility to construct quality controlled, standardized time-series in database compatible and exchangeable MS Excel formats to redistribute to end-users with data from 1929 onwards. These include: 1) landings and value of landings of Belgian sea fisheries in Belgian ports, by species, by port, per annum (1929-1999); landings and value of landings of Belgian sea fisheries in Belgian ports, by species, by fishing ground, per annum (1929-1999); landings and value of landings of Belgian sea fisheries in foreign ports, by species, by fishing ground, per annum (1950-1999). A similar effort will be conducted to compile and complete datasets for fleet size and capacity, fishing effort, and socio-economic aspects of the sector. For more information on the project:

http://www.vliz.be/NL/Zeecijfers/Zeecijfers_Intro (Dutch and English).

This project is made possible thanks to the support of the Sea Fisheries Service (DVZ) and the Institute for Agriculture and Fisheries Research (ILVO) (Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Flemish government), the provincial library and archives of West-Flanders, the Heritage Library 'Hendrik Conscience' (City of Antwerp), the State archives in Brussels and Bruges.

References

- Anon. 2008. Nationaal Operationeel Plan voor de Belgische Visserijsector 2007-2013. Kennisgeving planMER. Opgesteld door ILVO Visserij, Oostende in opdracht van: Departement Landbouw en Visserij, Afdeling Landbouw- en visserijbeleid.