

Vandendriessche Sofie

Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research (ILVO)

*Author(s): Sofie Vandendriessche¹, Kilian Persoon, Els Torreele¹, Jan Reubens², Kris Hostens¹**Affiliation(s) :*¹ *Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research (ILVO), Oostende, Belgium*² *Flanders Marine Institute, Oostende, Belgium****“A wind of change” in recreational fisheries? Recreational fishermen and wind farms: current use and perception***

Offshore wind farms create opportunities for recreational fishermen in Belgium, since the presence of hard substrates and the closure for trawling create a favorable habitat for fish. After the construction in 2008, a concentration of anglers was observed in the vicinity of the first wind farm during monitoring. In the following years, however, the interest of anglers for the wind farms seemed to disappear. To elucidate the evolution in the relation between recreational angling intensity and wind farms, this study aimed to assess how Belgian recreational fishermen perceive wind farms, how often they visit them and why, and which fish species they (expect to) catch. Data were derived from the annual DCF survey for recreational fishermen. Less than 2% of the sea anglers reported to go fishing in the larger wind farm area, even when 30 to 40 percent of the respondents either expected more fish, bigger fish or other fish species. The main reasons to stay away from wind farms is because entering the wind farms is not allowed, because the distance to the wind farms is relatively large, because charter vessels do not offer fish trips to wind farms, and because wind farms are protection zones and nursery areas for fish. 40% of the respondents would consider fishing inside wind farms if it were allowed, mainly because they expect more or other fish. This is a clear indication that the enforcement of wind farm closure for fisheries and shipping is vital when aiming at the creation and/or restoration of nursing grounds in the area. However, the large distance to the wind farms will probably continue to limit fishing pressure, even if wind farms would (partly) be opened for recreational fisheries.

Keywords: wind farms, recreational fisheries, questionnaire survey