

BELGIAN SEA FISHERIES STATISTICS: COMPILING HISTORICAL DATA TO RECOVER A WIDER PERSPECTIVE

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Belgian sea fisheries may be considered small or insignificant in the global context. Nevertheless, it does provide an interesting case study to look at trends in catch and landings statistics, and evolutions in the fleet size and capacity. With a tradition in beam trawl fishery (>90% of the actual fleet) and only three fishing ports where the main part of catches are landed, catch statistics are quite detailed and complete. The FAO statistics available for Belgian sea fisheries included per annum landings (tonnes) and values (EUR) per species, for larger fishing areas (e.g. ICES rectangles) from 1970 onwards. Recent FAO/ICES efforts have completed data from 1950 onwards. Nevertheless, 'older' data is available in fragmented publications and journals. Although source documents are often disperse, describing and storing has been made possible thanks to the support of the Sea Fisheries Service (DVZ), the Institute for Agriculture and Fisheries Research (ILVO), the Provincial Library West-Flanders and the Library of the City of Antwerp. After a thorough inventory of sea fisheries statistics from the late 19th century onwards, VLIZ is now collating data from these paper sources to compile historical time series. This requires previous storage, handling and quality control. A fair degree of continuity in the reporting is achieved starting 1929, although earlier data is available. Reporting focuses on 1) landings and value of landings per species by port, per annum, 2) landings and values of landings per species by fishing ground, per annum. Monthly data is reported from the early 1950's onwards. Additional reporting is available on the size and capacity of the fleet, fishing effort, and socio-economic aspects of the sector. Resulting graphs and tables that depict trends in landings and values per species, from the early 20th century, are presented in fact sheets per species. Information on taxonomy, biology and ecology, distribution and conservation status (where available), provides the interested reader with further background and links to reliable sources. For more information on the project: http://www.vliz.be/NL/Zeevijfers/Zeevijfers_Intro (Dutch and English).