New method for fish stock assessment can lead to higher TACs

The fish stocks in the North East Atlantic are rebuilding and our current method to assess them is not accurate. We should revise our approach and include fish interactions into the current assessments. That would in the end lead to higher TACs.

This claim was the main point of focus at the recent scientific mini-symposion organized by the MSE-project group and held in Copenhagen last wednesday.

Biologist and expert in assessment and monitoring of fish stocks through many years, Henrik Sparholt, presented data and calculations from the MSE-project group, that points to how the North East Atlantic actually is underfished – and that it would benefit the different species if a larger amount of predatory fish like cod, mackerel and blue whiting were caught. That would give the remaining predatory fish opportunity to grow to a larger size because there would be sufficient prey for them when not having to compete with too many of their own species.

* You can compare it to that you need to thin out radishes in your garden to get the best possible yield, explained Henrik Sparholt.

He claimed that when using the current method you neglect to include an important part of how fish interact with each other – the density dependence. Hence you should use a different model to calculate the so-called FMSY-reference points, that are used to determine the TACs.

* With the available data from 53 different fish stocks we have calculated new FMSY-reference points, that are 50 percent higher than the current ones. That would lead to almost 50 percent higher TACs.

Henrik Sparholt expect it to take some time before the scientists in ICES (International Council for Exploration of the Sea), that make the recommendations for Common Fisheries Policy in the European Union will be ready to start using the new methods.

* It takes time to convince about 4.000 scientists with a different perspective.