2026

Lost Fishing Gear:

Retrieval, recycling, and preventive actions for abandoned recreational fishing gear in the central Baltic Sea

Report on the Coherence of Recreational Fishery Legal Background in Sweden, Finland and Estonia

Interreg
Co-funded by the European Union
Central Baltic Programme
Re:Fish

Lost fishing gear is found in all seas, lakes, and waterways where recreational fishing takes place. It causes unnecessary suffering for fish, birds, and marine mammals. In the EU project Re:Fish, we are working towards a cleaner and healthier Baltic Sea.

Project period: 2023–2026
Funded by Interreg, Central Baltic Programme
Project partners: Keep Sweden Tidy (SE, lead partner), Keep the Archipelago Tidy (FI), University of Tartu (EE), Finland Environmental Institute (FI)

Read more at **centralbaltic.eu/project/refish/**

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Project information

Funded by the EU's Interreg Central Baltic Programme under its "Improved Coastal and Marine Environment" priority, the Re:Fish project "Retrieval, recycling, and preventive actions for abandoned recreational fishing gear in the central Baltic Sea" (project period from March 2023 to February 2026) was coordinated by the Keep Sweden Tidy Foundation in cooperation with partners from Finland, Keep the Archipelago Tidy Association and the Finnish Environment Institute, and from Estonia, the University of Tartu.

The Re:Fish project addressed the problem of ghost fishing and plastic pollution caused by lost recreational fishing gear in Sweden, Finland, and Estonia. Through activities such as gear retrieval operations, end-of-life gear collections, citizen-based science initiatives, educational training and awareness campaigns, the project engaged anglers and fishers using passive gears, manufacturers, NGOs, research institutions, and authorities to prevent gear loss and advance practical measures for gear recovery and material recycling.

More information, project materials, and results can be found on the project webpage.

Abbreviations

ALDFG – Abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear
CFP – Common Fisheries Policy
EU – European Union
EEZ – Exclusive Economic Zone
FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFA – Finnish Fishing Act
LOVA – Local Water Conservation Projects
SwAM – Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management's

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Contents

1 Introduction

Policy-making processes rely heavily on vertical governance approaches. These approaches establish a hierarchy that guides the development of global, ecoregional, and regional objectives. These, in turn, shape national and local objectives and assign responsibility for their implementation.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) defines recreational fishing in its *Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries* as 'fishing for aquatic animals (mainly fish) that are not the primary resource of the individual to meet basic nutritional needs and are not generally sold or otherwise traded on export, domestic, or black markets'[1]. The FAO further notes that recreational fishing is the dominant use of wild fish stocks in freshwater systems in industrialized countries and plays an important role in many coastal marine ecosystems.

These FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries outline approaches that have been developed to promote environmentally sustainable and socially responsible management of these fisheries. The outlined publication contains policy, management, and behaviour the Baltic region al guidelines that are intended to support their continued viability as an increasingly important segment of global fisheries. More specifically, these guidelines adapt relevant clauses of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries into explicit guidelines specifically for recreational fisheries, while presenting the notion of aquatic stewardship as a comprehensive ethical framework required to achieve ecologically sustainable recreational fisheries on an international scale.

From this normative perspective, an adaptive management philosophy based on quantifiable and transparent objectives combined with continuous learning and feedback loops is proposed, together with the recognition of principles such as the ecosystem approach and the precautionary approach. In addition, specific sections on policy and institutional frameworks for policymakers, fisheries management measures and strategies for managers, fishing practices for individual fishers, and fisheries research for researchers and managers provide concrete guidance to promote responsible recreational fisheries. Adherence to the guidelines and recommendations offered by the FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries will enable policymakers, managers, and the entire recreational fisheries sector to steer recreational fisheries towards maintaining or achieving sustainability.

[1] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 2012. *Recreational Fisheries*. FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries No. 13. Rome: FAO. https://www.fao.org/4/i2708e/i2708e00.pdf.

According to European Union (2013) regulation No 1380/2013[2] on the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), recreational fisheries can have a significant impact on fish stocks and Member States should therefore ensure that they are conducted in a manner consistent with the objectives of the CFP. Furthermore, with reference to European Union (2023) regulation 2023/2842[3], the "Recreational fisheries mean non-commercial fishing activities exploiting marine biological resources for recreation, tourism or sport". It is said also that recreational fisheries play an important role in the Union from a biological, economic and social point of view. In view of the significant impact of recreational fisheries on certain stocks, it is necessary to lay down specific provisions allowing for effective control of recreational fisheries by Member States, including an appropriate system of sanctions in case of non-compliance.

The collection of reliable catch data from certain recreational fisheries is necessary to provide member states and the Commission with the information required for the effective management and control of marine biological resources. To this end, the member states should have in place a system for the effective control of catches in certain recreational fisheries, including non-commercial activities carried out by individuals with fishing vessels or activities organized by commercial entities for tourism or sports competitions. The enforcement of conservation measures applicable to recreational fisheries requires the establishment of appropriate control measures.

Referring to Hodgson (2022)[4], the "command and control" is simply another name for the traditional regulatory approach that underpins legislation in every sector, including fisheries and environmental protection. The "command" element entails setting legally binding rules — either written directly into statutes and regulations or incorporated as conditions in licences and permits — whereas the "control" element relates to enforcing those rules through civil or criminal penalties for non-compliance. To operate effectively, a command-and-control regime must deter breaches of the relevant rule by means of an appropriate system of sanctions. It is added that deterrence rests not only on the severity of the penalties that may be imposed but equally on the likelihood of detection: even the most onerous sanctions will exert little influence if the chances of being caught are negligible.

To safeguard fish populations and ensure that species reach maturity and could reproduce, it is essential to implement minimum size limits for individuals that can be captured. This approach is intended to offer individuals a chance to contribute to the population's reproduction before they face the risk of being caught. Alongside minimum size limits,

[2] Regulation - 1380/2013 - EN - EUR-Lex
[3] Regulation - EU - 2023/2842 - EN - EUR-Lex
[4] Hodgson, S. 2022. Legal aspects of abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear. Rome, FAO and IMO. https://doi.org/10.4060/cb8071en

maximum size restrictions are sometimes also applied to prevent the removal of the largest and potentially most fecund individuals from the ecosystem.

Additionally, to further protect fish stocks during critical periods of their life cycle, fishing closure seasons are established. These periods often coincide with the species' spawning time, which is crucial for enabling them to reproduce successfully and without disturbance. Examples of species subject to such closed seasons include lobster and trout, for which specific times of the year are designated to allow these species a safe opportunity to spawn.

Effective fisheries management also require addressing the environmental impact of fishing activities beyond the scope of stock conservation. This includes tackling issues such as pollution and marine litter, which can arise as by-products of fishing operations. One critical concern is the proper handling of fishing gear to mitigate its adverse effects on marine ecosystems when it is not properly managed. Abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG), particularly plastic gear, is one of the most harmful forms of marine debris and plastic waste at sea. In order to reduce the long-term and significant impact of ALDFG on marine life and ecosystems, it is essential to ensure that fishing gear at the end of its life cycle is brought ashore for treatment in port reception facilities set up for that purpose in accordance with European Union (2019) directive 2019/883[5] of the European Parliament and the Council Directive (EU) 2019/904[6] on the recycling of discarded fishing gear.

This report on the coherence of recreational fishery legal frameworks in Sweden, Finland, and Estonia complements Re:Fish by examining whether the national legislations support or hinder the project's objectives. Effective ghost gear prevention depends on hands-on cleanup, awareness, and cohesive regulatory foundations, including clear rules on gear disposal, traceability systems, and responsibilities for recreational fishers and retailers. Legal incentives for deposit-based or recovery programs are also necessary. By aligning the legal analysis with the scope of Re:Fish, the report will demonstrate how regulatory coherence across borders can amplify the project's environmental impact through enforceable, harmonized frameworks.

The following paragraphs will give a detailed description and overview of the three countries (Sweden, Finland, Estonia) national recreational legislations and provide a comparison of the legislations and harmonization approaches to better secure the future of sustainable recreational fishing in the Baltic Sea region based on the studied countries.

[5] Directive - 2019/883 - EN - EUR-Lex
[6] eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:2019:155:FULL

2. Recreational fishery legal background in Sweden

2.1 Introduction

The history of recreational fishing in Sweden is closely tied to the country's abundant water resources and the population's deep connection to nature. With nearly 100,000 lakes, countless rivers, and extensive coastlines, Sweden has long been an ideal location for recreational fishing. Fishing in Sweden has ancient roots, with archaeological finds showing that people relied on fish for food since the Stone Age, using basic tools like spears, nets, and traps in lakes, rivers, and along the coast[7,8]. During the 16th and 17th centuries, fishing evolved from a necessity to a leisure activity among the nobility and clergy, with records mentioning angling and bait fishing for pleasure[9]. The 19th century brought industrialization and new fishing technologies like trawling and motorized boats, which boosted commercial fishing but sometimes led to overfishing.

Meanwhile, sport fishing gained popularity among the middle class, and fishing clubs began to form, promoting responsible angling and resource management. Following World War II, interest in recreational fishing increased, partly due to improved living conditions and greater access to leisure time[10]. In recent times, recreational fishing has come to be seen not only as a source of leisure but also as an important component of tourism and the local economy[11]. The experience of nature remains one of the most significant motivators for recreational fishing in Sweden[12].
A key player in supporting recreational fishing in Sweden is the Sportfiskarna (The Swedish Anglers Association), which has been instrumental in promoting sustainable fishing practices and ensuring opportunities for generations of anglers. Sportfiskarna advocates for the protection and restoration of aquatic environments, conducts educational initiatives, and

[7] Olson, C., et al. (2008). "Stone Age fishhooks – how were they dimensioned? Morphology, strength test, and breakage pattern of Neolithic bone fishhooks from Ajvide, Gotland, Sweden." Journal of Archaeological Science 35(10): 2813-2823. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jas.2008.05.009
[8] Hansson, A., et al. (2018). "A submerged Mesolithic lagoonal landscape in the Baltic Sea, south-eastern Sweden – Early Holocene environmental reconstruction and shore-level displacement based on a multiproxy approach." Quaternary International 463: 110-123. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.quaint.2016.07.059
[9] Sportfiskarnas historia, Över 100 år i sportfiskets tjänst. https://svensktfiske.se/sportfiskarnas-historia/, 2022-05-05
[10] Pluntke, J. (2024) Past, present and future of small-scale fisheries in Sweden: A case study of the decline in fisher livelihoods on the Norrland coast. Master thesis in Sustainable Development Uppsala University. Published at Department of Earth Sciences, Uppsala University, Uppsala, 2024.
https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1863338/FULLTEXT01.pdf
[11] Bergström, U., et al. (2022). "Long-term decline in northern pike (Esox lucius L.) populations in the Baltic Sea revealed by recreational angling data." Fisheries Research 251: 106307. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fishres.2022.106307
[12] SwAM (2021) Recreational fishing in Sweden 2018–2020. Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SWAM).

organizes nationwide fishing competitions. They also collaborate with authorities and local communities to enhance the sustainability and accessibility of fishing[13].

In 2023, approximately 1.3 million Swedes aged 16-80 engaged in recreational fishing, with about one-third being women. This resulted in 11.2 million fishing days, 8.6 million in lakes and rivers, and 2.6 million at sea. Around half of these fishing days involved a private or tour boat. The total economic expenditure reached SEK 16.3 billion, including SEK 6.1 billion spent on short-term costs such as equipment, travel, and accommodation, and SEK 10.2 billion invested in long-term items like boats and advanced fishing gear[14].

Today, recreational fishing in Sweden is a widespread leisure activity, valued for relaxation, connection with nature, and environmental stewardship.

2.2 Legal framework for recreational fishing

The Swedish rules on fishing aim to protect seas and lakes. These rules can be found on the 'Swedish Fishing Rules' website[15], hosted by the County administrative board Havs- och vattenmyndigheten[16]. There is also a map service presenting fishing rules applying to recreational fishing in Swedish sea areas and the country's five largest lakes (Vänern, Vättern, Mälaren, Hjälmaren, and Storsjön). It is also possible to search the map service for fishing rules that apply in Sweden.

The regulation on recreational fishing in Sweden is based on several legal texts and ordinances. It is mainly governed by the Fisheries Act (1993:787)[17], the Fisheries Ordinance (1994:1716)[18], as well as regulations published in the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management's (SwAM) regulations, called HVMFS[19]. These regulations usually deal with rules for fishing activities in sea areas and the five largest inland waters, as well as in the rivers and streams that flow into these waters up to the first barrier to fish migration. However, the protection of certain species of fish and restrictions on certain fishing practices are applicable throughout the country. There are also special rules for fishing in the area above the cultivation limit, which is called the reindeer grazing area.

SwAM is the main authority in Sweden regulating the recreational fishery.

[13] Sportfiskarna, official website https://www.sportfiskarna.se/ (2025)
[14] SCB, Official Website (2025). Fritidsfisket 2023, Statistics Sweden (SCB). https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/statistik-efter-amne/jord-och-skogsbruk-fiske/fiske/fritidsfiske/
[15] https://www.svenskafiskeregler.se/
[16] Havs- och vattenmyndigheten. n.d. *Svenska fiskeregler*. Accessed May 28, 2025.
[17] The Fisheries Act (1993:787) on the Swedish Parliament website
[18] The Ordinance on Fishing, Aquaculture and the Fishing Industry (1994:1716) on the Swedish Parliament website
[19] The Ordinance on Fishing, Aquaculture and the Fishing Industry (1994:1716) on the Swedish Parliament website

2.3 Fishing rights and access

2.3.1 Fishing in public *versus* private waterbodies

Public waters include water that does not belong to any property and is found along the coasts and in Lake Vänern, Lake Vättern, Lake Hjälmaren, and Lake Storsjön.

Private waters refer to water areas belonging to properties along the coast as well as islands that are at least 100 meters long. Private waters usually extend 300 meters from land or out to the depth curve marking a depth of three meters, but no further than that if the water area is deeper than three meters.

1. Waters belonging to a specific property (individually) and
2. waters that are jointly owned by several properties.

Private open waters mean private waters which are available to the public for fishing with certain gear. One example is parts of Lake Mälaren where the state has compensated the landowners having fishing rights.

The Act (1950:595) on the Boundary of Public Water Areas[20] contains three main rules that determine the extent of the individual water:

- **The beach water rule** states that water within 300 meters of land or an island, and is at least 100 meters wide, is private. If the three-meter depth curve extends further out than 300 meters, private water extends out to this contour (Figure 1).

- **The enclave rule** defines water areas directly connected to the open sea only over private waters as private. The area from Gullmarsfjorden to Hakefjorden in Bohuslän has been excluded from the application of the enclave rule.

- **The kilometres rule** applies along certain parts of the east and south coast of Sweden where waters that do not have an open connection wider than one kilometer of open sea are counted as private. The rule applies to the east and south coasts from the Finnish border in the north to Listershuvud in Blekinge in the south. The rule does not apply to Öland, Gotland, or other islands separated from the mainland by public waters (Figure 2).

[20] https://lagen.nu/1950:595

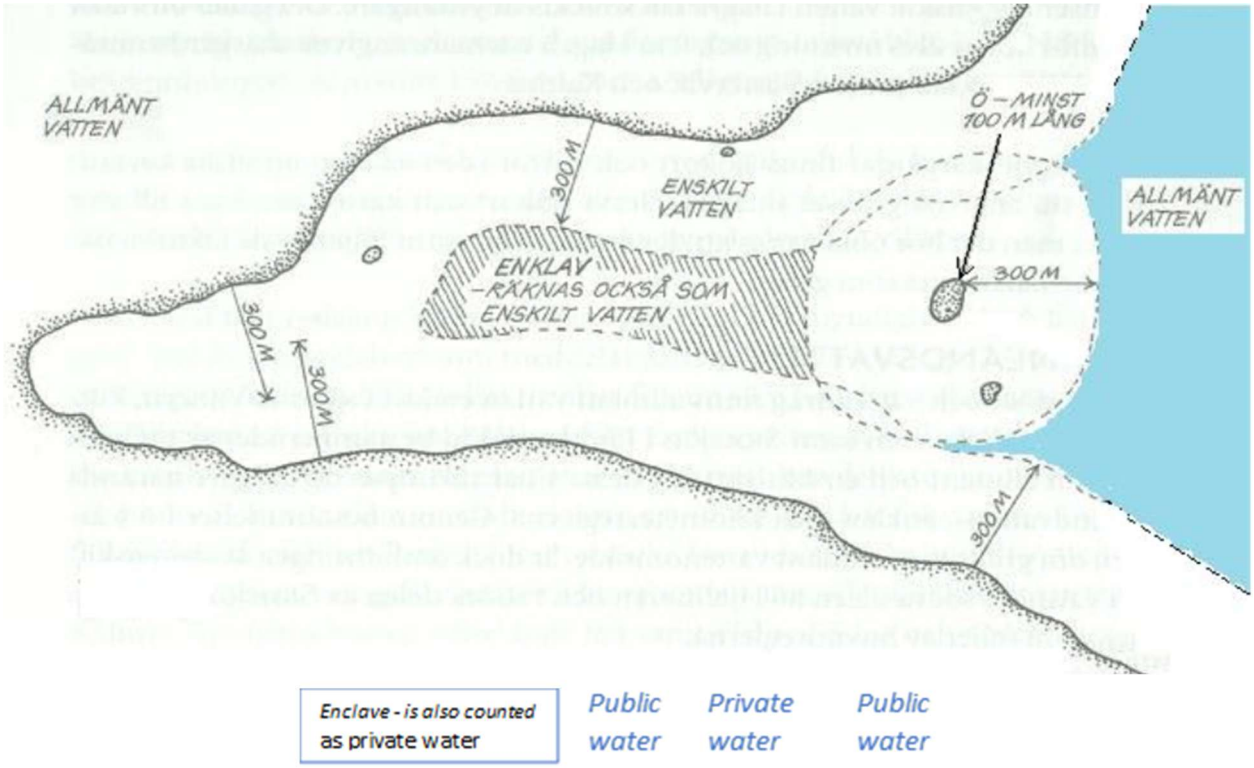

Figure 1. Sketch of the principle of the "Enclave Rule" (Modified image of illustration from the Swedish and Fisheries Conservation Association's training handbook for fisheries supervisors).

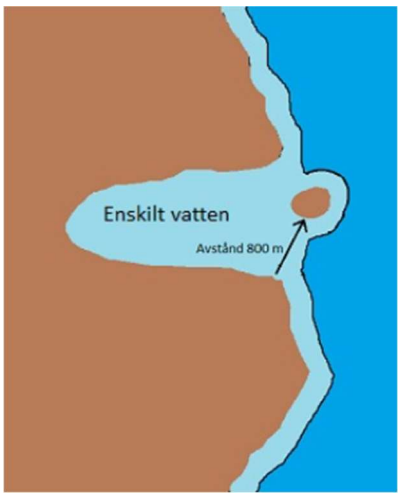

Figure 2. Sketch for the principle of the "Kilometre Rule". Enskilt vatten=private water.

There are also public waters in Lake Vänern, Lake Vättern, Lake Hjälmaren, and Lake Storsjön in Jämtland. Private waters in these lakes belong to the property in the same way as in the sea according to the example above.

2.3.2 Licensing

Recreational fishers, with Swedish or foreign citizenship, have the right to fish in public waters and private open waters under certain conditions. There are no general rules for fishing licence when it comes to age; it is decided by those who own the fishing area. The geographical boundaries of public and private waters are defined by law and vary depending on location and water depth. The Fisheries Act differentiates between public waters, private waters, and so-called private open waters in Section 8 of the Fisheries Act (1993:787). What is meant by public and private water is stated in the Swedish Act (1950:595) on the Boundary of Public Water Areas.

In Sweden, the most convenient method for obtaining a fishing license (fiskekort) is through online platforms such as iFiske or NatureIT. These services allow users to select their desired fishing location, make payment electronically, and receive the license instantly via email or SMS. Licenses are also available for purchase at local fishing shops, gas stations, and tourist offices.

Major fishing areas, including those managed by Sveaskog and Sportfiskarna, offer licenses through their own websites or via iFiske, where comprehensive information regarding prices, regulations, and covered waters is provided. For mountain fishing and state-owned waters above the cultivation border, licenses are typically acquired through NatureIT or local retailers in the region. Certain specialized waters, such as salmon rivers, may have dedicated online portals for license sales.

The cost of a fishing license varies according to location, water type, and duration, generally ranging from 9 to 45 EUR for a day or week. Premium waters, particularly popular salmon rivers, may charge up to 27 EUR per day. In some areas, young people may fish free of charge, although a license may still be required. It is essential to consult local regulations before fishing.

2.4 Gear restrictions and methods

According to the Swedish Fishing Act (Fiskelag 1993:787), recreational fishers in Sweden are generally allowed to use handheld gears like rods, lines, and hooks. For certain types of gear, like nets, traps, or longlines, regulations may limit the amount and size of gear used, the species targeted, and other conditions to prevent overfishing and environmental harm. In Sweden, the use of fishing equipment in recreational fishing is primarily regulated by the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management's (SwAM) regulations and by the regulations of local fisheries conservation areas. The purpose of these rules is to protect fish stocks and to ensure sustainable exploitation of water resources. Rules can, for example,

relate to what types of gear are allowed and at what times of the year, as well as how many fish can be caught per day. The Swedish Board of Fisheries' regulations (FIFS 2004:37) on fishing in freshwater areas provide some examples of the use of fishing gear allowed for recreational fishers.

General provisions for passive lines:

- Fishing with passive lines in public waters without individual fishing rights may only be carried out with a bottomed longline consisting of not more than 100 hooks, which must not float.
- In Lake Vättern, fishing with passive lines is prohibited at depths above 30 meters south of certain specified positions.

Restrictions on longline, trolling, or with a planer board:

- A maximum of ten lures per boat may be used for longline, trolling, and a planer board in public waters without individual fishing rights where fishing is free.
- During fishing trips in Lake Vänern or Lake Vättern, nets may not be emptied when such fishing is conducted.

Gear handling rules in Lake Vättern:

- When fishing with nets or with the support of certain sections in Lake Vättern, the gear must be emptied at least once every five days.
- Fish that are subject to a release obligation must be handled in such a way that they can be released alive.

Closed seasons in Lake Mälaren:

- There are seasonal bans on fishing with nets for specific species in Lake Mälaren, such as vendace, during certain parts of the year.

Fishing rules for certain watercourses and salmon and trout fishing:

- The prohibition period varies depending on the watercourse and geographical location.
- In the Enningdal River and other watercourses that flow into the Skagerrak and Kattegat, there are specific prohibitor periods for fishing for salmon and trout.

Additional closed seasons for salmon, trout, and asp:

- Fishing for salmon and trout is prohibited throughout the year in the Gullspång River and during other specific periods in other watercourses.
- Fishing for asps is prohibited during the spawning period in all of Vänern's, Mälaren's and Hjälmaren's tributary watercourses.

Fishing rules specific to river basins:

- Fishing in certain rivers is regulated by specific lines and geographical points that define the areas where rules apply.

Rules for fishing during times of prohibition:

- During the prohibition periods, fishing may only be conducted with different types of fyke nets[21], as well as with hand tools that do not require the use of boats, within the protected areas of the Klarälven and Tidan areas.
- Permission to fish with gear other than those mentioned can be granted by the county administrative board on application from licensed fishers, but not for fishing for salmon and trout.

2.4.1 Labelling and marking the gear

Labelling the fishing gear enables the identification of the owner of the fishing gear, and marking is to show in a visible way where the fishing gear is located in the aquatic environment. There are several rules on how passive fishing gear used in the sea and in four of the large lakes should be marked in Sweden, and these can all be found in The Swedish Board of Fisheries' regulations (FIFS 1994:14) on the labelling and marking of fishing gear.

In the case of recreational fishing or fishing based on private rights, passive fishing gear must be labelled with the name and address, or telephone number. Labelling is not done on the gear, but on the surface, for example, using a buoy. Recreational fishers must mark their gear with the letter "F" on the surface. Private fishing rights require the marking "ER".

For fishing beyond twelve nautical miles from the baselines[22] from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured, additional regulations decided by the EU apply. Passive fishing gears are gears like traps, pots, gill nets, trammel nets, stake nets, and longlines, which are anchored or passive to the substrate or a structure in the water. There are no rules for labeling or marking handheld fishing gears in Sweden. Handheld fishing gears are gears like rods, reels, lines, and hooks that are actively handled by the angler.

In Lake Vänern, a unique tool identification number must be obtained from the County Administrative Board for certain types of fishing gear. Before the number is issued, it is required by the county that the number is visibly marked on the fishing gear. In this way, all equipment used in the lake can be identified and regulated by the authorities.

There are differences in marking regarding the type of passive fishing gear used. The specificities are the following:

Short navigable fishing gears (less than 300 meters):

[21] "Lakstrut", "mjärde", and mörtstuga.
[22] The baseline normally consists of the low-water line along the coast, but on rugged coasts or where there are islands and archipelagos, the baseline is drawn along the outermost headlands or islets.

- Can be distinguished by a fishing float at each end. Alternatively, visible buoys can be used.

Long navigable fishing gears (more than 300 meters):

- Must have buoys at each end and be safely navigable for boats.

Surface-standing fishing gear:

- Buoys for surface-standing gear should have a radar reflector or a top ball to indicate that the gear is near the water surface, indicating that vessels need to navigate around it.

Permanent fishing gear and aquaculture facilities:

- These should be marked with buoys at least two meters above the surface, equipped with a yellow cross as a top mark, flags, and sometimes lights. Fishing within 100 meters of these is forbidden.

General distinguishing rules:

- Buoys in different areas must have various flags and light reflectors to indicate their location and facilitate identification.
- Intermediate buoys are mandatory every 600 meters inshore and every nautical mile offshore. They should be marked with a white flag.
- The height of buoys and the choice of colors for flags and fishing floats are specified to avoid confusion.

Light marking:

- For gear outside certain nautical boundaries in the Skagerrak, Kattegat, and the Baltic Sea, and for permanent gear where required, light marking must be used.

2.5 Catch limits and seasonal restrictions

To protect fish populations and support sustainable reproduction, it is crucial to establish minimum size limits for captured individuals. These limits ensure that fish can reach maturity and reproduce before being harvested. In some cases, maximum size limits are also applied to safeguard the largest, most fecund individuals, which play a key role in population resilience. Table 1 outlines the minimum (and, where applicable, maximum) size limits for various species in the Baltic Sea for fishing in Sweden, based on the ICES division of the Baltic Sea in Figure 3. Closed seasons in the Baltic Sea are mainly focused on herring (April–May) and are enforced as full closures for cod (except bycatch). Salmon is also heavily restricted, with most direct fishing banned outside

limited summer periods in specific coastal areas. In general, there are no exceptions nationally for the catch limits and closed seasons compared to EU regulations. Minimum and sometimes maximum sizes for different species are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Swedish minimum sizes of species in the Baltic Sea. Source: Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management.

Species	Minimum Size	Maximum Size	Area
European oyster ***(Ostrea edulis)***	6 cm	-	All sea areas
Pacific oyster ***(Crassostrea gigas)***	No minimum	-	All sea areas
European lobster ***(Homarus Gammarus)***	9 cm carapace length	-	Skagerrak, Kattegat, Baltic Sea subarea 23
Atlantic salmon ***(Salmo salar)***	60 cm	-	All subareas of the Baltic Sea
Sea trout ***(Salmo trutta)***	50 cm	-	All subareas of the Baltic Sea
Grayling ***(Thymallus Thymallus)***	30 cm	-	Baltic Sea subarea 29 north of lat. 60 00 N, 30-31
Northern pike ***(Esox lucius)***	40 cm	-	All subareas of the Baltic Sea south of the boundary between Västernorrland and Västerbotten counties for all permitted gear except 1) hand gear and 2) fyke nets in the area from the border between Östhammar and Tierp municipalities to the border between Västernorrland and Västerbotten counties.
Northern pike ***(Esox lucius)***	40 cm	75 cm	For hand gear in all subareas of the Baltic Sea south of the boundary between Västernorrland and Västerbotten counties.
European perch ***(Perca fluviatilis)***	45 cm	-	All subareas of the Baltic Sea for all permitted gear except hand gear and fyke nets.
European perch ***(Perca fluviatilis)***	45 cm	60 cm	All subareas of the Baltic Sea for hand gear and fyke nets.
Atlantic cod ***(Gadus morhua)***	38 cm	-	All subareas of the Baltic Sea
Flounder ***(Platichthys* spp.)**	23 cm	-	Baltic Sea subareas 22-25
Flounder ***(Platichthys* spp.)**	21 cm	-	Baltic Sea subareas 26-28
Flounder ***(Platichthys* spp.)**	18 cm	-	Baltic Sea subarea 29-south
European plaice ***(Pleuronectes platessa)***	25 cm	-	All subareas of the Baltic Sea
Turbot ***(Scophthalmus maximus)***	30 cm	-	All sea areas
Brill ***(Scophthalmus rhombus)***	30 cm	-	All sea areas

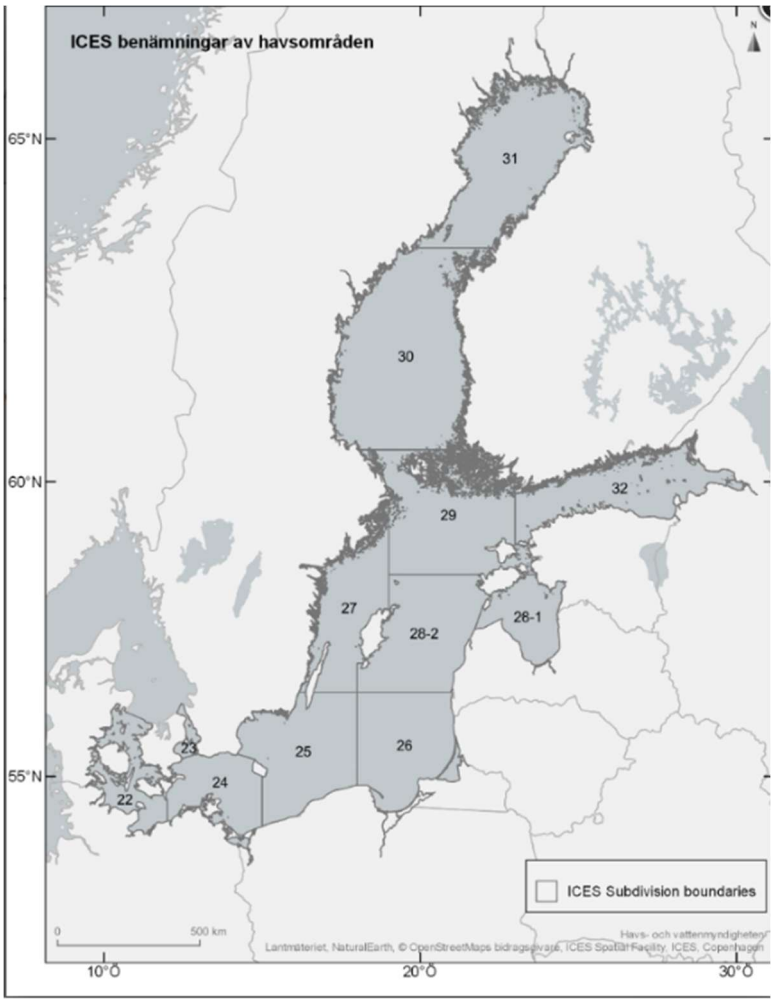

Figure 3. ICES ecoregions (subareas) in the Baltic Sea. Source: ICES.

2.6 Species and habitat conservation

Conservation for recreational fishing in Sweden is organized through a blend of national legislation and strong local management. Local fishery conservation associations play a key role in adapting rules to specific waters, while national law sets minimum standards for species and habitat protection. Local Water Conservation Projects (LOVA) are the most important government funding for physical measures and local action work in the water environment. For certain species, such as eel, there are special funds (e.g., the Eel Fund) that can finance specific measures to benefit the stock.

2.7 Reporting and data collection obligations

Recreational fishers in Sweden are generally not required to report their catches on a

national level, except in specific cases. The main points are:

- **No General Mandatory Reporting:** For most recreational fishing in Sweden, especially in public waters (the five largest lakes and along the coast), there is no general requirement to report catches[23,24].
- **Exceptions:** In some cases, such as fishing for certain species, in specific waters, or under local rules, reporting may be required. This is often stated in the conditions of the local fishing permit or by the managing fishery conservation association[25].
- **Local Permits:** Many fishing permits for private or managed waters may include rules about reporting catches, especially for valuable or threatened species.
- **Voluntary and Pilot Projects:** There are ongoing initiatives to improve data collection from recreational fishing, such as the SpöReg app, which allows anglers to voluntarily report their catches to support research and management. The ambition is to expand such systems in the future, but participation is currently voluntary and limited to selected groups[26].

In Sweden, there is no requirement for recreational fishers to report when they lose fishing gear in the aquatic environment. SwAM developed a reporting tool for recreational fishers that was in place during 2019-2024 (Ghost Guard tool) but was closed due to limited use and funding. It was applied both for lost fishing gear and for mapping cleaning efforts. There is an ongoing discussion at the authority as to whether Sweden should recommend an existing international application instead.

In June 2025, the first Fishing Cleanup Day was held: a national campaign encouraging recreational fishermen to clean up in and around popular fishing waters. In connection with this, an application will also be introduced where findings of lost fishing gear can be registered: https://fiskestadarna.se/

[23] van den Heuvel, L., Blicharska, M., Blyth, S., and Rönnbäck, P. (2020). Catch reporting in recreational fishing: Swedish anglers' attitudes and preferences, and the effect of social factors. Volume 233. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fishres.2019.105444
[24] https://www.ifiske.se/index.php/en/information-english/about-fishing-permits
[25]https://www.lansstyrelsen.se/download/18.8cd5a1b19362fb4fc23b6f/1732539935288/Fishing%20rules%20and%20permits%20for%20Kiruna%20municipality%202024.pdf
[26] https://www.slu.se/en/departments/aquatic-resources1/research/sustainable-fishery/sporeg/

3 Recreational fishery legal background in Finland

3.1 Introduction

Recreational fishing in Finland dates to prehistoric times, as the main source of livelihood, as settlements were created around fishing sites[27]. The existence/emergence of advanced fishing techniques soon after the last glacial period, as early as around 9000 BP, was shown through the finding of the "Antrea Net" in Antrea, Lake Korpijärvi, Finland, in the year 1914, also described as the second-oldest fishing net in the world[28]. Ancient fishing techniques, including hook fishing, nets, and traps, have persisted to the present day.

In Finland, recreational fishing is focused on inland waters and only a minority (about 20%) of recreational fishers operate in the sea[29]. Overall, recreational fishing is the most popular nature-related recreational activity or hobby in Finland, and about one-third of the total fish catch in the country can be attributed to recreational fishing[30]. The activity is rooted in culture and society, and skills are passed down through generations. Most recreational fishers credit their parents and siblings for teaching them fishing skills, and the median age for trying fishing for the first time is as low as 5 years old[31]. While consumption of self-caught fish is valued especially among older generations, the primary motivations for recreational fishing (according to all ages) include proximity to nature, relaxation, adventure/excitement, and summer cottage-related activity[32].

3.2 Legal framework for recreational fishing

Recreational fishing in Finland is regulated mainly by the Finnish Fishing Act (379/2015)[33] and the Government Decree on fishing (1360/2015)[34].

Recreational fishing refers to fishing carried out for leisure and personal use. The goal of the Finnish Fishing Act (FFA) is to ensure that fish resources are managed in an environmentally,

[27] https://www.kalastusmuseo.fi/kalastuksen-historiaa/, 2025-02-03
[28] Nurminen, M. (2021). *Kalastus ja kalastajat kivikauden lopun ja varhaismetallikauden Suomessa*. Iskos, vol. 26, pp. 123–142. Available at: https://journal.fi/iskos/article/view/110409 (Accessed: 28 May 2025)
[29] Based on https://itameri.fi/en/
[30] Based on Vapaa-ajankalastus - Maa- ja metsätalousministeriö, https://mmm.fi/etusivu
[31] Suomalainen vapaa-ajankalastaja ja -kalastus vuosituhannen vaihtuessa - Jukuri (https://www.luke.fi/fi).
[32] Suomalainen vapaa-ajankalastaja ja -kalastus vuosituhannen vaihtuessa - Jukuri (https://www.luke.fi/fi).
[33] https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/2015/en20150379.pdf
[34] https://www.finlex.fi/fi/lainsaadanto/saadoskokoelma/2015/1360#Lidm46651395835936

economically, and socially sustainable way. This means using the best available knowledge to protect fish populations, maintain their natural life cycles, and preserve the diversity of fish and other aquatic species.

The FFA applies to fishing (incl. lamprey and crayfish) in the following areas:

- a water area referred to in the Finnish Water Act (Chapter 1, section 3(1)(2), Water Act 587/2011[35]
- in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Finland (1058/2004, English translation not available)
- in a flood area, when flooded, located outside the boundary of the water area

Relation to other legislation:

- The FFA applies subject to other provisions in the European Union (EU) legislation concerning the common fisheries policy or national legislation laid down for its implementation and in an agreement with a foreign state.
- The provisions of the FFA and the Government degrees issued under it are applicable to water bodies located on the State borders, subject to other provisions in an agreement concluded with a foreign state.
- Provisions on the right of the Skolt Sami to fish in the Skolt region in State-owned water areas are laid down in the Skolt Act (253/1995).
- In addition to this Act, provisions on the import of fish species or fish stock or crayfish species or crayfish stock or gametes of these not naturally present in Finland are laid down in the Act on Veterinary Border Inspection (1192/1996) and the Animal Diseases Act (441/2013).

Recreational fishery is managed/enforced by Metsähallitus (state-owned forestry company), which decides on fishing based on national and regional fisheries management plans and is also responsible for selling fishing permits.

Fishery authorities in Finland are following[36]:

- State authorities:
- Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
- Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY-keskukset)
- Fishery duties are managed by
- Metsähallitus (state-owned forestry company)
- Natural Resources Institute Finland

[35] https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/2011/en20110587.pdf
[36] See from Chapter 3 in FFA https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/2015/en20150379.pdf

- Fishing authorities and supervisors regarding enforcement and supervision for compliance:
- The police
- The Finnish Border Guard
- Fishery authorities (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry; Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment)
- Metsähallitus officials (tasked with the management of fishing)
- Approved fishing supervisors
- Person with the fishing supervisor's examination passed, and approved as a fishing supervisor by the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (valid for 10 years)
- Note that they do not have the authority to supervise compliance with the EU legislation and related national legislation for its implementation.
- The Customs in territorial and state border waters, and in Finland's Exclusive Economic Zone

3.3 Fishing rights and access

3.3.1 Fishing in public *versus* private waterbodies

Fishing rights are based on ownership of a water area. Subject to the provisions of the FFA, the right to fish and rule on fishing belongs to the owner of the water area. A shareholder of a jointly owned water area has the right to fish in the water area as decided by the body of joint owners of the jointly owned water area.

Fishing right holder means:

a) a body of joint owners of a jointly owned water area;
b) owner of a water area not belonging to a body of joint owners;
c) owner of a property, if the property has fishing benefits resting on special
d) grounds;
e) natural or legal person holding fishing rights based on a fishing servitude
f) or other legal grounds; or
g) natural or legal person holding a fishing right based on a lease agreement
h) that can be assigned without hearing the owner.

The rules listed above also apply to state-owned waters.

Fishing permits and the right to fish in a public water area are decided upon by Metsähallitus based on the national fish resources management plans. However, the rights to fish in rivers located between Finland and its neighbouring countries in Lapland (River Teno and River Tornionjoki) are co-managed with the fishing officials in Norway and

Sweden. For example, fishing in the international waters of the River Tornionjoki is covered by the Agreement between Finland and Sweden Concerning Transboundary Rivers[37] and in a particular part of the Agreement called The Fishing Rule[38], which also sets restrictions on, e.g., the fishing gear and methods.

3.3.2 Licensing

Common fishing right means that fishing is free of charge to everyone engaging in angling and ice fishing, and to fish Baltic herring with a rod and vertically moved hooks attached to a line.
Everyone under 18 or at least 65 years of age and born in 1958 or at least 69 years of age if born in 1959 or later has the right to engage in lure fishing. People aged 18 to 69 must pay a fisheries management fee (license) to the state, and this allows one to fish with a single rod and lure in the whole country, except for waters where fishing is prohibited by law, and rapids and currents where migratory fish are present. Jigging, angling and ice fishing can be done without paying a fee[39]. Fishing permits[40] and minimum catch sizes and protection periods[41] are defined by Metsähallitus.

Fisheries management fee (Chapter 9 of the FFA):

- 45€ by calendar year, 15€ for seven days, 6€ for a day (21.12.2023/1219)
- Proof of payment of the fee must be shown to the authorities or fishing supervisor upon request.
- The amount of the fee is adjusted every five years by the Government Decree.

However, the rights referred above do not apply to rapids and currents in waters containing migratory fish or water areas where fishing is prohibited based on another provision. The permit of the fishing right holder shall be obtained for angling, ice fishing and lure fishing competitions, and similar organized events.

Persons with no Finnish citizenship: Every fisher who has paid the fisheries management fee and everyone under 18 or at least 69 years of age has the right to engage in recreational fishing in Finland's exclusive economic zone and public water areas at sea. As an exception, fishers who have turned 65 by 31 December 2023 do not need to pay the fishery

[37] Maa- ja metsätalousministeriö, 2024, https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/165766/MMM_2024_20.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
[38] https://www.fsgk.se/fi/kalastussaanto/#pll_switcher
[39] Maa- ja metsätalousministeriö n.d., https://mmm.fi/en/fisheries/fishing-restrictions-and-management-of-fish-resources
[40] https://www.eraluvat.fi/en/fishing/fishing-permits.html
[41] https://www.eraluvat.fi/en/fishing/responsible-fisheries-management-and-fishing/minimum-catch-sizes-and-protection-periods.html

management fee when fishing with one rod and lure.

Payment of the fee gives the right to fish with a rod of one lure in almost all water areas. However, for the northernmost municipalities and some waters of rapids and current areas of migratory fish waterways has been regulated by law with several exceptions[42].

3.4 Gear restrictions and methods

There are several different gears and methods allowed and used in recreational fishery. Most common ones are listed below, together with the definitions:

- Angling means fishing with one rod and hook without a reel suitable for spinning and without a lure.
- Lure means an artificially manufactured troll, wobbler, fly, jig, or comparable.
- Ice fishing means fishing with a short rod and a vertically moved jig attached to a line, a lure equipped with a hook that lures fish to strike with its movement, color, or shape.
- Lure fishing means fishing with a rod and lure, other than angling or ice fishing, trolling with one rod, a lure and a weighted lure, and reel fishing.
- Fishing gear unit value means the relative catching efficiency of a fishing gear or way of fishing.
- Fishing gear unit number of a property means the extent of the fishing right belonging to a property in a certain water area.
- Stationary fishing gear means a fish trap laid down in place, such as a net, a longline, and other hooked fishing gear, a fyke, a fish trap, and other barrier fishing gear.
- Fixed fishing gear means a dam and other structures of a permanent nature intended for fishing.

Allowed fishing gear specifications in Finland:
The FFA (379/2015) enables setting specific local restrictions for certain types of gear and fishing methods for protecting endangered species for 5 years at a time. For example, fishing can be prohibited in certain areas of Saimaa Lake district where the endangered Saimaa ringed seals (*Pusa hispida saimensis*) live. Moreover, the Government Degree 374/2021[43] focusing on certain areas in the Saimaa Lake district further specifies prohibited fishing gear and sets seasonal restrictions that prohibit using fishing nets (other than the

[42] https://kalastusrajoitus.fi/#/kalastusrajoitus

[43] https://mmm.fi/documents/1410837/1789418/Asetus_Saimaan_kalastusrajoituksista_2021.pdf/d1b638e0-7903-8a2b-db2c-f8691f29cf0a/Asetus_Saimaan_kalastusrajoituksista_2021.pdf?t=1620289447721

ones intended for vendace) from 15 April to 30 June.

Restrictions on net fishing:

In rivers belonging to migratory fish waters, net fishing is prohibited from the 14th of August to the 30th of November. For fishing salmon in the sea, the minimum net mesh size must be 80 mm.

In the sea, trout fishing with surface nets is prohibited. Additionally, there are different restrictions for net mesh size for different areas when targeting whitefish (Table 2). Net fishing of whitefish is defined as fishing where at least half of the catch weight is made up of whitefish.

Table 2: Mesh size restrictions for fishing whitefish with nets.

Location	Mesh size restrictions
North of 64°00'N	At least 27mm and at most 30 mm, or at least 43mm
Area between 64°00'N and 63°30'N	At least 30 mm and at most 35 mm, or at least 43 mm
Area between 63°30'N and 62°30'N	At least 40mm
South of 62°30'N	At least 43mm

Restrictions of fishing methods in Finland are more detailed described in the Finnish Fishing Act Chapter 6, section 46[44]. The following ways of fishing, catching methods, and fishing equipment are prohibited:

- Pressure obtained by means of an explosion or otherwise
- Firearms
- Intoxicating or substances (toxic or non-toxic) that contaminate water
- Electricity
- Intentional hooking of the fish from outside
- Fishing, harpoon or a comparable blade, hook or pointed instrument, fishing by using fire or light with a landing net in a river, rapids and currents in waters with migratory fish, and from April 15 to May 31, in other waters as well
- In rapids and currents in waters with migratory fish, angling, ice fishing, and fishing with a grayling trap
- A net drifting with currents or attached to a vessel
- Other fishing gear, devices, and ways of fishing that unnecessarily damage or kill fish or endanger the preservation of a fish stock or are harmful to biodiversity.

[44] en20150379.pdf (finlex.fi)

3.4.1 Labelling and marking the gear

The proper way of setting and marking fishing gear is stated in the FFA (379/2015) and Government Decree (1360/2021). In the FFA (section 48), it is described that fixed and standing (passive) fishing gear should be equipped with clear signs that can be detected by others moving in the area. These signs are not to be left in the water without the fishing gear, i.e. it is not allowed to reserve a fishing site, and one of the sings must label with fisher's name, contact details, and fishing right of the owner. Further specifications about flagging the fixed and standing fishing gear, for example, in the waterways and outside waterways, are set in the Government Decree (1360/2015).

3.5 Catch limits and seasonal restrictions

The size and species-specific restrictions, as well as restrictions on fishing during certain periods, are stated nationwide in the FFA (379/2015) and the Government Decree (1360/2015). In addition, regional authorities (Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment) can decide exceptions to these restrictions by increasing or decreasing the size limit of the catch by 20%. Also, tighter restrictions can be applied by the owner of the water area[45]. General catch limits and restrictions are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Catch limits and restrictions for different species for recreational fishing in Finland (compiled from Government Decree 1360/2015)[46,47,48].

Species	Location	Catch Restriction	Dates for protected status if specified	NB!
Trout with adipose fin (*Salmo trutta*)	Inland waters north of 67°00'N	At least 50cm		
	Inland waters between latitudes of 64°00'N and 67°00'N	At least 60cm		
	Inland waters south of 64°00'N	Fully protected – no catch	Except streams or ponds with NO migratory connection from/to the sea or a lake	
	Streams or ponds	**At most** 45cm		

[45] https://ahven.net/kalavesien-hoito/kalastuksen-saately/
[46] Valtioneuvoston asetus kalastuksesta 1360/2015 - Säädökset alkuperäisinä - FINLEX ®
[47] https://www.eraluvat.fi/en/fishing/fisher-s-information-bank/minimum-catch-sizes-and-protection-periods
[48] https://ahven.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Pyyntimittataulukko_2023_graafinen.pdf

	with no migratory connection from/to the sea or a lake			
	Rivers and streams	Seasonally protected – no catch	September 1 to November 30	
	All sea areas	Fully protected – no catch		
Trout without adipose fin (*Salmo trutta*)		At least 50cm		
	Rivers and streams	Seasonally protected – no catch	September 1 to November 30	
Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*)		At least 60cm		Recreational fishing limited to a catch of 2 salmon/day/person.
	In the Bay of Bothnia north of 63°30'N	At least 50cm		
	Rivers and streams	Seasonally protected – no catch	September 1 to November 30	
Landlocked salmon with adipose fin (*Salmo salar m. sebago*)		at least 60cm		
	Waters of Vuoksi and Hiitolanjoki	Fully protected – no catch		
	Other rivers and streams	Seasonally protected – no catch	August 1 to November 30	
Landlocked salmon without adipose fin (*Salmo salar m. sebago*)		At least 60cm		
	In the waters of the Vuoksi and Hiitolanjoki Rivers (defined in the map appendix of the Fishing Decree)	Seasonally protected – no catch	June 1 to August 31	Recreational fishing limited to a catch of 1 salmon/day/person in the Vuoksi waters
	Other rivers and streams	Seasonally protected – no catch	August 1 to November 30	
	Lake Inarijärvi	At least 45cm		
Arctic char (*Salvelinus alpinus*)	Vuoksi waters	At least 60cm	December 1 to August 31	
		Seasonally protected – no catch	from September 1 to November 30	
	Lake Kuolimo and Lake Saimaa; area between Puumalansalmi and Vuoksenniska	Fully protected – no catch		
Grayling (*Thymallus thymallus*)	South of 67°00'N	At least 35cm	June 1 to March 31	

		Protected – no catch	April 1 to May 31	
	North of 67°00'N	at least 30cm		
	In the sea	Fully protected – no catch		
European whitefish (*Coregonus lavaretus*)	Rivers and streams running into the sea	Seasonally protected – no catch	September 1 to November	
Pike-perch (*Sander lucioperca*)		At least 42cm (other restrictions exist for commercial fishing)		
European crayfish (*Astacus astacus*), signal crayfish (*Pacifastacus leniusculus*), narrow-clawed crayfish *(A. leptodactylus)*		Minimum length in general ≥10 cm. Local or regional, tighter restrictions can be determined. Seasonally protected – no catch	Protected from the 1st of November to 21st of July (at noon)	
European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*)	Inland waters	Seasonally protected – no catch	August 1 to June 30	
	Baltic Sea	Fully protected under EU legislation – no catch		
River lamprey (*Lampetra fluviatilis*)		Seasonally protected – no catch	April 1 to August 15	

3.6 Species and habitat conservation

Purchasing a fishing permit serves as a contribution to environmental conservation, with revenues being utilized by Metsähallitus for various initiatives, including the management of fishing waters and enhancing communication efforts. Each year, Metsähallitus and its partners allocate substantial funds—hundreds of thousands of euros—toward the enhancement of fishing habitats. This includes the restoration of running waters through the creation of new gravel spawning beds, diversification of riverbed structures, and the rehydration of previously dry channels. Additionally, the restoration of 30,000 hectares of mires by Metsähallitus contributes to water conservation efforts at the catchment area level[49].

3.7 Reporting and data collection obligations

Until 2024, there was no obligatory reporting system for recreational fishing in Finland. From

[49] https://www.eraluvat.fi/en/fishing/responsible-fisheries-management-and-fishing/renovation-of-habitats.html

1.1.2024, a new law[50,51] requires reporting catch of certain (vulnerable) species to Luonnonvarakeskus within 14 days post catch. Reporting will be obligatory starting 1.1.2025. The details of this act are set in a Government Decree 716/2024[52]. The reportable species are salmon, landlocked salmon, trout, and eel, as well as char and grayling in certain areas. Additionally, catch of pink salmon (*Oncorhynchus gorbuscha*) in the Baltic Sea shall be reported (for monitoring of invasive species). Fishers will be required to provide the following details about the catch (incl. Individuals returned into the water):

- Fishers' contact details (name and address)
- Fish species
- Equipment used
- Date of catch
- Location of catch

According to Decree 716/2024, recreational catch data of certain species must be submitted to the "Omakala" app maintained by the Natural Resources Institute Finland or using a specific form or by telephone. The Omakala app was published in 2022 and has been used for voluntary reporting of the catch before Decree 716/2024. The app had 6000 users by June 2022[53]. Voluntary reports of exceptional catch are encouraged and managed by different fishing associations, e.g., webpage Kalarekisteri[54], which is an online fish record database maintained by the Finnish Federation for Recreational Fishing (*Suomen Vapaa-ajankalastajien Keskusjärjestö*, SVK).

There is no regulation about the loss of fishing gear. A free application called 'Rosgis'[55] has been developed by the Finnish Environment Institute to enable collecting information on various litter observations in the environment, including also lost and found fishing gear. With this application, it is possible to report the location and type of lost or found fishing gear. The feature for reporting fishing gear has been in test use since the beginning of 2024.

[50] https://www.finlex.fi/fi/lainsaadanto/saadoskokoelma/2023/448
[51] https://valtioneuvosto.fi/-/1410837/saalis-ja-pyyntitietoja-kerataan-harvinaisista-kalalajeista-asetus-lausunnoille
[52] https://www.finlex.fi/fi/lainsaadanto/saadoskokoelma/2024/716
[53] https://omakala.fi/#/about
[54] https://www.vapaa-ajankalastaja.fi/kalarekisteri/
[55] www.rosgis.syke.fi

4 Recreational fishery legal background in Estonia

4.1 Introduction

Compared to its small size, Estonia has an extensive western and northern coastline. The length of the Estonian Baltic Sea coastline is 3,794 km of which 1,242 km are on the mainland and 2,552 km are divided among the islands. The country's eastern border crosses the large lake Peipus system, Europe's fourth largest inland water body. The fisheries sector has historically been very important for Estonia across the coastline of the Baltic Sea and in the eastern part of the country along the lake Peipus. Naturally, coastal and inland fisheries are somewhat different. However, since the northeastern part of the Baltic Sea is dominated by freshwater fish species, both inland and coastal fisheries use similar fishing gear[56]. In the sea, the most important area for recreational fishery is by far Pärnu Bay (main target species are perch, zander, and smelt), but recreational fishers also gather in Matsalu Bay (pike) and sparsely over the coastline of the Gulf of Finland (salmonids). There are also seasonal hot spots for ide, flounder, garfish, and pike.

The difference between recreational and commercial fishing lies in the fact that recreational catch is legally not allowed to be sold or bought (like in other EU countries). Commonly targeted species include sea trout, brown trout, salmon, pike, perch, and zander. Recreational fishing with a simple hand line is free, but more complex gear or specific locations require a recreational fishing right or a fishing card[57].
Based on the last study[58], the number of recreational fishers in Estonia is about 160,000, about 14% of the population ≥15 years and older. This number includes both sea and inland waterbodies. The number of purchased recreational fishing rights has grown year by year. Expanded to the entire population of recreational fishers, expenditures on recreational fishing in 2022 were estimated to reach €51.7 million, representing approximately a 50% increase compared to two years ago.

A large recreational fishing sector is on-ice fishing, where the preferred sea area is Pärnu Bay. There are a few recreational fishers' associations and several periodically published magazines targeting recreational fishing. Also, very active online forums have

[56] OECD. 2009. Eesti kalanduse ja kalakasvatuse sektor 2009. Available online: http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/14/0/46098775.pdf
[57] Environmental Board. 2022. Fishing rights. Available online: https://keskkonnaamet.ee/en/wildlife-nature-protection/fishing/fishing-rights
[58] Kantar Emor. 2023. Eesti harrastuskalapüügi kvantitatiivuuring 2022. aasta kohta. Uuringuaruanne. Available online: https://www.agri.ee/media/9967/download

been created on social media platforms to share information. Fishing gear shops also play an important role, with two leading retail chains dominating the market alongside numerous smaller, independent stores and individuals who sell highly valued handcrafted lures, primarily designed for sea trout and salmon. Recreational fishing, accompanied by professional fishing guides providing equipment and share know-how, is also a popular way to catch fish.

4.2 Legal framework for recreational fishing

Estonia's marine fisheries in the Baltic Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, have been governed by the EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) since May 2004, when Estonia joined the EU. The CFP regulates key areas of fisheries, including data collection, formulation of scientific advice, and monitoring. Estonian fisheries law and related secondary legislation are aligned with international conventions and agreements to which the European Community is a contracting party. The most important of these conventions is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

More concretely, in Estonia, fishing is regulated by the Fishing Act, which outlines broad legal principles and responsibilities, and by the Fishing Regulation, which includes details and specific requirements for fishing practices.

Fishing Act[59] is a comprehensive act governing all aspects of fishing activities in Estonia, including general regulations for both commercial and recreational fishing. It covers permissions, licensing requirements, and administrative frameworks.

Fishing Regulation[60] provides specific rules for fishing methods, allowed gear types, catch limits, and seasonal restrictions. It focuses on practical guidelines for compliance with the Fishing Act, which sets out provisions for fishing on public water bodies, including the Baltic Sea and large inland water bodies like Lake Peipus.

The Fisheries Policy Department of the Ministry of the Regional Affairs and Agriculture is responsible for managing recreational fishery in Estonia. The Minister responsible for fisheries has the authority to establish specific areas with restrictions on recreational fishing gear, the number of fishers, fishing times, and species. In these areas, the use of certain gear types — such as gillnets, hoop nets, crayfish traps, and longlines — is limited and requires a fishing card, confirming the recreational fishing rights. The Environmental Board of the Republic of Estonia is responsible for issuing recreational fisheries licenses and collecting fishing cards catch' reports. Inspectors who control

[59] https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/531072023001/consolide/current
[60] https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/129112023002?leiaKehtiv

and monitor fishing activities have worked under the Environmental Board since the 1st of January 2021. There is a public State helpline (1247) where people can call and notify them of any detected violations.

Essential information for recreational fishers in Estonia can be found in the following places:

- Riigi Teataja – Fishing Act, Fishing regulation, Nature Conservation Act, Water Act, other legal acts[61].
- Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture – thorough overview of recreational fishing possibilities with all the necessary links to more details[62].
- Ministry of Climate/Environmental Board – official website for buying recreational fishing licenses and submitting mandatory catch reports[63].
- Estonian Recreational Fishing Association – helpful information for recreational fishers about volunteering, competitions, and citizen science projects[64].
- South Estonian Fishing Club – new updates about fishing regulations, weather forecasts, and events[65].
- Map application of all fishing restrictions[66].

4.3 Fishing rights and access

4.3.1 Fishing in public *versus* private waterbodies

According to the Fishing Act, recreational fishing is allowed for everybody on **public waterbodies** according to the restrictions outlined in the Fishing Act; a recreational fisher must follow the same restrictions regarding the location (specific protected areas), temporal and full closures (spawning seasons), and specific fishing gear as a commercial fisher.

Recreational fishing on **privately owned waterbodies** requires permission from the landowner. However, privately owned water bodies open to public use following the same regulations that apply to public waters. There are only a few very small waterbodies privately owned in Estonia, and unlike Finland, there are no privately owned Baltic Sea areas in Estonia (Figure 4).

[61] https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/
[62] https://www.agri.ee/en/objectives-and-activities/fishing-industry-and-commercial-fishing
[63] https://kalaluba.ee/
[64] www.kalastajateselts.ee
[65] www.kalastusinfo.ee
[66] https://register.keskkonnaportaal.ee/register

4.3.2 Licensing

Recreational fishing rights in Estonia are categorized into three types, depending on fishing gear, location, and time of year:

- **Free-of-charge fishing right**: Available for fishing with a simple hand line, which consists of a rod, a fishing line up to 1.5 times the length of the rod, a single hook at the end, and maybe equipped with weight and a float. This method does not require a license or fishing card and is free for everyone. For any gear beyond this basic setup (e.g., spinning or trolling lines), a paid fishing right is necessary, even if used in public waters.
- **Paid recreational fishing right**: Required for more complex fishing gear, such as spinning reels, trolling lines, and additional hand lines beyond a single hand line. This right can be purchased for various durations (e.g., 24 hours, 7 days, one-month, half-year, or annual licenses) to provide flexibility for recreational fishers.

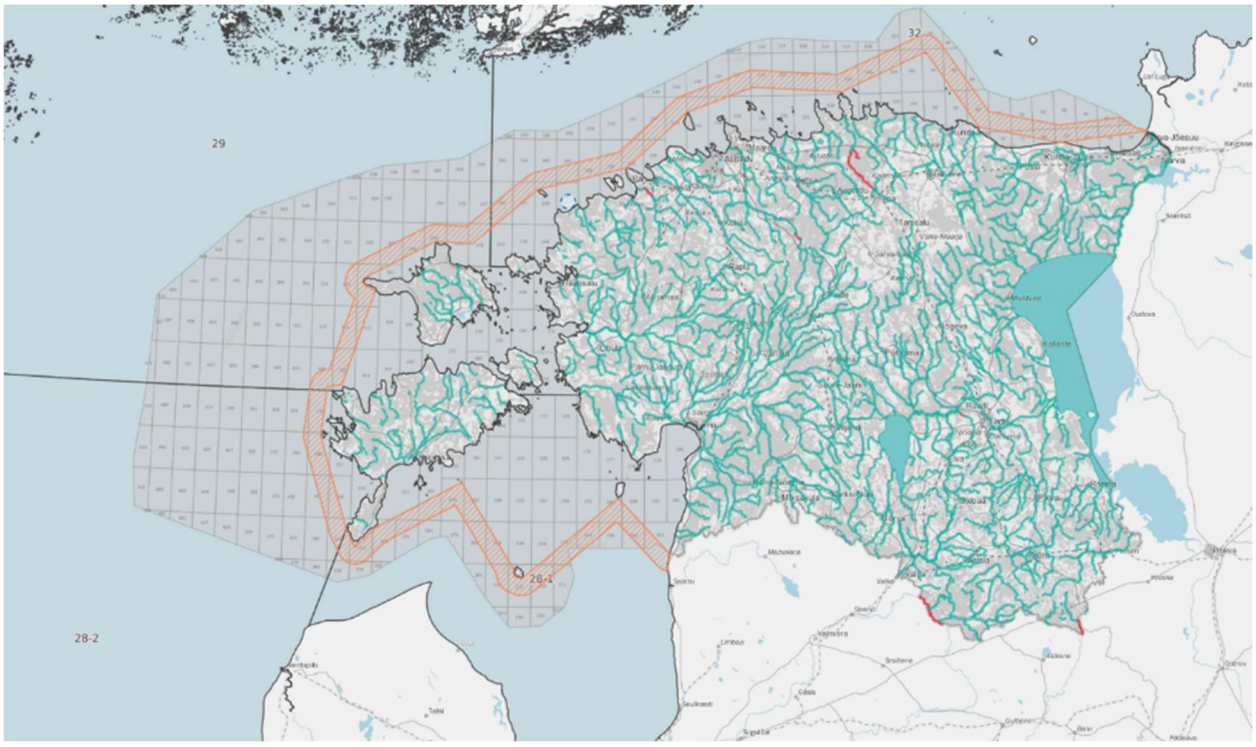

Figure 4. Map of Estonia that includes ICES subregions in Estonian waters (large grid in Estonian territorial waters), regional fishing subregions (small grid), 4 nautical mile fishing zone for salmon and sea trout (orange area), public rivers and waterbodies (blue), not publicly accessible waterbody (red). Source: Keskkonnaportaal[67].

[67] https://register.keskkonnaportaal.ee/register

- **Fishing Card**: A fishing card is required when using gear such as gillnets, longline, hoopnet, crayfish trap, crayfish net, dragnet, or scoop net; when fishing takes place with spinning or fly fishing rods on Central Estonian trout rivers or North Estonian salmon and sea trout rivers; and when fishing occurs in the Endla Nature Reserve, Matsalu National Park, or Silma Nature Reserve. Furthermore, in certain areas (e.g Matsalu), and specific gear has a limited number of available licenses for each fishing sector and period. The quotas are updated annually. Also, underwater spearfishing in certain lakes requires purchasing a fishing card.

All the licenses can be purchased through mobile, direct, or online payment[68]. Current license fees for fishing rights and card are provided in the Table 4.

Table 4. The fees for recreational fishing licenses in Estonia as of 07.01.2025[69].

Period/ Type of license	Recreational fishing right	Fishing card		
		Gillnets, longlines, harpoon, and grayfish traps	Salmon and sea trout rivers	Protected area
24 h	2.00 €	4.00 € (harpoon); 15.00/20.00 € (5 grayfish traps)	10.00 € 4.00 € (R. Vasalemma)	5.00 € (Endla)/ 9.00 € (Silma)
48 h		4 € (2 kadiska traps in inland waters)	14.00 €	4.00 € (Matsalu)
7 days	5.00 €	4.00 € (longline) 10.00 € (longline in L. Võrtsjärv) 5.00 € (gillnet in Jõgeva and Tartu counties) 9.00 € (gillnet in other areas)		7.00 € (Matsalu)
1 month		9.00 € (gillnet for residents of smaller islands)		
182 days	17.00 €			
365 days	27.00 €			

Exemptions from the recreational fishing fee apply to individuals under 16 years, pensioners, those who were unlawfully repressed, persons with disabilities, and those with partial or full incapacity to work. The recreational fishing right fee exemption does not cover activities or locations requiring a fishing card, which all users must purchase. Discounts on fishing cards for certain gear apply to residents of small islands.

4.4 Gear Restrictions and Methods

Recreational fishing rights and the fishing card permit the use of various types of sport fishing equipment, including multiple simple hand lines, hand lines, spinning reels, trolling lines, fly hooks, bottom lines (such as tonka and krunda), unanchored trimmers, hook lines for Baltic herring fishing, harpoon guns, a gillnet, longline (up to 100 hooks for general

[68] https://kalaluba.ee/
[69] Ajutised püügikitsendused, püügiõiguse tasu ja püügivahendite piirarv harrastuskalapüügil 2025. aastal–Riigi Teataja

recreational use and up to 300 hooks for permanent residents of small islands), hoopnet, crayfish trap, crayfish net, dragnet, and scoop net.

According to regulations, recreational fishing rights generally allow the use of up to three different or similar fishing devices simultaneously. One fishing card generally allows the use of one fishing device (depending on the area), in the case of crayfishing, up to five dipnets or traps. The hook line for Baltic herring may only be used in the sea. Each rig may use up to three hooks, with up to ten hooks allowed on hook lines specifically for Baltic herring, while trolling lines may have up to three three-pronged hooks. Detailed descriptions of each permitted type of fishing equipment are provided in the Fishing Regulation.

Only active fishing is allowed with recreational fishing gear, meaning the fisher must stay close to the equipment (except for gillnets, longlines, crayfish traps, and trap nets used under a fishing card) and be accessible for contact by inspectors on-site. Inspectors have the right to remove the fishing gear if this requirement is not met. Additionally, recreational fishing gear must not be used within 25 meters of stationary fishing gear like gill nets and various bigger trap nets (pound nets, etc.).

In the sea, gillnets and other stationary gear must be checked at least every 48 hours, except when fishing under the ice. Overall, it is prohibited to place gear and block more than one-third of the width of channels, rivers, streams between islands, inland water bodies (except Lake Võrtsjärv), bays, or straits with fishing gear, leaving the deepest part of the cross-section open for fish passage. All fishing gear must be removed during closed seasons for specific gear or after seasonal quotas are reached. If gillnets or longlines need to be taken out from the waterbody and the person who acquired the recreational fishing right has fallen ill or is otherwise unable to do it, the fishing right is proven by a letter of attorney from the person who acquired the right and a document proving the identity of the person authorized to remove the fishing gear from fishing. The authorized person must inform the Environmental Board one hour prior to the removal of gear.

Fishing without appropriate gear or using non-selective methods is strictly prohibited to minimize ecological impact. Specifically, the use of electricity, toxic or narcotic substances, stabbing tools (except for underwater harpoon fishing), hooking tools, firearms, and explosives is forbidden, with violations carrying legal penalties. The possession, production, storage, transportation, and use of electrical fishing equipment are also punishable offenses.

4.4.1 Labelling and marking the gear

When fishing with a purchased fishing card, it is mandatory to mark and tag specific fishing

gear, including gillnets, longlines, crayfish traps, and fish traps. For gillnets and longlines, the open-water end must be marked with two flags mounted above each other on a single pole, while the other end requires a single flag. If the gear or lines are positioned parallel to the shore or coast, the right-hand end of the line (when viewed from the water towards the shore) should be marked with one flag and the left-hand end with two flags. Flags must be red or orange (except for the lower flag on a two-flag marker) and at least 20×30 cm in size, positioned at a minimum height of 1 meter above the water surface, and a reflective strip must be attached to ensure visibility. However, in ice-free waters up to one meter deep, the lower edge of the flag may be positioned at a minimum of 0,5 meters above the water surface.

All the fishing gear must be labelled with an identification number identical to the number on the fishing permit. This identification must make it possible to verify the fishing permit holder on the water or through the issuing authority. For recreational fishing gear such as gillnets, kadiska traps, crayfish traps, and longlines, the identification mark should be the personal identification code of the fishing card holder.

For crayfish and fish traps, marking with a floating buoy of at least 10 cm in diameter is required to ensure visibility. Additionally, specific restrictions apply to gillnet mesh sizes, which vary based on the fishing area, period, and target species. In inland water bodies, the mesh size typically ranges from 60 to 130 mm, while in the sea, a standard mesh size of 70 mm is required. The length of gillnets is generally restricted to 70 meters, although in certain inland water bodies, this limit may be reduced to 35 meters.

4.5 Catch limits and seasonal restrictions

According to Fishing Regulations[70], specific coordinates and zones are **permanently closed** to fishing to conserve fish populations:

1. **Pärnu Bay**: Fishing is prohibited within the coordinates 58°22.829'N, 24°27.664'E to 58°22.446'N, 24°29.637'E year-round, except for smelt fishing with traps from 1 March to 30 April and ice fishing with jigs.
2. **Nasva River mouth**: Within 500 meters of coordinates 58°12.918'N, 22°23.769'E, fishing is only allowed with simple hand lines, rods, bottom rods, fly rods, and spinning rods.
3. **Vaemla and Sigala Bays**: Prohibited to fish within designated lines connecting points in these bays.
4. **River mouths**: For certain rivers and streams, depending on their size (listed in Appendix 12 of the Fishing regulations), fishing is prohibited within 1500, 1000 or 500 meters of the mouth year-round, with specific exemptions.

[70] https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/129112023002

5. **Puulaiu Canal**: Fishing with gillnets and fish traps is restricted from designated points in the canal extending to Käina Bay.
6. **Specific rivers**: Fishing is prohibited in 36 rivers that are listed in Appendix 15 of the Fishing regulation (e.g., Häädemeeste, Kloostri, Treppoja).
7. **Sections of specific rivers**: Fishing is prohibited from natural or artificial dams until sea in certain rivers listed in the Fishing regulations (e.g., Purtse, Mustoja, Selja, Loobu, and more).

Fishing is prohibited within 50 meters upstream and downstream of all fish passes. Additionally, fishing is banned within 100 meters downstream of all dams and waterfalls, with specific exceptions in the Fishing regulation.

Temporal closure restrictions for specific fish species are listed in Table 5.

Table 5: The minimum size limits, daily catch limits, and closure periods that recreational fishers must follow in Estonian waters[71].

Species	Size limit (cm)	Daily catch allowed per person	Closure periods			
			Sea	Peipsi, Lämmi and Pihkva Lakes	Lake Võrtsjärv	Other inner waterbodies
European perch *(Perca fluviatilis)*	21 *(at sea)*	15 kg				
Northern pike *(Esox lucius)*	50	5 fish	1.03-30.04	1.04-5.05	15.03-30.04	15.03-30.04
Pike-perch *(Sander lucioperca)*	46 51 (*Võrtsjärv)*	5 fish	15.05-15.07	5.05-10.06	5.05-10.06	5.05-10.06
Freshwater bream *(Abramis brama)*	35	15 fish		5.05-10.06 *(except with simple hand line and hand rod)*		1.05-10.06 *(except with simple hand line and hand rod)*
Ide *(Leuciscus idus)*	38 *(sea and inflowing rivers)*	15 fish				
Vimba bream *(Vimba vimba)*	30	20 fish				10.05-20.06 *(details in Fishing Regulations)*
Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar)* and sea trout (*Salmo trutta)*	60 50 *(sea trout)*	2 salmons or 2 trouts, or 1 salmon and 1 trout. In ICES areas 28 and	1.06-15.09; 15.06-30.09 *(details in Fishing Regulations)*			20.10-30.11 *(details in Fishing Regulations). Forbidden year-round*

[71] https://keskkonnaamet.ee/en/wildlife-nature-protection/fishing/closed-periods-and-locations-fishing-minimum-sizes

			29 catching salmon with adipose fin is forbidden and daily quota is is 1 salmon without adipose fin.			*in Pärnu river system*
Brown trout (*Salmo trutta)*	36		2 fish			15.09-31.01 *(except in the Narva river)*
Flounder *(Platichthys* spp.)	21 *(subregion 28)*; 18 *(subregions 29 and 32)*			15.02-15.05; 15.02-31.05 in GoF (subdivision 32)		
Turbot *(Scophthalmus maximus)*	30					
Vendace *(Coregonus albula)*	12				21.07-30.06	1.08-30.06
Tench *(Tinca tinca)*	30				20.06-20.07 *(except with simple hand line and hand rod)*	20.06-20.07 *(except with simple hand line and hand rod)*
Burbot *(Lota lota)*	40				10.01-10.02	
European whitefish *(Coregonus lavaretus)*	40 (*Võrtsjärv);* 35 (*sea and inflowing rivers)*			25.10-1.12	*Forbidden all year around*	15.10-15.11 *(Pärnu river)*
European smelt *(Osmerus eperlanus)*					*Forbidden all year around*	
River lamprey *(Lampetra fluviatilis)*						1.03-30.06 (*in rivers)*
European eel *(Anguilla anguilla)*	55 *(Võrtsjärv., Peipsi, Pihkva, Lämmijärv, Emajõgi);* 50 *(others)*			*Forbidden all year around*		
Atlantic cod *(Gadus morhua)*	35					
European crayfish *(Astacus astacus)*		11*	75			*31.08-1.08 (details in Fishing Regulations).*

4.6 Species and habitat conservation

In Estonian waters, four fish species are completely protected, making it illegal to target or retain them at any time: sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus*), Welsh catfish (*Silurus glanis*), asp (*Leuciscus aspius*), and grayling (*Thymallus thymallus)*.

In addition, under the Nature Conservation Act[72], it is prohibited to catch Category III protected species such as spined loach (*Cobitis taenia*), weatherfish (*Misgurnus fossilis*), and bullhead (*Cottus gobio)*.

Estonian Recreational Fishing Association organizes units of active conservationists who volunteer primarily in autumn (during the spawning season for Salmonidae) to patrol closed fishing areas and prevent illegal fishing.

Additionally, due to low population estimates, European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) from the sea is prohibited to catch year-round. The relevant authorities have the right to set additional year-round restrictions according to the situation of particular species. Other species are subject to regulations on size, catch limits, and fishing seasons, which must be strictly followed. Any fish of the protected species, undersized fish, or fish caught during closed season must be carefully removed from fishing gear and immediately released back into the water.

Additionally, several conservation efforts are in place to protect fish species and habitats essential for recreational fishing, particularly through regulated fishing sectors in nature-protected areas like Matsalu National Park.

Regarding invasive species, the presence of three non-native crayfish species — signal crayfish (*Pacifastacus leniusculus*), spiny-cheek crayfish (*Faxonius limosus*), and marbled crayfish (*Procambarus virginalis*) — poses a threat to native biodiversity. These species, originally from North America, can disrupt local ecosystems and spread diseases. Fishers encountering these invasive crayfish are encouraged to take a photo and report the sighting, along with location details, to the Estonian Environmental Board.

Fishing fees collected from recreational licenses play a significant role in funding conservation efforts related to restoring fishing stocks, removing dams, and preventing illegal fishing. Stocking has been implemented to support populations of endangered species, such as salmon and whitefish. Other species occasionally stocked include asp, sturgeon, eel, and crayfish. Additionally, targeted restoration projects focus on improving freshwater fish spawning habitats by opening river mouths and enhancing the

[72] https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/515112018002/consolide/current

spawning grounds in coastal areas.

4.7 Reporting and data collection obligations

In Estonia, catch data reporting is mandatory only for fishing conducted under a fishing card. Data submissions are managed by the Estonian Environmental Board and can be submitted in various formats: through the website kalaluba.ee[73] (using digital identification method), by email, post, or in person at the Environmental Board.

Catch data requirements and submission frequency depend on the validity of the fishing card:

- For fishing cards valid for up to one month, reports must be submitted within five days after the card expires.
- For fishing cards valid for more than one month, data must be submitted within five days after the end of each calendar month.
- Only one report should be submitted per issued fishing card, regardless of the number of fishing days.

The information to be reported includes the weight of the catch in kilograms for each fish species and the number of crayfish individuals of legal size. Fishers are required to submit a report even if no fishing activity took place or not a single fish was caught, in which case they must record "0" for the catch amount.

For location details, fishers must specify the fishing area as follows:

- In the sea, the report must include the large fishing grid number from the Baltic Sea fishing area map, where grid 28-1 represents the Gulf of Riga, 28-2 the open Baltic Sea and the western coast of Saaremaa, 29 the coastline of Hiiumaa and Väinameri, and 32 the Gulf of Finland (Figures 3 and 4).
- For other water bodies, the specific name of the water body must be provided in the "Fishing Location" field.

Failure to submit the required catch data may result in fines, and as of January 1, 2018, applicants who have not submitted their catch reports are denied new fishing cards until the required data has been provided.

Data collection by license type

The reporting obligations and data collection methods vary depending on the type of license and fishing gear used:

[73] https://kalaluba.ee/

1. **Recreational fishers using commercial gear**:

Fishers using commercial fishing gear, such as gillnets, trap nets, and longlines, are obligated to report their catches.

2. **Salmon and sea trout fishing in rivers**:

Fishers with a license for salmon and sea trout in rivers must report their catches.

3. **Anglers and rod fishers in the sea**:

Anglers and rod fishers in the sea are not subject to obligatory catch reporting; their catch data is estimated through a phone survey conducted every two years.

Specific data is recorded for each fishing card issued, including details on the number of licenses issued and the total number of fishing days. Information on catch abundance and species weight is also collected for these cards. However, the spatial and temporal resolution of the data depends on the type of fishing card. Cards issued for protected areas or rivers are registered according to specific nature reserves, river basins, or sea areas. In contrast, cards associated with commercial gear, such as gillnets, are recorded on a county basis. Catch data for these fishing cards are reported by individual fishing events, providing more precise information on fishing activities and their impact on specific regions.

In the case of **recreational fishing rights**, the number of licenses purchased, and their validity period are recorded. However, unlike fishing cards, no data has been collected on the specific areas of use, leaving marine and inland water activities undifferentiated.
The Estonian Environmental Board publishes annual statistics based on the reported fishing card data[74]. These statistics serve as a resource for understanding the impact of recreational fishing and for informing policy decisions aimed at sustainable fisheries management. Occasional periodic social studies, commissioned by the Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture, collect additional data on fishing activities and areas, providing further insights into recreational fishing patterns in Estonia.

However, that area also needs to be further improved and organized by the governmental organizations responsible for recreational fishery sector legislation and policies. Citizen science campaigns in Estonia occasionally focus on reusing old fishing gear. One such initiative, organized by the Estonian Recreational Fishing Association, is called “Võrgu eest elu” (translated as “A Life for a Net”). This campaign collects used gillnets made from monofilament fishing line at various locations around Estonia. These collected nets are then repurposed into anti-drone nets, which are sent to Ukraine to support Ukrainian soldiers in their defense efforts.

Additionally, under the Re:Fish project, a web application[75] was developed to

[74] https://kliimaministeerium.ee/harrastuspuuk#statistika
[75] https://gis.sea.ee/refish/

engage citizens in reporting fishing-related litter in nature. The application has been tested and used mainly in the voluntarily based beach cleaning event with the Estonian Fund for Nature, but larger outreach has not been achieved yet.

5 Comparison of the legal background of recreational fishery between Sweden, Finland and Estonia

All three countries (Sweden, Finland, and Estonia) share a rich history of recreational fishing shaped by their extensive Baltic Sea coastlines. Commonly, recreational fishing is regulated through national laws in each country and within the framework of the European Union's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). This ensures a shared commitment to the sustainable management of marine and inland fish resources. National laws in these countries complement EU regulations by addressing country-specific environmental, social, and economic factors.

In Sweden, recreational fishing is governed by the Fisheries Act and Fisheries Ordinance, while in Finland, it is regulated by the Finnish Fishing Act and accompanying government decrees, and in Estonia, by the Fishing Act and the more detailed Fishing Regulations. Management responsibilities for recreational fishing are divided among various national organizations in each country, reflecting differing governance structures.

Access to fishing areas is handled differently in each of the countries: Sweden and Finland distinguish between public, private, and privately open water bodies, with permissions varying accordingly, while Estonia allows public access to all state waters and has only a small number of private waterbodies that require landowner permission — none of which include parts of the Baltic Sea, unlike in the other two countries.

Licensing rules also vary; Sweden does not have uniform national rules regarding fishing licenses and age exemptions, leaving decisions to waterbody owners. In contrast, Estonia and Finland offer fee exemptions for youth and pensioners, although the age thresholds and eligible groups differ.

Gear restrictions and permitted methods are defined in national legislation and vary by area, season, and type of water body. Nonetheless, a shared feature across all three countries is that simple handheld fishing with rods, lines, and hooks is allowed without a license.

Labelling and marking of gear are similarly regulated only for passive equipment, with no such requirements for handheld gear in any of the countries. Furthermore, national

legislation outlines species- and size-specific restrictions and seasonal closures to protect fish stocks, ensuring ecological sustainability.
Revenue from fishing permits in all three countries is reinvested in the protection and management of aquatic environments. These funds are directed toward activities such as habitat restoration, restocking of vulnerable species, improvement of fishing conditions, and public outreach efforts, which also serve to combat illegal fishing through increased awareness and compliance. However, the public outreach activities differ a lot between the countries and could be more actively managed and homogenized between the countries. Currently, the educational campaigns are initiated mostly by NGOs and on voluntary bases. Ideally, the campaigns could be organized and implemented in a structured way with a plan by governmental institutions.

When it comes to reporting obligations, notable differences emerge. Estonia mandates catch reporting only for activities under a fishing card and requires reports even in the absence of a catch, with penalties for non-compliance, including being denied future cards. Finland, which previously lacked mandatory recreational fishing reporting, introduced new legislation in 2024 that requires reporting of catches of certain vulnerable species. Both Estonia and Finland lack formal regulations on reporting lost fishing gear, although voluntary tools like Estonia's citizen science campaigns and Finland's Rosgis app have been developed to fill this gap. Sweden does not require recreational catch or gear loss reporting and relied on the voluntary Ghost Guard tool until its discontinuation in 2024 due to limited use and funding. Across all three countries, the lack of formal gear loss reporting frameworks highlights a common area needing improved regulation and enforcement to support cleaner aquatic environments and responsible fishing practices.

Commercial fishers are required to report if a fishing gear (net or trap) is lost or left in the sea and explain what actions were carried out to retrieve it. So, if the net remains in the sea, when a closed fishing season begins, and is found afterwards by someone else or by the authorities, but the fisher had already reported it as lost, then no action is taken against the fisher — this also serves to protect the fishers. A similar system could be applied to recreational fishers who have purchased a fishing card for a specific period and whose net is marked with their personal identification info. If their net is lost, they should have the opportunity to report the loss. If someone later finds the net outside the validity period of their fishing card or during a fishing closure, and the fisher reported it as lost, no fine would be issued. This means that adding the opportunity to report the loss of the gear also protects the recreational fishers.

Promoting already existing voluntary reporting applications and providing official support to use those from the governmental side could be one option. Another option that could work is to follow the professional fisher's example and add the reporting option in the case of the loss of the gear into the catch report that recreational fishers must fill after each fishing event. This would mean improving the legislation and implementing mandatory reporting

systems for all recreational fishers. However, currently, in Sweden, no catch report must be filled, and in Finland, the catch of only some very specific fish species must be reported, so the legislation should be harmonized.

6. Summary and conclusions

It can be concluded that one of the areas that needs improvement and has many challenges in all three countries is reporting practices and systems. Based on the combined information, the following common cross-border challenges and opportunities have been identified.

6.1 Challenges

1. **Inconsistent catch reporting practices**
   - Lack of harmonized reporting obligations across countries creates data gaps, especially in Sweden, where no catch reporting is required, and Finland, where it has only been recently introduced.
2. **Unregulated gear loss reporting**
   - All three countries lack formal regulations for reporting lost fishing gear, leading to insufficient data on ghost gear and its environmental impacts.
3. **Discontinued or underused voluntary tools**
   - Voluntary gear loss reporting tools like Sweden's Ghost Guard, Finland's Rosgis, and the Estonian web application developed under the Re:Fish project face low user engagement or discontinuation due to a lack of incentives and funding.
4. **Varying access rules and licensing systems**
   - Differing rules on waterbody ownership and fishing rights (especially in Sweden and Finland) may confuse recreational fishers, particularly cross-border visitors.
5. **Limited enforcement of existing regulations**
   - In some cases, enforcement of reporting obligations is weak or uneven, reducing compliance and effectiveness.
6. **Lack of a unified communication strategy**
   - Differences in communication tools and public outreach reduce the effectiveness of awareness campaigns and the promotion of sustainable practices.

6.2 Opportunities and suggestions for improvement

1. **Standardization of reporting systems**
   - Harmonizing catch and gear loss reporting requirements across the Baltic countries

would improve data quality and fisheries management.

2. Enhancing digital tools and incentives

- Improving and promoting apps like Rosgis or relaunching tools like Ghost Guard with incentives (e.g., return of lost gear, recognition) could increase public participation.

3. Leveraging permit revenue for conservation

- Continued and transparent use of fishing permit revenues for habitat restoration, education, and enforcement can strengthen public trust and ecological outcomes.

4. Cross-border cooperation

- Sharing best practices and aligning policies on licensing, gear regulations, and environmental goals can benefit the entire Baltic Sea region.

5. Citizen science and community engagement

- Encouraging community involvement in data collection, gear reuse, proper waste management of EOL fishing gear, and educational campaigns offers cost-effective ways to increase stewardship and awareness.

6. Modernizing and simplifying access rules

- Streamlining access rights and license systems, particularly for tourists and casual fishers, could enhance participation while maintaining sustainability.

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