FISKISTOFA
DIRECTORATE OF FISHERIES

The Icelandic Directorate of Fisheries
- Responsibilities and main tasks

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About the Directorate of Fisheries

The Directorate of Fisheries was established in 1992 to handle various tasks previously undertaken by the Ministry of Fisheries and several other agencies. From an administrative point of view, this was a more economical and effective arrangement which also offers extra safeguards for legal rights.

There have been a number of changes in the functions of the Directorate of Fisheries since its foundation, and the Directorate is now responsible for the management and supervision of fishing in the sea, rivers and lakes, as well as whaling and aquaculture. The Directorate of Fisheries also collects a wide range of information on these activities, which it uses for its administrative and supervisory functions, and disseminates to interested parties and the public at large.

The Directorate employs approximately 75 people, representing a wide spectrum of experience, education and expertise. The headquarters of the Directorate of Fisheries are in Hafnarfjördur, in addition to which it has offices in Grindavík, Stykkishólmur, Ísafjördur, Akureyri, Höfn in Hornarfjördur and the Westman Islands.

The Directorate of Fisheries works in close cooperation with the Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture and other agencies serving the fisheries sector, both in Iceland and internationally.

Fisheries are the basis of economic prosperity in Iceland. Effective management and monitoring are vital in promoting the conservation and sustainable and efficient harvesting of fish stocks. The Directorate of Fisheries plays a key role in that work.

Aquaculture

Aquaculture in Iceland utilizes both salmonids and marine fish species. The primary aquaculture species are Atlantic salmon, brown trout, charr, cod, halibut, haddock, turbot and rainbow trout. The latter two species are non indigenous and specially imported for rearing.

Icelandic aquaculture focused initially on the rearing of salmonid juveniles for the enhancement of fish stocks in rivers and lakes. This is still an important aspect of salmon culture and a number of rivers are supporting angling exclusively through juvenile (smolt) releases. The on-growing component, however, has been increasing over the last 30 years and charr, as well as salmon farming, are now well established. Salmon farming, although well established in a few land-based facilities, is primarily conducted in sea-cages. The juvenile rearing of marine species is mostly experimental and limited to turbot, halibut and cod.

Those wishing to start aquaculture need to apply for an "environmental licence", which is issued by the relevant environmental authorities. Those holding an environmental licence subsequently have to apply for an "operational licence" to the Directorate of Fisheries. After obtaining comments from various research and management institutes, regarding disease and genetic threats as well as ecological issues, the Directorate issues an operational licence with relevant conditions regarding the species used and the minimum strength of rearing cages. The Directorate is subsequently obliged to inspect the facility at regular intervals. The Directorate of Fisheries also collects annual statistics regarding aquaculture production. Fish health inspection, as well as the control of the wholesomeness of aquaculture products, is the responsibility of the Veterinary and Food Authority.

Management of salmon and trout Fisheries

The Salmonid Resource

There are close to 250 rivers in Iceland. About 60 rivers exclusively produce Atlantic salmon, but minor runs of salmon are found in many sea trout and char rivers. The Atlantic salmon ascend about 80 rivers, many of which are located in the western part. Other major sport fishing areas are located in lowland areas of the north-western and north-eastern coasts.

The average 25-year salmon angling catch is close to 36,000. The contribution of sports caught salmon has gradually been increasing and is now close to 90 % of the catch.

There is great enthusiasm for salmon angling among Icelanders and many foreign anglers visit Iceland each summer. The fishing season starts in early June and extends through September, but each stream can only be fished for 3 months during the salmon season. Although Atlantic salmon are of greatest economic value with respect to sports fishing, there is also great interest in trout and sea trout fisheries.

The main objective of the management regime is to secure the sustainability of the salmon resource. The River Associations have the responsibility to manage the resource towards that goal. The Directorate of Fisheries must approve the number of rods permitted on a river, but daily and monthly fishing periods are specified by law. All salmon fishing is thus restricted with respect to annual, weekly and daily fishing times and the number of set nets and rods used on any river. There is a mandatory recording of the salmonid catch which is one of the pillars of sound management.

Mixed stock fishing for salmon in the sea has been forbidden in Iceland since the early 1930s. Severely regulated coastal net fisheries for char are, however, permitted in a few areas.

The right to harvest salmon and trout in rivers and lakes in Iceland is privately owned and follows the ownership of the land that adjoins the river. The river owners are by law obliged to form an association to share expenses and income from the river. The management and enforcement of salmon and trout fisheries, as well as the protection of salmonid resources against threats posed by various human activities on rivers and lakes, is the responsibility of the Directorate of Fisheries. This is, however, conducted in a close cooperation with the local fisheries associations.

Management of marine resources

In Iceland various methods are used for the effective management of fisheries. These include allocation of fishing permits and quotas, regulations on the types and configurations of fishing gear and fishing ground closures.

All commercial fishing operations are subject to a permit from the Directorate of Fisheries. The Directorate also issues permits for Icelandic vessels to fish in distant waters and for foreign vessels to fish within the Icelandic EEZ. Fishing for private consumption, on the other hand, is permitted to all, provided only a small quantity is caught, and it is forbidden to sell the catch or financially benefit from it by any other means.

All major commercial stocks are currently subject to quotas. The Directorate of Fisheries issues annual catch quotas to individual vessels based on their permanent share in the total allowable catch (TAC) which the Minister of Fisheries sets every fishing year (September – August) for each species based on recommendations from the Marine Research Institute. The Directorate compares the catches and quotas of individual vessels on a daily basis and, if catches exceed the quotas, the licence of the vessel concerned is immediately revoked and fishing is halted until its catch quota status has been resolved.

International cooperation

The Icelandic authorities place a great deal of emphasis on ensuring that the harvesting of fish stocks inside and outside Icelandic fishing waters is managed in a targeted and responsible manner, with the objective of supporting sustainability and promoting a more efficient exploitation of fish stocks. One of the preconditions for achieving this goal is to ensure that Iceland works in good collaboration with other fishing nations, when it comes to the management of fishing and exploitation of fish stocks in international waters and/or the fishing waters of one or several countries. Iceland has played an active role in the work of the international fisheries organisations that have been set up for this purpose, such as the Northeast Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) and Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO). The Directorate of Fisheries also works a great deal with the fisheries authorities of other countries in a variety of ways and has established formal collaboration agreements with some of them.

Fisheries Management System

Individual Transferable quotas (ITQ) have been applied in the management of fishing in Iceland. Fishing vessels that operate under this system are allocated specific and limited quotas of quota-bound species. The Directorate of Fisheries allocates quotas to individual fishing vessels at the beginning of the fishing year, once the minister has made a decision with regard to the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for those specific species. The quotas can be used during the fishing year and are also transferable between fishing vessels, within certain limits and conditions. There are two kinds of quotas: firstly, there are general quotas which can be applied to fishing with all types of permitted fishing gear and, secondly, there is a separate small boat quota system for vessels that must be below a certain size and are only allowed to fish with handlines or longlines. The dominance of any individual fishery company's fishing rights may not exceed certain limits that are specified in the law, and the Directorate of Fisheries is responsible for monitoring that these limits are observed. Moreover, the ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture maintains a certain reserve of catch quotas every fishing year, which, by law, it can allocate to fishing companies that have experienced substantial shocks, as a result of a contraction in catches or quotas and to fishing vessels from disfavoured areas that are heavily dependent on fishing.

Every fishing year, specific catch quotas are allocated to so-called coastal fishing. Boats that fish under this system must obtain a special fishing licence from the Directorate of Fisheries and may only fish at specified times of the day. They also have to use handlines and may not exceed a specified maximum catch on each fishing trip. Once the total allowed catch threshold has been reached, all licences to coastal fishing vessels are halted.

Monitoring of fishing activities iin the sea, rivers and lakes, whaling and aquaculture

The Directorate of Fisheries is responsible for ensuring that commercial fishing vessels do not go out fishing without the appropriate permit and sufficient catch quota. It also checks that the fishing activities of these vessels of these vessels are in accordance with the law and regulations and that they do not fish in excess of their quotas.

A team of inspectors from the Directorate of Fisheries ensures, both on land and at sea, that fishery companies, fishermen and other people connected to fishery activities observe the relevant laws and regulations. A very important part of the work of these inspectors is therefore to provide guidelines to all these parties and to explain the laws and rules in force.

The supervisory role the Directorate of Fisheries plays in monitoring the exploitation of fish stocks can be divided into supervision on land and supervision at sea. Inspectors who supervise activities at sea accompany the vessels on fishing trips to monitor their fishing methods and catches and to provide guidelines on fishing methods, so as to prevent damaging fishing practices and thus promote a more efficient and sustainable exploitation of fish stocks. Inspectors endeavour to prevent the fishing of undersized species and discards of catches and to monitor catch methods, configurations of fishing gear on the fishing vessels, the validity of fishing permits and the weighing and recording of catches, as well as the species and size composition of the catch on board the fishing vessel. They also measure mesh sizes and collect information and samples on behalf of the Marine Research Institute.

The catch of the Icelandic vessels that are allowed to fully process catches on board, is converted into life weight based on the actual measured utilisation on board the relevant vessels. The monitoring of these vessels requires experts to ensure that utilisation samples are correctly taken on board and that they give an accurate picture of processing utilisation.

The inspectors from the Directorate of Fisheries that work on land monitor the landing of catches and ensure that they are correctly weighed and recorded, according to precise applicable rules. This function is very important to ensure the effective management of fisheries. Fish processing plants

Back-calculations

The Directorate of Fisheries handles so-called back-calculations, which are investigations into whether illegal ("in the black") catches have been landed to fish processing plants. This is done by converting processed products into life weight and comparing these figures with legally registered catch landed in the relevant fish processing plant. If the investigation reveals that the weight of the converted products exceeds the volume of the catch that was officially recorded, this is considered to be proof of an illegal catch and the Directorate of Fisheries subsequently imposes a fine on the relative fish processing plant, equivalent to the value of the illegal catch.

and fish markets can, under certain conditions, obtain a permit from the Directorate of Fisheries to weigh the catch without ice, when the catch was previously weighed by the inspectors at the port of landing. The Directorate of Fisheries regularly checks that the working procedures and equipment of official weighmasters comply with the rules in force and that catches are weighed by accredited harbour officials.

According to the law, the Marine Research Institute is authorized to temporarily close certain fishing grounds to protect young fish, and to close certain fishing grounds at certain times of the year to protect spawning fish stocks, such as cod and plaice. These closures of fishing grounds are generally based on measurements and proposals from the Directorate of Fisheries' monitoring teams.

The Directorate of Fisheries is responsible for ensuring that the net fishing of salmon and trout comply with legislation and that the ban on the ocean fishing of salmon is observed.

The Directorate of Fisheries also monitors whaling and collects various data on whale hunting.

If there is reason to believe that there has been a breach of law or regulations, which fall under the scope and supervision of the Directorate of Fisheries, the Directorate investigates the matter and decides whether there is cause to issue a formal warning, impose administrative sanctions or, if need be, refer the matter to the police.

Area closures and protection of spawning fish

An important element in the protection of small fish and prevention of damaging fishing practices is the closure of fishing grounds that have a high concentration of small fish. Inspectors measure the length of the fish caught and if the percentage of small fish in the catch exceeds a specified threshold, the relevant inspector submits a proposal to the Marine Research Institute to close the fishing grounds; the closure then comes into immediate effect and generally lasts for two weeks. This decision does not require the approval of any other authority. If there is considered to be sufficient reason to close the fishing grounds for a longer period, the Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture issues a regulation.

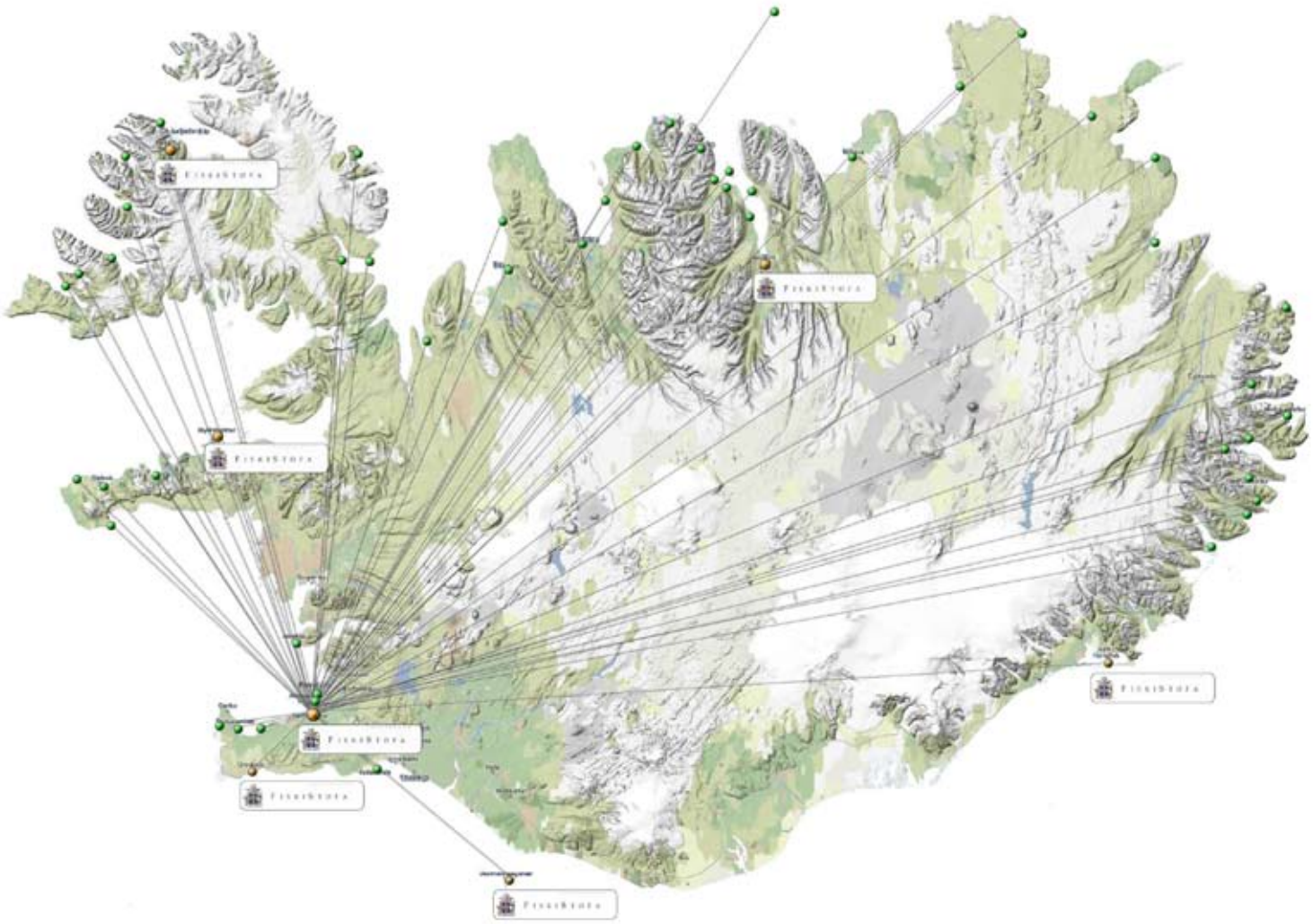
Dissemination of information

Besides its administrative and supervisory functions, the Directorate of Fisheries strives to play en equally important role as a provider of services and guidelines.

As has already been mentioned, the Directorate of Fisheries collects a large volume and broad range of data and information with regard to fishing vessels, fish catches and allocated catch quotas in its database. In addition to this, the directorate collects detailed information on the value of fish and how it is classified with regard to the processing methods applied. The Directorate's experts regularly process large volumes of varied data from these databases for various entities, such as other state bodies and local authorities, politicians, the media, interested parties and the public.

The Directorate of Fisheries often receives Icelandic and foreign guests, colleagues and experts, who are keen to learn about the Icelandic fisheries management and the Directorate's work. Experts from the Directorate have also been involved in teaching activities related to fisheries in specialised schools in this field.

In the spirit of good and transparent administration, the Directorate of Fisheries has set itself the objective of ensuring that the Icelandic public, authorities and interested parties have easy access to the information which it collects, preserves and processes. The Directorate endeavours to answer all the queries it receives as swiftly and as well as possible on a non-discriminatory basis and to provide reliable information on all aspects of the Directorate's work, provided it remains within the limits stipulated by law and regulations.



E-government

As part of its goal to achieve excellence in the performance of its administrative, supervisory and servicing duties and to avail of the best and most up-to-date information technology to collect data and information, as well as benefit from exchanges with the main interested parties, the Directorate of Fisheries has designed a special computerised catch registration system to collect, store, process and disseminate information on the catches of all Icelandic fishing vessels. All ports of landing in Iceland are connected to the Directorate database and, as soon as a catch has been landed and weighed by authorised weighmasters, the results are entered into the catch registration system and sent to the Directorate. This ensures that the Directorate has the most up-to-date information on the catch of each vessel, classified per species, port of landing, fishing gear, fishing grounds and the buyers of the catch, and enables the catch to be simultaneously deducted from the quota of the relevant vessel, on the basis of this registered data. The Icelandic authorities therefore receive information on catches and quota status in real time.

This special IT system enables the Directorate for Fisheries to maintain a highly dynamic and interactive website where all interested parties can monitor the precise quota status of each species, and examine the performance of individual vessels, their catches, quota status, transfer of allocated catches and other information regarding fishing vessels, their owners and related fishery companies. This information is posted on the Directorate website and updated every six hours.

The Directorate objective is to computerise as many work procedures as possible in order to provide a secure, effective and transparent services at lower costs. To mention only two of the many ways in which the Directorate uses IT in its services and data transmission, a large section of the fishing fleet now delivers its log book entries electronically, and the aim is to extend this practice further in the near future. Fishery companies can also transfer their allocated catch quotas between their fishing vessels electronically. The Directorate set objective is to be at the forefront of an increasingly electronic and transparent administration and its staff is constantly working on ways of enhancing the Directorate's systems and implementing ideas for better electronic administration.

Directorate of Fisheries

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