Water quality and aquaculture: legislative challenges in the Åland islands

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The Åland islands- background

- Swedish-speaking, autonomous region in the Baltic Sea
- Part of Finland
- Legislative competence in the fields of environment and fisheries
- Part of EU → bound by WFD and MSFD
- ”Small but important” aquaculture sector
Åland and the job situation

- Countryside 29.5%
- Archipelago 4.2%
- Town 66.3%
Aquaculture on the Åland Islands

• Open sea cages in archipelago environment since the 1970’s
• Dominated by rainbow trout farming
• Pilot-scale mussel farming
• Governmental vision of aquaculture growth within ecologically sustainable limits and a full nutrient cycle by 2030
Aquaculture and water quality

- Fish farming "blamed" for problems with eutrophication
- Bad location → local environmental degradation
- Today better technology and legislation → better spots, less negative effects
- Improvement in feeds
- But political and public opinion linger...
• Water Act: "special quality norms for eutrophication" with direct binding effect
  ➔ if not in place or fulfilled, no new or amended production
  ➔ (no norms established)
  ➔ If you cannot show that your activity will not lead to further eutrophication
  ➔ No new environmental permits
  ➔ Aquaculture stagnation
Is having good water quality and fish farming impossible?
Aquabest- best aquaculture practices for the BSR

- Towards closing the nutrient loop in practice and legislation!
Baltic Sea Fish Feed

• Using BS raw materials in fish feed in BS fish farms
1. herring and sprat
2. non-commercial fish
3. mussel meal
• Three roundtable meetings with industry, academia and authorities to find common ground
• Working definition chosen, now legislation
Closing the nutrient loop in legislation

- Include BSFF in legislation
  ➔ into environmental permits
  ➔ larger permits, i.e. expansion as an incentive to use BSFF

Coupled with...
...better localisation

- Åland working on a localisation plan á la Finnish plan
- Develop the already existing Fish Farming Decree
Water quality and localisation

As fish farms move further out, they are more a nutrient load on the BS as a whole than locally (with relevance for the WFD)
Modernise public opinion – and you will reach the politics

- Fish farming is a way to produce climate-smart, healthy and local food!
- Through better localisation and Baltic Sea-based fish feed we can combat the eutrophication issues!
- Fish farming creates important job opportunities in sparsely populated areas!
Challenges

• Create the necessary mechanisms in legislation that gives incentives to use improvement measures such as BSFF

• Integrate this legislation and thought-through aquaculture localisation plans in environmental permitting (big gap in Åland and Finland today!)

• Link work with WFD and MSFD with environmental permitting
And...

- Continue searching for sustainable raw materials in feed, best locations for aquaculture, new innovative nutrient abatement measures
How can the uncertainty about the legal and regulatory framework be reduced? And do we need a common policy approach throughout the Baltic Sea Region?

- The "Aquabest-way": by modernising and harmonising environmental legislation in similar ways in all BS states → cooperation essential!
Thank you for your attention!