

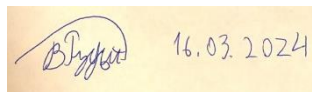
*Response to the Fiskeridirektoratet Consultation letter - regulations prohibiting the capture of catfish in the Saltstraumen marine protected area. We ask that any comments on the proposal be sent to the Directorate of Fisheries by 16 March 2024. Responses will be sent to [postmottak@fiskeridir.no](mailto:postmottak@fiskeridir.no).*

We are three postgraduate students from Nord University, and recreational fishers and divers (most of us with over 200 dives in the last year in Saltstraumen and around Bodø area), and we want to express our deep enthusiasm with this protection initiative. We will not deepen into the strong scientific arguments that back up the need of protecting certain areas, as we are aware that this will already be covered by other letters. Instead, we will keep it short, mentioning the most important points in our opinion. First, and foremost, excluding fisheries from certain areas, and fully protecting them increases surrounding fisheries and guarantee the future sustainability of the stocks (Vandepierre et al., 2011). This is true for all species, not only for the Atlantic Wolffish. Second, the Atlantic Wolffish is a resident species, and its populations are highly understudied, with very few studies addressing the welfare of their populations, but in the North Sea, this species has declined in recent years due to overfishing (Bluemel et al., 2022). There is no stock assessment done on the Atlantic Wolffish in Saltstraumen, but it is certain that it is a vulnerable species due to its sedentary ecological life habits and slow population growth rate. This, together with the fact that the Atlantic Wolffish plays a key ecological role to preserve kelp forests, by controlling the population of sea urchins, makes it highly reasonable and desirable to enforce protection of the species.

Finally, the most obvious effect of fishing in the area shows up while diving, and refers to the huge amount of fishing line, hooks and lead that is present in Saltstraumen waters. There is not a single dive in the area in which we don't encounter dozens of lures tangled around kelp, crabs or even fish. Every single dive. This is highly likely to have a negative effect for marine wildlife in the "protected" Saltstraumen area, as lead is a highly toxic metal and is surely accumulating at deeper depths, where the efforts of divers to remove it is highly reduced.

For all this, we strongly believe that real and institutional protection of the Atlantic Wolffish in the area is a necessary measure to guarantee the welfare of the population beyond the effort of the local community, which while being highly valuable, is also limited in time and resources. What is more, we believe that this measure falls a bit short, and that real protection of the Saltstraumen conservation area, including the prohibition of all fishing is a necessary measure in the short and midterm.

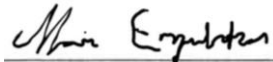
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Cesc Gordó-Vilaseca 16.03.2024



Marie Engebretsen 16.03.2024



#### References

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