

DOMESTIC FISHERY

LANDINGS

Belgian vessels specialize primarily in the catch of flatfish, specifically plaice and sole, and this is normally carried out through beam trawling. In value turnover terms for 1991, sole represented over 40% of the overall catch of flatfish while plaice was a close second with almost 30%. In volume turnover terms for 1991, plaice was the largest with almost 50% of the total flatfish catch, with sole ranked second with 17%.

Fishing for pelagic species such as the extremely popular herring was given up by Belgian vessels in 1983, as foreign vessels managed to catch these species much cheaper due to their better economies of scale. At the same time crustaceans and mollusc are basically the field of other European competitors.

FLEET

The Belgian fleet has undergone a period of renewal in the eighties, through different projects financed by the European Community or by regional offices. Nowadays, the number of vessels has been streamlined to fit beam trawling in order to achieve the allotted quota most efficiently. Extra vessels are regularly sold abroad. The Belgian fleet consists of five types of vessels, ranked Class I through V. Classification of the vessel is dependent on the gross register tonnage, or GRT, allowed.

The structure of the companies operating these vessels is still based on strict family business. Only 2 companies own three vessels, and the majority operate just one boat. In 1991, 818 fishermen were active in the Belgian fleet. In the secondary fishing industry (fresh fish ports and auctions, processing, etc.), the estimates are that another 4000 to 5000 people were employed. As it is highly seasonal work, strict employment figures are unfortunately unavailable.

Recent years have witnessed extreme changes in the landings by Belgian vessels at local ports. This is the result of the annual fishing quota for plaice and sole allotted by the European Community, whereby ships try to operate year round. At the same time they also try to trade quotas with other European countries.

Another trend being witnessed is the remarkable increase in the landings of Belgian vessels in foreign ports. This already accounts for 22.3% of the total landings by Belgian vessels. This is based on the fact that vessels try to increase their fishing days now that the number of days out of port have been limited by the government. Landings occur specifically in the Netherlands, Denmark and Great Britain, due to the proximity of the fishing grounds.