Lobbying for depletion

The effect of informational lobbying on fishing quota negotiations in the Baltic Sea area

Alexandra Allard[a,b,c]

[a] *Örebro University*
[b] *Södertörn University*
[c] *Research Institute of Industrial Economics (IFN)*

Draft, 3 March 2025

Abstract

Overfishing represents a significant global challenge, with the European fisheries management system being identified as one of the least effective in the world. Lobbying is a potential but unexplored aspect of this system. To examine the impact of informational lobbying on fishing quota (TAC) negotiations, I have compiled a dataset comprising interest group recommendations, scientific advice from ICES, and final TACs for 2015–2025. Two fixed-effects models are estimated. The first model evaluates the interest groups' unobserved political influence from their observed preferences and the final TAC. The second explores how their influence – in terms of preference attainment – is affected by interest group type, recommendation type, and level of conflict. I find that majority recommendations and industry groups have a high degree of political influence. Other interest groups, minority recommendations, and scientific advice, however, have a weaker influence on the policy outcome, indicating that the final TACs are largely dictated by the industry.

Keywords: Fisheries Management; European Union; Interest Groups; Informational Lobbying; Lobbying Coalitions

JEL-codes: D72; Q22; Q28

1. Introduction

Overfishing represents a significant global challenge. Despite the European Union's (EU) aim to achieve sustainable fisheries by 2020, several stocks in the Baltic Sea are in crisis and in a worse state today than in 2018.[1] There are political and environmental factors which may help explain this development. One potential but unexplored aspect is lobbying. In this study, I examine the effect of informational lobbying from interest groups on the policy outcome of fishing quota negotiations in the EU.

Informational lobbying is the most common form of lobbying within the EU, as interest groups are often more well-informed than policymakers, who tend to be under-resourced, understaffed, and pressed for time. Interest groups can use this informational asymmetry to gain legitimate access to the policy-making process in an attempt to make their voices heard, by providing decision-makers with information (Chalmers, 2013a).

Ahead of the yearly TAC negotiations, the EU decision-makers seek information on sustainable fishing quotas, both in terms of sustainable stock and a viable fishing sector. In this process, interest groups have gained legitimate access in the form of advisory councils. For the Baltic Sea, the interest group advisory council is called the Baltic Sea Advisory Council (BSAC).

Using novel data, I analyze the effect of informational lobbying on the final TACs in the Baltic Sea by estimating interest groups' political influence and preference attainment. The dataset contains clearly stated quota recommendations from interest groups within BSAC, making it possible to analyze information from interest groups to politicians, which often is challenging to obtain.[2] Bombardini and Trebbi (2020) argue that the challenge of finding evidence of information exchange between interest groups and policymakers as well as the informational needs of policymakers is the reason that quid-pro-quo models have been favored over informational models in the economic lobbying literature.

Understanding the influence of informational lobbying is vital for assessing the transparency and fairness of the TAC negotiation process. This study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence of interest group influence, highlighting whether certain groups, such as fisheries, wield disproportionate power compared to others.

Studying the effect of informational lobbying on fishing quotas can also shed light on the interplay between political decision-making, interest groups, and resource management more generally. This sector offers unique opportunities to study the lobbying process, as there are yearly negotiations and TAC decisions, a relatively small number of actors, and as the regulatory framework is straightforward. This setting makes it possible to trace the decision-making process and its outcomes in detail (Berkow, 2024).

In order to examine the impact of informational lobbying from interest groups within BSAC on the final TACs, I have compiled a dataset comprising of recommendations from BSAC,

[1] For example, Eastern Cod and Western Herring, which are in crisis today, were in the risk zone in 2018, and Central Herring and Herring in the Gulf of Bothnia are in the risk zone today but were of good status in 2018.
[2] Even though these recommendations might not be the only way in which these groups communicate, inform, or try to influence the policy process, they give a strong indication of their preferred outcome.

scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES), and the final TACs. For each TAC, the BSAC includes a majority recommendation and, in most cases, one or several minority recommendations. The dataset covers the period 2015-2025, five species, and approximately 270 observations.

I use two fixed-effects models to estimate the effect of informational lobbying on the TAC negotiations and, more specifically, how influential different lobbying groups are. The first model uses interest groups' preferences – their BSAC recommendations – to estimate their political influence and, thus, their effect on the TAC negotiations. The second model uses preference attainment as a measure of interest group influence by measuring to which degree the policy outcome has, or has not, moved in the direction of the interest groups' preference. In this model, I estimate how the interest group type, recommendation type, and level of conflict affect preference attainment.[3]

The results from the first model indicate that the majority recommendations and industry groups have a high degree of political influence, corresponding to 88 and 80–91 percent, respectively. OIGs have an insignificant or barely significant influence corresponding to 3.7 percent, while minority recommendation has a significant influence, corresponding to 5.1 percent. Similar to minority recommendations and OIGs, TACs are influenced by the ICES advice with about 4–8 percent.

The second model yields similar results, showing that majority recommendations increase preference attainment by 25.7 percent relative to minority recommendations, while OIGs see a 43.3 percent decline relative to fisheries, indicating their weaker influence. When these effects are measured relative to minority recommendations for fisheries, majority recommendations lose significance, whereas the negative impact of being an OIG persists, though slightly reduced. This suggests that group type may matter more than recommendation type. Controlling for level of conflict among the BSAC recommendations restores the significance of majority recommendations, indicating that preference attainment is 15.6 percent higher relative to minority recommendations from fisheries. The negative effect of being an OIG is, however, stable, and a higher level of conflict further reduces attainment. Additionally, TACs for plaice and salmon appear more prone to influence than those for cod.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Firstly, I explain the process leading up to the yearly TAC negotiations and which role interest groups have in this process. Next, I present a selection of previous literature on informational lobbying and lobbying in the EU. In the following sections, the theoretical framework and the method used for measuring political influence and preference attainment are presented. After that, the data is presented, followed by a discussion of my results. A short sensitivity analysis is also presented. Lastly, I conclude my main findings and discuss future research and policy implications.

[3] Where the two interest group types are fisheries and other interest groups, and the recommendation types are majority and minority recommendations.

2. Institutional setting

Within the EU, fisheries are managed under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). As the CFP aims to ensure sustainable fisheries, total allowable catches are set for most commercial fish stocks. Figure 1 shows the annual process leading up to the TAC negotiations for stocks in the Baltic Sea.

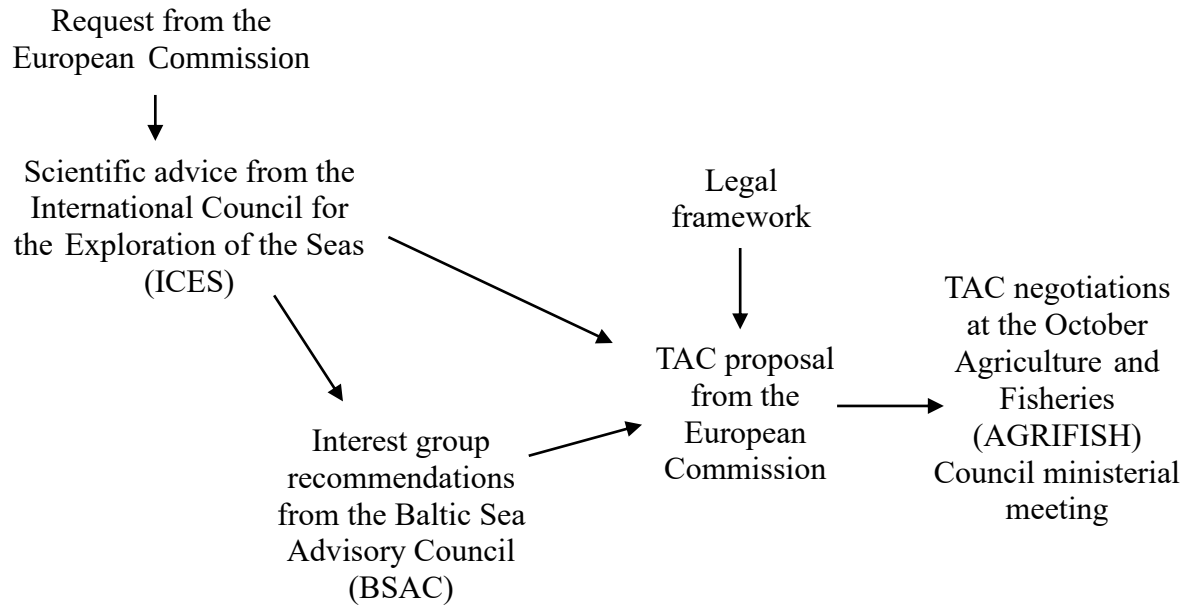

Figure 1: The yearly process for TACs in the Baltic Sea

The yearly process starts with a request from the European Commission (the Commission) to ICES to provide scientific advice on fishing efforts for different zones and species within a given framework. For each specific species, zone, and year, one of three approaches is used: the precautionary approach, Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY), or a range around MSY.[4] Several factors are important to note regarding the ICES advice. Firstly, environmental objectives, such as biodiversity, habitat integrity, and food webs, are not taken into account when creating the advice (Berkow, 2024).[5] Thus, these approaches may include or lead to overfishing (Froese et al., 2021). Secondly, the advice is more of a prognosis than a recommendation and should be regarded as such.

In the next step of the process, the ICES advice is used as a baseline for the interest groups' recommendations from BSAC. BSAC is a stakeholder-led advisory council that provides TAC recommendations as well as other recommendations related to fishery management in the Baltic Sea to the Commission and EU Member States. BSAC represents interest groups such as fisheries, environmental groups, and sports and recreational fisheries organizations. Sixty

[4] See Froese et al. (2021) for an explanation of the methods.
[5] Specific Grant Agreement 512.918553 under Framework Partnership Agreement MARE/2023/ICES (will be changed to a regular reference, I am not sure how to reference to an agreement).

percent of the seats in the council are reserved for fisheries, while the remaining 40 percent are reserved for OIG.

Based on the BSAC recommendations, ICES' advice, and legal framework, the European Commission drafts and publishes a TAC proposal. This proposal is then used as a starting point for the TAC negotiations. Ahead of the negotiations, EU Member States can also collect information to bring to the negotiation. The TACs for the Baltic Sea are decided during behind-closed-doors negotiations at the October Agriculture and Fisheries (AGRIFISH) Council ministerial meeting (Starr, 2023). During the year in which the TACs are valid, they can be revised by the Council (Villasante et al., 2011).

3. Previous literature

Informational lobbying is the most common form of lobbying within the EU, as interest groups often are more well-informed than policymakers (Chalmers, 2013a). Interest groups can use the existing informational asymmetry to exaggerate or understate the issue at hand. However, interest groups are still constrained by policymakers' own beliefs, and thus, the information cannot be used in a way that completely manipulates or deceives decision-makers (Awad, 2024).

Chalmers (2013a) uses ordered logistic regression and survey data on different information types, information tactics, and interest groups' access to the EU. The author finds that the content of the information is less important than how the information is delivered to policymakers. Chalmers (2013a) also finds that both inside and outside tactics are important.

Mahoney (2007), on the other hand, finds that outside lobbying has a negative effect on lobbying success when examining 47 issues and 149 advocates in the EU and US. In the EU, it is less likely for an advocate to be successful in their lobbying if the salience of an issue is generally high or if they are active on several issues. Further, while the level of conflict, i.e., the distance between the lowest and highest preference among the advocates, is insignificant in the EU, it has a negative effect on lobbying success in the US.

Chalmers (2013b) examines network strategies for interest groups in the EU and finds that strong ties trump weak ties. The authors explain that there is an information overload among the interest groups in the EU and, thus, it is more important to verify the reliability of information than to gather new information, which is easier to do in strong-tie networks where trust between members has already been established.

Using quantitative text analysis, Kluver (2011) finds that it is not the individual characteristics of an interest group that define its success but the characteristics of the lobbying coalition that the group is part of. More specifically, the study finds that larger coalitions have higher success compared to smaller coalitions working on the same issue. Thus, Kluver (2011) argues that a coalition can be regarded as one lobbying team.

Orach et al. (2017) also find that coalitions are important to gain political influence when examining how interest groups achieved influence on the 2013 CFP reform. Using document

analysis and expert interviews, Orach et al. (2017) find that coalition-building with a diversity of stakeholders within the coalition has played an important role for environmental interest groups. Other factors which benefited these interest groups were the high demand for policy-related information from both the European Commission and the European Parliament as well as the complexity and technical nature of the CFP.

Except for this study, previous literature on lobbying influence within fishery management is scarce. However, a few studies analyze other aspects of lobbying. For example, Birchall and Sanchirico (2021) examine the welfare cost of commercial lobbying in New Zealand and find that lobbying leads to a redistribution of welfare to firms from the public, with a minor welfare cost.

4. Political influence

To estimate interest groups political influence on the outcome of TAC negotiations, I used a simplified version of the comprise model, which is a cooperative bargaining model with a Nash bargaining solution. In this model, the outcome of a negotiation is the weighted mean of the product of the involved actors' preference, with weights equal to the product of power and salience. The saliency defines the importance of an issue for that actor and, thus, how much of the actor's power it is prepared to utilize to affect the outcome in the preferred direction (Schalk et al., 2007). Thus, the product of an actor's political power and their saliency for that issue is a measurement of their influence. Therefore, I can take the interest group's preferences as given and estimate their political influence.

This model has previously been used to estimate political power in TAC negotiations (e.g., Schalk et al., 2007). In my setting, fisheries and OIGs aim to influence policymakers through informational lobbying at the EU level and likely at the national level as well. Even though interest groups do not partake in the actual negotiations, the member states' representatives likely share their preferences. For example, some representatives put a higher value on TACs being similar to previous years, to not disturb the industry in a major way, while other wants quicker adaptation to change in stock sizes. Thus, this model can give a strong indication of whether, and to what degree, interest groups influence the TAC negotiations.

I estimate the following fixed-effect model:

$$\ln TAC_{szt} = \sum_{i \in A_{sz}} p_i \cdot i_{iszt} + \alpha_s + \mu_t + \varepsilon_{szt} \qquad (1)$$

where $\ln TAC_{szt}$ is the natural logarithm of the TAC for species *s* in zone *z* at time *t*, or more precisely $\ln(TAC_{szt} + 1)$, p_i is the product of interest group *i*'s political power and saliency, i.e., their political influence, i_{iszt} is the natural logarithm of the interest group's preference I_{iszt}, or more precisely $\ln(I_{iszt} + 1)$, and α_s and μ_t are species and time fixed effects, respectively.

5. Preference attainment

Preference attainment is one of three mainstream approaches that measure interest group influence.[6] This approach measures to what extent, if any, the policy outcome moves toward the actors' preferences. The measure can be calculated in various ways. There are, for example, more basic metrics where preference attainment is coded as a binary variable or using three value scores, where -1 indicates lobbying failure, 0 partial failure/success, and 1 indicates lobbying success (e.g., Sebők & Kozák, 2021). Another version is to measure the distance between the actors', e.g., interest groups', ideal point, and the final policy output.

In this institutional setting, it would be insufficient to use a binary variable or three-value scores, especially when the dataset makes it possible to calculate the exact differences. However, by only looking at the distance between the final output and the ideal point, it is unclear whether the outcome moved toward the interest group's preference during the policy process (Vannoni & Dür, 2017). Drawing from frameworks by Bernhagen et al. (2014) and Vannoni and Dür (2017), I present the following preference attainment calculation:

$$PA_i = \frac{|I_i - RP| - |I_i - P2|}{P2} \quad (2)$$

where PA_i is the preference attainment for interest group *i*, I_i is the preference for interest group *i*, RP is the reference point, and P2 is the policy output. Thus, in this setting, I_i is the BSAC recommendation for interest group *i*, RP is the ICES advice, and P2 is the final TAC.

The numerator in equation (2) measures to what degree the final policy output has moved in the direction of the actor's preference since the reference point. This measure increases if the distance between the reference point and the actor's preference increases or if the distance between the final policy output and the actor's preference decreases. Thus, the numerator measures the preference attainment in absolute terms. If all policy outcomes would, for example, be on a scale of 0 to 100, this would not be a problem. However, the final policy output for fishing quotas, i.e., TACs, in the Baltic Sea have been between 266 and 270,772 tonnes during 2015–2025. Thus, it is more accurate to measure the preference attainment in relative terms. To do this, I include the policy output as the denominator.

As the measurement for preference attainment is established, I want to examine whether preference attainment is affected by recommendation type – majority or minority recommendation – and interest group type – fishery or OIG. To do this, I propose the following fixed-effect model:

$$PA_{iszt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Maj_{iszt} + \beta_2 OIG_i + \beta_3 Con_{szt} + \alpha_s + \mu_t + \varepsilon_{szt} \quad (3)$$

where PA_{iszt} is the preference attainment for interest group *i*, for species *s*, in zone *z*, at time *t*, Maj_{iszt} is a dummy variable equal to one if the interest group *i*'s preferred TAC is part of the majority recommendation, and OIG_i is a dummy variables equal to one if interest group *i* is an OIG. The model also includes one control variable – Con_{szt} – measuring the level of conflict,

[6] The other approaches are process tracing and attributed influence.

i.e., the relative distance between the highest and lowest recommendation for species *s*, in zone *z*, at time *t*. The model also includes species and time-fixed effects, represented by α_s and μ_t.

6. Data

The data used in this study comes from several sources. The annual BSAC recommendations for the fishery in the Baltic Sea were collected from the BSAC's Advice web portal (https://www.bsac.dk/recommendations/). These publications present one majority recommendation and, on most occasions, one or several minority recommendations for each stock. For the minority recommendations, BSAC also publishes which interest groups support which minority recommendation. This data is merged with data on ICES advice, obtained from the ICES Advice web portal (www.ices.dk). When the ICES advice is given as a range around MSY, I use the recommended value, in cases such is given. If no recommended value is given in the range, the midpoint is used. To make the BSAC recommendations comparable to the policy output, TAC agreements were collected from the EUROLEX (www.eur-lex.europa.eu). All data were collected for the period 2015–2025. The final dataset covers 11 years and 10 stocks, consisting of five species with between one and four geographical zones per species.[7]

The main strength of this dataset is that interest groups' preferences are quantified, making it possible to compare them to the ICES advice as well as the final TAC. This is especially valuable as data on information from interest groups to policymakers can be troublesome to obtain. In comparison to previous literature on informational lobbying, this dataset has two additional strengths. Firstly, the TAC negotiations, and the corresponding preparations, are an annual process, not a one-time occurrence. Secondly, the dataset uses a continuous measure of interest groups' preferences rather than a binary one, such as agreeing with a policy outcome or not. Together, these features offer richer insights into the dynamics of interest groups' political influence and preference attainment, making it possible to explore patterns and variations in the success of informational lobbying with greater depth.

There are, however, limitations with this data as well. Even though it is clear which interest groups support which minority recommendation, there is generally no information about which groups favor the majority recommendation. However, it would be rational to assume that interest groups that do not support any minority recommendations either agree with the majority recommendation or are indifferent to it. To test this, I will assign the majority recommendation to all interest groups that do not express support for a minority recommendation for that stock, TAC zone, and year.

6.1. Descriptive statistics

This section starts with a presentation of descriptive statistics for my dataset, followed by descriptive statistics for the two models. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the ICES

[7] Stocks included in the Baltic Sea TAC negotiations, and, thus, in the dataset are: Western Cod, Eastern Cod, Western Herring, Central Herring, Gulf of Bothnian Herring, Gulf of Riga Herring, Plaice, Main basin Salmon, Gulf of Finland Salmon, and Sprat.

advice, BSAC recommendations, as a whole and divided into different sub-samples, depending on the recommendation type, and the final TAC.

Table 1: General descriptive statistics for the dataset

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
ICES advice	764	59,103	80,676	0	282,349
BSAC recommendations	734	64,282	85,815	0	375,838
Majority recommendations	150	80,815	93,267	340	285,860
Minority recommendations	560	60,945	84,775	0	375,838
Recommendations from fisheries	166	95,550	114,538	0	375,838
Recommendations from OIGs	468	53,249	72,131	0	270,772
Majority recommendations from fisheries	55	107,702	110,197	600	285,860
Majority recommendations from OIGs	0	-	-	-	-
Minority recommendations from fisheries	93	98,197	124,965	0	375,838
Minority recommendations from OIGs	462	53,667	72,472	0	270,772
Final TAC	771	64,749	76,872	266	270,772

As shown in Table 1, 150 of all BSAC recommendations are majority recommendations, while 560 are minority recommendations. The remaining 24 recommendations were included in postponed BSAC recommendations, without any division between majority or minority recommendations. Looking at interest group type, 166 recommendations are explicitly supported by the industry, while 468 are from OIGs. However, there is generally no notation about which interest groups support the majority recommendations, except for nine occasions. For three of these occasions, corresponding to 27 observations, there are several majority recommendations provided by different industry groups. Interestingly, there are no majority recommendations that are explicitly supported by an OIG, but there are 93 observations in which fisheries support a minority recommendation.

Table 2 shows the summary statistics for data included in the political influence model. The TACs and the BSAC recommendations, divided into majority and minority recommendations or recommendations from fisheries and OIGs, are in natural logarithms.

Table 2 shows that out of 110 TACs, 104 have a corresponding majority recommendation, and for 89 TACs, there is at least one minority recommendation. Looking at interest group type, 40 observations include recommendations from fisheries, while 88 observations include recommendations from OIGs. Thus, as less than half of the observations include recommendations from fisheries and 80 percent include recommendations from OIGs, I also include an estimation where I impute values for fisheries and OIGs. As there is no information about which interest group supports most of the majority recommendations, I assume that interest groups that do not explicitly express their support for any of the minority recommendations agree with, or at least are neutral to, the majority recommendation. Thus, I impute the majority recommendation as fisheries or OIGs preferred TAC when they are missing. Comparing recommendations with and without imputed values, the mean increases slightly for both fisheries and OIGs when I impute the majority recommendation, but the minimum and maximum values are stable.

Table 2: Summary statistics for the political influence model

	Description	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Dependent variable						
$\ln TAC$	Final TACs	110	9.970	1.825	5.587	12.51
Explanatory variables						
i, maj	Majority recommendations	104	10.17	1.652	5.832	12.56
i, min	Minority recommendations	89	9.159	3.226	0	12.55
$i, fish$	Recommendations from fisheries	40	9.699	2.049	5.832	12.72
i, OIG	Recommendations from OIG	88	8.220	4.257	0	12.51
Explanatory variables (with imputed values)						
$i, fish$	Recommended TAC from fisheries	109	10.08	1.684	5.832	12.72
i, OIG	Recommended TAC from OIG	110	8.698	3.958	0	12.55
Control variable						
$\ln ICES$	ICES advice	109	8.295	4.128	0	12.55

Notes: All variables are in natural logarithms or, more precisely, $\ln(I_i + 1)$, where I_i is the recommendation from interest group i. The same calculation is made for TACs and ICES advice. Explanatory variables with imputed values mean that I impute the majority recommendation for interest groups that do not support any minority recommendation.

Table 3 shows the summary statistics for the preference attainment model, including the relative preference attainment, dummy variables for majority recommendations and OIGs, and the control variable level of conflict.

Table 3: Summary statistics for the preference attainment model

	Description	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Dependent variable						
PA	Preference attainment	727	0.0854	0.539	-1.13	1.13
Explanatory variables						
Maj	Dummy variable, 1 if majority recommendation	706	0.211	0.408	0	1
OIG	Dummy variable, 1 if the interest group is an OIG member	628	0.736	0.441	0	1
Control variable						
Con	Level of conflict	727	1.176	2.141	0	12.38

The relative preference attainment is between -1.13 and 1.13 for all observations, as shown in Table 3. The average preference attainment is 0.0854, meaning that, relative to the final TAC, 8.54 percent of the preferred adjustment from the ICES advice, is attained. Table 3 further shows that about 21 percent of the BSAC recommendations are majority recommendations, and about 63 percent are from OIGs. However, as 21 observations miss information on whether the recommendation is a majority or minority recommendation and almost 100 observations

miss information on whether fisheries or OIGs support the recommendation, these are not exact values. Lastly, the mean for the level of conflict is 1.176, meaning that, on average, the difference between the lowest and highest recommendation is 17.6 percent larger than the final TAC.

7. Results

Table 4 presents the results from the political influence model, which estimates the product of interest groups' political power and saliency for the issue, i.e., their political influence. The first two columns investigate the impact of recommendation type – majority or minority recommendation – while the remaining columns compare interest group type – fisheries and OIGs. Columns (3) and (4) only include observations with explicit support from fisheries and OIGs, while (5) and (6) include observations with imputed values.

Table 4: Political influence

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Majority recommendation	0.883*** (0.021)	0.884*** (0.022)				
Minority recommendation	0.093*** (0.015)	0.051** (0.020)				
Recommendation from fishery			0.896*** (0.099)	0.796*** (0.104)	0.918*** (0.024)	0.910*** (0.025)
Recommendation from OIG			0.057 (0.043)	0.037 (0.041)	0.068*** (0.017)	0.037* (0.021)
ICES advice		0.045*** (0.014)		0.081** (0.038)		0.043** (0.016)
Observations	87	86	38	38	109	108
Adjusted R^2	0.999	0.999	0.996	0.996	0.998	0.998

Notes: ***, **, and * indicate significant p-values at the 1 %, 5 %, and 10 % level, respectively. Standard errors are presented in parentheses. Columns (1) and (2) focus on recommendation type – majority or minority – while columns (3), (4), (5), and (6) estimate the effect of recommendations from fisheries and OIGs. Columns (3) and (4) are without imputed values, and columns (5) and (6) are with imputed values.

When majority and minority recommendations are compared, both minority and majority recommendations have a significant effect on TAC negotiation, as shown by columns (1) and (2) in Table 4. More specifically, 88.3 percent of the TAC outcomes are influenced by majority recommendations, while 9.3 percent are influenced by minority recommendations. When the ICES advice is controlled for, the influence of minority recommendations decreases to 5.1 percent, while the influence of majority recommendations is stable.

According to Columns (3) and (4) in Table 4, OIGs have a small and insignificant effect on TAC outcomes when include observations that are explicitly supported by fisheries or OIGs. Fisheries, on the other hand, have a significant influence, corresponding to 89.6 percent before controlling for the ICES advice and 79.6 percent after. Further, the ICES advice is estimated to influence the TAC negotiations with 8.1 percent.

When imputing the majority recommendation as the preferred outcome for interest groups without explicit support for any recommendation, the influence for fisheries increases to 92 percent before controlling for the ICES advice and 91 percent after, as shown by columns (5) and (6) in Table 4. The influence of OIGs becomes significant and corresponds to 6.8 percent before controlling for the ICES advice and 4.3 percent after. The ICES is estimated to have an influence corresponding to 4.3 percent, which almost is the same effect as when majority and minority recommendations are compared, in column (2).

These findings indicate that even though scientific recommendations provide the baseline reference, majority recommendations and industry groups largely dictate the policy outcome, while minority recommendations and OIGs contribute to the discussion. As most of the BSAC seats belong to fisheries, it is logical to find similar results for fisheries and majority recommendations. Rationally, a higher share of the seats also leads to larger coalitions, which have previously been found to have a positive effect on lobbying success (e.g., Kluver, 2011). Previous literature has also found that lobbying success is less likely for industry groups active in several issues (Mahoney, 2007). Even though TACs and other fishery management issues are the main issues for fisheries, some of the OIGs have a wider focus, such as nature conservation. For these OIGs, questions within fishery management might have less saliency, and thus, less of their power is to alter the policy outcome.

Table 5 presents how an interest group's preference attainment is affected by being an OIG, by their recommendation being a majority recommendation, and by the level of conflict among the recommendations for that stock and year. The table also shows the species fixed effects, relative to cod.

Table 5: Preference attainment

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dummy, majority recommendation	0.257*** (0.049)		0.135 (0.093)	0.156* (0.093)
Dummy, recommendation from OIG		-0.433*** (0.051)	-0.413*** (0.061)	-0.419*** (0.061)
Level of conflict				-0.024** (0.011)
Herring	-0.067 (0.053)	-0.027 (0.054)	-0.038 (0.055)	-0.072 (0.057)
Plaice	0.212*** (0.078)	0.429*** (0.082)	0.438*** (0.083)	0.389*** (0.086)
Salmon	0.359*** (0.061)	0.431*** (0.061)	0.426*** (0.062)	0.375*** (0.067)
Sprat	-0.031 (0.064)	-0.027 (0.064)	-0.047 (0.066)	-0.102 (0.071)
Constant	-0.154 (0.103)	0.254** (0.127)	0.242* (0.131)	0.295** (0.133)
Observations	706	628	607	607
Adjusted R^2	0.116	0.212	0.215	0.219

Notes: ***, **, and * indicate significant p-values at the 1 %, 5 %, and 10 % level, respectively. Standard errors are presented in parentheses.

According to Table 5, majority recommendations have a positive and significant effect on preference attainment compared to minority recommendations. Thus, when an interest group supports a majority recommendations, the preference attainment increases by 25.7 percent, relative to the TAC. Focusing on interest group types, OIGs have a negative preference attainment of 43.3 percent, compared to fisheries.

When both dummies are included, and majority and OIG recommendations are estimated relative to minority recommendations for fisheries, the effect of supporting a majority recommendation becomes insignificant. Still, the effect of being an OIG remains significant and negative with a slightly lower coefficient. This indicates that interest group type has a larger effect on preference attainment than whether it is a majority or minority recommendation. However, when the level of conflict is controlled for, the effect of being a majority recommendation becomes significant at a 10 percent level and corresponds to 15.6 percent. The effect of being an OIG remains significant and is rather stable at -0.419. Level of conflict is also negative and significant and implies that when the difference between the lowest and highest TAC recommendation increases by 100 percent, relative to the TAC, the preference attainment decreases by 2.4 percent. Lastly, there is a positive preference attainment for plaice and salmon, compared to cod, indicating that TACs for plaice and salmon are easier to influence.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, I estimate the political influence BSAC recommendations have on TAC negotiation and how recommendation type – majority or minority – and interest group type – fisheries or OIG – affect interest groups' preference attainment. I find that majority recommendations and industry groups have a high degree of political influence, corresponding to 88 and 80–91 percent, respectively. OIGs and minority recommendations, on the other hand, exert considerably less influence. Similar to minority recommendations and OIGs, the TACs are influenced by the ICES with about 4-8 percent. These findings suggest that scientific recommendations provide a baseline reference but do not override stakeholder-driven preferences. This reinforces the idea that while scientific and minority perspectives contribute to the discussion, the negotiation outcomes are largely dictated by the dominant industry voices and majority-backed positions.

Similar results are found when examining the effect of majority recommendations and being an OIG on preference attainment. When the effects are examined separately, majority recommendations have a 25.7 percent higher preference attainment compared to minority recommendations. However, OIGs experience a negative preference attainment of 43.3 percent relative to fisheries, suggesting that their influence is considerably weaker. When both the effect of supporting a majority recommendation and being an OIG are measured, relative to minority recommendations for fisheries, the effect of majority recommendations becomes insignificant, while the negative effect of being an OIG remains significant but slightly lower. This suggests that the type of interest group may have a stronger impact on preference

attainment than whether the interest group's preference is aligned with a majority or minority recommendation.

When controlling for the level of conflict, the effect of majority recommendations regains significance at the 10 percent level, corresponding to an increase of 15.6 percent. Meanwhile, the negative effect of being an OIG remains stable at -0.419, reinforcing the notion that OIGs face greater challenges in influencing outcomes. Additionally, higher levels of conflict negatively affect preference attainment. Regarding species fixed effects, TACs for plaice and salmon appear to be more responsive to influence compared to cod.

This paper finds that fisheries and majority recommendations have more political influence, leading to higher preference attainment. If the aim of BSAC is to voice OIGs concerns alongside fisheries, politicians should consider increasing the seats for OIGs so that the industry and OIGs get half of the seats each. This way, there might not be as clear majority recommendations when different kinds of interest groups disagree about next year’s TACs.

References

Awad, E. (2024). Understanding influence in informational lobbying. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, *13*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41309-023-00197-0

Berkow, C. (2024). Fiskeripolitik—Ett lärorikt studieobjekt. In *Fakta och tankar om nationell havsförvaltning*. Swedish Institute for the Marine Environment Report 2024:6.

Bernhagen, P., Dür, A., & Marshall, D. (2014). Measuring lobbying success spatially. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, *3*, 202–218.

Birchall, C., & Sanchirico, J. (2021). *Lobbying over a dynamic resource: Evidence from a shared Fishery*. https://www.nzae.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Birchall.pdf

Bombardini, M., & Trebbi, F. (2020). Empirical models of lobbying. *Annual Review of Economics*, *12*(1), 391–413.

Chalmers, A. W. (2013a). Trading information for access: Informational lobbying strategies and interest group access to the European Union. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *20*(1), 39–58. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2012.693411

Chalmers, A. W. (2013b). With a lot of help from their friends: Explaining the social logic of informational lobbying in the European Union. *European Union Politics*, *14*(4), 475–496. https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116513482528

Froese, R., Tsikliras, A. C., Scarcella, G., & Gascuel, D. (2021). Progress towards ending overfishing in the Northeast Atlantic. *Marine Policy*, *125*, 104282. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2020.104282

Kluver, H. (2011). The contextual nature of lobbying: Explaining lobbying success in the European Union. *European Union Politics*, *12*(4), 483–506. https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116511413163

Mahoney, C. (2007). Lobbying success in the United States and the European Union. *Journal of Public Policy*, *27*(1), 35–56.

Orach, K., Schlüter, M., & Österblom, H. (2017). Tracing a pathway to success: How competing interest groups influenced the 2013 EU Common Fisheries Policy reform. *Environmental Science & Policy, 76*, 90–102.

Schalk, J., Torenvlied, R., Weesie, J., & Stokman, F. (2007). The Power of the Presidency in EU Council Decision-making. *European Union Politics*, *8*(2), 229–250. https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116507076431

Sebők, M., & Kozák, S. (2021). From state capture to "pariah" status? The preference attainment of the Hungarian Banking Association (2006–14). *Business and Politics*, *23*(2), 179–201.

Starr, A. (2023). Total allowable catches and fishing opportunity decisions of the Council of the EU–A voting power index approach. *Marine Policy*, *156*, 105798.

Vannoni, M., & Dür, A. (2017). Studying preference attainment using spatial models. *European Political Science*, *16*(3), 369–382. https://doi.org/10.1057/eps.2016.13

Villasante, S., Do Carme García-Negro, M., González-Laxe, F., & Rodríguez, G. R. (2011). Overfishing and the Common Fisheries Policy: (Un)successful results from TAC regulation? *Fish and Fisheries*, *12*(1), 34–50. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-2979.2010.00373.x

Appendix

List of abbreviations

BSAC	Baltic Sea Advisory Council
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy
EU	European Union
ICES	International Council for the Exploration of the Seas
OIG	Other interest groups
TACs	Total allowable catches
the Commission	The European Commission
the Council	The European Council