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Summary on inland water catch statistics in European countries and EIFAC members

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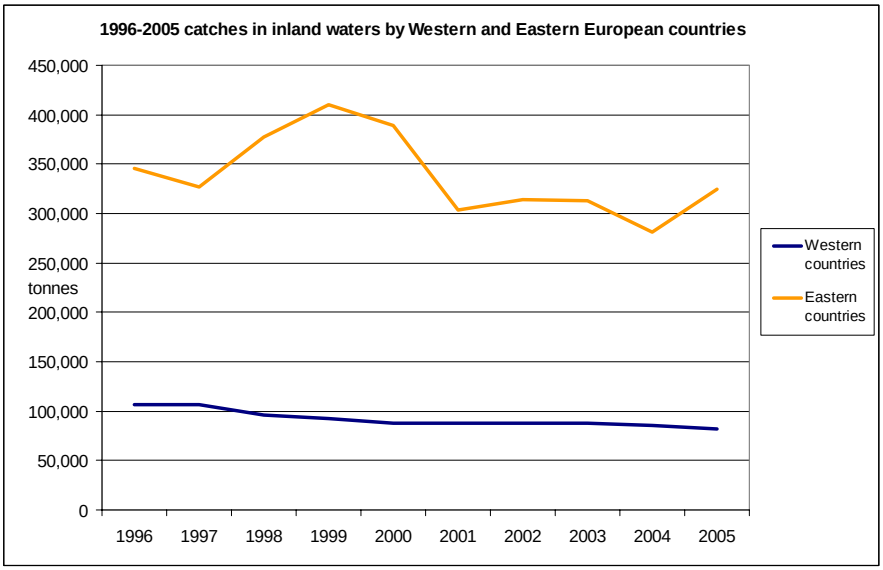
The FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Information and Statistics Service (FIES) collates annual global fishery statistics on capture and aquaculture production, trade, apparent consumption, fishing vessels and fishers. Similarly to the marine waters, global inland waters are also divided into major fishing areas for fishery statistical purposes, which mostly correspond to the geographical boundaries of the continents. The European Inland Fisheries Advisory Commission (EIFAC) is a regional fishery body established in 1957 which, among other objectives, strives to assist member countries in the collection and dissemination of pertinent information on inland fisheries and aquaculture.

In the mid-1980s, FAO and EIFAC designed the joint "FAO/EIFAC form for reporting statistics on catches in European inland waters" to facilitate the submission of inland water catch statistics by member countries. This questionnaire is available in English, French and Spanish in both paper and electronic formats. The form includes a list of major species items and three separate columns for recreational, commercial and total catches.

The present major issues on inland water catch statistics in Europe are summarized in the following bullet points.

- In 2005, total inland water catches in all European countries and non-European EIFAC members (i.e. Cyprus, Israel, and Turkey) amounted to 407,128 tonnes[1]. However, it should be taken into account that a significant portion of the 219,237 tonnes reported by the Russian Federation comes from inland waters which are geographically located in Asia (e.g. catches from the Caspian Sea and about 80,000 tonnes of Pacific salmons). Average total catches for the same countries in the last ten years was about 430,000 tonnes, with a peak of 503,011 t in 1999 and a minimum of 366,791 t in 2004 (see in the chart below data separated by Western and Eastern European countries; note the slight but continuous decreasing catch trend in Western countries).



[1]Data included in the FAO Global Capture Production Database, downloadable at http://www.fao.org/fi/statist/fisoft/FISHPLUS.asp together with the FISHSTAT+ software to consult it.

- For the 2005 statistical inquiry, 22 countries reported catch statistics through the FAO/EIFAC questionnaire, 11 countries reported inland water catches through other forms (e.g. the National Summary - NS1 questionnaire), whereas 6 countries (among which some major western European countries) made no report at all on inland water catches and FAO had to estimate their national inland water capture production.
- Professional fishing in European inland waters is declining, partly due to the competition with other human activities in the use of inland water resources and also to the falling economic viability of many commercial inland fisheries. A considerable portion of catches comes from the recreational fishery. Statistics on inland catches published by FAO are generally based on information made available by national correspondents, and total catches may vary significantly depending on whether or not the reporting country includes data on recreational catches.
- Among the countries that submitted data by the FAO/EIFAC form, only 6 reported both commercial and recreational data, 11 only commercial catches, and 5 only recreational catches. Apart from a few cases (e.g. Slovenia) in which the national correspondent declared that commercial fishery activities no longer exist, for the majority of the other countries it is not known if reporting data only for recreational or only for commercial catches is due to lack of information or to no activity in one of the two sub-sectors.
- For a few countries (i.e. Germany and Poland) an estimated amount of recreational catches is added to the reported commercial catches. Other countries (i.e. Croatia and UK) discontinued reporting of recreational catches for major species causing disruption in the data series. Since 1999, Ireland's catches in inland waters are no longer fully monitored and data are collected only for European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*), Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) and sea trout (*Salmo trutta*).
- In several countries, the national office collecting and reporting inland catch statistics to FAO is different from that in charge of marine catch statistics. This is due to the fact that responsibility for inland water fishery is under a different ministry or institution than marine fishery. Occasionally this separation creates problems, when inland water and marine fisheries overlap for some species and areas. Better coordination at the national level would be desirable in many cases.
- Regarding species breakdown in the European inland water catch statistics, data from 1950 to 2005 in the FAO database include figures for 98 species items, 92 of which have 2005 data. The stub in the FAO/EIFAC questionnaire lists 66 species items which are considered the most common in catches, but national correspondents are invited to report also information for additional species if available.
- The production of some diadromous or euryhaline species is sometimes classified differently among countries and this provokes discrepancies in the statistics as the same type of production can be reported either as capture or aquaculture and as inland or marine. This is particularly evident for an important and threatened species such as the European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*).
- Very little is known about the national statistical systems in place in European countries for the collection of data on inland water catches. Scattered landing places, scarce economic importance of inland professional catches in many countries and lack of relevant markets for inland water catches make it unlikely that national administrations bear the high cost of efficient and detailed data collection systems for inland water catch statistics.

Despite the constraints mentioned above, reporting of inland water catch statistics by European countries is in general much better than in other continents. Outside Europe, reporting of inland water catch statistics is often limited only to a single figure for the national total inland water catch, although in many countries inland waters are an important source of animal protein for a large part of the population.