



NDF WORKSHOP
WG 8 – Fishes
CASE STUDY 5 SUMMARY
Acipenser spp., Huso spp.
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STURGEONS OF THE NW BLACK SEA AND LOWER DANUBE RIVER COUNTRIES

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The recent management history of the lower Danube sturgeon fishery in Romania is presented, characterised by totally uncontrolled (over)fishing during 1990 – 2000 followed by adaptive management under CITES regulations. Three regional meetings of CITES and Fisheries MA of countries the lower Danube River were organized in year 2001, 2003 and 2006 in Bulgaria and Romania. These resulted in agreeing on a Regional Strategy on conservation and sustainable use of wild populations of sturgeons, including a common Monitoring System. This was encompassing eight population status indicators. Seven of them were fishery dependent: (1) Number of fishermen; (2) Number of fish captured; (3) Catch / species / fishing zones; (4) Sex ratio; (5) Distribution of length frequencies / classes; (6) Distribution of age frequencies / classes and (7) Rapid Rural Appraisal of captures in 5 selected fishing sites. The only one fishery independent population status indicator monitored, the abundance of young of the year sturgeons moving downstream over a control river bottom area of about 8 ha established at River Km 118, proved to be crucial for the NDF process.

Regularly stakeholder meetings, with participation of fishery scientists, fishery managers, law enforcement institutions, fishermen associations and CITES administration, held twice a year contributed significantly to the synergy of conservation efforts of CITES and Fisheries authorities.

Fishery dependent data were obtained by implementing a capture recording system involving commercial tagging, compulsory reporting of characteristics of each sturgeon specimen legally landed and posting these on-line by the officers of the fishery administration on a dedicated webpage (www.indd.tim.ro/rosturgeons), launched in July 2003. Quality of data improved over the last years. Implementation of compulsory reporting and recording in the data base on the webpage of all sturgeons legally captured in Romania resulted in acquisition of the largest number of individual data on sturgeons in the whole history of Romania: 717 specimens in year 2003; 863 specimens in year 2004 and 535 specimens in year 2005.

Lacking first time spawners age class in the cohort of adult sturgeons migrating in the river during two (in beluga) to three (in Russian sturgeon)

consecutive years, linked with low natural recruitment, were considered as crucial indicators of detrimental effect of continuation of commercial fishing and the base for adoption, in May 2006, by Romanian Ministries Environment and Agriculture of special regulations for the conservation of wild sturgeon populations and development of sturgeon aquaculture. This stopped commercial harvesting of sturgeons from the wild for a period of 10 years.

A large scale supportive stocking programme with individually tagged (CWT) young sturgeons produced from a controlled number of wild brood fish captured with special authorization and subsequently tagged with transponders and released back in the river, after non-destructive artificial propagation, has been implemented since 2006. Data of all sturgeons stocked in the river, including their CWT serial numbers are posted in a special data base on the webpage.

The main problem on the elaboration of NDF findings and deciding if continuation of commercial captures for export and domestic use was detrimental to the survival of population consisted in the unequal / poor quantity and quality of monitoring data recorded by partner countries of the region.