Integrated trend assessment of ecosystem changes in the Limfjord (Denmark): evidence of a recent regime shift?

An integrated ecosystem assessment was carried out for the Limfjord over the period from 1984 to 2008 to describe changes in ecosystem structure and potentially important drivers. The Limfjord is an eutrophic transitional Danish fjord system with the main inflow from the North Sea in the west and main outflow to the Kattegat in the east. We showed that from 1990 to 1995, the ecosystem structure shifted from dominance by demersal fish species (eel pout, whiting, flounder, plaice) to that of pelagic fish species (sprat, herring, sticklebacks), small-bodied fish species (black goby, pipefish), jellyfish, common shore crab, starfish and blue mussels. We interpret this change as a regime shift that showed a similar temporal pattern to regime shifts identified in adjacent seas. The observed changes in trophic interactions and food web reorganisation suggested a non-linear regime shift. The analyses further showed the regime shift to be driven by a combination of anthropogenic pressures and possible interplay with climatic disturbance.

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