

1 **Hydrophobic organic contaminants are not linked to microplastic uptake in Baltic Sea herring**

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13

14 **Abstract**

15 Due to its ubiquity in the environment, microplastic debris (MP) is commonly ingested by a range  
16 of aquatic organisms. A commonly held paradigm states that this can lead to lower food intake  
17 and the bioaccumulation of organic contaminants carried by MP. However, causal links between  
18 MP and contaminant levels in biota are poorly understood and *in situ* data are scarce. By examining  
19 the stomach contents of herring (*Clupea harengus membras*) caught along the Swedish east coast  
20 for the presence of plastic particles, and relating MP burden to hydrophobic organic contaminant  
21 concentrations in the fish muscle, we found that MP were present in about one third of herring,  
22 although the degree of ingestion exhibited a large geographic variability. This result is in good  
23 agreement with previous findings for Baltic Sea herring. If present, the mean number of MP  
24 particles was 8.4 ind<sup>-1</sup>. MP burden normalized to gut content volume did not differ significantly  
25 between sea basins. The observed MP abundance was in agreement with values predicted by an  
26 individual based model that had been parameterized for clupeids of a similar size and the ambient  
27 MP abundances reported for surface waters in the Baltic Sea. MP abundance in the gastrointestinal  
28 tract decreased with reproductive stage but increased with body size. Contaminant concentrations  
29 in the muscle tissue were found to be unrelated to the number of MP present in gastrointestinal  
30 tract, suggesting a lack of correlation between the bioaccumulation of contaminants and MP  
31 ingestion. Thus, despite their ubiquity, MP are unlikely to have a measurable impact on food intake  
32 or the total body burden of environmental contaminants in Baltic herring.

33  
34 **Capsule:** Ingested microplastic abundance is not correlated to hydrophobic organic contaminant  
35 body burden in Baltic herring.

36  
37 **Keywords:** *Microplastic, Baltic Sea, herring, hydrophobic organic contaminants, marine monitoring*

38

## 39 Introduction

40 Plastic debris, and especially microplastics (MP < 5 mm), can be found in a variety of aquatic  
41 organisms across several trophic levels (Cole et al., 2013; Lusher et al., 2015, 2013). Due to the  
42 importance of commercial fish and shellfish species for human consumption, the ingestion and  
43 presence of MP in these organisms has become a matter of concern (EFSA Panel on Contaminants  
44 in the Food Chain (CONTAM), 2016), and several studies have been aiming to provide a  
45 quantitative assessment of MP ingestion in several fish species (Beer et al., 2017; Budimir et al.,  
46 2018; Foekema et al., 2013; Lusher et al., 2013; Rummel et al., 2016).

47 Several experimental studies have found a link between microplastic ingestion and decreased food  
48 intake (Cole et al., 2015; Ogonowski et al., 2018, 2016) and the bioaccumulation of hydrophobic  
49 organic chemicals (HOCs) (Besseling et al., 2013; Oliveira et al., 2012; Rochman et al., 2013b)  
50 sorbed to the MP particles (Mato et al., 2001; Rochman et al., 2013a; Rusina et al., 2010).  
51 However, other studies indicate that plastic polymers could have a net cleaning effect, relieving  
52 the organisms of contaminants by acting as passive samplers (Gouin et al., 2011; Herzke et al.,  
53 2016; Koelmans et al., 2016). Hence, the relative importance of microplastics as vectors for  
54 contaminant transport remains unresolved, possibly also due to the lack of environmental data  
55 linking HOC body burden to ingested MP.

56 Here, we study MP ingestion by Baltic Sea herring (*Clupea harengus membras* L.), a  
57 commercially relevant species. Being facultative pelagic filter-feeders (Huse and Toresen, 1996),  
58 herring stand a high risk of MP ingestion. We used a modelling approach with reported parameters  
59 on clupeid feeding, food processing and ambient MP concentrations to estimate realistic intervals  
60 of MP ingestion in Baltic herring. The model was validated with *in situ* samples collected from  
61 various locations along the Swedish coast, stretching about 1500km from the Bothnian Bay in the  
62 north to the Bornholm basin (Hanö Bight) in the south. Furthermore, by investigating the  
63 relationship between consumed MP abundance and HOC concentrations in muscle tissue, we  
64 assess whether MP significantly contribute to HOC body burden in Baltic Sea herring.

65

## 66 Materials and Methods

### 67 *Fish collection and sample characteristics*

68 The Baltic herring used for our analyses were collected along the Swedish east coast as a part of  
69 the Swedish National Monitoring Program for Contaminants in Marine Biota, an initiative by the  
70 Swedish Museum of Natural History (Stockholm, Sweden). In order to avoid possible bias by  
71 known point sources, we randomly selected a total of 130 specimens that had been collected at  
72 thirteen reference monitoring stations, thus providing a sufficiently large geographical area and a  
73 representative range of HOC and MP levels for analysis (Figure 1).

74

75 The sex ratio in our sample was approximately 50:50 and uniform across sampling sites. The fish  
76 were 3-7 years old, with an average total length of  $173 \pm 18$  mm. The reproductive phase was  
77 determined by gametocytic maturity and varied geographically. It ranged from immature to mature  
78 and also included post-spawned individuals. The entire gastrointestinal tract (GIT) was removed,  
79 packed in aluminum foil, frozen at  $-20$  °C, and stored until MP –analysis at the Department of  
80 Environmental Science and Analytical Chemistry, Stockholm University, Sweden.

81

## 82 *MP quantification in the gastrointestinal tract of fish*

83 The GITs were individually placed in glass Petri dishes, dissected with surgical scissors, and rinsed  
84 with deionized, particle-free water. Each sample was carefully examined under a stereo  
85 microscope and any bolus items resembling plastic were extracted using stainless steel pincers and  
86 transferred to Eppendorf tubes for further analysis. To account for variable feeding rates and the  
87 corresponding variability in the amount of ingested plastic, we standardized the plastic counts per  
88 GIT using the gut fullness weighed by the mass of the fish, calculated as: gut fullness (%)  $\times$  body  
89 weight (g wet weight); gut fullness was assessed using a semi-quantitative scale with five possible  
90 values: 0% (empty), 25%, 50%, 75% or 100% (full). Furthermore, stomach volume was assumed  
91 proportional to body length (Pirhonen and Koskela, 2005).

92 Criteria for the visual identification of MP followed the recommendations of Norén (2007) and  
93 Hidalgo-Ruz et al. (2012). A particle with diameter between 1-5 mm was classified as MP if all  
94 the following criteria were met: (i) uniform, unnaturally bright or of an unnatural color, (ii) lack  
95 of organic structures, and (iii) uniform diameter over the entire length of a fiber. Each putative  
96 plastic particle was categorized according to its shape (fiber or fragment) and color. Particles with  
97 diameters smaller than 1 mm were discarded while particles  $>$  5 mm were recorded but not used  
98 for further analyses. To test the accuracy of the visual identification method, a random subset of  
99 20 samples containing MP (i.e., the gut contents of 20 individual fish) was analyzed using the hot  
100 needle test (De Witte et al., 2014).

101

## 102 *Controls and blanks*

103 To prevent cross-contamination by airborne particles during sample examination, the dissections  
104 were performed under a Fumex local extractor; each sample being analyzed for 10 min. A Petri  
105 dish filled with filtered deionized water was placed next to a test sample to serve as a blank for the  
106 quantification and characterization of potential contamination during the analysis. A cotton lab  
107 coat and nitrile gloves were used at all times to minimize contamination by clothing. The type and  
108 color of clothing were also recorded for each dissection event in order to back-trace potential  
109 contamination. Samples that would display quantifiable amounts of background contamination  
110 (plastic particles  $<$  1 mm) were excluded.

111

## 112 *Chemical analysis*

113 Fish muscle samples for contaminant analysis were taken from the middle dorsal muscle layer  
114 and tissue sampling was performed according to standard procedures (TemaNord 1995). The  
115 samples were analyzed for polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB 28, 52, 101, 118, 138, 153 and 180),  
116 organochlorine pesticides (DDE, DDD, DDT, HCB, AHCH, BHCH, and Lindane) and  
117 polybrominated flame retardants (BDE 28, 47, 99, 100, 153, 154 and HBCD), according to the  
118 guidelines of the Swedish National Monitoring Program for Contaminants in Marine Biota. For  
119 the analysis of most compounds, 10 g of muscle tissue from individual fish was used, whereas 1  
120 g samples of muscle tissue from 10 individuals were pooled for a few analytically challenging  
121 compounds. An overview of the analyzed contaminants and their average concentrations in  
122 herring muscle tissue are provided in

123 Table 1, while details of the analytical procedures are given elsewhere (Bignert et al., 2016).

124

125 *Data analysis and statistics*

126 *Relationships between biological factors, geography and ingested microplastic*

127 Regional differences in microplastic abundance in the GIT (both at a station and basin level) were  
128 tested using Permanova (Anderson, 2001), while relationships between specific biological  
129 variables were tested using generalized additive models (GAM). Due to an overrepresentation of  
130 zeros in the data (overdispersion), the models were run using zero-inflated Poisson error structures.  
131 Model performance was assessed using residual plots. All analyses were performed in R 3.5.0 (R  
132 Core Team, 2014).

133

134 *Relationships between HOCs and ingested microplastic*

135 Prior to statistical analyses, the measured values in samples whose chemical body burdens were  
136 below the limit of quantification (LOQ) were imputed by LOQ divided by the square root of two  
137 (Succop et al., 2004). The analyzed chemical concentrations were summed and grouped into their  
138 respective contaminant groups (PCBs, PBDEs and organochlorine pesticides). A factor analysis  
139 was performed to assess the degree of association between the chemical variables and microplastic  
140 abundance in the GIT.

141

142 *Modeling plastic ingestion by herring*

143 To evaluate whether the observed number of MP in the GIT could be predicted using ambient MP  
144 abundance data and fish feeding rate, we modeled the ingestion of MP using literature-derived parameters  
145 on food uptake, egestion, and MP abundance in the study area. The two main assumptions in the model  
146 were: (i) non-selective feeding by fish on ambient MP (1 to 5 mm) and (ii) non-discriminatory gut  
147 evacuation, i.e., MP being egested at the same rate as prey remains.

148 Then, the amount of MP in the GIT at any given time,  $t$ , can be written as the mass balance between uptake  
149 and loss rates (Eq. 1):

150

$$151 \quad MP_t = MP(t - dt) + (IR - Eg) dt, \quad (1)$$

152

153 where  $IR$  and  $Eg$  are the ingestion and egestion rates (number of MP  $h^{-1}$ ), respectively. They can be written  
154 as:

155

$$156 \quad IR = CMP \times FE \times CR \quad (2)$$

157

158 and

159

$$160 \quad Eg = GER \times MP_t, \quad (3)$$

161

162 where  $CMP$  is the ambient MP concentration (number of MP L<sup>-1</sup>),  $FE$  the effective feeding period  
163 (unitless; proportion of time spent feeding per day),  $CR$  the clearance rate (L h<sup>-1</sup>; the volume of water  
164 swept clear of particles per individual and hour, and  $GER$  the gut evacuation rate (h<sup>-1</sup>).

165

#### 166 *Model parameterization*

167 In the absence of published rates for adult Baltic herring, we used the gut evacuation and clearance rates  
168 of European pilchard (*Sardina pilchardus*) (Table 2), which is a clupeid with a feeding ecology similar to  
169 Baltic herring (c.f. Costalago and Palomera, 2014; Möllmann et al., 2004). Since neither herring nor  
170 pilchard are particular night time feeders (Arrhenius and Hansson, 1994; Costalago and Palomera, 2014),  
171 the effective feeding period was set to the average number of daylight hours in Sundsvall, Sweden  
172 (62°23'28" N, 17°18'22" E) during August; as this represents both the latitudinal and temporal midpoints  
173 of our sampling locations and times.

174

175 To determine a plausible range of MP burden under environmentally relevant conditions, we  
176 modeled two extreme scenarios. In the first and the more conservative scenario, we used the lowest  
177 reported ambient MP abundance for the northern Baltic proper (0.19 MP m<sup>-3</sup>, Gewert *et al.* 2017)  
178 established from surface manta trawls (335 µm mesh, MP size range = 0.335-5 mm) as well as the  
179 lowest reported experimental clearance rates when using *Brachionus plicatilis* (~190 µm) and  
180 *Artemia salina* nauplii (≤ 724 µm) as a prey (Garrido et al., 2007). In the second scenario, we used  
181 the highest known ambient MP abundance of 1.13 MP m<sup>-3</sup> (Gewert et al., 2017) and the highest  
182 clearance rates observed when feeding on low densities of fish eggs (Garrido et al., 2007).

183

## 184 **Results**

### 185 *Observed microplastic concentrations in the GIT*

186 Microplastic particles identified by visual inspection were found in 37 out of the 130 analyzed herring  
187 (33.8%; range: 0 to 51 pieces of plastic fiber and/or fragments per individual). In those 37 individuals, the  
188 mean abundance was 8.4 particles ind<sup>-1</sup>. The dominant type of MP were fibers of various colors (87.6%),  
189 while fragments were less frequent (12.4%). When excluding black particles that had been identified as  
190 non-plastic by the hot needle-test, the proportion of fibers decreased slightly (86.2%).

191 All procedural blanks contained plastic (mainly single fibers) of unknown origin. However, these particles  
192 all were < 1 mm and did thus not measurably contribute to the MP counts used for statistical analysis. The  
193 variation in total MP burden between stations and basins was high (Table 3), and we did not find any  
194 significant differences between the normalized abundances of MP from the different basins (*station* nested  
195 within *basin* as a random factor, pseudo  $F_{4,117} = 1.06$ ,  $p = 0.40$ ).

196

### 197 *Predicted microplastic concentrations in the GIT*

198 The model scenario using the lowest reported ambient MP concentrations (Gewert et al., 2017) and  
199 clearance rates (Garrido et al., 2007) yielded an average number of MP in the gastrointestinal tract of 0.01  
200 particles ind<sup>-1</sup> for clupeid fish of sizes similar to those analyzed here. The highest MP abundance and CR  
201 modelling scenario resulted in an average number of MP in the GIT of 0.88 particles ind<sup>-1</sup>.

202



203 *Linkage between ingested plastic and HOCs*

204 We found no relationship between the number of consumed MP and the concentration of any of  
205 the HOCs (Figure 2). Microplastic occurrence in GIT displayed a significant negative loading on  
206 the first axis and positive loading on the second. In contrast, the organochlorine pesticides and  
207 PBDEs loaded strongly only on the first axis, while the PCBs displayed some degree of positive  
208 loading on both axes. Hence, no contaminant group loaded in the same direction as MP abundance.

209

210 *Biological factors related to MP occurrence in fish GIT*

211 The amount of plastic found in the GIT was positively related to fish body weight for individuals  
212 > 50 g (GAM,  $\chi^2 = 306.7$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ , Figure 3 A), but not in the smaller fish. In contrast, an inverse  
213 relationship was found for individuals in their *reproductive phase*, where MP occurrence in the  
214 GIT was significantly lower in fish that had reached sexual maturity and recently spawned ( $\chi^2 =$   
215  $78.5$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ , Figure 3 B). Both *Gut fullness* (Figure 3 C) and *Age* (Figure 3 D) displayed weak  
216 bell-shaped relationships with MP occurrence. However, albeit significant (GAM,  $\chi^2 = 17.7$ ,  $p <$   
217  $0.0002$ ,  $\chi^2 = 32.4$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , *Gut fullness* and *Age*, respectively), these relationships were not  
218 particularly strong and likely of low biological importance.

219

220 **Discussion**

221 *Microplastics are only a small dietary component in planktivorous herring*

222 Microplastics were found in about one third of the gastrointestinal tracts, with a high proportion  
223 of fibers (88 %). While these values are in good agreement with those reported by Lusher et al.  
224 (2013) for the English Channel (36.5% of individuals containing MP, with 68% being fibers) and  
225 Beer et al. (2017) for the central Baltic Sea (20% containing MP, with 93% fibers), other studies  
226 found considerably lower MP prevalence and fiber contributions. Both Foekema et al. (2013) and  
227 Rummel et al. (2016) found plastics in only 2% of herring samples from the North Sea and the  
228 Southern Baltic Sea, with fibers accounting for less than 10% of MP. Having excluded fibers from  
229 their analyses, Budimir et al. (2018) reported a frequency of occurrence as low as 1.8% in herring  
230 from the northern Baltic Sea. These discrepancies between different studies could be related to  
231 differences in fish size and gut fullness. For example, Foekema et al. (2013) used fish that were  
232 considerably larger (>200 mm total length) which most likely already had switched from filter  
233 feeding to raptorial feeding on larger prey (Huse and Toresen, 1996). This change in feeding  
234 behavior would result in a lower ingestion rate of zooplankton-sized plastic particles and thus  
235 result in lower overall MP burden. In the study by Rummel et al. (2016), many fish stomachs were  
236 empty, which probably was related to arrested feeding related to spawning, and possibly, stress-  
237 induced gut evacuation caused by the fish sampling (Vinson and Angradi, 2011; Wilkins, 1967).  
238 This lends further support to our findings that MP burden increases with fish size and decreases  
239 with reproductive phase. In addition, one would expect the amount of ingested MP to scale with  
240 gut bolus size or gut fullness. However, our findings do not support this assumption. This could  
241 be due to one of our underlying model assumptions (see methods), namely that the rate of plastic  
242 egestion is equal to the egestion of natural food. If the egestion of plastic in herring occurs at a  
243 slower rate, as observed with plastic fibers in amphipods (Au et al., 2015), one would observe a  
244 higher rate of accumulation of MP in the GIT. While normalizing the ingested MP content by gut  
245 fullness seems to have little impact on the absolute amount of ingested particles (as indicated by  
246 the associated weak bell-shaped response curve), fish size appears be a better candidate for

247 standardizing internalized MP concentrations. Nevertheless, there are several other factors that  
248 must be considered. They include ontogenetic changes in feeding modes, behavior, maturity levels,  
249 fishing methods, and time of capture (diurnal differences in feeding activity).

250

251 *No correlation between MP presence and HOCs*

252 The so-called "Trojan horse" effect (Cole et al., 2011) denotes a transfer of hydrophobic  
253 contaminants from ingested plastics to biota. While this effect has been demonstrated under  
254 laboratory conditions (Batel et al., 2016; Besseling et al., 2013; Browne et al., 2013; Rochman et  
255 al., 2013b), recent modelling studies seem to indicate that compared to MP, natural sources play a  
256 much more important role in explaining HOC bioaccumulation patterns in aquatic organisms  
257 (Koelmans, 2015; Koelmans et al., 2016). Since we did not find any correlation between HOC  
258 concentrations in herring muscle tissue and MP abundance in the GIT, it could be argued that  
259 omitting MP with diameters < 1 mm from our analyses, could have biased the results by ignoring  
260 the potential influence a higher total surface area and thus higher HOC desorption rates (Hartmann  
261 et al., 2017; Hendriks et al., 2001). However, this is rather unlikely since filter feeding herring  
262 have a relatively low capacity to retain smaller particles due to their rather wide gill raker spacing  
263 (Gibson, 1988). In fact, this line of reasoning has been confirmed by several other studies who  
264 found a predominant retention of MP with diameters > 1 mm (Beer et al., 2017; Lenz et al., 2016).  
265 Given the short residence time (Grigorakis et al., 2017) of internalized plastics and the slow  
266 desorption kinetics of many HOCs, we would moreover only expect a rather weak correlation  
267 between the two, or no correlation at all.

268

269 Although causality is difficult to prove using environmental samples where many different  
270 parameters contribute to the contaminant body burden of an organism (Hartmann et al., 2017), our  
271 findings strongly suggest that there is no tenable relationship between the amount of ingested  
272 microplastic particles and tissue contaminant concentrations (Fig. 2). This findings contrasts the  
273 currently held paradigm according to which microplastics are an important source of HOCs in  
274 aquatic organisms (Mato et al., 2001; Rochman et al., 2013b). Similarly, no correlation has been  
275 found between the amount of ingested plastic and HOC concentrations in northern fulmars  
276 (*Fulmarus glacialis*) from the Norwegian coast (Herzke et al., 2016), although the birds had  
277 ingested much larger amounts of plastic and their gut passage times for plastic particles are several  
278 orders of magnitude longer than for herring (Ryan, 2015). In light of present and past findings  
279 regarding the role of MP as vectors for contaminant transport, our study further strengthens the  
280 view that MP only play a minor or even negligible role in explaining contaminant bioaccumulation  
281 in aquatic biota.

282

283 *Conclusions*

284 Our findings suggest that microplastic ingestion by filter-feeding fish is relatively low, even in a  
285 semi-enclosed sea like the Baltic, where the MP loading is expectedly high. A rather large  
286 discrepancy exists in the literature with regard to the interpretation of MP ingestion demonstrating  
287 the urgent need to find suitable standards for MP quantification in gut content analyses. Several  
288 studies also demonstrated that biological factors such as fish size and reproductive state may affect  
289 both feeding in general and selectivity towards MP, and hence MP burden. We found no  
290 correlation whatsoever between the amount of ingested plastic and muscle tissue HOC



291 concentrations. These results provide an additional challenge to the commonly held paradigm that  
292 MP are important vectors for the transfer of contaminants to biota.

293

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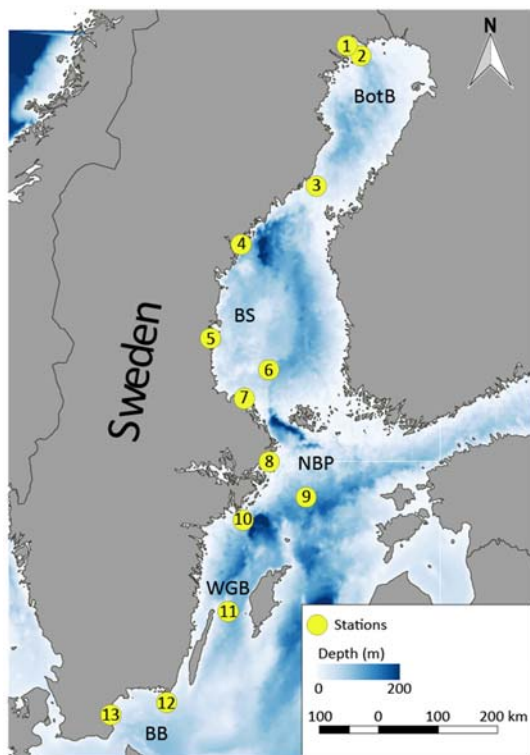
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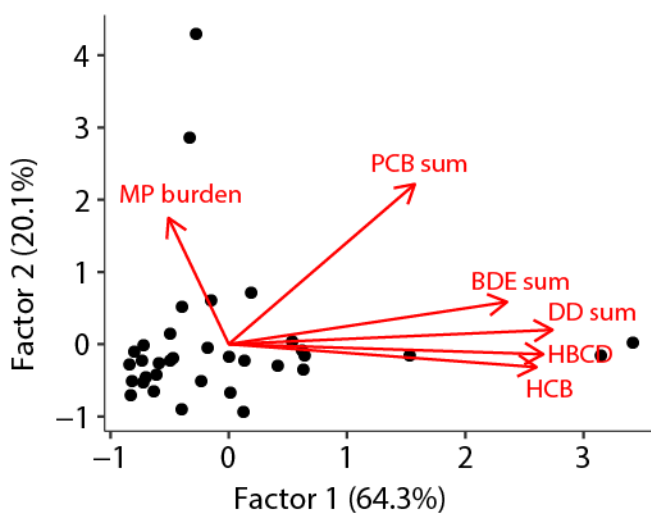
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440 **Figures and tables**

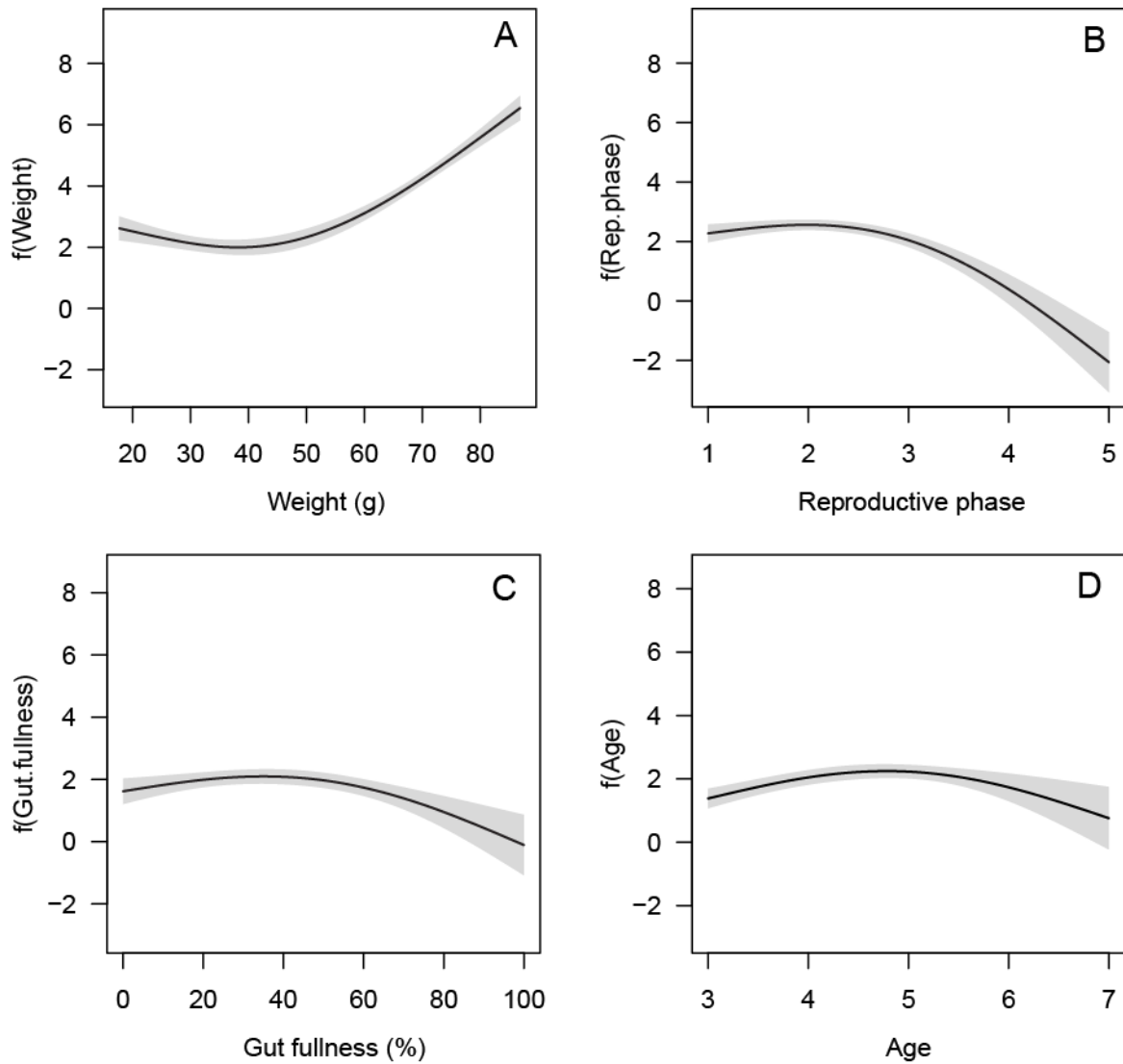


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442 **Figure 1.** Sampling sites within the Swedish National Monitoring Program for Contaminants in Marine  
443 Biota included in this study, BotB Bothnian Bay, BS Bothnian Sea, NBP Northern Baltic Proper, WGB  
444 Western Gotland Basin and BB Bornholm Basin. 1 Rånefjärden, 2 Harufjärden, 3 Holmöarna, 4  
445 Gaviksfjärden, 5 Långvindsfjärden, 6 Bothnian Sea offshore site, 7 Ängsskärsklubb, 8 Lagnö, 9 Baltic  
446 proper offshore site, 10 Landsort, 11 Byxelkrok, 12 Utlängan and 13 Western Hanö bight.  
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449  
450 **Figure 2.** Factor scores (axes) and loadings (arrows) of contaminants (HBCD, HCB and the sum  
451 of PCBs, BDEs and DDs) and average plastic content (*MP burden*).  
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453

454 **Figure 3.** Generalized additive model partial response curves for the measured biological variables: *body*  
455 *weight* (A), *reproductive phase* (B), *gut fullness* (C) and *age* (D). The classes for *reproductive phase*  
456 correspond to: 1 = immature, 2 = developing gonads, 3 = mature gonads, 4 = post-spawned and 5 =  
457 deformed gonads. The vertical axes, indicate the relative influence of each explanatory variable on the  
458 prediction on the base of partial residuals. Grey bands indicate 95% confidence intervals for each curve.

459 Table 1. Overview of the chemicals analyzed in herring muscle tissue and their average concentrations ( $\mu\text{g g}^{-1}$  fish muscle).

Chemical group	Chemical species	Abbreviation	Mean concentration in fish muscle ( $\mu\text{g/g}$ )	S.D	Median	Min	Max
Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)	2,4,4'-PCB	PCB 28	0.0039	0.0019	0.0033	0.0018	0.0106
	2,2',5,5'-PCB	PCB 52	0.0067	0.0044	0.0057	0.0025	0.0199
	2,2',4,5,5'-PCB	PCB 101	0.0222	0.0149	0.0176	0.0069	0.0713
	2,3',4,4',5'-PCB	PCB 118	0.0204	0.0135	0.0155	0.0062	0.0694
	2,2',3,4,4',5'-PCB	PCB 138	0.0591	0.0408	0.0444	0.0152	0.1896
	2,2',4,4',5,5'-PCB	PCB 153	0.0417	0.0280	0.0345	0.0120	0.1320
	2,2',3,4,4',5,5'-PCB	PCB 180	0.0181	0.0114	0.0149	0.0029	0.0551
Organochlorine pesticides	4,4'-DDT	DDT	0.0205	0.0218	0.0134	0.0037	0.0966
	4,4'-DDE	DDE	0.1055	0.0960	0.0815	0.0160	0.4130
	4,4'-DDD	DDD	0.0284	0.0333	0.0163	0.0016	0.1391
	$\alpha$ -1,2,3,4,5,6-Hexachlorocyclohexane	AHCH	0.0029	0.0005	0.0030	0.0018	0.0039
	$\beta$ -1,2,3,4,5,6-Hexachlorocyclohexane	BHCH	0.0056	0.0027	0.0057	0.0018	0.0099
$\gamma$ -1,2,3,4,5,6-Hexachlorocyclohexane	Lindane	0.0029	0.0005	0.0030	0.0018	0.0039	
Brominated flame retardants (BDEs)	2,4,4'-TriBDE	BDE 28	0.0002	0.0001	0.0002	0.0001	0.0005
	2,2',4,4'-TetraBDE	BDE 47	0.0051	0.0032	0.0041	0.0016	0.0160
	2,2',4,4',5-PentaBDE	BDE 99	0.0012	0.0009	0.0009	0.0005	0.0044
	2,2',4,4',6-PentaBDE	BDE 100	0.0012	0.0007	0.0011	0.0004	0.0035
	2,2',4,4',5,5'-HexaBDE	BDE 153	0.0002	0.0002	0.0002	0.0001	0.0009
	2,2',4,4',5,6'-HexaBDE	BDE 154	0.0006	0.0004	0.0005	0.0002	0.0018
	1,2,5,6,9,10-Hexabromocyclododecane	HBCD	0.0114	0.0096	0.0088	0.0025	0.0470
Other	Hexachlorobenzene	HCB	0.0289	0.0209	0.0246	0.0114	0.1013

460

461 **Table 2.** Parameters used to model microplastic ingestion in Baltic Sea herring.

Parameter	Unit	Average/estimate	Min	Max	Species	Meaning	Reference
CMP	MP L <sup>-1</sup>		0.00019	0.00113		MP concentration in water column.	Gewert et al. 2017
CR	L ind. <sup>-1</sup> h <sup>-1</sup>		21.6	304.2	<i>Sardina pilchardus</i>	Clearance rate.	Garrido et al. 2007
FE	unitless	0.625			<i>Clupea harengus</i>	Feeding efficiency.	Batty et al. 1986
GER	h <sup>-1</sup>	0.259	-0.215 <sup>a</sup>	0.733	<i>Sardina pilchardus</i>	Gut evacuation rate.	Costalago & Palomera 2014
IR	MP h <sup>-1</sup>					Ingestion, amount MP ingested at time <i>t</i> .	
MP	MP					Number of MP in fish stomach at time <i>t</i> .	
—Eg	MP h <sup>-1</sup>					Amount MP egested at time <i>t</i> .	

<sup>a</sup> The minimum estimate for GER is the reported lower 95% confidence limit of the mean. A negative gut evacuation rate is not biologically meaningful, therefore the mean value was used as the minimum rate in the model.

462

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics for the microplastics recovered from the gastrointestinal tract of Baltic Sea herring. The data are presented as particle shape and color as well as total MP burden (mean of presences) and range (min-max) Values are given per basin and ordered north to south.

Basin	Fiber				Fragment				Black fibers incl.				Black fibers excl.					
	Black	Red	Brown	Green	Clear	Black	Red	Green	Prevalence (%)	Median MP content	Mean MP content	Mean MP content of presences	Range (min-max)	Prevalence (%)	Median MP content	Mean MP content	Mean MP content of presences	Range (min-max)
Bothnian Bay	0-7	0-38	0-4	0-0	0-3	0-0	0-3	0-12	31.8	0	4.1	9.5	0-38	35.1	0	3.5	8.2	0-38
Bothnian Sea	0-8	0-18	0-0	0-0	0-5	0-7	0-0	0-2	27.3	0	1.3	5.2	0-18	24.3	0	1.0	4.3	0-18
Northern Baltic Proper	0-1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-51	0-0	0-2	0-2	13.6	0	6.7	32.8	0-51	10.8	0	6.6	32.7	0-51
Western Gotland Basin	0-1	0-3	0-0	0-1	0-1	0-0	0-7	0-0	18.2	0	1.0	2.7	0-7	18.9	0	0.9	2.6	0-7
Bornholm Basin	0-1	0-13	0-0	0-0	0-2	0-0	0-0	0-0	9.1	0	0.9	4.5	0-13	10.8	0	0.9	4.3	0-13
<b>Total</b>	<b>0-8</b>	<b>0-38</b>	<b>0-4</b>	<b>0-1</b>	<b>0-51</b>	<b>0-7</b>	<b>0-7</b>	<b>0-12</b>	<b>33.8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>0-51</b>	<b>28.5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>0-51</b>