



Landing the blame: Overfishing in Northern European waters

Uncovering the countries most responsible for overfishing in EU waters

Fisheries ministers squander the economic potential of our seas by consistently fishing over and above the limits recommended by scientists. This is the third in a series of briefings to identify which countries are standing in the way of more fish, profits and jobs for European citizens.

Food for an additional 160 million EU citizens. An extra €3.2 billion in annual revenue. 100,000 new jobs across the continent.¹ This could be the reality if EU waters were properly managed and damaged fish stocks allowed to return to their maximum sustainable yield (MSY).

Fishing limits vs. scientific advice

Every year fisheries ministers have an opportunity to unlock this potential when they agree how much fish should be caught in EU waters – the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for each commercial fish stock. Scientific bodies like the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) provide information about the state of most stocks and recommend maximum catch levels.

But for many years scientific advice has not been given the attention it deserves. Between 1987 and 2011 TACs were set higher than scientific advice in on average 68% of decisions; and 33% above the scientific advice.²

Unfortunately there are few signs of this changing. For the 2014 TACs, 31 out of 69 stocks were fished above scientific advice.³ TACs for the Baltic Sea and deep sea waters in 2015 were also set exceeding the scientific advice (see previous two briefings of this series).

The reformed Common Fisheries Policy that entered into force in 2014 aims to restore and maintain populations above levels capable of producing the maximum sustainable yield. The MSY exploitation rate is to be achieved by 2015 where possible and by 2020 at the latest for all stocks. Following scientific advice is essential to achieving this goal.

Agreements made during ministerial negotiations at the Fisheries Council are not public, only their outcomes. This lack of transparency means it is not possible to identify those ministers that ignore scientific advice and push for short-term interests, risking the health of fish stocks for future generations.

This briefing series reveals which member states and ministers are behind decisions that go against the EU public's collective interest. We do this by analysing the outcome of the negotiations, estimating which member states end up with a higher share of stocks fished above scientific advice. We can assume these member states are the main drivers of overfishing either because they are actively pushing for fishing limits to be set above scientific advice or by failing to prevent it.

Results for Northern European waters

At the December Fisheries Council, ministers and representatives agree to fishing limits for the vast majority of commercial EU fish species and therefore it is probably the most critical date in the calendar that determines if EU fisheries management goes in the right direction or not.

An analysis of 2014 December decisions for 101 TACs in the waters of north-western Europe, including the North, Irish, and Celtic Seas, and the waters west of Scotland and Ireland shows that 60 out of 96 TACs for which scientific advice was available, were set above scientific advice and only 36 TACs were set according to (or below) it.

The TACs agreed affected 28 species which are accessed by fourteen EU member states: Denmark, United Kingdom, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Sweden. Some of these TACs will be shared with Norway, Iceland, Faroe Islands and Russia.

The Overfishing League table

UK, France and Denmark top the ranking of EU overfishing states in Northern European waters because they have the highest share of stocks that will be fished above scientific advice. For example, UK will fish 34,453 tonnes of mackerel; France 7,118 tonnes of blue whiting; and Denmark 17,710 tonnes of sprat, all in excess of scientific advice.

Table 1. The overfishing league table

Member State	Minister / representative	Quota set above scientific advice (tonnes)
UK	Mr George Eustice, Mr Richard Lochhead	68,696
France	Mr Alain Vidalies	34,919
Denmark	Mr Dan Jørgensen	31,713
Ireland	Mr Simon Coveney	28,953
Netherlands	Mr Wepke Kingma	26,737
Germany	Mr Christian Schmidt	16,643
Spain	Ms Isabel García Tejerina	13,287
Sweden	Mr Sven-Erik Bucht, Ms Åsa Webber	10,810
Estonia	Mr Ivari Padar	4,009
Belgium	Mr René Collin, Mr Willy Borsus, Ms Joke Schauvliege	2,681
Portugal	Ms Assunção Cristas, Mr Manuel Pinto De Abreu	811
Poland	Mr Marek Sawicki	265
Lithuania	Ms Virginija Baltraitienė	26
Latvia	Mr Jānis Dūklavs, Mr Juris Štālmeistars	23

It is worth saying that Norway - and Iceland too - would make it to the top of the list because they have a big share of stocks which will be overfished above scientific advice like blue whiting and mackerel. Yet, this does not justify EU member states setting fishing limits that exceed scientific advice. The contribution of each EU member state to overfishing North Atlantic stocks is summarised in Table 1.

2015: a crucial year

Fisheries ministers will meet again at the end of 2015 to set fishing limits for commercial fish stocks in European waters. When preparing for these meetings it is crucial that the Commission proposal for 2016 fishing limits is sufficiently ambitious to end overfishing (i.e. follows scientific advice) and that any delays in reaching maximum sustainable yield by 2015 consistent with CFP Article 2.2 are justified with evidence of socioeconomic impacts by the European Commission and member states. This was not the case in 2014.

NEF will keep a close eye on the negotiations and will replicate this analysis to identify which member states are working in the public interest versus those that are willing to continue shooting themselves in the foot.

Endnotes

- 1 Crilly, R. & Esteban, A. (2012). Jobs Lost at Sea. New Economics Foundation. <http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/entry/jobs-lost-at-sea>
- 2 O'Leary, B., Smart, J., Neale, F., Hawkins, J., Newman, S., Milman, A & Roberts, C. (2011). *Fisheries mismanagement*. Marine Pollution Bulletin. <https://www.york.ac.uk/media/environment/documents/msc/mem/publications/OLeary%20et%20al%202011%20Fisheries%20mismanagement.pdf>
- 3 Seafish. (2014). Seafish summary 2014 TACs compared with ICES scientific advice. http://www.seafish.org/media/publications/Seafish_AnalysisTACs2014_201404.pdf

ANNEX – Atlantic TACs compared to scientific advice (tonnes)

Fishing Total Allowable Catch	Scientific advice (tonnes)	TAC agreed by ministers (tonnes)	Difference (tonnes)	Difference (%)
Blue whiting	839,886	1,272,000	432,114	51%
Mackerel	906,000	1,054,000	148,000	16%
Sprat	237,619	265,430	27,811	12%
Cod	29,254	40,489	11,235	38%
Pollack	4,200	13,892	9,692	231%
Dab and Flounder	9,548	18,434	8,886	93%
Hake	49,114	56,872	7,758	16%
Ling	10,755	16,679	5,924	55%
Plaice	142,865	147,613	4,748	3%
Anglerfish	43,638	48,219	4,581	10%
Haddock	55,360	59,854	4,494	8%
Whiting	28,419	32,813	4,394	15%
Northern prawn	6,844	10,900	4,056	59%
Megrimms	19,971	23,597	3,626	18%
Norway lobster	55,468	58,970	3,502	6%
Sole	14,867	17,804	2,937	20%
Lemon sole and Witch	4,231	6,391	2,160	51%
Skates and rays	8,107	10,133	2,026	25%
Greater silver smelt	4,648	5,344	696	15%
Turbot and brill	4,226	4,642	416	10%
Blue ling	5,046	5,107	61	1%
Sandeel	337,219	337,219	0	0%
Saithe	72,854	72,854	0	0%
Spurdog/ dogfish	0	0	0	0%
Porbeagle	0	0	0	0%
Boarfish	53,296	53,296	0	0%
Herring	167,597	167,274	-323	0%
Tusk	7,450	4,124	-3,326	-45%
Horse mackerel	114,504	100,932	-13,572	-12%
Norway pout	326,000	259,200	-66,800	-20%

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Illustrations: Toni Llobet – www.tonillobet.com drawings of Blue whiting (*Micromesistius poutassou*), Mackerel (*Scomber scombrus*) and European Hake (*Merluccius merluccius*)

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