

This meeting looked at the latest advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) on the key commercial species for the UK supply chain. It looked ahead to the negotiations for 2022 and provided an update on a key initiative helping to support the pelagic sector.

Fish stock status in the North East Atlantic (demersal, crustacean, benthic). Ewen Bell, Cefas.

The highlights were:

- Codwatch (a focus on cod) in the North Sea (NS), West of Scotland (WoS), Celtic and Irish Sea. The outlook remains poor for all three stocks.
- Benchmarks for NS whiting (improved), WoS whiting (revision of reference points) and Sole in area 7d (spawning stock biomass (SSB) increased).
- Industrial stocks – Norway pout (SSB will decline due to low recruitment in 2021 irrespective of fishing) and sandeel (a short-lived species with low recruitment in 2021).
- Major (>30%) changes for Greater silver smelt (Faroes & WoS), NS haddock, Rockall Megrim and NS Witch.

Discussion and Q&A

- **Q. Can you please briefly recap on how a change in category can lead to increased opportunity, even though the change may be in the direction of a more precautionary approach? It seems counter intuitive.**
A. A stock may be re-classified because there is something wrong with assessment and we are not sure about the absolute level. Category 3 assessment is when we know less about it. We take an index of where we think the stock is going. Using the precautionary approach, we will look at the biomass reference for the last two years and compare it with the previous three. If the stock index is going up, we will advise an increased catch. If the index is going down, we will advise a decrease in catch. If we are not sure about the absolute level, we will note if the stock was going up. But if a stock returns to Category 1 this means a re-scaling of where we want the stock to go. It is an emergent property and possibly counter intuitive. We may perhaps know less, and yet the management system gives you more.
- **Q. How do we escape the trap of the poorest stocks, such as North Sea cod, determining the catches of other key commercial species, such as whiting and haddock. Especially in the case where the abundance of cod in northern NS is far healthier than the NS basin wide science indicates? Is there a way out of this?**
A. It is very difficult. There are multiple stock units in the NS which are difficult to differentiate. All the information we have on age composition of the stock comes from the northern NS. We do have a problem of higher mortality in the northern NS. We need to be better about how we avoid catching the species that are depleted or struggling. We need more granularity about the traceability down to point of catch, and to be specific to a certain genetic component. This requires a step change in transparency of fishing effort, as well as in data collection and testing.

Pelagic stock status in the North East Atlantic. Steve Mackinson, Scottish Pelagic Fishermen’s Association.

The highlights were:

- North Sea herring – a benchmark has resulted in a revision of reference points which has big impact on advice despite the assessment of the stock being revised down. This has led to a higher catch advice for 2022 compared to 2021.
- Northeast Atlantic mackerel – 58% decrease in biomass compared with 2020.
- Blue whiting - Spawning biomass 2.4 mt. (44% decrease from 2019). >63% were age 5-7 years. The oldest and largest fish were found to the south this year (previously Rockall trough).

- The Coastal States agreed to follow the ICES scientific quota advice. There is no agreement yet how this will be shared out between the Coastal States.

| | Compared to 2021 TAC | UK quota 2021 to 2022 | Agreed TAC & UK quota | TAC basis* | ~Available Scientific quota UK (Scotland) |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|---|
|  <p>NE Atlantic mackerel</p> | -7% | tbc% | 794,920 t tbc t | Coastal states. | t (t) |
|  <p>Atlanto-Scandian herring</p> | -8% | tbc% | 598,588 t tbc t | Stock in one Party's waters. | t |
|  <p>Blue whiting</p> | -19% | tbc% | 752,736 t tbc t | Coastal states. | t (t) |

Discussion and Q&A

- Q. We noted the western expansion of NEA mackerel, and then the move back East. Has this phenomenon been noted before? Do we understand why that has happened? Could this happen again in the future**
- A.** Almost certainly this will continue into the future – this is ecological. Most certainly this has happened in the past. We do not have data to explain further. These international surveys must continue. We need to look at this expansion, which started in 2008. The more we do this the better. We have a large mackerel tagging database and a lot of current research activity to mine that data. We will learn more and more from the ongoing research to look at what is behind all these changes we are seeing. This will provide the basis Coastal States discussions

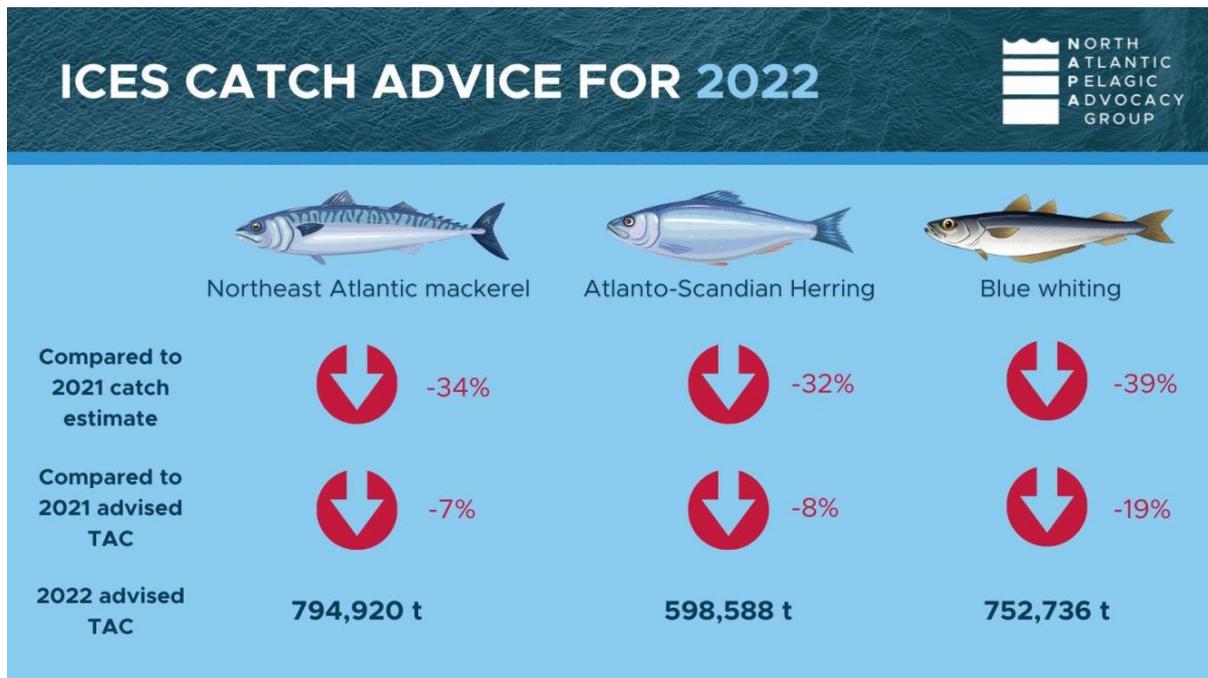
Further information

- [ICES advice on widely distributed fish stocks for 2022.](#) Steve Mackinson, SPFA.

Progress of the North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group. Tom Pickerell, NAPA.

- The history of NAPA was explained. NAPA Partners bought 127,270 tonnes of mackerel worth €180m; 784,683 tonnes of herring worth €486m; and 523,000 tonnes of blue whiting worth €136m.
- Overfishing has led to the suspension of MSC certification for NEA mackerel, Atlanto-scandian herring and NEA blue whiting. NAPA aims to secure: 1. An agreement on total allowable catches for these three stocks. 2. A long-term science-based management agreement.
- Advocacy - Our Asks of Coastal States**
 - Follow the Advice.** Regarding multilateral NEAFC coastal states negotiations on large pelagic stocks (mackerel, herring, and blue whiting), the contracting parties should ensure that the overall catch for each stock does not exceed scientific advice.
 - Management Plans.** Multi-annual management should be the underlying approach by default. All stakeholders benefit from agreeing to and working toward long-term sustainable management objectives. That includes stable sharing arrangements and harvest strategies that include precautionary harvest control rules for setting catch limits, a periodic review process, and any necessary mechanisms to transition from previous arrangements to a new system. The NAPA approach is Fishery Improvement Projects and to highlight the market consequences of inaction. A number of sourcing statements have been published.

- **Allocation.** Contracting parties should prioritise resolving the allocation issues around these stocks and re-establish the NEAFC WG on Allocation as a first step.



What can you do?



- ✓ **Join NAPA**
Greater numbers means greater influence. You can gain recognition for sourcing from the improvement projects. Demonstrate your leadership in the sustainability of North East Atlantic pelagic fisheries
- ✓ **Develop a clear position on sourcing**
Publish your position on North East Atlantic pelagic fisheries: What are you calling for and what will happen if the situation does not change?
- ✓ **Engage in Advocacy**
Write to Ministers, your suppliers, other membership organisations noting your requirements. ALL resources (lines to take, template text etc.) will be provided by NAPA.

Discussion and Q&A

- **Comment.** 300,000 mt was caught in international waters this year, it is pretty major. When this started in 2014 it was 100,000 mt. During this period we have seen TAC decline. It is a critical issue.
- **Q.** Why are NAPA producing options paper to outline potential solutions? What is their role? As a market-based initiative NAPA members are buyers, not primary producers, and as such do not hands-on influence.
A. The options papers cover three topics. 1. The option of a cap on international catches and what this could look like. 2. Dispute resolution how this has worked for other stocks. 3.

Allocation and how some other shared stocks have used different forms of allocation. These can be looked at to come to a solution, so information sharing and a prompt.

- **Q. Buyers trying to be helpful by recognising some of the challenges that could be part of the total solution. This new FIP concept with very few precursors. How confident are you that we are having an impact and can bring about an equitable allocation mechanism?**
- **A.** Pretty confident. The language at the Coastal States meeting was different to what we have heard before. There seems to be a recognition that this can't go on. We need to look at the bigger picture. This is year one of a three-year plan. We need to get a long-term management plan in place. Without pressure there is no urgency.

Further information

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