

North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group (NAPA)

After a decade of deadlock, it's time to seek help – NAPA's message to Coastal States

The [North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group](#) (NAPA) has released a [position paper](#) setting out concrete actions that Coastal States can take to resolve the problem of pervasive unilateral quota-setting and overfishing in Northeast Atlantic pelagic fisheries. In parallel with the Coastal States quota-sharing discussions, NAPA has come to the table with practical solutions – solutions that if taken seriously, could help Coastal States to agree on allocations for iconic pelagic species, for the first time in over a decade.

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For 13 years, annual disputes over quota allocations between Northeast Atlantic Coastal States fishing for prized, pelagic, shared-stock fisheries have resulted in a disregard for the scientific advice and overfishing. Since then, the combined TACs (total allowable catches) for Northeast Atlantic mackerel, Atlanto-Scandian herring, and Northeast Atlantic blue whiting have exceeded the scientific recommendations by 30-40% every year. As a consequence of this overfishing, and the absence of a long-term management strategy, fisheries in each stock have been stripped of their Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certifications, no longer boasting the recognisable and trusted blue tick that consumers have become familiar with.

The absence of MSC certification has meant that around 500,000 tonnes of MSC certified herring and 1 million tonnes of MSC certified mackerel and blue whiting respectively, have been lost to the supply chain and ultimately to consumers. The [North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group](#) (NAPA), a collective of retailers and supply-chain businesses with a commitment to sourcing sustainable pelagics, believes the solution is simple:

“What makes the unsustainable situation unfolding in Northeast Atlantic pelagic fisheries so frustrating is that the issues around their sustainability are purely political. Coastal States merely need to collectively agree on overall catch shares that follow the scientific advice. NAPA has been pushing hard to advocate for changes to the management of these stocks. Our new Position Paper sets out clear recommendations

of how to break the Coastal State deadlock over quota shares. If they are serious about wanting to do this; they should read with interest.” – Dr Tom Pickerell, NAPA Project Lead.

To fulfil its mission to drive sustainable change in these iconic fisheries, NAPA has now come to the table with a [Position Paper](#) setting out meaningful steps that Coastal States can take to achieve agreement on total allowable catches for mackerel, herring, and blue whiting. NAPA’s report argues that it is time for Coastal States to agree on an appropriate system for quota allocation, employ a dispute resolution mechanism, and consider a cap on international catches.

Agree an appropriate quota allocation system

NAPA’s urgent call for an allocation system within the Coastal States and North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) stems from the reality that if the parties cannot agree, there is no safety net in place to ensure the joint, sustainable management of the fisheries concerned. Adopting a fair allocation mechanism would ensure all Coastal States are better off engaging cooperatively. In addition, NAPA proposes that unilateral quotas should not be an option, full stop. If Coastal States fail to agree on shares of a TAC, maybe catches should be set to zero, or at the very least, considerably reduced.

Employ a dispute resolution mechanism

Fisheries negotiations by their very nature are complex. Achieving satisfactory resolutions is a daunting task. Frequently, dispute resolution mechanisms are used in fisheries negotiations, and these can incorporate conciliation, conflict resolution, mediation, and negotiation.

Since 1997, there have only been four years (2006-2009) in which Northeast Atlantic Coastal States have been in agreement on allocation of stock TACs for the three commercially important pelagic fisheries involved. NAPA believes that a dispute resolution mechanism would assist the parties in reaching a mutually acceptable agreement for these stocks.

Cap international catches

Limiting international catches – catches taken in the high seas – could act to counteract quota increases by Coastal States, according to NAPA. These reductions would not compensate for the current 30-40% overshoot of the scientific advice, but could act to constrain further overfishing.

NAPA reports that before the quota sharing talks took place last month, some Coastal States showed signs of settling into old habits. The EU, UK, and Norway pre-emptively set quotas for 2022 for some or all of the three fisheries.

“We are concerned that this sends an unhelpful message to other parties” said Aoife Martin, NAPA Chair. “While we do acknowledge that the fishing season for some fleets begins in January, our position is that preliminary, or nominal, quotas would have catered for this demand in advance of the sharing discussions rather than setting full quotas. We have written to the EU, UK, and Norway asking, for the

sake of productive negotiations, that they acknowledge their quotas are subject to the ongoing sharing discussions, and that they will be updated if needed. The UK has confirmed that this is the case for them.”

Following over a decade of failure to reach agreement, NAPA’s new [Position Paper](#) provides Coastal States with a set of options to consider. The power to make it happen lies in the hands of the seven NEAFC coastal nations, and their ability to work together.

Link to full report: <https://www.seafish.org/document/?id=c57abcb9-c1a8-4455-ab7e-f5a3bd1932fc>

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Notes to Editors:

More on NAPA

The [North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group](#) (NAPA) is a collective of more than 50 global retailers, food service companies, and suppliers with the shared aim of sourcing sustainable and certified seafood in order to supply a growing demand for sustainable, ecolabelled fish products. NAPA’s reach extends across the world, attracting members from Japan, Asia, and Africa, as well as the EU and UK. It represents an unprecedented coalition of business leverage, pushing hard to prevent overfishing of three iconic pelagic stocks - Northeast Atlantic mackerel, Atlanto-Scandian herring, and Northeast Atlantic blue whiting. As a collective, NAPA is using its voice to advocate for long-term, science-based management of these stocks: for prospering oceans and fisheries, and business security. To achieve this, NAPA is seeking an agreement on total allowable catches for Northeast Atlantic pelagic fisheries in line with scientific advice, and for a long-term science-based management agreement.

Further detail can be found at:

- NAPA website: <https://www.seafish.org/responsible-sourcing/fisheries-management/north-atlantic-pelagic-advocacy-group/>
- Twitter: [@NAPAfisheries](https://twitter.com/NAPAfisheries)