



# ACTION PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Prepared by



## 1. About the North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group

The North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group is a market-led approach to improve North Atlantic pelagic<sup>1</sup> fisheries management. Partners are retailers, food service companies and suppliers and aim to secure an agreement on total allowable catches for these fisheries in line with scientific advice, and for a long-term science-based management agreement.

## 2. Background

The Northeast Atlantic sustains a number of pelagic fish stocks, the most important of which are Northeast Atlantic mackerel (*Scomber scombrus*), Norwegian Spring Spawning (Atlanto-scandian) herring (*Clupea harengus*), and Northeast Atlantic blue whiting (*Micromesistius poutassou*). All these stocks are classified as straddling stocks in the sense that they not only cross boundaries between the EEZs of coastal states, but also traverse the high seas areas between those boundaries.

The North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) was formed to recommend measures to maintain the rational exploitation of fish stocks in the Atlantic and Arctic Oceans. To manage mackerel, herring and blue whiting, NEAFC's Contracting Parties<sup>2</sup> adopt management measures and allocations for the whole distribution area of the fish stocks.

The allocation of national quotas is based on allocation keys; many of these allocations were established when the 200 nm EEZs were established in the late 1970s. These keys are to a large extent based on the coastal states' fishing records during the period 1971–76 and has subsequently and with only a few amendments been used by the European Union (EU) for the annual allocation of fishing quotas among its Member States.

However, the changing distribution of these three species (Box 1) has led to demands for a share of the catch by those countries that have little history of it. However, the parties have not been able to reach a satisfactory agreement on quotas. The 'new' countries have called for cuts to EU and Norwegian quotas to allow them to take more of the stock but the EU and Norway have been unwilling to reduce their quotas to the extent demanded.

The continuing disputes over quota allocation in the North East Atlantic is resulting in annual catches well in excess of the advised catches and has already led to the suspension of all mackerel MSC certificates and put the herring and blue whiting MSC certifications at risk of suspension in early 2021.

To address this, the total combined fishing mortality in each stock needs to be brought down to a level which is consistent with scientific advice and management plans responsive to the fluctuation in the fish stocks needs to be implemented.

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<sup>1</sup> Northeast Atlantic mackerel (*Scomber scombrus*), Norwegian Spring Spawning (Atlanto-scandian) herring (*Clupea harengus*), and Northeast Atlantic blue whiting (*Micromesistius poutassou*).

<sup>2</sup> (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland (DFG)), the EU (Presumably the UK will seek admission as a contracting party following Brexit), Iceland, Norway and the Russian Federation

#### Box 1: Changing Distribution of Stocks

Mackerel spends most of the year in UK/EU waters, but a large part of the stock migrates into the eastern part of the Norwegian Sea and the North Sea from June to October. In recent years the mackerel migration has changed, potentially due to climate change, so that more mackerel are now found in northern waters.

Herring mainly inhabit Norwegian waters throughout the life cycle, but can migrate into Russian waters during the juvenile phase, and into Faroese, Icelandic and international waters as adults during the feeding period in the summer. Also, as with mackerel, herring distribution has changed in the last two decades.

Northeast Atlantic blue whiting is mainly found in the Norwegian Sea throughout the year, but spawns west of the British Isles in February-May. The stock is located in Norwegian, Icelandic, Faroese and EU waters, but the large-scale distribution pattern varies and is related to total stock size and water temperatures.

### 3. Actions and next steps

NAPA has developed an Action Plan to achieve its aims of securing an agreement on total allowable catches for these fisheries in line with scientific advice, and for a long-term science-based management agreement.

The Action Plan focuses on:

- Advocacy of NEAFC for management measures to ensure herring and blue whiting maintain their certifications.
- Developing and implementing a 'policy' Fisheries Improvement Project which seeks to address the governance issues affecting the management of the three fisheries.
- Reinstating the NEAFC Working Group for Allocation Criteria as a key input into delivering a robust catch allocation mechanism.
- Working with the MSC to revisit its standard on Yo-Yo fisheries (fisheries that repeatedly secure and then lose certification).
- Supporting blue whiting to enter the IFFO RS (MarinTrust) improver program, if MSC certification is lost, if sought

In addition, the following areas will be assessed to determine if they should be included as priority actions:

- Explore the feasibility of MSC certification being reinstated for the Mackerel Industry Northern Sustainability Alliance (MINSAs) and Faroese mackerel fisheries.
- Enabling the catching sector to establish a quota agreement amongst the six fishing nations.
- Setting a cap on catching in international waters.

The strategy for delivery the Action Plan will be via a 'policy FIP' which will encompass all necessary improvement areas such engagement and advocacy, as well as Group feedback to the MSC fisheries standard review.

#### **4. Membership**

NAPA is a European initiative that welcomes members from the processing and retail sectors with an interest in pelagic fisheries. If you would like further information on how to join NAPA please contact Aoife Martin at [aoife.martin@seafish.co.uk](mailto:aoife.martin@seafish.co.uk)