

North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group (NAPA)

Spillage of 100,000 blue whittings a ‘drop in the ocean’ in comparison to routine overfishing by Coastal States, says global supply chain collective

The North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group (NAPA) says the ‘huge bank of dead fish’¹ seen off the coast of France last week is small fry - highlighting that over 1,700,000,000 blue whittings are overfished annually, due to Northeast Atlantic fishing nations failing to respect scientific advice for the stock: ‘This is the real scandal’ says Executive Director, Tom Pickerell.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The news.

A recent, widespread news story concerning the mass discharge of blue whiting from the FV Margiris into the Bay of Biscay has caught the attention of the media, environmentalists, and top politicians.

The ‘floating carpet of dead fish’² found off the French coast by the campaign group Sea Shepherd, has sparked a contentious debate. Fishing industry group, the Pelagic Freezer-Trawler Association (PFA), which represents the vessel's owner, has stated the incident was caused by a rare rupture in the trawler's net. Sea Shepherd claims it was an illegal discharge of over 100,000 unwanted fish. Nevertheless, the 100,000 blue whiting lost in this incident will be deducted from the vessel's quota.

France's Maritime Minister, Annick Girardin, has asked France's national fishing surveillance authority to launch an investigation into the accident. EU Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, Virginijus Sinkevicius has also [called for an enquiry](#).

The facts and figures.

100,000 blue whiting amounts to around 18 tonnes of discarded fish. While this is undoubtedly a concerning amount, in 2021, Northeast Atlantic Coastal States³ set the quota for exactly the same blue

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60266117>

² <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/floating-carpet-dead-fish-found-off-french-coast-after-trawler-incident-2022-02-04/>

³ UK, EU, Norway, Iceland, Faroe Islands, Greenland & Russia



whiting at 313,435 tonnes above scientific advice for sustainable fishing (929,292 tonnes). That's an overshoot of 34%.

Blue whiting weighs on average 180g, so in terms of volume, this represents an 'over catch' of around 1,741,305,556 (1.7 billion) blue whittings, making the loss of 100,000 fish look like a mere drop in the ocean.

The reality.

Blue whiting is a prized, pelagic quota species of the Northeast Atlantic, predominantly used for fish oil and feed. Because of overfishing, it was stripped of its Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification in 2020, no longer boasting the widely recognised blue tick that consumers have come to know and trust for its sustainability credentials.

Why?

Coastal States have been setting catch levels above the established scientific advice for this stock for over a decade.

This unsustainable situation is driven by politics. Namely, the fractious politics of the countries participating in the shared-stock pelagic fisheries of the Northeast Atlantic – one of the most observed, assessed, understood, and rich areas for fishing in the world. Coastal States have all the evidence and resources within their grasp to come to the table with a clear roadmap to sustainability. But they continually fail to cooperate to achieve this. The power to make it happen lies in the hands of the seven Northeast Atlantic coastal nations, and their ability to work together.

Coastal States need to agree on catch shares that follow the scientific advice, implement management plans for these stocks, and set up a system to resolve allocation issues - where different nations take a different stance on what they're 'owed' from a share of the overall available catch for the stock. Robustly-managed, healthy, and sustainable fisheries must be the end goal - and in such a rich and evolved fishing area, should be the norm.

Who are we?

The [North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group](#) (NAPA) is an unprecedented coalition of businesses pushing hard to prevent overfishing of Northeast Atlantic blue whiting, alongside two other iconic pelagic stocks: Northeast Atlantic mackerel and Atlanto-Scandian herring.

NAPA was created to advocate for long-term, sustainable management of Northeast Atlantic pelagic fisheries, and is sector-wide, multi-stakeholder, global and non-competitive. Since its inception, NAPA

has attracted over 50 partner organisations from across the world - covering food service businesses, processors, buyers and retailers from Europe, Africa, Australia, North America, and Japan. As a collective of businesses with an €802 million share of Northeast Atlantic pelagic purchasing, NAPA is directly invested in the responsible, science-driven management of these fisheries.

What happens if Coastal States fail?

If no improvements in line with scientific advice are made, NAPA partners may be forced to re-think their purchasing decisions. To date, 23 partners have made public statements setting out the consequences of continued management failure of these fisheries.

Eleven companies have said they will review their sourcing, five will no longer source from these fisheries, four will only source from those Coastal States acting 'responsibly', and three noted the negative business impacts they would face.

*“For anyone concerned about last week’s blue whiting shed by the FV Margiris, there’s an even bigger, more systemic issue at play” says **NAPA Executive Director, Tom Pickerell**. “Coastal States need to be held accountable for overfishing blue whiting, mackerel, and herring at levels as high as 30-40% above scientific advice. Their actions risk the sustainability of these stocks and the balance of Northeast Atlantic ecosystems. This is the real scandal that the media should be writing about.”*

So as an irregular spill of 18 tonnes of blue whiting hits the headlines, meanwhile, over 300,000 tonnes of fish from the same stock are being irresponsibly exploited by Coastal States every year. The unified voice of the marketplace asserts that this is the real scandal. One that cannot be allowed to continue.

****ENDS****

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Notes to Editors:

More on NAPA



The [North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group](https://www.seafish.org/responsible-sourcing/fisheries-management/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)