

Let the small fish play their big role in the ocean



Northeast Atlantic forage fish

What are forage fish?

Forage fish, also called prey fish, are **small to medium-sized schooling species** that live in the water column. They usually feed on planktonic animals and plants, **contributing significantly** to the diets of many marine animals higher up the food web

35 cm

GREAT SILVER SMELT

MACKEREL

HERRING

NORWAY POUT

12 cm

SPRAT

CAPELIN

SANDEEL

ANCHOVY

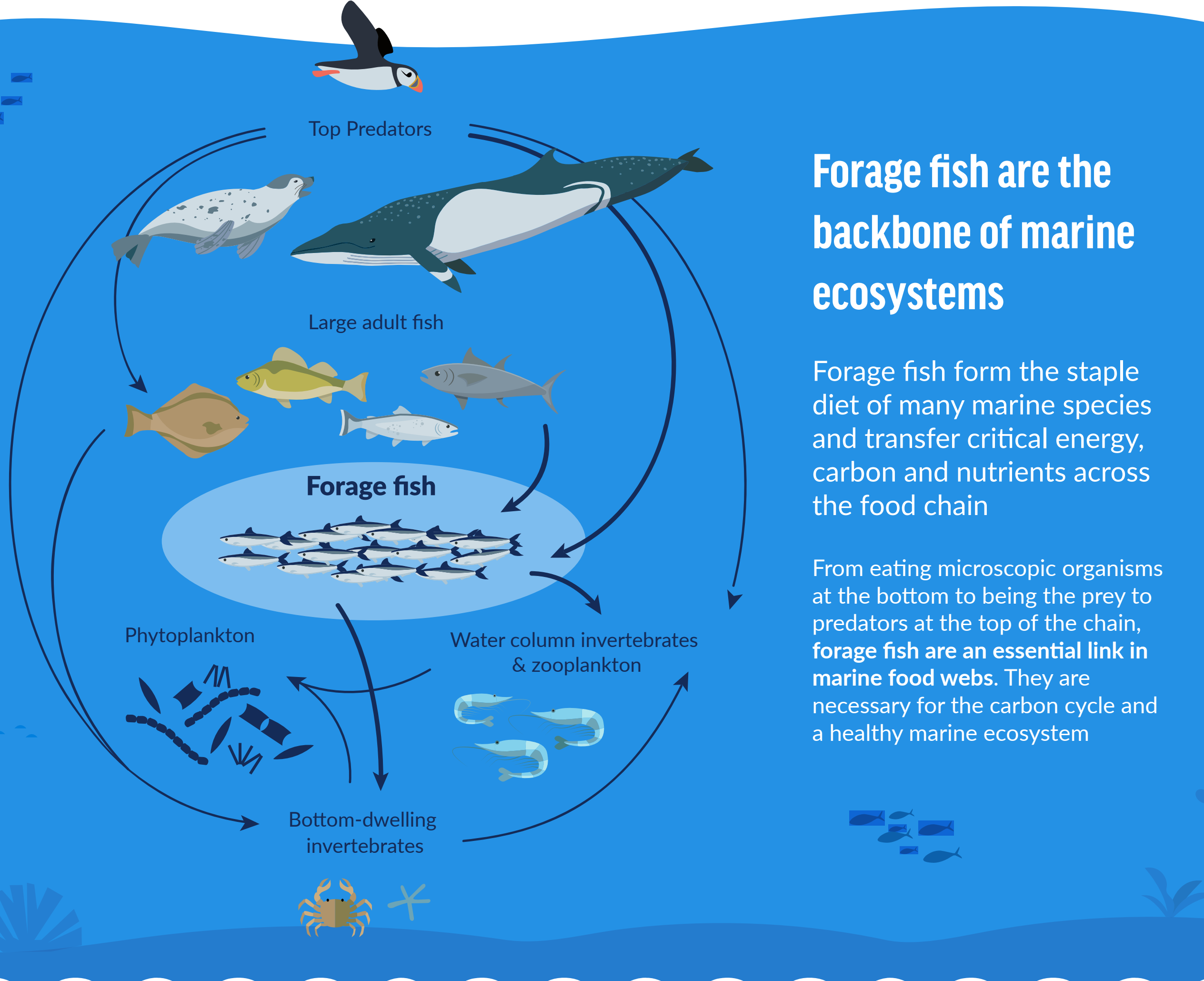
EXAMPLES OF FORAGE FISH SPECIES

Over **1/2** of total fisheries landings

They are among the top landed fish

They are caught for human consumption

and also for industrial purposes



A vital food source for other species

CARNIVOROUS FISH

like Atlantic cod and whiting, consumer favourites and highly profitable species

SEABIRDS

like the black-legged kittiwake and puffin, depend on forage fish as their primary source of food

MARINE MAMMALS

like the grey seal, harbour porpoise and minke whale, depend on forage fish

A bountiful **ABUNDANCE OF FORAGE FISH IS NECESSARY** to support healthy marine ecosystems!

A low supply of forage fish can reduce predator abundance, particularly when forage supply is low near their important breeding habitats

Why do we need to manage forage fish more carefully?

1 They are **KEY FOR A BALANCED ECOSYSTEM**

2 They are increasingly **VULNERABLE TO CLIMATE CHANGE**

3 They are **SENSITIVE TO ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES** and harm

4 Fisheries management disregards their **IMPORTANCE AS FOOD FOR PREDATORS**

5 Often **CATCH LIMITS ARE SET ABOVE SCIENTIFIC ADVICE**, perpetuating their overfishing

What can be done to protect these little fish and facilitate their big role in the ocean?

Northeast Atlantic countries have committed to adopt an **ecosystem-based and precautionary approach** towards managing forage fish, but they now need to put words into action

When managing forage fish, NE Atlantic countries should:

1 **ADOPT PRECAUTIONARY MANAGEMENT DECISIONS**

By closing fisheries or setting fishing limits well below the maximum catch advice, to account for their ecosystem role, and improve species' resilience to pressures

2 **IMPROVE SCIENTIFIC ASSESSMENTS**

By adding predator and interspecies considerations into natural mortality estimates, to account for their ecological role and align with precautionary principles

3 **IDENTIFY AND PROTECT KEY HABITATS**

To protect forage fish and foraging grounds of dependent predators

4 **EVALUATE AND ADOPT MANAGEMENT PLANS ALIGNED WITH ECOLOGICAL GOALS**

To ensure the long-term viability of the fisheries and marine ecosystem

5 **BAN THE EXPANSION AND OPENING OF NEW FORAGE FISHERIES IN THE NE ATLANTIC**

To ensure a full analysis has been done into their impact on the ecosystem