Oceana fishing opportunities recommendations for 2014

North East Atlantic stocks

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In advance of the next EU Council decision on fishing opportunities for stocks in the North East Atlantic in 2014, Oceana would like to provide a constructive opinion on how fishing opportunities should be set. It is our hope that the Council takes into account the recommendations contained in this document and proposes Total Allowable Catch (TAC) levels that are in line with scientific advice, thereby balancing conservation and exploitation objectives.

Fishing opportunities for 2014 will be the first to be adopted after the agreement on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy. Oceana is confident that the Council decision will reflect the objectives and commitments agreed in the future regulation, in particular those related to the sustainable exploitation of fish resources, the setting of fishing opportunities, and maximum sustainable yield (MSY).

Xavier Pastor, Executive Director of Oceana Europe

Introduction

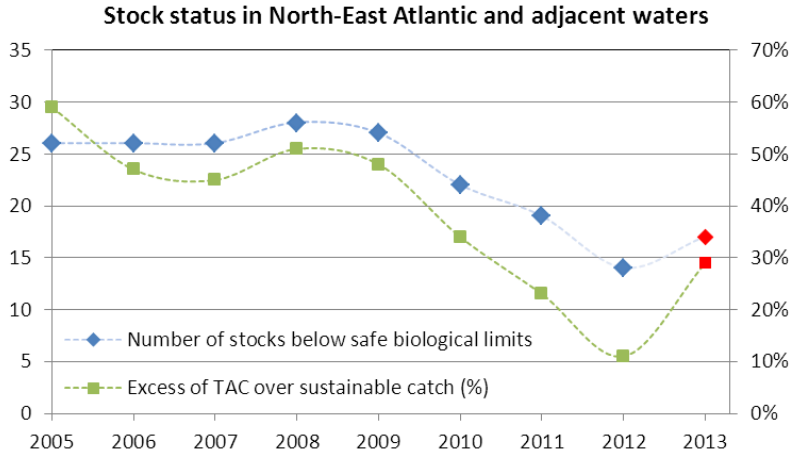
State of resources

The status of fisheries stocks in the North East Atlantic and adjacent waters has displayed a positive trend in recent years that could be summarized in the reduction of the percentage of stocks overexploited, from around 90% in the mid-2000s to 39% in 2013[1]. Oceana values this progress but also recognizes that pressure is still needed to reduce this rate and phase out overfishing.

[1] COM(2013) 319. Communication from the Commission concerning a consultation on Fishing Opportunities for 2014.

Oceana wants to highlight several concerns about the fisheries indicators contained in the Commission communication that threaten the sustainable exploitation of stocks in the North East Atlantic.

Fishing opportunities cannot exceed sustainable catch values without leading to overexploitation. There has been a steady decrease in the disparity between established TACs and sustainable catch values (in %) since 2008, dropping to its lowest rate of 11% in 2012. However, this value increased by 163% in 2013 and now stands at 29%. This shows a clear step back in the management of resources that leads to deterioration in the state of the stocks.



In addition, the number of stocks below safe biological limits has increased by 21% in the last year, from 14 stocks in 2012 to 17 in 2013, although this trend may also be in response to an increase in the number of stocks evaluated. Regardless, after decades of fisheries management it does not make sense that there are still 17 NE Atlantic stocks of species as common as cod, haddock, or herring that remain at levels below safe biological limits (Blim). To put an end to this deplorable situation, the setting of TACs in these particular cases must guarantee the recovery of stock biomass over precautionary limits as soon as possible and comply more than ever

with scientific advice. Examples of stocks below Blim included in this proposal are:

- Cod in the West of Scotland, the Irish Sea and the Kattegat,
- Haddock in the Faeroes Grounds,
- Herring in the South of West of Scotland, West of Ireland, and Porcupine Bank,
- Sole in the Irish Sea, and
- Whiting in the West of Scotland and Irish Sea

On the other hand, the number of fish stocks that are exploited at MSY, or are on their way to reaching MSY by 2015, continues to increase. Unfortunately, despite the Commission´s recommendation[2], currently only 25 out of the 77 Atlantic stocks, for which scientific advice concerning fishing opportunities is available, are known to be fished at MSY rate, and thus fulfil international commitments[3] and agreements of the future CFP. For the rest of stocks, they either do not comply with the MSY framework because they are in breach of scientific advice, or, because of a lack of data, no fishing rate vis à vis MSY is available. Recovering stocks to levels above MSY is essential to economic efficiency**,** as restoring stock productivity and ecosystem health will result in better revenues for fishers and will improve the welfare of fishing communities.

Data-poor stocks

Currently the status of 41 stocks, which make up half of all scientifically assessed stocks, in the North East Atlantic and adjacent waters, is unknown. This means that implemented fishing opportunities can neither guarantee sustainable exploitation, nor can they guarantee reaching MSY. This situation applies for example to most of the main stocks of species like anglerfish or megrim. To remedy this situation and improve the management of these stocks, ICES introduced in 2012, the use of alternative assessment methods appropriate for data-poor stocks[4] to provide quantitative catch recommendations where possible.

Oceana welcomes the use of these models, which will allow the use of best available scientific information to implement precautionary management measures and increase the number of stocks covered by scientific advice. However, Oceana defends that the assessments realized using data-poor stock analyses should only lead to maintaining the TAC at the same level or decreasing it, and only in select few cases should they lead to an increase in the TAC. In this way the precautionary approach will be applied and Member States will be encouraged to provide accurate information on fisheries to develop sound assessments.

Management plans

Oceana supports the Commission and Council intention to move from single-stock/species management plans towards multi-species management plans that not only take into consideration species and fisheries interactions but also the effects on the ecosystem. This new type of multiannual plan (MAP) should integrate specific measures to minimize unwanted catches and the overshooting of TACs, reduce fishing impacts on marine habitats, and protect essential fish habitats. In this manner, they should also contribute to achieving the objective under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive[5] to restore or maintain the good environmental status of marine waters by 2020. Oceana also welcomes the efforts to start providing multispecies advice in the North Sea and Baltic Sea.

While some of the MAPs already in place are working properly, several are poorly implemented and are not providing positive results

[2] COM (2006) 360. Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament. Implementing sustainability in EU fisheries through maximum sustainable yield.
[3] UN. 2002. World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), Johannesburg, South Africa.
[4] ICES. 2012. ICES Implementation of Advice for Data-limited Stocks in 2012 in its 2012 Advice. ICES CM 2012/ACOM 68. 42pp.
[5] Directive 2008/56/EC. Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

in terms of stock recovery and effort reduction, in particular those for cod in Irish Sea, haddock in West of Scotland and nephrops and hake in the southern Bay of Biscay. Oceana therefore calls for a review of these plans. Furthermore ICES recommends reviewing the management objectives of other management plans like the ones for cod in the North Sea, Eastern English Channel and Norwegian Sea, and highlights the fact that other management plans, like the one for herring in the West of Scotland, have not been evaluated by a scientific advisory body to confirm that they follow the precautionary approach.

The institutional dispute, which is the reason why several MAPs are in limbo, including those for anchovy in the Bay of Biscay, Baltic salmon and western horse mackerel, must be urgently resolved so as to facilitate the increase in the number of stocks managed through MAPs. Especially considering that ICES is recommending the implementation of new management plans for other stocks, like herring in the West of Scotland (South) and West of Ireland, Porcupine Bank and English Channel.

Management areas

Management areas should be consistent with the distribution of the stocks, however there are several cases where, for historical reasons, the management areas do not fit with the biological stock area nor with the scientific assessment area, hindering the popper management of the stocks.

The well-known case of the Norway lobster, for which scientific advisory bodies are recommending management based on functional units for the main stocks, which are smaller in size than the ICES areas and base on the preferential distribution of the species. Currently, the same TAC covers different functional units and vessels are free to move between grounds, allowing fishing effort to develop on some grounds in a largely uncontrolled way and this has historically resulted in inappropriate harvest rates and resource depletion.

Main examples contained in this proposal for which the management area partially covers other stocks are:

- anglerfish in the Celtic Sea, West of Scotland and North Sea;
- the haddock management area (VIIb-k, VIII, IX, X) does not correspond to the stock assessment area (VIIb-k);
- megrim in Rockall and whiting in Eastern English Channel that should be separated from the rest of areas and treated as a single stocks; and
- the assessment area of the whiting stock does not correspond to the TAC area (VIIb-k)

Commission´s principles for proposing TACs for 2014

The Commission has proposed the following principles to set fishing opportunities for 2014:

1. Apply harvest control rules consistent with what is contained in long-term management plans;
2. Implement TACs and other measures that have already been agreed with third countries;
3. Set TACs in accordance with scientific advice and with the ICES “MSY framework” to reach MSY by 2015;
4. Use qualitative analysis to set TACs for poor data stocks; and
5. Apply the precautionary approach where there is no scientific advice.

Oceana supports these guidelines as a commitment to reduce overfishing and rebuild fish stocks to their most productive levels. However, what is missing is a specific principle for setting TACs for the stocks that are below safe biological limits in order to restore them within precautionary limits in 2014.

Oceana TACs proposal (in tonnes) for North East Atlantic stocks. Brackets compare TAC difference in % from previous year

Species	Fishing area	TAC 2013	EU Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
Ammodytes spp.	Norwegian Waters of IV	Not relevant	Not relevant	Below Blim,PA and unknown (IVa,b, IIIa), completely unknown (IIa)	0 (0%)
Ammodytes spp.	EU Waters of IIa, IIIa and IV	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	Below Blim, PA and unknown (IVa,b,c), below Blim and unknown (IIIa), completely unknown (IIa)	0 (0%)
Argentina silus	EU and international waters of I and II	90 (-5%)	90 (0%)	Unknown (EU and int waters I and II)	81 (-10%)
Argentina silus	EU waters of III and IV	1028 (-5%)	1028 (0%)	Unknown (EU waters of III and IV)	925 (-10%)
Argentina silus	EU and international waters of V, VI and VII	4316 0%)	3798 (-12%)	Unknown (EU and int waters V, VI and VII	3700 (-14%)
Brosme brosme	IIIa and EU waters of 22-32	29 (+20%)	29 (0%)	Unknown but above possible reference points (IIIa), completely unknown (22-32)	29 (0%)
Brosme brosme	EU and international waters of I, II and XIV	21 (0%)	21 (0%)	Unknown (I, II), unknown but above possible reference points (XIV)	21 (0%)
Brosme brosme	EU waters of IV	235 (+20%)	235 (0%)	Unknown but above possible reference points (IV)	235 (0%)
Brosme brosme	EU and international waters of V, VI and VII	353 (+20%)	pm	Unknown (VIb), unknown but above possible reference points (Va,b, VIa, VII)	353 (0%)
Brosme brosme	Norwegian waters of IV	Not relevant	pm	Unknown but above possible reference points (IV)	Not relevant
Caproidae	EU and international waters of VI, VI, VIIII	82000 (0%)	127509 (+55%)	Above possible reference points	123820 (+51%)
Clupea harengus	IIIa	31500 (-19%)	pm	Above PA (IV)	30870 (-2%)
Clupea harengus	Union and Norwegian waters of IV (N 53º03´)	170099 (-30%)	pm	Above PA (IV)	166697 (-2%)
Clupea harengus	Norwegian waters south of 62ºN	Unknown	pm	Above PA (IV)	? (-2%)
Clupea harengus	By-catches IIIa	4661 (-30%)	pm	Below PA (IIIa)	4661 (0%)
Clupea harengus	By-catches IV, VIId and Union waters of IIa	12529 (-30%)	pm	Above PA (IV, VIId), completely unknown (IIa)	12529 (0%)
Clupea harengus	IVc, VIId	31185 (-30%)	pm	Above PA (IVc, VIId)	30561 (-2%)
Clupea harengus	Vb, VIb, VIa (N)	27480 (+20%)	pm	Completely unknown (Vb, VIb) Unknown (VIaN)	28067 (+2%)
Clupea harengus	VIa (S), VIIb, VIIc	1500 (-65%)	pm	Below safe biological limits (VIaS, VIIbc)	0 (-100%)
Clupea harengus	VI Clyde	?	pm (UK)	?	?

Species	Fishing area	TAC 2013	EU Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
Clupea harengus	VIIa	4993 (+5%)	5251 (+5%)	Above MSY B trigger (VIIaN and S)	5243 (+5%)
Clupea harengus	VIIe and VIIf	931 (-5%)	931 (0%)	Completely unknown (VIIe,f)	791 (-15%)
Clupea harengus	VIIg, VIIh, VIIj, VIIk	17200 (-18%)	22360 (+30%)	Above MSY B trigger (VIIg-k)	22360 (+30%)
Engraulis encrasicolus	IX, X and CECAF 34.1.1	8778 (+5%)	8778 (0%)	Unknown (IXa) and completely unknown (IXb, X and CECAF 34.1.1	7461 (-15%)
Gadus morhua	IIIa (West)	2561 (-30%)	pm	Below Blim (IIIa-W)	2254 (-12%)
Gadus morhua	IIIa (East-kattegat)	100 (-24%)	80 (-20%)	Below Blim (IIIa-E)	0 (-100%)
Gadus morhua	IV, EU waters of IIa, IIIa not covered by Ska y Kat	15382 (-30%)	pm	Below Blim (IV), Unknown (IIa),	13536 (-12)
Gadus morhua	Norwegian Waters S of 62ºN	Not relevant	pm	Below Blim (IV, IIIa), Unknown (IIa),	Not relevant
Gadus morhua	VIb, EU and international Waters of Vb (west of 12ºW), XII and XIV	74 (-5%)	74 (0%)	Unknown (VIb, XIV), Below PA (Vb1) Completely Unknown (XII)	70 (-5%)
Gadus morhua	VIa, EU and international Waters of Vb (east of 12ºW)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	Below Blim (VIa), Below PA (Vb1) Unknown (Vb2)	0 (0%)
Gadus morhua	VIIa	285 (-25%)	228 (-20%)	Below Blim (VIIa)	0 (-100%)
Gadus morhua	VIIb, VIIc, VIIe, VIIf, VIIg, VIIh, VIIj, VIIk, VIII, IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1 (EU)	10200 (+1%)	6848 (-33%)	Above MSY (VIIe-k) Completely unknown (VIIbc, VIII, IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1)	6848 (-33%)
Gadus morhua	VIId	1080 (-30%)	pm	Below Blim (VIId)	950 (-12%)
Lamna nasus	I to XIV, French Guyana, Kattegat, EU waters of Skagerrak, EU waters of CECAF	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	Completely Unknown (IIa, IVbc), above MSY B trigger (IVa)	0 (0%)
Lepidorhombus spp.	EU Waters of IIa and IV	1937 (+5%)	2083 (+8%)	Completely Unknown (IIa, IVbc), above MSY B trigger (IVa)	2083 (+8%)
Lepidorhombus spp.	VI, EU and international Waters of Vb, intern waters of XII and XIV	3387 (0%)	4074 (+20%)	Above MSY B trigger (VIa), Unknown uptrend (VIb) Completely unknown (Vb, XII, XIV)	4074 (+20%)
Lepidorhombus spp.	VII	17385 (0%)	13908 (-20%)	Unknown uptrend (VIIb-k), Completely unknown (VIIa)	10922 (-37%)
Lepidorhombus spp.	VIIIa, VIIIb, VIIId, VIIIe	1716 (0%)	1373 (-20%)	Unknown uptrend (VIIabd), Completely unknown (VIIIe)	1078 (-37%)
Lepidorhombus spp.	VIIIc IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1 (EU)	1214 (0%)	2257 (+86%)	Completely unknown (IXb, X, CECAF 34.1.1), unknown stable and increasing (VIIIc, IXa)	2257 (+86%) or 1821 (+50%)
Limanda limanda & Platichthys flesus	EU waters of IIa and IV	18434 (0%)	14747 (-20%)	DAB- completely unknown (IIa), unknown (IV) FLE- completely unknown (IIa), unknown (IV)	14747 (-20%)
Lophiidae	EU Waters of IIa and IV	8703 (-5%)	6962 (-20%)	Unknown negative trend (IV), Completely unknown (IIa)	6962 (-20%)

Species	Fishing area	TAC 2013	EU Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
Lophiidae	Norwegian Waters of IV	Not relevant	pm	Unknown negative trend (IV)	Not relevant
Lophiidae	VI, EU and international waters of Vb , international waters of XII and XIV	4924 (-5%)	3939 (-20%)	Unknown negative trend for (VI). Completely unknown (Vb, XII, XIV)	3939 (-20%)
Lophiidae	VII	29144 (-5%)	29144 (0%)	Unknown positive trend for (VIIb-k). Completely unknown (VIIa)	29534 (+1%)
Lophiidae	VIIIa, VIIIb, VIIId, VIIIe	7809 (-5%)	7809 (0%)	Unknown positive trend for (VIIIabd). Completely unknown (VIIIe)	7914 (+1%)
Lophiidae	VIIIc, IX, X, and CECAF34.1.1 (EU)	2475 (-25%)	2629 (+6%)	Unknown but stable trend and possibly above MSY* (VIIIc, IXa). Completely unknown IXb, X, CECAF 34.1.1	2629 (+6%)
Melanogrammus aeglefinus	IIIa, EU waters of IIIb,c,d (22-32)	1616 (-30%)	pm	Above MSY B trigger (IIIa W), Completely unknown (IIIaE,b,c,d)	1260 (-22%)
Melanogrammus aeglefinus	IV, EU Waters of IIa	27417 (-9%)	pm	Above MSY B trigger (IV, IIa)	21385 (-22%)
Melanogrammus aeglefinus	Norwegian waters of South 62º	Not relevant	pm	Above MSY B trigger (IV, IIIa west)	Not relevant
Melanogrammus aeglefinus	EU and Internat Waters of VIb, XII and XIV	990 (-70%)	1210 (+22%)	Below PA (VIb), Completely unknown (XII, XIV)	980 (-1%)
Melanogrammus aeglefinus	EU and international waters of Vb, VIa	4211 (-30%)	3988 (-5%)	Below Blim (Vb) Above PA and MSY B trigger (VIa)	3238* (-23%)
Melanogrammus aeglefinus	VIIa	1189 (-5%)	951 (-20%)	Unknown uptrend (VIIa)	1189 (0%)
Melanogrammus aeglefinus	VIIb-k, VIII, IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1 (EU)	14148 (-15%)	3602 (-75%)	Above MSY B trigger (VIIb-k) Completely unknown (VIII, IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1)	3602 (-75%)
Merlangius merlangius	IIIa	721 (-30%)	pm	Unknown (IIIa)	500 (-30%)
Merlangius merlangius	IV, EU waters of IIa	11940 (-24%)	pm	Unknown – above Blim (IV) Completely unknown (IIa)	11701 (-2%)
Merlangius merlangius	VI EU and international waters of Vb, international waters of XII and XIV	292 (-5%)	234 (-20%)	Below Blim (VIa), unknown (VIb) Completely unknown (Vb, XII, XIV)	11* (-96%)
Merlangius merlangius	VIIa	84 (-6%)	67 (-20%)	Below Blim (VIIa)	0 (-100%)
Merlangius merlangius	VIIb-h, VIIj-k	24500 (+28%)	pm	Above MSY (VIIe-k), Unknown (VIId), Completely unknown (VIIb-c)	22540 (-8%)
Merlangius merlangius	VIII	3175 (0%)	2540 (-20%)	Unknown (VIII)	2540 (-20%)
Merlangius merlangius	IX, X,CECAF (EU)	?	pm (Portugal)	IXa (unknown) Completely unknown (IXb, X, CECAF 34.1.1)	(-20%)
Merlangius merlangius & Pollachius pollachius	Norwegian waters south of 62ºN	Not relevant	pm-Not relevant	WHG- Unknown above Blim (IV), unlnown (IIIa) POL- Unknown (IIIa, IV)	Not relevant
Merluccius merluccius	IIIa, EU waters of IIIb and IIIc, IIId (22-32)	1661 (0%)	2466 (+49%)	Possibly above MSY (IIIa) & Completely unknown (IIIbcd)	1910 (+15%) or 2466 (+49%)

Species	Fishing area	TAC 2013	EU Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
Merluccius merluccius	EU waters of IIa and IV	1935 (0%)	2874 (+49%)	Completely unknown (IIa) & Possibly above MSY (IV)	2225 (+15%) or 2874 (+49%)
Merluccius merluccius	VI, VII, EU waters of Vb, int waters of XII, XIV	30900 (0%)	45896 (+49%)	Possibly above MSY (VI, VII) & Completely unknown (Vb, XII, XIV)	35535 (+15%) or 45896 (+49%)
Merluccius merluccius	VIIIa, VIIIb, VIIId, VIIIe	20609 (0%)	30610 (+49%)	Possibly above MSY (VIIIabd) & Completely unknown (VIIIe)	23700 (+15%) or 30610(+49%)
Merluccius merluccius	VIIIc, IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1 (EU)	14144 (+15%)	16266 (+15%)	Unknown uptrend (VIIIc, IXa), Completely unknown (IXb, X, CECAF 34.1.1)	12022 (-15%)
Micromesistius poutassou	Norwegian Waters of II and IV	0 (0%)	pm	Above MSY B trigger (II, IV),	0 (+48%)
Micromesistius poutassou	EU and internat Waters of I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIIIa,b,d,e, XII, XIV	110845 (+75%)	pm	Above MSY B trigger (II, IIIa, IV V, VI, VII, VIIIabde, XII, XI),	164050 (+48%)
Micromesistius poutassou	VIIIc, IX, X, EU waters of CECAF 34.1.1 (EU)	11369 (+13%)	pm	Above MSY B trigger (VIIIc, IX), completely unknown (X, CECAF 34.1.1)	16826 (+48%)
Micromesistius poutassou	EU waters of II, IVa, V, VI north of 56º30´N and VII west of 12ºW	Not relevant	pm	Above MSY B trigger (II, IVa, V, VI, VII)d	Not relevant (+48%)
Microstomus & Glyptocephalus	EU waters II, IV	6391 (0%)	5924 (-7%)	WIT – Unknown (IV) & completely unknown (II) WHB – Unknown (IV) & completely unknown (II)	5432 (-15%)
Molva dypterigia	International waters of XII	774 (-5%)	619 (-20%)	Unknown below possible reference points (International waters of XII)	0 (-100%)
Molva dypterigia	EU waters and international waters of II, IV	53 (-5%)	53 (0%)	Unknown below possible reference points (II, Iva)	0 (-100%)
Molva dypterigia	EU waters and international waters of II	8 (0%)	8 (0%)	Unknown below possible reference points (II)	0 (-100%)
Molva dypterigia	EU waters and international waters Vb, VI, VII	2375 (+26%)	pm	Unknown uptrend (Vb, VI, VII)	2850 (+20%)
Molva molva	EU and international waters I, II	36 (0%)	36 (0%)	Unknown stable (I, II)	36 (0%)
Molva molva	IIIa, EU waters of Subdivisions 22-32 (IIIbcd)	87 (-5%)	70 (-20%)	Unknown stable (IIIa), completely unknown (IIIbcd)	70 (-20%)
Molva molva	EU waters of IV	2428 (0%)	pm	Unknown stable (IVa), completely unknown (IVb,c)	1942 (-20%)
Molva molva	EU and international waters of V	33 (0%)	33 (0%)	Above possible reference points (Va) Unknown stable (Vb)	33 (0%)
Molva molva	EU and international waters of VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XII, XIV	8024 (+2%)	pm	Unknown stable (VI, VII, VIII, IX, XII, XIV), Completely unknown (X)	6419 (-20%)
Molva molva	Norwegian waters IV	Not relevant	pm	Unknown stable (IVa), completely unknown (IVb,c)	Not relevant
Nephrops norvegicus	IIIa, EU waters of Subdivision 22-32	5200 (-13%)	5019 (-3%)	Unknown (IIIa) Completely unknown (IIIbc, 22-32)	5019 (-3%)
Nephrops norvegicus	EU Waters of IIa and IV	17350 (-21%)	15038 (-13%)	Above and below MSY B trigger & Unknown (FU of IV), Completely unknown (IIa)	6518 (-62%)

Species	Fishing area	TAC 2013	EU Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
Nephrops norvegicus	Norwegian waters IV	Not relevant	pm	Above and below MYS B trigger & Unknown (FU of IV),	Not relevant
Nephrops norvegicus	VI, EU and international waters Vb	16690 (+18%)	pm	Not available at the time of writing this report (VIa) Completely unknown (Vb, VIb)	?
Nephrops norvegicus	VII	23065 (+6%)	pm	Not available at the time of writing this report (VII)	?
Nephrops norvegicus	VIIIa,b,d,e	3899 (0%)	3200 (-18%)	Unknown uptrend (VIIIab) Completely unknown (VIIIde)	3200 (-18%)
Nephrops norvegicus	VIIIc	74 (-10%)	67 (-9%)	Unknown decreasing (VIIIc)	0 (-100%)
Nephrops norvegicus	IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1 CECAF 34.1.1 (EU)	246 (-10%)	221 (-10%)	Unknown decreasing (IXa), Completely unknown (IXb, X, CECAF 43.1.1)	0 (-100%)
Pandalus borealis	IIIa	2646 (-30%)	pm	Above BMSY trigger (IIIa west), Unknown (IIIa east)	2646 (0%)
Pandalus borealis	EU waters of IIa, IV	3058 (0%)	pm	Above MSY (IIa), Unknown (IVa-Fladen ground)	3058 (0%)
Pandalus borealis	Norwegian waters south of 62º00´N	Not relevant	pm	Above BMSY trigger (IIIa, Iva-Norwegian deep)	Not relevant
Penaeus spp.	French Guyana Waters	?	pm (France)	?	?
Pleuronectes platessa	IIIa (Skagerrak)	5453 (-30%)	pm	Unknown uptrend (western component) downtrend (eastern component)	4362 (-20%)
Pleuronectes platessa	IIIa (Kattegat)	1800 (+10%)	pm	Unknown uptrend	2160 (+20%)
Pleuronectes platessa	IV, EU waters of IIa, IIIa not covered by Skagerrak and Kattegat	59087 (-25%)	pm	Above MSY B trigger (IV) Completely unknown (IIa, IIIa not covered by Skagerrak and Kattegat)	64996 (+10%)
Pleuronectes platessa	VI, EU and international waters of Vb, international waters of XII and XIV	658 (-5%)	658 (0%)	Completely unknown (Vb, VI, XII, XIV)	559 (-15%)
Pleuronectes platessa	VIIa	1627 (0%)	pm	Unknown possibly above reference points (VIIa)	1827 (1%$^{+}$)
Pleuronectes platessa	VIIb, VIIc	74 (-5%)	74 (0%)	Unknown (VIIbc)	30 (-59%)
Pleuronectes platessa	VIId, VIIe	6400 (+26%)	5322 (-17%)	Unknown increasing (VIId) above MSY (VIIe)	5322 (-17%)
Pleuronectes platessa	VIIf, VIIg	369 (0%)	443 (+20%)	Unknown (VIIfg)	369 (0%)
Pleuronectes platessa	VIIh, VIIj, VIIk	141 (-20%)	135 (-4%)	Unknown (VIIhjk)	135 (-20%$^{+}$)
Pleuronectes platessa	VIII, IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1 (EU)	395 (0%)	395 (0%)	Unknown (VIII, IXa) Completely unknown (IXb. X, CECAF 34.1.1)	233 (-20%$^{+}$)
Pollachius pollachius	VI, EU and international waters of Vb, international waters of XII and XIV	397 (0%)	397 (0%)	Unknown (VI) completely unknown (Vb, XII, XIV)	50 (-87%)
Pollachius pollachius	VII	13495 (0%)	10796 (-20%)	Unknown (VII)	4150 (-69%)

Species	Fishing area	TAC 2013	EU Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
Pollachius pollachius	VIIIa, VIIIb, VIIId, VIIIe	1482 (0%)	1186 (-20%)	Unknown (VIIIa, VIIIb, VIIId, VIIIe)	1186 (-20%*)
Pollachius pollachius	VIIIc	231 (0%)	185 (-20%)	Unknown (VIIIc)	185 (-20%*)
Pollachius pollachius	IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1 (UE)	282 (0%)	282 (0%)	Unknown (IXa) completely unknown (IXb, X, CECAF 34.1.1)	226 (-20%*)
Pollachius virens	IIIa and IV, EU waters IIa, IIIb, IIIc, Subdivisions 22-32	26443 (-30%)	pm	Below PA (IIIa, IV), Completely unknown (IIIbc 22-32), unknown (IIa)	21683 (-18%)
Pollachius virens	VI, EU and international Vb, XII, XIV	5481 (-30%)	pm	Below PA (VI) above MSY B trigger (Vb), Completely unknown (XII, XIV)	4494 (-18%)
Pollachius virens	Norwegian waters south 62ºN	Not relevant	pm	Below PA (IIIa, IV)	Not relevant
Pollachius virens	VII, VIII, IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1 (UE)	3176 (-5%)	3176 (0%)	Completely unknown (VII, VIII, IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1)	2700 (-15%)
Psetta & Scophthalmus	EU waters IIa, IV	4642 (0%)	4642 (0%)	TUR-Unknown (IV), completely unknown (IIa), BLL-Unknown (IV), completely unknown (IIa)	3946 (-15%)
Rajidae	EU waters IIa, IV	1256 (-10%)	1005 (-20%)	Not available at the time of writing this report	1005 (-20%)
Rajidae	EU waters IIIa	52 (-10%)	42 (-20%)	Not available at the time of writing this report	42 (-20%)
Rajidae	EU waters VIa, VIb, VIIa-c, VIIe-k	8924 (-10%)	7139 (-20%)	Not available at the time of writing this report	7139 (-20%)
Rajidae	EU waters VIId	798 (-10%)	638 (-20%)	Not available at the time of writing this report	638 (-20%)
Rajidae	EU waters VIII and IX	3800 (-10%)	3040 (-20%)	Not available at the time of writing this report	3040 (-20%)
Reinhardtius hippoglossoides	EU waters IIa, IV, EU and international waters Vb, VI	1400	pm	Unknown uptrend (IIa), above possibly reference point (Vb, VI), completely unknown (IV)	1400 (0%)
Scomber scombrus	IIIa, IV, EU waters IIa, IIIb, IIIc, Subdiv 22-32	21133 (+6%)	pm	Unknown (IV, IIa, IIIabc)	21133 (0%)
Scomber scombrus	VI, VII, VIIIa, VIIIb, VIIId, VIIIe, EU and internat waters Vb, internat waters IIa, XII, XIV	240792 (-7%)	pm	Unknown (VI, VII, VIIIabde, Vb, IIa, XII, XIV)	240792 (0%)
Scomber scombrus	VIIIc, IX, X, CECAF (EU)	27554 (-7%)	pm	Unknown (VIIIc, IXa IXb, X, CECAF 34.1.1)	27554 (0%)
Scomber scombrus	Norwegian waters of IIa, IVa	Not relevant	pm	Unknown (Iva, IIa)	Not relevant
Solea solea	EU waters II, IV	13945 (-14%)	pm	Above MSY B trigger (IV), completely unknown (II)	11156 (-20%)
Solea solea	IIIa, EU waters of IIIb-d (22-32)	560 (-8%)	353 (-37%)	Below MSY (IIIab, 22-24) Completely unknown (25-32)	353 (-45%)
Solea solea	VI, EU and international waters of Vb, internat Waters of XII, XIV	57 (-5%)	57 (0%)	Completely unknown (VI, Vb, XII, XIV)	48 (-15%)

Species	Fishing area	TAC 2013	EU Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
Solea solea	VIIa	140 (-53%)	95 (-32%)	Below Blim (VIIa)	0 (-100%)
Solea solea	VIIb VIIc	42 (-(5%)	42 (0%)	Unknown (VIIbc)	30 (-29%)
Solea solea	VIId	5900 (+6%)	3251 (-45%)	Above MSY	3251 (-45%)
Solea solea	VIIe	894 (+15%)	832 (-7%)	Above MSY	832 (-7%)
Solea solea	VIIf VIIg	1100 (+4%)	920 (-16%)	Above MSY	920 (-16%)
Solea solea	VIIh, VIIj and VIIk	402 (-5%)	322 (-20%)	Unknown (VIIh-k)	252 (-37%)
Solea solea	VIIIa and VIIIb	4100 (-4%)	pm	Above MSY	3270 (-20%)
Solea spp.	VIIIc, VIIId and VIIIe, IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1 (EU)	1072 (0%)	1072 (0%)	Unknown (VIIIc, IXa) Completely Unknown (VIIIde, IXb, X, CECAF 34.1.1)	543 (-49%)
Sprattus sprattus & by-catches	IIIa	33670 (-30%)	pm	Unknown (IIIa)	6787 (-80%)
Sprattus sprattus & by-catches	EU waters IIa, IV	150500	pm	Completely unknown (IIa), above PA (IV)	144000 (-4%)
Sprattus sprattus	VIId and VIIe	5150 (0%)	5150 (0%)	Unknown uptrend	3832 (-26%)
Squalus acanthias	EU waters of IIIa	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	No new status description	0 (0%)
Squalus acanthias	EU waters of IIa and IV	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	No new status description	0 (0%)
Squalus acanthias	EU and international waters of I, V, VI, VII, VIII, XII, XIV	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	No new status description	0 (0%)
Trachurus spp.	VIIIc	25011 (0%)	15034 (-40%)	Not available at the time of writing this report	15034 (-40%)
Trachurus spp.	IX	30000 (-3%)	35000 (+17%)	Unknown below long term average (IXa), completely unknown (IXb)	35000 (+16%)
Trachurus spp.	X, CECAF 34.1.1 (Azores)	?	pm (Portugal)	Unknown (Xa2), completely unknown (Xa1, Xb)	1800
Trachurus spp.	CECAF 34.1.1 (Madeira)	?	pm (Portugal)	Not available at the time of writing this report	?
Trachurus spp.	CECAF 34.1.1 (Canary Islands)	?	pm (Spain)	Not available at the time of writing this report	?
Trachurus spp. & by-catches	EU waters IVb, IVc, VIId	34045	pm	Unknown (IVb, IVc, VIId)	25500 (-25%)
Trachurus spp. & by-catches	EU waters IIa, IVa, VI, VIIa-c, VIIe-k, VIIIa, VIIIb, VIIId, VIIIe, EU and internat waters Vb,	157989	94966 (-40%)	Unknown downtrend (IIa, IVa, Vb, VIa, VIIa-c,e-k, VIIIa-e), completely unknown (VIb, XII, XIV)	94966 (-40%)

Species	Fishing area	TAC 2013	EU Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
Trisopterus esmarki & by-catches	IIIa, EU waters IIa, IV	167500	pm	Above MSY B trigger (IIIa, IV) Completely unknown (IIa)	216000 (+29%)
Trisopterus esmarki	Norwegian waters IV	Not relevant	pm	Above MSY B trigger (IV)	Not relevant

Anglerfish (*Lophius* spp.)

Species description

Anglerfish are found in most of the world's oceans. The two species found in the North Atlantic are the angler (*Lophius piscatorius*) and black-bellied angler (*Lophius budegassa*). The species are distributed from the south-west of the Barents Sea to the Straits of Gibraltar and the African coasts, including the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. *L. budegassa* is wider spread in southern waters than *L. piscatorius.* Anglerfish live in soft or muddy bottoms where they bury themselves waiting for prey, mainly fish. Spawning appears to occur largely in deep waters off the edge of the continental shelf, although mature females are rarely encountered.

State of the stocks

There are serious data gaps regarding anglerfish stocks, making them considered as data limited stocks. While the state of the stocks of the two target species (*L. piscatorius* and *L. budegassa*) differs, their management do not, and both are caught in the same grounds and by the same fleets. As anglerfish matures at a larger size, a large portion of catches consist of immature fish, making the stock susceptible to recruitment overfishing.

In the **Skagerrak and Kattegat** (IIIa), the **North Sea** (IV), and in **Western Scotland and Rockall** (VI), there is no solid analytical assessment for the stock as a whole, because of major uncertainties concerning catch-at-age and effort data, as well as limited knowledge about population dynamics. However, scientists indicate a decline in abundance from 2007 and in biomass since 2008. As a result, the average biomass in the last two assessed years (2011-2012) is 22% lower than the average biomass of the three previous years, (2008-2010). Data collection has improved in recent years and previous concerns about under-reporting, which amounted to around 40-60% of cases, are no longer an issue as all catches are assumed to be landed. Accurate growth estimates, ageing parameters and the implementation of a proper analytical assessment are needed to identify new reference points, as the current ones are not considered to be valid. This species' susceptibility to overexploitation has recently increased due to the development of fisheries in deeper waters, where spawning areas are located, and because a large proportion of the catch consists of immature fish.

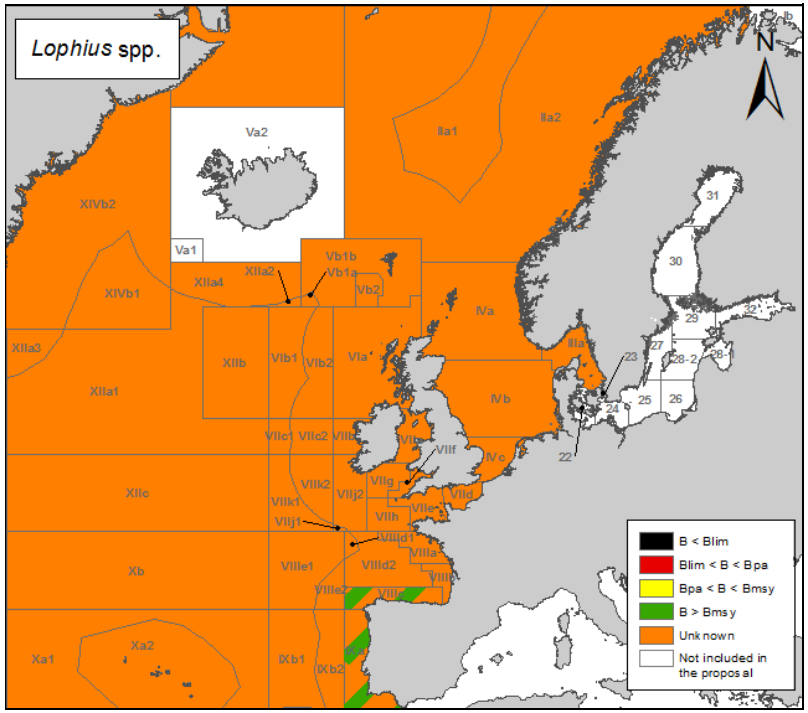


Figure 1. Anglerfish stock status in ICES areas included in the proposal according to spawning biomass.

In the **West of Ireland, Porcupine Bank, Eastern and Western English Channel, Bristol Channel, North and South Celtic Sea, and East and West of Southwest of Ireland** (VIIb-k), **North, Central and Bay of Biscay-Offshore** (VIIIa,b,d) there is no

analytical assessment of the state of the stocks, the exploitation status is unknown, and there are no reliable estimates of discards. There are no reference points defined for these stocks. Improved sampling of length composition and accurate estimates of growth parameters are needed to facilitate the development of analytical assessment. According to the data survey, biomass showed erratic behaviour; during the last years the stock showed signs of recovery during 2005-2008, a decrease during 2009-2010, and figures went up during 2011-2012. So for *L. piscatorius* and *L budegassa,* the average of the stock biomass indicator in the last two years (2011-2012) is respectively 55% and 25% higher than the average of the three previous years (2008-2010). Positive trends seem to be a consequence of successful recruitment, especially for *L. budegassa*, not as a result of a significant decrease in TAC or effort. The majority of anglerfish catches consist of young fish and anglerfish discards of small individuals seem to have increased in recent years.

In the Iberian Peninsula, **south of the Bay of Biscay** (VIIIc) and **west of Portuguese waters** (IXa) anglerfish stocks state depend on the species. While the black-bellied anglerfish stock is in good condition and presently above the Bmsy trigger thanks to a progressive reduction in mortality, which has been below Fmsy since 2001, the white anglerfish stock status is unknown in relation to any potential biomass reference point, but is estimated to be stable after a recovery trend from 1994 to 2005, in response to a fishing mortality decrease trend since the late 80s. Recruitment has been low in recent years with no evidence of strong year classes since 2001. *L. piscatorius* constitutes around 55% of the total anglerfish landings. Discards are considered negligible except in a few years when they have been high. A large proportion of catches include immature fish.

There are no scientific assessments that provide an evaluation about the status and rate of exploitation for the rest of the managed stocks in the **EU and international waters of Faeroes Grounds** (Vb), **Irish Sea** (VIIa), **West of Bay of Biscay** (VIIIe), **West Portuguese Waters** (IXb), **Azores Grounds** (X), **international waters of North Azores** (XII), **international waters of East Greenland** (XIV) and **CECAF 34.1.1**,.

Oceana proposal

Technical measures are required to ensure that sufficient numbers of individuals can reach the spawning size. Oceana proposes setting a minimum landing size linked to the reproductive size. EU Regulation (EC) 2406/96 fixes a minimum weight of 500g for anglerfish to ensure marketing standards, and increases the mesh opening for the nets used for this fishery in accordance with this criteria. The situation endangers the stock´s possible positive evolution by preventing the young individuals that have resulted from the latest good levels of recruitment, from being incorporated into the population.

As both anglerfish species are caught, landed and counted together, they are managed under a common TAC. The species requires a management plan, based on objective scientific criteria to control its exploitation. The control system also needs to be improved.

For the stock from the **Skagerrak and Kattegat** (IIIa) the **North Sea** (IV), and **Western Scotland and Rockall** (VI), ICES stated that, based on the approach to data-limited stocks, the TAC should be reduced at least by 20% in relation to the average of the last three years. Oceana agrees with the ICES recommendation, which is supported by the downtrend of anglerfish abundance and biomass indicators. Technical measures are also required to ensure that sufficient numbers of individuals can reach spawning size. ICES also recommends that the management area be consistent with the assessment area. The stock is qualified as a data-limited stock.

For stocks from the **West of Ireland, Porcupine Bank, Eastern and Western English Channel, Bristol Channel, North and South Celtic Sea, and East and West of Southwest of Ireland** (VIIb-k), **North, Central and Offshore of Bay of Biscay** (VIIIa,b,d), based on the specific assessment of data-limited stocks using biomass indicator trend, ICES advises that catches for the two species combined should not exceed 37448 tonnes, which implies a 20% increase in TAC in relation to the average landings of the last three years. Oceana agrees with this measure as anglerfish biomass indicators show an uptrend over the last years, even though discards, which are known to occur, are not included in the assessment.

For the Iberian Peninsula, **South of Bay of Biscay** (VIIIc) and **West of Portuguese waters** (IXa), ICES advises that, based on the MSY transition approach, landings of anglerfish in 2014 should not exceed 2629 tonnes, which implies a 6% increase in TAC. Discards are not included in the assessment. Oceana advises that the proposed increase is followed to ensure the achievement of MSY in 2015.

For the other managed stocks for which there is no information, **EU and international waters of Faeroes Grounds** (Vb), **Irish Sea** (VIIa), **West of Bay of Biscay** (VIIIe), **West Portuguese Waters** (IXb), **Azores Grounds** (X), **international waters of North Azores** (XII), **international waters of East Greenland** (XIV), and **CECAF 34.1.1**, Oceana proposes applying the scientific advice of the stocks included in the same management area.

Table 1. Comparative table of anglerfish TACs (in tonnes) in ICES areas registered in the proposal, Council decision for 2012 and 2013, stock status and Oceana proposal for 2014. Brackets compare TAC difference from previous year (in %).

Fishing area	Name area	TAC 2013	Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
EU Waters of IIa and IV	EU waters of Norwegian Sea and North Sea	8703 (-5%)	6962 (-20%)	Unknown negative trend (IV), Completely unknown (IIa)	6962 (-20%)
Norwegian Waters of IV	Norwegian Waters of North Sea	Not relevant	pm	Unknown negative trend (IV)	Not relevant
VI, Vb (EU&IW), XII (IW) and XIV (IW)	Rockall, West of Scotland, EU &International waters of Faeroes Grounds, international waters of North Azores and international waters East Greenland	4924 (-5%)	3939 (-20%)	Unknown negative trend for (VI). Completely unknown (Vb, XII, XIV)	3939 (-20%)
VII	Irish Sea, West of Ireland, Porcupine Bank, Eastern and Western English Channel, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North and South, and Southwest of Ireland - East and West	29144 (-5%)	29144 (0%)	Unknown positive trend for (VIIb-k). Completely unknown (VIIa)	29534 (+1%)
VIIIa, VIIIb, VIIId, VIIIe	Bay of Biscay North, Central, Offshore and West	7809 (-5%)	7809 (0%)	Unknown positive trend for (VIIIabd). Completely unknown (VIIIe)	7914 (+1%)
VIIIc, IX, X, and CECAF34.1.1 (EU)	Bay of Biscay South, Portuguese Waters, Azores Grounds and EU waters of CECAF34.1.1	2475 (-25%)	2629 (+6%)	Unknown but stable trend and possibly above MSY* (VIIIc, IXa). Completely unknown IXb, X, CECAF 34.1.1	2629 (+6%)

*Stock status depending on the species

Blue Whiting (*Micromesistius poutassou*)

Species description

Blue whiting is found on the North-East and North-West Atlantic coasts. In the North-East Atlantic, this species is found from the Barents Sea and down along the African coast to Cape Bojador. It is found on the continental shelf and slope down to 1000 meters where it feeds mainly on small crustaceans.

State of the stocks

It has been deemed likely that there would be more than one stock in the Northeast Atlantic, but ICES has confirmed that there is no scientific evidence supporting multiple stocks with distinct spawning locations or timings, so blue whiting is assessed as one single stock. According to the latest scientific evidence, it seems that the stock can be classified as non-overexploited in EU waters.

Although there are recognised shortfalls in the evaluations of this species' stock levels in recent years, these deficiencies are being fixed. The main survey conducted in 2013 for the adult part of this stock had high quality coverage of the survey area in space and time and is considered to have provided good quality data.

Spawning stock biomass has been above MSY trigger and precautionary levels for the past 15 years. Although for 8 years biomass showed a very worrying downtrend, going from a peak of 7.0 million tonnes in 2003 to 2.9 million tonnes in 2010, this trend has now reversed. Biomass has almost doubled from 2010 to 2013 (5,5 million tonnes) as clear evidence of the stock recovery. This positive trend is a response to the huge reduction in landings and fishing mortality (0.04 in 2011), in combination with an increase in recruitment since 2010. Discards are considered to be negligible.

It is expected that the recovery of the stock will have a positive impact on the ecosystem, because the species plays an important role in the pelagic environment not only as a predator, but also as prey for commercial species for which it is an important source of food.

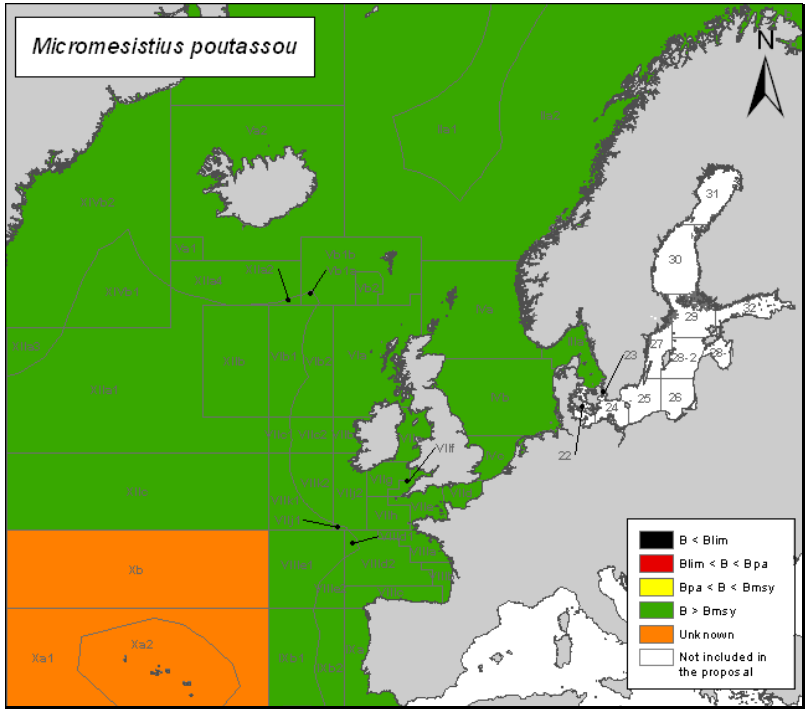


Figure 2. Blue whiting stock status in ICES areas included in the proposal according to spawning biomass.

Oceana's Position

TACs and quotas for blue whiting stocks are set during annual negotiations between the EU, Norway, Iceland and the Faroe Islands on the basis of the management agreed in 2008 by these countries and endorsed by NEAFC. According to ICES, the management plan is in compliance with the precautionary approach if fishing mortality is

drastically reduced in the first years of its operation, as has been the case.

ICES advises, on the basis of the management plan, that landings in 2014 should be no more than 948950 tonnes, compared to 643000 tonnes in 2013. This represents a 48% increase in catches. ICES has pointed out that this increase is in accordance with the MSY and precautionary approaches, and it will allow increasing blue whiting biomass by 4%. Therefore Oceana agrees with this proposal.

Other approaches, like the MSY and the NEAFC requests on new F rates, recommend a higher increase in catches. Oceana, taking into account the uncertainties about the stock structure, the estimate of F, SSB and recruitment, suggests following the Management plan approach to make a progressive increase in catches.

Table 2. Comparative table of blue whiting TACs (in tonnes) in ICES areas registered in the proposal, Council decision for 2012 and 2013, stock status and Oceana proposal for 2014.Brackets compare TAC difference from previous year (in %).

Fishing area	Name area	TAC 2013	Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
Norwegian Waters of II and IV	Norwegian waters of Norwegian Sea and North Sea	0 (0%)	pm	Above MSY B trigger (II, IV),	0 (+48%)
EU and internat Waters of I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIIIa,b,d,e, XII, XIV	EU and international Waters of Barents Sea, Norwegian Sea, Spitzbergen and Bear Island, Skagerrak, Kattegat, Sound, Belt Sea, and Baltic Sea, North Sea, Iceland and Faeroes Grounds, Rockall, West of Scotland, Irish Sea, West of Ireland, Porcupine Bank, Eastern and Western English Channel, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North and South, and Southwest of Ireland - East and West, Bay of Biscay North Central, Offshore and West, North of Azores, East Greenland	110845 (+75%)	pm	Above MSY B trigger (II, IIIa, IV V, VI, VII, VIIIabde, XII, XI),	164050 (+48%)
VIIIc, IX, X, EU waters of CECAF 34.1.1 (EU)	Bay of Biscay South, Portuguese Waters, Azores Grounds, European waters of CECAF 34.1.1	11369 (+13%)	pm	Above MSY B trigger (VIIIc, IX), completely unknown (X, CECAF 34.1.1)	16826 (+48%)
EU waters of II, IVa, V, VI north of 56º30´N and VII west of 12ºW	European waters of Norwegian Sea, Spitzbergen and Bear Island, Northern North Sea, Iceland and Faeroes Grounds, Rockall and West of Scotland north of 56º30´N and Irish Sea, West of Ireland, Porcupine Bank, Eastern and Western English Channel, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North and South, and Southwest of Ireland - East and West west of 12ºW	Not relevant	pm	Above MSY B trigger (II, IVa, V, VI, VII)d	Not relevant (+48%)

Cod (*Gadus morhua*)

Species description

This epibenthic, pelagic species can be found in a wide variety of habitats, from the coast to the boundaries of the continental shelf. It forms aggregations during the day. Cod is an omnivorous species and its diet consists of invertebrates and fish, including its own juveniles. The largest stocks are found in the Norwegian Arctic, the Barents Sea and Iceland. It is also found in the Baltic Sea, the North Sea and west of Scotland.

State of the stocks Vb1 Vb2

Cod stocks in European waters are in a poor state, the species has been subject to two successive management plans (the last of which was in 2008[6]), and the species is still showing no solid signs of recovery. Furthermore, some of the stocks continue to collapse with biomasses below the safe biological and precautionary limits.

Despite the low abundance of the species, it is still possible to find areas of high cod density due to its hyper-aggregating behavior. This can lead to high catches in specific places causing high mortality on damaged stocks. Rising sea temperature has been shown to have a negative impact on cod recruitment in warmer waters of the species' range distribution.

In the **Northeast Artic** (I,II) the cod stock is in a good state and it is exploited at sustainable rates. Spawning stock biomass (SSB) has been above the MSY B trigger since 2002 and is currently at the highest values in the time series. Fishing mortality (F) has been reduced from above Flim in 1997 to below Fmsy in 2007 and is currently below this reference point. The last three year classes, 2010-2012, are slightly above average, which helps to maintain the stock´s health. Data on discarding is scarce but all catches are assumed to be landed. Cod in this area is a target species caught in a mixed fishery together with haddock and saithe. Redfish (Sebastes sp.) are caught as by-catch in the cod fishery.

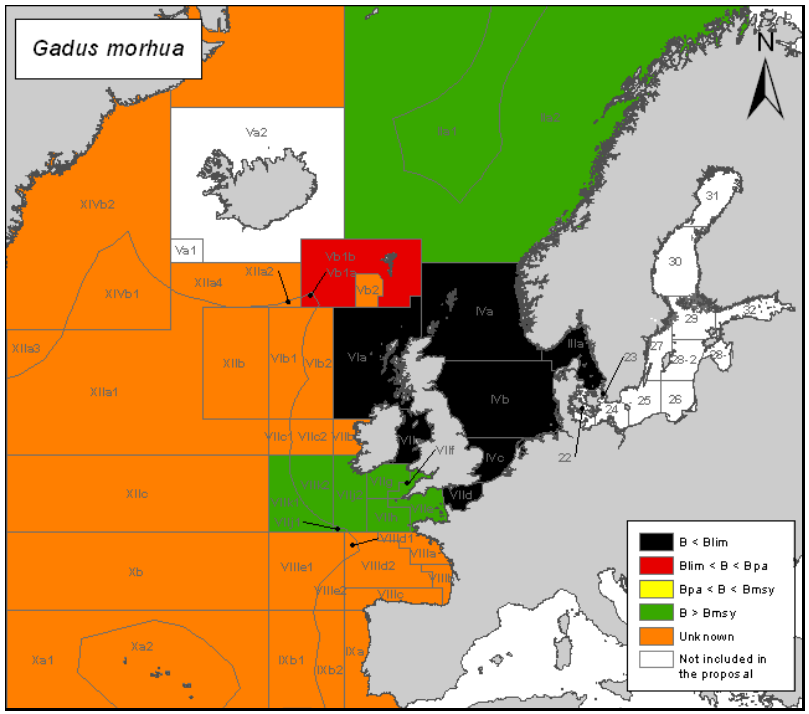


Figure 3. Cod stock status in ICES areas included in the proposal according to spawning biomass.

Kattegat (IIIa, East): new data available for this stock does not change the perception of the stock, so the description of the status in 2013 is the same as in 2012. The stock is collapsed and overexploited with biomass levels below safe biological limits since 2000. Recruitment in recent years has been among the lowest in the time series with values that compromise any short term recovery. Scientists have spent 13 years unsuccessfully recommending the

[6] Council Regulation (EC) No 1342/2008 of 18 December 2008 establishing a long-term plan for cod stocks and the fisheries exploiting those stocks and repealing Regulation (EC) No 423/2004.

closure of this fishery according to the precautionary approach. The implementation and enforcement of the 2008 management plan is not adequate, and has not helped the stock to recover. The current level of fishing mortality is uncertain and reported landings and discard estimates do not represent total removals from the stock. ICES estimates that total removals have been much higher than the reported landings in the past years, therefore, the level of fishing mortality cannot be reliably estimated. Discard data from on-board observers indicates an increase since 2009. Fishing mortality has been the major driver of long-term stock dynamics, more than the effects of environmental and climate change.

In the **North Sea** (IV) **Eastern Channel** (VIId) and **Skagerrak** (IIIa West), the stock has gradually increased since its historical low in 2006, confirming that a recovery trend is taking place, but remains low, in the vicinity of safe biological limits. Fishing mortality has decreased since 2000 and it is now at around 0.4, between Fpa and Fmsy, well over Fmsy (0.2). Recruitment has been poor since 2000 and the proportion of discards, around 24%, is high although lower than in previous years. The stock is managed through the EU management plan (Regulation (EC) 1342/2008) and the EU–Norway long-term management plan. Both plans are in accordance with the precautionary approach, according to ICES, but only if properly implemented and enforced. An evaluation of these plans' effectiveness in 2011-2012 concluded that although a gradual reduction in F and discards has taken place in recent years, the management plan has not controlled F as envisaged in the Nord Sea.

Rockall (VIb): There is no new assessment as the 2012 advice is biennial and therefore also utilizable for 2013 and 2014. Reliable information is lacking to evaluate the status of this stock, and current landing levels are 20 times lower than those documented ten years ago, having gone from 2000 tonnes in 2002 to less than 100 today. Although there are doubts on the accuracy of the reported landings, as these are reported by vessels operating in both divisions VIa and VIb, the strong downtrend in landings is proof of stock depletion and that catches and fishing efforts are not sustainable.

East Greenland (XIV): new data (landings and surveys) available for this stock do not change the 2012 perception, therefore ICES advice remains the same as last year. No analytical assessment is available for this stock because of the lack of a time-series of landings since 1993. Therefore, fishing possibilities cannot be projected. Available information indicates that the cod biomass is low compared to before the 1990s. The stock has been managed since 2008 through a management plan agreed on by Greenland and the EU. Although the stock has slightly increased in recent years, it is still far below any possible biomass reference points.

West of Scotland (VIa): this stock is completely collapsed with a biomass level that has remained stable and well below safe biological limits since 1997. The management plan (Regulation (EC) 1342/2008) has yet to be implemented and enforced adequately. It has therefore failed to reduce fishing mortality to the required levels and fishing mortality continues to be very high, over the safe biological limits and three times higher than MSY fishing rate. The fishery is also managed by a combination of by-catch restrictions, area closures and technical measures. Recruitment has been estimated to be low during the last decade in line with spawning stock biomass. Discard information is imprecise compared to landing data because of lower sampling coverage but it is estimated to be around 71% of total catches in 2012.

Irish Sea (VIIa): the 2012 ICES assessment for this stock is biennial and valid for 2013. The collapse of this stock is deeply worrying when looking at biomass levels which are 60% below safe biological limits. Spawning stock biomass has declined since the late 1980s and it is below safe biological limits (at a historical low since 1993), reducing reproductive and recovery capacity. Recruitment has been below average for the past eighteen years and eight of the last nine years showed recruitment levels among the lowest on record due to low spawning stock biomass and poor environmental conditions. Scientists have spent 12 years, including 2013, unsuccessfully recommending the closure of this fishery. Although fishing mortality has been declining in recent years it remains very high, clearly above any reference points (biological security, precautionary or MSY), and cannot reverse the depletion of the stock. The long term

management plan is not enforced adequately or showing any positive results in the short term. After evaluating the plan, ICES considers that it is not in accordance with the precautionary approach. Official landings are higher than allowed catches - 24% higher in 2011 - and total removals continue to vary between 2 and 3 times higher than the reported landings. There is a high amount of bycatch of cod in this area by fisheries targeting nephrops and whitefish.

W English Channel (VIIe), **Bristol Channel** (VIIf), **N&S Celtic Sae** (VIIg,h), **Great Sole** (VIIj), **W Great Sole** (VIIk): although the predicted stock size may be overestimated, spawning biomass is clearly above any reference point, including the MSY objective since 2011. The good status of the stock, which was below safe biological limits from 2004 to 2010, is directly related to the sharp reduction of the fishing mortality (which is now close to MSY mortality) since 2005. Recruitment has been highly variable over time. Although Celtic Sea cod is known to have higher growth rates and to mature earlier than other cod stocks, this is an example of cod stock recovery.

For the rest of the managed stocks, in the **West of Ireland and Porcupine Bank** (VIIbc), **Bay of Biscay** (VIII), **Portuguese Waters** (IX), **Azores Grounds (**X), **international waters of North Azores** (XII) and EU waters of **CECAF 34.1.1** there is no scientific assessment basis to provide an evaluation about its status and its exploitation rate.

Oceana proposal

Bearing in mind the worrying state of conservation and development of most of the Atlantic cod stocks, Oceana urges the Council to adopt TAC reductions, including fisheries' closures, to guarantee that populations recover above precautionary biomass levels as quickly as possible. An improvement on data collection is also desirable to amend fishing parameters and get better assessments.

Because NE Atlantic demersal fisheries are mixed fisheries harvesting a wide range of commercial species, including cod, a multi-species management plan is being developed to consider the fisheries and species interaction. Regarding cod, this plan would allow the reduction of the recurring cod TAC overshoot due to by-catch in other fisheries. The scope of the new multi-species plan would include the North Sea, Skagerrak and the Eastern Channel. Oceana believes that the future plan will contribute to improve the management of these species.

In **Northeast Arctic** (I,II) ICES advises, on the basis of the joint Russian-Norwegian management plan, that the 2014 TAC be set at 993000 tonnes, which implies a 1% TAC reduction. The plan is considered by ICES to be in accordance with the precautionary approach and not in contradiction to the MSY approach. Oceana agrees to set a TAC according to the management plan, even when it represents a 15% reduction in biomass in 2015. By-catches of coastal cod and *Sebastes marinus* should be kept as low as possible.

Kattegat (IIIa, East): New data available does not change the perception of the stock, so the ICES advice for this fishery for 2014 remains the same as in 2013. According to the multi-annual plan, TAC and effort should be reduced by 25%, the lowest possible reduction level attending to article 9. Due to the continuing critical stock status, with a biomass far below safe biological limits and uncertain mortality, Oceana considers, based on precautionary considerations and in line with ICES advice, that there should be no direct fisheries and that by-catch should be minimised as much as possible. If the fishery is not closed Oceana recommends imposing conservation measures and minimizing the fishing effort in the area to avoid over-catching, since there is a lack of controls prevents the fixed TAC from accurately controlling real catches. Oceana recommends that only fisheries that can demonstrate a close to zero catch of cod is allowed in this area given the bad state of the stock and the fact that ICES states that the current low TAC is likely to be reached before the end of the year, thus increasing the risk of discard of cod.

For the **North Sea** (IV) **Eastern Channel** (VIId) and **Skagerrak** (IIIa, West), ICES advises, based on the management plan, which limits annual TAC variations to 20%, that combined landings in 2014

should be no more than 28809t, resulting in a 9% reduction. If discards rates do not change from those in 2012 this implies catches of no more than 37496. This figure does not fulfil the scheme for transition towards the MSY framework. According to the MSY transition framework, ICES advises, that landings should be no more than 28057t, resulting in a 12% reduction. This constrain could be also acceptable according to the management plan. In fact, in accordance with the MSY framework, ICES recommends reducing mortality to 0.1 and landings to 16187t, which means a 49% TAC reduction. Oceana believes that as biomass is still around safe biological limits and fishing mortality is above Fmsy, the reduction should be equal to, or higher than, the one recommended by the MSY transition approach, 12% reduction, to ensure the recovery of the stock. It should be noted that all previous catch recommendations will keep biomass below the precautionary benchmark during 2014.

Rockall (VIb): There is no new advice as the 2012 ICES advice is biennial and therefore also utilizable for 2013 and 2014. Despite the lack of sound knowledge about the rate of exploitation and stock trends, ICES advises based limited stock assessment data that catches in 2014 should be no more than 70 tonnes. Oceana agrees with this advice.

East Greenland (XIV): in response to ICES recommendations, and based on precautionary considerations, no offshore fishery should take place in 2014 to improve the likelihood of spawning stocks in West and East Greenland. Oceana agrees with this advice and urges the Council to follow it.

West of Scotland (VIa): According to the management plan, which has not been evaluated by ICES, effort should be reduced by 25%, which according to the ICES forecast is not enough to recover the stock. The plan however, also suggests that if the stock is failing to recover properly, which it is the case, a higher reduction could be considered. ICES advises, on the basis of the MSY approach, that there should be no direct fishing and by-catch should be minimized in 2014. Oceana agrees with the zero catch advice and requests the closure of the fishery. Because of critical low biomass and recruitment over last decade it is impossible to identify any catch compatible with the precautionary approach or with the MSY approach. Scientists have spent 11 years unsuccessfully recommending the closure of this fishery. It is necessary to recover the stock above Bpa as quickly as possible. Any allowable catch will generate the same amount of discards, something that the stocks cannot afford.

Irish Sea (VIIa): ICES has warned that the current management plan is not in accordance with the precautionary approach so it makes no sense to continue setting TACs this way. According to the long term management plan, the TAC should be reduced by at least 25%. ICES advice for 2014 remains the same as for 2013. Therefore, there should be no direct fisheries and cod by-catch in the area should be minimized taking into account that it is impossible to identify a non-zero catch compatible with the MSY objective. Oceana supports this advice due to the stock´s deplorable state and recommends closing the fishery based on precautionary considerations, and only allowing fisheries that can demonstrate a close to zero by-catch of cod; TAC reductions are not enough to guarantee that the stocks recover above Blim quickly. The stock has been harvested unsustainably since the late 1980s. Oceana is of the opinion that the use of selective gears should be made mandatory in this area, e.g the use of the eliminator trawl in fisheries targeting whitefish and sorting grids in trawls targeting nephrops.

W English Channel (VIIe), **Bristol Channel** (VIIf), **N&S Celtic Sea** (VIIg,h), **Great Sole** (VIIj), **W Great Sole** (VIIk): ICES advises, based on the MSY approach, that landings in 2014 be no more than 6848 tonnes with a 0.4 mortality rate, a 33% TAC decrease. Oceana agrees with this advice and warns that this decrease should be respected so as to guarantee the MSY in following years. Discard rates (mainly minimum landing size) represents around 11% of total catches that are not included in the assessment, measures aimed at reducing discarding and improving the fishing pattern should be encouraged. A plan for this stock is under development by NWWRAC and STECF.

For the rest of the managed stocks **West of Ireland and Porcupine Bank** (VIIbc), **Bay of Biscay** (VIII), **Portuguese Waters** (IX), **Azores Grounds** (X), **international waters of North Azores** (XII) and EU waters of **CECAF 34.1.1,** Oceana proposes, in line with the precautionary approach, a minimal reduction in catches of 15% for those stocks which are not managed together with other stocks for which there is a scientific advice.

Table 3. Comparative table of cod TACs (in tonnes) in ICES areas registered in the proposal, Council decision for 2012 and 2013, stock status and Oceana proposal for 2014.Brackets compare TAC difference from previous year (in %).

Fishing area	Name area	TAC 2013	Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
IIIa (West)	Skagerrak	2561 (-30%)	pm	Below Blim (IIIa-W)	2254 (-12%)
IIIa (East)	Kattegat	100 (-24%)	80 (-20%)	Below Blim (IIIa-E)	0 (-100%)
IV, EU waters of IIa, IIIa not covered by Ska y Kat	North Sea, EU waters of Norwegian Sea, Transition area to Baltic not covered by Ska y Kat	15382 (-30%)	pm	Below Blim (IV), Unknown (IIa),	13536 (-12)
Norwegian Waters S of 62ºN	Norwegian Waters South of 62ºN	Not relevant	pm	Below Blim (IV, IIIa), Unknown (IIa),	Not relevant
VIb, EU and internat Waters of Vb (west of 12ºW), XII and XIV	Rockall, EU and int water of Faeroes West of 12ºW, North Azores and East Greenland	74 (-5%)	74 (0%)	Unknown (VIb, XIV), Below PA (Vb1) Completely Unknown (XII)	70 (-5%)
VIa, EU and internat Waters of Vb (east of 12ºW)	West of Scotland and EU and int water of Faeroes East of 12ºW	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	Below Blim (VIa), Below PA (Vb1) Unknown (Vb2)	0 (0%)
VIIa	Irish Sea	285 (-25%)	228 (-20%)	Below Blim (VIIa)	0 (-100%)
VIIb, VIIc, VIIe, VIIf, VIIg, VIIh, VIIj, VIIk, VIII, IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1 (EU)	West of Ireland, Porcupine Bank, Western English Channel, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North, Celtic Sea South, Southwest of Ireland / East, Southwest of Ireland – West, Bay of Biscay, Portuguese Waters, Azores Grounds, EU waters of CECAF 34.1.1	10200 (+1%)	6848 (-33%)	Above MSY (VIIe-k) Completely unknown (VIIbc, VIII, IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1)	6848 (-33%)
VIId	Eastern English Channel	1080 (-30%)	pm	Below Blim (VIId)	950 (-12%)

Haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus)*

Species description

Haddock is found in the North-East Atlantic, from the Bay of Biscay to the Barents Sea. It is also found in the North-West Atlantic. Adults are found between 80 and 200 meters depth, on rocky, sandy or gravel bottoms. The species feeds on benthic organisms including crustaceans, molluscs, equinoderms and fish.

State of the stocks

The state of haddock stocks in European waters is very heterogeneous: some stocks are in a deplorable situation while others are at MSY B trigger levels. Threats in different areas stem from problems caused by unsustainable exploitation, discards and undeclared catches.

In the **North Sea** (IV) and **Skagerrak** (IIIa west), stocks are in good condition and exploited according to the MSY approach. Spawning stock biomass has surpassed the MSY B trigger since 2001 and fishing mortality rates have been intermittent around the MSY framework starting this year. Recruitment over the last ten years has been poor, except in 2005 and 2009 when year classes were around average. Discards are highly variable but appear to be declining in recent years, and the discard rate in 2011 and 2012 was respectively 25% and 12% of the total catch apparently linked to low recruitment.

Haddock biomass in **Faeroes Grounds** (Vb) has decreased since 2003 and is currently estimated to be below safe biological limits in its lowest record in the time-series. Fishing mortality has been oscillating between precautionary and safe biological limit, it is currently just above precautionary and MSY levels. Since the mid-1970s, recruitment has fluctuated from 1 to 3 strong year classes followed by several weak ones. Year classes from 2003 onwards have all been well below the long-term average. Given the low biomass, poor recruitment and slow growth, stock recovery would remain compromised unless drastic measures are taken. Discards are assumed negligible.

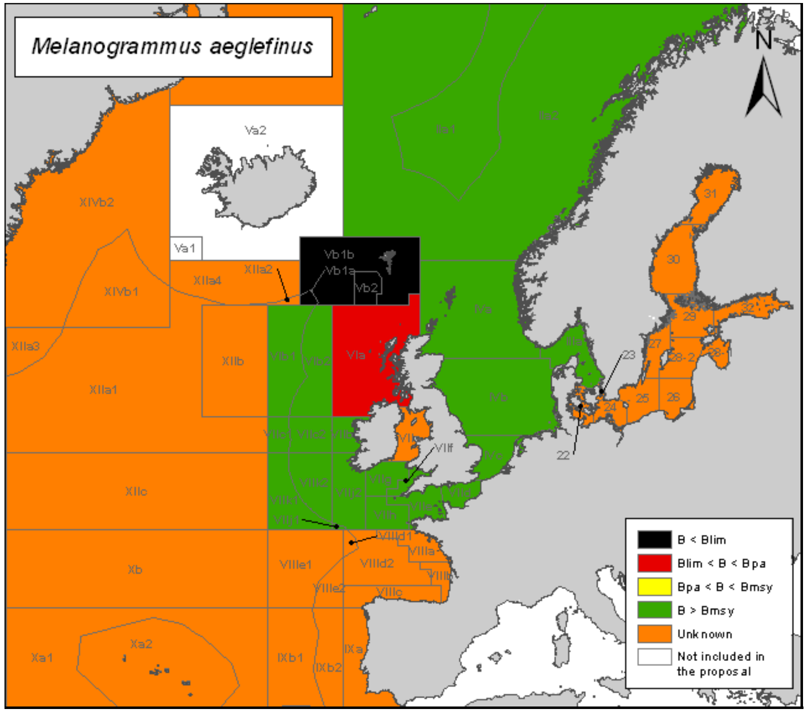


Figure 4. Haddock stock status in ICES areas included in the proposal according to spawning biomass[7].

In the **West of Scotland** (VIa) the stock is partially managed according a management plan proposal considered to be precautionary by ICES. Biomass has been decreasing from 2002 to 2010 when it reached its lowest levels in over 35 years below safe biological limits, and has increased during the last two years (due to the 2009 year class) showing a recovery trend. Average recruitment

[7] Stock status based on trends for VIIa

in the last years has been below the long-term average. Fishing mortality has been well above the precautionary level for most years since 1987, but since 2005 it has dropped and since 2009 it has been lightly below MSY framework. Discards that are usually high, around 50% in 2010 and 2011, seem to have decreased during 2012.

In the **Rockall** (VIb) spawning stock biomass is below precautionary levels despite fishing mortality has declined over time, it is now below the MSY framework. Nevertheless, the marked downward trend for biomass since 2008 and the extremely weak recruitment during 2007-2012 is worrying as it is expected that biomass would be placed below safe biological limits in 2014. If these trends do not change, the situation could doubtlessly jeopardise fishing activity in the upcoming years. Discard ratio in recent years has been reduced, from around 34% in the period 1999-2009 to 7% and 2% in last two years, 2011 and 2012 respectively, as result of the minimal presence of young undersize individuals in the population. An improved time series of landings and discards is needed to provide an accurate assessment of the stock. A management plan is under development.

Biomass for stocks of **West of Ireland** (VIIb), **Porcupine Bank** (VIIc), **E&W English Channel** (VIId-e), **Bristol Channel** (VIIf), **Celtic Sea N&S** (VIIg-h), **Southwest of Ireland E&W** (VIIj-k), has showed an increasing trend over the last time-series, particularly in 2011 when it increased significantly due to an exceptional recruitment in 2009 year class. During the last two years it has showed a worrying decreasing trend that if not corrected t might place the stock below MSY in few years. Fishing mortality is above Fmsy and appears to have increased in 2012. Recruitment is highly variable and it has been below average since 2010 with its lowest value in the time-series in 2012. This situation seriously compromises future catches and biomass as they are highly dependent on the strength of incoming year classes. Discards, representing 56%, 53% and 36% of total catches in 2010, 2011 and 2012 respectively (because of minimum landing size and over-quotas), pose a serious concern for the stock status. Official landings from Subareas VIII, IX, and X, managed together with Division VIIb-k, have made up less than 2% of all landings in the TAC area since 1973.

Haddock status in the **Irish Sea** (VIIa) is unknown as there is no sound data on the fishery, so the assessment is only indicative of trends. Biological indicator trends show that, after worrying decline, the average of the biomass indicator in the last two years (2012-2013) is 17% higher than the average of the three previous years (2009-2011). Recruitment is very variable and biomass fluctuations depends on the incoming years classes. Discards in this area are high, 68% of total catches in 2012, and represent a serious problem for this stock.

For the rest of the managed stocks, in the **Kattegat** (IIIa East), **Sound** (IIIb), **Belt Sea** (IIIc), **Baltic Sea** (24-32), **Bay of Biscay** (VIII), **Portuguese Waters** (IX), **Azores Grounds** (X), **international waters of North Azores** (XII), **east Greenland** (XIV) and **CECAF 34.1.1** (EU), there is no scientific assessment basis to provide an evaluation about its status and exploitation rate.

Oceana proposal

Due to the lack of control over real catches and the high levels of haddock discards, the regulation of its exploitation using only a TAC is not suitable. Management measures must be urgently introduced to improve fishing selectivity. These measures must guarantee the reduction of current discard levels, with the aim of maximising additional recruits to the breeding stock biomass and future catches.

For the **North Sea** (IV) and **Skagerrak** (IIIa west) stock management is dependent on the EU-Norway management plan agreed in 2008. According to the plan, ICES advises that the TAC in 2014 be no more than 40639 tonnes if landings for human consumption are considered, or 45318 tonnes if it is assumed that discards and industrial by-catch have not changed from the previous 3 years, which represents a 15% decrease in catches and fishing at the target rate of 0,3. This TAC does not follow the MSY framework. Following the ICES MSY approach implies a 22% TAC reduction. Therefore, Oceana, while recognizing the obligation to comply with the management plan, recommends that the EU pressure Norway to

follow this criterion. ICES has provisionally assessed the plan and concludes it can be accepted as precautionary

For **Faeroes Grounds** (Vb), ICES advises, based on the MSY and the precautionary approach, that there should be no directed fishery for haddock in 2014. It is the sixth consecutive year that scientists recommend closing the fishery. ICES has warned that it is necessary to put measures in place to minimize haddock by-catch in other fisheries and to develop a recovery plan as a prerequisite to reopening the directed fishery. Oceana agrees with ICES advice to ensure the stock´s recovery over safe biological limits as quickly as possible. Regrettably, even a zero fishing mortality in 2014 will not result in getting the stock above safe biological limits in 2015.

For the **West of Scotland** (VIa) ICES advises, on the basis of the MSY approach, that catches be no more than 6432 tonnes in 2014, which corresponds to 3988 tonnes in landing, and implies a 5% decrease in catches. According to the proposed plan, considered precautionary by ICES, the TAC in 2014 would result in 5223 tonnes (3238 landing tonnes) which represents a 23% decrease; fulfilling the MSY framework. In this case Oceana agrees with the advice as the TAC decrease according to the proposed management plan, is in line with the MSY approach. Oceana proposes fixing a TAC for this area only if the Faeroes Grounds (Vb) are closed to fishing as these two Divisions are managed together under the same TAC. Furthermore, Oceana encourages the mandatory implementation of effective technical measures to reduce haddock discard rates in Nephrops fisheries, which are responsible for up to 70% of haddock discards.

For the **Rockall** stock (VIb), ICES advises that based on the MSY framework catches should be no more than 1620 tonnes in 2014. If discard rates do not change from the average of the last 7 years, this implies landings of no more than 980 tonnes. Oceana agrees with this advice and recommends further management measures to minimize the by-catch of small haddock to maximize their contribution to the recovery of the stock. Oceana urges to follow the scientific advice as otherwise biomass probably will be below safe biological limits in 2014. .

For the **West of Ireland** (VIIb), **Porcupine Bank** (VIIc), **E&W English Channel** (VIId-e), **Bristol Channel** (VIIf), **Celtic Sea N&S** (VIIg-h), **Southwest of Ireland E&W** (VIIj-k), ICES advises on the basis of the MSY transition scheme that landings should be no more than 5281 tonnes, which represents a TAC reduction of 75%, and that fishing mortality should be reduced to 0.39. This situation is largely due to scientific advice being disregarded in recent years. Oceana agrees with this approach and requests the Council to follow the MSY transition scheme approach, especially taking into account recent years of poor recruitment. The high rate of discards puts the stock at risk, and therefore the technical measures that have been introduced should be fully implemented and evaluated in order to reduce discarding and improve recruitment

The haddock in the **Irish Sea** (VIIa) is a data limited stock. ICES advises that, based on the data-limited stock approach, catches should be no more than 1120 tonnes in 2014. This implies a 17% increase in catches compared to the average catches of the last three years. Oceana bears in mind that previous TACs did not seem to be restrictive for the landings mainly due to the restricted TAC for cod, that relative fishing mortality for this stock is above average time series, and the high discard rate, around 68% in 2012, recommends to do not increase catches in 2014. Technical measures like an increase in mesh size (large square meshes) or sorting grids should be widely implemented to reduce the haddock discard ratios, in particular in nephrops and cod fisheries.

For the rest of the managed stocks in the **Kattegat** (IIIa East), **Sound** (IIIb), **Belt Sea** (IIIc), **Baltic Sea** (24-32), **Bay of Biscay** (VIII), **Portuguese Waters** (IX), **Azores Grounds** (X), **international waters of North Azores** (XII), **east Greenland** (XIV) and **CECAF 34.1.1** (EU), Oceana, according to the precautionary approach, proposes a minimal reduction in catches of 15% for those stocks which are not managed together with other stocks for which there is scientific advice.

Table 4. Comparative table of haddock TACs (in tonnes) in ICES areas registered in the proposal, Council decision for 2012 and 2013, stock status and Oceana proposal for 2014.Brackets compare TAC difference from previous year (in %).

Fishing area	Name area	TAC 2013	Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
IIIa, EU waters of IIIb,c,d (22-32)	Skagerrak, Kattegat, Sound, Belt Sea, and Baltic Sea	1616 (-30%)	pm	Above MSY B trigger (IIIa W), Completely unknown (IIIaE,b,c,d)	1260 (-22%)
IV, EU Waters of IIa	North Sea, EU Waters of Norwegian Sea	27417 (-9%)	pm	Above MSY B trigger (IV, IIa)	21385 (-22%)
Norwegian waters of South 62º	Norwegian waters South of 62º	Not relevant	pm	Above MSY B trigger (IV, IIIa west)	Not relevant
EU and Internat Waters of VIb, XII and XIV	EU and Internat Waters of Rockall, North of Azores, East Greenland	990 (-70%)	1210 (+22%)	Below PA (VIb), Completely unknown (XII, XIV)	980 (-1%)
Vb, VIa	Faeroes Grounds, West of Scotland	4211 (-30%)	3988 (-5%)	Below Blim (Vb) Above PA and MSY B trigger (VIa)	0 (-100%) or 3238* (-23%)
VIIa	Irish Sea	1189 (-5%)	951 (-20%)	Unknown uptrend (VIIa)	1189 (0%)
VIIb-k, VIII, IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1 (EU)	West of Ireland, Porcupine Bank, E&W English Channel, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea N&S, Southwest of Ireland E&W, Bay of Biscay, Portuguese Waters, Azores Grounds , CECAF 34.1.1	14148 (-15%)	3602 (-75%)	Above MSY B trigger (VIIb-k) Completely unknown (VIII, IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1)	3602 (-75%)

* Only in the case that Faeroes Grounds (Vb) is close to fishing.

Hake (*Merluccius merluccius*)

Species description

European hake (*Merluccius merluccius*) is widely distributed throughout the North-East Atlantic, from Norway and Iceland down to southern Mauritania. This demersal species is found on bottoms between 70 and 370 meters depth where it feeds on crustaceans during its juvenile stage and on fish during its adult stage.

State of the stocks

The management of hake in European waters distinguishes itself between two big stocks that are managed differently: the northern and the southern stocks. After years of overexploitation the state of both stocks is clearly improving. These populations are managed through management plans[8,9] that should be updated.

For the northern stock of **Skagerrak and Kattegat** (IIIa), **North Sea** (IV), **Rockall and West of Scotland** (VI), **Irish Sea, West of Ireland, Porcupine Bank, Eastern and Western English Channel, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North and South**, and **Southwest of Ireland** (VII) and **North, Central and Offshore Bay of Biscay** (VIIIa,b,d), spawning biomass has been increasing since 1998, with the exception of 2006, and particularly during 2009-2011. This trend has placed the biomass in 2012 at a record high above any potential reference point. Equally positive is the fishing mortality trend, which has decreased sharply in recent years and has been stable close to Fmsy in 2011 and 2012. Recruitment fluctuations appear to show no substantial trend over the whole series: after low recruitments in 2009, 2010 and 2011, the 2012 is estimated to be the highest in the time-series. There is still a great amount of uncertainty concerning the total number of catches due to the amount of undeclared discards, especially of juvenile hake, which can be substantial in some areas and fleets. Landings far exceeded the TACs during previous years. The new status of the stock, which was subjected to high levels of exploitation from the late 1980s to the mid-2000s, requires a new management plan according to new management objectives as the current ones are based on reference points that are no longer appropriate.

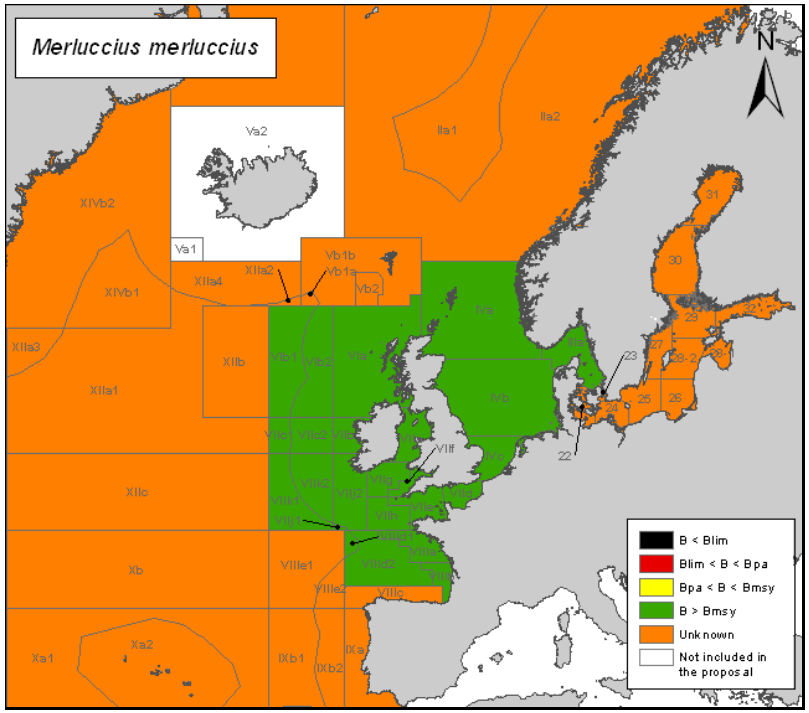


Figure 5. Hake stock status in ICES areas included in the proposal according to spawning biomass[10].

[8] Council Regulation (EC) No 811/2004 of 21 April 2004 establishing measures for the recovery of the Northern hake stock.

[9] Council Regulation (EC) No 2166/2005 of 20 .December 2005 establishing measures for the recovery of the Southern hake and Norway lobster stocks in the Cantabrian Sea and Western Iberian Peninsula.

[10] Stock status based on trends for IIIa, IV, VI, VII, VIIIabd

In the southern hake stock of **South of Bay of Biscay** (VIIIc) and **East of Portuguese waters** (IXa), there is no known biomass reference point. Biomass has been improving since 1998, when spawning biomass was at historic lows, and it is considered to be above the average in 2012. Fishing mortality has decreased in recent years but it is still well above MSY mortality, about two- to three times higher. Most recruitments have been above the historical average since 2005 which has helped the stocks recovery in recent years. Catch levels and landings have far exceeded the approved TACs in past years due to a lack of control by Member States and commitment from the fleets. There is no match between minimum landing size and the trawl mesh size currently enforced, resulting in high discard rates.

For the rest of the managed stocks, in the **Sound** (IIIb), **Belt Sea** (IIIc), **Baltic Sea** (24-32), **European Waters of Norwegian Sea** (EU waters of IIa), **EU and international waters of Faeroes Grounds** (Vb), **int waters of North Azores** (XII), **East Greenland** (XIV), **West of Bay of Biscay** (VIIIe), **West Portuguese Waters** (IXb), **Azores Grounds** (X) and **CECAF 34.1.1** (EU), there is no scientific assessment basis to provide an evaluation about its status and rate of exploitation.

Oceana proposal

Because of the new perspective on assessments and stocks status, the current existing management plans should no longer be used. Oceana suggests the possible implementation of TACs according to the MSY framework instead of the corresponding recovery plans.

For the northern stock, **Skagerrak and Kattegat** (IIIa), **North Sea** (IV), **Rockall and West of Scotland** (VI), **Irish Sea, West of Ireland, Porcupine Bank, Eastern and Western English Channel, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North and South, and Southwest of Ireland** (VII) and **North, Central and Offshore Bay of Biscay** (VIIIa,b,d), the recovery plan (EC Nº 811/2004) implies a maximum TAC increase of 15%, which means a maximum TAC of 63397 tonnes in landings. ICES advises, on the basis of the MSY approach, that landings in 2014 be no more than 81846 tonnes, a 49% increase from the 2013 TAC. Advice is based on landings because the total amount of discards cannot be quantified. Oceana agrees with both advices as the objectives of the management plan has been achieved. Oceana also recommends updating the current management plan as ICES has stated that target values based on precautionary reference points are no longer appropriate. Spawning biomass and the long-term yield can be substantially improved by reducing small fish mortality through technical measures.

For the Southern stock, **South of Bay of Biscay** (VIIIc) and **East of Portuguese waters** (IXa), ICES advises on the basis of the transition to the MSY approach, that catches be no more than 13123 tonnes in 2014, which implies a reduction in TAC by 15%, and landings of no more than 12025 tonnes. The existing management plan (Regulation (EC) Nº 2166/2005) means a 10% reduction in fishing mortality and a 15% constraint on TAC changes between years; this would lead to a TAC of 17772 tonnes in 2014. It is worth remembering that although ICES has not carried out an in-depth assessment of the management plan, it stated that the plan's target is no longer valid because reference points are no longer appropriate. Due to the uncertainty regarding the management plan, Oceana supports fixing a TAC according to the MSY transition scheme proposed by ICES.

For the rest of the managed stocks **Sound** (IIIb), **Belt Sea** (IIIc), **Baltic Sea** (24-32), **European Waters of Norwegian Sea** (EU waters of IIa), **EU and international waters of Faeroes Grounds** (Vb), **int waters of North Azores** (XII), **East Greenland** (XIV), **West of Bay of Biscay** (VIIIe), **West Portuguese Waters** (IXb), **Azores Grounds** (X), and **CECAF 34.1.1** (EU), scientists cannot provide assessments because fishing parameters are lacking. For those stocks, Oceana, according to the precautionary approach, proposes a minimal reduction in catches of 15% for those stocks which are not managed with other stocks for which there is a scientific advice.

Table 5. Comparative table of hake TACs (in tonnes) in ICES areas registered in the proposal, Council decision for 2012 and 2013, stock status and Oceana proposal for 2014. Brackets compare TAC difference from previous year (in %).

Fishing area	Name area	TAC 2013	Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
IIIa, EU waters of IIIb and IIIc, IIId (22-32)	Skagerrak, Kattegat, EU waters of Sound, Belt Sea, and Baltic Sea	1661 (0%)	2466 (+49%)	Possibly above MSY (IIIa) & Completely unknown (IIIbcd)	1910 (+15%) or 2466 (+49%)
EU waters of IIa and IV	European Waters of Norwegian Sea and North Sea	1935 (0%)	2874 (+49%)	Completely unknown (IIa) & Possibly above MSY (IV)	2225 (+15%) or 2874 (+49%)
VI, VII, EU waters of Vb, int waters of XII, XIV	Rockall, West of Scotland, Irish Sea, West of Ireland, Porcupine Bank, Eastern and Western English Channel, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North and South, and Southwest of Ireland, EU waters of Faeroes Grounds, int waters of North Azores, East Greenland .	30900 (0%)	45896 (+49%)	Possibly above MSY (VI, VII) & Completely unknown (Vb, XII, XIV)	35535 (+15%) or 45896 (+49%)
VIIIa, VIIIb, VIIId, VIIIe	Bay of Biscay (North), Bay of Biscay (Central), Bay of Biscay (Offshore), West of Bay of Biscay	20609 (0%)	30610 (+49%)	Possibly above MSY (VIIIabd) & Completely unknown (VIIIe)	23700 (+15%) or 30610 (+49%)
VIIIc, IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1 (EU)	Bay of Biscay (South), Portuguese Waters, Azores Grounds	14144 (+15%)	16266 (+15%)	Unknown uptrend (VIIIc, IXa), Completely unknown (IXb, X, CECAF 34.1.1)	12022 (-15%)

Herring (*Clupea harengus*)

Species description

Herring is found throughout the North Atlantic. In the North-East Atlantic, the species is distributed from the Bay of Biscay up to Iceland and southern Greenland, including the Baltic Sea. The species forms schools in coastal waters and feeds on small pelagic copepods.

State of the stocks

In 2008, the EU approved a multi-annual plan for fisheries exploiting herring [11], in waters of Faeroes Grounds (Vb), Rockall (VIb), and part of Western of Scotland (VIa), which ICES has assessed as being in compliance with the precautionary approach. The plan has not yet begun to show positive results. The species, and in particular juveniles, is usually caught as by-catch by industrial fisheries.

In the Herring North Sea autumn spawners, **Skagerrak** (IIIa West), **Kattegat** (IIIa East), **North Sea** (IV) and the **Eastern English Channel** (VIId), the stock looks in good condition and could be classified as being at full reproductive capacity, nevertheless, MSY biomass reference point has not been defined yet. Biomass has been increasing since 2007 and it is currently well above Bpa. The stock suffered several years of collapse between mid-60s to mid-80s with lowest time-series biomass. Fishing mortality has been low for the past five years and since 2008 is below MSY. Although recruitment in 2008 and 2009 are estimated to be above the long-term geometric mean the year classes from 2002 onwards are estimated to be among the weakest since the late 1970s. ICES considers the stock to be in a low productivity phase, as the survival ratio between newly hatched larvae and recruits is still much lower than prior to 2001. All catches are assumed to be landed.

There is no accurate survey data for stocks in the **West of Scotland-South** (VIa South), **West of Ireland** (VIIb) and **Porcupine Bank** (VIIc) but an exploratory ICES assessment shows that biomass is well below safe biological limits since mid-90´s. This indicates that stocks are in a state of complete overexploitation and collapse. Recruitment information is uncertain but it does not appear to be above average limiting a possible change in trend or recovery in the short term. The exploratory assessments show some discrepancies in mortality trends but both assessment methods (VPA and ICA) indicate a fishing mortality reduction during the last year. VPA estimates that F is well above Fmsy while ICA estimates the F below Fmsy. Discards are considered to be low. A rebuilding plan is necessary for a proper management of this stock.

In the stock of the **West of Scotland-North** (VIa North) spawning stock biomass has been fluctuating at a low level since the mid-1970s and is currently just above safe biological limits. Fishing mortality has showed a progressive reduction trend during last decades and in recent years it is below MSY. Current recruitment is low compared with the historical period. A stock recovery is expected in the medium term if the recruitment trend changes. All catches are assumed to be landed so discards are considered to be low.

In the **Irish Sea-North** (VIIa North) spawning stock biomass has been progressively increasing since 2004 and currently is well above MSY B trigger, it is at its highest abundance within the 18 year time-series. Fishing mortality has decreased since 2003 and has been fluctuating around MSY in recent years with the lowest values in the time-series. Recruitment has increased during the last decade and it is estimated to be above the average of the time-series since 2006. All catches are assumed to be landed therefore discards are considered to be low. Spawning and nursery areas are sensitive and vulnerable to anthropogenic influences.

Stocks from **Irish Sea-South** (VIIa South), **Celtic Sea** (VIIg,h) and **Southwest of Ireland** (VIIj,k) are in a good state and are exploited in a sustainable way. Spawning stock biomass has increased since 2005 and is currently at its highest level since the late 1960s, and at its full reproductive capacity. Fishing mortality is below Fmsy since 2007, although it has increased slightly since 2010. Year classes over the past years are above average, in particular 2003/4, 2005/6

[11] Council Regulation (EC) 1300/2008

and 2007/8 year classes. All catches are assumed to be landed, therefore, discards are considered to be low. Spawning and nursery areas are sensitive and vulnerable to anthropogenic influences.

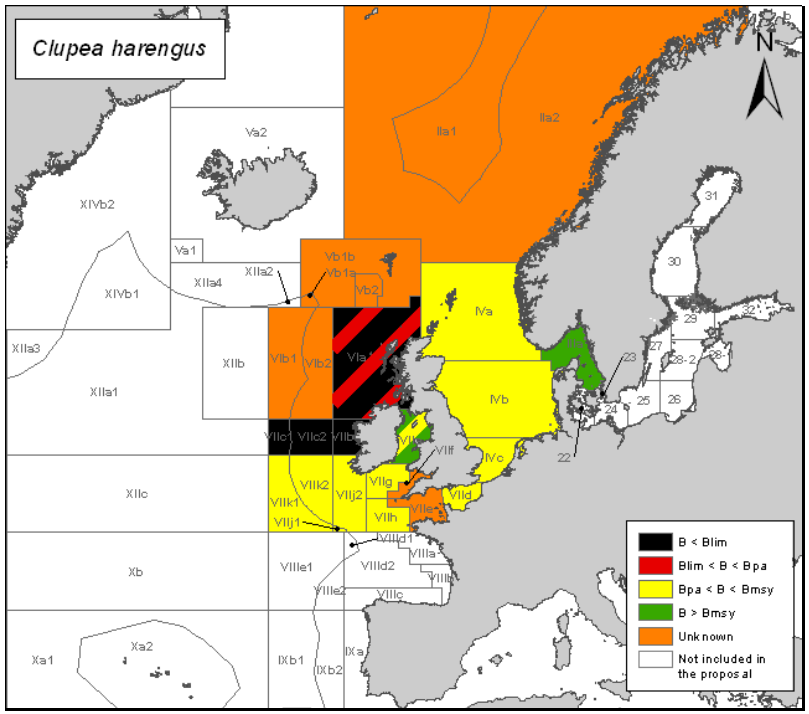


Figure 6. Herring stock status in ICES areas included in the proposal according to spawning biomass[12].

For the rest of the managed stocks, in the **EU waters of Norwegian Sea** (IIa), **Faeroes Grounds** (Vb), **Rockall** (VIb), **Western English Channel** (VIIe) and **Bristol Channel** (VIIf) there is no scientific assessment basis to provide an evaluation of its status and rate of exploitation.

[12] Stock status based on trends for VIa, VIIbc.

Oceana proposal

Given the importance of gravel substrate as an important fish habitat for herring spawning, activities that have a negative impact on this habitat, such as the extraction of marine aggregates and marine construction on spawning grounds, should not occur.

For the stocks of **Skagerrak** (IIIa West), **Kattegat** (IIIa East), **North Sea** (IV) and the **Eastern English Channel** (VIId) ICES advises, on the basis of the agreed EU-Norway management plan, that total catches in 2014 be no more than 482477 tonnes, which implies a 2% decrease in TAC. The management plan is considered to be consistent with the precautionary approach and the MSY by ICES. Oceana therefore agrees with the TAC proposed, although it would let biomass decrease by 11% in 2014.

For the **West of Scotland-South** (VIa-S) **West of Ireland** (VIIb), **Porcupine Bank** (VIIc), ICES has recommended on the basis of the precautionary considerations and the MSY approach, that there be no catches. It is the sixth time in eight years that scientists have recommended the closure of the fishery. Due to the poor stock situation, Oceana agrees that the closure is needed to enable this stock to recover.

For the stock of the **West of Scotland-North** (VIa North), on the basis of the agreed management plan, the TAC for 2013 should be no more than 28067 tonnes, which represents a 2% increase in catches. ICES has evaluated the plan and concludes that it is in accordance with the precautionary approach. It seems that the management plan catch recommendation could be in line with the MSY approach, so Oceana agrees with this advice despite the unknown status of the other stocks managed under the same TAC.

For the **Irish Sea North** (VIIa North) ICES advises on the basis of the MSY approach, that catches in 2014 should be no more than 5251 tonnes, which represents a 5% increase of catches and a fishing

mortality at 0.26. Oceana recommends setting a TAC according to the MSY framework and not increasing catches by more than 5%. This stock is managed together with VIIa South.

For the **Irish Sea South** (VIIa South), **Celtic Sea** (VIIg,h) and **Southwest of Ireland** (VIIj,k) stocks, ICES advises on the basis of the MSY approach, that landings in 2014 should be no more than 35942 tonnes, which implies a 109% TAC increase. According to the management plan agreed by the Pelagic RAC and evaluated by the Irish Marine Institute and ICES as precautionary, the TAC in 2014 should be set at 22360 tonnes, a 30% TAC increase. Both proposed TACs are compatible with the MSY framework, but Oceana recommends a 30% increase to provide progressive stability in catches over time.

For the rest of managed stocks **EU waters of Norwegian Sea** (IIa), **Faeroes Grounds** (Vb), **Rockall** (VIb), **Western English Channel** (VIIe) and **Bristol Channel** (VIIf), Oceana, according to the precautionary approach, proposes a minimal reduction in catches of 15% for stocks that are not managed together with other stocks for which there is a scientific advice.

Table 6. Comparative table of herring TACs (in tonnes) in ICES areas registered in the proposal, Council decision for 2012 and 2013, stock status and Oceana proposal for 2014. Brackets compare TAC difference from previous year (in %).

Fishing area	Name area	TAC 2013	Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
IIIa	Skagerrak and Kattegat	31500 (-19%)	pm	Above PA (IV)	30870 (-2%)
Union and Norwegian waters of IV (N 53º03´)	EU and Norwegian Waters of North Sea (north of 53º30´)	170099 (-30%)	pm	Above PA (IV)	166697 (-2%)
Norwegian waters south of 62ºN	Norwegian Waters south of 62º	Unknown	pm	Above PA (IV)	? (-2%)
By-catches IIIa	by-catches in Skagerrak and Kattegat	4661 (-30%)	pm	Below PA (IIIa)	4661 (0%)
By-catches IV, VIId and Union waters of IIa	by-catches in North Sea, Eastern English Channel and EU waters of Norwegian waters	12529 (-30%)	pm	Above PA (IV, VIId), completely unknown (IIa)	12529 (0%)
IVc, VIId	Southern North Sea and Eastern English Cannel	31185 (-30%)	pm	Above PA (IVc, VIId)	30561 (-2%)
Vb, VIb, VIa (N)	EU and int waters of Faeroes Grounds, Rockall and north of west of Scotland (N)	27480 (+20%)	pm	Completely unknown (Vb, VIb) Unknown (VIaN)	28067 (+2%)
VIa (S), VIIb, VIIc	West of Scotland (S), West of Ireland, Porcupine Bank	1500 (-65%)	pm	Below safe biological limits (VIaS, VIIbc)	0 (-100%)
VI Clyde		?	pm (UK)	?	?
VIIa (South & (North)	Irish Sea	4993 (+5%)	5251 (+5%)	Above MSY B trigger (VIIaN and S)	5243 (+5%)
VIIe and VIIf	Western English Channel and Bristol Channel	931 (-5%)	931 (0%)	Completely unknown (VIIe,f)	791 (-15%)
VIIg, VIIh, VIIj, VIIk	Celtic Sea North and South, Southwest of Ireland East and West	17200 (-18%)	22360 (+30%)	Above MSY B trigger (VIIg-k)	22360 (+30%)

Mackerel (*Scomber scombrus*)

Species description

Atlantic mackerel is present throughout the North Atlantic, although it is more abundant around the continental shelf, in cold or temperate waters. Mackerel form large schools and feed on zooplankton and small fish.

State of the stocks

Mackerel in the NE Atlantic comprises 3 spawning stocks areas that are widely spread. These are the western (**VI, VII, VIIIa,b,d,e**), southern (**VIIIc, IXa**) and North Sea (**IV, IIIa**) spawning components, Only the North Sea component could be considered as a separate spawning component. The combined NE Atlantic mackerel is assessed as one stock.

There are uncertainties in previous catches reports and unaccounted mortality, restricted to the period before 2005, which indicates that the assessment model used until 2012 underestimated the stock size. So ICES states that potential catch for this stock had been underestimated in the recent past and that the previous stock assessment method was no longer appropriate. Catches of mackerel have been increasing since 2005 and have been around 900 Kt since 2009 when the exploitation agreement between was broken.

Fortunately, the stock's status does not seem to be affected; survey results and estimates of mortality based on catch give indications that there has been an increase in stock size, so it seems that current levels of catch and landings do not pose a threat to the stock. The mackerel egg survey index shows a preliminary 30% increase from 2010 to 2013.

There is no proper evaluation concerning discards. For a limited number of fleets, discards are estimated to be low but for other fleets, however, the discards may be significant. The collection of reliable data, especially discards, slippage and unreported landings, is a necessity to improve the stock assessment.

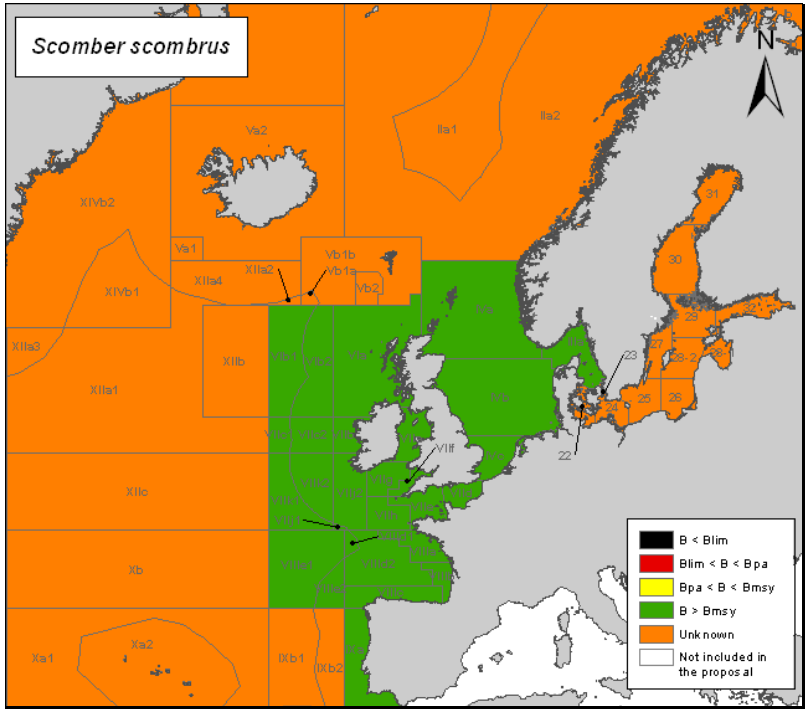


Figure 7. Mackerel stock status in ICES areas included in the proposal according to spawning biomass[13].

Oceana's Position

A management plan was agreed upon in 2008 by Norway, the Faroe Islands and the EU, to replace a previous agreement reached in 1999. ICES has evaluated the plan and concluded that it is precautionary. This year however, ICES was unable to give advice according to the management plan as there was no accepted analytical assessment for mackerel in 2013. The current model basis

[13] Stock status based on previous reference points.

for the assessment has been rejected. A new benchmark for mackerel is scheduled for February 2014

Despite the uncertainties in the stock assessment, it should be noted that there has not been an international agreement on TACs since 2009, when several countries decided to increase their catch quotas unilaterally by more than 200%. This situation endangers coordinated resource exploitation, with unpredictable biological consequences, as well as risking other fishing agreements. Oceana urges the countries involved in the exploitation of mackerel to seek a consensus which will enable sustainable exploitation of common fishery resources.

According to ICES, and on the basis of the landings of the last three years, which do not seem to affect the stock negatively in the short term, landings of mackerel should be no more than 889886 tonnes in 2014. ICES advice on catches cannot be provided because discards cannot be quantified accurately. Oceana agrees with this approach even though it is considerably higher than the TACs advised by ICES in the recent years.

It should be added that ICES advises that the existing measures to protect the North Sea spawning component should remain in place. These measures are the following:

• There should be no mackerel fishing in Divisions IIIa and IVb,c at any time of the year;

• There should be no mackerel fishing in Division IVa during the period 15 February–31 July, and

• The 30 cm minimum landing size currently in force in Subarea IV should be maintained.

Controlling excess catches continues to be a problem for this species. This lack of control leads to mortality rates which seriously threaten the stock development.

Table 7. Comparative table of mackerel TACs (in tonnes) in ICES areas registered in the proposal, Council decision for 2011 and 2012, and stock status and Oceana proposal for 2013. Brackets compare TAC difference from previous year (in %).

Fishing area	Name area	TAC 2013	Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
IIIa, IV, EU waters of IIa, IIIb, IIIc, 22-32	Skagerrak and Kattegat, North Sea, European waters of Norwegian Sea, Sound and Belt Sea, and Baltic Sea	21133 (+6%)	pm	Unknown (IV, IIa, IIIabc)	21133 (0%)
VI, VII, VIIIa,b,d,e, EU and internat waters Vb, internat waters IIa, XII, XIV	Rockall and West of Scotland, Irish Sea, West of Ireland, Porcupine Bank, Eastern and Western English Channel, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North and South, and Southwest of Ireland - East and West, Bay of Biscay North, Central, Offshore, West, European and international waters of Faeroes Grounds, international waters of Norwegian Sea, North of Azores and East Greenland	240792 (-7%)	pm	Unknown (VI, VII, VIIIabde, Vb, IIa, XII, XIV)	240792 (0%)
VIIIc, IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1 (EU)	Bay of Biscay South, Portuguese Waters, Azores Grounds and European waters of CECAF 34.1.1	27554 (-7%)	pm	Unknown (VIIIc, IXa IXb, X, CECAF 34.1.1)	27554 (0%)
Norwegian waters of IIa and IVa	Norwegian waters of Norwegian Sea and Northern North Sea	Not relevant	pm	Unknown (Iva, IIa)	Not relevant

Megrim (*Lepidorhombus* spp.)

Species description

The two species of megrim found in the North-East Atlantic are *Lepidorhombus whiffiagonis* and *Lepidorhombus boscii.* Widely distributed, these species are found from Icelandic waters to the African coasts of the Western Sahara on soft bottoms and at depths ranging between 288 and 700 meters where they feed on small demersal fish, cephalopods and crustaceans.

State of the stocks

Despite the fact that the two species are widely distributed and exploited, the state of most stocks is still uncertain despite years of management. *L. whiffiagonis,* which makes up around 20% of the total catches, is the species in the poorest state of conservation in terms of biomass.

In the **Northern North Sea** (IVa) and **West of Scotland** (VIa) the stocks are in a good state and exploited in a sustainable way. Spawning stock biomass is stable and well above MSY B trigger, in its highest record for the past 3 decades. Overall, mortality has declined since the late 1990s and since then it has been maintained at levels below MSY. Information about discards is imprecise but it is estimated to have declined from 30% in the beginning of the time series to 15% in 2012.

In the **Rockall** (VIb) although there is no analytical assessment for this stock because of the lack of basic data, the 2012 survey indices show an increase in biomass over the last time-series from 2005 to 2010 followed by a decline in 2011 and a substantive increase in 2012. The biomass average of the stock in the last two years 2011–2012 is 52% higher than the average of the three previous years. Paradoxically commercial landings per unit of effort showed an increase in 2011 and a decrease in 2012 and the harvest ratio has been on a low and stable level since 2007. No reference points have been defined for this stock. Discards are known to take place but are not quantified. There has been a substantial reduction in effort in recent years.

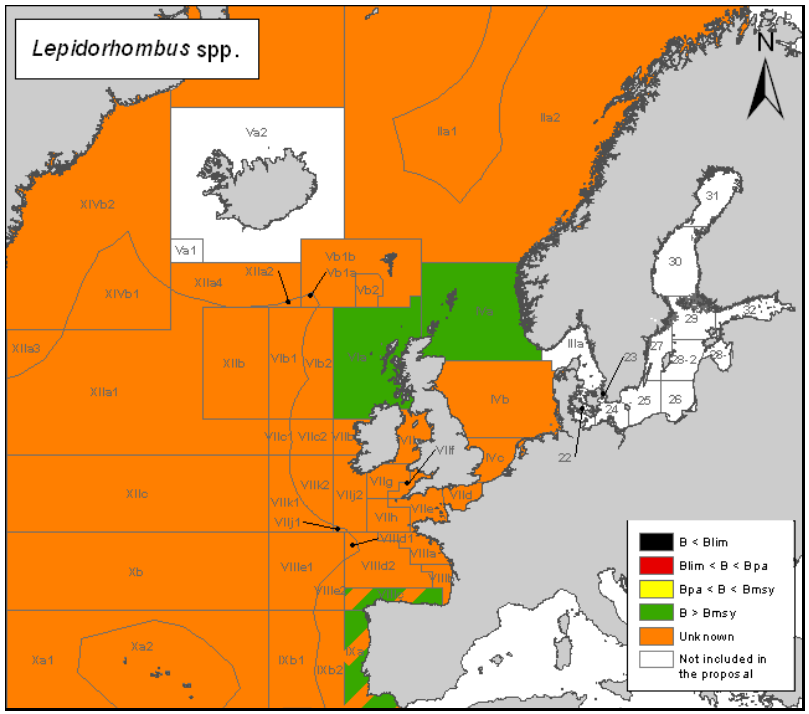


Figure 8. Megrim stock status in ICES areas included in the proposal according to spawning biomass.

In the **West of Ireland** (VIIb), **Porcupine Bank** (VIIc), **Eastern and Western English Channel** (VIId,e) **Bristol Channel** (VIIf), **Celtic Sea North and South**, (VIIg,h) and **Southwest of Ireland** (VIIj.k) and **North, Central and Offshore Bay of Biscay** (VIIIa,b,d), new data available for this stock does not change its perception, therefore, ICES status description in 2014 remains the same as for 2013. The state of the stock and exploitation rate is uncertain and the

analytical assessment should only be considered as indicative of trends using data through 2010. Trends in biomass indicated an increase of 25% in the last two years 2009–2010 compared to the three previous years, when the stock was below its long term average. Fishing mortality in the last decade has been stable but above its long-term average. Previous defined reference points are no longer valid and no new points have been defined yet. The discard rate is estimated to be at 25%, consisting mainly of undersized megrims and high-grading. The management implemented for this stock in previous years has not followed the scientists´ catch recommendations.

In the Iberian Peninsula, **South of Bay of Biscay** (VIIIc) and **East of Portuguese waters** (IXa) the ICES stock assessment differentiates the two species caught.

The *L. boscii* biomass continues increasing in an upward trend since 2001, when it was at its lowest recorded level, and it is in a record high in 2013. Fishing mortality which has been above MSY framework in the time series fell below the Fmsy for first time in 2012.

In the case of *L. whiffiagonis,* biomass has increased from a minimum observed in 2009 but it is still low. Fishing mortality has been fluctuating during last year and according to the latest available data it is above MSY. Recruitment has been low for over a decade with the exception of the high 2009 year-class estimate for *L whiffiagonis* and around average since 2000, with the exception of a record high in 2009, for *L boscii*. The range of discards for both species is substantial and estimated between 39-63% and 10-45% (in numbers) respectively although this is considered to be an underestimation.

For the rest of the managed stocks, in the **Norwegian Sea** (IIa), **Central and South North Sea** (IVb,c), **Faeroes Grounds** (Vb), **Irish Sea** (VIIa), **West of Bay of Biscay** (VIIIe), **North Azores** (XII), **East Greenland** (XIV), **West Portuguese Waters** (IXb), **Azores Grounds** (X) and **CECAF 34.1.1** there is no scientific assessment basis to provide an evaluation about its status and rate of exploitation.

Oceana proposal

The poor information on the stocks in some areas, and the uncertainty about their evolution in others, makes it necessary to improve data collection systems and, consequently, the assessment of this species.

Management of the stocks is set for the two species of megrim since they are caught and recorded together in landings. The advice on TACs should be based on the stock that is in the poorest condition.

For the **Northern North Sea** (IVa) and **West of Scotland** (VIa) ICES advises, on the basis of the MSY approach, that catches in 2014 and 2015 should be no more than 7000 tonnes, which implies landings of no more than 5950 tonnes if the discard rate does not change from the average of the last three years. Oceana recommends that the Council propose this TAC, as the probability of the biomass falling below the MSY B trigger is less than 1%.

For the **Rockall** (VIb) stock, ICES advises, on the basis of data-limited stocks approach, that landings should be no more than 207 tonnes. As discards cannot be quantified, total catches cannot be calculated. Considering that harvest ratio is low and the substantial increase in biomass according to the survey indices, Oceana agrees with the precautionary approach presented by ICES. Despite this increase recommendation, landings are below the established TAC. Scientists recommend that megrim in Rockall should be managed as a single separate stock.

In the **West of Ireland** (VIIb), **Porcupine Bank** (VIIc), **Eastern and Western English Channel** (VIId,e) **Bristol Channel** (VIIf), **Celtic Sea North and South**, (VIIg,h) and **Southwest of Ireland** (VIIj.k) and **North, Central and Offshore Bay of Biscay** (VIIIa,b,d), ICES advises, on the basis of the data limited stocks approach, that landings should be no more than 12000 tonnes in 2014. Oceana agrees with this precautionary recommendation that means a reduction in landings by 37%.

For the stocks of the Iberian Peninsula, **South of Bay of Biscay** (VIIIc) and **East of Portuguese waters** (IXa), ICES advises on the basis of the MSY approach, that combined catches of megrims should be no more than 2790 tonnes, 2257 landings tonnes, which represents a 86% TAC increase, if discard rates do not change from average of the last decade. Oceana agrees with this advice. However, as these stocks are managed together and their state is unknown (IXb, X and CECAF 34.1.1), Oceana recommends also selecting a more precautionary increase, around 50%, in order to provide for a progressive stability in fishing opportunities.

For the rest of the managed stocks **Norwegian Sea** (IIa), **Central and South North Sea** (IVb,c), **Faeroes Grounds** (Vb), **Irish Sea** (VIIa), **West of Bay of Biscay** (VIIIe), **North Azores** (XII), **East Greenland** (XIV), **West Portuguese Waters** (IXb), **Azores Grounds** (X) and **CECAF 34.1.1**, according to the precautionary approach, Oceana proposes a minimal reduction in catches of 15% for those stocks that are not managed together with other stocks for which there is a scientific advice.

Table 8. Comparative table of megrim TACs (in tonnes) in ICES areas registered in the proposal, Council decision for 2012 and 2013, stock status and Oceana proposal for 2014. Brackets compare TAC difference from previous year (in %).

Fishing area	Name area	TAC 2013	Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
EU Waters of IIa and IV	EU Waters of Norwegian Sea and North Sea	1937 (+5%)	2083 (+8%)	Completely Unknown (IIa, IVbc), above MSY B trigger (IVa)	2083 (+8%)
VI, EU and int Waters of Vb, intern waters of XII and XIV	Rockall, West of Scotland, EU and int Waters of Faeroes Grounds, intern waters of North of Azores and East Greenland	3387 (0%)	4074 (+20%)	Above MSY B trigger (VIa), Unknown uptrend (VIb) Completely unknown (Vb, XII, XIV)	4074 (+20%))
VII	Irish Sea, West of Ireland, Porcupine Bank, Eastern and Western English Channel, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North and South, and Southwest of Ireland - East and West	17385 (0%)	13908 (-20%)	Unknown uptrend (VIIb-k), Completely unknown (VIIa)	10922 (-37%)
VIIIa, VIIIb, VIIId, VIIIe	North, Central, Offshore and West Bay of Biscay	1716 (0%)	1373 (-20%)	Unknown uptrend (VIIabd), Completely unknown (VIIIe)	1078 (-37%)
VIIIc IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1 (EU)	South Bay of Biscay, Portuguese Waters, Azores Grounds, CECAF 34.1.1	1214 (0%)	2257 (+86%)	Completely unknown (IXb, X, CECAF 34.1.1), unknown stable and increasing (VIIIc, IXa)	2257 (+86%) or 1821 (+50%)

*Stock status depending on the species: unknown uptrend for *L. boscii* and unknown stable for *L. whiffiagonis*.

Norway lobster (*Nephrops norvegicus)*

Species description

Norway lobster occurs throughout the continental shelf and the East Atlantic slope, from Iceland to the Atlantic coast of Morocco. It is present in muddy bottoms between 20 and 800 meters depth. The species feeds on detritus, crustaceans and annelids.

State of the stocks

Nephrops are limited to muddy habitats. This means that the distribution of suitable sediment defines the species distribution and stocks are therefore assessed as separate functional units inside the same area. ICES provides specific information on the state of the stocks in functional units. The general state of the stocks is not unfavourable, with several Functional Units (FU) exploited at the MSY B trigger. However, problems persist for stocks which are in a worse condition, such as those in the north and west areas of the Iberian Peninsula.

In **Skagerrak** and **Kattegat** (IIIa), there are two functional units, Skagerrak (FU3) and Kattegat (FU4), which are assessed together as one stock. Although there is no sound information, estimates of absolute abundance available for 2011 and 2012, based on biological underwater surveys, showed a 30% decrease. Otherwise fishery indices like landings per unit effort (IPUE) suggest an increase in biomass over time-series. However IPUE is also influenced by changes in catchability, selectivity or gear efficiency. It must be stressed that discards (in weight) in 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 represented 56%, 39%, 31% and 52% respectively of total catches.

In the **North Sea** (IV) nephrops stocks are assessed as nine separate functional units, and for several of them, no reference points have been defined. Overall, catches grew constantly until 2006, doubling in a period of ten years. Since then, catches have slowly started to decline. Landings in the North Sea were around 16900 and 13500 tonnes in 2011 and 2012.

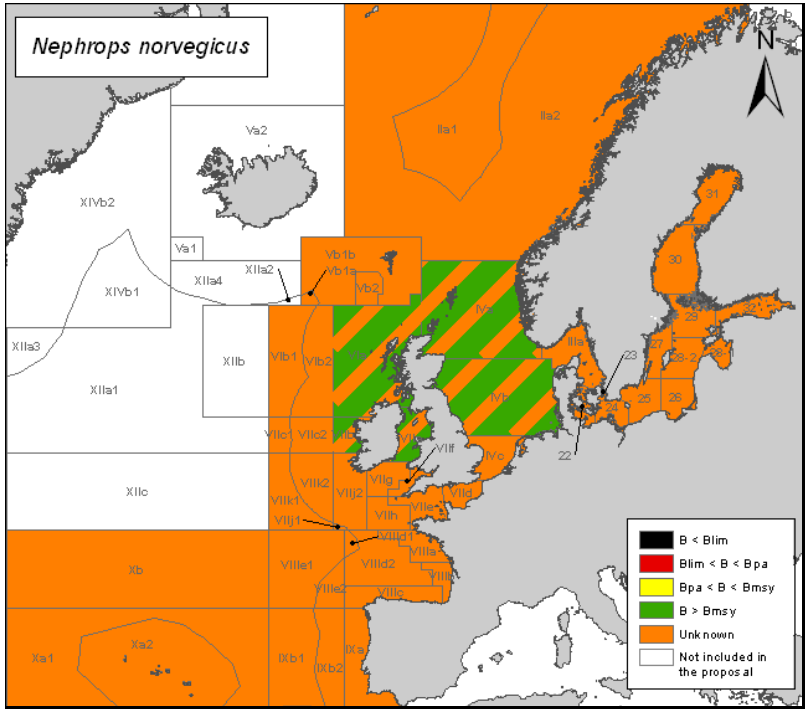


Figure 9. Norway lobster stock status in ICES areas included in the proposal according to spawning biomass[14].

The current management of the Norway lobster in the North Sea, both in terms of TAC and effort, does not offer enough guarantees to be sustainable. Few of the units are in “good” condition: Moray Firth (FU9-IVa) and Firth of Forth (FU8-IVb), although their fishing mortality is clearly above the MSY framework. For the rest of the

[14] VII based on trends

functional units, Farn Deeps (FU6-IVb), Botney Gut-Silver Pit (FU5-IVbc), Fladen Ground (FU7-IVa), Noup (FU10-IVa), Norwegian Deeps (FU32-IVa), Off Horn´s Reef (FU33IVb), Devil´s Hole (FU34-IVb) and the group of other areas or rectangles, the status is overexploited or unknown. Despite the use of more selective gears trawling for nephrops results in by-catch and discards of other species, including cod, haddock and whiting that can be high due to the mesh size. This is particularly problematic for the various North Sea cod stocks which are in poor condition. Nephrops discards are also high for several FUs, up to 27%.

In the **West of Scotland** (VIa) there are three functional units: North Minch (FU11), South Minch (FU12) and Firth of Clyde+Sound of Jura (FU13) that are in good shape, FU11 and FU12 are above the MSY B trigger, although their fishing mortality rates are above MSY framework. However, there are deficiencies in the assessment of FU13, while Firth of Clyde seems to be not overexploited, Sound of Jura shows a biomass downtrend. For the rest of the rectangles outside FUs there is no information available on the trend in the stock or its exploitation status. For some fleets, high rates of discard of haddock and whiting have been observed in recent years.

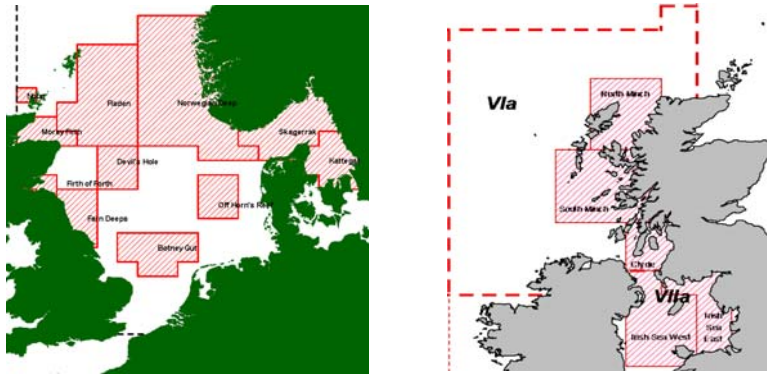


Figure 9.1 Nephrops functional units in the North Sea and Skagerrak-Kattegat (left) and in the West of Scotland (right). Source: ICES.

In Subdivisions of **Subarea VII,** stocks are assessed as seven separate functional units belonging to different regions: FU14 and FU15 (Irish Sea-VIIa), FU16 (West of Ireland-VIIb, Porcupine Bank-VIIc, South West of Ireland-VIIjk), FU17 (West of Ireland-VIIb), FU19 (Irish Sea VIIa, Celtic Sea North VIIg, South West of Ireland East VIIj) FU20, FU21,22 (Celtic Sea- VIIgh). The state of the stocks varies among functional units. Most of the catches, around 55% of total catches of the area, are taken in the FU15 followed by the FU22 and FU 20-21 with around 12% each respectively. There are also small catches from areas outside these functional units and FU18, which are not formally assessed. Trawling for nephrops results in high by-catch and discards of other commercial species including cod, haddock, whiting, hake, monkfish and megrim.

In the **North** and **Central Bay of Biscay** (VIIIab), two functional units (FU23) and (FU24) are assessed together. New data on landings and available abundance indices do not change the perception of the stock status, therefore the description is the same as last year. The stock is defined as a data-limited stock, its condition is not well known. Trends in biomass indicate an increase in the last two years (2010 and 2011), by 19% with respect to the biomass average of the three previous years. Although fishing mortality has been declining in recent years it is above possible reference points and recruitment has shown a downwards trend in recent years.

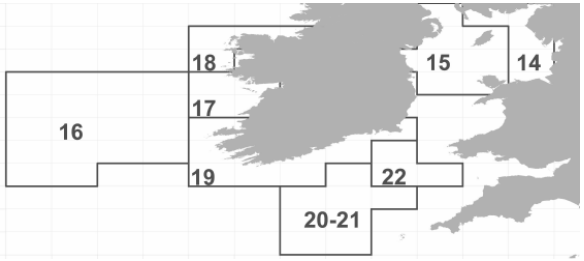


Figure 9.2 Nephrops functional units in the Subarea VII. Source: ICES.

In the **South of Bay of Biscay** (VIIIc) the stocks are assessed as two separate functional units: North Galicia (FU25) and Cantabrian Sea (FU31). New information indicates that the stocks in both FUs are at a very low level and in a poor state. Annual TAC reductions of 10%, according to the management plan (EC Nº2166/2005), have been ineffective in reducing fishing mortality. Landings are well below the established TAC. In 2012 the last year for which landing information is available only 76% of the agreed TAC was landed. This situation is clear evidence of the stock overexploitation. There is no evidence that the current management of nephrops ensures that effort is sufficiently limited to avoid depletion in the functional units. A high proportion of the catches are taken outside of the two FUs.

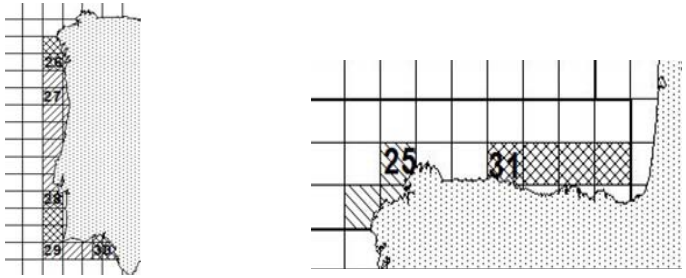


Figure 9.3 Nephrops functional units in the Subarea (VIIIc) and East of Portuguese Waters (IXa). Source: ICES.

In the **East of Portuguese Waters** (IXa), stocks are assessed as five separate functional units, West Galicia (FU26), North Portugal (FU27), Southwest Portugal (FU28), South Portugal (FU29), Gulf of Cadiz (FU30). New data available for the stock do not change the perception of the stock that implies that the recovery plan is not well implemented. After many years of management under a recovery plan (Regulation EC Nº2166/2005) stocks continue to decrease and to be overexploited in many FUs with extremely low biomass levels. Oceana is deeply worried about the status and downtrend of all the stocks. The established TACs are not respected, and as such, are useless. Fleets are catching as much as they can, further depleting the stock. In 2012 (the last year for which reliable information of the fishery is available) the fleet caught 29% more than what was agreed, which is especially dangerous for those FU for which ICES has recommended over 12 years zero catches. A high proportion of the nephrops catches are allocated into areas outside of the FUs

For the rest of managed stocks, in the **Norwegian Sea** (IIa), **Belt, Sound and Baltic Sea** (Subdivisions 22-32), **Faeroes Grounds** (Vb), **Rockall** (VIb), **Offshore and West of Bay of Biscay** (VIIId,e), **West Portuguese Waters** (IXb), **Azores Grounds** (X) and **CECAF 34.1,1** there is no scientific assessment basis to provide an evaluation about their status and rate of exploitation.

Oceana proposal

For years ICES has recommended a change in the geographical scope of the management of Norway lobster; ICES has requested management based on functional units for the North Sea (IV), the West of Scotland (VIa), Subarea VII and the waters of the Iberian Peninsula (VIIIc and IXa). These units, which are smaller in size than the ICES areas, are defined on the basis of the actual differentiated distribution of the species.

Nephrops management according to ICES areas does not provide adequate safeguards to ensure that local effort is sufficiently limited to avoid depletion of the resource in the FU. Management at the functional unit level should ensure that catch opportunities and effort are compatible and in line with the scale of the resources in each of the stocks defined by the functional units.

Currently, the same TAC covers different functional units and vessels are free to move between grounds, allowing effort to develop on some grounds in a largely uncontrolled way. This has historically resulted in inappropriate harvest rates from some units.

The volume of discards in this fishery is significant. Furthermore, the type of fishing gear used in this fishery causes a significant amount of by-catch and discards of other species, such as cod, haddock and whiting. Scientists have repeatedly signalled the need to introduce improvements in the selectivity of the gear. Scientific studies recommend an increase in mesh size and the use of square mesh panels as an appropriate method for reducing these catches.

Nephrops individuals have a survival rate after discarding of about 25%, so the application of the future discard ban, from 2016 to 2018, will have potential implications in setting management measures and catch limits, as they will have to be landed in the future. A potential TAC reduction is expected to correct this situation.

The potential recovery of main predators of nephrops such as cod could be associated with a reduction in nephrops abundance, therefore it may be expected a reduction in fishing opportunities when these species recover.

For **Skagerrak** and **Kattegat** (IIIa), ICES advises on the basis of the MSY approach that landings in 2014 should be no more than 5019 tonnes, a 3% TAC decrease, which implies catches of about 8895 if discard rates do not change from average past three years. Although harvest rate values are considered preliminary and may be modified following further data exploration and analysis Oceana agrees with this TAC proposal. Nephrops fisheries in Skagerrak and Kattegat are heavily influenced by the management of cod. Despite the efforts to reduce discard through the use of selective gears, more efforts are still needed, the main reason for the high amount of discards (52% in weight and 65% in numbers in 2012) is the lack of connection between the minimum landing size and the net mesh size. Cod in the Kattegat is in a particularly dire situation and Oceana therefore recommends that only fisheries that are demonstrating a near zero bycatch of cod is allowed.

For the **North Sea** (IV) nephrops, ICES does not provide a single recommendation for the whole group of FUs. TAC advice for the FUs show increases for Firth of Forth (FU8), as well as decreases for Farn Deeps (FU6), Fladen Ground (FU7), Moray Firth (FU9), and maintaining numbers for Botney Gut-Silver Pit (FU5), Noup (FU10), Norwegian Deeps (FU32), and Off Horn´s Reef (FU33). For the case of other areas or rectangles not defined as FUs, ICES advises that allowed catches should not change from the 2012 landings of 608 tonnes. For the sum of total FUs, ICES advises catches be set at 16446 tonnes.

There are a couple of drawbacks for this advice: on one hand if catch limits cannot be adapted by functional units, this sum can lead to nephrops local depletion; on the other hand if this sum is directly applied, it also leads to cod catches being potentially higher than allowed under the cod management plan. Other species taken as by-catch by trawling, like haddock or whiting should also be considered. In addition, official landings are usually much lower than the agreed TAC so the TAC is not restrictive for the fishery. For these reasons and due to the overexploitation situation of cod, Oceana based on mixed fisheries approach to cod recommends, setting the TAC at 6518 tonnes.

For the **West of Scotland** (VIa), functional units can admit increases in catches ranged depending on the FU but also need slight decrease (Sound of Jura – FU13) on the basis of the MSY framework. For the rest of the rectangles outside the FUs ICES advises that catches should be no more than 326 tonnes. If management cannot be adapted by functional units Oceana recommends keeping e last year catch level to avoid nephrops potential depletion.

For Subdivisions of **Subarea VII**, landings in the time-series were always well below agreed TACs, and as such, TAC has never been restrictive. ICES advises, from previous recommendations, slight increases for FU14, FU16 and FU22, reductions in catches for FU15, FU19, and FU22, same advice for FU17, FU20, and FU21, and finally for FU18 and other areas outside the units for which there is no information available on stock trends or exploitation status ICES advises based on the data limited approach that landings should be no more than 235 tonnes. As all functional units are still managed together, Oceana requests, on the basis of precautionary considerations, a minimum 20% TAC reduction for subarea VII, as there is no justification to increase or maintain it since many FU require reductions.

For the **North** and **Central Bay of Biscay** (VIIIab), ICES advises that landings be no more than 3200 tonnes based on the ICES approach for data-limited stocks. Oceana agrees with this approach and recommends the Council follows this TAC advice, which implies a reduction in catches of 18% for 2013.

For the **South of Bay of Biscay** (VIIIc) after years under the management plan, instead of recovering, the stocks are still stable at low or declining. The perpetual state of overexploitation is why this year is the 13th in a row that scientists advise zero catches for the FUs of the fishery. Oceana, according to the precautionary approach, urges the Council to obviate the management plan and propose a 0 TAC.

For **East Portuguese Waters** (IXa), the state of the stocks has led scientists to recommend the closure of the West Galicia (FU26) and North Portugal (FU27), and significant reductions in the rest of functional units. Oceana, according to ICES advice agrees with the closure of West Galicia (FU26) and North Portugal (FU27) and recommends a 110 tonnes TAC for the Southwest (FU 28) and South Portugal (FU29), and a 90 tonnes TAC for the Gulf of Cadiz (FU30) on the basis of precautionary considerations. If management cannot be adapted by functional units Oceana recommends ignoring the management plan and setting a zero TAC for 2014. Control at landing should be improved as last year the TAC was overshot by 29%.

For the rest of the managed stocks **Norwegian Sea** (IIa), **Belt, Sound and Baltic Sea** (Subdivisions 22-32), **Faeroes Grounds** (Vb), **Rockall** (VIb), **Offshore and West of Bay of Biscay** (VIIId,e), **West Portuguese Waters** (IXb), **Azores Grounds** (X) and **CECAF 34.1,1** according to the precautionary approach, Oceana proposes a minimal reduction in catches of 15% for those stocks that are not managed with other stocks for which there is a scientific advice.

Table 9. Comparative table of Norway lobster TACs (in tonnes) in ICES areas registered in the proposal, Council decision for 2012 and 2013, stock status and Oceana proposal for 2014.Brackets compare TAC difference from previous year (in %).

Fishing area	Name area	TAC 2013	Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
IIIa, EU waters of Subdivision 22-32	Skagerrak (West) and Kattegat (East), EU waters of Belt Sea – Sound, and Baltic waters	5200 (-13%)	5019 (-3%)	Unknown (IIIa) Completely unknown (IIIbc, 22-32)	5019 (-3%)
EU Waters of IIa and IV	EU Waters of North Sea and Norwegian Waters	17350 (-21%)	15038 (-13%)	Above and below MSY B trigger & Unknown (FU of IV), Completely unknown (IIa)	6518 (-62%)
Norwegian waters IV	Norwegian waters of North Sea	Not relevant	pm	Above and below MYS B trigger & Unknown (FU of IV),	Not relevant
VI, EU and internat waters Vb	Rockall, West of Scotland, EU and internat waters of Faeroes Grounds	16690 (+18%)	pm	Not available at the time of writing this report (VIa) Completely unknown (Vb, VIb)	?
VII	Irish Sea, West of Ireland, Porcupine Bank, Eastern and Western English Channel, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North and South, and Southwest of Ireland - East and West	23065 (+6%)	pm	Not available at the time of writing this report (VII)	?
VIIIa,b,d,e	Bay of Biscay North Central Offshore West	3899 (0%)	3200 (-18%)	Unknown uptrend (VIIIab) Completely unknown (VIIIde)	3200 (-18%)
VIIIc	Bay of Biscay / South	74 (-10%)	67 (-9%)	Unknown decreasing (VIIIc)	0 (-100%)
IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1 (EU)	Portuguese Waters, Azores Grounds and EU Waters of CECAF 34.1.1	246 (-10%)	221 (-10%)	Unknown decreasing (IXa), Completely unknown (IXb, X, CECAF 43.1.1)	0 (-100%)

Plaice (*Pleuronectes platessa*)

Species description

European plaice is the most important flat fish in European fisheries. It is distributed throughout the North-East Atlantic, from Greenland and Norway to Morocco. The distribution of the species in the water column depends on its age, where older specimens tend to migrate to greater depths. The species feeds on molluscs and polychaete worms. .

State of the stocks

The state of plaice stocks varies between areas, but all are plagued by high discard rates, which compromise the responsible exploitation of the stocks. Some fisheries have discard rates of 80%, due to an imbalance between minimum landing size and fishing gear mesh size.

In **Skagerrak** (IIIa subdivision 20) plaice is considered to have two components, Eastern and Western, and is closely associated with North Sea plaice, in particular for the Western component. There is no sound information about stock status and rate of exploitation. A biomass index suggests that, in recent years, the Western component has been 7% higher in the last three years than the average of the five previous years; conversely, the eastern component is lower, despite the notable increase observed in 2013, and can be considered depleted. Fishing mortality is unknown but there are evidences that effort has been reduced by 41% between 2003 and 2012. It is thought that most of landings are taken in Western Skagerrak. Selective and large-meshed gears for that fishery have reduced Plaice discard; currently 12% of total catches are discarded.

In the **North Sea** (IV) the EU management plan for plaice and sole (Council regulation (EC) No 676/2007) seems to be yielding good results. Biomass is well above the MSY framework and has reached its highest level in time series in 2013. Fishing mortality has been reduced since 2000 from levels over safe biological limits to below the MSY framework in 2008 at the historic low. Recruitment in recent years has been around the long-term average from 2007 onwards. Although total fleet discard ratio has gradually decreased since 2000 it is still high and discards represent a substantial part of the total catch, as the mesh size is smaller than the minimum landing size. For 2010, 2011 and 2012 discards represented 43%, 37% and 44% respectively of the total catches.

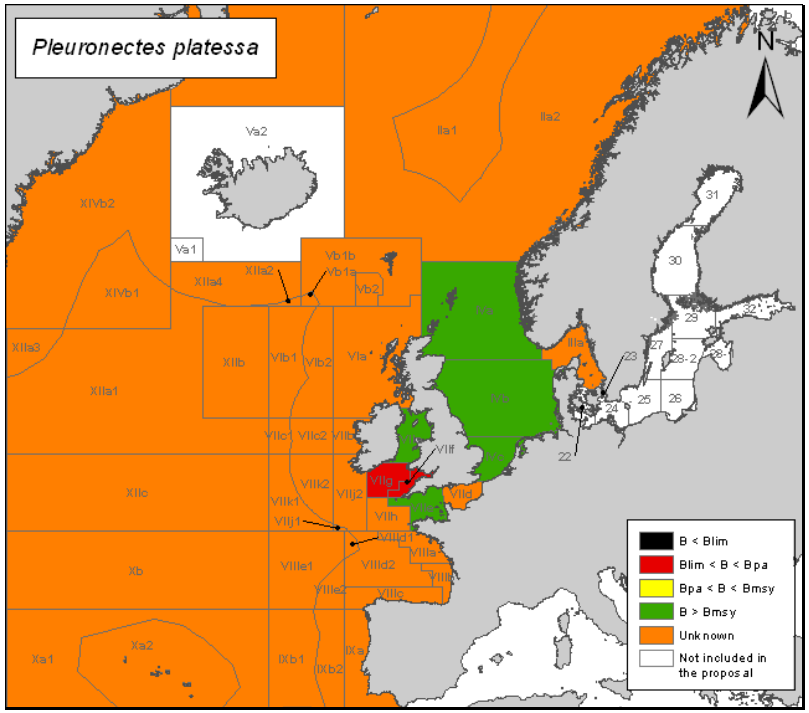


Figure 10. Plaice stock status in ICES areas included in the proposal according to spawning biomass[15].

[15] Stock status based on trends for VIIa, VIIfg.

In the **Irish Sea** (VIIa) there is no sound information and assessments are only indicative of trends. No reference points are defined for this stock, and previous precautionary reference points are no longer considered appropriate. The surveys and biomass (SSB) trends indicate an increase in stock size since the mid-1990s, which has subsequently stabilised since 2003. Reflecting this stabilization, the average of the stock size indicator in the last two years (2011-2012) is 1% higher than the average of the three previous years (2008-2010). Fishing mortality has shown a downward trend since the beginning of the 1990s and since 2000 it seems to be established in low values, as the estimates of total catch (landings and discards) since 2006 are only around 15% of the AEPM (annual egg production method) estimates of SSB over this period. Although the assessment method has improve compared to last year, there are still difficulties regarding data interpretation. Nevertheless, indicators suggest that biomass is above possible reference points and fishing mortality below them. A very high proportion of the catch is discarded 87%, 50% and 70% of total catches in 2010, 2011 and 2012 respectively.

In the **West of Ireland** (VIIb) and **Porcupine Bank** (VIIc) the state of the stock is unknown because information is lacking to evaluate it and available catch statistics are not considered reliable enough to estimate trends in abundance. Catches in this area are too low to support the collection of the necessary information for assessment of the stock status. No reference points are defined for these stocks, nor is there any evidence that the current level of exploitation is appropriate for the stock.

In the **Eastern English Channel** (VIId), both the stock status and rate of exploitation are unknown; therefore assessments are indicative of trends only. No reference points are defined for these stocks. The surveys and biological trends indicate that spawning stock biomass has been declining continuously since mid-1990s to a record low (2003-2008), and has since increased. Fishing mortality has declined since 2002 and is currently below average and among the lowest in the time-series. The recruitment trend during last years is uncertain. Survey information indicates that discard rates are unknown, although in previous years it has been estimated to be up to 50% in numbers of the catch depending on the specific outing and on fishing practices. In many cases, the mesh size does not match the minimum landing size for Plaice (27cm).

In the **Western English Channel** (VIIe), spawning stock biomass has increased in recent years and has been well above the MSY B trigger in the last four years due to the above-average recruitment in 2009-2011. Fishing mortality increased slightly until 2007, and has decreased since then, especially during 2009, while remaining well above the MSY framework. Discarding in the Western Channel is high, about 20%, but much lower than for other plaice stocks.

In the **Bristol Channel** (VIIf) and **Celtic Sea** (VIIg) previous reference points (2010) are no longer considered appropriate by ICES and no new reference points are defined for these stocks. The assessment is only indicative of trends. The average of the stock size indicator (SSB from the survey) in the last two years (2011-2012) is 50% higher than the average of the three previous years (2008-2010). Spawning stock biomass reached its highest level between 1988 and 1990, declined significantly after 1997, and is increasing since 2004. Although fishing mortality is considered to be uncertain, it appears that for some fleets there has been a reduction in average fishing mortality since 2004 that could be responsible of the commensurate increase in spawning stock biomass. Discards are very high in the fishery, in 2010, 2011 and 2012 they represented 62%, 72% and 68% respectively of the total catches, and were in excess of landings. Data landings suggest that for 2012 total landings were 17% above the agreed TAC.

In the **Celtic Sea South** (VIIh), **Southwest of Ireland East & West** (VIIj,k) stock status is unknown. No reference points are defined for this stock since the analysis for this assessment area is only based on landings and does not take discards in to account even when they are considered to be substantial. The average spawning-stock biomass in the past two years (2011-2012) is 33% higher than the average of the three previous years (2008-2010). Fishing mortality has been stable since 2008 and well above potential reference points. Discard rates are too high to maintain a sustainable exploitation of the resource; in 2012 30% of the Plaice in weight was

discarded, although it had been on average over 60% of the catch in weight in past years. Data landings were above agreed TAC by 14% in 2012.

In the **Bay of Biscay** (VIII) and **East of Portuguese Waters** (IXa), there is not enough information to evaluate stock trends and exploitation status. Therefore plaice status in the region is unknown and it is considered a data-limited stock. No reference points are defined for the stocks.

For the rest of the managed stocks, in the **Norwegian Sea** (IIa), **Faeroes Grounds** (Vb), **Rockall, West of Scotland** (VI), **West Portuguese Waters** (IXb), **Azores Grounds** (X), **North of Azores** (XII), **East Greenland** (XIV) and **CECAF 34.1.1**, there is no scientific assessment basis to provide an evaluation about its status and rate of exploitation.

Oceana proposal

Any measure which leads to a reduction in discards will favour an increase in future productivity of the fishery. More efforts and technical measures should be introduced to reduce unsustainable discard rates.

For **Skagerrak** (IIIa, subdivision 20) ICES advises on the basis of data limited stocks analysis that catches in 2014 should be no more than 10196 tonnes in Skagerrak, which implies no more than 8972 tonnes if the discard rate does not change from 2012 rate. In the Eastern Skagerrak, no direct fisheries should occur and by-catch and discards should be minimized. Oceana, according to the precautionary approach recommends that unless the management between Western and Eastern Skagerrak is differentiated, TAC in this area should not be increased, due to the depletion of the Eastern Skagerrak stock.

For the **North Sea** (IV) stock, ICES advises on the basis of the agreed management plan that catches in 2014 should be no more than 159584 tonnes, resulting in a 15% TAC increase, which implies landings of no more than 111631 tonnes if discard rates do not change from the average of the last three years (2010-2012). Otherwise the MSY framework results in a 10% TAC increase. Due to the stocks´ exceptionally good status and rate of exploitation, Oceana agrees with both proposals although because of possible overshoot of by-catch species, recommends the adoption of the MSY framework. Technical measures should be introduced to reduce discard rates and transitional arrangements should be established to the second stage of the management plan.

For the **Irish Sea** (VIIa), ICES advises, based on an assessment of data limited stocks, that catches should be no more than 1827 tonnes, a 1% TAC increase, which implies landings of no more than 497 if discard rates do not change from the average of the past three years (2010-2012). It should be added that the TAC is not restrictive and landings are much below the agreed TAC. Oceana agrees with the advice but is deeply worried about the high discard rate, 70% in 2012, due to the discrepancy between the minimum landing size and the mesh size of the gear being used. Technical measures should be introduced urgently to reduce the high discard rates, as previous measures have had little effect. Efforts to reduce plaice by-catch in nephrops fisheries, like the introduction of grids, are expected to have positive results in the reduction of discards in the area.

For the **West of Ireland** (VIIb) and **Porcupine Bank** (VIIc), ICES advises, based on the approach for data limited stocks, that catches be no more than 30 tonnes. In the last ten years, TACs were 2-5 times larger than landings. It should be noted that the average landings over the last five years, 33.8 tonnes, is very close to ICES recommendation. Although this stock is listed in the joint statement of the Commission and Council (Doc 5315/13 PECHE 15) that provide the possibility to maintain the 2013 TAC. Oceana, due to precautionary approach and based on ICES data limited approach recommends fixing a TAC of 30 tonnes.

For the **Eastern English Channel** (VIId), ICES advises on the basis of assessment for data limited stocks that landings should be no more than 3925 tonnes, which implies an increase in landings. Catches cannot be calculated as discards, known to be high, cannot be quantified. ICES recommends to set fishing mortality to 0.28 in

2014 as a first step to move towards the Fmsy by 2015. Scientific recommendations concerning catch levels have been consistently ignored for decades despite agreed TACs have been larger than official landings. Both English Channel stocks (VIId and VIIe) are managed together, so the management measures implemented must be effective at controlling mortality for both stocks. Advice in VIId allows for an increase in landings, whereas the advice of VIIe is for reduced catches. Combined advice result in a 17% TAC reduction, Oceana recommends to set fishing opportunities variation according to this criteria. Technical measures should be introduced urgently to reduce the high discard rates, in particular to improve the matching of the mesh size with the minimum landing size.

For the **Western English Channel** (VIIe), ICES advises on the basis of the transition to the MSY approach, that landings in 2014 should be no more than 1397 tonnes, which also implies a reduction in catches and fishing mortality to 0.29. Total catch cannot be calculated because discards cannot be quantified. The MSY framework would imply 1148 tonnes in TAC and a 0.24 fishing mortality. Oceana agrees with both proposals that would allow an increase to plaice biomass in 2015 by 13% and 18% respectively. Both English Channel stocks (VIId and VIIe) are managed together, so the management measures implemented must be effective at controlling mortality for both stocks. Advice in VIId allows for an increase in landings, whereas the advice of VIIe is for reduced catches. Combined advice result in a 17% TAC reduction, Oceana recommends to set fishing opportunities variation according to this criteria.

For the **Bristol Channel** (VIIf) and **Celtic Sea**, (VIIg) stocks ICES advises, on the basis of assessment for data limited stocks, that catches should be no more than 1608 tonnes. If discard rates do not change from the average of the previous three years, this implies landings of no more than 519 tones. Oceana recommends not increasing catches as ICES suggest, and keeping the previous level of TAC, if discard mitigation measures are not implemented. Because of the high discard rates that exceed landings, stemming from a mismatch between mesh size and the minimum landing size, Oceana recommends to urgently implement technical measures, like the use of larger mesh size gear.

In the **South Celtic Sea** (VIIh), and **Southwest of Ireland East&West** (VIIj,k) ICES advises on the basis of the approach for data limited stocks that landings in 2014 be no more than 135 tonnes, 20% reduction. As discards, which are known to occur, cannot be quantified total catches cannot be calculated. TACs established for the last ten years have been between 1.1-4 times greater than landings, so TACs have not been restrictive, and this persistence in maintaining excessive TACs is not logical. Considering that the stock is estimated to be overexploited and that the biomass level is unknown, Oceana agrees with ICES and recommends reducing the TAC by 20%. By-catch and discards should be also urgently reduced.

For stocks in the **Bay of Biscay** (VIII) and **East of Portuguese Waters** (IXa) ICES advises, based on the approach for data limited stocks, that catches should decrease by 20% from the average of the last three years. ICES does not provide catch figures due to the uncertainty in the landing data. Although this stock is listed in the joint statement of the Commission and Council (Doc 5315/13 PECHE 15) that provide the possibility to maintain the 2013 TAC. Oceana asks for a reduction of 20%. This is especially important given that these stocks are managed under the same TAC as other stocks for which status is completely unknown. Furthermore, agreed TACs have been more 20%, higher, than official landings during past decade. It is unclear whether there should be more than one management unit for these stocks.

For the rest of the managed stocks, for which there is no information **Norwegian Sea** (IIa), **Faeroes Grounds** (Vb), **Rockall, West of Scotland** (VI), **West Portuguese Waters** (IXb), **Azores Grounds** (X), **North of Azores** (XII), **East Greenland** (XIV) and **CECAF 34.1.1**, Oceana, according to the precautionary approach, proposes a minimal reduction in catches of 15% for those stocks that are not managed together with other stocks for which there is a scientific advice.

Table 10. Comparative table of plaice TACs (in tonnes) in ICES areas registered in the proposal, Council decision for 2012 and 2013, stock status and Oceana proposal for 2014. Brackets compare TAC difference from previous year (in %).

Fishing area	Name area	TAC 2013	Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
IIIa (Skagerrak)	Skagerrak (West)	5453 (-30%)	pm	Unknown uptrend (western component) downtrend (eastern component)	4362 (-20%)
IIIa (Kattegat)	Kattegat (East)	1800 (+10%)	pm	Unknown uptrend	2160 (+20%)
IV, EU waters of IIa, IIIa not covered by Skagerrak and Kattegat	EU Waters of Norwegian Sea and North Sea, and waters not covered by Ska&Katt	59087 (-25%)	pm	Above MSY B trigger (IV) Completely unknown (IIa, IIIa not covered by Skagerrak and Kattegat)	64996 (+10%)
VI, EU and internat waters of Vb, internat waters of XII and XIV	Rockall, West of Scotland, EU and internat waters of Faeroes Grounds, internat waters of North of Azores and East Greenland	658 (-5%)	658 (0%)	Completely unknown (Vb, VI, XII, XIV)	559 (-15%)
VIIa	Irish Sea	1627 (0%)	pm	Unknown possibly above reference points (VIIa)	1827 (1%[+])
VIIb and VIIc	West of Ireland and Porcupine Bank	74 (-5%)	74 (0%)	Unknown (VIIbc)	30 (-59%)
VIId VIIe	English Channel	6400 (+26%)	5322 (-17%)	Unknown increasing (VIId) above MSY (VIIe)	5322 (-17%)
VIIf and VIIg	Bristol Channel and Celtic Sea North	369 (0%)	443 (+20%)	Unknown (VIIfg)	369 (0%)
VIIh, VIIj and VIIk	Celtic Sea South, Southwest of Ireland East&West	141 (-20%)	135 (-4%)	Unknown (VIIhjk)	135 (-20%[+])
VIII, IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1 (EU)	Bay of Biscay, Portuguese Waters, Azores Grounds and EU waters of CECAF 34.1.1	395 (0%)	395 (0%)	Unknown (VIII, IXa) Completely unknown (IXb. X, CECAF 34.1.1)	233 (-20%[+])

*Landings
[+]Respect average of three previous years' landings

Pollack (*Pollachius pollachius*)

Species description

Pollack is a marine benthopelagic species distributed throughout the North East Atlantic, from Iceland and Norway to the Bay of Biscay – and in the southern Baltic Sea-, in areas with hard bottoms at 40-100m depths (but they can be found as deep as -200 m). Juveniles are pelagic, spending two to three years near the coast, in rocky areas, kelp beds, sandy shores and estuaries. Larger individuals move to the open sea and are often found around rocky areas.

State of the stocks

Information is very limited for pollack fisheries and therefore both the state of the population and its rate of exploitation are unknown. TACs are not restrictive for the fishery as they are higher than official landings, which have decreased during the past decades. This can be interpreted as an overexploitation sign. The management of the species in European waters lacks sustainability guarantees.

In the **Rockall and West of Scotland** (VI), and **Irish Sea, West of Ireland, Porcupine Bank, Eastern and Western English Channel, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North and South, Southwest of Ireland** (VII) new data available for this stock do not change the perception of the stock, meaning that the 2012 advice is valid for 2013. Available information is insufficient to evaluate the exploitation and trends in this area. Catch and landing figures are incomplete and erratic and further scrutiny of available information is required. No reference points have been defined for this stock. TACs are not restrictive for the fishery, although quotas can be restrictive for some countries. There are indications of high catches by recreational fisheries on a local scale but these have not been reported.

Available information is insufficient to evaluate stock trends and exploitation status in **Bay of Biscay** (VIII), and **Portuguese waters East** (IXa) ecoregions. New available data on landings do not change its perception, therefore the same advice for 2013 is considered valid for 2014. No reference points have been defined for the fishery. TACs are not restrictive (30% over official landings in 2012). Landings strongly decreased towards the end of the 1980s and have, over the past two decades, stably remained at low levels. Recreational fisheries are an important component of the catch.

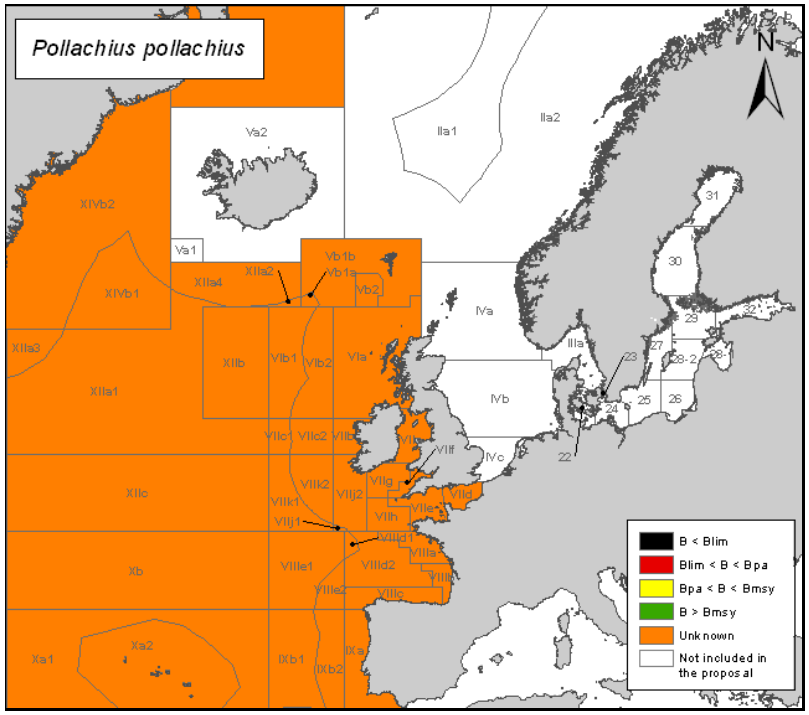


Figure 11. Pollack stock status in ICES areas included in the proposal according to spawning biomass.

For the rest of the managed stocks, in the **Faeroes Grounds** (Vb), **Portuguese waters West** (IXb), **Azores Grounds** (X) **North of Azores** (XII), **East Greenland** (XIV), and **CECAF 34.1.1**, there is no

scientific assessment basis to provide an evaluation about its status and rate of exploitation.

Oceana proposal

In order to ensure the sustainable exploitation of pollack and avoid potential risks, Oceana recommends improving data collection and scientific assessments.

For the **Rockall and West of Scotland** (VI), and **Irish Sea, West of Ireland, Porcupine Bank, Eastern and Western English Channel, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North and South, Southwest of Ireland** (VII) ICES advises, based on assessment methods for data limited stocks, that catches be no more than 4200 tonnes in 2014, which matches with the average catch over the last three years. The advice is based on estimates from the Depletion-Corrected Average Catch (DCAC) method, which uses historical catch data and estimates of stock depletion over the catch time series to estimate sustainable yields. This stock is listed in the joint statement of the Commission and Council (Doc 5315/13 PECHE 15) that suggests maintaining the 2013 TAC. Oceana, due to precautionary approach and based on ICES data limited approach recommends fixing a TAC of 4200 tonnes (50 tonnes for VI, and 4150 for VII) instead 2013 TAC. It should be noted that fixed TACs are 3-8 times higher than official landings: for example the TAC approved in 2012 was 13892 tonnes when the official landings were 4477 tonnes.

For the **Bay of Biscay** (VIII), and **Portuguese waters East** (IXa) ICES advises, based on assessment methods for data limited stocks, that catches should decrease by 20% in relation to the average of the last three years. Due to the uncertainty of the landings data, ICES is not able to quantify the resulting TAC. Although this stock is listed in the joint statement of the Commission and Council (Doc 5315/13 PECHE 15) that suggests maintaining the 2013 TAC, Oceana recommends a reduction of at least 20% for these areas.

For the rest of the managed stocks **Faeroes Grounds** (Vb), **Portuguese waters West** (IXb), **Azores Grounds** (X) **North of Azores** (XII), **East Greenland** (XIV), and **CECAF 34.1.1**, Oceana, according to the precautionary approach, proposes a minimal reduction in catches of 15% for those stocks that are not managed together with other stocks for which there is a scientific advice.

Table 11. Comparative table of pollack TACs (in tonnes) in ICES areas registered in the proposal, Council decision for 2012 and 2013, stock status and Oceana proposal for 2014. Brackets compare TAC difference from previous year (in %).

Fishing area	Name area	TAC 2013	Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
VI, EU and international waters of Vb, international waters of XII and XIV	VI, EU and international waters of Vb, international waters of XII and XIV	397 (0%)	397 (0%)	Unknown (VI) completely unknown (Vb, XII, XIV)	50 (-87%)
VII	VII	13495 (0%)	10796 (-20%)	Unknown (VII)	4150 (-69%)
VIIIa, VIIIb, VIIId, VIIIe	VIIIa, VIIIb, VIIId, VIIIe	1482 (0%)	1186 (-20%)	Unknown (VIIIa, VIIIb, VIIId, VIIIe)	1186 (-20%*)
VIIIc	VIIIc	231 (0%)	185 (-20%)	Unknown (VIIIc)	185 (-20%*)
IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1 (UE)	IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1 (UE)	282 (0%)	282 (0%)	Unknown (IXa) completely unknown (IXb, X, CECAF 34.1.1)	226 (-20%*)

* In relation to the last three years catches average

Sole (*Solea solea*)

Species description

The sole is distributed throughout the East Atlantic, from the Norwegian Sea -including the Baltic Sea and the North Sea- down to Senegal. The species is non-gregarious, lives buried in sandy or muddy bottoms and its diet consists of molluscs, annelids and small crustaceans. Sole is a nocturnal predator and therefore more susceptible to be captured at night than in daylight.

State of the stocks

The general state of sole stocks is slowly improving from last decade´s dismal scenario, with several areas currently exploited in accordance with the MSY framework. However, problems continue for other stocks, such as those in the Irish Sea, which present evidence of overexploitation.

In **Skagerrak, Kattegat** (IIIa), and **Subdivisions 22-24**, the spawning stock biomass has decreased since 2006 and has been below the MSY framework for the last six years showing a worrying trend. Fishing mortality seems to have been fluctuating over Fmsy since early 2000s, and it is currently right above this reference point. With the exception of the 2000 strong year class, recruitment over the last few years has been at around the long-term average. Discard rates are moderate, about 8% and 3% in 2011 and 2012 respectively, so most of the catches are assumed to be landed. It should be noted that cod in the Kattegat is depleted which is taken as by-catch in the sole fishery.

In the **North Sea** (IV) the spawning stock biomass has fluctuated between Blim and Bpa for the last decade but during past two years it has increased and currently it is well above MSY B trigger. Fishing mortality has shown a declining trend since 1995 and it is estimated to be right above Fmsy in 2012. The North Sea is the most northern border of this species distribution. There are indications that in recent years sole discarding has increased.

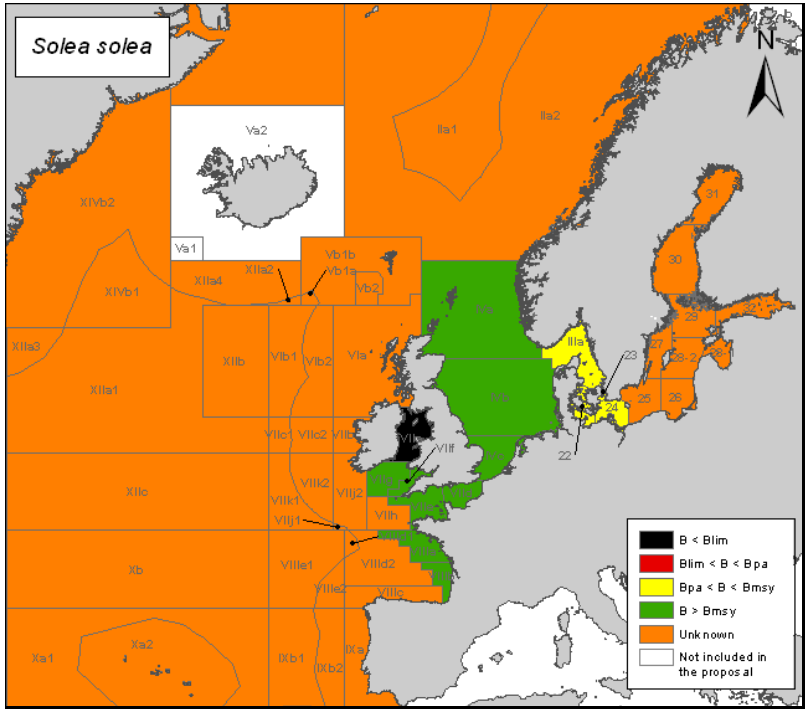


Figure 12. Sole stock status in ICES areas included in the proposal according to spawning biomass[16].

In the **Irish Sea** (VIIa) the stock is clearly overexploited with a worrying trend and no sign of recovery in the short term. Biomass has continuously declined since 2001, and is so far below safe biological limits since 2006 that the stock is at its lowest level and in danger of collapse. Catch reductions from previous years were much lower than those recommended by scientists, and have not been able to reverse the biomass downtrend. Fishing mortality has been

[16] Stock status based on trends for IIIa, 22-24, VIIe.

high for more than 40 years and although it has shown a steady but slight reduction since mid-1980s, it is still above precautionary limits, at nearly twice the MSY framework. In addition, recruitment over the past eight years has been at its lowest, marked by its lowest point in the 2011 time series. Information from observer trips indicates that sole discards make up between 0 and 8% of the total weight, although rates for other species can be considerable.

In the **West of Ireland** (VIIb) and **Porcupine Bank** (VIIc) there is not enough information to evaluate the stocks status and rate of exploitation as catches in this area are too low to support the collection of necessary information for an assessment. No reference points are defined for the stock. Landings have been low for several decades.

In the **Eastern English Channel** (VIId), the spawning stock biomass has been fluctuating above precautionary and MSY B trigger levels for most of the time series. For the last 15 years, fishing mortality has fluctuated between precautionary and safe biological limits and is therefore well above MSY framework; it has been above Fpa since 2005. Although fishing mortality should be reduced, there are indications that the stock is harvested in an unsustainable way. Recruitment has been above average for the last decade. All catches are assumed to be landed.

In the **Western English Channel** (VIIe), stock assessments are favourable. Spawning stock biomass has been fluctuating around the MSY B trigger framework for about two decades with an increase since 2009. Fishing mortality has been over the MSY framework since the early 1990s and after a significant reduction in 2009 it is now below it. Recruitment is fluctuating without trend, but the 2010 and 2011 year classes are estimated to be below average. All catches are assumed to be landed so discards are considered to be low.

The stocks in the **Bristol Channel** (VIIf) and **Celtic Sea North** (VIIg, North) are in good condition although fishing mortality has increased during last year. Spawning stock biomass has been fluctuating around the MSY B trigger framework since 1987 and above this reference point since 2002. Fishing mortality has decreased from Flim in 2003 to Fmsy in 2005 and remained there until 2011. In 2012 it increased to above Fpa. Recruitment is fluctuating without a clear trend around average except in 2009 when it was the lowest of the time series. All catches are assumed to be landed so discards are considered to be negligible.

In the **Celtic Sea South** (VIIh) **South West of Ireland** (VIIj, VIIk), the status of the stock is unknown and no reliable assessment can be presented. No reference points are defined for this stock. However, a qualitative evaluation of fishing mortality suggests that it has decreased over the period 2003-2006 and since 2007 it seems to remain stable below possible reference points. In response of this trend biomass indicator is progressively increasing since 2005, so the average SSB in the last two years (2011-2012) is 11% higher than the average of the three previous years (2008-2010). Landings in recent years have been much lower, around half, than the agreed TAC. In 2012 only 46% of the catch limit was landed, so the TAC is not restrictive, except for a few countries. All catches are assumed to be landed.

In the **North** and **Central Bay of Biscay** (VIIIab), the stock biomass appears to have recovered from its lowest point in the time series, in 2003. The more recent estimates of spawning stock biomass are above the MSY B trigger for the last four years and in its high record in time-series. After years of excessive fishing mortality it has declined since 2002 and fluctuated around the precautionary reference point, but last year in a worrying trend it increased and it is again over the precautionary reference point and over the MSY framework,. Recruitment values since 2004 are the lowest in the time-series, with the exception of the 2009 recruitment. All catches are assumed to be landed.

In the Iberian Peninsula waters, which comprise the areas **South of Bay of Biscay** (VIIIc) and **East of Portuguese Waters** (IXa), the stocks state and their rate of exploitation are unknown because available information is insufficient to evaluate them. Sole is poorly suited for monitoring by the surveys carried out in this area. Therefore, no reference points are defined for these stocks. Landings, which are incomplete and erratic, are mainly taken from

Division IXa, have declined significantly since the late 1980s and are much lower than agreed TACs, which are therefore not restrictive.

For the rest of the managed stocks, in the **Norway Waters** (IIa), **Baltic Sea** (25-32) **Rockall, West of Scotland** (VI), **Faeroes Grounds** (Vb), **Offshore and West of Bay of Biscay** (VIIIde), **Portuguese waters West** (IXb), **Azores Grounds** (X) **North of Azores** (XII), **East Greenland** (XIV), and **CECAF 34.1.1**, there is no scientific assessment basis to provide an evaluation about its status and rate of exploitation.

Oceana proposal

For **Skagerrak, Kattegat** (IIIa) and **Sound, Belt Sea** (22-24), ICES advises, on the basis of the transition to the MSY approach, that landings in 2014 should be no more than 353 tonnes, which implies a 42% TAC reduction. Advice corresponding to the MSY approach would imply a 49% reduction in catches. Oceana recommends following any of this advice in order to get back to the MSY framework and stabilise the status of the stock in the area. A higher TAC would prevent the recovery of the stock over the MSY transition framework. Note that catches and by-catch of cod, which is depleted in the Kattegat, should be avoided.

In the **North Sea** (IV), ICES advises on the basis of stage one of the EU management plan (Regulation (EC) Nº 676/2007) that landings in 2014 should be no more than 11900 tonnes, meaning a 15% TAC reduction. According to the MSY approach landings should not be more than 11190, a 20% TAC reduction, which correspond with sole landings in 2012. Advice corresponding with total catches cannot be calculated because the discards, which are known to occur, cannot be quantified. Stage one of the plan is to restore the stock within safe biological limits and then to exploit the stock at MSY. The TAC for sole has not been fully utilized in 2010, 2011, and 2012. Oceana suggests that the 2014 TAC should follow the MSY approach, as the plan´s first stage objective is achieved and because a TAC reduction in line with MSY would not imply a big impact to the fishing sector.

In the **Irish Sea** (VIIa), ICES advises, based on the precautionary and MSY approaches, that there should be no direct fisheries in 2014 and that by-catch and discards should be minimised. The MSY transition and approach suggest a reduction by 32% and 62% respectively. However, considering the low SSB and low recruitment since 2000, ICES recognizes that it is not possible to identify any non-zero catch which would be compatible with the MSY or precautionary approaches. Also, the MSY reduction in catches (62%) is not acceptable as it will only increase the biomass by 22%, leading the stock far from safe levels. Oceana considers that, given the stock status and trends, a zero TAC is the only suitable option to guarantee the population recovery above safe limits as quickly as possible, even if it will leave the stock below safe biological limits in 2015.

For the **West of Ireland** (VIIb) and **Porcupine Bank** (VIIc), ICES advises, based on assessment methods for data limited stocks that catches should be no more than 30 tonnes in 2014. The advice is based on a precautionary reduction of catches of 20% in relation to the average landings of the last three years due to missing or non-representative data. Although this stock is listed in the joint statement of the Commission and Council (Doc 5315/13 PECHE 15) that recommends maintaining the 2013 TAC, Oceana considers that a precautionary reduction of catches like the one proposed by ICES be implemented unless there other information indicates that the current exploitation is sustainable.

For the **Eastern English Channel** (VIId), ICES advises, based on the transition to the MSY approach that catches in 2014 be no more than 3251 tonnes, which lead to a 45% TAC decrease. This proposal represents an 8% increase in biomass, and a reduction of fishing mortality below precautionary limits of 0.33. Oceana agrees with this advice and is confident that this proposal would help reduce the high mortality rate.

For the **Western English Channel** (VIIe) ICES advises, based on the MSY framework, that catches in 2014 be no more than 832 tonnes, which means a 7% TAC decrease. This advice matches the level of catches and fishing mortality corresponding to the management plan (Regulation (EC) Nº 509/2007), which was not

assessed by ICES. Oceana agrees with both proposals. Landings during last years exceeded the agreed TAC.

For the **Bristol Channel** (VIIf) and the **Celtic Sea North** (VIIg North) stocks, ICES advises, based on the MSY approach, that catches in 2014 be no more than 920 tonnes, which represents a -16% TAC decrease. Oceana agrees with this proposal as it would slightly increase the current level of biomass and reduce the fishing mortality to 0.31.

For the **Celtic Sea South** (VIIh) **South West of Ireland** (VIIj, VIIk), ICES advises, based on assessment methods for data limited stocks that catches be no more than 252 tonnes in 2014. Oceana agrees with this precautionary approach and suggests that the Council follow ICES advice. Furthermore, based on the state of plaice in this area, technical measures should be implemented to reduce plaice by-catch and discards.

In the **North** and **Central Bay of Biscay** (VIIIab) ICES advises, based on the transition to the MSY approach, that catches in 2014 be no more than 3270 tonnes, which implies a 20% TAC reduction. This proposal also implies a fishing mortality reduction to 0.28. On the other hand the application of the MSY framework would mean a 26% TAC reduction. Oceana supports these two proposals to stabilise the recovery of the stock and reduce the fishing mortality. It is worth noting that the multiannual plan for sole in the Bay of Biscay (Regulation (EC) No 388/2006) the target of which is estimated to be achieved, does not provide any basis for TAC advice for 2014.

For the Iberian Peninsula, **South of Bay of Biscay** (VIIIc) and **East of Portuguese Waters** (IXa) ICES advises, based on the assessment method to data limited stocks that catches should decrease by 20% in relation to the average of the last three years. Due to uncertainty in landing information, ICES is not able to quantify the resulting TAC for 2014. Oceana, following the precautionary approach and stock trends of landings, asks for a 20% TAC reduction for 2014 to bring the TAC closer to total landings. It is unclear whether there should be more than one management unit in this area.

For the rest of the managed stocks, for which there is no information **Baltic Sea** (25-32), **Rockall, West of Scotland** (VI) **Faeroes Grounds** (Vb), **Offshore and West of Bay of Biscay** (VIIIde), **Portuguese waters West** (IXb), **Azores Grounds** (X) **North of Azores** (XII), **East Greenland** (XIV), and **CECAF 34.1.1,** Oceana, following the precautionary approach, proposes a reduction in catches of at least 15% for those stocks that are not managed together with other stocks for which there is a scientific advice.

Table 12 Comparative table of sole TACs (in tonnes) in ICES areas registered in the proposal, Council decision for 2012 and 2013, stock status and Oceana proposal for 2014. Brackets compare TAC difference from previous year (in %).

Fishing area	Name area	TAC 2013	Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
EU waters II, IV	EU Waters of Norwegian Sea and North Sea	13945 (-14%)	pm	Above MSY B trigger (IV), completely unknown (II)	11156 (-20%)
IIIa, EU waters of IIIb-d (22-32)	Skagerrak, Kattegat, EU waters of Sound, Belt Sea, and Baltic Sea,	560 (-8%)	353 (-37%)	Below MSY (IIIab, 22-24) Completely unknown (25-32)	353 (-45%)
VI, EU and international waters of Vb, internat Waters of XII, XIV	Rockall, West of Scotland, EU and internat waters of Faeroes Grounds, internat waters of North of Azores and East Greenland	57 (-5%)	57 (0%)	Completely unknown (VI, Vb, XII, XIV)	48 (-15%)
VIIa	Irish Sea	140 (-53%)	95 (-32%)	Below Blim (VIIa)	0 (-100%)
VIIb VIIc	West of Ireland , Porcupine Bank	42 (-(5%)	42 (0%)	Unknown (VIIbc)	30 (-29%)
VIId	Eastern English Channel	5900 (+6%)	3251 (-45%)	Above MSY	3251 (-45%)
VIIe	Western English Channel	894 (+15%)	832 (-7%)	Above MSY	832 (-7%)
VIIf VIIg	Bristol Channel and Celtic Sea North	1100 (+4%)	920 (-16%)	Above MSY	920 (-16%)
VIIh, VIIj and VIIk	Celtic Sea South, Southwest of Ireland East and West	402 (-5%)	322 (-20%)	Unknown (VIIh-k)	252 (-37%)
VIIIa and VIIIb	Bay of Biscay North and Central	4100 (-4%)	pm	Above MSY	3270 (-20%)
VIIIc, VIIId and VIIIe, IX, X, CECAF 34.1.1 (EU)	Bay of Biscay South, Offshore and West, Portuguese Waters, Azores Grounds and CECAF 34.1.1	1072 (0%)	1072 (0%)	Unknown (VIIIc, IXa) Completely Unknown (VIIIde, IXb, X, CECAF 34.1.1)	543 (-49%)

Whiting (*Merlangius merlangus*)

Species description

Whiting occurs in the North-East Atlantic, from the south-western Barents Sea and Iceland down to Portugal. The species lives mainly on muddy and gravel bottoms between 30 and 100 meters depth, although it can also be found on rocky and sandy bottoms. Its diet consists of crustaceans, molluscs, polychaetes and small fish.

State of the stocks

Although the whiting stocks status varies among the different fishing grounds, decline in landings and high discard ratios due to its low market value, are common to most stocks. Most catches are by-catch in fisheries using fine mesh.

In **Skagerrak and Kattegat** (IIIa) there is insufficient information to provide a reliable assessment on stock status and rate of exploitation. No reference points are defined for the stock. Available survey indices show a lack of internal consistency. A better understanding of population structure and connectivity is desirable. Landing statistics do not represent catches as discard rates are very high: for example, only 8% of total catches in 2011 was landed while the rest of the catches was either discarded (88%) or industrial by-catch (4%). The major part of the catch is taken as by-catch in demersal fisheries. Landings have decreased dramatically from 19400 tonnes in 1990 to 100 tonnes in 2011.

In the **North Sea** (IV) and the **Eastern English Channel** (VIId), although the stock abundance perception has improved, its status is unknown and reference points are not being defined. Spawning stock biomass has been increasing slightly since 2007, after a downtrend period, and is currently below average of the time-series. Fishing mortality has remained stable during the last seven years with a slight downtrend over the last five years. Recruitment was very low between 2003 and 2007, and increased in 2008 and 2009 remaining below average since 2003. Although true levels are uncertain, it seems that whiting is no longer considered to be in a period of impaired recruitment. Discards appear to have gone down since 2003, but they are still high, 37% in 2011 and 32% in 2012.

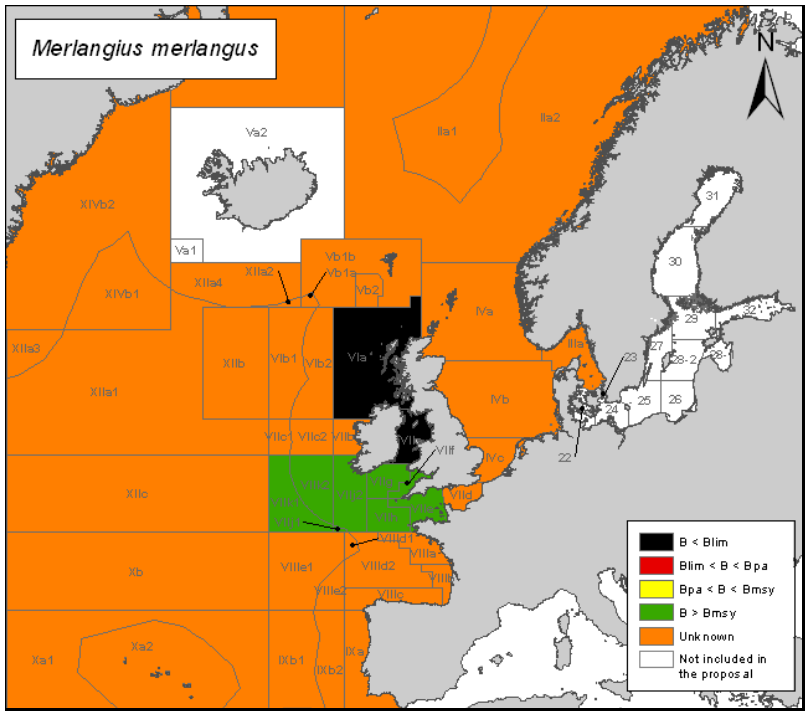


Figure 13. Whiting stock status in ICES areas included in the proposal according to spawning biomass[17].

In the **West of Scotland** (VIa) the stock is clearly deplorable with spawning stock biomass below safe biological limits since 2000. Analytical assessments are based on surveys, historical yields and catch composition, although there is uncertainty in the historical reported landings. Fishing mortality has decreased since 2000 and it

[17] Stock status based on trends for VIIa.

is now at historically low levels, well below the precautionary reference point. It is therefore expected that the biomass will increase in abundance if recruitment does not continue to be discarded at the current rate observed. Recent recruitment has been very weak, at historically low levels, although there are signs that recruitment has increased in 2009 and 2011. The proportion of whiting discards is very high, more than half of the annual catch weight, and appears to have increased in recent years with levels as high as 74%, 60% and 70% in 2009, 2010 and 2011 respectively. Approximately 80% of these discards come from the Nephrops (TR2) fishery. There are strong indications that management control is not effective to limit the catch.

In **Rockall** (VIb) there is not enough information to evaluate the status of the stock and its rate of exploitation. No reference points are defined. There are doubts on the accuracy of the reported landings. Landings in Rockall seem to have decreased dramatically from 14000 tonnes in 2001 to a negligible 1000 tonnes in 2012. This reduction is not a consequence of the TAC reduction as landings are only around <5% of allowed catches, but is a sound example of the unsustainable rate of exploitation implemented during decades.

In the **Irish Sea** (VIIa) stock status is uncertain. Since 2003, low landing levels have resulted in poor sampling coverage. The presented assessment is only indicative of trends. Information on historical yields and catch composition indicate that the present stock size is extremely low. Although no reference points are defined, qualitative evaluation indicates that biomass and fishing mortality are above and below possible reference points respectively and obviously far from possible MSY targets. Landings have shown a worrying decline from around 12000 tonnes in the 80´s to 100 tonnes this decade and there is no remaining targeted whiting fishery in the Irish Sea. Whiting is caught as by-catch in other Irish Sea fisheries and almost all the catches are discarded, particularly the one of smaller size. Discard estimates are available for the main fleets but are imprecise: it is estimated that more than 1000 tonnes of whiting are discarded annually since 2007.

In the **Western English Channel** (VIIe), **Bristol Channel** (VIIf) **Celtic Sea North and South** (VIIgh), and **Southwest of Ireland - East and West** (VIIjk), the status of whiting has improved in the past few years and is in good shape. Spawning stock biomass has been increasing since 2008, after a strong decline from the mid-1990s, and it has been over the MSY B trigger during the past four years. Fishing mortality has shown a declining trend since 2007 and is below Fmsy since 2011. 2011 and 2012 year classes are estimated to be the lowest of the time-series. Good recruitment in 2008 and 2009 entered the fishery and are contributing to the spawning stock. Discard rates are very high, accounting for around 40% of total catches in 2011 – no new estimations are available, due to the low market value, particularly for smaller individuals. This is especially worrying as spawning stock biomass is highly dependent on incoming recruitment.

In the **Bay of Biscay** (VIII) and **East of Portuguese Waters** (IXa) there is not enough information to assess the status of the stock and its rate of exploitation, therefore the state of whiting in the area is unknown. There is no reference points defined for this stock.

For the rest of the managed stocks, in the **Norwegian Sea** (IIa), **Faeroes Grounds** (Vb), **West Portuguese Waters** (IXb), **Azores Grounds** (X), **North Azores** (XII), **East Greenland** (XIV), and **CECAF 34.1.1**, there is no scientific assessment basis to provide an evaluation about its status and rate of exploitation.

Oceana proposal

In **Skagerrak and Kattegat** (IIIa) ICES advises, based on the approach for data limited stocks, that catches be no more than 500 tonnes. In previous years, TACs were set high, up to 15 times higher than catches. Oceana requests that the TAC for 2014 be reduced by more than 50%, based on landing trends, unknown stock status, and precautionary considerations.

For the **North Sea** (IV) and **Eastern English Channel** (VIId), ICES advises on the basis of precautionary considerations, that combined catches be no more than 36992 tonnes in 2014, if discard rates do

not change from average of the last three years. According to ICES, a TAC fixed in accordance with the management plan is not appropriate as reference points are no longer applicable and targets need re-evaluation, although it could be consistent with long-term stability if recruitment is not poor. In the absence of MSY reference points, Oceana agrees with the TAC according to the precautionary approach, which leads to a 2% decrease in TAC, as it is expected to lead to a 15% increase in biomass in 2015. Management for Division VIId should be separated from the rest of Subarea VII.

For the **West of Scotland** (VIa), after years of recommending the fishery closure, ICES advises, based on precautionary considerations, that catches in 2014 should be reduced to the lowest possible level. ICES has pointed out that given the low biomass and recruitment in recent years it is not possible to identify any non-zero catch which would be compatible with the precautionary approach. Even a zero TAC would not recover the stock over safe limits in 2015. Oceana urges a fishery closure and the establishment of a minimal by-catch TAC. Measures to reduce whiting discards in the Nephrops fishery should be implemented urgently, taking advantage of the strong 2009 recruitment and accelerate stock recovery.

For **Rockall** (VIb), ICES advises based on assessment methods for data limited stocks, that catches in 2014 be no more than 11 tonnes. As this stock is managed together with VIa Division (West of Scotland), the worrying downtrend in landings, and the TAC undershoot, Oceana also requests setting an 11 tonne limit for by-catch in the area.

For the **Irish Sea** (VIIa), after years of having recommended the closure of the fisheries, ICES has advised, based on precautionary considerations, that catches should be reduced to the lowest level possible. As there is no direct whiting fishery in the area and all whiting catches are by-catch of other fisheries Oceana agrees with the TAC reduction but also urges the active implementation of technical measures, already available (such as the square mesh panel), to reduce the whiting discard rate.

For the **Western English Channel** (VIIe), **Bristol Channel** (VIIf) **Celtic Sea North and South** (VIIgh), and **Southwest of Ireland - East and West** (VIIjk), ICES advises, based on the MSY approach that landings in 2014 be no more than 15562 tonnes, which implies an 8% TAC reduction. Total catches cannot be calculated because discards, which are known to occur, cannot be quantified. Oceana agrees with this proposal as it is expected to lead to a spawning biomass of 45329 tonnes in 2015, well above the MSY biomass trigger. Additional technical measures should be urgently introduced to reduce discards rates of whiting and haddock. The assessment area of the stock does not correspond to the TAC area (VIIb-k).

For the **Bay of Biscay** (VIII) and **East of Portuguese Waters** (IXa) ICES advises that, based on the assessment method for data limited stocks, catches in 2014 be reduced by 20% in relation to the average of the last three years. Due to uncertainty in the landing data, the resulting catch could not be quantified by ICES. For years, landings have been much lower than the agreed TAC: on average, landings hardly represented 40% of the agreed TAC during the past 4 years. Oceana considers that a precautionary reduction of catches should be implemented until enough information is available to guarantee that the exploitation is sustainable. It is still not clear whether there should be one or more management units.

For the rest of the managed stocks, for which there is no information **Norwegian Sea** (IIa), **Faeroes Grounds** (Vb), **West Portuguese Waters** (IXb), **Azores Grounds** (X), **North Azores** (XII), **East Greenland** (XIV) and **CECAF 34.1.1** Oceana, according to the precautionary approach, proposes a reduction in catches of at least 15% for those stocks that are not managed with other stocks for which there is a scientific advice.

Table 13. Comparative table of whiting TACs (in tonnes) in ICES areas registered in the proposal, Council decision for 2012 and 2013, stock status and Oceana proposal for 2014. Brackets compare TAC difference from previous year (in %).

Fishing area	Name area	TAC 2013	Commission proposal 2014	Stock Status	Oceana proposal 2014
IIIa	Skagerrak (West) and Kattegat (East)	721 (-30%)	pm	Unknown (IIIa)	500 (-30%)
IV, EU waters of IIa	North Sea and EU Waters of Norwegian Sea	11940 (-24%)	pm	Unknown – above Blim (IV) Completely unknown (IIa)	11701 (-2%)
VI EU and internat waters of Vb, internat waters of XII and XIV	Rockall, West of Scotland, EU and internat waters of Faeroes Grounds, internat waters of North Azores and East Greenland	292 (-5%)	234 (-20%)	Below Blim (VIa), unknown (VIb) Completely unknown (Vb, XII, XIV)	11* (-96%)
VIIa	Irish Sea	84 (-6%)	67 (-20%)	Below Blim (VIIa)	0 (-100%)
VIIb-h, VIIj-k	West of Ireland, Porcupine Bank, Eastern and Western English Channel, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North and South, and Southwest of Ireland (East and West)	24500 (+28%)	pm	Above MSY (VIIe-k), Unknown (VIId), Completely unknown (VIIb-c)	22540 (-8%)
VIII	Bay of Biscay	3175 (0%)	2540 (-20%)	Unknown (VIII)	2540 (-20%)
IX, X,CECAF (EU)	Portuguese Waters , Azores Grounds and EU Waters of CECAF	?	pm (Portugal)	IXa (unknown) Completely unknown (IXb, X, CECAF 34.1.1)	(-20%)

*This amount is or Division VIb

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Acknowledgements

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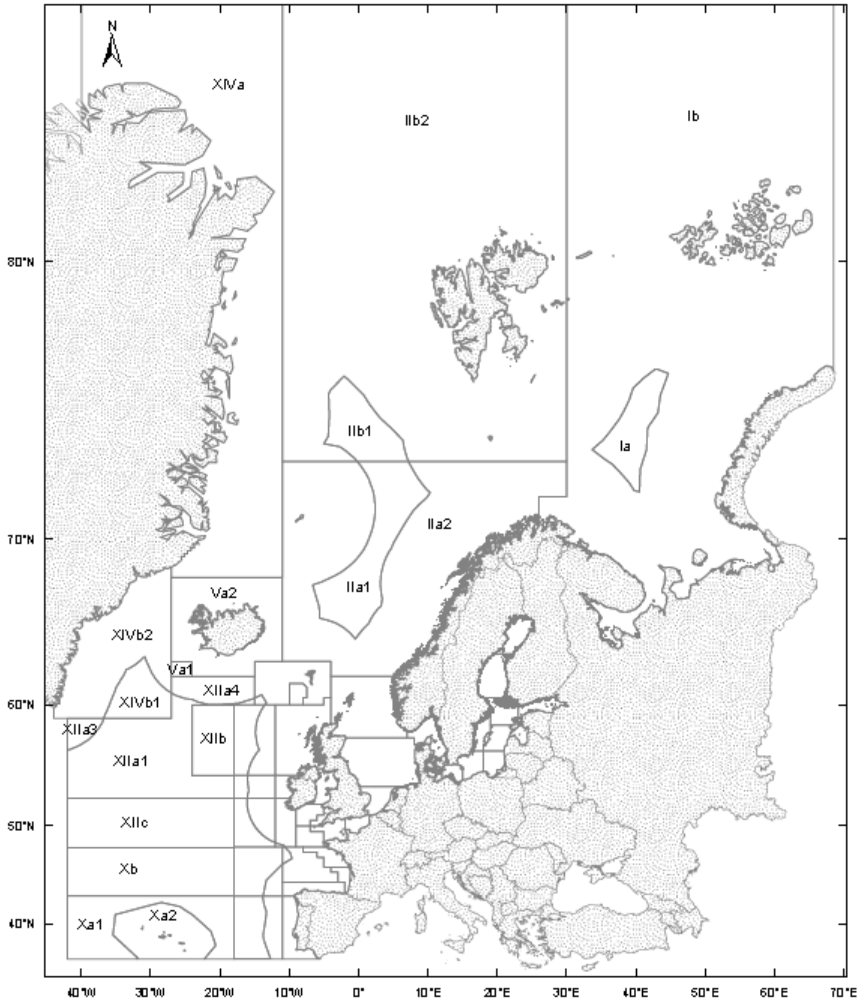
Most of the species descriptions in this document have been taken from Fishbase (www.fishbase.org).

Description of ICES areas

Subarea	Division	Subdivision	Description
Subarea I			Barents Sea
Subarea II			Norwegian Sea, Spitzbergen, and Bear Island
	Division IIa		Norwegian Sea
	Division IIb		Spitzbergen and Bear Island
Subarea III			Skagerrak, Kattegat, Sound, Belt Sea, and Baltic Sea, the Sound and Belt together known also as the Transition Area
	Division IIIa		Skagerrak (West) and Kattegat (East)
	Division IIIb,c		Sound and Belt Sea or the Transition Area
		Subdivision 22	Belt Sea
		Subdivision 23	Sound
	Division IIId		Baltic Sea
		Subdivision 24	Baltic West of Bornholm
		Subdivision 25	Southern Central Baltic – West
		Subdivision 26	Southern Central Baltic - East
		Subdivision 27	West of Gotland
		Subdivision 28	East of Gotland or Gulf of Riga
		Subdivision 29	Archipelago Sea
		Subdivision 30	Bothnian Sea
		Subdivision 31	Bothnian Bay
		Subdivision 32	Gulf of Finland
Subarea IV			North Sea
	Division IVa		Northern North Sea
	Division IVb		Central North Sea
	Division IVc		Southern North Sea
Subarea V			Iceland and Faeroes Grounds
	Division Va		Iceland Grounds
	Division Vb		Faeroes Grounds
		Subdivision Vb1	Faeroe Plateau
		Subdivision Vb2	Faeroe Bank
Subarea VI			Rockall, Northwest Coast of Scotland and North Ireland, (the Northwest Coast of Scotland and North Ireland also known as the West of Scotland)
	Division VIa		Northwest Coast of Scotland and North Ireland, or as the West of Scotland
	Division VIb		Rockall
Subarea VII			Irish Sea, West of Ireland, Porcupine Bank, Eastern and Western English Channel, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North and South, and Southwest of Ireland - East and West
	Division VIIa		Irish Sea
	Division VIIb		West of Ireland
	Division VIIc		Porcupine Bank
	Division VIId		Eastern English Channel
	Division VIIe		Western English Channel

Subarea	Division	Subdivision	Description
	Division VIIf		Bristol Channel
	Division VIIg		Celtic Sea North
	Division VIIh		Celtic Sea South
	Division VIIj		Southwest of Ireland / East
	Division VIIk		Southwest of Ireland - West
Subarea VIII			Bay of Biscay
	Division VIIIa		Bay of Biscay / North
	Division VIIIb		Bay of Biscay / Central
	Division VIIIc		Bay of Biscay / South
	Division VIIId		Bay of Biscay / Offshore
	Division VIIIe		West of Bay of Biscay
Subarea IX			Portuguese Waters
	Division IXa		Portuguese Waters / East
	Division IXb		Portuguese Waters / West
Subarea X			Azores Grounds
	Division Xa		Azores Grounds
	Division Xb		Northeast Atlantic South
Subarea XI			
Subarea XII			North of Azores
	Division XIIa		Southern mid-Atlantic Ridge (Southern Reykjanes Ridge south to Charlie-Gibbs Fracture Zone)
	Division XIIb		Western Hatton Bank
	Division XIIc		Central Northeast Atlantic - South
Subarea XIII			
Subarea XIV			East Greenland
	Division XIVa		Northeast Greenland
	Division XIVb		Southeast Greenland
		Subdivision XIVb1	Southeast Greenland - Parts of NEAFC Regulatory Area
		Subdivision XIVb1	Southeast Greenland - Non-NEAFC Regulatory Area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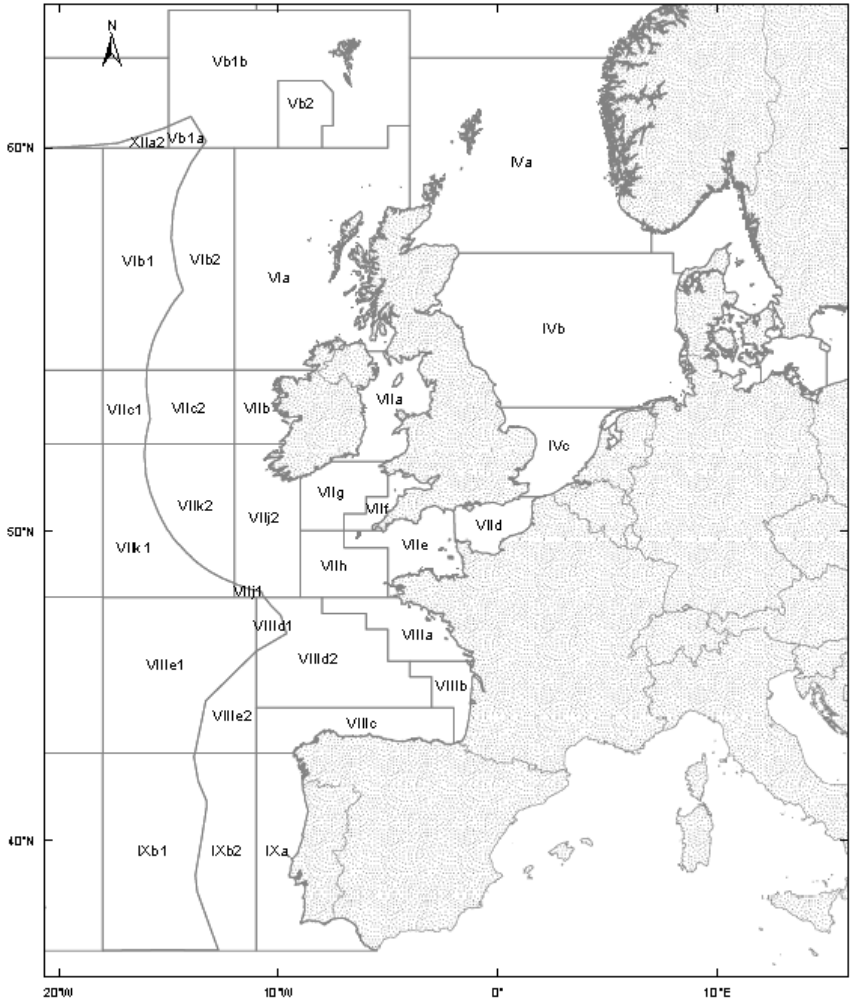
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IVc
VIIg
VIIk2
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VIId
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VIIIc
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