

Coastal States consultations 2024 NGO statement on Blue whiting

Thank you chair for the floor and thank you to Iceland and the Coastal States for the opportunity to contribute to this meeting. The following statement comes from six non-governmental organisations – The Pew Charitable Trusts, Blue Marine Foundation, the Marine Stewardship Council, the North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy group, Clientearth and Accountability.Fish. Noting that today's meeting is to secure management for blue whiting, our statement refers in general to the situation around all three species for which consultations are taking place this week and next. While we welcome the unprecedented opportunity to speak at these consultations, we regret that it comes at a time of such concerning news. Chairs, Coastal States representatives – the status of pelagic fish across the Northeast Atlantic is increasingly worrying.

Both mackerel and Norwegian spring-spawning herring are moving towards critically low population sizes, impairing their ability to thrive. Their status impacts the sustainability of fisheries on these species, with less fish to catch for the industry now and likely into the future. This, in turn, negatively affects the supply chains of these fisheries, as the failure to secure meaningful catch limits delays their re-certification for example. More broadly, it impacts efforts towards increased biodiversity conservation, as the excessive levels of fishing pressure on these species deprives declining Northeast Atlantic seabirds and other predators of food. Finally, the status of pelagic fish in the Northeast Atlantic also weakens public faith in the ability of governments to manage fisheries and preserve ocean biodiversity.

In the face of this situation, the signatories to this statement expect action. The Coastal States should secure a swift and durable resolution to the absence of sharing arrangements for these species, including for blue whiting. This arrangement and wider management should be secured through effective, decisive international cooperation, with parties prioritising restoring the status of these species over national self-interest. Efforts towards broader ecosystem-based management should be catalysed through robust, evidence-based management strategies, with rules based on sustainability, precaution, long-term economic viability and maintaining ecological health. The commitment to revise blue whiting management is now nearly three years overdue and the Coastal States should use the opportunity of these negotiations to advance on an ecosystem-based long-term management strategy for this species. Finally, these actions should be accompanied by improvements in transparency, with more formal systems in place for engagement with non-state actors, including in the drafting of scientific advice requests and the development of management strategies.

We believe there is a great deal of common cause amongst the parties to implement these actions, with the stakeholders ready to support them. We are happy to help however we can and we wish you all the best of luck in these critical next two days.