NORTH ATLANTIC PELAGIC ADVOCACY GROUP

2024 NEAFC Position Statement

North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group (NAPA)

To address the ongoing risk of management failure for North East Atlantic mackerel, Atlanto-Scandian herring and North East Atlantic blue whiting, the North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group (NAPA) has three key objectives:

Agree and commit to a comprehensive sharing arrangement

The Parties must agree to a comprehensive and durable catch sharing mechanism that ensures collective fishing effort is in line with scientific advice.

Follow the scientific advice

The Parties should ensure that the overall catch for each stock does not exceed scientific advice.

Establish a binding disputes resolution process

The Parties should establish an approach to ensuring the current lack of a management agreement for these three stocks cannot be repeated in future.

NAPA's objectives have not changed since NAPA was founded. The continued lack of agreement between Parties means the management of these stocks has not met accepted global standards of sustainability for at least 5 years.

In this period, overfishing has continued and the three stocks have depended on exceptional productivity or strong, incoming year classes to compensate for failures in management.

We are now at a critical juncture – without action, collaboration and concession, we risk jeopardising the stocks, the health of the North East Atlantic marine environment, and the fisheries, communities and businesses that depend on them.

1) AGREE AND COMMIT TO A COMPREHENSIVE SHARING ARRANGEMENT

Since 1996, there have only been four years (2006- 2009) where North East Atlantic Coastal States have been in agreement on the allocation of total allowable catch (TAC) for the North East Atlantic mackerel, Atlanto-Scandian herring and North East Atlantic blue whiting fisheries.

Efforts to agree catch shares through establishing the NEAFC Working Group on Allocation were reinitiated in 2015 but discontinued in 2019, and there continues to be no agreement on catch shares at this time.

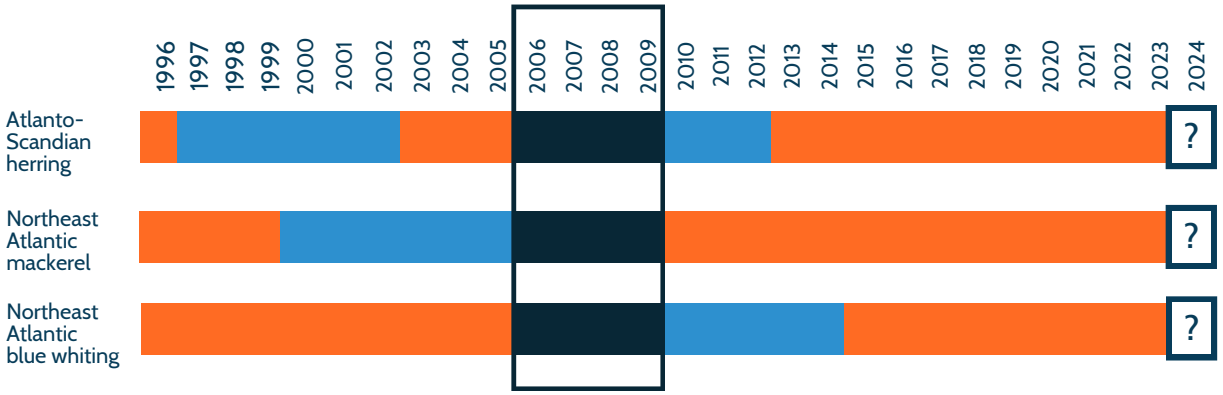
Critically, the distribution and abundance of these pelagic stocks changes from year to year, so competing interests and claims mean that there is no way to be confident of sustainable management. Nevertheless, effective, sustainable management is what is needed, facilitated through collaboration and concession. The alternative - fishery collapse - would be nothing less than disastrous for all.

NAPA is calling for:

A comprehensive and durable catch sharing mechanism that addresses changing distribution and abundance of the mackerel, herring and blue whiting stocks.

A commitment from NEAFC to reinstate the working group on allocation to progress the development of such a mechanism.

Timeline of Coastal States (dis)agreements



There have been just four years (2006-2009) in which Coastal States agreed on total allowable catches for pelagic stocks

2) FOLLOW THE SCIENTIFIC ADVICE

Linked to the lack of agreed sustainable catch shares for North East Atlantic mackerel, Atlanto-Scandian herring and North East Atlantic blue whiting, unilateral action by fishing nations in setting quotas has resulted in significant overfishing since 2010 on all three stocks (Table 1). The situation has not improved in the most recent five years, and overfishing has continued.

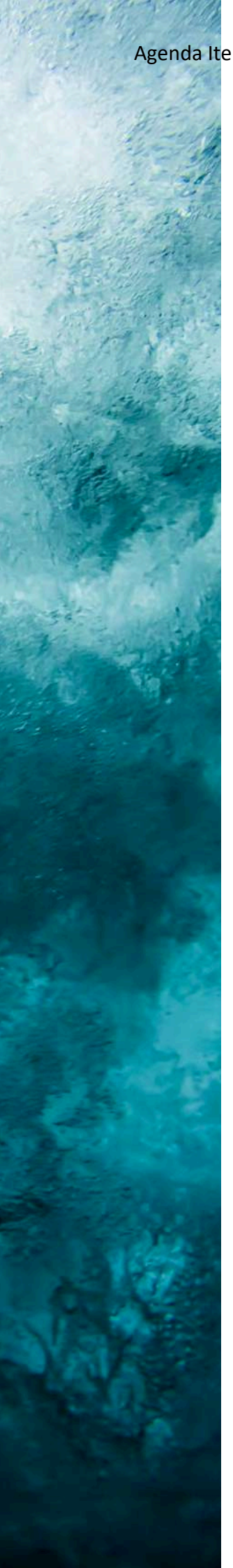
Table 1: Mean overcatch relative to scientific advice from 2010-2023 and 2019-2023 (Data from ICES 2024 annual advice for each stock).

MEAN OVERCATCH AGAINST ADVICE	Whole period 2010-2023 (%)	Recent period 2019-2023 (%)
North East Atlantic mackerel	40.0	23.1
Atlanto-Scandian herring	23.5	33.8
North East Atlantic blue whiting	19.3	30.0

Parties have agreed to follow the scientific advice for 2025 - but without agreeing catch shares, this is a hollow promise for pelagic stocks that migrate between different EEZs and international waters. Instead, history demonstrates that fishing will not be undertaken sustainably, as unilateral interests overcome the collective good in a modern-day tragedy of the commons.

NAPA is calling for:

Agreement on and adherence to quotas that collectively do not exceed scientific advice.



3) ESTABLISH A BINDING DISPUTES RESOLUTION PROCESS

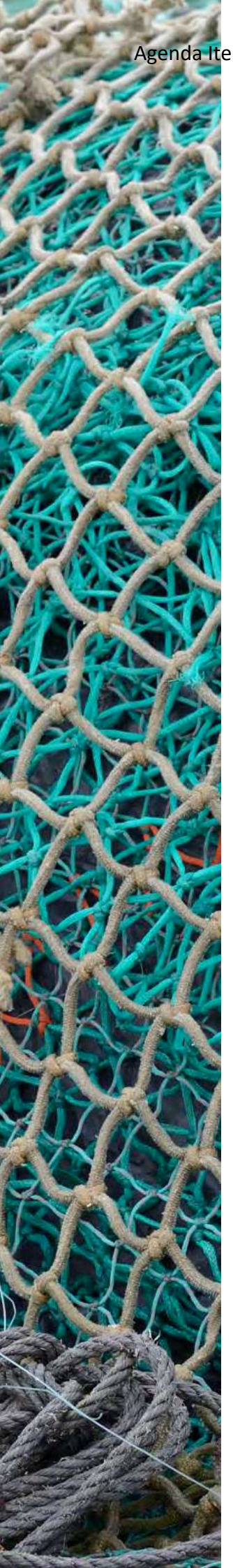
International fisheries negotiations by their nature are complex, especially where the distribution and abundance of stocks may change dramatically through time. Achieving satisfactory resolutions is a daunting task, but dispute resolution mechanisms are frequently used in fisheries negotiations. They have been incorporated into a number of fisheries agreements in order to overcome exactly the kind of issues that exist in the North East Atlantic.

Dispute resolution mechanisms are structured processes that address disputes or grievances that arise between two or more parties. They aim to reach a consensual agreement that will best accommodate parties' needs. This does not mean that all parties will achieve all objectives, but should minimise injustice and maximise equity and stability.

NAPA accepts that the NEAFC Guidelines for Coastal State Consultations in the North East Atlantic provide for a variety of dispute settlement avenues. However, their weakness is their non-binding nature and the apparent reluctance by the Coastal States to employ them. Something more is clearly needed to ensure we don't get to this situation again.

NAPA is calling for:

A binding disputes resolution process for the management of North East Atlantic mackerel, Atlanto-Scandian herring, and North East Atlantic blue whiting stocks.



In transitioning to more sustainable management of these three stocks, NAPA has two specific recommendations that will support sustainable fishing.

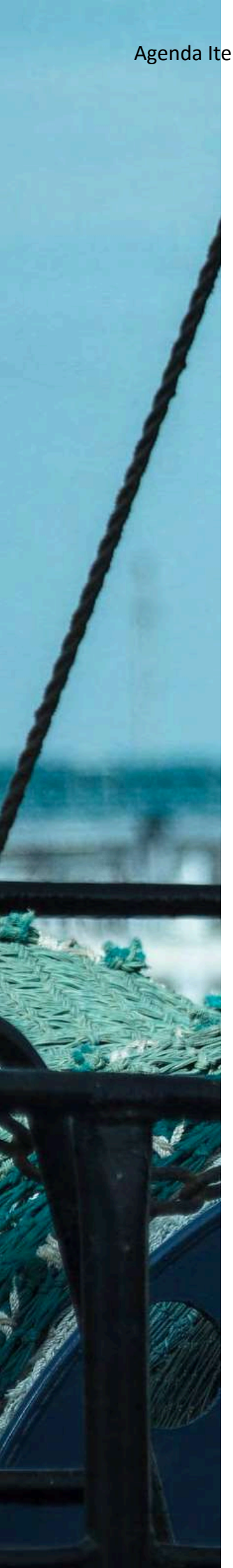
Establishing a 10-20% cap on catching in international waters.

There has been an increase in the percentage of North East Atlantic mackerel caught from international waters in the last decade. In essence, some fleets have chased the fish harder and longer than before. A 2023 NAPA analysis indicated that a cap on catching in international waters could act to constrain overfishing for mackerel. It is considered likely that this would also be the case for herring and blue whiting.

Limiting banking and borrowing between years to 10%

Banking is saving quota from the current year to fish in the next year, while **borrowing** is fishing extra in the current year but deducting that catch from the quota of the following year. Both practices are well established in international fisheries, including being listed in the arrangement for the long-term management of Atlanto-Scandian herring and North East Atlantic blue whiting fisheries.

Minimising banking and borrowing is likely to be particularly important in avoiding overfishing when stocks are in decline - as is the case for mackerel and herring. Coastal States reports from October 2024 indicated that some fleets have caught significantly less than their declared quotas for these stocks. If this uncaught quota is banked to next year, it would greatly exacerbate the problem of agreeing catch shares and limiting catches to the scientific advice, and put the stock at considerable additional risk.



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