



MarinTrust Standard V2

Whole fish Fishery Assessment

WF32

Norway Pout (*Trisopterus esmarkii*)

in ICES Division 3a and Subarea 4

MarinTrust Programme

Unit C, Printworks

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Table 1 Application details and summary of the assessment outcome

Application details and summary of the assessment outcome			
Name(s): FF Skagen A/S, Thyborøn			
Country: Denmark			
Email address:		Applicant Code	
Certification Body Details			
Name of Certification Body:		NSF / Global Trust Certification Ltd.	
Assessor Name	CB Peer Reviewer	Assessment Days	Initial/Surveillance/ Re-approval
Sam Peacock	Matthew Jew	2.5	Surveillance 1
Assessment Period	July 2024 – July 2025		
Scope Details			
Management Authority (Country/State)		EU & Norway	
Main Species		Norway pout (<i>Trisopterus esmarkii</i>)	
Fishery Location		ICES Division 3a and Subarea 4	
Gear Type(s)		Small-meshed midwater trawl, bottom trawl. Primarily otter trawls.	
Outcome of Assessment			
Overall Outcome		PASS	
Clauses Failed		NONE	
CB Peer Review Evaluation		APPROVED - Agree with assessor's recommendation	
Fishery Assessment Peer Review Group Evaluation		APPROVED – See full comments in Appendix B	
Recommendation		APPROVED	

Table 2. Assessment Determination

Assessment Determination
<p>There have been no substantial changes to the status or management of this fishery since the time of the 2023 MT re-assessment. No new information on catch composition was available, and so the species categorisation for this assessment remains unchanged.</p> <p>As previously, the only Type 1 species for this assessment is Norway pout (<i>Trisopterus esmarkii</i>). Type 2 species are herring (<i>Clupea harengus</i>), whiting (<i>Merlangius merlangius</i>), haddock (<i>Melanogrammus aeglefinus</i>), and mackerel (<i>Scomber scombrus</i>). All five species have been categorised by the IUCN as Least Concern, with the exception of haddock which is Vulnerable. None of the five species appears in the CITES appendices. Two whiting stocks are present in the area relevant to this assessment, and as previously these have been assessed separately. Therefore, all stocks are eligible to be certified under the MarinTrust Wholefish Standard.</p> <p>Management structure and function is almost entirely unchanged since the previous assessment, and all Category M requirements continue to be met. Similarly, understanding and management of the impacts of the fishery on ETP species, habitats and ecosystems has not changed, and all of the requirements of Category F also continue to be met.</p> <p>Norway pout continues to be subject to annual stock assessment by ICES. Stock biomass has fallen since 2023, but is still considered to be above the target reference point level. The total international TAC for the 2023 season was set in line with the ICES advice, and as in previous years catches were substantially smaller than the TAC allowed. The stock continues to meet the requirements of Category A.</p> <p>All five Type 2 stocks continue to be subject to annual or (in the case of whiting in Division 3a) biennial stock assessment. The reference points of several stocks have been updated to reflect revised estimates of natural mortality. Biomass of all five stocks continues to be above the target reference point level and so all pass the Category C assessment.</p> <p>As all of the requirements of the MT whole fish assessment continue to be met, this fishery should remain approved as a source of raw material for MT-certified facilities.</p>
Fishery Assessment Peer Review Comments
<p>The assessor have provided a concise and updated surveillance 1 report for the fishery with appropriate levels of referenced evidence to substantiate a decision to re-approve the fishery.</p> <p>The assessor have provided a very thorough examination of the fishery, with concise level of detail specific to each clause and applying these to the Type 1 (Cat A) and Type 2 Cat C species. The assessor notes that the landings can be variable from year to year, but overall the species categorisation remains consistent with the full assessment and considered by the external peer review an appropriate approach.</p>
Notes for On-site Auditor

Table 3 General Results

General Clause	Outcome (Pass/Fail)
M1 - Management Framework	PASS
M2 - Surveillance, Control and Enforcement	PASS
F1 - Impacts on ETP Species	PASS
F2 - Impacts on Habitats	PASS
F3 - Ecosystem Impacts	PASS

Table 4 Species- Specific Results

List all Category A and B species. List approximate total percentage (%) of landings which are Category C and D species; these do not need to be individually named here

Category	Species	% landings	Outcome (Pass/Fail)	
Category A	Norway Pout	80-95%	A1	PASS
			A2	PASS
			A3	PASS
			A4	PASS
Category B	No Category B Species			
Category C	Herring	<10%	PASS	
	Whiting, Subarea 4 & Division 7d	<5%	PASS	
	Whiting, Division 3a	<5%	PASS	
	Haddock	<1%	PASS	
	Mackerel	<1%	PASS	
Category D	No Category D Species			

Table 5 Species Categorisation Table

Common name	Latin name	Stock	IUCN Redlist Category ¹	% of landings	Management	Category
Norway pout	<i>Trisopterus esmarkii</i>	Subarea 4 & Division 3a	Least Concern ²	80-95%	Yes	A
Herring	<i>Clupea harengus</i>	Subarea 4 & Divisions 3a & 7d (Autumn spawners)	Least Concern ³	<10%	Yes	C
Whiting	<i>Merlangius merlangus</i>	Subarea 4 & Division 7d	Least Concern ⁴	<5%	Yes	C
		Division 3a			Yes	C
Haddock	<i>Melanogrammus aeglefinus</i>	Subarea 4, Division 6a and Subdivision 20	Vulnerable ⁵	<1%	Yes	C
Mackerel	<i>Scomber scombrus</i>	Northeast Atlantic	Least Concern ⁶	<1%	Yes	C

¹ <https://www.iucnredlist.org/>

² <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/18125208/45098689>

³ <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/155123/4717767>

⁴ <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/198585/45097610>

⁵ <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/13045/3406968>

⁶ <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/170354/6764313>

Species categorisation rationale

The 2023 re-assessment of this stock considered several sources of catch composition data, specifically: bottom and midwater trawl catches as listed in the MSC certification report for the “Norway sandeel, pout and North Sea sprat” fishery⁷; detailed bycatch information submitted by the applicant⁸; a 2021 scientific paper which analyses catch composition in the Danish fishery⁹; and the report from the 2016 Norway pout benchmarking workshop¹⁰. The re-assessment report concluded as follows:

“All sources indicate that Norway pout makes up the majority of catches in the targeted fishery, around 80-95%, and is clearly a Type 1 species for the purposes of this assessment. The usual approach when determining species categorisation for an MT assessment is to ensure that the Type 1 species represent at least 95% of the catch; however, in this instance the proportion of species other than Norway pout in the catch varies from year to year, and several sources suggest that Norway pout may be 95% of landings in some years. Potential candidates for other Type 1 species include blue whiting, horse mackerel, Argentine, and herring. In each case, at least one reference suggests that each of these is not regularly present in the catch in significant quantities. Therefore, as a pragmatic alternative and to ensure consistency between this and future MT assessment reports, all species representing a significant proportion of the catch have been categorised as Type 2”¹¹.

Two MSC certifications remain relevant to this fishery. The certification identified by the 2023 re-assessment has since dropped the Norway pout Units of Assessment, and is now titled the “Norway sandeel and North Sea sprat” fishery. The most recent assessment report for this fishery does not contain catch composition information for the Norway pout component of the fishery. The second relevant MSC-certified fishery is the “DFPO, DPPO and SPFPO North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat sandeel, sprat and Norway pout” fishery. An Announcement Comment Draft Report for this fishery was published in April 2023, but only contains Norway pout catch composition data for the period 2010-2014.

No other new sources of catch composition data were available, and therefore catch composition is assumed to remain unchanged from 2023. Additionally, the management status of the five species and six stocks covered by this assessment are also unchanged.

⁷ DNV, 2022. NORWAY SANDEEL, POUT AND NORTH SEA SPRAT FISHERIES Announcement Comment Draft Report. <https://fisheries.msc.org/en/fisheries/norway-sandeel-pout-and-north-sea-sprat/@assessments>

⁸ Pers. Comm., Søren Anker Pedersen, 2 May 2023

⁹ Paoletti *et al* (2021). *Potential for Mesopelagic Fishery Compared to Economy and Fisheries Dynamics in Current Large Scale Danish Pelagic Fishery*. *Frontiers in Marine Science*, 24 August 2021. Volume 08, Article 720897

¹⁰ ICES. 2017. Report of the Benchmark Workshop on Norway Pout (*Trisopterus esmarkii*) in Subarea 4 and Division 3a (North Sea, Skagerrak, and Kattegat), 23–25 August 2016, Copenhagen, Denmark. ICES CM 2016/ACOM:35. 69 pp. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.5599>

¹¹ 2023 MT re-assessment report for WF32: Denmark Norway Pout.

MANAGEMENT

The two clauses in this section (M1, M2) relate to the general management regime applied to the fishery under assessment. The clauses should be completed by providing sufficient evidence to justify awarding each of the requirements a pass or fail rating. A fishery must meet all the minimum requirements in every clause before it can be recommended for approval.

M1	Management Framework – Minimum Requirements	
	M1.1 There is an organisation responsible for managing the fishery.	PASS
	M1.2 There is an organisation responsible for collecting data and assessing the fishery.	PASS
	M1.3 Fishery management organisations are publicly committed to sustainability.	PASS
	M1.4 Fishery management organisations are legally empowered to take management actions.	PASS
	M1.5 There is a consultation process through which fishery stakeholders are engaged in decision-making.	PASS
	M1.6 The decision-making process is transparent, with processes and results publicly available.	PASS
Clause outcome:		PASS

There have been no substantial changes in the management of the fishery relevant to this section. A summary of the outcomes of the 2023 MT re-assessment are provided here for convenience; please refer to the full re-assessment report for details.

Almost all Norway pout is taken by Norway and Denmark, although small amounts are also taken by other EU countries and the UK.

M1.1 There is an organisation responsible for managing the fishery.

Fisheries in Denmark and other EU countries are managed according to the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), which was most recently updated through Regulation (EU) No. 1380/2013. Individual member states generally incorporate the requirements of the CFP into their national legislation, and are individually responsible for its implementation. The CFP therefore sets out the policies and procedures by which member states manage their fisheries (EC 2018).

Fisheries management in Norway is the responsibility of the Directorate of Fisheries under the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries. The Directorate is responsible for most day-to-day aspects of fisheries management, including tackling IUU fishing, regulating and licensing fishing activity, and negotiating quotas and other international agreements (Government.no 2024).

There are organisations responsible for managing the fishery, and M1.1 is met.

M1.2 There is an organisation responsible for collecting data and assessing the fishery.

The primary organisation responsible for coordinating and analysing the data relevant to the management of the Norway pout fishery is the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES). ICES is an intergovernmental marine science organisation which provides frequent analytical and advisory services for the management of fisheries, primarily in the Atlantic but also in the Arctic, Mediterranean, Black Sea and North Pacific (ICES 2024a).

Within Norwegian waters, the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research (IMR) is also relevant. The IMR is affiliated with the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries and works closely with many of the ICES Working Groups (IMR 2024).

There are organisations responsible for collecting data and assessing the fishery. Requirement M1.2 is met.

M1.3 Fishery management organisations are publicly committed to sustainability.

Objective 1 of the CFP, as set out in Regulation (EU) No. 1380/2013 is to “ensure that fishing and aquaculture activities are environmentally sustainable in the long-term and are managed in a way that is consistent with the objectives of achieving economic, social and employment benefits, and of contributing to the availability of food supplies”.

The Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries states that its main objective is to “promote profitable economic activity through sustainable and user-oriented management of marine resources and the marine environment” (DoF 2019).

Fishery management organisations are publicly committed to sustainability and M1.3 is met.

M1.4 Fishery management organisations are legally empowered to take management actions.

In EU member states fisheries management is generally carried out under the national legislation arising from the implementation and/or transposing of EU regulations, in particular but not limited to Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013. In Denmark the key legislation implementing the CFP and guiding fisheries management is the Fisheries Act (No. 978 of 2008, as amended). The primary legal instrument empowering fisheries management in Norway is the Marine Resources Act of 6 June 2008 (no. 37).

Fishery management organisations are legally empowered to take management actions, and M1.4 is met.

M1.5 There is a consultation process through which fishery stakeholders are engaged in decision-making.

The main mechanism for the consultation of stakeholders within the EU is the North Sea Advisory Council (NSAC). The NSAC “is an interdisciplinary stakeholder-led organisation that takes a regional approach to provide the European Commission and EU countries...with recommendations...on the management of North Sea fish stocks on behalf of the fisheries sector, environmental and other stakeholders” (NSAC 2024).

Norwegian fisheries management engages with industry and other stakeholders via the Advisory Meeting for Fisheries Regulations. The Directorate of Fisheries proposes domestic regulations, and subsequently stakeholders such as fishermen’s associations, industry, trade unions, local authorities, environmental organisations and the Sami parliament are consulted during one or more Advisory Meetings (FAO 2024).

There is a stakeholder consultation process in place, and M1.5 is met.

M1.6 The decision-making process is transparent, with processes and results publicly available.

All of the information used to produce this MarinTrust assessment report was freely available online. The fisheries management decision-making process is primarily guided by the ICES advice, the basis for and outcomes of which are made available via the ICES website. Decisions and outcomes at the EU level are published on the EC website and elsewhere. Information regarding Norwegian fisheries management decisions is published on the Directorate of Fisheries website (DoF 2024).

The decision-making process is transparent, and M1.6 is met.

References

Danish Fisheries Act, 2008, amended to 2017. <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/den134943original.pdf>

Directorate of Fisheries (2015). The Marine Resources Act, English translation. <https://www.fiskeridir.no/English/Fisheries/Regulations/The-marine-resources-act>

Directorate of Fisheries (2019). Vision, objective, roles and areas of operation. <https://www.fiskeridir.no/English/About-the-directorate/Objective-and-roles>

Directorate of Fisheries (2024). Website root page. <https://www.fiskeridir.no/English/Fisheries>

EC (2018). Common Fisheries Policy. https://ec.europa.eu/oceans-and-fisheries/policy/common-fisheries-policy-cfp_en

FAO 2024. Fishery and Aquaculture Country Profiles. Norway. Country Profile Fact Sheets. Fisheries and Aquaculture Division. <https://www.fao.org/fishery/en/facp/nor>

Government.no (2023). “Department for Fisheries” summary page, <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/nfd/organisation/Departments/department-of-fisheries-and-aquaculture-/id706781/>

ICES (2024a). Who we are. <https://www.ices.dk/about-ICES/who-we-are/Pages/Who-we-are.aspx>

ICES (2024b). Latest Advice. <https://www.ices.dk/advice/Pages/Latest-Advice.aspx>

NSAC (2024). North Sea Advisory Council, “What We Do”. <https://www.nsrac.org/what-we-do/>

Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1954/2003 and (EC) No 1224/2009 and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 2371/2002 and (EC) No 639/2004 and Council Decision 2004/585/EC.
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2013/1380/contents#>

Links

MarinTrust Standard clause	1.3.1.1, 1.3.1.2
FAO CCRF	7.2, 7.3.1, 7.4.4, 12.3
GSSI	D.1.01, D.4.01, D2.01, D1.07, D1.04,

M2	Surveillance, Control and Enforcement - Minimum Requirements		
	M2.1	There is an organisation responsible for monitoring compliance with fishery laws and regulations.	PASS
	M2.2	There is a framework of sanctions which are applied when laws and regulations are discovered to have been broken.	PASS
	M2.3	There is no substantial evidence of widespread non-compliance in the fishery, and no substantial evidence of IUU fishing.	PASS
	M2.4	Compliance with laws and regulations is actively monitored, through a regime which may include at-sea and portside inspections, observer programmes, and VMS.	PASS
Clause outcome:			PASS

There have been no substantial changes in the management of the fishery relevant to this section. An updated Annual Fisheries Inspection report has been published, and information from this report has been added to M2.3. A summary of the outcomes of the 2023 MT re-assessment are provided here for convenience; please refer to the full re-assessment report for details

M2.1 There is an organisation responsible for monitoring compliance with fishery laws and regulations.

Monitoring and enforcement of fisheries compliance in the EU is the responsibility of the individual member states. The agency responsible in Danish waters is the Danish Fisheries Agency (FA). The FA operates a small fleet of enforcement vessels and is responsible for regulating, monitoring and inspection of Danish fishing activities. National control and enforcement activities are supported by the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA). The EFCA aims to “promote the highest common standards for control, inspection and surveillance under the CFP” (EFCA 2024).

There are organisations established with responsibility for monitoring compliance, and M2.1 is met.

M2.2 There is a framework of sanctions which are applied when laws and regulations are discovered to have been broken.

A framework of sanctions is in place as set out in the CFP legislation and transposed into Danish national law. Sanctions potentially include suspension of fishing licence, fines, confiscation of catch and/or equipment, and imprisonment. These are set out in Chapter 23 of the Fisheries Act 2008, as amended.

There is a framework of sanctions set out in the key fisheries legislation, and M2.2 is met.

M2.3 There is no substantial evidence of widespread non-compliance in the fishery, and no substantial evidence of IUU fishing.

The most recent summary from the Danish Fisheries Agency covering control and enforcement, published in 2023 (FA 2023), reports that in 2022, 1,868 inspections were carried out on vessels or landings at ports, and 405 inspections were conducted on vessels at sea. In the industrial reduction fishery, which includes the Norway pout fishery, there were a total of 1,557 landings, of which 163 were inspected.

Throughout the compilation of this MT surveillance assessment report, no evidence was encountered suggesting widespread non-compliance in the fishery, and available evidence suggests a robust and focussed control and enforcement regime is in place. M2.3 is met.

M2.4 Compliance with laws and regulations is actively monitored, through a regime which may include at-sea and portside inspections, observer programmes, and VMS.

Compliance with laws and regulations is monitored through the use of at-sea and portside inspections, e-logbooks, landings certificates, sales notes, VMS, designated ports, and inspections throughout the supply chain. (FA 2024).

Compliance is actively monitored through a wide range of measures, and M2.4 is met.

References

Danish Fisheries Act, 2008, amended to 2017. <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/den134943original.pdf>

EFCA (2024). Mission and Strategy. <https://www.efca.europa.eu/en/content/objectives-and-strategy>

FA (2023). Om Fiskeristyrelsen Årsrapport (Danish Fisheries Agency annual report) 2022.

https://fiskeristyrelsen.dk/fileadmin/user_upload/Fiskeristyrelsen/Erhvervsfiskeri/Kontrol/AArsrapport/AArsrapport_2022.pdf

FA (2024). Control. <https://fiskeristyrelsen.dk/erhvervsfiskeri/kontrol>

Links

MarinTrust Standard clause	1.3.1.3
FAO CCRF	7.7.2
GSSI	D1.09

CATEGORY A SPECIES

The four clauses in this section apply to Category A species. Clauses A1 - A4 should be completed for **each** Category A species. If there are no Category A species in the fishery under assessment, this section can be deleted. A Category A species must meet the minimum requirements of all four clauses before it can be recommended for approval. The clauses should be completed by providing sufficient evidence to justify awarding each of the requirements a pass or fail rating. The species must achieve a pass rating against all requirements to be awarded a pass overall. **If the species fails any of these clauses it should be re-assessed as a Category B species.**

Species Name		Norway Pout	
A1	Data Collection - Minimum Requirements		
	A1.1	Landings data are collected such that the fishery-wide removals of this species are known.	PASS
	A1.2	Sufficient additional information is collected to enable an indication of stock status to be estimated.	PASS
Clause outcome:			PASS

A1.1 Landings data are collected such that the fishery-wide removals of this species are known.

Catch data are collected through logbooks and landings reporting. ICES reports that 100% of catches were taken by the small-meshed trawl fleet, and that discards and bycatch of Norway pout are negligible (ICES 2023). Total catches in 2022 were 35,724t. Catch data are available broken down by location and vessel flag. In Division 3a almost all catch is taken by Denmark, with very small amounts (an estimated 4t in 2022) taken by Norway and Sweden. In Subarea 4 the large majority of catch is taken in Division 4a by Denmark and Norway (around 34,746t total in 2022), with smaller amounts taken by the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden and the UK (around 174t total in 2022). The total catch in Division 4b has been under 300t in recent years, and the total catch in Division 4c is negligible. In some years catch is also taken by the Faroe Islands, generally in Division 4a (ICES 2023). The relative share of catch taken by Denmark versus Norway varies each year.

Landings are collected such that fishery-wide removals of Norway pout are well understood, and A1.1 is met.

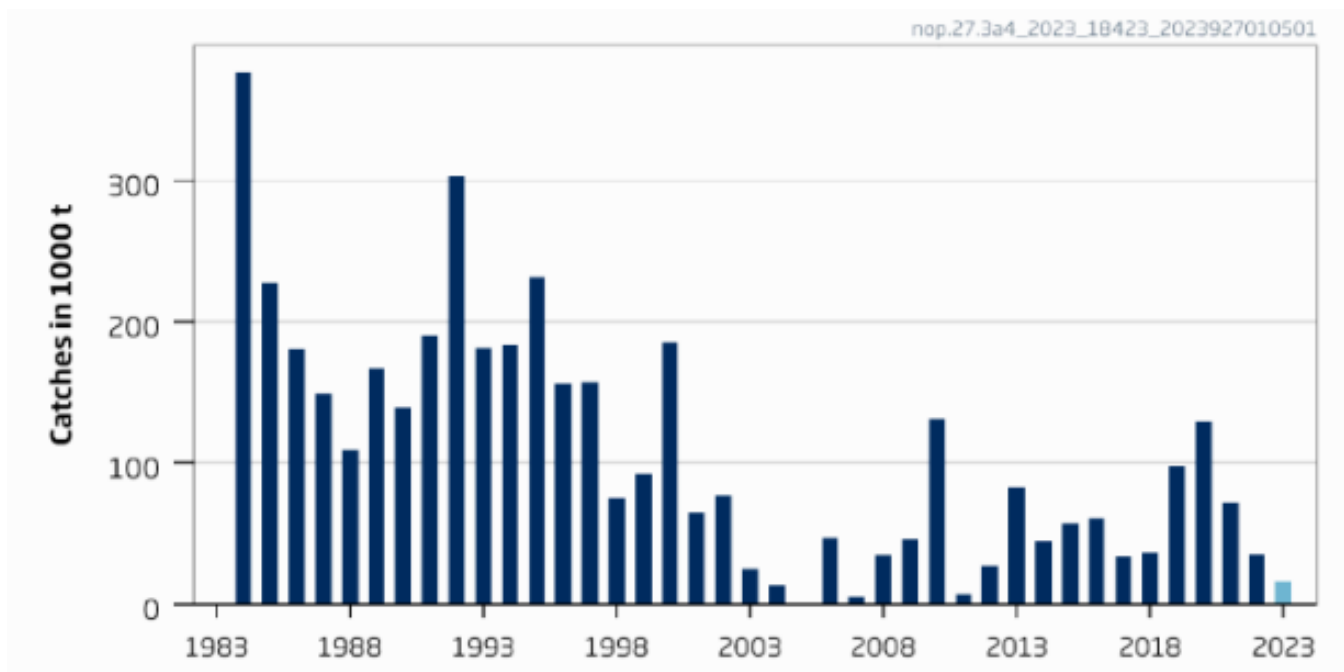


FIGURE 1. NORWAY POUT IN ICES DIVISION 3A AND SUBAREA 4, CATCHES 1984 – 2023 (ICES 2023)

A1.2 Sufficient additional information is collected to enable an indication of stock status to be estimated.

A range of additional information is used to inform the stock assessment process and allow an estimate of stock status to be calculated. This includes catch sampling, to produce age and weight-at-age data; estimates of maturity and natural mortality

rates based on multispecies assessments; and survey indices from the International Bottom Trawl Survey (IBTS), the English Ground Fish Survey (EGFS), and the Scottish Ground Fish Survey (SGFS) (ICES 2023a).

When discussing the quality of the stock assessment, ICES notes that the assessment “is considered appropriate to indicate trends in the stock and immediate changes in the stock because of the assessment taking into account the seasonality in fishery, use of seasonal based fishery independent information, and using most recent information about recruitment”, and that the method “gives a good indication of the stock status the 1 October the following year based on projection of existing recruitment information in 3rd quarter of the assessment year” (ICES 2023a).

Sufficient additional information is collected to enable an indication of stock status to be estimated, and A1.2 is met.

References

ICES (2023). Norway pout (*Trisopterus esmarkii*) in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a (North Sea, Skagerrak, and Kattegat). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.21907857.v1>

ICES (2023a). Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.22643143.v1>

Links

MarinTrust Standard clause	1.3.2.1.1, 1.3.2.1.2, 1.3.2.1.4, 1.3.1.2
FAO CCRF	7.3.1, 12.3
GSSI	D.4.01, D.5.01, D.6.02, D.3.14

A2 Stock Assessment - Minimum Requirements		
A2.1	A stock assessment is conducted at least once every 3 years (or every 5 years if there is substantial supporting information that this is sufficient for the long-term sustainable management of the stock), and considers all fishery removals and the biological characteristics of the species.	PASS
A2.2	The assessment provides an estimate of the status of the biological stock relative to a reference point or proxy.	PASS
A2.3	The assessment provides an indication of the volume of fishery removals which is appropriate for the current stock status.	PASS
A2.4	The assessment is subject to internal or external peer review.	PASS
A2.5	The assessment is made publicly available.	PASS
Clause outcome:		PASS

A2.1 A stock assessment is conducted at least once every 3 years (or every 5 years if there is substantial supporting information that this is sufficient for the long-term sustainable management of the stock), and considers all fishery removals and the biological characteristics of the species.

Norway pout in Subarea 4 and Division 3a is subject to an annual stock assessment by the ICES Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). The most recent of these was carried out in 2023 using an age-based analytical assessment. All fishery removals are considered; discarding and bycatch are considered negligible (ICES 2023). The biology and ecology of the species are taken into account extensively, as evidenced by the contents of the WGNSSK report (2023a), which itself uses a methodology set out by the Norway pout benchmarking process described in the benchmark workshop report (ICES 2016).

A2.2 The assessment provides an estimate of the status of the biological stock relative to a reference point or proxy.

The annual stock assessment provides an indication of the status of the stock relative to target and limit reference points. Three reference points remain unchanged since the 2023 MT re-assessment, as follows (ICES 2023):

- Fishing mortality reference point F_{cap} , set at 0.70, based on a long-term management strategy evaluation, indicating that an escapement strategy for Norway pout is only precautionary with the addition of an upper limit on fishing mortality = $F_{cap} (F_{bar[1-2]})$ at 0.7.

- Biomass limit reference point B_{lim} , set at 42,573t, set at the level of the lowest observed biomass, seen in 2005.
- Biomass target reference point B_{pa} , set at 69,736t, set at a level calculated to ensure the long-term probability of SSB falling below B_{lim} is <5%.

At the time of the 2023 stock assessment, SSB in 2023 was projected to be 78,191t (ICES 2023).

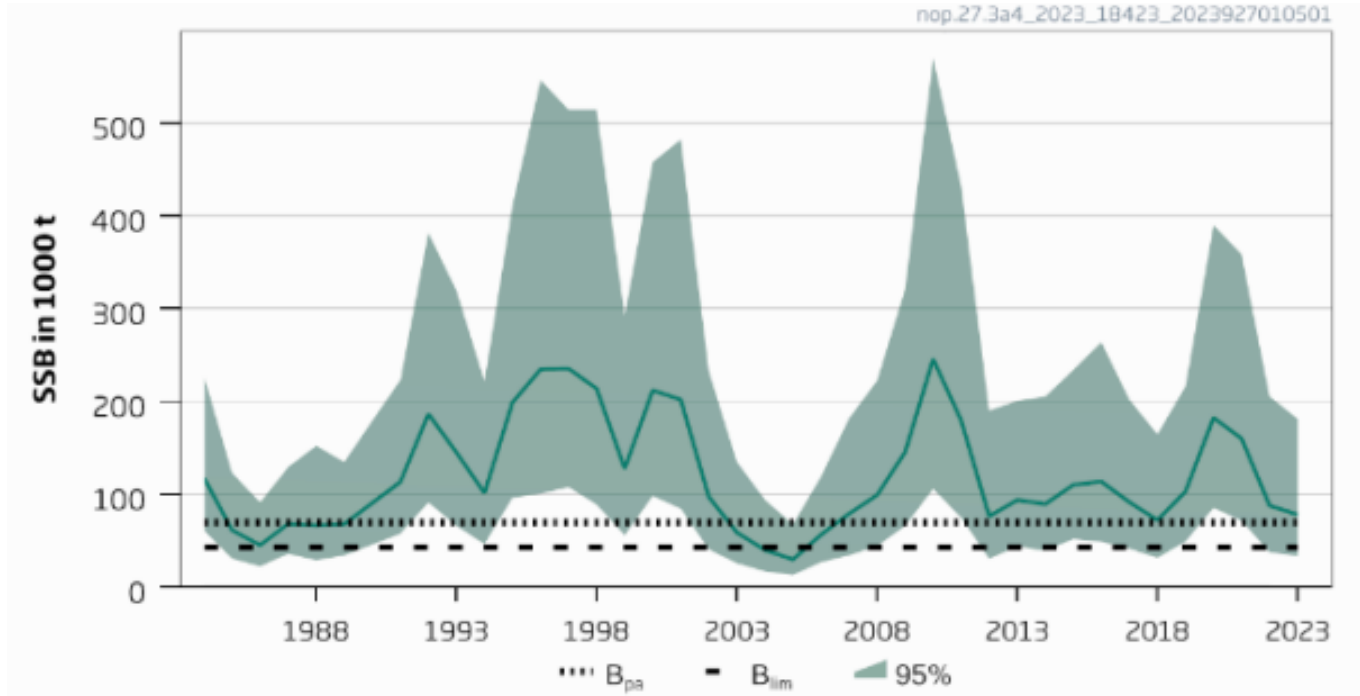


FIGURE 2. NORWAY POUT IN SUBAREA 4 AND DIVISION 3A, ESTIMATED SSB RELATIVE TO CURRENT REFERENCE POINTS (ICES 2023)
A2.3 The assessment provides an indication of the volume of fishery removals which is appropriate for the current stock status.

ICES publishes an annual recommendation for the maximum appropriate level of fishery removals for the stock. This is based on an escapement strategy, which aims to ensure the probability of SSB falling below B_{lim} is less than 5% in the long term. In practice this means incorporating incoming recruitment into calculations. Recruitment “is highly variable and influences SSB and total stock biomass rapidly because of the short life span of the species” (ICES 2023a). As recruitment is such a significant component of total stock size, ICES catch recommendations are often of a similar scale as the total estimated SSB.

In addition to the headline MSY-based catch recommendation, ICES also provides a range of other potential catch scenarios and lists the likely outcomes of following each (Figure 3). However, in reality TACs are set roughly in line with the headline, MSY-based advice (see A3.1 & A3.2).

Basis	Catch (1 November 2023– 31 October 2024)*	F (1 November 2023– 31 October 2024)	5 th percentile SSB (4 th quarter 2024)	Median SSB (4 th quarter 2024)	% SSB change **	% catch change ***	% advice change ^
ICES advice basis							
MSY approach: (escapement strategy) 95% probability of SSB being above B _{lim} in the 4th quarter of 2024	20583	0.123	42573	114391	46	-47	-82
Other options							
F = 0	0	0	50415	127212	63	-100	-100
F = F _{status quo} ^{^^}	48658	0.305	33385	100095	28	26	-58
F = 0.2	33246	0.200	38119	108096	38	-13.6	-72
F = 0.3	48015	0.303	33631	100477	29	25	-59
F = 0.4	61702	0.408	29945	93407	19.5	60	-47
F = 0.5	74206	0.508	26188	86907	11.2	93	-36
F = 0.6	85848	0.605	22913	81038	3.6	123	-27
F = 0.7	96690	0.710	20610	76245	-2.5	151	-17.2

* The catch forecast is for the period 1 October to 30 September.
 ** SSB at the beginning of the 4th quarter of 2024 relative to SSB at the beginning of the 4th quarter of 2023 (78 191 tonnes).
 *** Catches 1 October 2023–30 September 2024 relative to catches 1 October 2022–15 September 2023 (38 490 tonnes).
 ^ Advice value 2024 relative to the advice value 2023 (116 823 tonnes).
 ^^ Fishing mortality from the 4th quarter of 2022 to the 3rd quarter of 2023; from the assessment model.

FIGURE 3. NORWAY POUT IN DIVISION 3A AND SUBAREA 4, CATCH SCENARIOS FOR 2023/24 (ICES 2023)

A2.4 The assessment is subject to internal or external peer review.

The Guide to ICES Advisory Framework and Principles (ICES 2020) sets out the process by which ICES carries out scientific activities and provides fishery management advice. The process is designed to be transparent, independent and produce peer-reviewed recommendations. Advice is provided based on ten key Principles, of which Principle 7 states that “To ensure that the best available, credible science has been used and to confirm that the analysis provides a sound basis for advice, all analyses and methods are peer reviewed by at least two independent reviewers. For recurrent advice, the review is conducted through a benchmark process; for special requests through one-off reviews”.

The ICES advice, and the stock assessment methodology underpinning it, are subject to independent peer review, and therefore the fishery meets the requirements of A2.4.

A2.5 The assessment is made publicly available.

All of the stock assessment information used to produce this MarinTrust assessment report was publicly available. Specifically, information is published in the WGNSSK report (ICES 2023a), the stock annex (ICES 2017), the benchmarking report (ICES 2016) and the catch advice (ICES 2023). Additionally, the publication of methodologies, data, deliberations and outcomes is a core part of the ICES process, as set out by the ICES Advisory Framework and Principles, particularly Principles 4, 5 and 6 (ICES 2020).

The stock assessment process and outcomes are made publicly available and therefore the fishery meets the requirements of A2.5.

References

ICES (2016). Report of the Benchmark Workshop on Norway Pout (*Trisopterus esmarkii*) in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a (North Sea, Skagerrak, and Kattegat), 23–25 August 2016, Copenhagen, Denmark. ICES CM 2016/ACOM:35. 396 pp.
<https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.5599>

ICES (2017). Stock Annex: Norway Pout in the North Sea and Skagerrak (area 4 and 3.a). ICES Stock Annexes. Report.
<https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.18622934.v1>

ICES (2020). Guide to ICES advisory framework and principles. In Report of the ICES Advisory Committee, 2020. ICES Advice 2020, Guide to ICES Advice. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.7648>

ICES (2023). Norway pout (*Trisopterus esmarkii*) in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a (North Sea, Skagerrak, and Kattegat). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.21907857.v1>

ICES (2023a). Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.22643143.v1>

Links	
MarinTrust Standard clause	1.3.2.1.2, 1.3.2.1.4, 1.3.1.2
FAO CCRF	12.3
GSSI	D.5.01, D.6.02, D.3.14

A3	Harvest Strategy - Minimum Requirements		
	A3.1	There is a mechanism in place by which total fishing mortality of this species is restricted.	PASS
	A3.2	Total fishery removals of this species do not regularly exceed the level indicated or stated in the stock assessment. Where a specific quantity of removals is recommended, the actual removals may exceed this by up to 10% ONLY if the stock status is above the limit reference point or proxy.	PASS
	A3.3	Commercial fishery removals are prohibited when the stock has been estimated to be below the limit reference point or proxy (small quotas for research or non-target catch of the species in other fisheries are permissible).	PASS
Clause outcome:			PASS

A3.1 There is a mechanism in place by which total fishing mortality of this species is restricted.

Prior to 2020, removals of this species were restricted by two TACs, one set by Norway and one by the EU. From 2020 onwards, an additional TAC was set by the UK, meaning Norway pout is now subject to three separate TACs. Since 2016, ICES advice has been provided based on the period running from the 1st November of the year previous to the 31st October of the current year, and since 2018 TACs have been set along the same period. Quotas appear to be effective at restricting the total fishing mortality, as – according to ICES data – they have never been exceeded (ICES 2023). ICES notes that “the lack of full quota uptake is likely due to targeting of other industrial species like sprat for which fishing costs are lower, but also high fishing (fuel) costs and bycatch regulations (mainly in relation to herring and whiting bycatch) have an impact” (ICES 2023a).

There is an effective mechanism in place which restricts total fishery removals of this species, and A3.1 is met.

A3.2 Total fishery removals of this species do not regularly exceed the level indicated or stated in the stock assessment. Where a specific quantity of removals is recommended, the actual removals may exceed this by up to 10% ONLY if the stock status is above the limit reference point or proxy.

As noted above, there are three TACs set for this species, by Norway, the EU, and the UK. The 2023 MT re-assessment noted that in recent years the total of all three TACs has generally been slightly larger than the ICES advice (although always less than 10% larger); for the 2023 season the total international TAC was in line with the ICES advice.

Final Norway pout landings continue to be consistently smaller than the total TAC, in many years substantially so. For example, the ICES advice for 2022 (covering November 2021 – October 2022) was for catch not to exceed 118,273t. The total of the three TACs was 118,865, but total landings were only 35,724t (ICES 2023).

Total fishery removals of this species are consistently lower than the maximum level recommended by ICES, and A3.2 is met.

Year	ICES advice	Predicted catch corresponding to advice^^	TAC Norway	TAC EU^	TAC UK^	Official catch (including bycatch of other species)	ICES catch
2019	MSY approach (escapement strategy; probability of SSB falling below B_{lim} is less than 5%) with $F_{cap} = 0.7$	≤ 135459	82230	55000		100615	97654
2020	MSY approach (escapement strategy; probability of SSB falling below B_{lim} is less than 5%) with $F_{cap} = 0.7$	≤ 167105	98053	72500		131300	129497
2021	MSY approach (escapement strategy; probability of SSB falling below B_{lim} is less than 5%) with $F_{cap} = 0.7$	≤ 254038	127019	116555	11745	72486	71954
2022	MSY approach (escapement strategy; probability of SSB falling below B_{lim} is less than 5%)	≤ 118273	59137	49524	10204	35954	35724
2023	MSY approach (escapement strategy; probability of SSB falling below B_{lim} is less than 5%)	≤ 116823	58411	46973	11439		
2024	MSY approach (escapement strategy; probability of SSB falling below B_{lim} is less than 5%)	≤ 20583					

FIGURE 4. NORWAY POUT IN DIVISION 3A AND SUBAREA 4: ICES ADVICE, TACS AND TOTAL CATCHES SINCE 2019 (ICES 2023)

A3.3 Commercial fishery removals are prohibited when the stock has been estimated to be below the limit reference point or proxy (small quotas for research or non-target catch of the species in other fisheries are permissible).

ICES has historically recommended the closure of the fishery when biomass was estimated to be low; this occurred several times between 2005 and 2007, and also in 2011 and 2012. During the former period small TACs of 6,000t were set; in 2011 and 2012 quotas were set to zero. ICES currently provides advice using an MSY-based escapement strategy, aiming to reduce the probability that SSB will fall below B_{lim} to less than 5% (ICES 2023).

Norway pout is a short-lived species, and as such recruitment is taken into account when calculating the appropriate catch level to recommend. Therefore, the fishery would not necessarily be closed if SSB were estimated to be below B_{lim} . However, ICES would recommend closure there was a greater than 50% chance that SSB would be below B_{lim} in the following year should any fishing take place. This approach has been assessed by ICES and determined to be precautionary (ICES 2023).

Commercial fishery removals have been prohibited in the past based on ICES advice. ICES is highly likely to recommend the closure of the fishery in future should such action become necessary. A3.3 is met.

References

ICES (2023). Norway pout (*Trisopterus esmarkii*) in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a (North Sea, Skagerrak, and Kattegat). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.21907857.v1>

ICES (2023a). Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.22643143.v1>

ICES (2023). Advice on fishing opportunities. In Report of the ICES Advisory Committee, 2023. ICES Advice 2023, section 1.1.1. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.22240624>

Standard clause 1.3.2.1.3

Links

MarinTrust Standard clause	1.3.2.1.3, 1.3.2.1.4
FAO CCRF	7.2.1, 7.22 (e), 7.5.3
GSSI	D3.04, D6.01

A4 Stock Status - Minimum Requirements	
A4.1	<p>The stock is at or above the target reference point, OR IF NOT:</p> <p>The stock is above the limit reference point or proxy and there is evidence that a fall below the limit reference point would result in fishery closure OR IF NOT:</p> <p>The stock is estimated to be below the limit reference point or proxy, but fishery removals are prohibited.</p>
Clause outcome:	
PASS	
<p>A4.1 The stock is at or above the target reference point, OR IF NOT:</p> <p>The stock is above the limit reference point or proxy and there is evidence that a fall below the limit reference point would result in fishery closure OR IF NOT:</p> <p>The stock is estimated to be below the limit reference point or proxy, but fishery removals are prohibited.</p> <p>The most recent ICES catch advice for Norway pout states that “spawning-stock size is above B_{pa} and B_{lim}” (ICES 2023) (see A2.2; Figure 2). SSB is estimated to be larger than the target reference point, and therefore the stock meets the first statement in this clause. A4.1 is met.</p>	
References	
ICES (2023). Norway pout (<i>Trisopterus esmarkii</i>) in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a (North Sea, Skagerrak, and Kattegat). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.21907857.v1	
Links	
MarinTrust Standard clause	1.3.2.1.4
FAO CCRF	7.2.1, 7.2.2 (e)
GSSI	D6 01

CATEGORY C SPECIES

In a whole fish assessment, Category C species are those which make up less than 5% of landings, but which are subject to a species-specific management regime. In most cases this will be because they are a commercial target in a fishery other than the one under assessment.

Clause C1 should be completed for **each** Category C species. If there are no Category C species in the fishery under assessment, this section can be deleted. Where a species fails this Clause, it may be assessed as a Category D species instead, EXCEPT if there is evidence that it is currently below the limit reference point.

Species Name		Herring in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3a and 7d (Autumn spawners)	
C1	Category C Stock Status - Minimum Requirements		
	C1.1	Fishery removals of the species in the fishery under assessment are included in the stock assessment process, OR are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.	PASS
	C1.2	The species is considered, in its most recent stock assessment, to have a biomass above the limit reference point (or proxy), OR removals by the fishery under assessment are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.	PASS
			Clause outcome: PASS
<p>C1.1 Fishery removals of the species in the fishery under assessment are included in the stock assessment process, OR are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.</p> <p>Herring in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3a and 7d is subject to annual stock assessment by the ICES Herring Assessment Working Group for the Area South of 62°N (HAWG). The most recent stock assessment was conducted in 2024, using an age-based analytical assessment with catches incorporated into the model and forecast. The stock assessment also utilised five survey indices and survey maturity data, plus estimates of natural mortality from the North Sea multispecies model. The section of the catch advice which comments on potential sources of uncertainty, “Quality of the assessment”, does not indicate any concerns about the outcomes of the assessment, noting that new natural mortality estimates were introduced, resulting in a re-evaluation of the stock reference points; these were similar to the old reference points (ICES 2024). Fishery removals from the Norway pout fishery are included in the stock assessment process through the use of a four-fleet approach to monitor catches; Fleet B is defined as “the industrial fleet of EU nations targeting sprat, Norway pout, and sandeel, operating in the North Sea” (ICES 2024). C1.1 is met.</p> <p>C1.2 The species is considered, in its most recent stock assessment, to have a biomass above the limit reference point (or proxy), OR removals by the fishery under assessment are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.</p> <p>The 2023 stock assessment produced an estimate of the current status of the stock relative to established reference points, which have been slightly revised since the 2023 MT re-assessment. The target reference points $MSY B_{trigger}$ and B_{pa} are now set at 1,130,747t and 1,049,521t respectively. The limit reference point B_{lim} has been set at 828,874t. The 2024 catch advice estimated that SSB in 2024 would be 1,386,241t, above all three reference points. The advice also states that “spawning-stock size is above $MSY B_{trigger}$, B_{pa}, and B_{lim}” (ICES 2024).</p> <p>Stock biomass is estimated to be above all three reference points, and C1.2 is met.</p>			

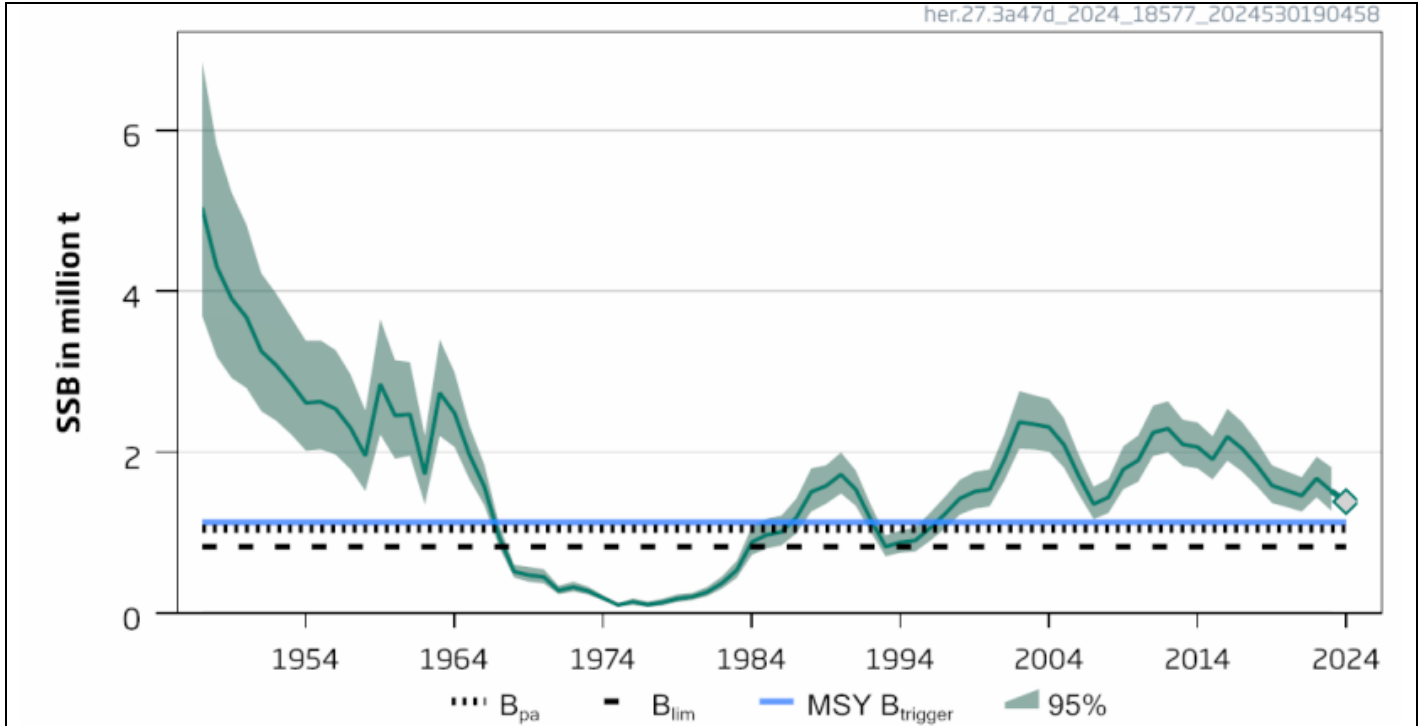


FIGURE 5. HERRING IN SUBAREA 4 AND DIVISIONS 3A AND 7D, ESTIMATED SSB RELATIVE TO CURRENT REFERENCE POINTS (ICES 2024)

References

ICES (2024). Herring (*Clupea harengus*) in Subarea 4 and divisions 3.a and 7.d, autumn spawners (North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat, eastern English Channel). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.25019285.v1>

Links

MarinTrust Standard clause	1.3.2.2
FAO CCRF	7.5.3
GSSI	D.3.04, D5.01

Species Name	Whiting in Subarea 4 and Division 7d
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C1	Category C Stock Status - Minimum Requirements		
	C1.1	Fishery removals of the species in the fishery under assessment are included in the stock assessment process, OR are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.	PASS
	C1.2	The species is considered, in its most recent stock assessment, to have a biomass above the limit reference point (or proxy), OR removals by the fishery under assessment are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.	PASS

Clause outcome: PASS

C1.1 Fishery removals of the species in the fishery under assessment are included in the stock assessment process, OR are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.

Whiting in Subarea 4 and Division 7d is subject to annual stock assessment by the ICES Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). The most recent assessment was conducted in 2024 using an age-based analytical approach which utilised catches in the model and forecast. The stock assessment also incorporated two survey indices and a survey maturity estimate, plus time-varying natural mortalities from the North Sea multispecies model. Discarding is significant but included in the assessment. The ICES documentation does not raise any concerns in relation to the reliability of the stock assessment outcomes. C1.1 is met.

C1.2 The species is considered, in its most recent stock assessment, to have a biomass above the limit reference point (or proxy), OR removals by the fishery under assessment are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.

The 2024 stock assessment produced an estimate of stock status relative to established reference points, which were updated due to a revision of the stock benchmark which also occurred in 2024. The updated target reference points MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa} , and MAP MSY $B_{trigger}$ were set at 167,419t. The limit reference points B_{lim} and MAP B_{lim} were set at 119,585t. The stock assessment produced a short-term forecast for SSB, estimating that it would be 363,356t in 2025, substantially larger than the reference point levels. The catch advice also states that “spawning-stock size is above MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa} , and B_{lim} ” (ICES 2024).

Stock biomass is above the target and limit reference points and C1.2 is met.

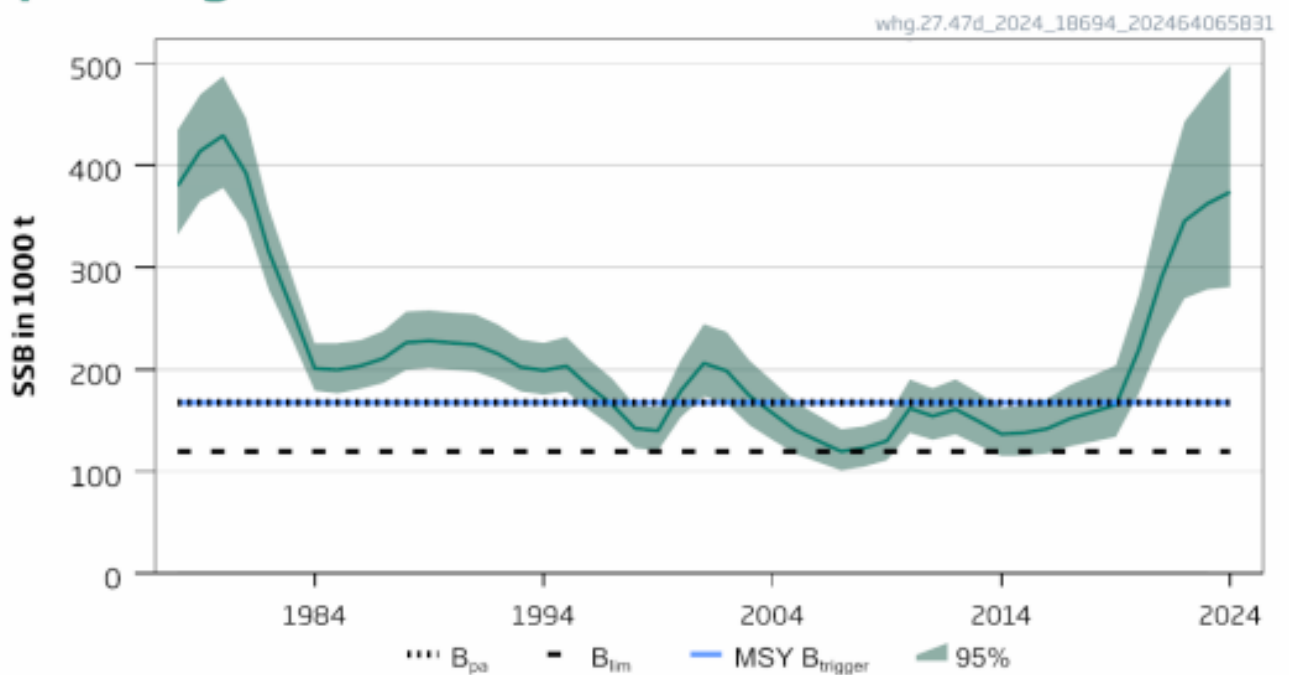


FIGURE 6. WHITING IN SUBAREA 4 AND DIVISION 7D, ESTIMATED SSB RELATIVE TO CURRENT REFERENCE POINTS (ICES 2024)

References

ICES (2024). Whiting (*Merlangius merlangus*) in Subarea 4 and Division 7.d (North Sea and eastern English Channel). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.25019720.v1>

Links

MarinTrust Standard clause	1.3.2.2
FAO CCRF	7.5.3
GSSI	D.3.04, D5.01

Species Name		Whiting in Division 3a	
C1	Category C Stock Status - Minimum Requirements		
	C1.1	Fishery removals of the species in the fishery under assessment are included in the stock assessment process, OR are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.	PASS

	C1.2 The species is considered, in its most recent stock assessment, to have a biomass above the limit reference point (or proxy), OR removals by the fishery under assessment are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.	PASS
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Clause outcome: PASS

C1.1 Fishery removals of the species in the fishery under assessment are included in the stock assessment process, OR are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.

Whiting in Division 3a is subject to bi-annual stock assessment by the ICES Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSK), the most recent of which was carried out in 2024. A survey-trends-based assessment was applied, utilising commercial catches and survey information from four trawl and acoustic surveys, plus discard and bycatch data. The ICES documentation indicates that there is a degree of uncertainty over the extent of stock mixing between this whiting stock and those in the North Sea and western Baltic (ICES 2024); however this does not appear to have produced significant concerns over the reliability of the stock assessment outcomes. C1.1 is met.

C1.2 The species is considered, in its most recent stock assessment, to have a biomass above the limit reference point (or proxy), OR removals by the fishery under assessment are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.

The 2024 catch advice provides an indication of the current status of the stock relative to one established reference point, which is unchanged since the 2023 MT re-assessment. $I_{trigger}$ is defined as 1.4 times larger than I_{loss} , which in turn is the lowest value of the biomass index produced by the combined survey index. The stock index is currently estimated to be around the reference point level, and the catch advice states that “the stock size index is above $I_{trigger}$ ” (ICES 2024). The stock is estimated to have a biomass above the proxy reference point, and C1.2 is met.

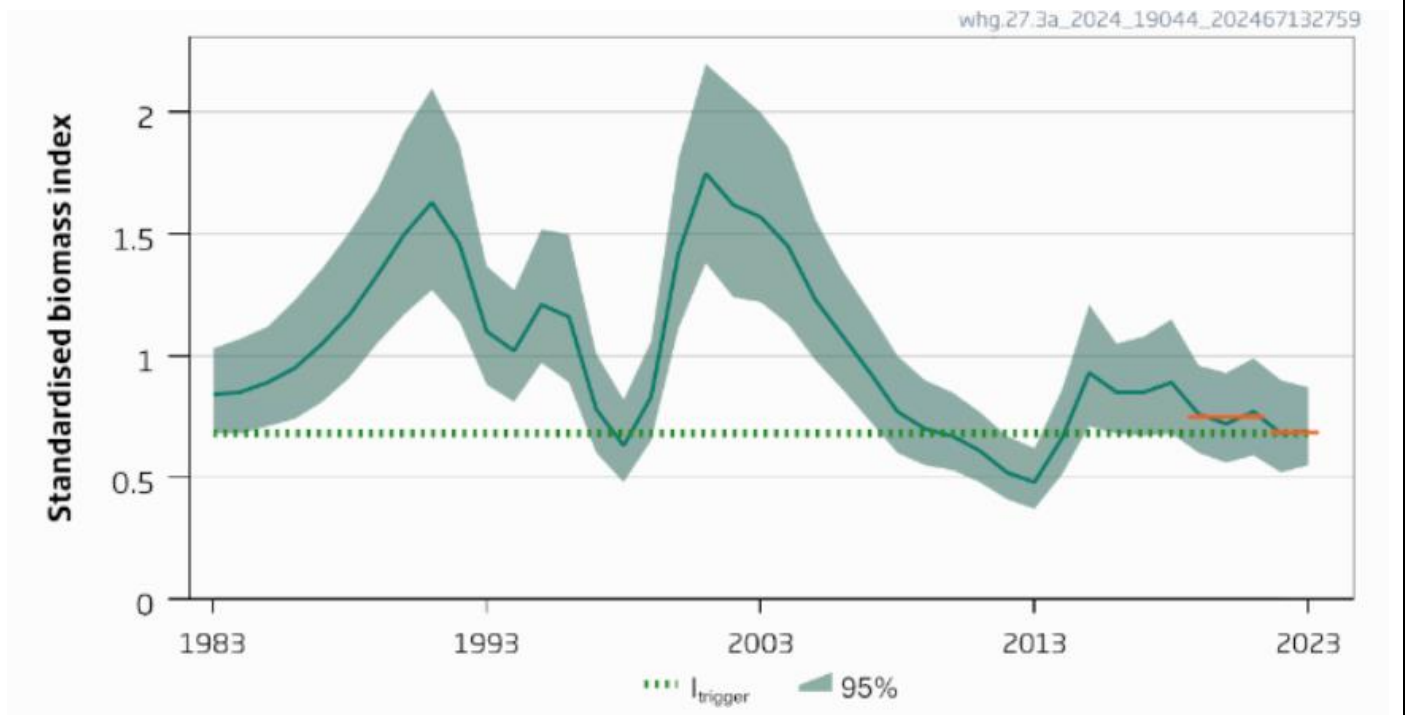


FIGURE 7. WHITING IN DIVISION 3A, BIOMASS INDEX RELATIVE TO CURRENT REFERENCE POINT (ICES 2024)

References

ICES (2024). Whiting (*Merlangius merlangus*) in Division 3.a (Skagerrak and Kattegat). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.25019717.v1>

Links

MarinTrust Standard clause	1.3.2.2
FAO CCRF	7.5.3

GSSI	D.3.04, D5.01
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Species Name		Haddock	
C1	Category C Stock Status - Minimum Requirements		
	C1.1	Fishery removals of the species in the fishery under assessment are included in the stock assessment process, OR are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.	PASS
	C1.2	The species is considered, in its most recent stock assessment, to have a biomass above the limit reference point (or proxy), OR removals by the fishery under assessment are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.	PASS
Clause outcome:			PASS

C1.1 Fishery removals of the species in the fishery under assessment are included in the stock assessment process, OR are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.

Haddock in Subarea 4, Division 6a and Subdivision 20 is subject to annual stock assessment by the ICES Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). The most recent assessment was conducted in 2024, using an age-based analytical approach which utilised catches and survey data in the model and the forecast. In addition to targeted catch, discards, below minimum size landings and haddock taken as bycatch in other fisheries have been included since 2016. The ICES documentation does not raise any major concerns relating to the quality of the assessment. C1.1 is met.

C1.2 The species is considered, in its most recent stock assessment, to have a biomass above the limit reference point (or proxy), OR removals by the fishery under assessment are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.

The 2024 stock assessment produced an estimate of stock status relative to reference points, which were updated in 2024 to reflect revised natural mortality estimates. The target reference points MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa} , and MAP MSY $B_{trigger}$ are currently set at 196,402t. The limit reference points B_{lim} and MAP B_{lim} are set at 141,339t. The 2024 stock assessment produced a short-term projection for the estimated biomass in 2025 of 535,682t, substantially larger than the reference point levels. Additionally, the 2024 catch advice states that “spawning-stock size is above MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa} , and B_{lim} ” (ICES 2024). Stock biomass is estimated to be above the target and limit reference points, and C1.2 is met.

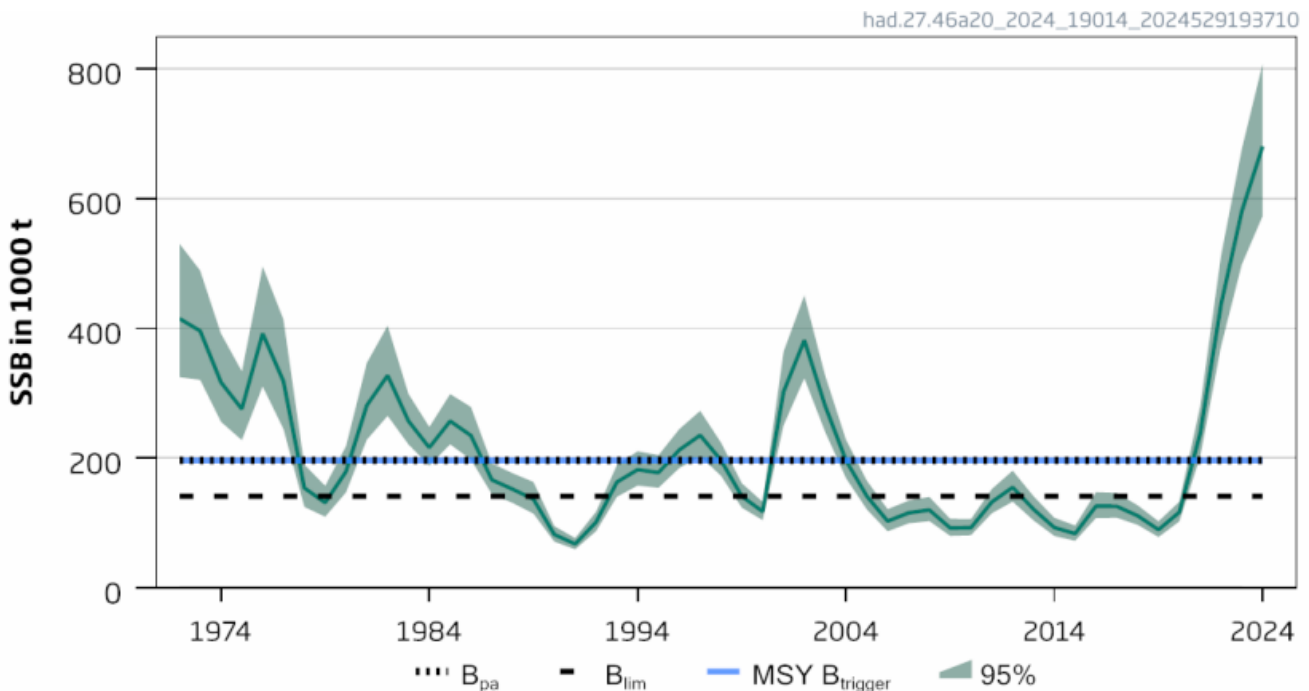
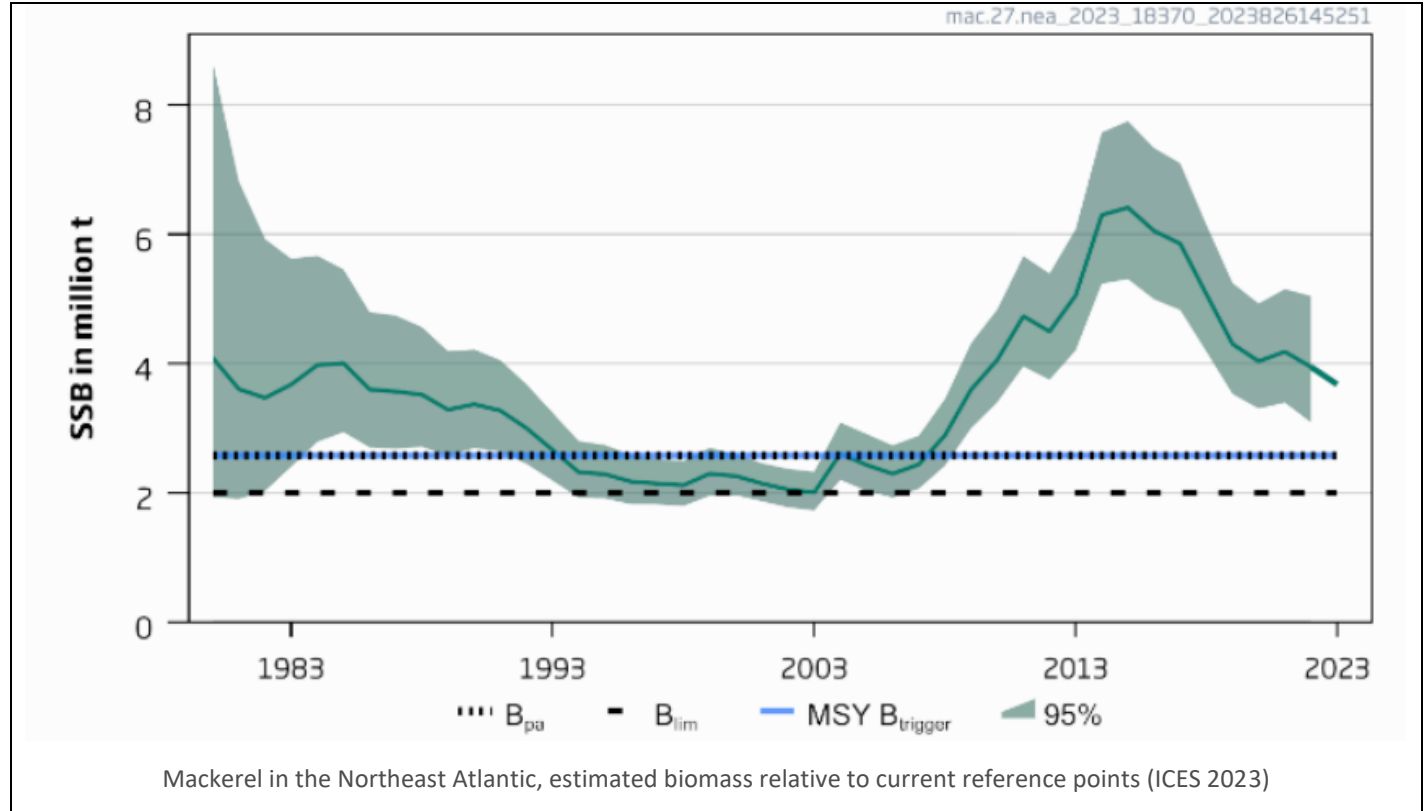


FIGURE 8. HADDOCK IN SUBAREA 4, DIVISION 6A AND SUBDIVISION 20, ESTIMATED BIOMASS RELATIVE TO CURRENT REFERENCE POINTS (ICES 2024)

References	
ICES (2024). Haddock (<i>Melanogrammus aeglefinus</i>) in Subarea 4, Division 6.a, and Subdivision 20 (North Sea, West of Scotland, Skagerrak). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.25019252.v1	
Links	
MarinTrust Standard clause	1.3.2.2
FAO CCRF	7.5.3
GSSI	D.3.04, D5.01

Species Name		Mackerel	
C1	Category C Stock Status - Minimum Requirements		
	C1.1	Fishery removals of the species in the fishery under assessment are included in the stock assessment process, OR are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.	PASS
	C1.2	The species is considered, in its most recent stock assessment, to have a biomass above the limit reference point (or proxy), OR removals by the fishery under assessment are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.	PASS
			Clause outcome: PASS
<p>C1.1 Fishery removals of the species in the fishery under assessment are included in the stock assessment process, OR are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.</p> <p>Mackerel in the Northeast Atlantic is subject to annual stock assessment by the ICES Working Group on Widely Distributed Stocks (WGWIDE), the most recent of which was carried out in 2023. The assessment used an age-based analytical model which utilised catches in the model and the forecast. The approach also incorporated data from three survey indices, steel tagging data from 1980-2006, and RFID tagging data from 2014-2021. Bycatch in other fisheries is included in the catch data. The ICES documentation reports some potential sources of uncertainty, such as limited data regarding the Russian component of the fishery; however these are largely accounted for in the methodology and do not appear to be considered to have affected the reliability of the assessment outcomes. C1.1 is met.</p> <p>C1.2 The species is considered, in its most recent stock assessment, to have a biomass above the limit reference point (or proxy), OR removals by the fishery under assessment are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.</p> <p>The 2023 stock assessment produced an indication of the current stock status relative to established reference points, which remain unchanged since the 2023 MT re-assessment. The target reference points $MSY_{B_{trigger}}$ and B_{pa} are set at 2,580,000t. The limit reference point B_{lim} is set at 2,000,000t. The 2023 assessment estimated that at spawning time in 2023 SSB would be 3,681,064t, substantially above the reference point levels. The catch advice also states that “spawning-stock size is above $MSY_{B_{trigger}}$, B_{pa}, and B_{lim}” (ICES 2023). Stock biomass is considered to be above the target and limit reference points, and C1.2 is met.</p>			



References

ICES (2023). Mackerel (*Scomber scombrus*) in subareas 1–8 and 14, and in Division 9.a (Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.21856533.v1>

Links

MarinTrust Standard clause	1.3.2.2
FAO CCRF	7.5.3
GSSI	D.3.04, D5.01

FURTHER IMPACTS

The three clauses in this section relate to impacts the fishery may have in other areas. A fishery must meet the minimum requirements of all three clauses before it can be recommended for approval.

F1	Impacts on ETP Species - Minimum Requirements		
	F1.1	Interactions with ETP species are recorded.	PASS
	F1.2	There is no substantial evidence that the fishery has a significant negative effect on ETP species.	PASS
	F1.3	If the fishery is known to interact with ETP species, measures are in place to minimise mortality.	PASS
			Clause outcome: PASS
<p>There have been no substantial changes in the management of the fishery relevant to this section. A summary of the outcomes of the 2023 MT re-assessment are provided here for convenience; please refer to the full re-assessment report for details.</p> <p>F1.1 Interactions with ETP species are recorded.</p> <p>Interactions with ETP species are recorded as required by EU legislation (for example EC Regulation 812/2004 and EU Regulation 2017/10042) and are submitted to the ICES Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC) for analysis. The most recent WGBYC report was published in 2023 (ICES 2023) and contains detailed information on the data sources used to inform the activities of the group. The bycatch data are used by the WGBYC to estimate bycatch rates and overall impacts of fisheries on ETP species in the waters covered by ICES.</p> <p>Interactions with ETP species are recorded, and F1.1 is met.</p> <p>F1.2 There is no substantial evidence that the fishery has a significant negative effect on ETP species.</p> <p>The catch composition data provided by the applicant for the original MT assessment lists all species present in the catch, including those where less than 100kg were caught in the 2022 season. None of the species listed meet the MT definition of an ETP species. Until recently the Norwegian component of the Norway pout fishery held an MSC certification, and as part of the MSC assessment process the potential direct impacts of the fishery on ETP species were reviewed. The most recent relevant assessment reports, including the full re-assessment from 2022 and surveillance from 2023, state that the level of impact of the Norwegian fishery on ETP species is low (MSC 2023). The two species considered ETP under the MSC methodology are harbour porpoise (<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>, Least Concern) and spiny dogfish (<i>Squalus acanthias</i>, Vulnerable), neither of which meet the MT definition of ETP.</p> <p>The available evidence suggests it is unlikely that the fishery is having a significant negative effect on ETP species, and no evidence was encountered to the contrary. F1.2 is met.</p> <p>F1.3 If the fishery is known to interact with ETP species, measures are in place to minimise mortality.</p> <p>There is no evidence to indicate the fishery regularly interacts with ETP species, and therefore no such measures are required to be in place. However, some general measures are in place across EU fisheries, such as the reporting requirements listed in F1.1 above, and a recently proposed Action Plan for further protecting ecosystems and vulnerable species (EC 2023).</p>			
<p>References</p> <p>EC (2023). Fisheries, aquaculture and marine ecosystems: transition to clean energy and ecosystem protection for more sustainability and resilience. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_828</p> <p>ICES (2023). Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.24659484.v2</p> <p>IUCN Red List, Harbour porpoise. https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/17027/50369903</p> <p>IUCN Red List, Spiny dogfish. https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/91209505/124551959</p> <p>MSC (2023). Norway sandeel, pout and North Sea sprat fishery certification reports. https://fisheries.msc.org/en/fisheries/norway-sandeel-pout-and-north-sea-sprat/@@assessments</p>			
<p>Links</p>			

MarinTrust Standard clause	1.3.3.1
FAO CCRF	7.2.2 (d)
GSSI	D4.04, D.3.08

F2	Impacts on Habitats - Minimum Requirements		
	F2.1	Potential habitat interactions are considered in the management decision-making process.	PASS
	F2.2	There is no substantial evidence that the fishery has a significant negative impact on physical habitats.	PASS
	F2.3	If the fishery is known to interact with physical habitats, there are measures in place to minimise and mitigate negative impacts.	PASS
Clause outcome:			PASS

There have been no substantial changes in the management of the fishery relevant to this section. A summary of the outcomes of the 2023 MT re-assessment are provided here for convenience; please refer to the full re-assessment report for details.

The targeted Norway pout fishery is conducted using midwater and bottom trawls, mainly otter trawls. Midwater trawls are known to have minimal impact on physical habitats, as they are operated with the intention of avoiding contact with the sea bed. This section therefore considers only the bottom trawling component of the fishery, with the midwater trawl gears assumed to meet the requirements.

F2.1 Potential habitat interactions are considered in the management decision-making process.

The potential impacts of the fishery on seabed habitats are taken into account during the decision-making process. The ICES ecosystem overviews – of which the Greater North Sea ecoregion is the most relevant to this report – include an analysis of the overall level of seabed disturbance caused by fisheries and other human activities (ICES 2022).

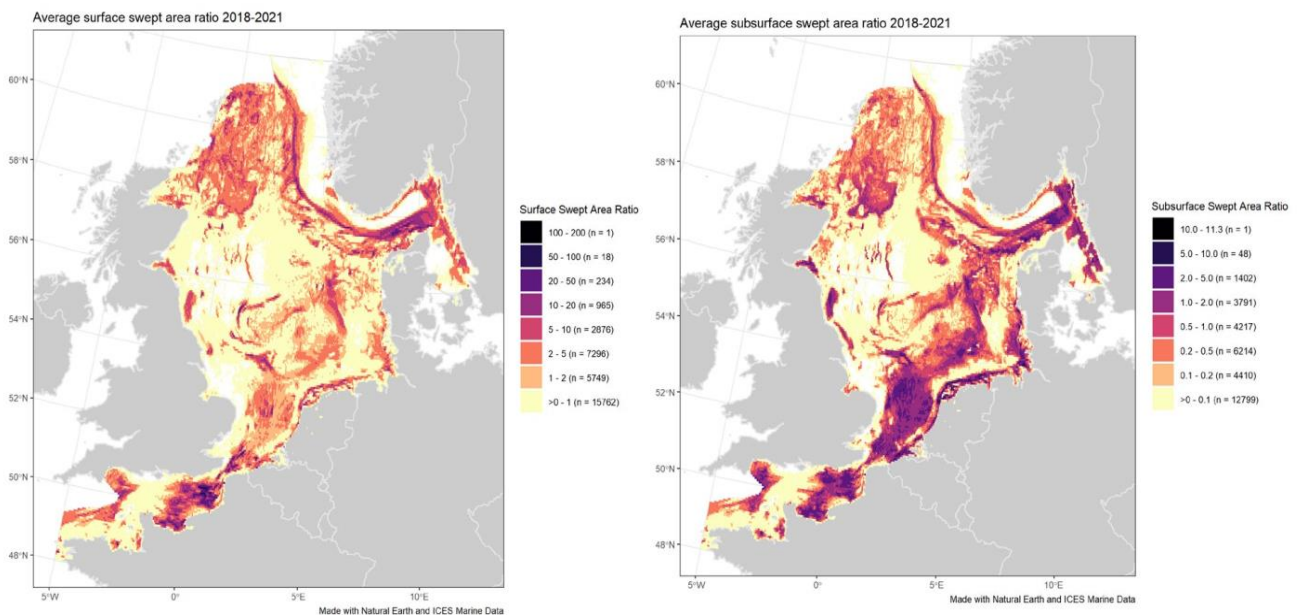


FIGURE 9. AVERAGE ANNUAL SURFACE (LEFT) AND SUBSURFACE (RIGHT) DISTURBANCE BY MOBILE BOTTOM-CONTACTING FISHING GEAR (BOTTOM OTTER TRAWLS, BOTTOM SEINES, DREDGES, BEAM TRAWLS) IN THE GREATER NORTH SEA DURING 2018–2021 (WITH AVAILABLE DATA), EXPRESSED AS AVERAGE SWEEPED AREA RATIOS (SAR) (ICES 2022)

Habitats in the North Sea are relatively well mapped and understood, through mechanisms including the North Sea International Bottom Trawl Survey. Maps are maintained and made available by the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet).

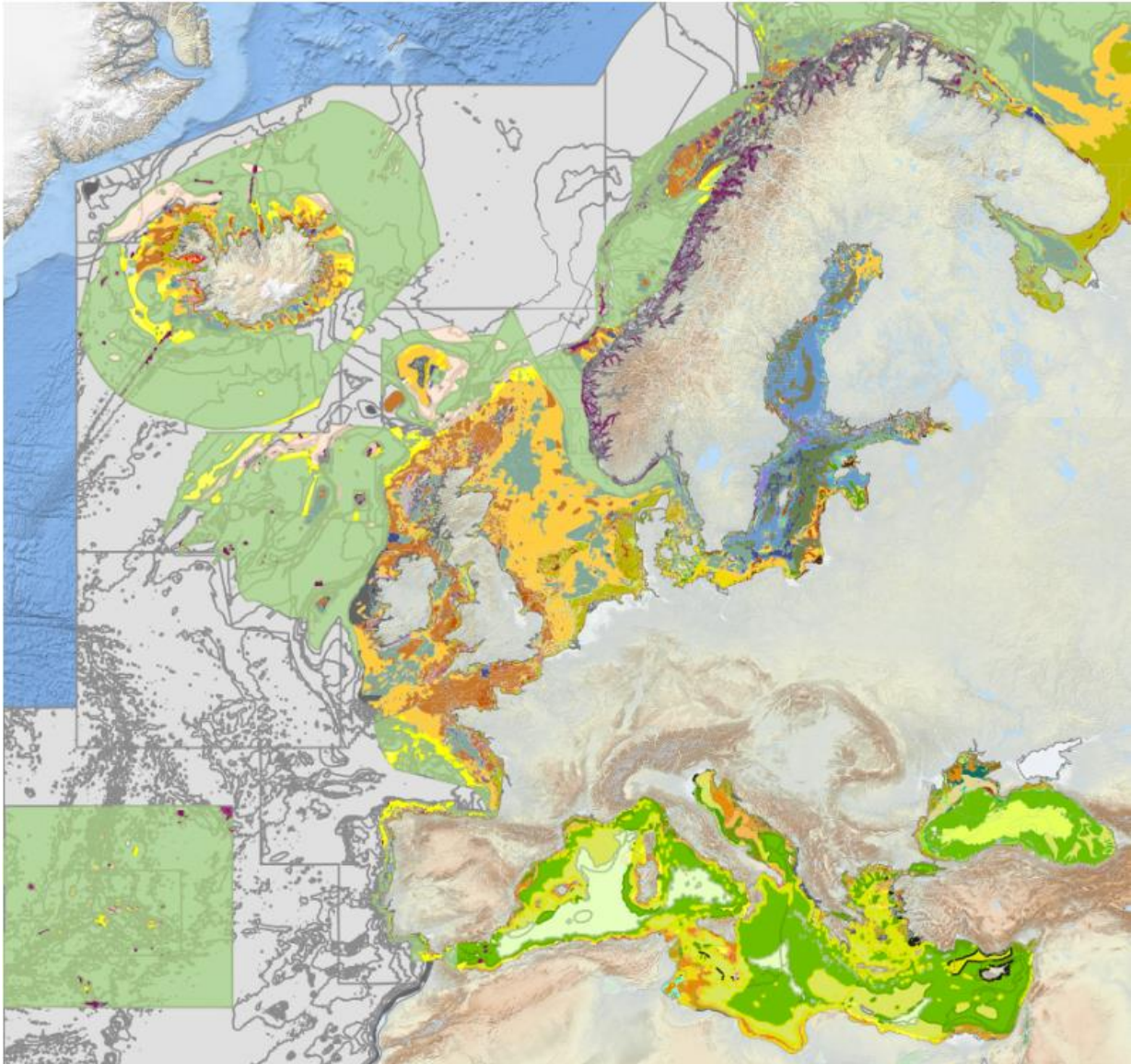


FIGURE 10. BROAD-SCALE SEABED HABITAT MAP FOR EUROPE (EMODNET 2023)

These analyses feed into the broader mechanisms in place to protect seabed habitats in the North Sea.

F2.2 There is no substantial evidence that the fishery has a significant negative impact on physical habitats.

No evidence was encountered to indicate that the Norway pout fishery has a substantial negative impact on physical habitats. The fishery primarily takes place in muddy areas, and regulations are in place to minimise the potential impacts (see F2.3). F2.2 is met.

F2.3 If the fishery is known to interact with physical habitats, there are measures in place to minimise and mitigate negative impacts.

The fishery is known to interact with seabed habitats, primarily deeper, muddy seabeds (Bigné *et al* 2019). Protection for these habitats is provided across all fisheries and is not specific to the Norway pout fishery. Mechanisms include Natura 2000, which protects core breeding and resting sites for rare species, along with rare natural habitats (EC 2023). Natura 2000 sites in the North Sea include Sylt Outer Reef, Borkum Reef Ground, Dogger Bank, Eastern German Bight, Cleaver Bank, and Frisian Front (EC 2022). Additional Marine Protected Areas in the North Sea include the Frisian Front and Central Oyster Grounds MPAs. Trawling is prohibited in all of these areas (EC 2022a).

References

Bigné, M, Rasmus Nielsen, J, Bastardie, F. Opening of the Norway pout box: will it change the ecological impacts of the North Sea Norway pout fishery? ICES Journal of Marine Science, Volume 76, Issue 1, January-February 2019, Pages 136–152, <https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fsy121>

European Commission (2022). Fisheries and nature conservation: Increased protection of Natura 2000 sites in the North Sea. https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/news/fisheries-and-nature-conservation-increased-protection-natura-2000-sites-north-sea-2022-12-08_en

European Commission (2022a). Commission delegated regulation C(2022) 8918. https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/C-2022-8918_en.pdf

European Commission (2023). Natura 2000. https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm

EMODnet (2023). Seabed habitats. <https://emodnet.ec.europa.eu/en/seabed-habitats>

ICES (2022). Greater North Sea ecoregion – Ecosystem Overview. ICES Advice: Ecosystem Overviews. Report. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.21731912.v1>

Links

MarinTrust Standard clause	1.3.3.2
FAO CCRF	6.8
GSSI	D.2.07, D.6.07, D3.09

F3 Ecosystem Impacts - Minimum Requirements		
F3.1	The broader ecosystem within which the fishery occurs is considered during the management decision-making process.	PASS
F3.2	There is no substantial evidence that the fishery has a significant negative impact on the marine ecosystem.	PASS
F3.3	If one or more of the species identified during species categorisation plays a key role in the marine ecosystem, additional precaution is included in recommendations relating to the total permissible fishery removals.	PASS
Clause outcome:		PASS
<p>There have been no substantial changes in the management of the fishery relevant to this section. A summary of the outcomes of the 2023 MT re-assessment are provided here for convenience; please refer to the full re-assessment report for details.</p> <p>F3.1 The broader ecosystem within which the fishery occurs is considered during the management decision-making process.</p> <p>The potential ecosystem impacts of fisheries are primarily taken into account in the management process by ICES. A key component of this is the development of ecosystem overviews, the outcomes of which are incorporated into Working Group discussions and recommendations. The relevant ICES ecoregion to this fishery is the Greater North Sea (ICES 2022), which includes the North Sea but also the English Channel, Skagerrak, and Kattegat. Ecosystem overviews provide a summary of the key environmental indicators, ecosystem pressures, and the current state of the ecosystem.</p> <p>In addition to this over-arching consideration, the role of Norway pout in the ecosystem also factors in to the development of the stock assessment process. The most recent WGNSSK report notes that the population dynamics of the species are “very dependent on changes caused by high recruitment variation and variation in predation mortality...due to the short lifespan of the species” (ICES 2023). There are also a range of technical management measures in place to protect other species, including a closed Norway pout box, restrictions on bycatch, minimum mesh size, and minimum landing size (ICES 2023).</p> <p>The broader ecosystem and the role of Norway pout within in it considered extensively throughout the decision-making process, and F3.1 is met.</p> <p>F3.2 There is no substantial evidence that the fishery has a significant negative impact on the marine ecosystem.</p> <p>As discussed in F3.1, Norway pout plays an important role in the marine ecosystem and as such the ecological aspects of the fishery are analysed extensively throughout the management process. Although there is clear potential for the fishery to have a significant negative impact on the ecosystem if Norway pout was overfished, there are two main reasons why it is highly unlikely to be having such an impact at present. Firstly, the ICES catch recommendations are based on the extensive analysis of potential ecosystem impacts described above, particularly the importance of Norway pout as a prey species. Secondly, in recent years the fishery has rarely caught quantities close to the maximum amount recommended, due primarily to economic factors but also because of bycatch regulations and restrictions. Therefore as long as catch recommendations are followed, and especially where TACs are not fully taken, the fishery is unlikely to have a significant negative impact on the marine ecosystem.</p> <p>F3.3 If one or more of the species identified during species categorisation plays a key role in the marine ecosystem, additional precaution is included in recommendations relating to the total permissible fishery removals.</p> <p>Norway pout is recognised as an important prey species within the ecosystem of the North Sea and Skagerrak. ICES states that “there is a need to ensure that the stock remains high enough to provide food for a variety of predator species” (ICES 2023). These include saithe, haddock, cod, whiting and mackerel. Natural mortality levels are estimated for the stock as part of the stock assessment process, using a multispecies assessment model. This ensures that catch recommendations recognise the likely quantity of Norway pout which will be removed by predators over the coming year, and are lower than they would be otherwise. Additional precaution is included in catch recommendations to recognise the important role of the species in the ecosystem, and F3.3 is met.</p>		
References		

ICES (2022). Greater North Sea ecoregion – Ecosystem overview. In Report of the ICES Advisory Committee, 2022. ICES Advice 2022, Section 7.1, <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.21731912>

ICES (2023). Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.22643143.v1>

Links	
MarinTrust Standard clause	1.3.3.3
FAO CCRF	7.2.2 (d)
GSSI	D.2.09, D3.10, D.6.09

SOCIAL CRITERION

In addition to the scored criteria listed above, applicants must commit to ensuring that vessels operating in the fishery adhere to internationally recognised guidance on human rights. They must also commit to ensuring there is no use of enforced or unpaid labour in the fleet(s) operating upon the resource.

Appendix A - Determining Resilience Ratings

The assessment of Category B species described in this assessment report template utilises a resilience rating system suggested by the American Fisheries Society. This approach was chosen because it is also used by FishBase, and so the resilience ratings for many thousands of species are freely available online. As described by FishBase, the following is the process used to arrive at the resilience ratings:

“The American Fisheries Society (AFS) has suggested values for several biological parameters that allow classification of a fish population or species into categories of high, medium, low and very low resilience or productivity (Musick 1999). If no reliable estimate of r_m (see below) is available, the assignment is to the lowest category for which any of the available parameters fits. For each of these categories, AFS has suggested thresholds for decline over the longer of 10 years or three generations. If an observed decline measured in biomass or numbers of mature individuals exceeds the indicated threshold value, the population or species is considered vulnerable to extinction unless explicitly shown otherwise. If one sex strongly limits the reproductive capacity of the species or population, then only the decline in the limiting sex should be considered. We decided to restrict the automatic assignment of resilience categories in the Key Facts page to values of K , t_m and t_{max} and those records of fecundity estimates that referred to minimum number of eggs or pups per female per year, assuming that these were equivalent to average fecundity at first maturity (Musick 1999). Note that many small fishes may spawn several times per year (we exclude these for the time being) and large live bearers such as the coelacanth may have gestation periods of more than one year (we corrected fecundity estimates for those cases reported in the literature). Also, we excluded resilience estimates based on r_m (see below) as we are not yet confident with the reliability of the current method for estimating r_m . If users have independent r_m or fecundity estimates, they can refer to Table 1 for using this information.”

Parameter	High	Medium	Low	Very low
Threshold	0.99	0.95	0.85	0.70
r_{max} (1/year)	> 0.5	0.16 - 0.50	0.05 - 0.15	< 0.05
K (1/year)	> 0.3	0.16 - 0.30	0.05 - 0.15	< 0.05
Fecundity (1/year)	> 10,000	100 - 1000	10 - 100	< 10
t_m (years)	< 1	2 - 4	5 - 10	> 10
t_{max} (years)	1 - 3	4 - 10	11 - 30	> 30

[Taken from the FishBase manual, “Estimation of Life-History Key Facts”, <http://www.fishbase.us/manual/English/key%20facts.htm#resilience>]

MarinTrust Fishery Assessment Peer Review Template

This section comprises a summary of the fishery being assessed against version 2 of the MarinTrust Standard.

Fishery under assessment	Wholefish Assessment -Surveillance 1 Norway pout (<i>Trisopterus esmarkii</i>) ICES Division 3a and Subarea 4 By Small-meshed midwater trawl, bottom trawl. (Primarily otter trawls).
Management authority (Country/State)	EU Commission and Norway - Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries
Main species	Norway pout (<i>Trisopterus esmarkii</i>)
Fishery location	FAO 27 Atlantic Northeast, Norway EEZ
Gear type(s)	Small Midwater Otter trawl & Bottom Trawl
Overall recommendation. (Approve/ Fail)	Approve

Summary: in this section, provide any additional information about the fishery that the reviewers feel is significant to their decision.

The assessor have provided a concise and updated surveillance 1 report for the fishery with appropriate levels of referenced evidence to substantiate a decision to re-approve the fishery.

General Comments on the Draft Report provided to the peer reviewer

The assessor have provided a very thorough examination of the fishery, with concise level of detail specific to each clause and applying these to the Type 1 (Cat A) and Type 2 Cat C species. The assessor notes that the landings can be variable from year to year, but overall the species categorisation remains consistent with the full assessment and considered by the external peer review an appropriate approach.

Summary of Peer Review Outcomes

Peer reviewers should review the fishery assessment report with the primary objective of answering the key questions listed in the table below. Where the situation is more complicated, reviewers may instead answer “See Notes”.

	YES	NO	See Notes
A – Fishery Assessment			
1. Has the fishery assessment been fully completed, using the recognised MarinTrust fishery assessment methodology and associated guidance?	✓		
2. Does the Species Categorisation section of the report reflect the best current understanding of the catch composition of the fishery?	✓		
3. Are the scores in the following sections accurate (i.e. do the scores reflect the evidence provided)?	✓		
Section M - Management	✓		
Category A Species	✓		
Category B Species	N/A		
Category C Species	✓		
Category D Species	N/A		
Section F – Further Impacts	✓		

Detailed Peer Review Justification

Peer reviewers should provide support for their answers in the boxes provided, by referring to specific scoring issues and any relevant documentation as appropriate.

Detailed justifications are only required where answers given are one of the ‘No’ options. In other (Yes) cases, either confirm ‘scoring agreed’ or identify any places where weak rationales could be strengthened (without any implications for the scores).

Boxes may be extended if more space is required.

1. Is the scoring of the fishery consistent with the MarinTrust standard, and clearly based on the evidence presented in the assessment report?
Scoring is consistent with Marin Trust Standard and clearly based on the evidence with recent updates where available and presented.
Certification body response
n/a

2. Has the fishery assessment been fully completed, using the recognised MARINTRUST fishery assessment methodology and associated guidance?
The fishery assessment has been fully completed following the MarinTrust methodology and guidance, except that internal peer review comments box is not completed.
Certification body response
Peer review comment box is noted – clarification will be sought from MT as to whether this box should be filled out by the internal or external peer reviewer.

3. Does the Species Categorisation section of the report reflect the best current understanding of the catch composition of the fishery?

Yes, the species categorisation section reflects the best current understanding of catch composition. The assessor derives the data from several sources ranging from ICES benchmark committee, recent published scientific literature, MSC assessment reports for Norway sandeel and North sea sprat, previously including Norway pout as a unit of assessment, and some applicant submitted information as well as the 2023 re-assessment report for the fishery. All references are retrievable and current. All species are IUCN categorised as Least Concern except Haddock which is categorised as Vulnerable. The IUCN assessment is across the entire population and not stock specific (so not specifically saying that Subarea 4, Division 6a and Subdivision 20 is vulnerable) and the Norway Pout fishery encounters haddock at <1% according to the information available. Norway Pout is identified as a type 1 Cat A species for MT assessment and whilst the proportion of several other species can vary, the more consistent proportion of 'regularly' encountered other species, tends to remain within the <5% range, the assessor has determined other species to be type 2, which is consistent with previous assessment reports for the fishery. Each of the type 2 species is categorised as Cat C; as they are managed fisheries with formal stock reference indicators. Information is clear and concise.

Certification body response

n/a

3M. Are the scores in "Section M – Management" clearly justified?

The scores in this section are evidenced by the available information and are justified and the assessor reports that there has been no significant changes to the management arrangements that would impact on MT scoring.

The assessor clearly summarises the various entities that make up the legal framework and management of the fishery under Danish/EU jurisdiction. The management authority, Directorate of Fisheries (DoF), within the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries is also noted.

The organisation responsible for analysing collected data from the fishery (ICES) is noted as too, the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research (IMR) for Norwegian waters. The actual collection of fishery data may be different to ICES, potentially the Danish Fisheries Agency, in regard to logbook and landing data.

The assessor refers to the EU CFP and DoF objectives to confirm commitment to sustainability and; regulations that give authority to these organisations is notes. The EU NSAC stakeholder committee is identified as the main vehicle for consultation and decision making and the Norwegian engagement process is described based on FAO 2024 reference. Reports from the processes are freely available and can be described as transparent and publicly available.

The assessor notes that the agency responsible in Danish waters is the Danish Fisheries Agency (FA). The FA operates a small fleet of enforcement vessels and is responsible for regulating, monitoring and inspection of Danish fishing activities and the framework of sanctions is described and referenced. The FA publishes enforcement activities and outcomes (FA 2023) and no evidence of substantial non-compliance was reported. Compliance with laws and regulations is monitored through the use of at-sea and portside inspections, e-logbooks, landings certificates, sales notes, VMS, designated ports, and inspections throughout the supply chain. (FA 2024).

The evidence is referenced, summarised and provides verification of the fishery continuing to meet the M clauses.

Certification body response

n/a

3A. Are the “Category A Species” scores clearly justified?

Norway pout is correctly identified as Cat A species. The assessor provides a comprehensive summary of recent catches across the species stock distribution with collated ICES catch data broken down by location and vessel flag with data available ICES Division 3a and Subarea 4, Catches 1984 – 2023 (ICES 2023).

Additional data to inform stock assessments includes catch sampling, to produce age and weight-at-age data; estimates of maturity and natural mortality rates based on multispecies assessments; and survey indices from the International Bottom Trawl Survey (IBTS), the English Ground Fish Survey (EGFS), and the Scottish Ground Fish Survey (SGFS) (ICES 2023a) and seasonal based fishery independent information; sufficient to enable stock status estimation. Norway pout in Subarea 4 and Division 3a is subject to an annual stock assessment by the ICES Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). The most recent of these was carried out in 2023 using an age-based analytical assessment. The annual stock assessment provides an indication of the status of the stock relative to target and limit reference points. The assessor notes that three reference points remain unchanged since the 2023 MT re-assessment, as follows (ICES 2023). The ICES recent advice is based on MSY approach with 95% probability of SSB being above Blim in the 4th quarter of 2024, is considered precautionary and is peer reviewed and publicly available.

The assessor notes that ICES states; Quotas appear to be effective at restricting the total fishing mortality, as – according to ICES data – they have never been exceeded (ICES 2023). ICES notes that “the lack of full quota uptake is likely due to targeting of other industrial species like sprat for which fishing costs are lower, but also high fishing (fuel) costs and bycatch regulations (mainly in relation to herring and whiting bycatch) have an impact” (ICES 2023a). Whilst the combined TACs of EU, Norway and UK can exceed ICES advice, this is not >10% and landings are lower than TAC’s set.

Currently, SSB is estimated to be larger than the target reference point. The assessor notes that historically, commercial fishery removals have been prohibited in the past based on ICES advice when biomass estimated to be too low, and recruitment is taken into account when recommending catch levels, albeit may not necessarily, prevent a fishery when stock was <Blim but not if there is a >50% chance that it would lead to SSB<Blim in the following year, which is determined as precautionary by ICES. (ICES 2023)

A species scores are clearly justified.

Certification body response

n/a

3B. Are the “Category B Species” scores clearly justified?

There are no Cat B species in the fishery.

Certification body response

n/a

3C. Are the “Category C Species” scores clearly justified?

Herring in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3a and 7d (Autumn spawners)

As described by the assessors evidence; Herring in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3a and 7d is subject to annual stock assessment by the ICES Herring Assessment Working Group for the Area South of 62°N (HAWG). The most recent stock assessment was conducted in 2024, The advice states that “spawning-stock size is above MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa} , and B_{lim} ” (ICES 2024).

Whiting in Subarea 4 and Division 7d

Whiting in Subarea 4 and Division 7d is subject to annual stock assessment by the ICES Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). The assessor notes that discarding can be significant but taken into account in the stock assessment. The catch advice also states that “spawning-stock size is above MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa} , and B_{lim} ” (ICES 2024).

Whiting in Division 3a

Whiting in Division 3a is subject to bi-annual stock assessment by the ICES Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK), the most recent of which was carried out in 2024. There is some potential mixing of stocks between North Sea and Baltic but noted, ICES recent assessment records that the stock is estimated to have a biomass above the proxy reference point.

Haddock Subarea 4, Division 6a and Subdivision 20

Haddock in Subarea 4, Division 6a and Subdivision 20 is subject to annual stock assessment by the ICES Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). The most recent assessment was conducted in 2024. The assessor notes that In addition to targeted catch, discards, below minimum size landings and haddock taken as bycatch in other fisheries have been included since 2016. The 2024 catch advice states that “spawning-stock size is above MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa} , and B_{lim} .”

Mackerel Northeast Atlantic

Mackerel in the Northeast Atlantic is subject to annual stock assessment by the ICES Working Group on Widely Distributed Stocks (WGWIDE), the most recent of which was carried out in 2023. Bycatch in other fisheries is included in the catch data. . The catch advice also states that “spawning-stock size is above MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa} , and B_{lim} ” (ICES 2023).

All Cat C species scores are clearly defined.

Certification body response

n/a

3D. Are the “Category D Species” scores clearly justified?

There are no Cat D species.

Certification body response

n/a

3F. Are the scores in “Section F – Further Impacts” clearly justified?

The assessor notes that there are no substantial changes in the management of the fishery that negatively impacts the F score outcomes.

The EU regulations requiring that ETP species are recorded is identified and that this data is submitted to the ICES Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC) for analysis.

The two species considered ETP under the MSC methodology are harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*, Least Concern) and spiny dogfish (*Squalus acanthias*, Vulnerable), neither of which meet the MT definition of ETP. Recent MSC (2023) reports are cited as well as the original MT assessment.

As noted by the assessor the available evidence suggests it is unlikely that the fishery is having a significant negative effect on ETP species, and also that no evidence was encountered to the contrary.

No direct ETP mitigation measures are deemed necessary due to the absence of interactions, although some general measures are in place across EU fisheries are noted, such as the reporting requirements listed in F1.1 above, and a recently proposed Action Plan for further protecting ecosystems and vulnerable species (EC 2023).

The majority of targeted Norway pout fishery is conducted using midwater and bottom trawls, mainly otter trawls. Midwater trawls are known to have minimal impact on physical habitats, as they are operated with the intention of avoiding contact with the sea bed. For bottom trawl, the assessor notes that an analysis of the overall level of seabed disturbance caused by fisheries and other human activities is undertaken (ICES 2022). The habitat in the sea area is generally very well mapped. The fishery primarily takes place in muddy areas, and regulations are in place to minimise the potential impacts. The mechanisms for areas protected as vulnerable/sensitive habitats are listed by the assessor (Natura 2000, MPA's) where trawling is prohibited.

The assessor has described the ICES Ecosystem overviews that provide a summary of the key environmental indicators, ecosystem pressures, and the current state of the ecosystem across ICES regions. These are then incorporated into stock assessment processes and decision making.

Norway pout is identified as having an important role in the marine ecosystem and is analysed extensively throughout the management process. ICES has clearly recognised and states that “there is a need to ensure that the stock remains high enough to provide food for a variety of predator species” (saithe, haddock, cod, whiting and mackerel) (ICES 2023). The assessor notes that there are two main reasons why it is highly unlikely that the fishery of having a negative impact. Firstly, the ICES catch recommendations are based on the extensive analysis of potential ecosystem impacts described above, particularly the importance of Norway pout as a prey species. Secondly, in recent years the fishery has rarely caught quantities close to the maximum amount recommended, due primarily to economic factors but also because of bycatch regulations and restrictions. There are also a range of technical management measures in place to protect other species, including a closed Norway pout box, restrictions on bycatch, minimum mesh size, and minimum landing size (ICES 2023).

Additional precaution is included and described - Natural mortality levels are estimated for the stock as part of the stock assessment process, using a multispecies assessment model. This ensures that catch recommendations recognise the likely quantity of Norway pout which will be removed by predators over the coming year, and are lower than they would be otherwise.

The evidence is concisely described and referenced for F scores.

Certification body response

n/a

Optional: General comments on the Peer Review Draft Report

The report is concise, sufficiently evidenced and well referenced.

Certification body response

n/a

Glossary

Non-target: Species for which the gear is not specifically set, although they may have immediate commercial value and be a desirable component of the catch. OECD (1996), Synthesis report for the study on the economic aspects of the management of marine living resources. AGR/FI(96)12

Target: In the context of fishery certification, the target catch is the catch of stock under consideration by the unit of certification – i.e. the fish that are being assessed for certification and ecolabelling. (GSSI)