

## North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group

### STATEMENT TO THE PRESS:

#### Eminent UK salmon retailers step forward to highlight consequences of inaction on North East Atlantic blue whiting management

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Since 2015, the North East Atlantic Coastal States have failed to reach an agreement on the sharing of the total allowable catch (TAC) for North East Atlantic blue whiting. Since this time, the combined individual quotas that have subsequently been set have significantly exceeded the scientific advice; in short, they have been overfishing.

As a consequence of this overfishing, and in the absence of a long-term management strategy, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certificates for blue whiting fisheries in this region were suspended in 2020. This greatly impacted supply chain companies who had made public commitments to sourcing sustainable seafood. Despite this wake-up call of loss of certification, the Coastal States continue to overfish to this day. The total catch figures reveal that the ICES scientific advice was exceeded by 30% in 2021 and 47% in 2022.

We, the [North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group \(NAPA\)](#), together with our partners, major seafood businesses and retailers, have repeatedly called for urgent action to end the overfishing of North East Atlantic blue whiting – but there now exists a ‘golden opportunity’ to achieve this goal.

#### **The Golden Opportunity**

For the last 7 years the North Eastern Atlantic Coastal States have exceeded the blue whiting catch limits that scientists have recommended. This is because the Coastal States have failed to agree on how to share the catch between them. As a result, each Coastal State sets their own quota and collectively these exceed the scientific advice.

In 2023 we have an opportunity to do things differently. The latest science shows that the blue whiting stock has increased following record levels of recruitment, and therefore, the total catch can be increased. The Coastal States therefore have a choice. They can continue to fish as they have done since 2015, which will mean that they will exceed the new higher catch limit. Or, they could follow common sense and come to an agreement to ensure their collective catch aligns with the latest scientific advice.

We have calculated that if each Coastal State lowers their own quota by 23.2%, the sum of all quotas will reach 100% of scientific advice (rather than the 147% seen in 2022) - or to put it another way, to stop overfishing. Critically, because of the increase in the stock size, such a reduction would still actually result in an *increase* in catch for each Coastal State of approximately 12%!

Our partners are clear on which option they want to see.

Consultations on sharing arrangements for North East Atlantic blue whiting for 2023 took place in London at the beginning of this month. To coincide with this meeting, the three primary buyers of this fish, the feed manufacturers Cargill, Skretting, and Biomar, [publicly called](#) for the Coastal States to seize the golden opportunity that the huge increase in the scientific advice offers; noting they were prepared to walk away from the fishery if mismanagement continued. Today, this call for

action is echoed by the salmon-producing sector, where blue whiting can be used in feed, and by their retail customers.

**Dr Andrew Davie, Head of Aquaculture at Aquascot**, commented:

*“We source UK farmed salmon renowned for its eating quality and we cannot compromise on our expectations for the responsible sourcing of the ingredients within the feeds the salmon are reared on. Blue whiting has great strengths as an ingredient, but we can only approve of its use if it is sourced from a sustainably managed fishery, which is why we fully support the feed manufacturers’ strong stance announced last week.”*

Both Aquascot and their retail customer Waitrose are members of our coalition of global seafood businesses committed to securing sustainable North East Atlantic pelagic stocks – the [North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group](#) (NAPA). Both partners want to see the Coastal States take cooperative action to agree quota shares that are in line with scientific advice, and commit to long-term management plans for this vital, valuable stock. To achieve this, we have established a [blue whiting improvement project](#).

**Dr Tom Pickerell, NAPA Project Lead**, said:

*“We require urgent action for this fishery and therefore needed a strong, joint voice to advocate for responsible management practices, which NAPA represents. We strive for a shared, global and non-competitive solution to sustainability issues in North East Atlantic pelagic fisheries.*

*Our group represents the majority of blue whiting purchasing power and we need confidence in the management of these fisheries: that is, that they reflect our shared values of long-term, science-based strategies to deliver security of supply and sustainable stocks for the future.*

*The positive news about blue whiting offers a **golden opportunity** to Coastal States. The revised estimates of abundance allow all parties to scale-back their share and ensure the total catch does not exceed the scientific advice without taking real-term cuts in catches.”*

**Melissa Tillotson, Senior Aquaculture and Fisheries Manager at Waitrose**, added:

*“Our commitment to only source from well-managed fisheries applies equally to the marine ingredients in our aquaculture feed as it does to the fish on our customers’ plates: There are no exceptions. Thanks to record levels of recruitment, we are fortunate to be presented with a rare chance to safeguard the blue whiting stock from overfishing without making cuts to catches this year and secure an agreement to help the blue whiting fisheries re-establish their certified status. The last time there was an agreement on sustainable shares for blue whiting was 2015 – 8 years ago! Our collective message to the coastal states is clear: do not to waste this golden opportunity.”*

**\*\*ENDS\*\***

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*Notes to Editors:*

### **More on NAPA**

The [North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group](https://www.seafish.org/responsible-sourcing/fisheries-management/north-atlantic-pelagic-advocacy-group/) (NAPA) is a collective of up to 60 global retailers, food service companies, and suppliers with the shared aim of sourcing sustainable and certified seafood in order to supply a growing demand for sustainable, ecolabelled fish products. NAPA's reach extends across the world, attracting members from Japan, Asia, USA, and Africa, as well as the EU and UK. It represents an unprecedented coalition of business leverage, pushing hard to prevent overfishing of three iconic pelagic stocks – North East Atlantic mackerel, Atlanto-Scandian herring, and North East Atlantic blue whiting. As a collective, NAPA is using its voice to advocate for long-term, science-based management of these stocks: for prospering oceans and fisheries, and business security. To achieve this, NAPA is seeking an agreement on total allowable catches for North East Atlantic pelagic fisheries in line with scientific advice, and for a long-term science-based management agreement.

Further detail can be found at:

- NAPA website: <https://www.seafish.org/responsible-sourcing/fisheries-management/north-atlantic-pelagic-advocacy-group/>
- Twitter: [@NAPAFisheries](https://twitter.com/NAPAFisheries)