

PRESS STATEMENT: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Global Seafood Coalition describes mackerel update as shocking - but not surprising

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The North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group (NAPA) has expressed deep concern after newly released scientific research shows that the North East Atlantic mackerel stock has reached its lowest level for over 20 years, which corresponds to decades of excessive catches. In addition, Atlanto-Scandian herring and North East Atlantic blue whiting have also seen substantial stock declines. These declines follow entrenched periods of unilateral quota setting by Coastal States for all three species, placing beyond doubt the role and importance of collaborative, international fisheries management in securing a sustainable future for the species.

New evidence and advice has been released today from the International Council for Exploration of the Seas (ICES), outlining the status of key pelagic fisheries in the North East Atlantic, including mackerel - one of the region's most prized catches. The species has plummeted to a level from which it will struggle to recover. Scientists have advised a stark 77% reduction in catches from the previous year - a sign of how concerning the latest stock declines are. Catches have been higher than the scientific advice in every year but one since 1998 - and have been 33% beyond what science considers safe limits each year on average for the past decade.

NAPA, a market-led coalition of over 50 global retailers, food service companies and suppliers, has been working since 2020 to drive sustainable, science-driven management of mackerel, alongside two other key pelagic fish stocks in the North East Atlantic (blue whiting and Atlanto-Scandian herring). Highlighting the importance of the issue, working on new science and solutions to help bring about an accord between Coastal States, NAPA emphasises the impact of poor management of these key stocks on the whole seafood market, on the fishing industry, and on the health of the wider North East Atlantic ecosystem. The Group is calling urgently for international quota sharing agreements to bring mackerel catches back into line with scientific advice and reduce pressure on the struggling species.

Aoife Martin, NAPA Independent Chair, said, "The latest update on the state of the mackerel stock is shocking - but not surprising. As the voice of the marketplace, NAPA has been calling for action to address this issue for five years. In that time, excess catches have totalled over 1 million tonnes above scientific advice. It has proven inevitable that there

would be stark consequences not only for the species, but for all who depend on it for their livelihoods.”

NAPA is leading a groundbreaking Fishery Improvement Project (FIP) that aims to drive political action towards a comprehensive sharing arrangement, keeping total catches within scientific limits. Success could see the fishery regain the MSC certification it lost in 2019. The group has also identified interim steps that all Coastal States can take to reduce fishing pressure while working towards an agreement, in recognition of the time needed for international political negotiations. This includes limiting high seas catches to 10% of total catches, focussing on human consumption for the use of whole mackerel, and limiting banking and borrowing – in which countries bring forward or push back certain amounts of quota between years – to 10% of the annual total.

Aoife Martin continues: “It was clear from Coastal States discussions last week that there is willingness from the parties involved to find solutions - to the extent that there are several proposals on the table, although not yet any one proposal that all States endorse. The severity of the state of the stock should serve as a jolt to get the next round of negotiations on track towards a meaningful compromise, and an agreed position for sustainable fishing”

NAPA's solutions-focussed FIP is designed to encourage collaboration and compromise between Coastal States, paving the way for political consensus. However, the FIP ends in April 2026. If Coastal States have not delivered sufficient improvements in management by then, the group warns that its members will be forced to seriously reconsider their pelagic sourcing decisions – potentially looking to other species and regions with a more dependable future.

Martin continues, “Our Partners - from processors to distributors to retailers - are absolutely committed to seeing North East Atlantic mackerel return to its previous healthy state, and we will leave no stone unturned in our search for solutions. But we can't wait forever. If Coastal States don't deliver a comprehensive catch sharing agreement in the next 6 months, many of our Partners will be faced with difficult decisions about where they source product from. Coastal States must work together: it is the only way to safeguard the future of North East Atlantic mackerel and the ecosystems, businesses, and communities that rely on it.”

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Notes to Editors:

The North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group (NAPA) is a market-led approach to improve North Atlantic pelagic fisheries management. The collective has the shared aim of responsible sourcing and production of seafood in order to supply the growing demand for sustainable, certified products. NAPA's reach extends across the world, attracting members from Asia, the USA, Australia, and Africa, as well as the EU and UK.

As a collective, NAPA is using its voice to advocate for long-term, science-based management of three key fish stocks in the North East Atlantic: mackerel, blue whiting and Atlanto-Scandian herring (also known as Norwegian Spring-Spawning herring). In all cases, disputes over quota allocation between the Coastal States that fish for these species have resulted in annual catches well in excess of the scientifically advised level.

Multiple Coastal States engage in mackerel fishing, and although there is a general consensus on the need to follow recommendations on catch limits, they have failed to reach comprehensive agreements on how to allocate those limits among themselves. In 2024, the UK, Norway, and the Faroe Islands signed a tripartite catch-sharing agreement that commits to reducing their catches and adhering to specified percentages of the recommended limits. However, this agreement excludes other Coastal States: the EU, Iceland, and Greenland.

NAPA is calling for agreements that ensure quotas are shared equitably between Coastal States, catch limits that are in line with scientific advice, and dispute resolution processes that will prevent a stalemate when countries fail to agree on quota shares. The ultimate aim is lasting economic and environmental sustainability, which are vital for the businesses and communities that depend on these species.

NAPA is tackling these issues through the coordination of two Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs) – one that covers both mackerel and herring, and one for blue whiting. The FIPs serve to drive political will for sustainable management, while holding key actors and decision-makers to account. Both projects are unique in that they are 'policy FIPs' – focusing on advocacy aimed at decision-makers, rather than on changing fishing practices on the water.

Further information can be found at:

- NAPA website: www.napafisheries.org
- NAPA LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/napafisheries
- ICES Science Release:
 - North East Atlantic mackerel:
https://ices-library.figshare.com/articles/report/Mackerel_i_Scomber_scombrus_i_in_subareas_1-8_and_14_and_in_divisions_9_a_12_a_and_12_b_Northeast_Atlantic_and_adjacent_waters_/27202689
 - North East Atlantic blue whiting:
https://ices-library.figshare.com/articles/report/Blue_whiting_i_Micromesistius_poutassou_i_in_subareas_1_9_12_and_14_Northeast_Atlantic_and_adjacent_waters_/27202938
 - Atlanto-Scandian (Norwegian Spring Spawning) herring:
https://ices-library.figshare.com/articles/report/Herring_i_Clupea_harengus_i_in_subareas_1_2_5_and_divisions_4_a_and_14_a_Norwegian_spring-spawning_herring_the_Northeast_Atlantic_and_Arctic_Ocean_/27202611