

PRE-ICES NAPA POSITION STATEMENT

The imminent announcement from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) on the state of North East Atlantic pelagic stocks (notably mackerel, blue whiting and Atlanto-Scandian herring) due on 30 September, will undoubtedly mark another crucial moment for Coastal States to step back and reflect on the way ahead. But whether or not they will remains in serious doubt.

We, the North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group (NAPA), comprising more than 50 global seafood businesses, have repeatedly called for urgent action to end overfishing and secure science-based management of key North East Atlantic pelagic stocks.

The 2025 ICES assessment signalled a stark warning for mackerel with a recommended reduction in catches of around 77%, the sole goal being stock recovery. The science for blue whiting was also bleak, with a recommended 41% catch reduction.

But 12 months on, this sobering verdict – which marked a turning point for many in the global marketplace – was *still not enough* to shock Coastal States into taking political action on sustainable catch-sharing agreements. The deadlock remains, with no clear pathway to recovery or re-certification for these stocks.

The ongoing removal of North East Atlantic mackerel products from many supermarket shelves all over Europe is the clearest sign yet that the market is being forced to act in the face of political indecision. Many NAPA members have reluctantly walked away from sourcing from these fisheries, rethinking whole business models in the process. These are not decisions taken lightly. They reflect the difficult reality that, despite a strong desire from NAPA members to keep sourcing mackerel, herring and blue whiting from the Northeast Atlantic, and continued consumer demand for these products, current management inaction has left many businesses with little choice.

With the ICES announcement now due, any progress on quota-sharing negotiations remains disappointingly and excruciatingly slow in spite of ongoing and rapidly escalating concerns from the global market over the future of these business-critical species. Through NAPA's two supply-chain-led, advocacy-based Fisheries Improvement Projects (FIPs), our members have consistently tried, across six years, to secure a resolution to this problem. But the FIPs will end in October and, with political deadlock still obstructing science-backed catch-sharing agreements, NAPA anticipates that the latest advice will not change that situation any time soon.

The continued absence of a resolution for these fisheries is indefensible. The long-term future of supply-chain businesses, coastal communities and livelihoods rely on these fisheries, and we have a collective responsibility to safeguard food security, consumer choice and economic potential.