

MSC Fishery Fact Sheet: Scottish Pelagic Sustainability Group Ltd North Sea herring



Latin name	<i>Clupea harengus</i>
Deutsch	Hering
English	Atlantic herring
Español	Arenque
Français	Hareng de l'Atlantique
Nederlands	Haring

Basic information

Location	North Sea and Eastern English Channel, within the EEZs of the EU and Norway
Fishing gear	Pelagic (mid-water) trawl
Season	Summer months
Quota / TAC	15,000MT (2009 quota)
Products	whole, headed & gutted, gutted, fillets, portions, chilled, coated, frozen, frozen block, marinated, pickled, ready meals, smoked
Date certified	July 2008

Background information

Atlantic herring is a pelagic species, widely distributed throughout the north-east Atlantic, and an important prey species for a number of predators, including cod. There are three main herring stocks in the North Sea, with distinct spawning grounds, migration routes and nursery grounds. However, as catches are mixed, they are managed as a single unit. North Sea herring suffered a notable decline during the 1970s, but recovered following a moratorium on fishing. The fishery is now managed by a quota system.

The certified Scottish fleet comprises 24 large, modern and technologically advanced pelagic vessels, which use mid-water trawl nets. Recent advances in technology allow precise targeting of herring shoals.

MSC webpage www.msc.org/track-a-fishery/certified/north-east-atlantic/spsg-north-sea-herring



Sustainability notes

Stock levels The North Sea herring spawning stock biomass has increased gradually since the low levels of the mid 1990s, and until 2002 was above the defined precautionary level. Continued low recruitment since 2002, considered to be due to environmental influences rather than fishing, reduced the spawning stock biomass to below precautionary levels in 2006. As a result, the North Sea herring TAC has been reduced by over 50% since 2006.

Environmental Impact Bycatch in the directed North Sea herring fisheries appears to be low, at less than 5%, and mainly consists of mackerel when fishing mixed shoals. Observer programmes indicate that interactions with endangered, threatened and protected species are very limited. Bottlenose dolphins may be sighted when fishing close inshore, but there is no direct interaction, and independent observers report no cetacean or seal bycatch.

Management plan The North Sea herring fishery is managed through the EU Common Fisheries Policy in accordance with the EU-Norway agreement (December 1997), a negotiated international agreement through which annual TACs are set. The International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) conducts annual stock assessments and provides management advice based on the precautionary principle. The SPSG has its own sustainability policy for members.

Further notes Although bycatch rates are very low, the main bycatch species are subject to separate assessment and management measures, which include a current closure of the Norway Pout fishery to allow recovery of this stock. Seasonally closed areas are established for spawning herring on the UK North Sea coast and for juvenile herring on the West Coast of Denmark. Similar closures for sprat fishing provide additional safeguards for the herring.

Fishery Improvements A substantial revision of the monitoring and enforcement process has been undertaken to ensure compliance. Monitoring now uses satellite Vessel Monitoring Systems, patrol vessels and aerial surveillance. There are regular inspections at sea and almost 100% monitoring of landings. Where necessary, strong punitive action has been taken in cases of under-reporting and illegal landings. The cooperation of fisheries with these measures has resulted in a considerable improvement in the reliability of landings data.

Useful websites

Suppliers: www.msc.org/where-to-buy/find-a-supplier
Fishbase: www.fishbase.org/Summary/SpeciesSummary.php?id=24

Certificate holder

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