

MSC Fishery Fact Sheet: South West (Cornwall) mackerel handline



Latin name	<i>Scomber scombrus</i>
Deutsch	Makrele
English	Atlantic mackerel
Español	Caballa
Français	Maquereau commun
Nederlands	Makreel

Basic information

Location	South west coast of England, from the River Exe estuary to Hartland Point, within UK waters
Fishing gear	Handline
Season	Spring, summer and autumn (fall) months
Quota / TAC	1,750MT
Products	whole, headed & gutted, gutted, fillets, portions, chilled, coated, frozen, frozen block, individually quick frozen, marinated, pickled, ready meal, skewers, snacks and smoked
Date certified	August 2001. Recertified in February 2007

Background information

Mackerel is a pelagic fish, spending most of its time in large shoals, often moving at great speed. It is a very oily fish, and an important predator. The north-east Atlantic stock comprises three different components with widely separated spawning areas, the western, the southern and the North Sea component, however these may be found together at times, particularly during summer and autumn in the North Sea.

Around 150 boats fish the South West mackerel handline fishery most of them under 10 metres in length. Fishing is very low-intensity, using one line per fisher with usually 25-30 un-baited hooks per line. Most fishing takes place within six nautical miles from shore, and targets mackerel from the western component of the stock. Handline-caught mackerel attracts a price premium due to its high quality.

MSC webpage www.msc.org/track-a-fishery/certified/north-east-atlantic/south-west-mackerel-handline



Photo © John Spaul



Sustainability notes

Stock levels The western component of the mackerel stock, targeted by certified vessels, appears resilient, and total catches have stabilized at around 600,000 tonnes per year. The SW mackerel handline fishery catches a relatively small component of this total catch. Following recent lower levels, the spawning stock biomass has now increased to above the precautionary reference point.

Environmental Impact Handlining is a targeted, selective method fishing method with very low bycatch rates. The fishery occasionally catches pollock, bass, whiting and pilchard and lands any commercially marketable fish. The only protected species potentially affected by the certified fishery are allis and twaite shads, however there are no records of captures of either species.

Management plan The fishery is managed under the EU Common Fisheries Policy, in accordance with an additional EU-Norway- Faroes agreement, with the long-term objective of keeping the stock above a precautionary level. Since 1998 the certified fishery has received an individual quota underpinned at a minimum of 1750 tonnes, in order to protect the rights of traditional handline fishermen. The quota is also 'ring-fenced', in that handline fishing may continue, up to the quota limit, even if the fishery has been closed to all other sectors.

Further notes The South West Mackerel Box, off the UK south-west peninsula, was introduced in 1981 to protect juvenile mackerel, which are present in the area in high numbers, from trawling and purse-seining. Specific targeting of mackerel within the box is only permitted by handlining, and mackerel bycatch limits are set for vessels fishing for other species.

Fishery Improvements The recording of mackerel landings in the fishery has improved since initial certification in 2001. Fisheries officers monitor daily landings at major markets. Fisheries officers also now monitor landings at minor ports through tracking of sales and transport documents and random inspections. The recent registration of buyers and sellers of fish has also improved the accuracy and speed of data collection.

Useful websites

Suppliers: www.msc.org/where-to-buy/find-a-supplier
Fishbase: www.fishbase.org/Summary/speciesSummary.php?id=118

Certificate holder

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Last updated: July 2009