

Four Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certified Atlanto-Scandian herring fisheries are at high risk of losing their certificates by 30 December 2020.

Catch of Atlanto-Scandian herring is above scientifically advised limits because governments have failed to reach a quota sharing agreement for the stock.

NATIONS FISHING ATLANTO-SCANDIAN HERRING

Atlanto-Scandian herring are fished by the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) contracting parties:

- **Coastal states:** the European Union (EU), United Kingdom (UK), Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Russia.
- **Fishing nation:** Greenland has access to Atlanto-Scandian herring through international waters or through bilateral agreements with coastal states.

MSC CERTIFIED ATLANTO-SCANDIAN SPRING SPAWNING HERRING FISHERIES

In 2017, 84% of the total Atlanto-Scandian herring catch came from four MSC certified fisheries:

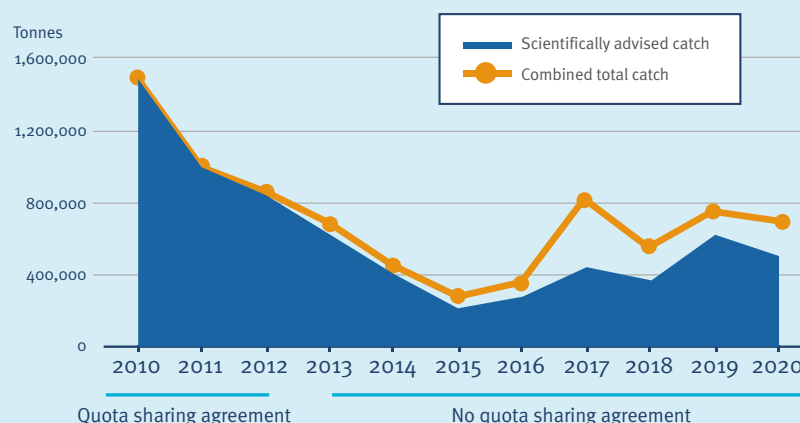
- Norway Spring Spawning Herring
- SPSG, DPPO, PFA, SPFPO & KFO Atlanto-Scandian Purse Seine and Pelagic Trawl Herring, combined fleets from across the EU
- Iceland Sustainable Fisheries (ISF) Norwegian and Icelandic Herring Trawl and Seine
- Faroese Pelagic Organisation Atlanto-Scandian Herring

WHY ARE ATLANTO-SCANDIAN HERRING FISHERIES AT RISK OF SUSPENSION FROM THE MSC PROGRAM?

Catch exceeds scientific advice

- The coastal states and fishing nations set the total allowable catch for 2020 at 525,594 tonnes, in line with scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES)¹.
- But the states involved did not reach an agreement on how the total allowable catch would be shared between them.
- As a result, each state individually set its intended catch for 2020. When combined, those intended catches amount to 693,915 tonnes, exceeding scientific advice by almost a third².
- There have been no quota sharing agreements in place since 2012, and the combined intended catch from the involved nations has exceeded scientific advice every year since.

Combined total catch compared to scientific advice



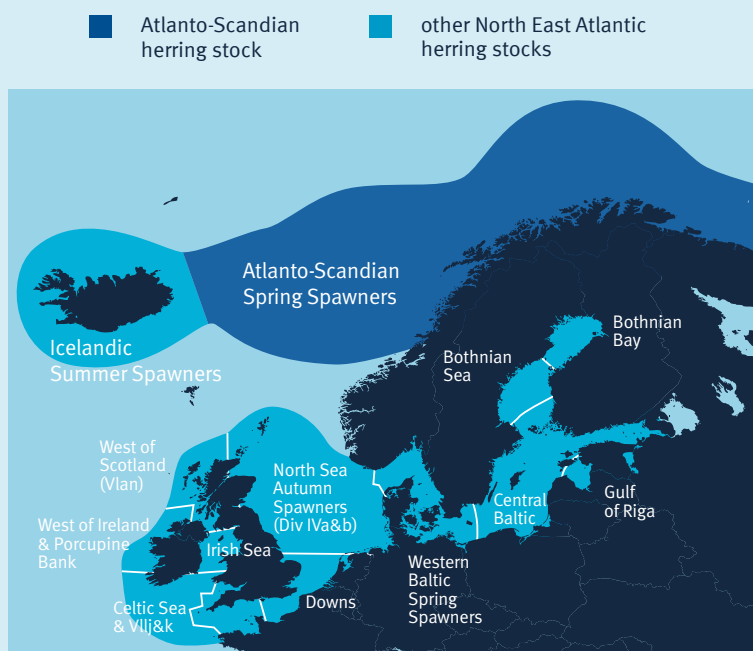
¹⁻²ICES advice on fishing opportunities, catch and effort for Northeast Atlantic and Arctic Ocean ecoregions (2019)

MANAGING ATLANTO-SCANDIAN HERRING STOCK

There are several different herring stocks within the North-East Atlantic Ocean. Atlanto-Scandian herring stock is found primarily between the Norwegian Sea, from the shores of Iceland and Norway, and the Barents Sea, off the shores of Russia. It can also be found off the coasts of Scotland and the Faroe Islands.

- Herring are an important food source for other fish, seabirds and marine mammals, and are popular for human consumption.
- In the mid-20th Century, Atlanto-Scandian herring stock was overfished. Spawning population was around 10 million tonnes in the late 1950s, but the population collapsed in the late 1960s, recovering only after 20 years of restricted catches.³
- Since 2008, the spawning population of Atlanto-Scandian herring has been declining once again.⁴
- The MSC Fisheries Standard is focused on securing and maintaining the long-term health of fish stocks.
- Robust stock management is a fundamental principle of the MSC Fisheries Standard for sustainable fishing. It is essential to avoid the boom-bust cycle of overfishing and recovery.

Primary areas of major herring stocks in the North East Atlantic⁵



LACK OF QUOTA AGREEMENT AFFECTS STOCK MANAGEMENT

Without an international quota-sharing agreement there is a high risk that the four MSC certified Atlanto-Scandian herring fisheries will lose their MSC certificates. One fishery is likely to fail its ongoing re-assessment, whilst the other three are at risk of suspension from their current MSC certificates on 30 December 2020.

- Although the fisheries met the internationally recognised MSC Fisheries Standard, independent assessors found that they all needed to improve their stock management systems. This is because the nations that fish Atlanto-Scandian herring have not reached an agreement on how to share the quota for this stock.
- Quota agreements are essential for stocks not to be overfished and to remain healthy in the short, medium and long term.
- The assessors set each fishery the same condition of MSC certification: to improve their stock management to the 'best practice' set level by the MSC Fisheries Standard. This requires management practices such as a quota sharing agreement to be in place.
- All four fisheries were set a joint deadline by the assessors to resolve the condition by 2020. This was first stipulated in 2015, giving fisheries a five-year time frame to work towards.
- Because governments have not reached a quota sharing agreement, the fisheries have been unable to achieve this goal. As a result, one of the fisheries is likely to fail its ongoing reassessment, and the other three fisheries are at high risk of being suspended from the MSC certification program.

³Dragesund O et al, (1997), Sarsia 82: 97 - 105

⁴ICES advice on fishing opportunities, catch and effort for Northeast Atlantic and ARCTIC Ocean ecoregions (2019)

⁵ Von Dorrien et al., (2013), Acta Ichthyologica et Piscatoria 43:(3), 169 - 182

CAN MSC CERTIFICATION BE REINSTATED?

Suspended fisheries have 90 days to submit a corrective action plan to assessors. This must set out how the fishery will address the causes of suspension. If the plan is approved their MSC certificate can potentially be reinstated in the future, but only after the necessary improvements have been made and successfully audited.



If the fishery does not achieve the improvements required before the deadline set in the action plan, the fishery is withdrawn from the MSC program. Fisheries can begin a new assessment to re-join the MSC program later – but only when the conditions of previous certifications have been met.

ALTERNATIVE MSC CERTIFIED PRODUCTS

There are several other MSC certified herring fisheries from which products can be sourced. This includes North Sea herring, which has an annual catch of 500,000 tonnes, Iceland summer spawning herring, Central Baltic herring and Irish Sea herring. A list of alternative MSC certified herring fisheries can be found at: fisheries.msc.org

Consumers are encouraged to continue to only buy MSC certified herring products. If no sustainable herring is available, we advise consumers to look for alternative MSC certified seafood.



THE IMPACT OF SUSPENSION ON BUYERS AND RETAILERS

- If suspension of the MSC certificates occurs, Atlanto-Scandian herring caught after the date of suspension cannot be traded as MSC certified or carry the MSC ecolabel.
- MSC certified herring caught before the date of suspension can still be stocked and sold with the MSC label after the suspension has come into force.
- Atlanto-Scandian herring caught before suspension but landed afterwards can only be sold as MSC certified if the fishery can show the fish were separated on board according to date of capture.



INDUSTRY PRESSURE ON GOVERNMENTS

The fishing industry, retailers, and wholesale sectors have publicly called on the coastal states to reach an effective agreement on sustainable quotas for shared fish stocks in the North Atlantic.



Commercial partners, fishermen and non-governmental organisations should encourage governments to reach a quota sharing agreement, and highlight the impact the issue is having on them to policy makers.

MACKEREL AND BLUE WHITING FISHERIES

The lack of quota sharing agreements between the involved states is also affecting other fisheries in the region. Four MSC certified blue whiting fisheries in the North East Atlantic are at a high risk of suspension on 30 December 2020. All MSC certified North East Atlantic mackerel fisheries were suspended from the MSC program in 2019 and have not yet been reinstated due to ongoing concern about how catch is managed in response to scientific data on stock levels.

KEY MEETINGS AND MILESTONES

TIMELINE LEADING UP TO POTENTIAL SUSPENSION OF MSC CERTIFIED ATLANTO-SCANDIAN HERRING FISHERIES.

- **OCTOBER 2018**

Coastal states agree a new long-term management strategy for Atlanto-Scandian herring, which did not include a quota sharing agreement

- **OCTOBER 2019**

Coastal states set a total allowable catch limit for Atlanto-Scandian herring, in-line with scientific advice, but do not reach agreement on quota sharing

- **JANUARY 2020**

Independent assessors for each fishery set a joint deadline for fisheries to resolve conditions by 30 November 2020

- **OCTOBER 2020**

ICES announce latest stock assessment data and scientific advice on total allowable catch limits for 2021

North-East Atlantic Coastal States meeting to discuss international management measures

- **NOVEMBER 2020**

Assessors expected to announce notice of suspension of fisheries from the MSC program

- **DECEMBER 2020**

Annual meeting of EU Council to discuss fishing negotiations.

- **30 DECEMBER 2020**

Any suspensions from the MSC program announced in November expected to come into force. One of the fisheries expected to have left the MSC program.

- **28 FEBRUARY 2021**

Deadline for fisheries to submit corrective action plans addressing the cause of suspension.