

# SMALL PELAGICS MARKET ANALYSIS 2026: NETHERLANDS



# DUTCH MARKET DEVELOPMENTS FOR SUSTAINABLE SMALL PELAGICS

THE DUTCH SMALL PELAGICS MARKET is evolving as consumer behaviour shifts, certified supply grows, and collaboration increases. At the same time, the food sector focuses on accelerating the protein transition to reduce climate impact. Small pelagics align strongly with these goals, offering nutrient-dense blue foods that land-based proteins cannot easily replace.

Still, herring demand is declining as younger consumers lose interest, highlighting the need for renewed storytelling and innovative products that better connect with emerging audiences. In 2025, several targeted initiatives helped lay the foundation for this transformation. Fish Tales launched a digital campaign highlighting herring and introduced an innovative product that includes Kesbeke's traditional Dutch pickles and onions directly in the packaging, blending heritage with modern convenience. Albert Heijn celebrated the start of the herring season with instore traditional herring stalls and complimentary samples, creating

renewed excitement around the product. Princes supported this momentum with additional instore visibility of their herring product at Albert Heijn. MSC strengthened engagement among younger consumers by collaborating with influencers to promote sustainable herring.

Looking ahead, 2026 offers a significant momentum-building moment as the market celebrates twenty years of MSC-certified North Sea herring. This milestone will be supported through national and international communication efforts. In an episode of the Dutch television programme SBS6 *Bouwen aan de Toekomst*, herring was featured as an example of MSC certified Blue Foods, with the broadcast highlighting their importance in the protein transition and the sustainable fishing practices. Albert Heijn, as the biggest retailer in The Netherlands, has also taken a significant stance by emphasizing the importance of the MSC-certified North Sea herring together with Cornelis Vrolijk in the MSC



By choosing only sustainably caught seafood, we ensure fish for future generations. We were the first brand to bring smoked and canned Chilean jack mackerel to Dutch supermarkets, and it proved that change really starts with the choices we make. We are very proud of our sustainable and delicious assortment of small pelagics, including traditional Dutch herring last year and the addition of Iberian sardines coming up later this year!

Irene Kranendonk, Impact Manager Fish Tales



**John West has reached a significant sustainability milestone by announcing that its entire standard assortment will be fully MSC-certified by April 2026. By committing to a full MSC certification, John West aims to provide shoppers with total transparency and the assurance that their seafood choices support long-term ocean health. John West will continue introducing innovations in 2026, which will meet evolving consumer needs for more convenient products.**

**Markus Slump, Brand Manager  
John West Holland B.V.**

herring video that is released with the publication of this edition of the Small Pelagics Yearbook. Together, these initiatives aim to reinforce herring's relevance for a new generation.

Meanwhile, more market parties embrace opportunities from fisheries that are relatively new to the MSC program, marking an encouraging shift toward broader sustainable sourcing of Small Pelagics. Fish Tales played a pioneering role by bringing canned Chilean jack mackerel on the Dutch Market. They also introduced the first smoked Chilean jack mackerel to the Dutch market. Lidl also celebrated the launch of its canned Chilean jack mackerel, as the first Dutch retailer, through a press release in the MSC Check je Vis campaign. In 2026, Dutch market leaders in sustainable seafood will continue to take significant steps: both John West and Princes will also introduce canned Chilean jack mackerel. Furthermore, Albert Heijn will broaden its MSC-certified small pelagics portfolio through the introduction of the Benelux's first smoked Atka mackerel

and an expanded selection of smoked MSC-certified herring.

Sardines present one of the most compelling sustainability opportunities. The recent recertification of Iberian sardine fisheries creates ideal conditions for accelerating the transition to certified sourcing. Retailers ALDI, Lidl, Jumbo, and several Superunie members already lead the way with MSC-labelled private label sardines, while brands such as Fish Tales, Princes, and John West provide early certified options. However, many branded sardine products still lack certification despite a readily available sustainable supply.

Small pelagics occupy a pivotal moment in the Dutch market, with expanding certified options and evolving consumer expectations driving progress. By embracing sustainability and the nutritional strengths of these blue foods, market parties can strengthen the category while supporting responsible sourcing and contributing to a more resilient, health-promoting food system. ●

**Find out more:**

<https://www.msc.org/species/small-pelagic-fish>

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