



# SMALL PELAGICS YEARBOOK 2026

Market data, innovations and  
insights from communities  
protecting our ocean



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# A YEAR IN SMALL PELAGICS

- MSC engaged fisheries land less than 20% of small pelagic global catch
- Canned goods account for 58% of MSC certified small pelagic catch



# FISHERIES AND MARKETS ADVANCE SMALL PELAGICS

Small pelagic fisheries account for more than 24 million metric tonnes (mT) of the global marine catch. This species group is crucial for human consumption and non-food uses, such as marine ingredients in aquaculture, fishmeal, and fish oil production. The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) has a long history with small pelagic fisheries.

Several small pelagic fisheries are lagging behind on sustainability. Most whitefish and tuna catches are considered sustainable, with 80% and 63% of global catches respectively involved in the MSC program: only 14% of small pelagic fisheries are engaged with the MSC, showing a significant gap.

Progress has been slow for several reasons. Small pelagic stocks are highly variable and sensitive to environmental factors. Many are managed through international agreements and are also challenged by climate shifts altering stock distribution. Some destination markets often lack incentives for demonstrating sustainability, reducing motivation.

However, the landscape is starting to change, with the private sector prioritising MSC certified fisheries. This momentum is being led by brands and retailers committed to sustainable sourcing. They are joining forces with NGOs and certification standards, such as the MSC, to end overfishing on small pelagic fisheries.

**Now is the time for governments to help establish long term science-based mechanisms to protect this species group for future generations.**



# MSC CERTIFIED SMALL PELAGIC TRENDS

**13%**

of global small pelagics catch is MSC certified

**0.59%**

of global small pelagics catch is in the MSC Improvement Program

**18%**

of global small pelagics catch is currently in a FIP (basic or comprehensive)

**68%**

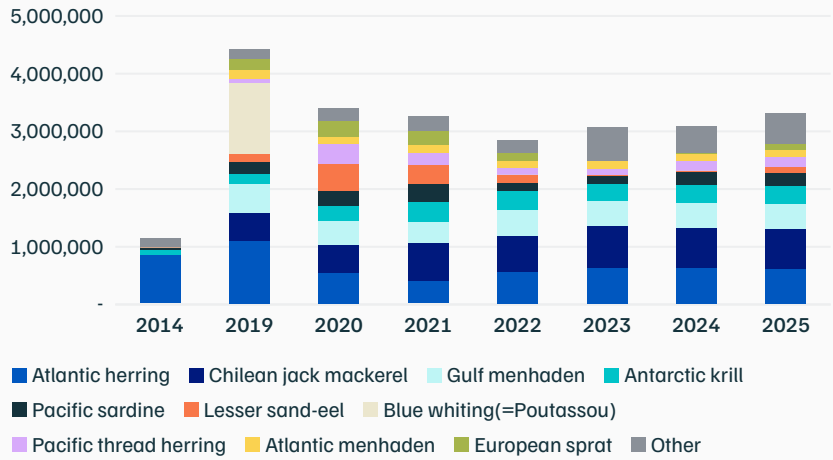
of global small pelagics catch is neither MSC certified, in assessment, or in a FIP

Excludes suspended catch

Fisheries data on this page is correct as of 31 December 2025.

Historical data is used to present current views of ocean capture. Due to a 1-3 year reporting delay, recent catch figures are continually updated.

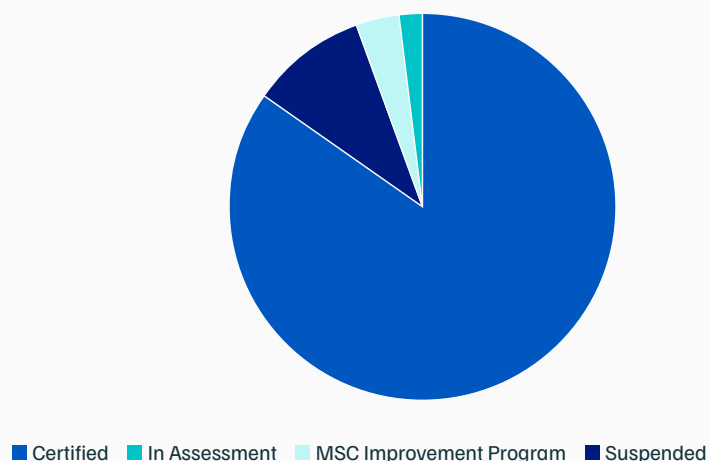
**Certified small pelagics volumes by year, metric tonnes**



**Growth of small pelagics in the MSC program, metric tonnes**

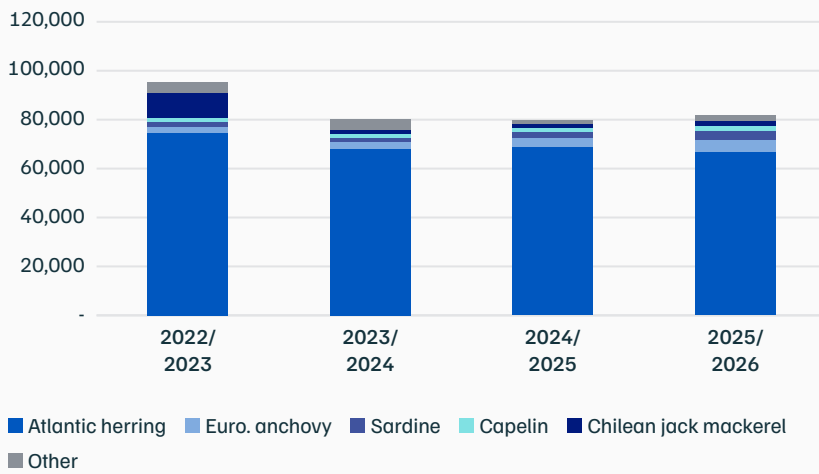


**Small pelagics catch by status (2025)**



# GLOBAL MARKET MOVEMENTS

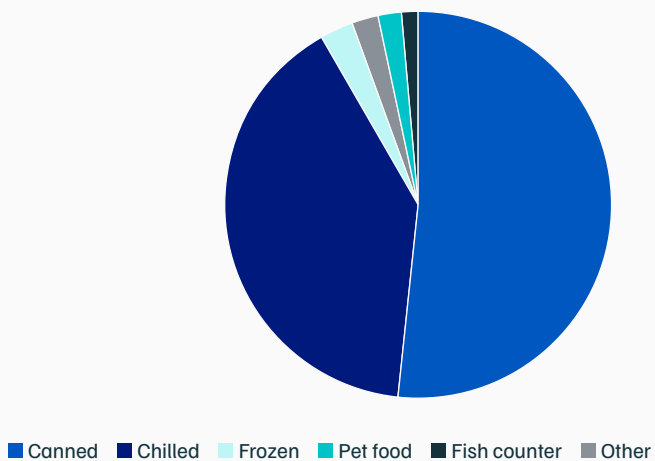
MSC labelled small pelagics, metric tonnes



Top ten countries by volume

Country	Total small pelagics volume (2025/26)
Germany	41,817
<Multiple>	4,809
Netherlands	4,605
Czech Republic	4,566
Poland	3,305
United Kingdom	2,644
Spain	2,578
Chile	1,804
Austria	1,726
Japan	1,660

Small pelagics catch by product type (2025/2026)



“Our priority is to offer sustainable food which is affordable.”

Michaela Reischl, Head of CSR at Lidl Spain

Commercial data on this page is correct as of 20 January 2026. Forecast data included in 2025/2026.



# MSC LEADERS IN GLOBAL MARKETS

The leaders for certified small pelagics in the top six MSC countries globally.

## Top ten German brands

Rank by volume

Appel	1
ALDI Süd	2
NETTO (Netto Marken-Discount)	3
Hawesta	4
EDEKA	5
LIDL	6
REWE	7
PENNY	8
Merl	9
Kaufland	10

## Top ten Dutch brands

Rank by volume

Ouwehand	1
Albert Heijn	2
ALDI Nord	3
LIDL	4
Superunie	5
Princes	6
Thai Union	7
Jumbo	8
Zeelandia's Garnalen	9
Fish Tales	10

## Top ten Czechian brands

Rank by volume

Varmuža	1
PENNY	2
LIDL	3
albert	4
Atlantik	5
Kaufland	6
Łosoš Ustka	7
Tesco	8
Appel	9
Nekton	10

## Top ten Polish brands

Rank by volume

LIDL	1
Kaufland	2
ALDI Nord	3
PENNY	4
GRAAL	5
Cucina Nobile	6
SEKO	7
Takie Proste Szybko & Smacznie	8
ALDI Süd	9
METRO	10

## Top ten UK brands

Rank by volume

LIDL	1
Sainsbury's	2
Waitrose	3
Silver Star	4
Princes	5
Tesco	6
ALDI Süd	7
ASDA	8
Thai Union	9
Frost & Posner	10

## Top ten Spanish brands

Rank by volume

Serpis	1
Eroski	2
Carrefour	3
LIDL	4
Carbonell	5
ALDI Nord	6
Rioverde	7
Dia	8
Auchan	9
Palacio de Oriente	10

# MARKET AND SPECIES ANALYSIS

257

certified brands of Atlantic herring on sale  
(down from 294 in 2015/16)

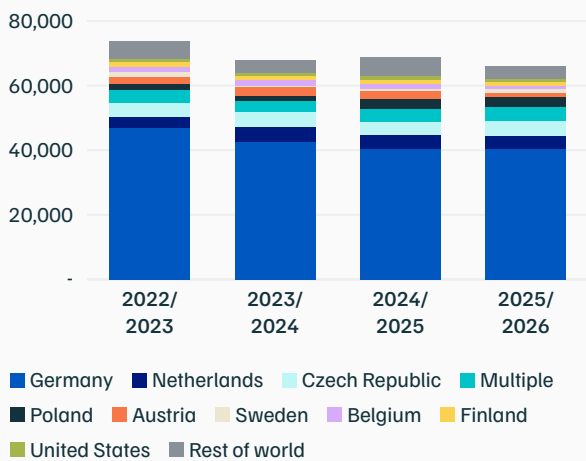
146

certified brands of European anchovy on sale  
(up from 13 in 2015/16)

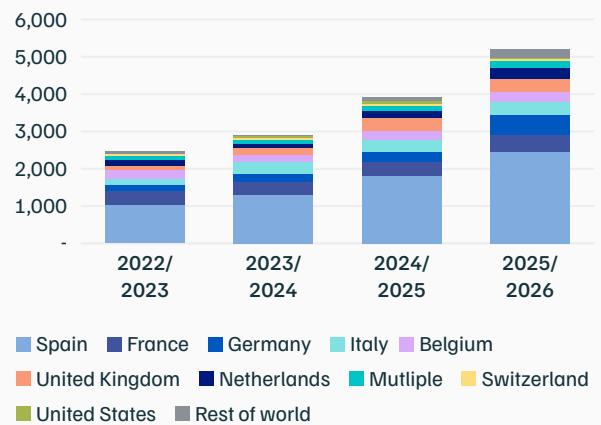
58

certified brands of sardine on sale  
(up from 55 in 2015/16)

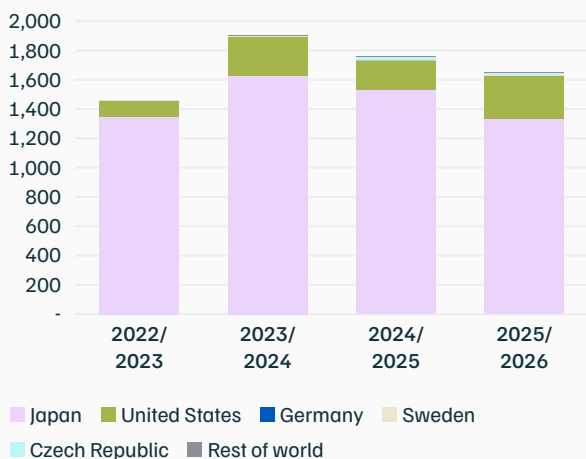
MSC labelled Atl. herring, metric tonnes



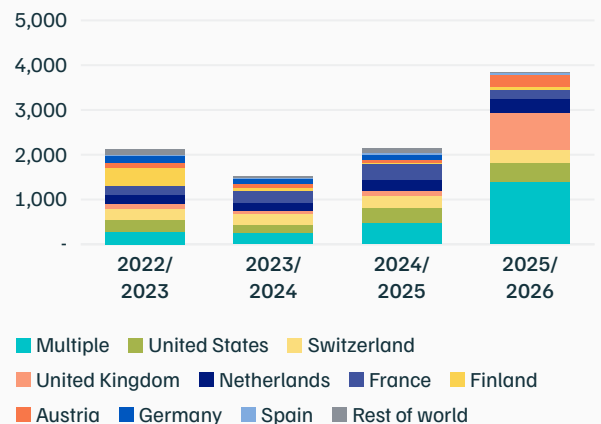
MSC labelled European anchovy, metric tonnes



MSC labelled capelin, metric tonnes



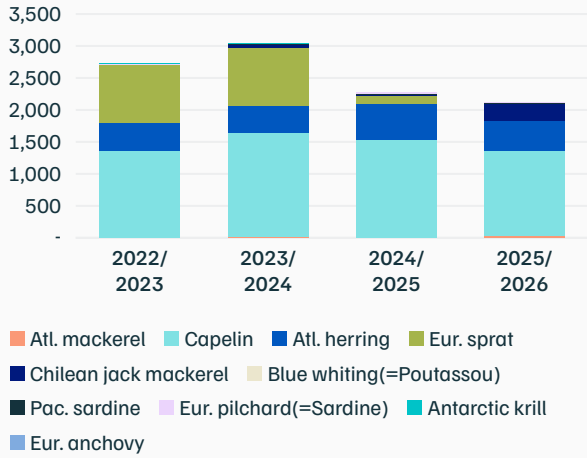
MSC labelled European sardine, metric tonnes



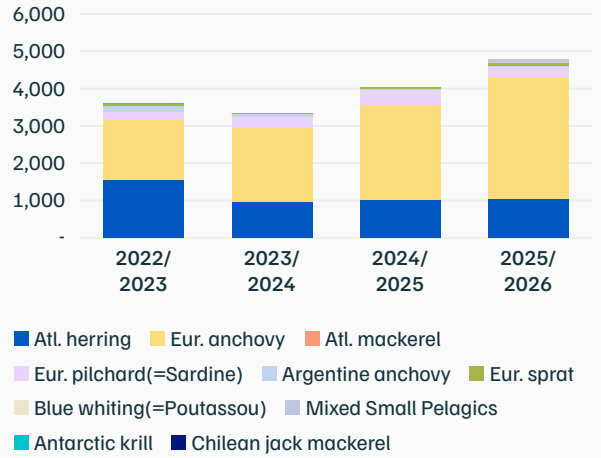
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# REGIONAL ANALYSIS

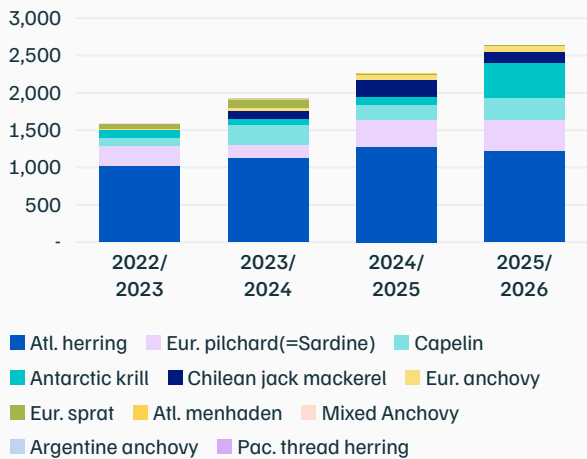
## Asia-Pacific labelled volume



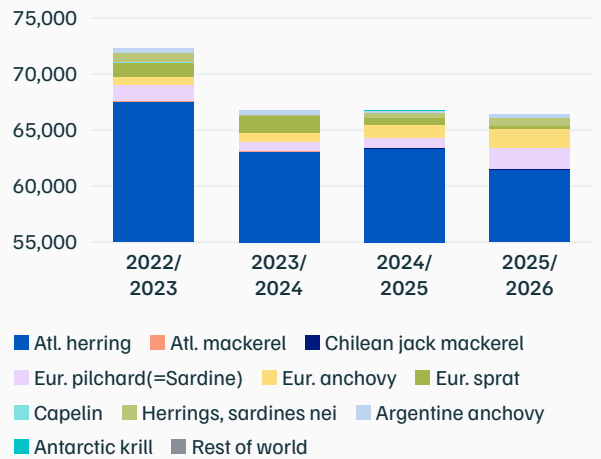
## S. Europe & AMESA labelled volume



## USA & Canada labelled volume



## Northern Europe labelled volume



Commercial data on this page is correct as of 20 January 2026. Forecast data included in 2025/2026.



# MARINE INGREDIENTS SECTOR MOVING UP THE SUSTAINABILITY LADDER

THE MARINE INGREDIENTS SECTOR USES aquatic resources to supply fishmeal and fish oil, for nonhuman consumption, notably as a farmed seafood feed source. Approximately, a fifth of marine ingredients come from wild capture fisheries, the majority of which are small pelagic fisheries (FAO SOFIA report 2024).

According to the IFFO (International Fish Meal Fish Oil Organization) the production of fishmeal and fish oil has remained stable in the last decade, reaching a total volume of 6 million mT, made up of 5 million mT fishmeal and 1 million mT fish oil. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates 1.2% growth on average

for the next decade - 5.9 million mT of fishmeal and 1.5 million mT of fish oil. While the marine ingredients sector is steadily on the rise, the utilisation of wild catch has remained stable due to a growing use of by-products, which today account for one third of the world's fishmeal production.

Small pelagic, or “reduction” fisheries, are the biggest source for the marine ingredients industry. There are worrying trends that some of these fisheries are being affected by declining stock populations due to overfishing, weak management, and poor scientific information. MSC certification is open to all fisheries, but





they must demonstrate through a robust and rigorous process that they are targeting fish stocks in a way that is sustainable and not causing long-term harm to the environment.

Small pelagic species occupy a vital position in the marine ecosystems because they support the bottom of the ocean food chains, otherwise known as being low-trophic level species. The MSC Standard takes a precautionary approach to these species to ensure the protection of the wider marine environment.

Through the designation of key low trophic level species, the MSC Standard ensures that even if the stock is biologically healthy, the ecological role of the fishery is protected, and the ecosystem impact of the fishing operations is limited.

### **ASC accelerating sustainable sourcing**

The Feed Standard, launched by the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) in 2021, established a clear

direction for companies in the FMFO (fish meal, fish oil) sector towards transparent and responsible feed used in aquaculture production. In order to maintain ASC certification, feed mills have to demonstrate sustainability credentials used in feed and improve every three years until the majority of marine raw material comes from MSC certified fisheries.

The tool to measure the evolution of marine ingredients sourcing is the ASC Majority Sustainability Level (MSL) which establishes four levels of recognition, MSC certified catch at the top (level 4) and the MSC Improvement Program at level 3. These new requirements from ASC are driving more fisheries to demonstrate they are progressing on the path towards making measurable improvements. This contributes to higher transparency in the FMFO sector and brings recognition to fisheries operating in healthy stocks and well-managed frameworks.

### **MSC and MarinTrust collaborating for efficiency**

Following the memorandum of understanding signed last year, the MSC and the MarinTrust have developed several actions to enhance efficiency in the sector and avoid duplication of audits. The first step was the recognition of the MSC Standard by the MarinTrust whole fish fishery assessment, meaning that raw material coming from a MSC certified fishery with a valid chain of custody certificate is automatically approved.

Currently both organisations continue to explore opportunities to create synergies which will help reduce complexity and duplication of efforts for the growing marine ingredients sector.

### **MSC supporting small pelagics in West Africa**

Small pelagic fisheries are critical for food security and economies in West Africa, accounting for 80% of catch. The MSC has been working in West Africa for more than 20 years, engaging with governments, fisheries, scientists and supply chain stakeholders to strengthen capacity, conduct pre-assessments and foster research

collaboration. Since 2023, the MSC has been developing a regional project focused on small pelagic fisheries in Mauritania, supported by the MAVA Foundation and the MSC Ocean Stewardship Fund (OSF).

The aim of the initiative, implemented in collaboration with IMROP (Institut Mauritanien de Recherches Océanographiques et des Pêches), the Mauritanian fisheries research institute, is to enhance fisheries data and ecosystem knowledge through targeted data collection - particularly on endangered species - ecosystem model development, observer training and capacity building.

The MSC has also taken part in the Global Roundtable of Marine Ingredients international workshop in Mauritania to address how FMFO sector can support sustainability of the fisheries, which are now in a downward trend in the region due to warmer temperatures and overfishing, maximising the value of the catch and increasing human consumption of these high nutritional and affordable species. ●

## **BALANCING FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE**

According to the FAO, in the total production of fisheries and aquatic resources, 89% is currently used for food utilization and the remaining 11% supplies non-human consumption. This trend is expected to continue and even increase slightly in favour of food purposes. Following FAO projections, in 2034 global fisheries and aquaculture production will be approximately 212 mT, of which 192 mT will be for food use and 21 mT for non-human consumption. Of this non-human consumption share, around 83% (approximately 17 mT) will be used in fishmeal and fish oil production.



# NORTH EAST ATLANTIC STATUS

THE MSC HAS BEEN CALLING FOR ACTION for years, urging decision-makers to heed the science before it's too late for the vital small pelagic stocks in the North East Atlantic (NEA).

Currently, for the NEA pelagics, states agree on management of the stocks and set the overall Total Allowable Catch (TAC) on an annual basis, in line with scientific advice. However, there are no agreed quotas for determining what proportion of the TAC can be fished by each state. As a result, each country sets its own quota, the sum of which exceeds the overarching TAC.

The lack of coastal state agreement on quotas for these stocks resulted in the suspension of some fisheries' sustainability certification and subsequent withdrawal from the MSC Program when their regional certification period ended.

The International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) recommended a 77% reduction in the catch of Atlantic mackerel in 2026 and a 41% reduction for blue whiting. The situation with Atlanto-Scandian (AS) herring is more positive with ICES advising a 23% increase in catch which is linked to stronger recruitment in recent years, but stock is still being overexploited and approaching its critical threshold. Therefore, a quota share in line with scientific advice is needed to ensure this internationally shared stock is effectively managed.

The NEA small pelagics are vital to marine ecosystems, global seafood supply chains and livelihoods. The MSC is once again calling on the coastal states and fishing nations of the North East Atlantic to end the political deadlock and agree on a quota share agreement in line with scientific advice for the NEA stocks of AS herring, blue whiting, and mackerel. ●



# INCENTIVISING FISHERIES TO ATTAIN HIGHER PERFORMANCE LEVELS

## KEY TERMS

**Principles:** Fisheries in assessment are scored against the three core principles of the MSC Fisheries Standard: 1) Sustainability of the stock, 2) Ecosystem impacts, 3) Effective fisheries management.

**Performance indicators (PIs):** 25 PIs sit under the 3 principles. Fisheries are assigned a score for each.

**Condition:** A requirement to achieve outcomes that increase a current performance indicator score to 80 or above (best practice).

A KEY STRENGTH OF THE MSC'S certification program is that once a fishery has achieved certification, it is incentivised to make continual improvements.

Fisheries must meet requirements across 25 Performance Indicators (PI) to achieve certification to the MSC Standard. However, if any PI meets the MSC's minimum measure of sustainability and still requires work to shift that indicator to a best practice level, a condition is placed on that PI and the fishery must make improvements and close the condition before reassessment – which usually takes place five years after certification.

## Improved performance

A review of the eight small pelagic fisheries that have completed two full five-year assessment cycles of the

MSC Standard shows they have used MSC certification to demonstrate improvements in their performance for sustainable fishing. Their scores awarded in the initial assessment and at the fourth and final surveillance audit of the second assessment cycle were compared to see how performance improved over the course of approximately nine years.

The results were definitive: across each of the three principles, the fisheries showed measurable improvement. The most striking was across Principle 3, where the average score increased by 1.6%. Since the starting point was already above 90 (best-in-class status) these fisheries demonstrate that even exemplary management can show further improvement.

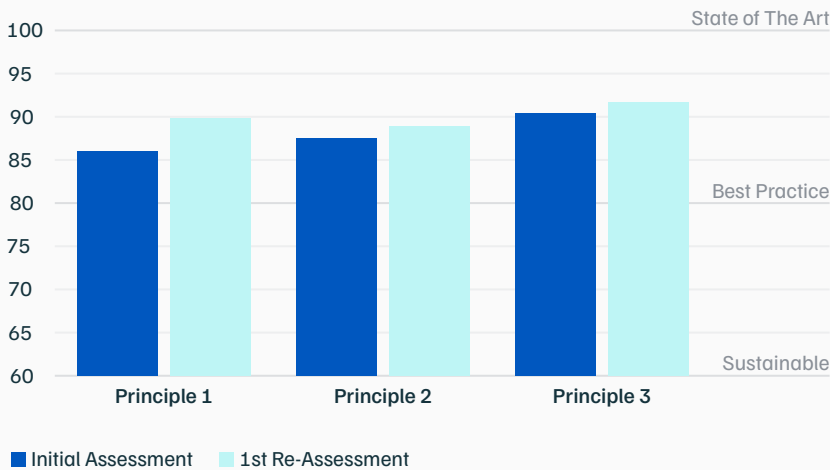
An additional analysis took fishery size into account. A larger fishery could have greater impact on the ocean than a smaller one: there will be more fish caught, greater influence on stocks, and an increased likelihood of interaction between gear and the environment.

Hence the impact of bigger fisheries is more significant when evaluating the overall sustainability. This second

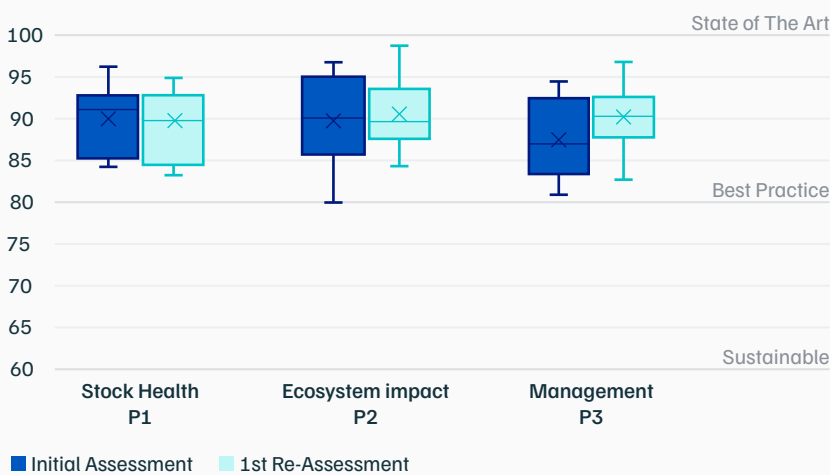
	Initial Assessment	1st Re-Assessment	% Change
Principle 1	88.99	89.54	+0.6%
Principle 2	87.66	88.33	+0.8%
Principle 3	90.81	92.26	+1.6%



### Scoring: Initial Assessment vs. 1st Re-Assessment



### Scoring: Initial Assessment vs. 1st Re-Assessment



**“This analysis shows that MSC certified fisheries that have met the highest standards for sustainability, continue to make further improvements, providing assurance to consumers when they see the MSC label and for the market in their sourcing decisions.”**

Laura Rodriguez, Head of Species Strategies

analysis calculated a weighted average of the fisheries’ scores with fishery volume determining the weight.

The weighted average results are even more marked: when giving larger fisheries greater importance in the calculations, the MSC certified small pelagic fisheries show even greater improvement over the course of two certification cycles. Principle 1 scores improved by

4.4%, and Principle 2 scores improved by 1.6%, double the improvement when counting by fishery. Principle 3 scores improved by 1.5%, showing the same steady improvement as demonstrated when counting by fishery. Certified fisheries also undergo annual audits by independent assessors to ensure they are closing outstanding conditions and evaluating material changes over time.

	Initial Assessment	1st Re-Assessment	% Change
Principle 1	85.97	89.78	+4.4%
Principle 2	87.53	88.89	+1.6%
Principle 3	90.36	91.67	+1.5%

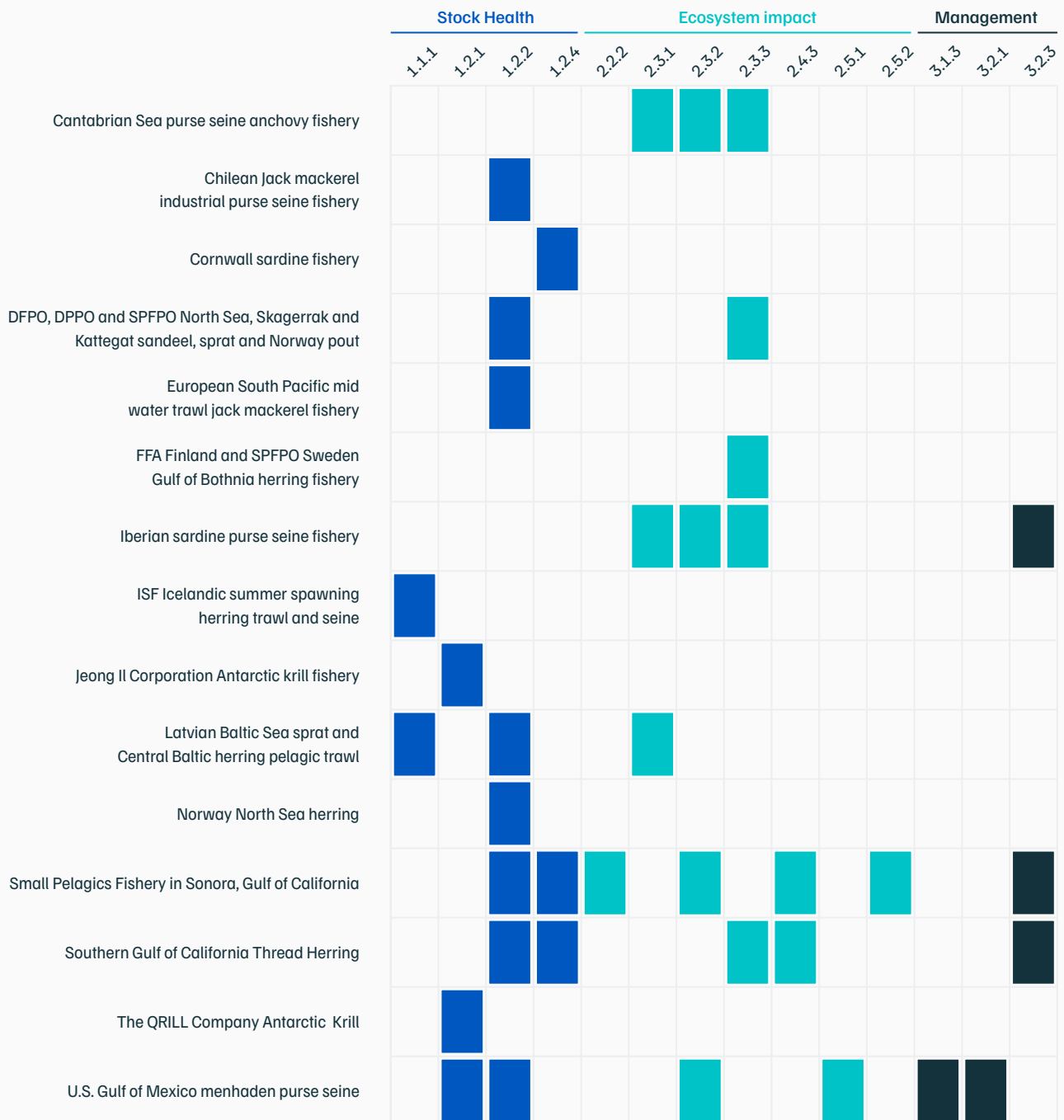
This analysis shows that the MSC program creates incentives that make a big impact for these small pelagic fisheries, especially in sustaining the populations of their target species. Adherence to the MSC Standard helps safeguard fisheries for future generations and ensures they will enjoy the fishery’s bounty for years to come. ●

# SUMMARY OF CONDITIONS

THE CHART BELOW SHOWS the current open conditions (Performance Indicator scores between 60 and 79) for small pelagic fisheries at the beginning of 2026. It displays the improvements that are to be made

over the course of the fisheries five-year certification period in order to remain within the MSC program. This demonstrates the continued incentive to improve brought by the MSC program. ●

## Summary of conditions 2025



# IMPACT ON THE WATER

- Fisheries collaborating and building on collective solutions
- Balancing governance and ecological awareness for sustainable results
- Markets that are maintaining a position on sustainable sourcing



# THE EARLY WARNING SYSTEM THAT TRANSFORMED A SONORA FISHERY

**Fishery:** Small Pelagics Fishery in Sonora, Gulf of California

**Gear Type:** Purse seine

**Tonnage:** 742,742 mT

Pacific chub mackerel 47,006 mT; Californian anchovy 191,500 mT; Pacific anchoveta 106,283 mT; Pacific sardine 233,938 mT; Pacific thread herring 164,015 mT

**First certified:** Jul 2011

**Performance Indicator (PI) scores:**

**Stock health (P1):** 85.4 (avg.)

**Ecosystem impact (P2):** 81.0

**Fisheries management (P3):** 88.3

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## KEY TERMS

**Fish stock:** The community from which catches are taken in a fishery. The term implies that a particular population is a biologically distinct unit.

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THE SMALL PELAGICS FISHERY OF SONORA has been one of the most important fisheries in northwestern Mexico for decades. Industrial fleets, processing plants, and port communities depend on the economic activity generated by this multi-species fishery. The diversity of species is an ecological strength but also presents a major operational challenge: monitoring real-time catches and the size of the fish to ensure the season

progresses without compromising environmental sustainability or triggering premature closures, as each species has its own minimum size and quota.

Until a few years ago, this challenge seemed insurmountable. Each fishing company operated its own recording systems, while the fishing authority compiled information for the entire fishery. With a high degree of environmental and biological variability, the absence of a collective mechanism to monitor catches and fish size made it difficult to anticipate risks, especially when the proportion of undersized fish increased. Decision-making depended on fragmented information, generating uncertainty for industry and operational tension throughout the season. However, to comply with the requirements of MSC certification (beginning for the fishery in 2011) and close conditions, a solution needed to be found.

## Effective Actions

To address these challenges, the fishery led the development of an innovation called the Early Warning System for Small Pelagics (SATPM). Designed as a collaborative monitoring platform, the SATPM integrates catch, size, and effort data from all companies operating in the region. Technicians input data daily, which is then consolidated to produce standardised indicators and





automatic alerts when critical thresholds approach. The system does not replace public regulation; rather, it complements it by enabling rapid, evidence-based operational adjustments.

The success of the SATPM lies not only in the technology itself, but in the trust built among companies competing for resources and markets. Agreeing on common protocols, sharing sensitive data, and supporting a neutral platform required significant governance efforts. Over time, the process demonstrated that cooperation yields tangible benefits: greater certainty in trip planning, better spatial distribution of fishing effort, and more informed decisions about where and when to operate to avoid unwanted catches of small fish.

The results have been clear. Over several seasons, the SATPM has made it possible to anticipate increases in juvenile proportions and to reduce operational risks, avoiding the early closures that had plagued the industry. It has also helped optimize fleet operations, reduce unnecessary travel, and enhance the efficiency of fishing efforts. For processing plants, access to early information has translated into a more stable supply and more precise production planning.

Beyond day-to-day operations, this effort has strengthened the sustainability of the fishery. Systematic monitoring of sizes and catches supports better scientific analysis, informs decision-making, and improves the industry's ability to respond to environmental variability. The SATPM has become an example of how productive sectors can actively contribute to adaptive management systems, particularly in multispecies fisheries.

### **The Impact Beyond**

The impact of this initiative was recognized at the national level when the SATPM received the 2025 Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture Award, granted by the Government of Mexico to projects that promote innovation, sustainability, and collaboration within the sector. Today, SATPM continues to evolve, integrating new data, strengthening technical capacities, and consolidating itself as a reference platform in the region. Due to its success, it is being replicated in other small pelagics fisheries in Mexico. This story demonstrates that when an industry shares a common vision, it is possible to build collective solutions that benefit all stakeholders, along with the ecosystems upon which they depend. ●

# THE GULF OF RIGA HERRING FISHERY DISPLAYS RESILIENCE

**Fishery name:** NZRO Gulf of Riga herring and sprat trawl fishery

**Gear Type:** Midwater trawl

**Tonnage:** 15,937mT

**First certified:** Jan 2020

**Performance Indicator (PI) scores:**

**Stock health (P1):** 92.5

**Ecosystem impact (P2):** 87.0

**Fisheries management (P3):** 87.1

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## KEY TERMS

**Best practice score:** A score of 80 or higher against a performance indicator in the MSC Fisheries Standard that results in a pass without requiring additional improvements.

**Fish stock:** The community from which catches are taken in a fishery. The term implies that a particular population is a biologically distinct unit.

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IN THE BALTIC SEA, WHERE KEY herring stocks have declined under the combined pressures of environmental factors, climate change and overfishing, the Gulf of Riga stands out as an exception. Its herring population has reached historic highs, a rare success story in a region marked by ecological challenges.

The Gulf of Riga herring is distinct from its Baltic counterparts. It is largely resident, adapted to the shallow waters of the Gulf. These fish mature earlier, remain smaller, and spawn predominantly in spring, a shift influenced by changing temperature and salinity levels. While a climate-related shift in the 1990s reduced productivity and altered zooplankton composition, the stock adapted, maintaining strong abundance.

## Management Measures That Work

The resilience of this stock is reinforced by targeted fisheries management. Key measures include:





- **Gear and Vessel Restrictions:** Engine power is capped at 221 kW spreading fishing efforts over time, trawl openings limited, and demersal trawling banned.
- **Spatial and Seasonal Closures:** Trawling is prohibited in shallow areas, and spring spawning periods are protected through closures in both Latvia and Estonia.
- **Quota Allocation and Effort Distribution:** Nearly half the quota goes to coastal fishers. Fishing is spread throughout the year, avoiding harmful concentration.

### **Governance and Scientific Oversight**

The Gulf of Riga herring is managed as a single, biologically coherent stock by just two countries: Latvia and Estonia. This simplifies coordination and enables consistent enforcement. Robust scientific monitoring, including acoustic surveys and high-frequency sampling, ensures management decisions are grounded in reliable data.

The scientific assessment and advice is provided by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and the latest findings in 2025 indicate that the Gulf of herring population is increasing while fishing is maintained at sustainable levels.

### **Lessons for the Baltic and Beyond**

The Gulf of Riga herring fishery shows that sustainability is achievable when management aligns with ecological realities. By combining environmental awareness and disciplined governance, this fishery has become a model for resilience and a blueprint for other fisheries seeking to balance exploitation with conservation.

The fishery was recertified in February 2026 with no conditions, so is operating at state-of-the-art level. Efforts are being made to bring back other stocks, like Baltic sprat, into the MSC program. ●

# MSC CERTIFIED SOURCING SELECTIONS

THE SITUATION WITH SEVERAL North East Atlantic (NEA) pelagic fisheries is now having a noticeable impact in many European markets. Brands and retailers are taking action by reassessing their sourcing strategies and looking for sustainable sources from MSC certified fisheries, driving change. This follows on from longstanding commitments to exclusively source small pelagics species from MSC certified sources from brands such as Followfood, Fish Tales, Hawesta, and IKEA Sweden among others.

Scientists have warned that NEA mackerel numbers are now at critical levels. To protect the species for the future, the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) say catches need to be reduced this year. For brands and retailers that rely on stable supply chains and credible sustainability claims, concerns on the status of NEA mackerel is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. A growing number are reviewing their sourcing and looking to MSC certified fisheries.

One company leading the change in the UK, and continuing its commitment to sustainability, Princes announced in 2025 that it would be changing all its

Princes brand mackerel products to MSC certified Chilean jack mackerel. David McDiarmid of Princes said: “Along with other brands and retailers, we have long called on coastal states to agree quotas in line with scientific advice and implement a long-term science-based management plan.

“We don’t doubt that governments are well intentioned, but the fact remains there has been insufficient progress on catches , and we now have ICES warning of stock collapse. Princes warned that a lack of progress meant we would actively consider alternative certified sustainable sources and species, and our decision is proof of action.”

As part of their process to transition supply, Princes said, “We undertook a comprehensive product review and consumer panelling, which fully endorsed the move. This exercise helped manage formulation and supply challenges associated with switching species, ensuring consistent quality and strong consumer acceptance.”

Princes continued, “While it’s still relatively early in terms of sales to consumers on the UK market, the number of





“We’re proud to be the first Dutch retailer offering own-brand MSC-certified canned Chilean jack mackerel—part of our commitment to sourcing 100 % of own-brand fish from responsibly managed fisheries, safeguarding healthy stocks and oceans for future generations”

Rebekah Simmons,  
Lidl Netherlands

retailer listings we have for Jack Mackerel is growing rapidly, rates of sale are encouraging and consumer feedback is positive”.

While Princes’ products were available in UK stores from October 2025, the focus now shifts to the Netherlands, where they will launch in March 2026. In this market, LIDL was the first retailer to transition its canned products to MSC certified Chilean jack mackerel. Fish Tales were the first global seafood brand to announce they would be sourcing MSC certified Chilean jack mackerel and their products can be found across the Netherlands, increasing the availability of sustainable MSC certified small pelagic products.

The overexploitation of Atlanto-Scandinavian (AS) herring has also resulted in brands and retailers looking for sustainable alternatives. In Sweden, all the major retailers banned AS herring that was caught before April 2025, which resulted in a big market shift. The market

leader, Abba, opted for MSC certified herring and will start to label again in 2026. Other responsible brands in Sweden, like Klädesholmen, ICA and Axfood, are also sourcing from MSC certified herring in 2025/26. These decisions are not isolated, they follow the example set by LIDL and IKEA, who lead the way in Sweden with 100% MSC certified herring products. This collective action has sent a clear signal to suppliers that they are increasingly prioritising sustainability in Sweden and are choosing to source from MSC certified fisheries.

These commitments demonstrate growing momentum among leading retailers and brands. As more companies align their sourcing with MSC certification, it is opening more opportunities for small pelagic fisheries operating at global best practice. For remaining brands and retailers, the message is clear: maintaining position in key markets and meeting consumer expectations now depend on sourcing MSC certified sustainable small pelagics. ●

# SMALL PELAGIC ESSENTIALS

- Gear types, how fishers catch small pelagics
- Key small pelagic species
- Glossary of terms
- Annex, listing the small pelagic species in the MSC

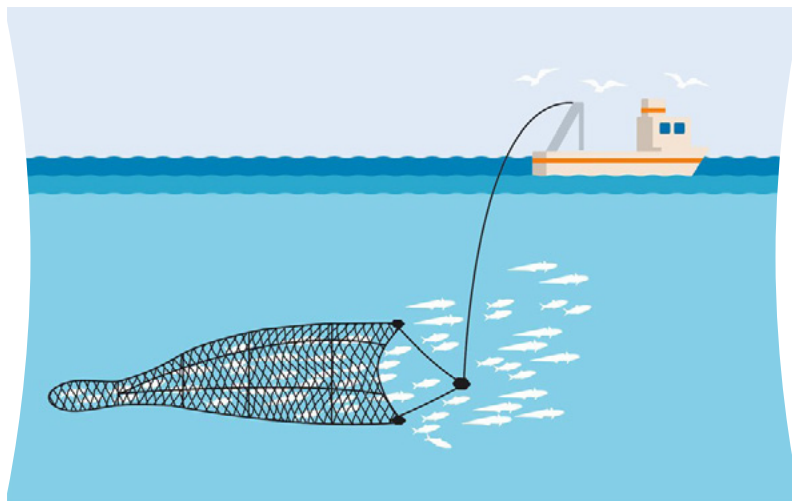
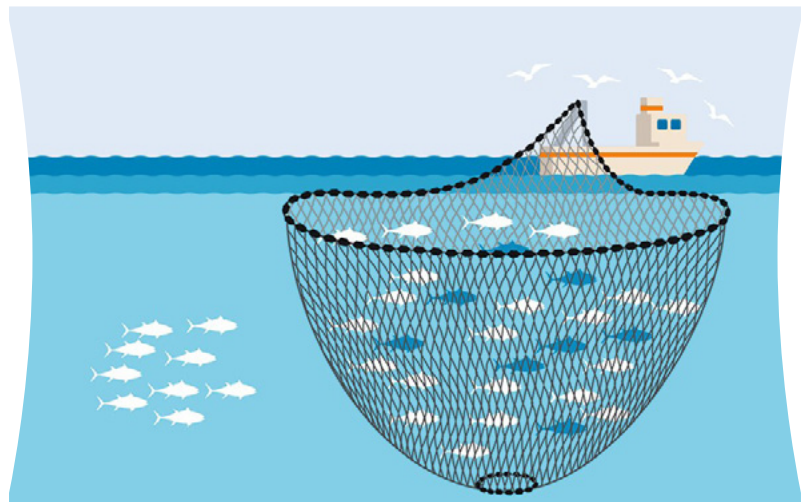


# GEAR TYPES

Small pelagics can be caught using various gear types and methods. The catch method used depends on the size of the fish, the depth at which it swims, the size of the fishery and its location. Every assessment against the MSC Fisheries Standard considers the gear type used and its impact on the marine environment specific to each fishery.

## PURSE SEINES

A vertical 'wall of net' used to encircle a school of fish. The net is pulled closed from the bottom – like a purse – preventing the catch from escaping. Purse seines can be used to catch small pelagic species. The majority of sardine and anchovy are caught using this method.

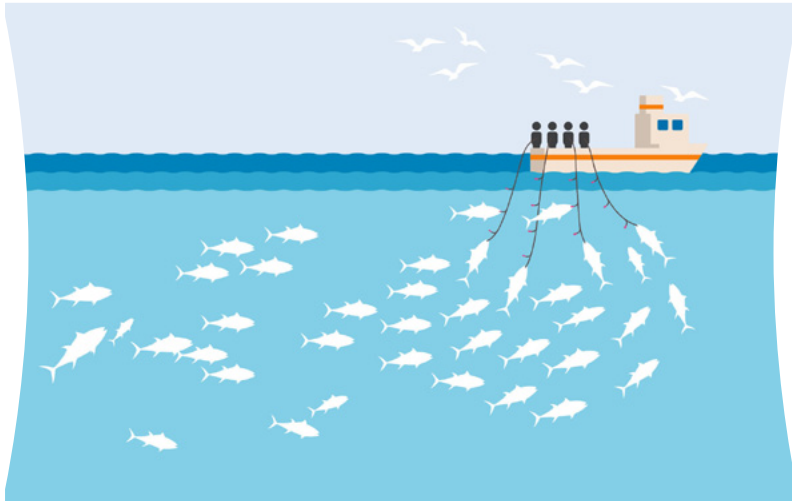
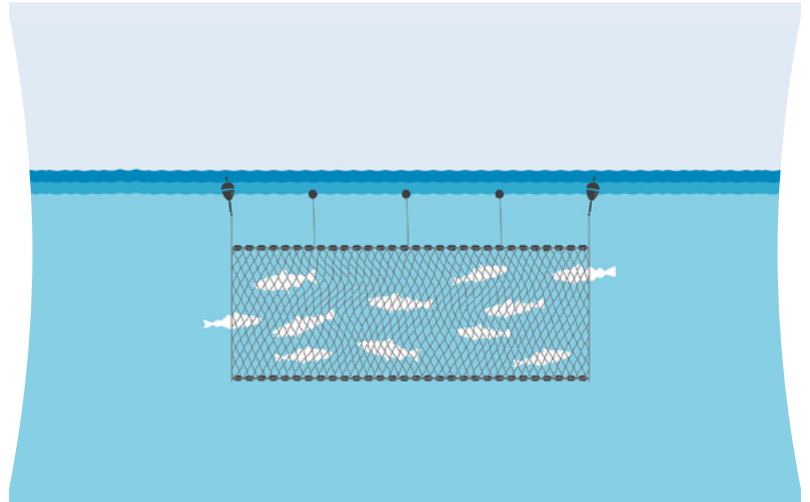


## MID-WATER TRAWLING

Trawls include several different types of fishing gear that use a cone-like net with a closed end that holds the catch. A mid-water, or pelagic, trawl is deployed in the middle of the water column. Acoustic technology is used to locate the position and depth of the target fish, sediment and other features of the bottom, and the path of the fishery operations are adjusted accordingly to help minimise the impact on bottom habitat.

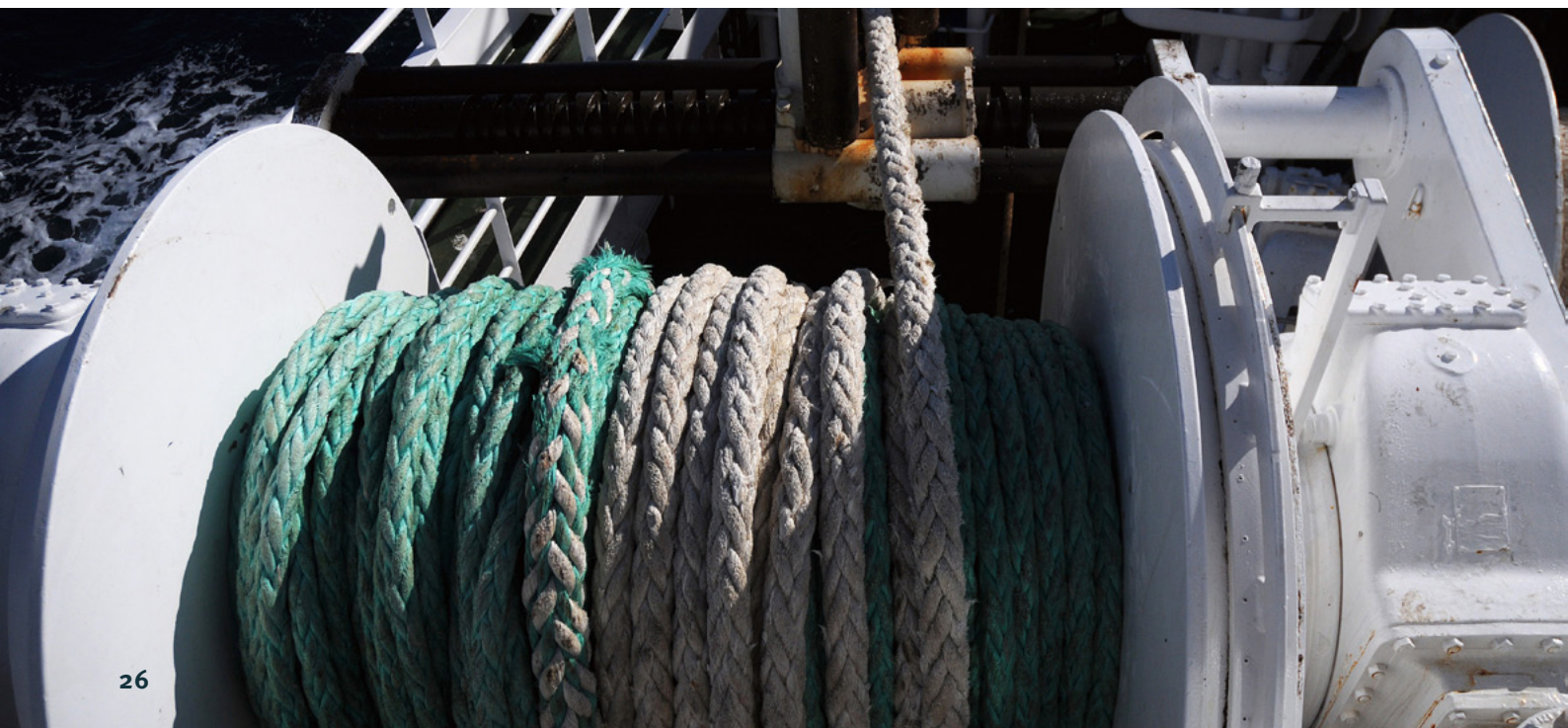
## GILLNETS

'Gillnet' is a collective term for wide fishing nets that resemble a curtain and hang vertically in the water column. As the name suggests, gillnets are designed to catch fish by their gills. The mesh of the gill net is usually just large enough to allow the head of the target species through but not their bodies. Fish will attempt to swim through the mesh and become trapped by the gills when they attempt to back out.



## HANDLINES

Handlining involves using long fishing lines, held by hand, with multiple baited hooks attached to it. Handlines may be used with or without a pole or rod. The length of the fishing lines used depends on the environmental conditions and depth that the fish are expected to be found. The fishing lines are then reeled in by hand.



# SMALL PELAGICS SPECIES

Small pelagics are a group of small, often schooling fish found throughout the world's oceans. Many small pelagic fish serve as a food source for other animals such as larger fish, seabirds and marine mammals. Some of the key commercial species of small pelagics are listed below.

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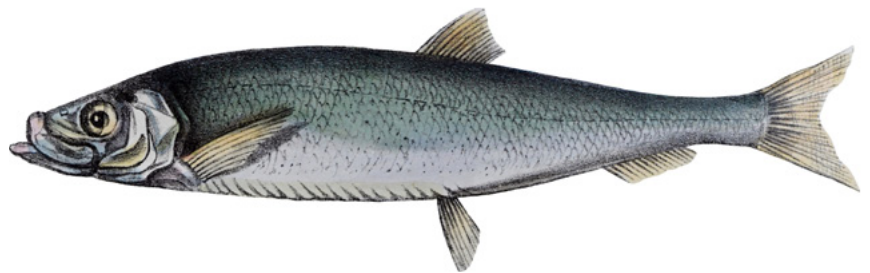
## HERRING

*Clupeidae*

**Volume MSC certified catch:**

**838,710 metric tonnes**

Herring belongs to a wider family of around 200 fish species in the family Clupeidae, but there are three species of herring that are most common: Atlantic, Pacific thread and Araucanian. These species can be found in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans with adults ranging from 20cm to 38cm in length. One of the most abundant groups of fish in the world, herring is a staple in many nations' cuisines.



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## ANCHOVY

*Engraulidae*

**Volume MSC certified catch:**

**329,262 metric tonnes**

The *Engraulidae* family consists of around 144 species, with the European (*Engraulis encrasicolus*), the Peruvian (*Engraulis ringens*) and the Californian anchovies (*Engraulis mordax*) among the most commercially significant. These fast-growing species can be found in the Atlantic, Pacific and Mediterranean oceans, as well as the Black Sea, and typically measure between 4cm and 13cm in length.



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## SARDINE

*Clupeiformes*

**Volume MSC certified catch:**

**281,969 metric tonnes**

Sardine (or pilchard) applies to a number of species that are part of the wider *Clupeiformes* order and are closely related to herrings, anchovies and pilchards. They range in length from 15cm to 25cm and can spawn as early as one to two years of age, with females producing between 10,000 and 40,000 eggs each. Sardines spawn mainly in the spring and migrate in large schools across coastlines, feeding on plankton.



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## MACKEREL

*Scombridae, Carangidae*

**Volume MSC certified catch:**

**817,945 metric tonnes**

Mackerel is found world-wide, ranging from the Atlantic to the Pacific ocean is the name for more than 30 species of pelagic fish belonging to the *Scombridae* family. Mackerel is used as a common name for various fish in other families, such as the Chilean jack mackerels (*Trachurus murphyi*) in the *Carangidae* family, and is an important food source for large marine predators like sharks, whales and seals.



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## MENHADEN

*Brevoortia tyrannus, Brevoortia patronus*

**Volume MSC certified catch:**

**570,736 metric tonnes**

Menhaden are found in the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean. Their roles as filter feeders, primarily consuming phytoplankton and zooplankton, make them essential to their ecosystems. Menhaden can reach up to 15cm in length and once fully grown can weigh more than a kilogram.



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*iStock (Mackerel)/*

# GLOSSARY

**Best practice score:** A score of 80 or higher against a performance indicator in the MSC Fisheries Standard that results in a pass without requiring additional improvements.

**Bycatch species:** Unwanted catch that includes undersized or surplus fish for which fisheries do not have a quota, endangered, threatened and protected species, and other unwanted marine species.

**Byproduct:** Refers to the various materials derived from fish processing that are not intended for direct human consumption but have value in other industries.

**Conformity Assessment Body (CAB):** Third-party certification body accredited to carry out assessments against the MSC Fisheries Standard.

**Condition of certification:** A requirement to achieve outcomes that increase a current performance indicator score to 80 or above.

**Conditional pass:** Awarded to fisheries that achieve MSC certification but are required to make improvements to ensure all performance indicators meet global best practice (a score of 80 or above) within the five-year duration of a certificate.

**ETP species:** Endangered, Threatened or Protected Species - In MSC assessments, auditors will determine if a species should be considered as ETP by seeing if they are included in relevant national legislation and international agreements.

**Feed:** Seafood utilised for the production of feed for livestock, domestic animals, and farmed fish.

**Feed Mills:** Manufacture feed for either single or multiple species.

**Fish stock:** The community from which catches are taken in a fishery. The term implies that a particular population is a biologically distinct unit.

**Harvest Control Rules (HCRs):** Measures that require catch to be adjusted in response to stock changes.

**Harvest Strategy (HS):** The combination of monitoring, stock assessment, harvest control rules and management actions taken by a fishery to ensure the target stock remains healthy and sustainable.

**Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY):** MSY is the largest catch that fishers can take from a fish stock each year without affecting future years.

**MSC Chain of Custody Standard:** Certification to this standard ensures an unbroken chain where certified seafood is easily identifiable, separated from noncertified products, and can be traced back to another certified business.

**Performance indicators (PIs):** 25 PIs sit under the 3 principles. Fisheries are assigned a score for each.

**Principles:** Fisheries in assessment are scored against the three core principles of the MSC Fisheries Standard: 1) Sustainability of the stock, 2) Ecosystem impacts, 3) Effective fisheries management.

**Reduction fishery:** One that uses, or 'reduces', its catch to produce fishmeal or fish oil rather than for direct human consumption.

**Total Allowable Catch (TAC):** Catch limits that establish the total amount of fish that can be taken from a stock.

**Trimming:** The off-cuts and waste resulting from preparation of fish.

**Unit of Assessment (UoA):** The target stock(s) combined with the fishing method/gear and practice (including vessel type/s) pursuing that stock, and any fleets, or groups of vessels, or individual fishing operators or other eligible fishers that are included in an MSC fishery assessment.



# ANNEX

To complement the content of this yearbook, the annex provides a full list of small pelagic species included in the MSC program and serves as a valuable resource, showing the diverse range of certified small pelagic species. Krill and blue whiting are included in this report to recognise their relevance alongside other small pelagic species.

English name	Scientific name	English name	Scientific name
Antarctic krill	<i>Euphausia superba</i>	Gulf menhaden	<i>Brevoortia patronus</i>
Atlantic herring	<i>Clupea harengus</i>	Japanese anchovy	<i>Engraulis japonicus</i>
Atlantic menhaden	<i>Brevoortia tyrannus</i>	Japanese pilchard	<i>Sardinops melanostictus</i>
Blue whiting (=Poutassou)	<i>Micromesistius poutassou</i>	Lesser sand-eel	<i>Ammodytes marinus</i>
Californian anchovy	<i>Engraulis mordax</i>	Norway pout	<i>Trisopterus esmarkii</i>
Capelin	<i>Mallotus villosus</i>	Pacific anchoveta	<i>Cetengraulis mysticetus</i>
Chilean jack mackerel	<i>Trachurus murphyi</i>	Pacific chub mackerel	<i>Scomber japonicus</i>
European anchovy	<i>Engraulis encrasicolus</i>	Pacific sardine	<i>Sardinops sagax</i>
European pilchard (=Sardine)	<i>Sardina pilchardus</i>	Pacific thread herring	<i>Opisthonema libertate</i>
European sprat	<i>Sprattus sprattus</i>	Thread herrings nei	<i>Opisthonema spp</i>
Greenback horse mackerel	<i>Trachurus declivis</i>		





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



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