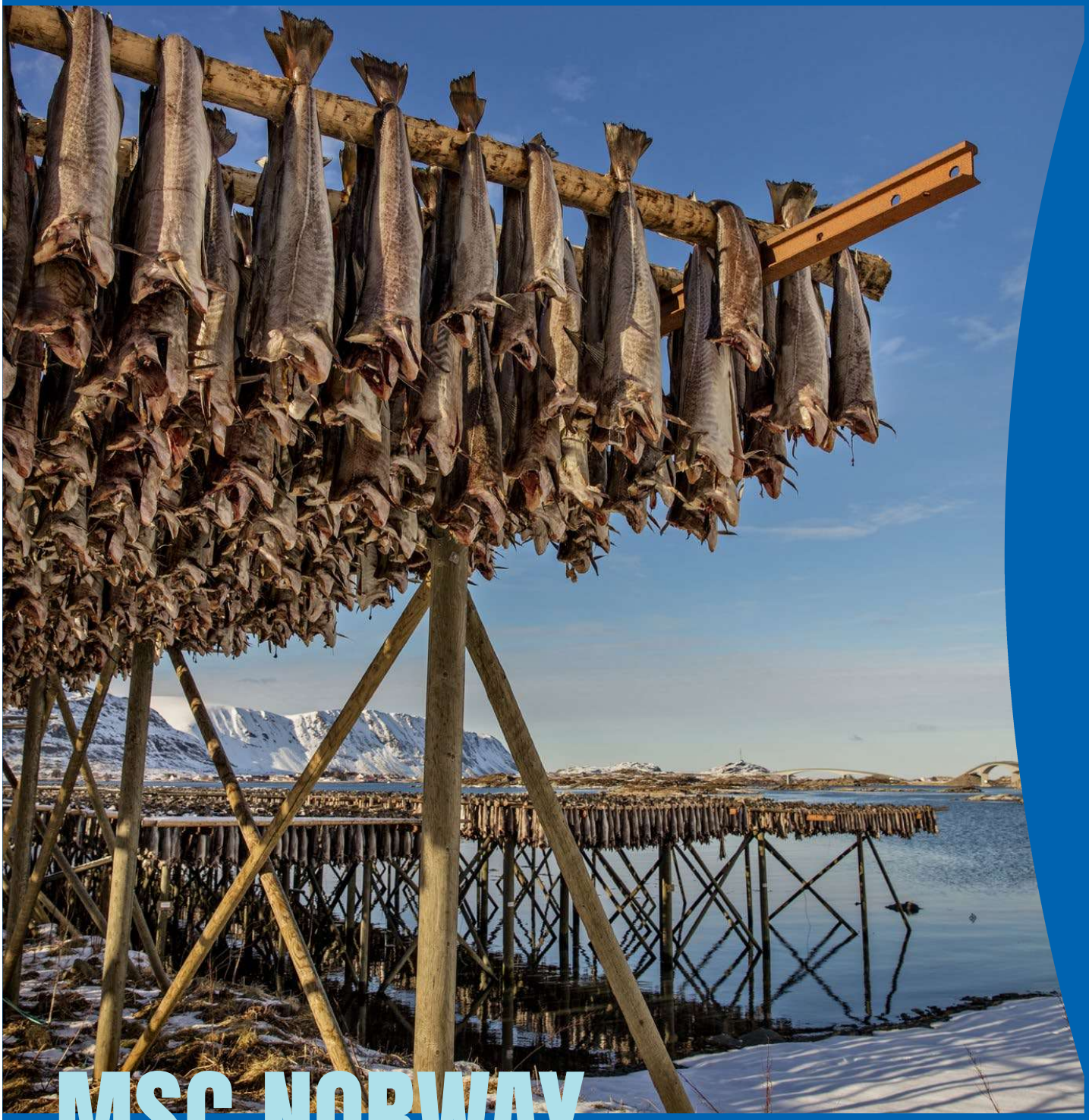
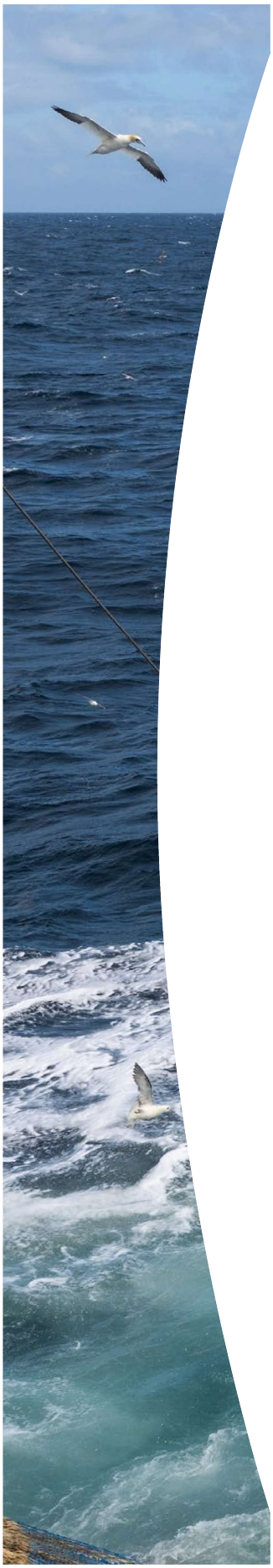
Marine Stewardship Council



MSC NORWAY
STATE OF THE WATER REPORT 2026

First Edition



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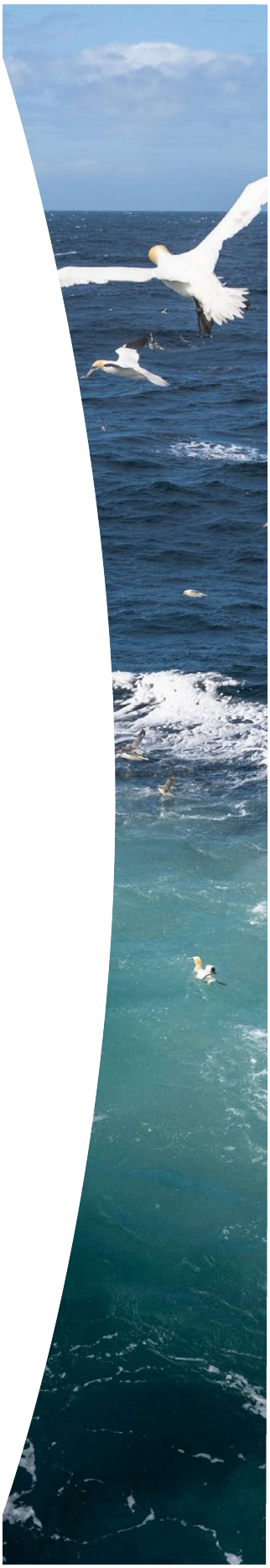
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FOREWORD

Norwegian waters boast some of the most productive marine ecosystems on Earth. For a thousand years, the seasonal migration of Northeast Arctic cod to Lofoten has drawn fishers to these waters. The stockfish trade that grew from this fishery connected coastal communities with European markets from the Middle Ages, helping shape a trading nation that today ranks among the world's leading seafood exporters. Norway's fishing communities carry forward a strong seafaring heritage, paired with a fisheries science and management tradition that is, rightly, held up as a global leader.

It is this combination, natural abundance and institutional excellence, that has made Norway such a valued partner of the Marine Stewardship Council. Our relationship stretches back to 2008, when Norwegian saithe became one of the first fisheries in the region to achieve MSC certification. Eighteen years on, that early commitment has grown into one of the most significant certified fisheries programmes in the world: ten certified fisheries today, spanning whitefish, pelagic and crustacean stocks. But certification is not a stationary tool; it is a mechanism for continuous, measurable improvement, and Norway's fisheries have used it as exactly that, representing nearly two decades of partnership with the MSC program.

The value of this commitment to sustainable fisheries extends beyond Norway's own waters with Norwegian cod supplying 62% of the cod consumed in Portugal, the largest cod market in the world; and MSC-certified Norwegian seafood bearing the blue ecolabel in supermarkets and restaurants across the globe. In each of these markets, that label gives buyers and



consumers independent, third-party assurance that what they are purchasing has been caught sustainably, verified against a rigorous global standard, and is traceable back to a well-managed fishery.

In a world where increasingly discerning customers demand verified sustainable seafood, the role of certification is paramount and Norwegian consumers too are following this trend. In the last two years alone, awareness of the ecolabel increased by 8 percentage points, from 35% to 43%, accompanied by a trust increase of 20 points, from 59% to 79%, representing a remarkable shift in awareness of ecolabelling amongst Norwegian seafood consumers.

Despite this progress, challenges remain. Stock distributions are shifting at an accelerated rate under warming sea temperatures, alongside environmental and political pressures that make the management of shared fish stocks increasingly complex. Building resilient, adaptive management systems that can respond to these shifts is key, and Norway is well placed to continue its leadership both within domestic and international fisheries frameworks, drawing on its world-class science and decades of experience in fisheries management and governance.

Ultimately, this report is a celebration of Norway's commitment to sustainable fisheries, providing decades of strong leadership, demonstrating what sustainable fisheries management looks like in practice.



Erin Priddle
Regional Director, North Europe
Marine Stewardship Council

INTRODUCTION

With the world's second longest coastline, only surpassed by Canada, Norway's relationship with the ocean has shaped the nation's economy, culture, and identity throughout its history. Positioned on the Northeastern side of the Atlantic Ocean, Norway benefits from the warm and nutrient-rich waters of the Gulf Stream, creating conditions for exceptionally productive marine ecosystems teeming with life.[i] Coastal access and abundant marine resources have shaped human settlement and economic activity, from the Viking Age through to the modern seafood industry that today connects Norway's fjords and fishing grounds to markets across the globe. In 2024 alone, Norwegian-registered vessels landed over 2 million metric tonnes (mt) of seafood across a fleet of over 5000 vessels (the great majority of them under 15 metres), representing a fleet structure that reflects both large-scale offshore capacity and smaller more dispersed, coastal fishing practices that has helped to characterise the Norwegian coast.[ii]

This State of the Water Norway report sets out the country's contribution to certified sustainable fisheries since Norway's first MSC certification, Northeast Arctic saithe, entered the program in 2008. Since this time, the programme has grown from two certified fisheries to ten in 2026, spanning whitefish, small pelagic and crustacean species across the Barents Sea, North Sea, Skagerrak, Norwegian Deep and Antarctica. Certified landings have grown substantially over that period, from around 200,000 mt in the program's first decade to reaching over 1 million mt in 2024 (Fig. 3).

As one of the world's leading seafood exporters, shipping nearly 3 million tonnes of seafood worth £14 billion in 2025[iii], Norway is considered a powerhouse in global fisheries. The region is immensely important to the MSC, contributing to its vision for one third of global marine catch engaged by 2030. In the last two decades, the MSC has worked in close partnership with the Norwegian seafood sector, fostering mutual support and continual fisheries improvements in one of MSC's longest standing and valued regions for certified sustainable fisheries.





About this report

The Norwegian State of the Water report provides an overview of the development and performance of Norwegian fisheries within the MSC programme since the first Norwegian certifications took hold in 2008. Its core analysis focuses on currently certified fisheries within FAO Fishing Area 27 (Northeast Atlantic) and 48 (Antarctic Atlantic), covering key commercial gear types, areas, and species across whitefish, pelagic and crustaceans.

Drawing on initial assessments, reassessments and annual surveillance audits, the report examines certification conditions and the documented improvements associated with their closure, including changes in stock management, fishing practices, ecosystem monitoring, and governance. A selection of case studies illustrate how these developments have been implemented in practice. The report also discusses selected fisheries that have lost certification, providing context on the stock and management challenges affecting their participation in the MSC programme.

The report is structured to provide important fishery information about the availability of certified fisheries in Norway, including relevant data points on key species categories, export markets, and notable improvements over time. To note, data points change over time and the data presented are current as of 2026.

Fisheries - cornerstone of Norway's identity

Norway's fisheries have evolved from historic coastal livelihoods into a modern, globally connected seafood sector, while remaining deeply rooted in the country's coastal identity. The seasonal Lofoten cod fishery, targeting Northeast Arctic cod during its spawning migration, has operated for roughly a thousand years and grew into one of the most important fisheries



in Northern Europe. The export of dried stockfish to Europe during the Middle Ages connected Norway to international markets and laid the foundation for a maritime export economy that continues to this day.[iv] For generations, fisheries sustained small and remote communities from Finnmark in the north to Rogaland in the south. Historic settlements developed around landing sites, processing facilities, and export infrastructure. Today, key fisheries hubs such as Båtsfjord, Tromsø, Ålesund and Bergen illustrate the rich history of Norway's relationship with the sea, as well as modernisation within the seafood sector.

Alongside the growth and modernisation of Norway's fishing fleet and seafood production sector, environmental pressures have also increased in recent years, as observed around the world. Changing ocean temperatures are accelerating shifts in stock distribution patterns, shaping fisheries' dynamics and affecting the resilience of marine ecosystems, which increases pressure on regulators, fishers, and other users of marine resources.[v] However, with Norway's reputation in delivering best in class management of marine resources, this nation is well positioned to build resilient fisheries management frameworks that aim to safeguard ecologically and economically important resources for future generations to come.

Small country, big exporter

Norway is today among the world's leading seafood export nations. According to the Norwegian Seafood Council annual report, in 2025, Norway exported 2.8 million tonnes of seafood with an export value of 13.97 billion GBP. Wild-caught seafood accounted for 27% of total export value and 46% of export volume in 2025. The same year, Norway exported 1.3 million tonnes of wild-caught seafood worth £3.7 billion.[vi]

From cod and haddock to herring and prawns, Norwegian fisheries provide a critical supply to demanding global seafood markets that value high quality and sustainable wild caught seafood for their customers, making this sector central to Norway's regional economic stability.



Regulation, management and Marine Stewardship Council MSC engagement

Norway is internationally recognised for its science-based fisheries management framework and integrated system of scientific research and policy. Annual quotas are set based on advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), The Joint Russian-Norwegian Working Group on Arctic Fisheries (JRN-AFWG), and Norway's Institute of Marine Research (IMR).

As a major fishing nation, Norway shares stocks with many other nations, particularly in the Barents Sea, North Sea and Skagerrak waters. Many of these shared stocks are jointly managed with Russia through the Joint Norwegian-Russian Fisheries Commission (JNRFC), while other stocks involving the EU, the UK, Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands are managed through the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), as well as through bilateral and multi-lateral arrangements between coastal states.[vii viii]

Norway has a longstanding history with the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), with voluntary certification widely adopted across major fisheries since that first certification for Norwegian North East Arctic saithe in 2008 (page 15). The history between the MSC and Norway therefore runs deep, reflecting a commitment by the sector to demonstrate their sustainability while embracing third party certification through MSC's independent, globally recognised Fisheries and Chain of Custody Standards.



UNDERSTANDING MSC CERTIFICATION

The MSC Fisheries Standard

The MSC Fisheries Standard was developed based on the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, in consultation with a range of stakeholders across the globe, including government, academics, researchers, fishing industry, NGOs, and private sector actors. The standard has evolved over the past 25 years through several iterations to reflect changing best practices in global fisheries management. The Fisheries Standard is made up of three Principles:

Principle 1: Sustainability of the stock. Fisheries must operate in a way that allows fishing to continue indefinitely, without overexploiting the resource.

Principle 2: Ecosystem impacts. Fishing operations need to be managed to maintain the structure, productivity, function, and diversity of the ecosystem upon which the fishery depends, including other species and habitats.

Principle 3: Effective management. All fisheries need to meet all relevant local, national, and international laws and have an effective management system in place.

Each principle is broken down into several Performance Indicators (PIs) against which every fishery is assessed by independent assessment teams.

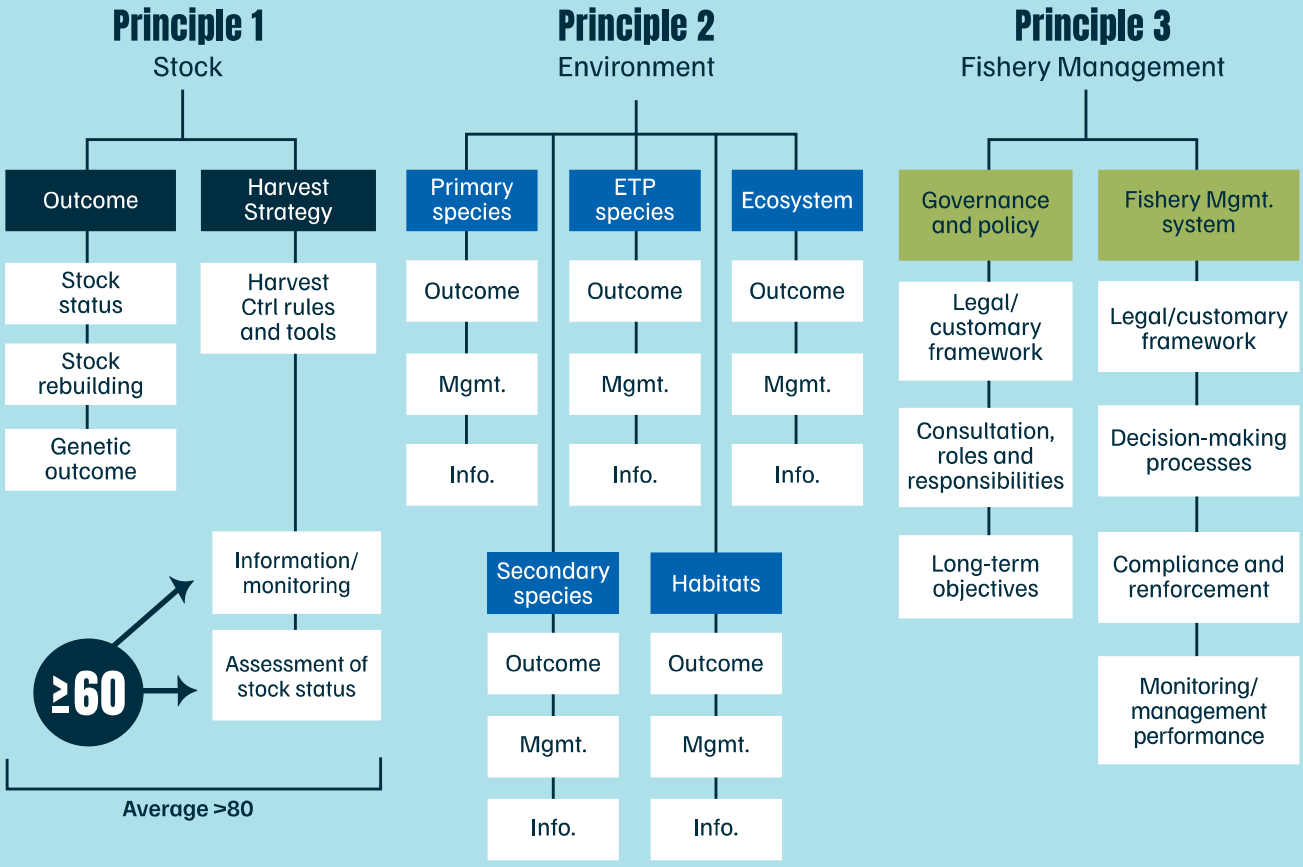


Figure 1. The three Principles and 28 Performance Indicators of the MSC Fisheries Standard (v2.01).

MSC Fisheries Program Revisions

The MSC has engaged in a series of revisions to its Fisheries Standard since publication of the latest standard, Version 3.0. The most recent set of revisions, known as the Fisheries Program Revisions (FPR) project, is currently underway and has undergone extensive research, testing, and refining of the proposed revisions with the aim to deliver a workable fourth version of the Standard and deliver on the MSC Theory of Change.

The proposed revisions focus on four key topics:

1. Updating requirements for assessing fisheries' impacts on endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) species, as well as out-of-scope species such as mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians.

2. Revising the data-limited fisheries assessment tool, the Risk-Based Framework, to ensure it remains precautionary and aligned with the Fisheries Standard.

3. Improving the Fisheries Certification Process (FCP) to support more consistent and efficient fishery assessments.

4. Reviewing which fisheries are required to use Section SE.

Updating the Evidence Requirements Framework to improve clarity and ensure it effectively supports sustainability outcomes.

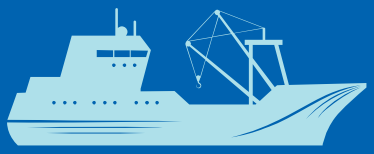
These topics will be consulted on before finalising the revisions which are due to be published in mid-2027 pending approval by the MSC Board.

MSC Assessment Process

After their initial assessment and certification, all MSC certified fisheries must be audited annually – this is known as "surveillance auditing". At the end of the five-year certification cycle, fisheries must successfully complete the re-assessment process to remain certified. All assessment, annual audits, and re-assessment results are posted on the MSC Track-a-Fishery page.



Figure 2: The MSC fishery assessment and re-assessment process.



What is a "fishery" at the MSC?

To judge whether fish has been caught sustainably, it is necessary to look not only at the target species, but also where and how it was caught. A certified fishery is therefore always a combination of those factors, which means that, for example, haddock is not itself certified as a whole species but can only carry the blue MSC ecolabel if fished in the defined location under the distinct management regime and with the approved gear by a vessel belonging to a certified fishery conforming to all requirements of the Fisheries Standard.

A fishery can consist of a group of local fishers or be a large international collaboration - as long as there is joint management. Being part of an MSC certificate allows fishers to land catches that comply with the MSC Standard for sustainable fishing. The MSC Chain of Custody Standard ensures that there is no mixing of certified and non-certified catches throughout the supply chain.[24,25]

For this report, a fishery is defined by the certificate scope of the fishery, and so may contain multiple species, stock areas, or gear types.

Use of conditions to drive continual improvement

MSC certification requires fisheries to meet minimum performance requirements while addressing areas where further improvement is needed. Fisheries must score at least 60 on every performance indicator and achieve an average of at least 80 under each of the Standard's three principles. Where an individual indicator scores below 80, the independent certifier sets a condition of certification requiring the fishery to improve its performance. The condition is closed once evidence demonstrates that the indicator meets a score of at least 80, typically within five years.

While a fishery that achieves MSC certification is sustainable, no fishery is without shortcomings. In many cases, specific performance indicators require improvement. As long as a fishery meets the minimum requirements across all criteria and demonstrates an overall high level of sustainability, it may be certified with conditions. These conditions are time-bound and require the fishery to implement improvements. In this way, MSC certification promotes continuous progress through annual auditing of condition progress, pushing fisheries toward best practice standards over time. If the fishery does not close its conditions within the specified timeframe, or the certifier determines that adequate progress towards closing a condition is not made, the fishery's certificate can be suspended. The MSC certification process generates extensive, publicly available data on each fishery through the Track-a-Fishery webpage.



NORWEGIAN FISHERY LANDSCAPE

Norway's fishery landscape is defined by its extensive network of landing ports, advanced coastal infrastructure, and a fleet structure adapted to a wide range of fisheries. Along its long coastline, more than 200 state-supported fishery ports facilitate local and regional activity, enabling efficient landing, processing, and logistics. Larger hubs such as Tromsø, Ålesund, Måløy and Kristiansand serve as key export gateways, connecting offshore fleets to international markets, while a multitude of smaller ports sustain dispersed production and coastal communities along the entire coastline. This decentralised infrastructure is fundamental to both economic activity and settlement patterns in coastal Norway.[ix]

In 2024, Norwegian-registered vessels landed over 2 million metric tonnes across a fleet of around 5,400 vessels.[x] More than 90 percent of the fleet consists of vessels under 15 meters, while those above 28 meters represent only about 5 percent. Coastal vessels mainly target demersal species using passive gears, while larger vessels use trawls and purse seines in both pelagic and demersal fisheries.[xi] Pelagic fisheries also play a central and growing role in supporting Norway's production of seafood for human consumption, but also importantly for the fishmeal and fish oil sector where Norway is a key global player.

The sector as a whole is supported by a science-based management system that integrates research, regulatory frameworks, and industry actors in decision-making, allowing Norway to combine efficient resource utilisation with long-term stock sustainability.[xii]



Mareano - The Sea in Maps and Pictures

Initiated in 2006 to address major knowledge gaps, Mareano has become one of the world's most comprehensive seabed mapping programmes. The Institute of Marine Research, the Geological Survey of Norway and the Norwegian Mapping Authority carry out the field sampling and other scientific activities.

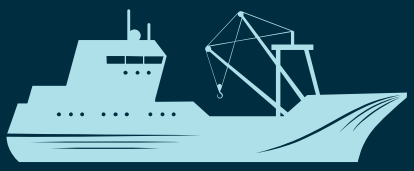
The goal of the initiative is to map the Norwegian continental shelf's seascape, seabed composition, biodiversity, habitats and biotopes, their links to the physical environment, and the distribution of contaminants in sediments. Today, large areas have been systematically mapped using high-resolution bathymetry, sediment sampling, and biological surveys. The results have improved understanding of species distributions, identified vulnerable habitats, and contributed to more sustainable use and protection of marine resources.[xiii]

By the numbers

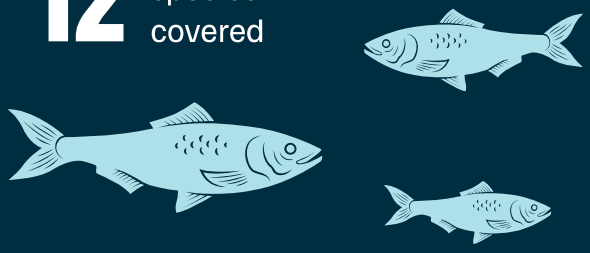


51.7% of Norwegian landings are MSC certified sustainable

10 Certified fisheries



12 species covered



1,101,992 Metric tons of MSC Certified Catch



Tor Bjørklund Larsen Senior Adviser, Norwegian Fishermen's Association (Norges Fiskarlag)



Almost 20 years have passed since the first MSC certification of a Norwegian fishery. Since then, Norwegian fisheries and the Norwegian Fishermen Association have been increasingly committed partners of the MSC organization, and the standard has been an important tool for documenting our sustainability credentials. Many key markets for Norwegian seafood ask for MSC-certification, and as a leading export nation for premium seafood, we aim to deliver!

Managing sustainable fisheries is a voyage, and our fisheries may have enjoyed favourable winds for the first 15 years of the MSC leg. Now, rapidly changing ecosystems and international political frameworks, as well as changing demands from society, are making the waters we sail in rougher and our charts less reliable. Some of the challenges, such as shared stock management, are beyond what individual fishers can solve, and international cooperation is as important as ever. This is where the sustainable management systems we have spent decades building are put to the test. The challenges only strengthen our commitment. Sustainable seafood is integral to our country, culture and economy, and there is no alternative to staying the course and managing our resources for the generations to come.





MSC CERTIFIED NORWEGIAN FISHERIES (FROM BEGINNING TO NOW)

MSC-certified Norwegian fisheries from 2008 to 2026

2008

Norway's MSC certification journey began in 2008 with Northeast Arctic saithe and North Sea saithe, the latter now listed as Norway North Sea demersal. Five fisheries followed in 2009: Norwegian spring-spawning herring, North Sea herring, Northeast Atlantic mackerel, and the Domstein Longliner Partners Northeast Arctic cod and haddock fisheries.

2010

In 2010, Norway Northeast Arctic cod and haddock achieved certification, alongside the Antarctic krill fishery now operated by The QRILL Company. Northeast Arctic cold-water prawn followed in 2012 and Rimfrost Antarctic krill in 2015.

2016

In 2016, Northeast Atlantic mackerel regained certification through MINSA, and Norway Skagerrak and the Norwegian Deep cold-water prawn joined the programme. The combined NFA Norway ling, tusk and lumpfish fishery followed in 2017, and Norway sandeel and North Sea sprat in 2018.

2019

Certification of major Northeast Atlantic pelagic fisheries was subsequently suspended: MINSA mackerel in 2019, followed by Norwegian spring-spawning herring and Northeast Atlantic blue whiting in 2020. Disagreements over quota allocation and combined catches exceeding scientific advice undermined sustainable management of these shared stocks. These challenges are explored further in the Small Pelagic Yearbook and a dedicated section to NEA pelagic challenges featured in the report.

2023

Norway beaked redfish and Norway Greenland halibut achieved certification in 2023, followed by Norway Barents Sea snow crab in 2024. The dataset records a maximum of twelve certified fisheries in 2018, 2023 and 2024, with ten remaining in 2026.

MSC CERTIFIED LANDINGS IN NORWAY

MSC certified fisheries in Norway have been dominated by whitefish and small pelagic species, followed by smaller volumes of crustaceans, including cold-water prawns and snow crab. The first decade of Norway's certification journey, volumes of MSC certified landings fluctuated around 1 000 000 mt and reached an all-time high at almost 1 900 000 mt in 2019 (Fig. 3) with 11 fisheries. These included a large variety of fisheries across Norway's fleet, some with landings as small as 10 594 mt (Norway North sea sprat 2019) to those at almost 430 506 mt (Norwegian spring spawning herring 2019).

MSC Certified Landing, MT

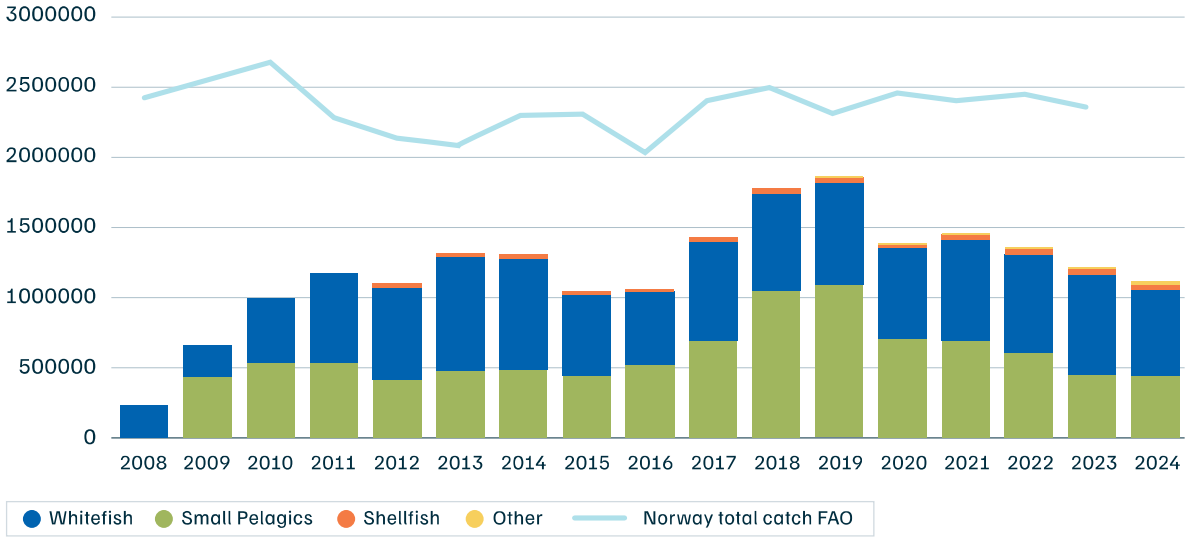


Figure 3. MSC-certified catches by Norwegian vessels (2008–2024), grouped into pelagic fisheries (including Antarctic krill), whitefish and other crustaceans, compared with total Norwegian catch (FAO, 2026).

MSC Certified Landing by species grouping 2023

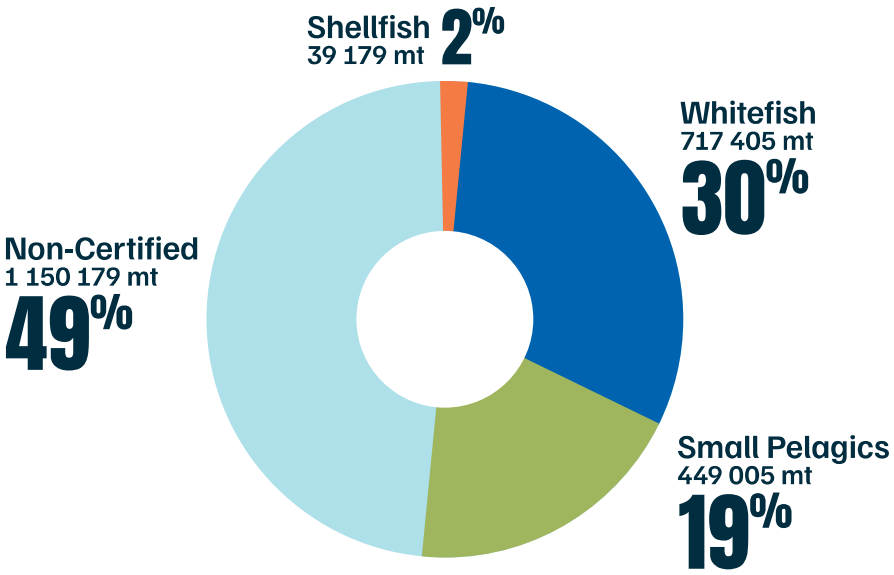


Figure 4. Share of MSC-certified landings in Norway (2023), by species group, relative to non-certified catch.

Map of fishing grounds of Norwegian certified fisheries

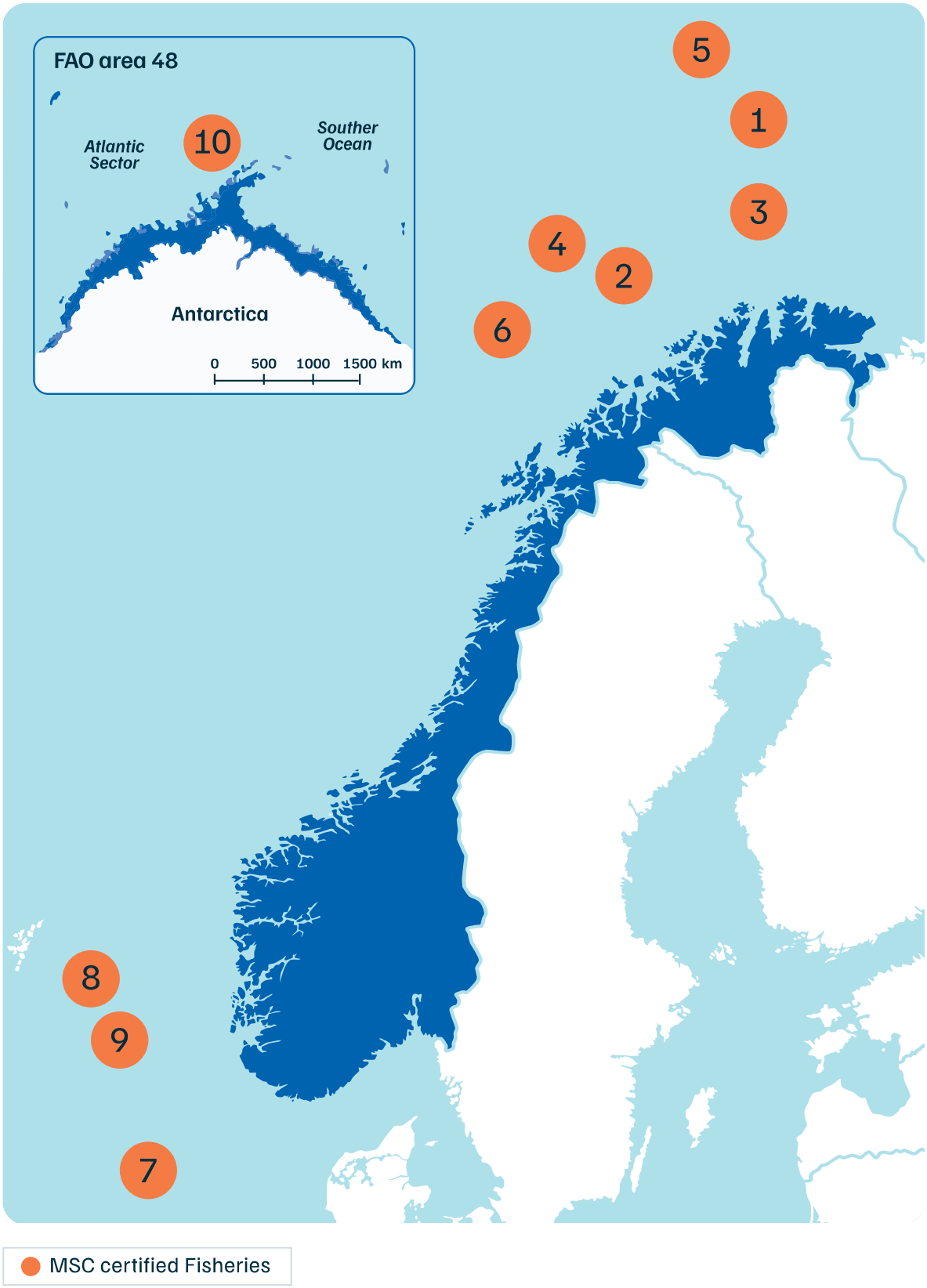


Figure 5. 1. Norway Barents Sea snow crab, 2. Norway beaked redfish, 3. Norway North East Arctic cod, 4. Norway North East Arctic cold water prawn, 5. Norway North East Arctic haddock, 6. Norway North East Arctic saithe, 7. Norway North Sea demersal, 8. Norway North Sea herring, 9. Norway sandeel and North Sea sprat, 10. The QRILL company

NORWEGIAN WHITEFISH FISHERIES AND MSC CERTIFICATION

Whitefish form the backbone of Norway's wild capture fisheries and are deeply embedded in the country's coastal economy. For centuries, whitefish fisheries supported settlement, trade and cultural traditions, and they remain central to Norway's seafood exports today.

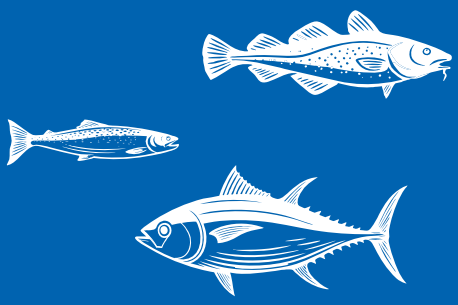
Historical significance and development

Norway's whitefish fisheries have developed from small-scale coastal operations into a modern, highly regulated industry. Advanced fishing and navigation technology have enabled more precise operations, alongside increasingly sophisticated fisheries management.

Preservation and access to export markets have long shaped the sector. Dried and salted products enabled trade over long distances, while modern freezing and logistics now allow Norway to supply fresh and frozen whitefish to markets worldwide.[v]

MSC certified whitefish fisheries

- Norway North East Arctic cod
- Norway North East Arctic saithe
- Norway North East Arctic haddock
- Norway North Sea demersal
- Norway beaked redfish



Status of Norwegian whitefish in the MSC program

Norwegian whitefish fisheries operate across three main offshore areas: the Barents Sea, the Norwegian Sea and the North Sea, as well as within Norwegian coastal waters. The Barents Sea accounts for the largest volumes of whitefish and is home to some of the most productive fish stocks in the world.[xiv] The certified whitefish fisheries in Norway are key to the MSC program and supply substantial volumes of sustainably caught whitefish to demanding markets all over the globe. Major certified whitefish species include cod, haddock and saithe.

Norway and Russia jointly manage cod and haddock stocks through scientific cooperation and annual negotiations over catch limits, while Norway sets the catch limit for Northeast Arctic saithe. Quota allocations for these fisheries are also made available to third countries through annual quota negotiations.[xv]

Norwegian catches in the North Sea are smaller compared to the Northeast Arctic and Barents Sea and are managed under trilateral agreements with the EU and the UK. Several demersal stocks in the region have experienced declines in recent years, with consequences for both

catch opportunities and MSC certification. Despite this, industry leaders are committed to resolving issues and challenges within the sector, supporting long-standing certificates and demonstrating commitment to sustainable fishing practices for this species group.

Main fishing area for Norwegian whitefish fisheries



Figure 5. Main fishing areas for Norwegian whitefish fisheries: the North East Arctic (ICES Subareas 1 and 2, covering the Barents Sea and the Norwegian Sea) and the North Sea (ICES Subarea 4).



Atlantic Cod

For Norwegian fisheries there are several commercial cod stocks, of which NEA cod is by far the largest and most economically important, and is an iconic MSC-certified fishery. This highly productive stock has fluctuated over time, reaching a peak spawning stock biomass of approximately 2.221 million tonnes in 2013xvi. While the stock biomass has since declined (see “North East Arctic Cod – Management in Challenging Times”), continued commitment to certification has kept this fishery as a stalwart species of certified whitefish in Norway.



Saithe

NEA saithe biomass similarly increased during much of the 2010s, however has experienced some decline in recent scientific advice. Despite this, fisheries are committed to upholding measures set out under the management plan to ensure harvests stay within safe biological limits with stocks remaining certified5. Catches totalled 132 960 mt in 2024.[xvii]



Haddock

NEA haddock is another crucially important whitefish species in the Barents Sea. While it experienced a peak biomass in the early 2010s, the stock remains at a healthy level and is now showing encouraging signs of recovery, with strong year-classes entering the fisheryxviii. Catches reached 71 433 mt in 2024.

Norwegian landings of North Sea and Skagerrak haddock are considerably lower than those of NEA haddock, totalling 3145 mt in 2024. The stock is currently in a strong state, with spawning biomass well above biological limits.[xix]



Northern Hake

Landings of northern hake across its wider stock range increased markedly during the mid-2010s, alongside a substantial rise in biomass. Since then, landings have gradually declined in line with the stock’s changing biomass, reflecting the fisheries commitment to responsible management. The spawning-stock biomass remains in a healthy state, and the Norwegian MSC-certified hake fishery in the North Sea and Skagerrak totalled 1,265 mt in 2024.[xx]



Beaked redfish

The Norwegian Northeast Arctic beaked redfish fishery was MSC-certified in 2023. Beaked redfish is a long-lived deep-water species, requiring particularly cautious management. The stock is currently in a healthy condition and is relatively stable. The Norwegian MSC-certified fleet caught 47,390 MT in 2024.[xxi]

Cross-cutting management considerations

While it is positive that biomass levels of whitefish stocks caught by the Norwegian fleet are generally above critical thresholds with several stocks meeting important sustainability criteria, it is also recognised that this species group faces ongoing management challenges related to climate change, recruitment variability and other environmental and political pressures. Management has responded with reduced fishing quotas and additional measures to help support healthy stock levels. Additionally, improvements to scientific monitoring and data collection are ongoing, with international cooperation remaining essential to secure the long-term sustainability of Norway's whitefish fisheries.[xxii] Ongoing commitment to certification can help foster continuous improvement to ensure these iconic species continue to supply certified volume to a discerning global export market where certified whitefish species are in high demand.



NORTH EAST ARCTIC COD - MANAGEMENT IN CHALLENGING TIMES



Geir Hønneland Research Professor, Fridtjof Nansen Institute

Stock status

Northeast Arctic (NEA) cod (Gadus morhua) is the largest cod stock in the world by total biomass, although it has declined considerably in recent years. As a demersal species, it is primarily distributed along the continental shelf of the Barents Sea. Its main prey is capelin, and feeding migrations extend towards the Polar Front, where cold, relatively fresh Arctic water flowing southwards meets warmer, more saline Atlantic water flowing northwards. Larger cod are generally found in the western Barents Sea, i.e. within the Norwegian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the Fishery Protection Zone around Svalbard, where they are also more accessible to fishing than in the eastern areas within the Russian EEZ. Over the past decades, total catches have ranged from 212,000 tonnes in 1990 to 986,449 tonnes in 2014. The highest total allowable catch (TAC) was set at 1 million tonnes in 2013. Since then, the TAC has followed a gradual downward trend, reaching 285,000 tonnes for 2026 – the second lowest level on record after the 210,000 tonnes set in 1990. The decline is primarily attributable to poor recruitment, although the Joint Russian-Norwegian Arctic Fisheries Working Group (JRN-AFWG) assessment also indicates that in recent years fishing mortality has exceeded sustainable levels. Under the harvest control rule, fishing mortality has declined substantially, but has since last year risen above the target range again. A modest stock increase is projected in the coming years, reflecting a moderately strong 2021 year class; however, the stock is expected to remain at a historically low level.

Management of NEA cod

The main fish stocks in the Barents Sea are transboundary and have been managed bilaterally by the Joint Norwegian-Russian Fisheries Commission (JNRFC) since 1976. The JNRFC sets TACs for five shared stocks, including NEA cod, which are then divided between the two coastal states according to pre-agreed allocation keys – for cod, 50/50. Approximately 15% of the TAC is allocated to third states through quota exchanges: Belarus, the EU, Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland and the UK. Over the five decades of its operation, the bilateral management regime has expanded both in breadth and in depth. First, an increasing number of management areas have been incorporated into the cooperation framework, ranging from joint scientific research

to the harmonisation of technical regulations and the coordination of monitoring, control and surveillance MSC. Second, management methods have become progressively more sophisticated. TACs are now set in accordance with harvest control rules, or management plans, that link quota levels to biological reference points, including spawning stock biomass and fishing mortality.

Norwegian–Russian fisheries cooperation has endured shifting political times, but it has come under increasing strain since 2022. In the summer of 2025, Norway implemented an EU regulation placing two major Russian fishing companies on the sanctions list, thereby denying them access to its ports and exclusive economic zone (EEZ). In response, Russia threatened to withdraw from the bilateral management regime, but eventually agreed with Norway on TACs for 2026.

MSC certification

The first Norwegian and Russian cod fisheries were MSC-certified in 2009 and 2010, respectively. UK, German, French, Faroese and Icelandic fisheries followed in 2012, the Spanish fishery in 2013 and the Greenlandic one in 2015. While the entire Norwegian fleet is covered by a single certificate held by the Norwegian Fishermen's Association, several Russian fishing companies hold individual certificates. As a result, virtually all NEA cod fisheries are now MSC-certified, distributed across roughly a dozen certificates.

Most of the improvement conditions set for the certificates have concerned MSC's Principle 2 on the environmental impacts of the fishery, particularly with regard to endangered, threatened or protected (ETP) species and benthic habitats. These conditions have led to action by both fishery clients and management authorities to rectify the identified shortcomings. Approximately half of the fisheries received stakeholder comments during the assessment process, primarily from WWF and largely concerning ETP species and habitat impacts. In addition, four formal objections were filed in relation to Barents Sea fisheries on similar grounds. These objections resulted in the introduction of additional improvement conditions in two of the fisheries.



NORWEGIAN WHITEFISH AND THE UK MARKET

The United Kingdom (UK) is one of the world's largest markets for key Norwegian-caught species including cod, haddock, and coldwater prawns. In 2024, the UK imported around 131 600 mt of seafood from Norway,[xxiii] supplying retail and foodservice, where Norwegian seafood products carrying the MSC label are available in supermarket aisles and on restaurant menus across the country.

Fish and Chips

Fish and chips is one of the UK's most important and iconic foods, with cultural, historical, and economic significance. According to research commissioned by the MSC on the British public's favourite seafood dishes, 63% said that fish and chips was their go-to seafood dish. The dish is such a symbol of British culture that during World War II the UK government did not ration fish and chips, unlike other foods, in an effort to boost public morale.

The fish of choice in this dish has a strong regional element within the UK, with diners in northern England and Scotland having a strong preference for haddock, whilst in southern England cod is the more common choice. A large share of the cod and haddock used by UK fish and chip shops is sourced from MSC certified fisheries in Norway and Iceland, alongside other North Atlantic sources.



THE PORTUGUESE COD MARKET AND THE ROLE OF SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY

Portugal relies heavily on imports to meet domestic demand for cod, with Norway being a major supplier of both raw material and processed products. Portugal accounts for roughly 20% of global cod consumption, with approximately 62% sourced from Norway, positioning Portugal as Norway's largest cod export market.[xxiv]

Bacalhau, salted and dried cod, remains central to Portuguese food culture. In 2024, Portugal imported around 88,200 mt of cod valued at 705 million euros, while frozen and desalted products continued to grow alongside more traditional formats.[xxv]

Historically dominated by salted and dried cod (bacalhau salgado seco), which remains the most iconic retail format, the Portuguese cod market has diversified to meet modern needs. The rise of desalted ultra-frozen cod represents a key innovation, catering to convenience-driven lifestyles while retaining the authentic taste and versatility of traditional bacalhau. This shift has driven a gradual transition in consumption patterns, elevating frozen products alongside salted staples.



NORWEGIAN PELAGIC FISHERIES AND MSC CERTIFICATION

Small pelagic fisheries supply seafood for direct human consumption and raw material for fishmeal and fish oil. Their sustainability depends on management that responds to changes in stock abundance and distribution, supported by cooperation where stocks cross national boundaries. The Small Pelagic Yearbook provides a detailed overview of these fisheries, their role in global markets and their engagement with MSC certification, including management challenges facing shared Northeast Atlantic pelagic stocks of Atlantic mackerel, blue whiting and Atlanto-scandian herring.

Historical significance and development

During the nineteenth century, herring fisheries played an important role in the development of coastal fishing centres such as Stavanger and Haugesund. The fisheries supported fishing, processing and related maritime activities, establishing infrastructure and expertise that strengthened these communities as centres of the pelagic sector.[xxvi] From the 1870s, pelagic processing became increasingly industrialised. Sprat fisheries contributed to the growth of Stavanger's canning industry, while industrial processing later expanded to Northern Norway, including the Neptun herring oil factory in Melbu, opened in 1910.[xxvii] These developments reinforced the importance of pelagic fisheries in several coastal regions along the country.[xxviii]

During the twentieth century, Norway's pelagic fisheries developed through changes in fishing methods and fleet organisation. Purse seining and pelagic trawling became central to the sector, enabling vessels to harvest schooling species such as herring, mackerel, blue whiting and capelin.[xxix] This expansion contributed to intense fishing pressure: Atlanto-scandian herring collapsed in the late 1960s, while North Sea herring collapsed during the following decade. A moratorium on fishing for Atlanto-scandian herring was introduced in 1970, while targeted North Sea herring fishery was closed from 1977 to 1983.[xxx]

The collapses contributed to major changes in the regulation and management of Norwegian pelagic fisheries. Today, management is based on catch limits, scientific advice and international negotiations, although agreement on the allocation and sustainable exploitation of shared stocks remains challenging. In 2024, pelagic fish accounted for approximately 54% of total Norwegian landings by volume.[xxxi]

Fun fact

Did you know that in norwegian they use the expression Herring in a barrel when talking about there being a lot of people in one place or cramped etc...



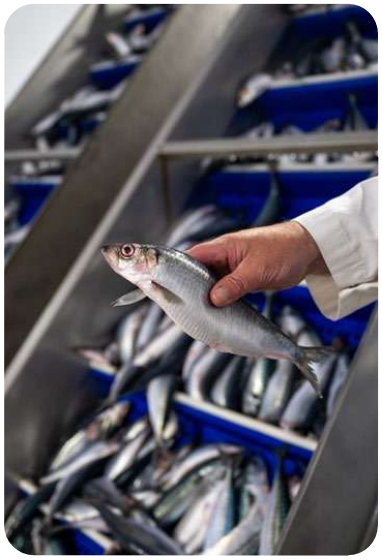
NORWEGIAN MSC CERTIFIED PELAGIC FISHERIES

- Norway North sea herring
- Norway Sandeel and North sea sprat
- The QRILL Company Antarctic Krill

Status of Norwegian small pelagic in the MSC program

Norwegian pelagic fisheries operate across the North Sea, Norwegian Sea and Barents Sea, targeting schooling species such as herring, mackerel, blue whiting and capelin. Many of these stocks migrate across national boundaries, making cooperation between coastal states essential to their management.

MSC certification covers part of this diverse sector, including fisheries for North Sea herring, sandeel and sprat. Other major fisheries, including Northeast Atlantic mackerel, blue whiting and Atlanto-scandian herring, have lost certification following unresolved management challenges (see feature on NEA pelagics, p. 30). Furthermore, some small pelagic stocks can fluctuate considerably from year to year in response to environmental conditions, requiring management that can adapt to rapid changes in stock size and distribution.[xxxii] The following section examines the status of these fisheries and the stock and management issues shaping their engagement with the MSC program.



Herring

The North Sea autumn-spawning herring stock remains in a healthy state, although spawning stock biomass has declined from the higher levels seen in the early 2010s. The latest catch advice is a 38% increase on 2026's advice, reflecting an upward revision in estimated stock size. The EU, Norway and the UK also agreed a long-term management strategy in 2025, setting out predefined rules for adjusting catch limits in response to changes in stock size.[xxxiii] The Norwegian North Sea herring fishery is a longstanding participant in MSC programme, having been certified 2009 (see "Case study: North Sea herring"). The total catches for the Norwegian MSC-certified fishery was 138 160 mt 2024.



Sprat

As a short-lived species, sprat biomass can fluctuate considerably between years. North Sea sprat has been MSC-certified since 2018. As an important prey species in the North Sea ecosystem, sustainable management is therefore particularly important. Despite this natural variability, the stock is currently in a healthy condition. The Norwegian MSC-certified fishery totalled 735 mt in 2024.[xxxiv]



Lesser Sand-eel

North sea sandeel, covering the northern and central North sea and Skagerrak, has been MSC-certified since 2018. The stock is currently subject to a zero-catch recommendation in response to low biomass, demonstrating a precautionary management approach intended to support recovery.[xxxv]



Krill

The QRILL Company's Antarctic krill fishery first achieved MSC certification in 2010 under the name Aker BioMarine. Krill is assessed as a key low-trophic-level species under the MSC Standard, requiring specific consideration of its role as prey for whales, seals and penguins. The company's certified fishery caught 312,000 tonnes during the 2023/2024 fishing season.[xxxvi]



CASE STUDY: NORTH SEA HERRING



Norway's North Sea herring fishery is a longstanding participant in the MSC program, having first achieved certification in 2009. The initial assessment identified a need to better understand and minimise losses from slipped catches, strengthen bycatch monitoring and demonstrate an effective harvest strategy. Addressing these conditions brought the fishing industry, scientists and management authorities together to improve fishing practices and the information available to assess their impacts.

Audits documented practical measures, including marker buoys on purse seines identifying the point beyond which catches could no longer be released, alongside research and monitoring through Norway's reference fleet. Since certification, all four conditions raised at the initial assessment have been closed, together with a subsequent condition on harvest control rules.

International cooperation has also supported the management of the shared stock. Fishing pressure on the shared North Sea herring stock has generally remained at or below the scientific benchmark for sustainable fishing over the past two decades. Building on this experience, Norway, the EU and the UK agreed a long-term management strategy in 2025, evaluated by ICES as precautionary. The strategy sets out rules for adjusting catches as stock conditions change.

Continuous improvement remains central to the MSC programme. Following the latest surveillance audit, a new certification condition requires the fishery to demonstrate that the recently adopted management strategy is achieving its objectives. Together, these efforts show how MSC certification can support improvements on the water, and reinforce the efforts that fisheries make to prioritise sustainable fishing, nested in a well-functioning and cohesive international management framework.



NORTHEAST ATLANTIC PELAGICS; ONGOING CHALLENGES IN NEED OF RESOLUTION

Working together for the future of Northeast Atlantic pelagic fisheries

Atlantic mackerel, blue whiting and Atlanto-scandian herring are economically and environmentally significant species that span national and international waters of the Northeast Atlantic Fisheries Development Commission (NEAFC) – the Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (RFMO) responsible for fisheries management of the NEAFC Regulatory Area. These species support coastal livelihoods, processing industries and international seafood markets for both human consumption and feed meal / fish oil markets. Their future is a shared interest for fishing nations and seafood businesses, with Norway's fishers, scientists and fisheries managers bringing valuable knowledge and experience to this shared task.

Managing a shared resource

Managing stocks that migrate between national waters, and whose distribution changes over time, is complex. Agreeing how fishing opportunities should be shared requires countries to reconcile different perspectives on access and allocation, while considering the livelihoods of their fishing communities.

Yet the consequences of leaving these issues unresolved are clear. Catches of these shared pelagic stocks have repeatedly exceeded scientific advice, contributing to a history of overfishing that puts their long-term productivity at risk. Agreement on an overall catch level is only effective if the quotas allocated between countries collectively remain within it.

The difficulties of reaching agreement deserve recognition, but they also underline the importance of finding a lasting solution. Sharing arrangements need to keep catches within scientific advice while responding to changes in stock distribution, giving fisheries a more secure basis for the future.



Responding to changing stock conditions

New data from the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) shows unilateral quotas for mackerel have resulted in catches exceeding the science by, on average, 32% over the past 10 years. While the latest estimate shows a slight improvement in mackerel stock biomass, the stock remains close to the critical threshold. Continued overfishing could therefore undermine this early sign of improvement and prevent the stock from recovering to safe biological levels.

In recent years, the combined Atlanto-scandian herring catches for all nations fishing the stock are now nearly in line with the recommended total allowable catch (TAC), and blue whiting biomass is currently healthy, but continued overfishing remains a risk. With stocks doing relatively okay from a biomass perspective, now is the time at this year's upcoming coastal states negotiations for negotiating leads to break the political deadlock and secure a comprehensive stock sharing agreement at upcoming 2026 meetings.

Markets and product significance

International markets are decisive for the Norwegian pelagic industry in both volume and value terms. In 2025, pelagic exports recorded the fourth consecutive year of declining volumes, reaching their lowest level since 1992. At the same time, average prices reached record highs. A volume reduction of around 30 percent has largely been offset by price growth, resulting in an export value of NOK 13.1 billion, only marginally below the 2024 record of 13,6 billion NOK. [xxxvii] [xxxviii]

Herring is traditionally processed into frozen, salted and marinated products. Key markets include Europe, Eastern Europe and parts of Africa.



Herring - a Swedish tradition with strong Norwegian ties

Pickled herring, holds a special place in Swedish food culture. Served at Midsummer, Christmas and Easter, it connects generations through recipes ranging from classic onion and mustard to modern flavour combinations. Norwegian-caught herring is widely available to Swedish consumers, linking these traditions to fisheries across the border. According to the Norwegian Seafood Council, Sweden imported around 3,600 tonnes of preserved herring from Norway 2025.

Major brands and retailers are increasingly sourcing MSC-certified North Sea herring, expanding the availability of labelled products on supermarket shelves, with around 1,600 tonnes sold with the MSC label last year.

This demand aligns with the ambitions of the swedish roadmap for a sustainable food supply chain, a Swedish food industry initiative with most of the largest food brands involved, coordinated by WWF. Its seafood goal is for all seafood to be MSC- or ASC-certified, KRAV-labelled or green-listed in the WWF Fish Guide by 2030. For Sweden's much-loved herring, these commitments connect sourcing decisions with the long-term health of the fish stocks on which the tradition depends.



Hollandse Nieuwe - a Dutch tradition rooted in the North Sea

Hollandse Nieuwe is one of the Netherlands' most recognisable seafood traditions. Each June, the first herring of the season marks the start of a national celebration, with consumers enjoying the product at fish stalls, harbours, markets and festive events across the country. It is typically eaten raw-cured rather than cooked. The classic Dutch way is to hold the herring by the tail, tilt the head back and take bites from the fish. It is also very common to eat it cut into pieces, often with finely chopped onions and pickles. At fish stalls, Hollandse Nieuwe is usually served simply and immediately, which is part of its appeal: fresh, seasonal and informal. For many Dutch people, Hollandse Nieuwe is more than a seasonal delicacy; it is part of their cultural heritage.

The story of Hollandse Nieuwe is distinctly Dutch: the product is matured, prepared, traded and enjoyed in the Netherlands, supported by a long-established network of importers, processors, wholesalers and fishmongers. The herring itself comes through an interconnected North Sea and northeast Atlantic supply chain, with fish from several sustainably managed fisheries contributing to the Dutch season. Norway is one part of that network, supplying approximately 10,000 tonnes of MSC-certified herring to the Netherlands. This interconnected supply chain supports a tradition whose character is shaped in the Netherlands, where herring is prepared and enjoyed as Hollandse Nieuwe.

MSC certification helps strengthen that connection. When North Sea herring, including the seasonal Hollandse Nieuwe, carries the MSC label, it gives Dutch consumers confidence that the fish comes from a fishery assessed against a recognised global standard for sustainable fishing. It also gives all countries involved an opportunity to demonstrate how well-managed fisheries can support international seafood traditions and the long-term health of shared fish stocks.



NORWEGIAN CRUSTACEAN FISHERIES AND MSC CERTIFICATION

Norwegian crustacean fisheries comprise a diverse group of species harvested in coastal waters and fjords along the Norwegian coast, as well as offshore grounds in the Skagerrak, the Norwegian Deep and the Barents Sea. Fishing methods include trawls and traps, with shrimp fisheries operating across both coastal and offshore areas and snow crab fishing concentrated on the Norwegian continental shelf in the Barents Sea. The sector includes both long-established fisheries and more recently developed operations, with strong regional variation in target species, fleet structure and economic importance.

Historical significance and development

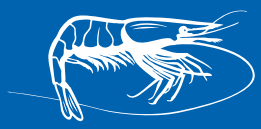
Norway's crustacean fisheries developed around northern shrimp, with commercial interest in the Skagerrak and Oslofjord emerging in the late nineteenth century. Initially small-scale and coastal, shrimp fishing expanded during the twentieth century into a combination of coastal and offshore trawl fisheries. Alongside shrimp, coastal fisheries for brown crab, European lobster and Norway lobster have contributed to the diversity of Norway's crustacean sector, with Norway lobster harvested using both pots and trawls.[xxxix]

More recently, red king crab and commercial snow crab fishing, which began in 2012, have broadened the sector's geographical reach and commercial opportunities in the Barents Sea. This diversity requires management tailored to different species, habitats and fishing methods, addressing selectivity, bycatch and the ecological effects of newly established crab populations.[xl]



NORWEGIAN MSC CERTIFIED CRUSTACEANS FISHERIES

- Norway North East Arctic cold-water prawn
- Norway Barents Sea Arctic snow crab



Main fishing area for Crustacean fisheries



Figure 7. Location of MSC certified Norwegian crustacean fisheries in the North East Arctic (ICES Subareas 1 and 2)



Coldwater prawn

The Norwegian Barents Sea cold-water prawn fishery has been certified since 2012 and stock remains in a healthy condition, with exploitable biomass consistently above biological reference thresholds. However, a recent decline in stock has prompted a reduction in scientific catch advice. Fishing pressure is estimated to have remained below the maximum sustainable yield throughout 1970-2025. In 2024 the catch reached a historical peak at 47 799 mt.[xli]



Snow crab

The Barents Sea snow crab stock has shown strong growth since its establishment and appears to have stabilised in recent years. The Norwegian fishery targeting snow crab was certified in 2024, with a catch of 13 430 mt. Scientific advice supports maintaining relatively stable quotas, reflecting a positive stock status and continued sustainable exploitation.[xlii] (see “Case Study: Snow Crab – The Queen of the Barents Sea”)



CASE STUDY: SNOW CRAB - THE QUEEN OF THE BARENTS SEA



Norway's Barents Sea snow crab fishery presents a distinctive management story: a relatively newly established resource, an uncertain pathway of arrival, and a biological stock spanning two countries' continental shelves. Although the species was initially considered introduced, recent genetic evidence suggests that its presence in the Barents Sea is unlikely to be the result of human activity. The population is now established and self-reproducing. Although the Norwegian and Russian populations form part of the same Barents Sea stock, they are assessed and managed separately on their respective continental shelves.

Management is closely tailored to the species' biology. Harvesting targets large males, protecting females and undersized individuals while retaining sufficient mature males to support reproduction. Scientific stock assessments inform catch advice, while seasonal restrictions are intended to protect crabs during vulnerable periods associated with moulting and shell recovery. Individual vessel quotas, introduced in 2025, marked a further development from the previous shared-quota system.

The Norwegian fishery achieved MSC certification in April 2024 without conditions. Certification nevertheless identified priorities for further improvement, including handling practices, unwanted catches and ghost fishing. Subsequent audits documented published handling guidance and the development of more selective traps. They also recorded the client's confirmation that the requirement for degradable thread in traps, introduced before certification, had been implemented across the fleet.

Snow crab's expanding presence also creates an ongoing scientific challenge. As both a predator on seabed organisms and prey for species such as cod, its role in the ecosystem continues to develop. The case illustrates how species-specific management, scientific assessment and independent certification can support responsible harvesting of an emerging resource while keeping ecological uncertainties and improvement needs in focus.

Snow crab delicacies

In Japan, snow crab is seen as a great delicacy, featured in dishes such as snow crab hot pot (kani-suki), Crab leg hot pot (kani-shabu), grilled crab (yaki-gani) and crab sashimi (kani-sashimi). There are some MSC labelled Norwegian snow crab products by Nichirei, Aeon, and Royal Greenland. Status in the MSC program

In Norway, crab is a great delicacy, often oven cooked and served with herb butter.



Norwegian cold-water prawns from bait to SCANDINAVIAN summer staple

Cold-water prawns have long been part of Norway's seafood portfolio, but their role has changed significantly over time. For centuries, shrimp were abundant and undervalued, more often used as fishing bait than regarded as food for people.

Only in the 20th century did cold-water prawns gain importance as a food product, driven by the rise of commercial fisheries, better cold storage, and improved transport. This transformation reflects a broader shift in Norwegians' relationship with seafood, from necessity to enjoyment.19

Today, prawns are deeply connected to leisure and social life. The simple summer tradition of enjoying fresh peel-it-yourself prawns with white bread and mayonnaise reflects a relaxed, communal way of eating. Unlike more expensive shellfish such as lobster or oysters, Norwegian prawns have remained largely free of class markers, enjoyed across social backgrounds without pretension.

This culture extends beyond Norway, with prawns featured on smørrebrød in Denmark and in the classic Swedish räksmörgås. (reference)



Fun fact

Did you know prawns are hemaphrodites?



NORWAY FISHERY SCORES AND CONDITIONS

Condition status in Norwegian certified fisheries

For the purposes of this section, the term “fishery” refers to a Unit of Certification (UoC). Under the MSC Fisheries Standard, a UoC is the unit entitled to receive an MSC certificate and is defined by the target stock(s), fishing gear type(s), relevant vessel type(s), and the fishing fleets, groups of vessels or fishing operators covered by the certificate.

Since the first Norwegian fishery was certified in 2008, there has been clear progress in addressing certification conditions with a total of 87 UoCs that have made improvements to their practices, successfully closing a substantial number of conditions (Fig. 12).

In total seven currently certified fisheries in Norway have closed conditions during their certification period. One of the longest-standing MSC-certified fisheries in Norway, the Norway Northeast Arctic saithe fishery has closed over 35 conditions since entering the MSC program in 2008. Similarly, the Norway North Sea demersal fishery and the Norway North Sea herring fishery have closed 12 and 10 conditions, respectively. This pattern demonstrates that participation in the MSC program contributes to tangible, on-the-water improvements in fisheries management and on the water practices.

Number of improvements per UoC

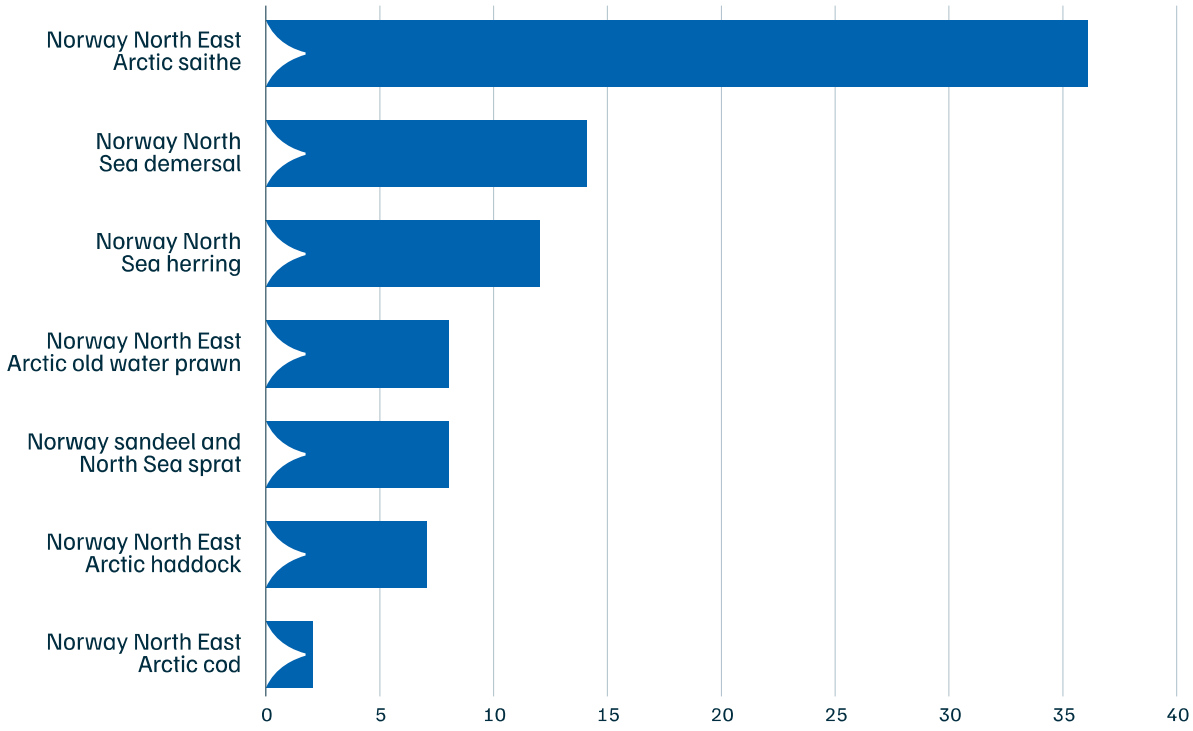


FIGURE 12. Number of improvements completed by currently certified Norwegian fisheries (Units of Certification, UoCs). Improvements represent conditions successfully closed during certification and should not be interpreted as a comparative measure of fishery performance.

The number of conditions closed should not be interpreted as a measure of how well one fishery performs compared with another. Fisheries may enter certification with different numbers and types of conditions, and some may meet the required performance level without conditions in particular areas. Rather, closed conditions indicate improvements made to address specific requirements identified during the MSC assessment process.

Conditions and Improvements by Principle

The distribution of conditions across the MSC principles shows a varied pattern of progress (Fig. 13). While Principle 3 (management) stands out, with 84% of conditions closed, indicating substantial improvements in governance and management systems, progress under Principle 2 (ecosystem impacts) indicates that 60% of conditions remain open, highlighting the need to ensure continual improvement in delivering against conditions within the certification period. For Principle 1 (stock health), progress is good, with roughly half of the conditions closed and half still open, indicating that further improvements are required while momentum is in the right direction.

Number of open/closed improvements per MSC Principle

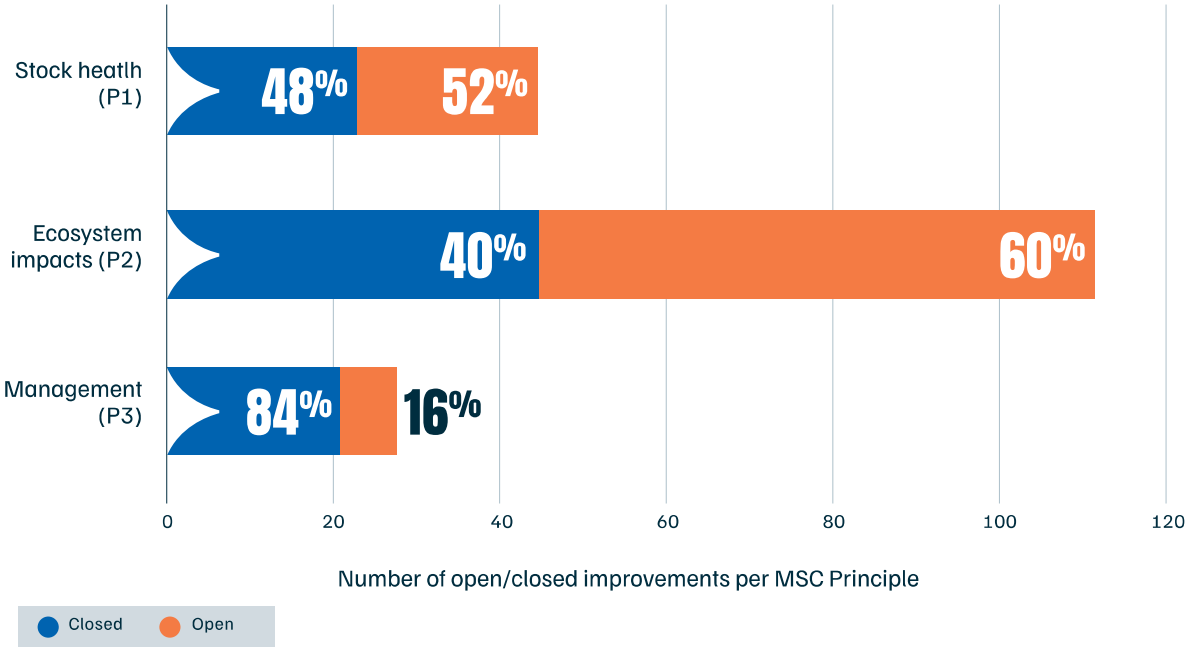


FIGURE 13. Number and proportion of open and closed improvements across the three MSC Principles: stock health (P1), ecosystem impacts (P2) and management (P3) in currently certified Norwegian fisheries.

The distribution of improvements within Principle 2 shows a clear concentration in specific components (Fig. 14). The largest share relates to ETP species (41%), followed by habitats (33%) and bycatch (26%), while no improvements are recorded under the broader ecosystem component. At the same time, the concentration of improvements in these areas indicates that substantial progress has been made in addressing key areas.

Principle 2 Improvements by Components

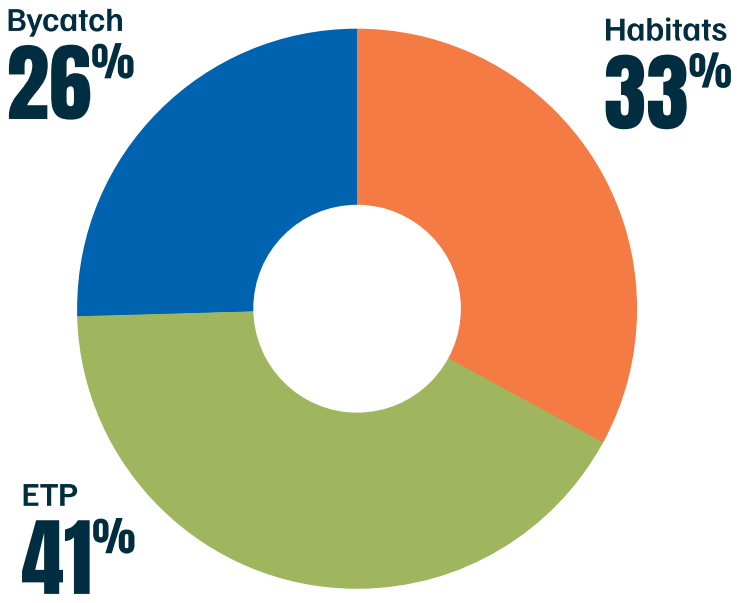


Figure 14. Distribution of improvements in Principle 2 by component, including ETP species, habitats, and bycatch.



THE OCEAN STEWARDSHIP FUND

Ambitious plans to accelerate change

In 2019, the MSC launched the Ocean Stewardship Fund (OSF) to support fisheries on their pathway to sustainability and to invest in new scientific research. 5% of annual royalties from MSC certified product sales are allocated to the fund, which has continued to expand in scope and scale every year since it was started. To date, the MSC's Ocean Stewardship Fund has awarded £9 million to support over 200 fisheries and projects worldwide, including 90 in developing economies. In 2026, the fund awarded projects focused on accelerating at-sea monitoring, developing harvest strategies and control rules and applied research, to support fisheries on their sustainability journey.

The focus of the Ocean Stewardship fund is:

- Healthy fish populations: Supporting science-based management to maintain sustainable fish stocks.
- Protecting marine ecosystems: Reducing environmental impacts of fishing on habitats and marine wildlife.
- Transparent and effective fisheries management: Strengthening monitoring, governance and accountability in fisheries management systems

Several strands of funding are available under the Ocean Stewardship Fund:

- Student Research Grants
- Science and Research Fund
- Recertification Assistance Fund
- Transition Assistance Fund



Recertification Assistance Fund:

Four Norwegian fisheries were awarded a grant under this fund that supports fisheries with long-standing commitments to sustainability and supports fisheries with the cost of Conformity Assessment Body fees for their 2nd and subsequent recertifications.

- Norwegian fisheries that received the OSF Recertification Assistance Fund include:
- Norway North East Arctic Cod Offshore (>12nm) fishery (2023)
- Norway North East Arctic Haddock offshore (>12nm) fishery (2023)
- Norway North Sea herring (2021)
- Norway Spring Spawning herring (2021)

DISCUSSION

Since Norway's first MSC certification in 2008 the programme has grown substantially, expanding from two certified fisheries to more than ten by 2024, with annual certified catches rising from 200,000 mt to 1.1 million mt over the same period. This growth reflects both new entrants to the programme and longstanding participants that have completed multiple recertification cycles, underscoring the durability of certification as a long-term commitment to the MSC program and demonstrating sustainable efforts in fishing operations.

That commitment has translated into measurable, on-the-water change. Certified fisheries have implemented 87 improvements to their practices across the MSC's three principles. Progress has been strongest under Principle 3 (management), where 84% of conditions have been closed, reflecting the strength Norway already brings to fisheries governance. While progress has been more gradual under Principle 2 (ecosystem impacts), where 60% of conditions remain open, improvements are tangible with continued efforts to close further conditions over time. Principle 1 (stock health) has roughly half its conditions closed and half still open. Taken together, these patterns show a programme with real momentum, just one where ecosystem-level improvements take greater efforts to address, but where sector commitment is strong.

Shifting stock distributions under changing ocean conditions, alongside the complexity of managing stocks shared across multiple nations, mean that certification outcomes are influenced as much by international cooperation and political agreement as by fishery-level performance. Therefore, progress within the MSC program depends not only on the efforts of individual fisheries, but on the wider governance and management context in which they operate.

Norway's position as one of the world's leading seafood exporters, underpinned by MSC-certified supply to markets such as the UK and Portugal — means that certification outcomes in Norway have impacts well beyond its own waters. As global markets and rising consumer demand increasingly expect verified evidence of sustainable sourcing, the credibility of independent, third-party certification continues to have a meaningful role to play in assuring markets on the sustainability of fisheries, particularly in export markets.

The partnership between Norwegian fisheries and the MSC held over two decades of certification remains strong, despite headwinds which are characteristic in managing a wild, natural resource. Ongoing complexity of international stock management, combined with an increasingly challenging political and environmental landscape, reinforce the need for strong partnerships to face these headwinds together. Ultimately, as the operating environment for fisheries grows more complex, sustained engagement between standards and fisheries becomes ever more important — with each playing a distinct role in working towards long-term, sustainable fisheries that embody the distinctive culture and leadership of Norway.



ANNEX

Other Resources:

For a broader global perspective, see the MSC Sustainable Whitefish Yearbook 2025.

CERTIFIED FISHERIES (as of August 2026)

Certificate:	Norway North East Arctic cod
Certified:	26 Apr 2010 - 13 Dec 2026
Target species:	Atlantic cod (*Gadus morhua*)
Location:	FAO area 27 ICES subareas 1 and 2, Norwegian coastal zone (<12nm)
Method:	Seine Nets, Gillnets, Bottom trawls, Longlines, Hooks And Lines

Certificate:	Norway North East Arctic haddock
Certified:	26 Apr 2010 - 13 Dec 2026
Target species:	Haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*)
Location:	FAO area 27 ICES subareas 1 and 2, Norwegian coastal zone (<12nm)
Method:	Longlines, Gillnets, Hooks And Lines, Bottom trawls, Seine Nets

Certificate:	Norway North East Arctic saithe
Certified:	16 Jun 2008 – 16 Dec 2028
Target species:	Saithe (=*Pollock*) (*Pollachius virens*)
Location:	FAO area 27 ICES Subareas 1 and 2
Method:	Gillnets, Surrounding Nets, Hooks And Lines, Bottom trawls, Seine Nets

Certificate:	Norway North Sea demersal
Certified:	16 Jun 2008 - 13 Jun 2029 13 Jun 2029
Target species:	European hake (Merluccius merluccius), Haddock (Melanogrammus aeglefinus), Saithe(=Pollock) (Pollachius virens)
Location:	FAO Area 27 Atlantic Northeast, North Sea ICES Area IV & IIIa
Method:	Gillnets, Surrounding Nets, Hooks and Lines, Bottom and midwater trawl, Seine Nets, Traps, purse seine

Certificate:	Norway North Sea herring
Certified:	30 Apr 2009 – 30 Jan 2030
Target species:	Atlantic herring (Clupea harengus)
Location:	FAO area 27 North Sea, ICES Division 4
Method:	Midwater trawls, purse seine

Certificate:	Norway sandeel and North Sea sprat
Certified:	23 Feb 2018 – 23 Feb 2028
Target species:	European sprat (Sprattus sprattus) and Lesser sand-eel (Ammodytes marinus)
Location:	FAO Area 27 Atlantic, Northeast, ICES 3a, 4a, 4b, ICES 4
Method:	Midwater trawls, bottom trawls, purse seine

Certificate:	Norway Barents Sea snow crab
Certified:	8 Apr 2024 – 6 Apr 2029
Target species:	Snow crab (Chionocetes opilio)
Location:	FAO Area 27 Atlantic Northeast, Barents Sea
Method:	Traps - pots

Certificate:	Norway beaked redfish
Certified:	25 Jan 2023 – 24 Jan 2028
Target species:	Beaked redfish (Sebastes mentella)
Location:	FAO Area 27 Barents Sea and Norwegian Sea, ICES Subareas 1 and 2 North East Arctic
Method:	Trawls – mainly semipelagic but also demersal

Certificate:	The QRILL Company Antarctic Krill
Certified:	15 Jun 2010
Target species:	Antarctic krill (Euphausia superba)
Location:	FAO Area 48 Southern Ocean, Antarctic Atlantic sector (CCAMLR Area 48)
Method:	Trawls - Midwater trawls: Pelagic Trawl using own Eco-Harvesting System

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Designed by Laura C. Corbilla

All data in this report is correct as of 1 October 2026, unless otherwise stated

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