

Landing the blame: Overfishing in deep sea waters

Uncovering the countries most responsible
for overfishing in EU waters

Fisheries ministers risk damaging our natural resources by consistently fishing over and above the limits recommended by scientists. Deep sea fisheries are the focus of the second in our briefings series to identify which countries are standing in the way of more fish, profits and jobs for European citizens.

Deep sea fish species tend to grow slower, mature later, live longer and spawn fewer offspring than most other species. As such, deep sea populations are particularly vulnerable to overfishing. Several deep sea fish stocks in EU waters are currently being managed below their potential; producing fewer fish than if they were allowed to recover. Allowing EU fish stocks to return to their maximum sustainable yield (MSY) could deliver food for an additional 160 million EU citizens; an extra €3.2 billion in annual revenue and up to 100,000 jobs across the continent.¹

Fishing limits vs. scientific advice

Every year fisheries ministers have an opportunity to make this a reality when they agree how much fish should be caught in EU waters – the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for each commercial fish stock. Scientific bodies like the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) provide information about the state of most stocks and recommend maximum catch levels.

But for many years scientific advice has not been given the attention it deserves. Between 1987 and 2011 TACs were set higher than scientific recommendations in 68% of decisions; and 33% above scientifically recommended levels on average.² In 2012, 15 out of 69 stocks had TACs which were above scientific advice (ICES)³ rising to 30 out of 58 in 2013.⁴

The reformed Common Fisheries Policy that entered into force in 2014 aims to restore and maintain populations of fish stocks, with the ultimate goal to restore and maintain biomass above levels capable to produce the maximum sustainable yield (MSY). The corresponding fishing mortality is to be achieved by 2015 where possible and by 2020 at the latest for all stocks. Following scientific advice and ensuring full accountability with recorded catches is essential if we are to achieve this goal, end overfishing and restore fish stocks to healthy levels.

Agreements behind closed doors

Ministers' negotiations at the Fisheries Council are not public, only their outcomes. This lack of

transparency means it is not possible to identify those ministers that ignore scientific advice and give priority to opaque short-term interests risking the health of fish stocks for future generations.

The Landing the Blame briefing series reveals which member states and ministers are behind decisions that go against the EU public's

collective interest. We do this by analysing the outcome of the negotiations, estimating which member states end up with a higher share of stocks fished above scientific advice. We can assume these countries are the main drivers of overfishing either because they are actively pushing for fishing limits to be set above scientific advice or by failing to prevent it.

Table 1. Deep Sea TACs with fishing limits above scientific advice

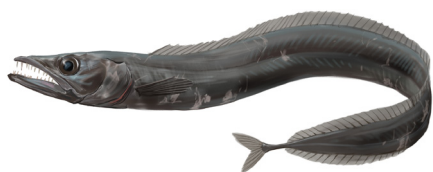
Fishing Total Allowable Catch	Scientific advice (tonnes)	TAC agreed by ministers (tonnes)	Difference (tonnes)	Difference (%)	Member States with largest share
Black scabbardfish (I,II,III,IV, V, VI, VII, XII, VIII, IX, X)	5894	7358	1464	25%	Portugal (48%), France (42%)
Alfonsinos (I,II,III,IV, V, VI, VII, IX, X, XII, XIV)	280	296	16	6%	Portugal (65%), Spain (23%)
Roundnose grenadier (III)	0	435	435	N/a	Denmark (95%), Sweden (5%)
Roundnose grenadier (VIII, IX, X, XII)	1606	2901	1295	81%	Spain (72%), Poland (22%), France (3%)
Red seabream (VI, VII, VIII)	0	169	169	N/a	Spain (83%), UK (10%), France (4%)
Red seabream (IX)	115	374	259	225%	Spain (79%), Portugal (21%)
Red seabream (X)	400	690	290	73%	Portugal (98%), Spain (1%), UK (1%)
Greater forkbeard (I, II, III, IV)	34	37	3	9%	UK (42%), Germany (29%), France (29%)
Greater forkbeard (V, VI, VII)	2239	2434	195	9%	UK (40%), Spain (29%), France (18%)
Greater forkbeard (VIII, IX)	295	320	25	8%	Spain (91%), France (6%), Portugal (4%)
Greater forkbeard (X, XII)	60	65	5	8%	Portugal (67%), France (17%), UK (17%)

Deep Sea results

In the November 2014 Council, ministers agreed fishing limits for 2015-16 for twenty Total Allowable Catches (TACs) including the six species described in table 2. Twelve nations will have access to these stocks: Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Spain, France, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, United Kingdom.

Of the sixteen TACs that can be compared to scientific advice, eleven have been set above scientific recommendations. Red sea bream and black scabbardfish stand out as the two species for which fishing limits exceeded scientific advice by the largest margin. Scientific advice was only followed to renew the zero TAC for orange roughy stocks and for two stocks of roundnose grenadier.

Table 2. Deep sea fish species



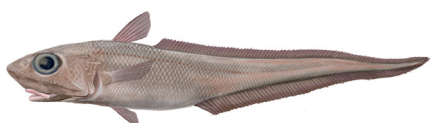
Black scabbardfish
(*Aphanopus carbo*)



Alfonsinos
(*Beryx decadactylus*)



Roundnose grenadier
(*Coryphaenoides rupestris*)



Roughead grenadier
(*Macrourus berglax*)



Red seabream
(*Pagellus bogaraveo*)



Greater forkbeard
(*Phycis blennoides*)

The Overfishing League table

Spain, Portugal and France top the ranking of deep sea overfishing because they have the highest share of stocks that will be fished above scientific advice. The contribution of each member state to overfishing of deep sea stocks is summarised in Table 3.

Not just the amount, but the method

There are ways of catching fish that deliver more jobs and have a significantly lower environmental impact than others. Of all fishing practices, EU data suggests that trawling is among the lowest in terms of number of jobs sustained per tonne of fish; whereas methods such as long lining sustain many more jobs and are not as harmful to the environment and marine ecosystems.

This is particularly relevant for these results because while Portugal ranks second in the overfishing league (Table 2), it is mainly small-scale bottom long-liners that catch the black scabbardfish quota in Portugal, supporting many jobs in Madeira, Azores and Sesimbra. France instead catches most of its deep sea quota with trawlers and supports six times fewer jobs per tonne landed than the Portuguese black scabbardfish.⁵

Table 3. The overfishing league table

Member State	Government representative present at Council	Quota set above scientific advice (tonnes)
Spain	Ms Isabel García Tejerina	1,405
Portugal	Mr José Diogo Albuquerque, Mr Manuel Pinto De Abreu	1,054
France	Mr Stéphane Le Foll, Mr Alain Vidalies	700
Denmark	Mr Ole Toft	412
Poland	Mr Marek Sawicki	291
UK	Mr Rupert Mauley, Mr Richard Lochhead	148
Ireland	Mr Simon Coveney	54
Latvia	Mr Juris Št. Imeistars	43
Germany	Mr Christian Schmidt	22
Sweden	Mr Sven-Erik Bucht	21
Estonia	Mr Ivari Padar, Mr Clyde Kull	4
Lithuania	Ms Virginija Baltraitien	2

In this example, Portugal is more efficient than France in delivering economic, social and environmental value out of its deep-sea quota, but these benefits can only be maintained by ensuring fish stocks return to their maximum sustainable yield and supporting fishing limits that follow scientific advice.

Critical decisions ahead

Fisheries ministers will meet again in December 15–16 to agree 2015 fishing limits for the majority of commercial fish stocks in European waters. NEF will monitor the negotiations and replicate

this analysis to identify which nations are working in the public interest versus those that are willing to jeopardise responsible management of one of Europe's most vital public resources.

Endnotes

1. <http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/entry/jobs-lost-at-sea>
2. <https://www.york.ac.uk/environment/our-staff/callum-roberts/>
3. http://www.seafish.org/media/Publications/SeafishSummary_TACs2012_ICESAdvice_201201.pdf
4. http://www.seafish.org/media/764975/seafishsummary_tacs2013_icesadvice_201302.pdf
5. <http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/entry/deep-trouble>

ANNEX

Fishing Total Allowable Catch	Scientific advice	TAC agreed by ministers	TAC change from advice	Denmark	Germany	Estonia	Spain	France	Ireland	Latvia	Lithuania	Poland	Portugal	Sweden	United Kingdom
Black scabbardfish (I,II,III,IV, V, VI, VII, XII, VIII, IX, X)	5,894	7,358	1,464	0	9	4	45	612	22	28	0	0	699	0	44
Alfonsinos (I,II,III,IV, V, VI, VII, IX, X, XII, XIV)	280	296	16	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	10	0	0
Roundnose grenadier (I, II, IV)	120	13	-107	-8	-8	0	0	-82	0	0	0	0	0	0	-8
Roundnose grenadier (III)	0	435	435	412	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	0
Roundnose grenadier (Vb, VI, VII)	3,952	3,794	-158	0	0	-2	-3	-130	-10	0	-3	-2	0	0	-8
Roundnose grenadier (VIII, IX, X, XII)	1,606	2,901	1,295	0	8	0	931	43	2	15	2	291	0	0	4
Orange roughy (VI)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Orange roughy (VII)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Orange roughy (I, II, III, IV, V, VIII, IX, X, XII, XIV)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Red seabream (VI, VII, VIII)	0	169	169	0	0	0	140	7	5	0	0	0	0	0	18
Red seabream (IX)	115	374	259	0	0	0	204	0	0	0	0	0	55	0	0
Red seabream (X)	400	690	290	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	285	0	3
Greater forkbeard (I, II, III, IV)	34	37	3	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Greater forkbeard (V, VI, VII)	2,239	2,434	195	0	1	0	57	34	25	0	0	0	0	0	78
Greater forkbeard (VIII, IX)	295	320	25	0	0	0	23	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Greater forkbeard (X, XII)	60	65	5	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	0	1
Net contribution to overfishing by member state				404	14	2	1,403	488	43	43	-1	290	1,054	21	132
Quota above scientific advice (tonnes)				412	22	4	1,405	700	54	43	2	291	1,054	21	148

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