

BUSINESSES CALL TIME ON UNSUSTAINABLE FISHING

GLOBAL BRANDS CALL FOR POLITICAL ACTION ON PRIZED PELAGICS



Major commercial retailers and supply-chain businesses are asking fisheries ministers to turn the tide on more than a decade of unsustainable decision-making—for our most prized pelagic fisheries, and our plates. **Dr Tom Pickerell**, Executive Director of The North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group (NAPA), explores the difficulties facing iconic commercial stocks in the Northeast Atlantic, and throws light on how the marketplace is holding ministers to account.

For the past year, over €802 million of global commercial retail and supply-chain power has worked across the Northeast Atlantic to push coastal nations to make more sustainable decisions for our seas. The new voice of supply-chain advocacy, the North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group (NAPA), represents an unprecedented coalition of global business leverage, calling explicitly for long-term, sustainable management of commercially



important pelagic stocks.

Why? Business can see governments across the world repeating the mistakes of the past in fisheries management—and whole ocean ecosystems are at risk. In the Northeast Atlantic—one of the richest and best understood areas for fishing in the world—even the most highly valued stocks are, in the absence of coordinated management, at risk of being overfished.

For more than a decade, three globally important fish stocks—Northeast Atlantic mackerel, Atlanto-Scandian herring, and Northeast Atlantic blue whiting—have been harvested at levels in excess of scientific advice. The Coastal States responsible for their management—the EU, UK, Norway, Iceland, The Faroes, Greenland, and Russia—have failed to agree a multilateral management agreement.

In 2019, the Marine Stewardship Council's (MSC) blue tick assurance of sustainability was suspended from the mackerel fishery, with Atlanto-Scandian herring and blue whiting certifications suspended the following year. This has had far-reaching implications for the global marketplace—the businesses that rely on robust fisheries management and sustainable stocks to meet their own commitments to consumers, the environment, and to protect business security.

We are beginning to see major retailers and manufacturers in Europe start to source MSC-certified sustainable jack mackerel from Chile as an alternative to Northeast Atlantic mackerel. Unlike Northeast Atlantic mackerel, the Chilean jack mackerel is sustainably managed: the 15 nations catching jack mackerel in the South Pacific Ocean have been able to agree on a sustainable quota allocation in line with scientific advice.



Irrespective of the complexities surrounding the joint management of these three stocks, NAPA's mission is simple: to work together, as a group of over 50 businesses that represent the majority of pelagic purchasing power in the region, and advocate clearly and unequivocally for long-term sustainable management of mackerel, Atlanto-Scandian herring, and blue whiting.

How is NAPA holding ministers to account?

NAPA has innovated a novel Fisheries Improvement Project (FIP) to start the clock on a 3-year countdown to certification-ready fisheries for mackerel and Atlanto-Scandian herring. A new take on a traditional FIP, the NAPA policy FIP¹, will run until 2024, providing a time-bound business plan to seek improvements in management of mackerel and herring through commercial pressure.

Whilst traditional FIPs focus on the need to enact data collection, reduce bycatch, or rebuild stocks, NAPA's construct acknowledges that these pelagic stocks are in the unusual position of being data-rich, well-understood, 'clean' fisheries that are not yet overfished. The barriers to enacting sustainable management therefore solely relate to decision-making and political will—hence the FIP's 'policy' focus.

In parallel, NAPA has also developed a similar tool to drive improvements into the third key pelagic stock under its remit: Northeast Atlantic blue whiting. In contrast to mackerel and

herring, both favoured for human consumption, blue whiting is an important 'feed fish', used within salmon aquaculture production. NAPA's FIP for blue whiting² is therefore structured around the MarinTrust Improver Programme (IP)—a unique international certification programme for marine feed ingredients.

NAPA's approach for driving political action towards responsive, precautionary decision-making and adherence to sustainable catch levels is to use commercial leverage to pursue three main goals:

1. Address allocations

The Coastal States should prioritize resolving the allocation issues around these stocks and consider a formal dispute resolution mechanism.

2. Follow the scientific advice

The Coastal States should ensure that the overall catch for each stock does not exceed the scientific advice.

3. Implement long-term management plans

Multi-annual management that includes stable sharing arrangements and precautionary harvest strategies should be the underlying approach by default.

The improvement plans act as tools for NAPA to push for progress against these goals.

To highlight the consequences of inaction, NAPA partners, including Young's Seafood, Morrisons, Skretting, Cargill, and Asda, have published public sourcing statements³ setting out the repercussions, should Coastal States fail to agree. More than 20 companies have said they will review their sourcing; eight will cease sourcing from these fisheries altogether; seven will only source from Coastal States acting 'responsibly'; and five have noted the negative business impacts they would face.

We're beginning to see tangible evidence that NAPA's advocacy efforts are paying off. In 2022, in response to pressure from NAPA, the catching sector, and NGOs, the Coastal States agreed some positive steps. For example, for mackerel, they set their own deadline of 31st March 2023 to reach a sharing agreement. This is highly significant and NAPA will be holding them to this.

NAPA is a case study for a market-led approach to robustly managed fisheries. The global supply chain has exposed the need for meaningful change by 2024. The clock is ticking. ●

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Further reading

The North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group (NAPA)
<https://www.seafish.org/responsible-sourcing/uk-fisheries-management-and-supply-chain-initiatives/north-atlantic-pelagic-advocacy-group/>

¹ <https://www.seafish.org/document/?id=4583d9d1-0e01-4cd9-87b2-f42b54d5e3e3>

² <https://www.marin-trust.com/ne-atlantic-blue-whiting-fip>

³ <https://www.seafish.org/document/?id=3352bee2-34c1-4eae-986f-aa7c8ab8f122>