

North Sea Advisory Council



NSAC Advice Ref. 03-1920 **NSAC Advice on Seabass**

This paper was approved by the NSAC Executive Committee on the 10th December 2019 via fast-track written procedure.

Background

The NWWAC and NSAC engaged in a joint Focus Group meeting on the 4th of September to discuss advice to the Commission on potential conservation measures in 2020 in both commercial and recreational fisheries, to aid the recovery of sea bass stocks. At the Executive Committee meeting held on Thursday, 19th September 2019, the NSAC discussed a draft Advice on Seabass proposed by the NWWAC. It has been recognised that in order to give the NSAC members an opportunity to present their opinion and yet not hinder and/or lengthen NWWAC's drafting process, a separate advice should be produced by the NSAC. An underlying premise of this advice is a broad support of the NWWAC paper.

Recommendation

The NSAC recognises that catches of bass in the North Sea are a relatively small component in the total catch of the stock, most of which is taken in western waters. For this reason, we have closely watched the evolution of the advice being prepared by the North WWAC and we write in broad support of the approach adopted there.

The significant reduction in fishing mortality that has been achieved through painful management measures since 2016 is very welcome as is ICES' confirmation, in its recent



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advice, that the stock is fished below F_{msy} . Nevertheless, the biomass has a considerable way to go before it could be considered to be within safe limits, or close to the MSY reference point.

Against this background, the NSAC advocates no change to the current management regime, apart from exploring how fish currently killed and discarded, as unavoidable bycatch in the trawl fishery, could be retained as landed catch, without increasing the overall mortality.



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