



SPSG

Scottish Pelagic Sustainability Group

Mackerel fact sheet

North East Atlantic mackerel quota shares and the work towards a sustainable fishery

Background

The setting of unilateral quotas for North-east Atlantic mackerel first began in 2013-14 when Iceland self-awarded itself a unilateral catch allowance outwith any international coastal states agreement, and without having any historical track record in the mackerel fishery. Over the intervening period, Russia and Greenland have followed suit, and the situation was compounded further when both Norway and the Faroe Islands decided to unilaterally increase their mackerel quotas by 55% for 2021.

The end result for 2021 is a 42% overshoot of unilateral TACs (total allowable catch) above the ICES recommended advice. In reality, the catch is likely to be well below this figure, as the countries that have set unilateral TACs have consistently been unable to catch their self-allocation.

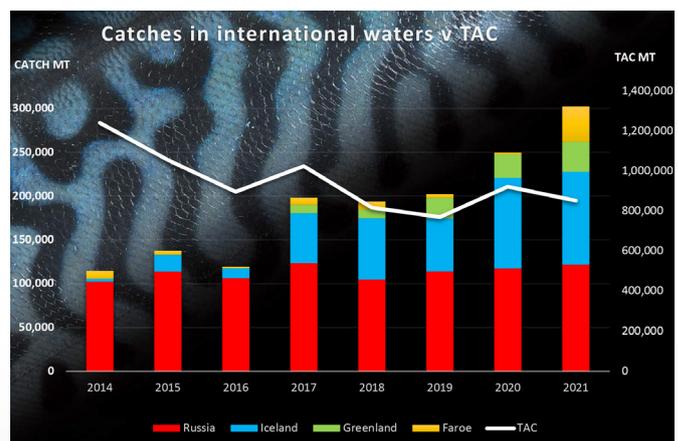
The behaviour of these northern states contrasts starkly with the UK and EU, who have both maintained their traditional share of the catch within multilateral coastal states agreement and have not embarked upon any unilateral increases. The UK also catches all its mackerel quota in its Exclusive Economic Zone (territorial waters) and none in international waters. Prior to 2019, the mackerel fishery was Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certified, but this has now been suspended due to the unilateral actions of these rogue coastal states.

Furthermore, Iceland, Faroe and Greenland have all been unable to catch the quotas they awarded themselves in 2021, even after intensive fishing in international waters. It is worth noting that the Faroese have used 14% of their self-allocated

mackerel quota to buy whitefish quota from Russia. In other words, their unilateral increase is being used to create 'currency' to buy other quota.

In summary

- TAC in overall decline over time.
- Catches in international waters increasing over time and in 2021 at around 300,000 mt accounted for 35% of the 2021 TAC.
- Catches under unilateral arrangement in 2021 totalled 647,109 mt, accounting for 76% of the 2021 TAC.



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UK facts

- The UK has maintained its traditional share of the catch based on a long-standing historical participation in the fishery.
- All mackerel caught is in the UK EEZ and not international waters.
- The UK has not set a unilateral TAC for mackerel.
- UK fishers are committed to conservation and sustainable catching, and are engaged in a range of scientific work, including self-sampling programmes under the auspices of science/industry partnerships. The aim of these initiatives is to gain greater understanding of the North East Atlantic mackerel stock, which can be used in ICES stock assessments and TAC recommendations.
- The UK Industry is opposed to the use of transshipping to facilitate increased high seas catches – due to lack of adequate control measures.
- The UK industry favours maintaining closed areas to allow for juvenile protection of mackerel (since the early 1980s the UK has been a leader in establishing this, as evidenced by the SW Mackerel Box).
- The UK has not engaged in quota swapping or access agreements with countries that have established unilateral TACs.

The position of the Scottish Pelagic Sustainability Group

The Scottish Pelagic Sustainability Group (SPSG) was established in 2006 and represents all sectors of Scotland's pelagic industry, including catching, processing and marketing. SPSG was established to oversee the certification of its main fisheries to the Marine Stewardship Council eco-label standard and is currently driving forward a number of other sustainability initiatives, including the science work already mentioned.

With regards to the current mackerel situation, SPSG is calling for:

- A 10% cap on mackerel catches set in international waters.
- Catching opportunity to be based on zonal attachment and the availability of mackerel stocks in each coastal state's EEZ, and on long-term historical record, and set within ICES recommendations.
- The cessation of the setting of unilateral quotas outwith international agreement.
- A pledge from seafood suppliers that they will continue to source UK mackerel, given that the UK fishing fleet is catching mackerel responsibly and is committed to the sustainability of the fishery.

