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NWWAC ADVICE

On the Communication from the Commission “Sustainable fishing in the EU: state of play and orientations for 2026” COM(2025) 296 final and on the ICES advice published on June 27th, 2025

28 August 2025

1. Background

The North Western Waters Advisory Council (NWWAC) exchanged views with reference to the ICES presentation of scientific advice for fish stocks in the North Western Waters (NWW) for 2026 and the Communication COM(2025) 296 from DG MARE at the meetings of the NWWAC Working Groups and Executive Committee in Vigo on 2-4 July 2025.

Having collected the main inputs from these discussions, the NWWAC Focus Group Landing Obligation addressed in more detail the content of COM(2025) 296. The implications for the fishing opportunities for each NWW stock for 2026 following the scientific advice, article 2(2) of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and the negotiations with the UK were discussed.

This resulted in the development of this advice which represents the NWWAC’s main contribution to the Commission for their work towards negotiating fishing opportunities with the UK for the majority of these stocks before proposing fishing opportunities in the North Western Waters for 2026 to the Council.

Given that ICES will issue advice for several stocks in the autumn, the NWWAC will consider options on how to provide recommendations on these remaining stocks, once the advice has been released.

2. Progress in achieving sustainable fishing in the EU

The NWWAC recognises and welcomes the long-term progress made towards more sustainable EU fisheries as reflected in the Commission’s Communication COM(2025) 296. Members are especially pleased to read that the Commission reports that on average the latest results in the North-East Atlantic indicate evolutions with fishing mortality and stock biomass in line with the objectives of the CFP.

However, the NWWAC notes that the positive communication from the Commission on the status of the stocks in the NWW is in stark contrast to the ICES advice for 2026 for many stocks. Also, the ICES advice is often in contrast to what fishers experience on the ground. Specific examples will be provided under chapter 8 of this document.

The NWWAC continues to highlight the critical need for quality assurance in the ICES advice. The AC greatly appreciates the effort ICES has made in addressing this issue, including the adoption of a new Advisory Plan in 2019¹. It also notes that, as part of their quality assurance system, ICES has established the Transparency Assessment Framework (TAF). However, the AC believes that more effort is needed to achieve the full implementation of the ICES quality assurance system as some of the advice provided remains overly precautionary and out of line on what fishers see on the fishing grounds. Specifically, advice for category 5 and 6 stocks, lacking the necessary data, risks completely contradictory to the actual state of the stocks and is therefore as good as of no use to managers.

The NWWAC re-emphasises that its members experience climate change as an impact on the environmental circumstances on the fishing grounds and accordingly on the reference points to assess the state of the fish stocks. The NWWAC therefore encourages scientific bodies to investigate how environmental changes are impacting recruitment and stock dynamics. It also recommends that managers request ICES to prioritise work on climate change impacts on key stocks, as fisheries impact alone is no longer sufficient to explain some observed declines in fishing opportunities.

In line with all the above the AC reiterates the need to better integrate fishers' local knowledge and observations into the development of scientific advice, ensuring a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of the current stock status. For several stocks, as reported in chapter 8, the advice does not reflect fishers' perception of these stocks on fishing grounds.

3. State of the EU fleet

Referring to the EU fleet capacity and its balance with fishing opportunities, the Communication COM(2025) 296 reports that the Commission has continued concerns on:

- (1) the accuracy and reliability of engine power declarations by Member States
- (2) the data underpinning the national reports, and
- (3) the existence or effectiveness of Member States Action Plans required under article 22 of the CFP Regulation.

In the NWWAC response to the consultation on the evaluation of the CFP², the AC questions the relevance of the basis used to set vessel capacity ceilings (gross tonnage (GT) and engine power (kW)). In order to reach the CFP's sustainability objectives these criteria should serve to facilitate decarbonisation of the fleet as well as improving safety, working conditions and environmental sustainability. This is also highlighted in the 2023 NWWAC advice on the Commission's Communication on the Energy Transition of the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture sector (COM(2023) 100)³ and the 2025 NWWAC advice on the Energy Transition Partnership for EU Fisheries and

¹ ICES. 2019. Advisory Plan. <http://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.5468>

² NWWAC Advice on the CFP Regulation Evaluation ([link](#))

³ NWWAC advice on the Communication from the Commission "On the Energy Transition of the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture sector" COM(2023) 100 final ([link](#))

Aquaculture⁴. It is a shared opinion among the EU fishing industry that restrictions on vessel capacity hinder energy transition, especially concerning modifications to vessels and the installation of technologies that minimise the sector's environmental footprint.

When considering the implementation of article 22 the AC recommends an assessment of whether the different fleet segments have enough potential to use their fishing opportunities to ensure the supply to the EU food production value chain and to remain economically viable.

4. Socio-Economic Performance

The NWWAC believes that further efforts are necessary to ensure that all individuals involved in the industry, including the younger generation and women, can enjoy a fair standard of living, secure income, and safe working environments. It is particularly important to create conditions that attract and retain young people in the sector, offering them opportunities for career development (i.e. training courses), fair pay, and job security. This is vital not only to address the aging demographic of the industry but also to ensure the sector can meet the challenges of the future. The NWWAC highlights that these innovations could lead to further costs, including the need to invest in new vessels or equipment. Given the current financial challenges within the industry, many fishers may choose to exit the sector rather than adopt expensive and complex technologies. There are also unresolved safety and capacity issues that may arise with the introduction of new technologies.⁵ Enhancing investments supports for integrating modern technology, sustainable innovations, and digital advancements on board will not only enhance safety and better data collection but also increase the sector's appeal to the young generation.⁶

5. Landing Obligation

The NWWAC highlights that avoiding choke issues remains one of the biggest challenges for the landing obligation in mixed NWW fisheries. The AC acknowledges that avoiding and minimising unwanted catches is key to improving selectivity and continues to pursue this objective. However, even with improvements in selectivity the ICES advice for fishing opportunities 2026 creates serious challenges to comply with the landing obligation.

There is the zero-catch advice for cod 7a, cod 7e-k, haddock 7b-k, and whiting 7bc,e-k, as well as significant decrease in the advice for several stocks in the NWW (for example haddock 6b, haddock 7a, lemon sole 7d, plaice 7d, saithe, whiting 7a), posing significant challenges to the avoidance of choke situations. The NWWAC recommends reconsidering this principle and looking more closely at the possibility of stock recovery instead.

Additionally, and as mentioned earlier, stocks assessed as category 5 and 6 (e.g. Rockall cod) lead to highly precautionary advice resulting in low quotas regardless of the state of the stocks. Such advice is not fit for purpose and ICES need to reconsider the utility of providing such advice,

⁴ NWWAC advice on the Energy Transition Partnership for EU Fisheries and Aquaculture ([link](#))

⁵ NWWAC feedback to future fisher profiles by the "Fishers of the Future" foresight study ([link](#))

⁶ NSAC/NWWAC Advice on Generational Renewal ([link](#))

given the choke issues it creates. This is one of the examples where individual stock advice is not in line with mixed fisheries reality.

Whilst the NWWAC appreciates the management principle used in preceding years, it is acknowledged that setting bycatch TACs for zero catch advice stocks is not addressing the MSY objective. The NWWAC fully accepts that directed fishery on stocks with repetitive zero-catch advice remains prohibited, but to address the choke risk of prematurely closing fisheries the NWWAC sees no other solution than the setting of a bycatch TAC. Bycatch TACs remain the only option to address closing fisheries due to zero-catch advice stocks in 2026.

In addition, the NWWAC approves of the quota-exchange pool as mentioned in the Fishing Opportunities Regulations since 2019 to cover unavoidable bycatches by Member States that have no quota for such stocks. This both covers stocks in mixed fisheries for which certain Member States have no quota and stocks with zero catch advice for which – as described above – catch provisions must be considered to avoid premature closures of mixed fisheries. The NWWAC suggests considering using this measure in other situations where it may be applicable.

In June 2023, the AC developed advice⁷ identifying scenarios where the implementation of the LO is impracticable and where alternative approaches are needed. We acknowledge the recent publication of the European Commission's report, "*Study Supporting the Evaluation of the Landing Obligation – Common Fisheries Policy – Final Report*," and note that the NWWAC contributed by providing its responses to the Deloitte questionnaire associated with this study⁸.

6. Main messages and orientations for 2026 fishing opportunities proposals in preparation for EU-UK bilateral consultations

Because of Brexit, the bilateral consultations with the UK have become a key step towards setting Fishing Opportunities for more than 85 shared fish stocks, the majority of which are in the NWW. The NWWAC wishes to emphasise the vital importance of strengthening stakeholder participation in management and governance structures in negotiations with the UK on setting fishing opportunities as well as on other joint management measures.

Accepting the CFP objective to reach MSY status for the stocks, the NWWAC still recommends that the EU and the UK look beyond the headlines of the ICES advice for each shared stock, particularly where such advice (1) is affected by retrospective adjustments, (2) is not in line with what fishers experience at sea and (3) will have serious socio-economic impacts on the industry and on coastal communities. The AC appreciates the dialogue with DG MARE, where note was taken of this recommendation by the AC, and it was confirmed that the Commission will look into the content of the complete ICES advice when preparing the negotiating strategy.

The NWWAC notes that in its proposals to the Council subsequent to the bilateral consultation the Commission applies the so-called Top-Down Approach, subtracting a priori a quantity of the TAC negotiated with the UK. As the UK does not appear to apply this principle the NWWAC

⁷ NWWAC letter to DG MARE on difficulties with the landing obligation ([link](#))

⁸ NWWAC response to the MRAG/Deloitte questionnaire evaluating the landing obligation ([link](#))

considers it important to maintain a level playing field between EU and UK and recommends that the Commission reconsiders using such an approach.

7. NWWAC comments to the ICES advice for 2026

The NWWAC thanks ICES for presenting the scientific advice for 2026 at the NWWAC meetings in July and for providing a detailed elaboration of the relevant advice publications.

Last year's NWWAC advice on fishing opportunities put forward recommendations such as the consideration of the whole ICES advice beyond the headline advice, the aim for more stability in the ICES advice – for example by expanding the use of the stability clause – and the need to avoid being excessively precautionary in the advice. We appreciate that ICES has taken note of these items, which were also raised at MIAC in January 2025, and urge that further action is taken towards their accomplishment.

7.1 The NWWAC sees that certain stocks do not seem to be recovering despite fishers' best efforts to fish within quotas and in implementing technical measures. On several occasions, assessment models do not reflect the reality seen on the ground by fishers. Moreover, the lack of data for certain stocks is negatively impacting stock assessments. The ICES Advisory Plan also recognises this as a quality assurance issue. In this regard, it is essential to consider partnerships between scientists and fishers as one of the main tools to boost data availability and quality. Industry surveys and non-quantifiable information are an important part of this process. The NWWAC stands ready to continue its collaboration with ICES in this remit and specifically to follow the progress of the outcomes of the implementation of the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy (WKSTIMP) and other ICES working groups reflecting on stakeholder engagement.

7.2 The NWWAC reiterates the issues relating to stock identification. Uncertainty around the degree at which two or more stocks of the same species are mixed may frustrate the stock assessment process. Mixing can also lead to problems with the setting of reference points and to issues around management decisions due to a mismatch between stock and TAC management areas. On several occasions the AC highlighted the gadoids management area boundaries between areas 7a & 7fg, as well as the scientific work on stock identification of sole in area 7hjk. Considering this, the NWWAC would like to make the following recommendations:

- National institutes should continue to be supported in ensuring that the implementation of the Data Collection Framework is completed.
- Where appropriate, genetic research should be used as a tool to determine stock structures and to address mismatches between stock and TAC management areas. In this respect the NWWAC refers to its recommendation that the collection of genetic data is integrated into the Data Collection Framework⁹.

⁹ NWWAC letter to the COM requesting for genetic studies to be integrated into the Data Collection Framework, February 2020 ([link](#))

- New data should no longer be subject to a five-year flow and should be used immediately in the relevant assessments.
- Category 5 and 6 assessments are not fit for purpose and should not be considered as a basis for setting fishing opportunities. ICES should aim to develop category 3 assessments for category 5 and 6 stocks and ultimately move to analytical category 1 and 2 assessments for all stocks. In this context, the AC expresses its concerns to the systematic and arbitrary application of a 20% precautionary reduction in fishing opportunities every three years for category 5 and 6 stocks. This approach, applied irrespective of regulatory changes that may benefit the stock, leads in ICES' view to necessary reductions but in practice results in the steady erosion of fishing opportunities. It is not always consistent with the actual state of the stock and, in some cases, imposes disproportionate constraints on fisheries.

The NWWAC acknowledges that stability clauses do not match in category 1 and 2 assessments which are based on sufficient availability of relevant data. However, when such assessments result in substantial fluctuations in the advice – specifically when based on retrospective adjustments – the NWWAC requests a more detailed explanation from ICES and recommends that managers take into account the impact on business planning of the fisheries sector and of the wider value chain, and accordingly look into possibilities to mitigate such fluctuations.

In some cases, stocks are assessed to be in a good condition, and all the criteria are in a positive state in relation to the reference points, yet ICES publishes a reduction in catch advice. This can lead to some stakeholders mistakenly perceiving that there is a serious decline in stock status. The NWWAC recommends improving the clarity of such advice to prevent any misinterpretation. ICES and managers are encouraged to review how the advice is presented, ensuring that key messages are clearly communicated to maintain stakeholder confidence and avoid unnecessary concern.

8. NWWAC main messages and orientations for 2026 fishing opportunities proposals

Listing of stocks with NWWAC comments on the ICES advice.

8.1. Skates and Rays

The ICES advice for these species will be released in autumn. The AC would like to highlight that the joint NWWAC/NSAC Focus Group supports the continuation of the high survival exemption for all skates and rays species to avoid choking fisheries where they are caught as a bycatch.

In 2024, and in partnership with DG MARE, members of the joint **NWWAC/NSAC Focus Group have focused their attention on the difficulties related to the group TAC setting approach** covering multiple commercially important species in the North Western Waters and the North Sea. Recommendations on this topic have been collected and submitted to DG MARE in a letter of 3 April 2024¹⁰. Members expressed their **concern about the application of the same rule to**

¹⁰ NWWAC/NSAC letter on TAC setting for skates & rays ([link](#))

arrive at management for various stocks as life histories between elasmobranch species can differ greatly making a one-size-fits-all approach unsuitable. Attention must be paid to potential unintended consequences when investigating the removal of individual species from the group TAC to avoid an increase in choke situations linked to the setting of individual TACs for such species.

The NWWAC is currently leading the organisation of a follow-up stakeholder workshop on the management of skates and rays similar to the one held in 2023 to explore alternative approaches to generic group TAC and reflect on the potential management plans. This workshop is scheduled for 02 September 2025, and its resulting recommendations will assist the European Commission in the progression of improving the management of these shared stocks.

8.2. West of Scotland

Cod 6b	<p>Cod in 6b is currently assessed as a category 6 stock. Because landings are very much restricted by the quotas (generally set at low levels) the catch advice rarely changes as the assessment is based on landings data. In recent years signs of increasing abundance are creating issues for fishers operating in the area given the low level of the TAC currently (Union TAC for 2024 is 20 tonnes). As this stock has been at very low levels for many years, Member States have not diverted any resources to improving the quality of the data feeding into the assessment. This means the stock continues to be assessed as being data poor and ICES applies the precautionary approach, therefore even though abundance increases the TAC does not. Without any additional information there is no possibility of moving the stock to a category 3 assessment. To avoid this stock becoming a choke species, the NWWAC recommends that ICES reviews the usefulness of continuing to apply advice for category 6 stocks in situations where the advice does not reflect the reality being seen on the fishing grounds. Alternative management approaches should be considered in the context of the EU/UK negotiations for this and other stocks in a similar position.</p>
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8.3. Celtic Sea

Cod 7e-k	<p>Regarding cod 7e-k, the AC would like to refer to the 2024 webinar organised by the AC on climate change impacts on cod in the Celtic Sea. Relevant research was discussed, specifically on how water temperature can influence reproduction, embryonic development and larvae survival. This can have serious implications on the survival of young cod. Without recruitment there are serious doubts about the validity of the reference points used in the assessment. The AC highlights the importance of these aspects and recommends that they are considered in TAC setting. The</p>
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	NWWAC appreciates that ICES is working towards a more solid understanding of climate change impacts on fish populations and towards incorporating such effects into the assessment. The AC urges that such efforts continue and are supported by DG MARE.
<u>Haddock 7b-k</u>	AC members are very concerned about the zero-TAC advice for this stock and highlight a mismatch between the available quota and the fish on the ground as observed by fishers. Similarly to hake, new technical measures introduced for this stock, with more selective gears, impacted the recruitment value in the assessment. As such the NWWAC recommends to take this into consideration when preparing the consultation with the UK and the proposal to the Council. .
<u>Plaice 7fg</u>	For plaice 7fg there is no new scientific advice. The ICES framework for category 3 stocks was applied and since 2022 the advice is based on the rfb rule. This led to significant decreases in the scientific advice. However, the NWWAC points out that the necessary data justifying such a high precautionary approach are lacking. Fishers report seeing an abundance of this stock in the northern part of 7fg whilst the 100 km results for the biomass index (r) trend appear to be recorded by a single survey in the southern part. The NWWAC recommends reviewing the assessment method for next year's advice, using all available data and avoiding a precautionary approach disregarding the unavoidable catches of this stock in mixed fisheries.
<u>Pollack 6 and 7</u>	<p>The NWWAC welcomes the additional work carried out by ICES this year to incorporate recreational catch data into the 2026 TAC advice for pollack. This addresses a concern raised by the AC in its previous advice, where it was noted that recreational catches represent a significant portion of total removals but were not previously included in the assessment. The latest ICES analysis confirms that recreational catches have remained relatively stable and now exceed commercial catches in recent years. Given that most management measures to date have targeted commercial fisheries, the NWWAC stresses the need to define a management framework for recreational fishing at the stock level, particularly in EU waters, including improved catch reporting and consideration of measures such as daily bag limits.</p> <p>The NWWAC also highlights the importance of improving data collection on both recreational catches and releases. While ICES estimates a relatively high survival rate of 71% for released pollack, some members, based on their experience with a stock that is caught at a depth greater than 10m depth, suggest that survival rates may in fact be lower. Additionally, the NWWAC</p>



	<p>notes that in some Member States, pollack caught in recreational fisheries is not released, further emphasising the need for accurate data.</p> <p>Therefore, the NWWAC recommends that future advice clearly specifies the data used in the figures and an improvement of the collection of information on both retained and released fish in the recreational sector. This will help to provide a more accurate picture of total removals and support better management of the stock.</p>
Sole 7fg	<p>While the NWWAC advised last year to increase the TAC for 2025 for this stock, the AC notes the 13.9% reduction in the advice for sole in divisions 7fg, mainly driven by a downward revision of stock size and the continued influence of retrospective issues in the assessment.</p> <p>The NWWAC also highlights concerns from fishers operating in the area, who report that sole catches are difficult to avoid and that the stock abundance observed at sea does not reflect the low TAC advised. Furthermore, to manage their fishing opportunities on some occasions fishers are limiting directed fisheries. This important factor that catches are avoided is not taken into account assessing this stock. For the NWWAC this is an example where the $F_{MSY\ Upper}$ option appears to be the right approach. Considering the TAC-size in which even less than 20% deviation in advice will have a huge economic impact and taking into account the above, the NWWAC recommends to reconsider the 20% condition in the WW MAP and to discuss the other ICES catch options in the bilateral consultation with the UK, aiming for a TAC setting closer to the $F_{MSY\ UPPER}$ criterion.</p>
Sole 7hjk	<p>For sole 7hjk there is no new advice for 2026, as advice was provided by ICES in 2023 for the years 2024, 2025, 2026. The NWWAC recommends that the Commission requests ICES to start using the results of Fisheries-Science Projects on stock assessments and DNA analysis for subsequent advice.</p>



8.4. English Channel

<u>Lemon sole 4, 3a and 7d</u>	<p>While it is acknowledged that the 24% decrease in the assessment for lemon sole is linked to a decreasing pattern in the biomass index, this is in contradiction with what is experienced at sea by fishers. This stock is an example of where more and better consideration of fishers' experience would lead to an assessment that is closer to reality.</p> <p>The NWWAC recommends exploring the possibility of providing multi-annual advice for stocks that have not undergone a benchmark assessment, particularly lemon sole. NWWAC members notes the data poor status of this category 3 stock which does not appear to reflect the true status of the stock. This results in repeated application of a precautionary approach in annual advice. Whilst on one hand multi-annual advice could help provide greater stability for fishers while still ensuring precautionary management of the stock, NWWAC members stand ready to contribute to addressing the lack of data, so that this stock can be benchmarked with priority.</p>
<u>Plaice 7d</u>	<p>This stock has also been benchmarked recently. An aspect in the assessment is a 75% discard rate, but contrary to 7e this is not mitigated by including an estimated survival percentage. The NWWAC acknowledges that a TAC should be set aiming at bringing F and B respectively under and above the main reference points, but the headline advice put forward by ICES with a 56% reduction, is too large a step for aiming at this objective.</p> <p>This is an example where it would be logical to take into account the need for some stability and to consider other options to gradually reach the CFP objectives.</p>
<u>Plaice 7e</u>	<p>The NWWAC acknowledges work carried out by ICES regarding benchmarking this stock. It is unfortunate that this work has not resulted in the stock being moved from a Cat. 3 to a Cat. 1 assessment. The NWWAC reiterates its concern regarding the decrease in the advice, considered to be a consequence of the lack of data, and recommends that further monitoring and assessment should be carried out in order to move the stock to a Cat. 1.</p>
<u>Seabass 4b-c, 7a and 7d-h</u>	<p>The NWWAC welcomes the benchmark on seabass. The AC recommends improving clarity and consistency in the data and management of recreational fisheries for seabass. Members raised concerns about the accuracy of national surveys, noting that earlier assessments may have underestimated recreational catches, while current estimates may overestimate them. Questions remain as to whether these surveys fully reflect the legal restrictions applied in recent years and whether survey</p>



	<p>methods are consistent across Member States.</p> <p>The NWWAC also highlights the importance of reviewing the use of the catch allocation tool and the definitions of recreational fishing, which vary between countries and may affect data comparability. Furthermore, members emphasise the need to consider both recreational releases and commercial discards when evaluating total removals, as discards in the commercial sector remain a concern. Given the improved stock status – with SSB above Btrigger and F below FMSY – the NWWAC also recommends reviewing whether existing management measures, including previous moratorium thresholds, remain appropriate. The NWWAC is organising further work in its Focus Group on Seabass to develop specific advice on the ICES advice for 2026.</p>
<u>Sole 7d</u>	<p>In different métiers represented in the NWWAC targeting this stock, there are diverging experiences. As perceptions closer to the French coast are substantially different to the rest of the Eastern Channel, consideration could be given to further assess the data sources and obtain confirmation that the available data are still in line with the most recent benchmark outcome. The NWWAC recommends that future advice for sole in divisions 7d and 7e take better account of differences in stock availability as observed by fishers across the areas. NWWAC members noted that, in French fisheries, sole is not being seen at sea, resulting in underuse of quota, while in Belgian fisheries, from March onwards, large quantities of sole are observed but insufficient quota is available to match this abundance.</p> <p>The difference in observations can be explained by the distinct fishing areas frequented by the two main fleets targeting sole, which echo the sub-stocks identified by the SMAC project¹¹. The NWWAC recommends taking into account the results of this project on the spatial distribution of sub-stocks of sole in the Eastern Channel. In addition, it should be considered to further assess the data sources and obtain confirmation that the available data are still in line with the most recent benchmark outcome.</p>
<u>Whiting 7d</u>	<p>The NWWAC is doubtful in relation to the seemingly sharp stock boundary between this stock and the one in the Western Channel and the Celtic Sea. The same applies for the boundary between the North Sea and 6a. The benchmark of another whiting stock (7a) has not contributed to any clarification of these huge differences. The NWWAC recommends that scientific institutes further reflect on the feedback of fishers on the different grounds, mainly the ones targeting gadoids in the different</p>

¹¹ <https://archimer.ifremer.fr/doc/00694/80644/>

	stock areas.
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8.5. Irish Sea

<u>Plaice 7a</u>	.As it is perceived that a TAC reduction will only lead to increased discarding (particularly with an excessive -59%) and plaice 7a in many cases is a bycatch in other fisheries, the NWWAC recommends considering other than headline advice and negotiate a TAC closer to the $F_{MSY\ upper}$ outcome.
<u>Sole 7a</u>	The NWWAC notes retrospective issues in the assessment, concerning recruitment estimates. Given the stock status perception by fishers, it is regrettable that because of this the advice is -11%, despite F being below and B above the reference points. The NWWAC recommends having a discussion on this at the bilateral consultation with the UK.
<u>Whiting 7a</u>	The NWWAC welcomes the benchmark carried out in the Irish Sea and notes the increase from zero TAC to 200 tonnes for 2026. However, it should be noted that the following catch advice would mean that the TAC 2026 would be 72% lower than the bycatch TAC agreed in the previous years when ICES gave zero catch advice. The NWWAC recommends having a discussion on this at the bilateral consultation with the UK.

8.6. Joint-Recommendation NWWAC-PelAC on Greater silver smelt in areas 6 and 7

ICES published advice on 12 June 2025, advising a **MSY approach** to be followed for Greater Silver Smelt in the areas 5b and 6a, with catches in 2026 to be **no more than 18 441 tonnes**.

Following the Gentlemen's Agreement between the NWW and Pelagic ACs¹² agreed on March 31 2022, both ACs acknowledge that any recommendation on **Greater silver smelt in areas 6 and 7** under the direct competence of the NWWAC in accordance with Annex III of the CFP.

The NWWAC proposes the following recommendation for this stock, which is endorsed by the Pelagic AC and the result of a joint-exercise, whereby the NWWAC advises on bycatch issues and the PelAC advises on the directed fishery.

The NWWAC and PelAC recommend following ICES MSY advice (18 441 tons).

The two ACs would like to point out that since 2016, unilateral quota are set by the Faroe Islands and EU/UK separately, and the sum exceeds the recommended catches. NWWAC/PelAC underline the vulnerability of greater silver smelt as a deep-sea, slow-growing species, and call

¹² Gentlemen's Agreement between the NWWAC and the PelAC on joint work on sprat and greater silver smelt ([link](#))

on the EU Commission and the Council to prevent overfishing of the stock and reach an agreement on this shared stock.

Given the ecological importance of greater silver smelt as a forage species for many predators in the North Western Waters, the ACs underline the necessity of incorporating ecosystem-based management considerations in both the scientific assessments and the management frameworks. **We therefore urge the European Commission and Member States to develop a roadmap for implementing an ecosystem-based approach for this stock.**

In addition, in the context of improved management of the directed fishery, the PelAC will be examining the possibility of developing a management strategy for area 5b and 6a, associated with developing measures to improve the reference data issue of the stock in the area 6b and 7.

Therefore, the NWWAC and PelAC underline the need for genetic analyses to be undertaken in order to ensure better identification of the stocks and of their distribution.

9. Summary of NWWAC recommendations

- Address climate and natural changes in ecosystems to adapt stock recovery targets and assessment reference points.
- Address the fact that precautionary approaches and TACs & quotas are not in line with actual fishing opportunities demotivate fishers and lead (in combination with administrative and control burdens) to disinterest in and departure from the sector.
- Move away from zero-catch advice and request advice on stock recovery potential. Until this is achieved continue the use of bycatch quotas and quotas pools.
- Avoid repetitive precautionary approaches for stock categories lacking data. Find an easier way to use fishers' knowledge to address the lacks.
- Regardless of current MAPs and similar (UK) legislation consider the full ICES advice for all stocks during the bilateral consultation, using managers' and fishers' expertise to determine fishing opportunities based on the best available scientific advice.
- Refrain from distracting assumed quantities of discards exempted from the Landing Obligation to set EU TACs after agreeing overall TACs with the UK.
- Request better explanation from ICES when there is substantial instability in the advice for category 1 and 2 stocks, also when a positive status of both F and B still leads to declining catch advice.
- For recommendations on specific stocks, please note bold text in chapter 8.

- END -