

NWWAC Focus Group Seabass Terms of Reference

September 2024

Chair: Pauline Stephan (CNPMEM)

Rapporteur: NWWAC Secretariat

Languages: The work of the Focus Group will be conducted in EN and FR.

Framework: The FG will function within the NWWAC WG 3 Channel.

Background:

During the last meeting of Working Group 3 in July 2024, NWWAC members had the opportunity to hear a presentation on the ICES advice for 2025 fishing opportunities and, among others, discussed the advice on seabass in divisions 4b-c, 7a and 7d-h.

ICES advises that total removals of sea bass in 2025 should not exceed 2,776 tonnes, following the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) approach. This recommendation includes both commercial and recreational catches, accounting for the mortality of released fish, estimated at approximately 5%. The advice is based on a precautionary management plan developed by relevant authorities.

According to the assessment, fishing pressure is currently below the MSY level, while the spawning-stock size remains below the MSY Btrigger but between Bpa and Blim. The stock has shown variable recruitment over the years, with recent estimates indicating higher than average recruitment in 2020 and 2021.

Fishery sampling rates have varied over time across all countries, leading to uncertainty in catch data, particularly due to limited sampling of discards and recreational removals. Discards are estimated from sampling programs and logbooks, with data available only from the early 2000s, covering some fleets and fisheries imprecisely. According to the advice, modelled discard estimates are much lower than observed ones. Moreover, more comprehensive data on recreational removals from all countries is necessary for more accurate stock assessments.

Seabass is a shared stock between the EU and the UK. The UK and EU have access to fish seabass commercially in each other's exclusive economic zone under the access provisions for non-quota species in the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA). In December 2023, the UK Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs published a Fisheries Management Plan for seabass in English and Welsh waters.

Purpose (aims and objectives):

The objective of this Focus Group is to prepare advice to the European Commission on the measures to take in 2025 in both commercial and recreational fisheries to aid the recovery of seabass stocks in the North Western Waters. The advice will also comment on the ICES advice released on 28 June and provide recommendations on aspects where the AC believes further action is needed to improve the assessment.

Following the publication of the report from the WKBSEABASS 2024 benchmark, planned on 25-29 November 2024, the Focus Group will consider if further work is needed to update the abovementioned advice or to produce recommendations on the benchmark results.

Functioning:

The Focus Group will proceed as follows:

- First meeting online on 6 September to approve terms of reference and collect input for advice drafting.
- Most tasks will be conducted through written correspondence via email to minimize the number of meetings.

Outcome/advice:

- Advice to DG MARE on the management of seabass for 2025
- Advice following the publication of the WKBSEABASS 2024 report, if relevant.

Timeline:

- First meeting: 6 September
- Advice on management measures for 2025 to be delivered in October 2024

- Further advice later in 2025 might be issued following the publication of the report from the ICES benchmark WKBSEABASS 2024 planned on 25-29 November 2024

Recipients of Advice (target audience): European Commission (DG MARE)

Measures of success (Key Performance Indicators):

- Consensus advice (when possible);
- DG MARE response to advice;
- Reference to advice by decision-makers and managers.

Members

Name	Organisation	Membership
David Curtis	EAA	OIG
Manu Kelberine	CRPMEM de Bretagne	IND
Franck Le Bazic	Cobrenord	IND
Olivier Lepretre	CRPMEM Hauts de France	IND
John Lynch	ISEFPO	IND
Llibori Martinez Latorre	IFSUA	OIG
Geert Meun	VisNed	IND
Pauline Stephan	CNPMEM	IND
Dominique Thomas	OPCMEMMN	IND
Arthur Yon	FROM Nord	IND