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## Recommendations to the parties managing shared fish stocks in the Northeast Atlantic

Many important catch limits for 2021 need to be agreed between the EU and third countries such as Norway, or through the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) coastal states process. Moreover, as things currently stand, next year some of the richest fishing grounds that have until now been managed under the EU's CFP, will instead be under the sovereignty of the UK because they fall within that nation's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). A new joint management framework will be required for around 100 stocks shared by the UK and the EU.

In the 2013 reform of the CFP, EU member states – including the UK at the time – committed to ending overfishing by 2015 where possible and 2020 at the latest. More recently, the EU has bolstered its wider environmental commitments with the publication of its Green Deal for Europe. Meanwhile, the UK government has said it wants to become a “world leader” in fisheries management following its departure from the EU. Commitments to sustainable fishing have also been made by all parties through the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 14 on ‘life below water’. The EU, the UK and the other coastal states involved in Northeast Atlantic fisheries should, therefore, agree on arrangements for 2021 that contribute to achieving these objectives.

**The EU and the UK should agree on a framework for future fisheries management that will finally end overfishing.** The EU and the UK should prioritise sustainable fisheries management based on the best available scientific advice and legally commit to MSY as the upper limit for exploitation, the benchmark required in the CFP and based on international law. Such an agreement is essential to address the current climate and biodiversity threats. Sustainability, conservation and protection of the marine environment must be given priority over short-term political and sectorial interests. Current EU legal standards of protection and preservation of the marine and aquatic environment must not be lowered.<sup>1</sup>

The EU, the UK and the other coastal states like Norway involved in Northeast Atlantic fisheries should agree on specific arrangements for 2021 that achieve several objectives:

- Talks on joint management should be comprehensive, including all relevant coastal states and stakeholders, avoiding unilateral processes where stocks are shared. In line with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), collaboration on management must be multilateral when more than two coastal states have a stake in a given fish population, or fishery, in order to ensure transparency across all relevant states. The role of regional fisheries management organisations such as the NEAFC must be considered in this context.
- Agreements on shared stocks must include provisions regarding abundance of fish populations, limit reference points for mortality, and precautionary and ecosystem considerations. In addition to

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<sup>1</sup> For details please see: [Oceana recommendations for the EU-UK Fisheries Agreement](#) and [The Pew Charitable Trusts' 'A path to a new fisheries management agreement between the EU and the UK'](#)

objectives to maximise long-term sustainable yields, coastal states must act with urgency to conserve biodiversity, considering the impact of fishing activity on both fish populations and on the whole ecosystem.

- Agreements on shared stocks must implement a genuine precautionary approach as defined by the United Nations Fish Stock Agreement<sup>2</sup> (UNFSA, 1995). When the available data and information are uncertain, unreliable or inadequate, decision makers should engage in more cautious management, and a lack of scientific certainty cannot preclude management action.
- Multi-annual management should be the underlying approach by default. Although details will need to be revisited regularly, all stakeholders benefit from agreeing to and working toward long-term sustainable management objectives. That includes stable sharing arrangements, harvest strategies that include precautionary harvest control rules for setting catch limits, a robust monitoring and evaluation scheme, a periodic review process, and any necessary mechanisms to transition from previous arrangements to a new system.
- Coastal states should set explicit standards for the scientific advice on which decisions will be made, using the best available, peer-reviewed scientific advice from independent institutions recognised at the international level. Published scientific advice from independent scientific institutions such as ICES should be used as the basis for management, rather than unpublished or last-minute submissions from individual states.
- The management of shared stocks should be consistent with the obligations and rights under the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters<sup>3</sup> (Aarhus Convention, 1998). Management proposals, negotiations and decisions should be made transparently, with access guaranteed for all stakeholders, including the fishing industry, civil society organisations and other interested parties.
- Citizens of the EU and of other coastal states involved in the shared fishery must be able to scrutinise management decisions. Management objectives and all other elements of negotiated harvest strategies and annual decisions must be clear and available to the public. The joint management measures, the scientific advice underpinning them and the positions of the different parties involved, must be made available and actively disseminated to those interested in reviewing them.

In particular:

- Regarding multilateral NEAFC coastal states negotiations on large pelagic stocks (mackerel, herring and blue whiting), the contracting parties should prioritise resolving the allocation issues around these stocks and ensuring that the overall catch for each stock does not exceed scientific advice.
- Regarding stocks managed through other joint management arrangements involving the EU, the UK and Norway:
  - Given that the North Sea cod stock is below  $B_{lim}$ , parties should prioritise recovering this stock when setting a TAC. Further conservation measures (such as seasonal or area closures) are necessary in addition to setting the catch limit in line with scientific advice;
  - The parties should set TACs for other shared stocks that do not exceed the scientific advice. Furthermore, precautionary, science-based long-term management plans should be introduced for all shared stocks;
  - All parties should publish their position on joint TACs before the negotiations, so the public can understand the rationale in the case any party advocates for fishing above the scientific advice.

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<sup>2</sup> [UN, Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 Relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks](#)

<sup>3</sup> [UNECE, Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters \(Aarhus Convention, 1998\)](#)