CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES SEPTENTRIONALES
NORTH WESTERN WATERS ADVISORY COUNCIL
CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA LAS AGUAS NOROCCIDENTALES

EU Transparency Register Id. No: 8900132344-29

NWWAC ADVICE

On the Communication from the Commission "*Sustainable fishing in the EU: state of play and orientations for 2027*" COM(2026) 271 final and on the ICES advice published on June 30th, 2026

28 August 2026

Contents

1. Background

Members of 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 2027 and the Communication COM(2026) 271 from DG MARE at the meetings of the NWWAC Working Groups and Executive Committee in Dun Laoghaire (Co. Dublin) on 6-8 July 2026.

Having collected the main inputs from these discussions, the NWWAC Focus Group Landing Obligation addressed in more detail the content of COM(2026) 271. The implications for the fishing opportunities for each North Western Waters (NWW) stock for 2027 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 many of these stocks before proposing fishing opportunities in the NWW for 2027 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(2026) 271. Members are especially pleased to read that the Commission reports that on average the latest results in the North-East Atlantic indicate an increase in stock biomass and a decreased proportion of stocks where $F>F_{MSY}$. 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 2027 for many stocks.

The NWWAC reiterates the critical need for quality assurance in the ICES advice. The AC acknowledges the effort ICES has made in addressing this issue, including the adoption of a new Advisory Plan in 2025[1]. However, the AC believes that the full implementation of the ICES quality assurance system has still not been achieved as some of the advice provided remains overly precautionary and appears not to be taking into account relevant data leading to discrepancies with what fishers experience on the fishing grounds. Specifically, the NWWAC highlights the advice for data-limited category 5 and 6 stocks, which is based on an overly precautionary interpretation of sparse catch information.

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

[1] ICES (2025). Advisory Plan. ICES Convention, policies, and strategy. Report.

chapter 9, the advice does not reflect fishers' perception of these stocks on fishing grounds, in many cases as a consequence of not using relevant operational data in the assessment. NWWAC members stand ready to provide their contributions and input during the next ICES WGREFRAME meeting, which is expected to take place in February 2027.

3. State of the EU fleet

Referring to EU fleet capacity and its balance with fishing opportunities, the Communication COM(2026) 271 reports that the Commission has continued concerns on:

(1) the imbalance between fisheries resources and the fleet's fishing capacity
(2) the accuracy and reliability of engine power declarations by Member States
(3) the data underpinning the national reports
(4) the existence or effectiveness of Member States' Annual Reports and Action Plans required under article 22 of the CFP Regulation, and
(5) the increase in the number of Member States with fleet segments with no biological or economic indicators

Considering a possible revision of the CFP Regulation, which could address the concerns identified above, the NWWAC reiterates the need for clarification of the methodology and criteria used to establish vessel capacity ceilings, in terms of gross tonnage (GT) and engine power (kW). 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 different NWWAC advice documents on the Energy Transition Partnership for EU Fisheries and Aquaculture[2], as well in the NWWAC advice on Vision 2040[3] and in the NWWAC Advice of the CFP Regulation Evaluation[4]. 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 of the CFP, the AC recommends enhancing the assessment framework by giving greater consideration to retrospective data and robust quality indicators. These elements are fundamental to accurately assess 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.

[2] NWWAC advice on the Communication from the Commission "On the Energy Transition of the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture sector" COM(2023) 100 final (link); NWWAC advice on the Energy Transition Partnership for EU Fisheries and Aquaculture (link); NWWAC Letter regarding additional input on the ETP document integrating ACs Recommendations (link)
[3] NWWAC advice on Vision 2040 – 10 April 2026 (link)
[4] NWWAC Advice on the CFP Regulation Evaluation – 22 April 2025 (link)

4. Socio-Economic Performance

According to the Commission Communication, the overall economic performance of the EU fishing fleet is on a downward trend. At the same time, the NWWAC acknowledges that, in the NWW, the EU fleet has seen a rebound in 2023[5], albeit from a low base, following from Brexit, COVID and the conflict in Ukraine, and considering that the overall result does not reflect the situation across all NWW Member States.

NWWAC members are concerned that the positive trend observed in the NWW may be reversed in 2026 because of the sharp increase in operating costs including marine fuel prices linked to the ongoing situation in the Middle East as well as a reduction in fishing opportunities. The NWWAC proactively submitted advice on 26 March 2026[6] calling on the European Commission to activate the EMFAF emergency measures and welcomes the fact that these measures have since been approved for Member States operating in the NWW region. Nevertheless, members continue to face significant economic pressures arising from elevated fuel costs and their wider socio-economic impacts on fishing operations as well as on the lives of their families. In this context, the NWWAC reiterates its call to support the search for swift and effective energy transition possibilities of the EU fishing fleet to improve resilience and reduce dependence on fossil fuels[7].

Secondly, the EC Communication states that the fishing sector continues to face significant challenges in attracting and retaining workers. It is often perceived as offering limited career prospects due to relatively low incomes, uncertainty surrounding the future availability of fish stocks, concerns about the long-term viability of the profession, demanding working conditions, an ageing fleet and outdated technologies, as well as increasing administrative burdens and regulatory complexity. In addition, NWWAC members express concern about the cumulative impact of increasingly restrictive advice on the future of EU fisheries. They note that persistent negative outlooks may discourage young people from entering the sector and warn that continued declines in fishing activity risk the permanent loss of knowledge, skills, and expertise within coastal communities.

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 that policy makers as well as the sector itself, endeavour 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 for addressing the aging demographic of the industry but also for ensuring that the sector can meet the challenges of the future. The NWWAC highlights

[5] Full text for reference – page 23 of the Staff Working Document: "The North-Western waters are fishing areas around the UK and Ireland. The EU fleet (mainly vessels from France, Ireland and Spain) has seen a rebound, with landings totalling 777 800 tonnes (+15%), worth EUR 1.14 billion (+1%) – the highest landing volume since 2013. Gross value added was estimated at EUR 595.7 million, representing an increase of 3.5% compared to the previous year. The fleet achieved a gross profit of EUR 179.3 million, an increase of 51% compared with 2022"
[6] NWWAC Letter "Concerns on rising fuel prices linked to the Middle East crisis and request to activate EMFAF emergency measures" – 26 March 2026 (link)
[7] See footnote 3

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.[8] Enhancing investment 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.[9]

For this reason, the NWWAC is pleased to see that the Commission launched an initiative which will assess the best way of incorporating into EU law the "International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel Personnel 3 (STCW-F)". Implementation of these standards without excessive administrative burden can be determining factors for generational renewal. In addition, the NWWAC notes that certain national licensing conditions, including crew nationality requirements applied in some Member States, may create challenges in recruiting sufficient qualified crew for fishing vessels. The NWWAC therefore recommends reviewing such requirements where they may hinder the safe manning of vessels, while ensuring appropriate labour standards and protections for all fishers, irrespective of nationality.

5. Landing Obligation

The NWWAC highlights that avoiding choke issues remains one of the biggest challenges for the fishing industry in implementing the landing obligation in mixed NWW fisheries[10]. The AC acknowledges that avoiding and minimising unwanted catches is key to improving selectivity and continues to pursue this objective. However, even with consistently improving selectivity, the fishing opportunities set for 2026 have created serious challenges to comply with the landing obligation, and these will be even greater in 2027 if following the ICES advice in totality.

In the joint NWWAC/NSAC advice on the European Commission's Study Supporting the Evaluation of the Landing Obligation submitted to the Commission[11], the two ACs recommended a comprehensive reform of the Landing Obligation into an adaptive, evidence-based system focused on unwanted avoidance of catches and improved selectivity, supported by robust data collection. Such a reform is needed urgently and, in the Joint Advice, the ACs emphasised that, at the least, any future revision of the CFP should contain such reform.

With zero-catch advice for cod 7a, cod 7e-k, haddock 7b-k, whiting 7bc,e-k, and plaice 7a, as well as significant decrease in the advice for several other stocks in the NWW (for example, whiting 7d and 4, sole 7d, plaice 7fg, sole 7hjk, hake 6&7, saithe 4,6,3.a), the NWWAC stresses the need for managers to consider all sustainable options in the advice when setting TACs and

[8] NWWAC feedback to future fisher profiles by the "Fishers of the Future" foresight study – 30 September 2024 (link)
[9] NSAC/NWWAC Advice on Generational Renewal – 4 January 2024 (link)
[10] NWWAC Advice on persistent Choke Species challenges in the context of the Landing Obligation - 5 June 2026 (link); NWWAC advice Addressing Choke Risk in NWW after exemptions – 13 January 2025 (link)
[11] Joint NWWAC/NSAC Advice on the European Commission "Study supporting the evaluation of the landing obligation" – 18 December 2025 (link)

quota for 2027 and for properly resourced plans for stocks in the Celtic Sea, developed with the meaningful involvement of stakeholders. Without these considerations or plans, the outcome is likely to be the early closure of many fisheries in the NWW as reduced fishing opportunities will lead to multiple choke situations.

Secondly, the NWWAC notes that the Commission Communication places considerable emphasis on the insufficient data available to quantify discards occurring under existing exemptions, ineffective monitoring and enforcement tools, limitations in control systems, and a perceived lack of industry buy-in as key obstacles to the effective implementation of the Landing Obligation. However, the NWWAC stresses that it is too simplistic to link the successful implementation of the Landing Obligation with increased enforcement. A more holistic, participatory, and results-oriented approach, targeting the selectivity objective, is needed that reflects the reality of fisheries. The Advisory Councils also highlighted, in the advice previously mentioned, the need for better integration of economic and social considerations into the policy framework and for recognising the ongoing efforts made by the fishing industry to improve selectivity and reduce unwanted catches. Such proactive initiatives should be encouraged and supported rather than overshadowed by an excessively control-focused approach.

6. Integration of climate change factors into scientific advice and management decisions

The NWWAC wishes to reiterate its concern regarding the increasing predominately negative impacts of climate change on the distribution, productivity and recovery of fish stocks, impacts that are also being observed and reported by fishers across the NWW region. NWWAC members note that evidence has been presented at several NWWAC meetings[12] demonstrating that water temperatures have risen beyond the preferred spawning conditions for several stocks, including cod. Members highlight that environmental change appears to be a major factor affecting the recovery of certain stocks and should be given greater consideration alongside fishing activity in providing scientific advice. The NWWAC expresses concern that framing advice predominantly through the lens of overfishing creates a misleading public narrative that attributes stock decline primarily to fishing, while insufficiently acknowledging the growing role of environmental and climate-related pressures in stock decline.

The NWWAC therefore encourages scientific bodies to further investigate the impacts of environmental change on recruitment, stock productivity and stock dynamics. It also recommends that fisheries managers request ICES to prioritise work on the effects of climate change on key stocks, recognising that fishing pressure alone is no longer sufficient to explain some of the observed declines in stock status and associated fishing opportunities. The NWWAC emphasises the importance of creating mechanisms for stakeholders to contribute real-time observations and practical knowledge and suggest that greater consideration should be given to how this information can be incorporated and quantified within the scientific and advisory process.

[12] NWWAC Horizontal Working Group (07 July 2026) (link)

The NWWAC recommends that ICES and the European Commission systematically integrate climate-related factors into scientific advice and fisheries management decisions, respectively, and clearly identify cases where environmental conditions may constrain stock recovery. In this regard, the NWWAC welcomes the ongoing work within ICES to better incorporate climate change and wider ecosystem considerations into fisheries advice, as presented by the ICES Advisory Committee (ACOM) Vice-Chair during the NWWAC meeting in Dún Laoghaire in July 2026.[13]

However, the NWWAC also highlights the need for careful consideration of how such information is incorporated into fisheries management frameworks. The NWWAC notes that the practical application of climate and ecosystem information is ultimately a matter for fisheries managers and policymakers and may present challenges within existing legal and regulatory frameworks. The NWWAC therefore recommends that the Commission, Member States and ICES work together to develop transparent and practical approaches for integrating climate-related information into management decisions, ensuring that any new approaches are scientifically robust, proportionate, operationally feasible, and fit for purpose for the fisheries sector.

7. Main messages and strategic orientations for 2027 Fishing Opportunities in preparation for EU-UK bilateral consultations

Following from 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 headline 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 NWWAC notes that the Commission, in its proposals to the Council subsequent to the bilateral consultation, applies the so-called Top-Down Approach, subtracting a priori a quantity of the TAC negotiated with the UK. The NWWAC, in all circumstances, considers it important to maintain a level playing field between EU and UK.

The NWWAC also notes that the Commission reported in its Communication the ongoing work on rebuilding plans under the EU-UK Specialised Committee on Fisheries, for cod, haddock and whiting in the Celtic Sea, as well as sole and plaice in the Eastern Channel. The NWWAC is aware that discussions with the UK are ongoing in this regard and appreciates that the Commission has provided information and updates on several occasions to the members. As recommended in its

[13] See footnote 12.

recent advice,[14] the NWWAC emphasises that rebuilding plans must be based on robust and up-to-date scientific assessments that accurately reflect stock status, including the impacts of climate change on recruitment, distribution and productivity. It recommends that the Commission, in cooperation with ICES, systematically integrate these factors into scientific advice and management decisions, and clearly acknowledge where environmental conditions may limit stock recovery. The NWWAC stresses the importance of early and genuine stakeholder involvement in the development of rebuilding plans, to ensure that measures are realistic, proportionate and supported by the sector; and emphasises the need for the AC to be meaningfully involved and given adequate opportunity to provide timely and substantive recommendations. Finally, the NWWAC stresses the need for supporting measures to rebuilding plans in the form of funding for multi-annual tie-up schemes and support for the adoption of selective gears.

Secondly, in the context of the forthcoming EU–UK consultations on fishing opportunities for 2027, the NWWAC supports an approach whereby any EU-UK agreement on technical measures for the Celtic Sea, Irish Sea and the Channel is taken forward through a Joint Recommendation developed by the relevant EU Member States and subsequently adopted through a dedicated Delegated Act, rather than being initially incorporated into the annual Fishing Opportunities Regulation, as was the case for 2026. The NWWAC recommends ensuring avoidance of any contradiction between such Delegated Act and the Technical Measures Regulation [EU 1241(2019). At the same time, the NWWAC highlights that the Specialised Committee on Fisheries should serve as the framework for discussions to harmonise technical measures with the UK. Finally, the NWWAC also reiterates the importance of genuine, timely and meaningful stakeholder consultation throughout the development, adoption and implementation of such measures.

8. NWWAC key observations to the ICES advice for 2027

The NWWAC thanks ICES for presenting the scientific advice for 2027 at the NWWAC meetings in July and for providing a detailed elaboration of the relevant advice publications.

8.1 Integrating fishers' local knowledge into stock assessments to better reflect the reality on the fishing grounds

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. Regarding the ICES advice for 2027, many stakeholders perceive significant discrepancies between what they observe in practice on the ground and the realities reflected in the assessment models, which has led to a loss of confidence in some of the scientific advice produced.

Moreover, the lack of data for certain stocks, as well as random changing of reference points or downwards revision of advice, is negatively impacting stock assessments. The ICES Advisory

[14] NWWAC Advice on the implementation of Technical Measures and Rebuilding Plans in the context of EU–UK fisheries management – 16 June 2026 (link)

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.

8.2 Addressing mismatches between stock boundaries and management areas

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. Considering this, the NWWAC would like to make the following recommendations:

- National institutes should be supported under the Multiannual Financial Framework in ensuring that the implementation of the Data Collection Framework is continued.
- Where appropriate, genetic research should be used as a tool to determine stock structures and to address mismatches between stock and TAC management areas, recognising that this has implications for relative stability in quota setting; or where relevant, the degree of connectivity between stocks of the same species in adject area should be estimated. In this respect the NWWAC refers to its recommendation that the collection of genetic data is integrated into the Data Collection Framework[15].
- Initiatives are being taken to make available live data from fishing vessels. ICES should look into the possibility of including such information in the assessments.

8.3 Reviewing the use of Category 5 and 6 Assessments as a basis for setting fishing opportunities and the associated 20% precautionary reductions

There is a lack of consistency in the ICES advice provided for stocks assessed as category 5 and 6 (e.g. Rockall cod and sole 7hjk). In some cases, this correctly leads to ICES advice providing no advice while for others it leads to highly precautionary catch advice being issued, resulting in arbitrary, low quotas regardless of the state of the stocks. Such advice is not fit for purpose and, according to NWWAC members, should not be considered as a basis for setting fishing opportunities. The NWWAC recommends ICES reconsider the utility of providing such advice, given the choke issues it creates.

Furthermore, the AC expresses its concerns in 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 to

[15] NWWAC letter to the COM requesting for genetic studies to be integrated into the Data Collection Framework – 3 February 2020 (link)

necessary reductions in ICES' view, but in practice results in the steady erosion of fishing opportunities and in increasingly restrictive TACs. It is not always consistent with the actual state of the stock and, in some cases, imposes disproportionate constraints on fisheries as well as serious operational difficulties. These reductions have significant consequences in relation to the landing obligation, availability of quota, and access to fish that remain abundant on the fishing grounds. The NWWAC recommends that the automatic application of the 20% precautionary buffer at each assessment cycle should be suspended, as it is based on very limited information, often with no estimate of stock biomass beyond landings data. The continued application of these reductions is becoming increasingly problematic and runs contrary to the principles of the Landing Obligation. For stocks caught only as unavoidable by-catch, appropriate by-catch quotas should instead be established in line with the target fisheries in which they occur.

There is a risk of causing long-term damage to fishing businesses if these issues are not addressed during upcoming negotiations. NWWAC members urge that precautionary stocks under review be discussed in greater detail and that greater attention be paid to the practical consequences for fleets.

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.

8.4 Addressing Choke Risks associated with Zero-Catch Advice through Bycatch TACs

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 for addressing closure of fisheries due to zero-catch advice stocks in 2027.

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 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 also be applicable.

8.5 Mitigating the impact of large advisory fluctuations resulting from retrospective adjustments

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.

8.6 Improving the presentation and communication to fishers and stakeholders of advice when catch reductions do not reflect deteriorating stock status

In some cases, stocks are assessed as being in good condition, and all 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.

8.7 Update on the NWWAC/NSAC work on skates and rays ahead of the publication of ICES advice in autumn

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 ray 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 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 were collected and submitted to DG MARE in a letter on 03 April 2024[16].

On 02 September 2025 the NWWAC organised a second stakeholder workshop on the management of skates and rays with the support of the NSAC. Building on outcomes from the February 2023 workshop, the workshop focused on examining group TACs and potential species separation, along with suitable methodologies. Attention was drawn to category 5 stocks requiring improvements in assessment. Advice based on the discussions was subsequently submitted on 28 October 2025[17]. Members again expressed their concern about a one-size-fits-all approach because the biological life histories of different elasmobranch species vary so significantly. This issue is further exacerbated by profound mismatches between existing regulatory management units and actual biological stock units, alongside historical reference periods for quota allocation that no longer accurately reflect current stock distributions and threaten to limit fishing opportunities. Additionally, severe data limitations for certain high-value species, such as blonde ray, have triggered precautionary reduction rules that artificially slash scientific advice down to just 20% of its original level without reflecting actual changes in the fishery.

Additional joint advice between the NWWAC and NSAC was submitted on 24 June 2026[18] in which the ACs provided recommendations following a review of the work on potential updates to skates

[16] NWWAC/NSAC letter on TAC setting for skates & rays – 3 April 2026 (link)
[17] NWWAC/NSAC advice on skates and rays management – 28 October 2025 (link)
[18] NWWAC/NSAC Advice on Skates & Rays Management – 24 June 2026 (link)

and ray fisheries management by the EU-UK ad hoc scientific expert group on skates and rays. This included recommendations regarding the simplification of footnotes, the utility of 'of which' clauses within the TAC for skates and rays, stakeholder engagement, as well as use of AI and image recognition for identification.

9. NWWAC Recommendations on ICES advice for NWW stocks in preparation of for the 2027 Fishing Opportunities

9.1 West of Scotland

Cod 6b (Rockall)	The NWWAC highlights the significant uncertainty surrounding the biological identity of the stock, including whether it is connected to the West of Scotland stock, the Faroe stock, or another population entirely. In this context, the NWWAC notes the lack of meaningful evidence supporting catch advice of 9 tonnes, which would create disproportionate management consequences. The NWWAC further points to the inconsistency between this approach and that applied to other category 6 stocks, such as Northern prawn, for which no specific catch advice has been provided. Moreover, setting a TAC at this level would be unrealistic in a mixed fishery where cod is encountered as unavoidable bycatch and would effectively create a choke situation for all fisheries operating at Rockall. More generally, the NWWAC notes that the application of precautionary reductions to data-poor stocks has frequently resulted in severe management problems without contributing to improved scientific understanding of the stocks concerned. **In the context of the EU-UK negotiations on catch advice for 2027, and to avoid this stock becoming a choke species, the NWWAC recommends setting a bycatch TAC at levels that will allow fisheries in 6b continue**. Further, the **NWWAC recommends that ICES reviews the usefulness of continuing to provide advice for category 5 and 6 stocks.**
Cod 6a	The NWWAC notes the advice will be delivered in autumn 2027.
Whiting 6a	The NWWAC notes the advice will be delivered in autumn 2027.
Whiting 6b	The NWWAC queries the relevance of this advice given it is unlikely that there is a separate whiting stock in 6b and that there is no TAC set by the EU-UK. The advice has little practical value and **the NWWAC recommends that ICES either discontinues providing separate advice or incorporates it into the 6a whiting advice**.
Haddock 6b (Rockall)	**The NWWAC recommends following the ICES MSY advice for catches of no more than 23,271 tonnes.**

Haddock in the North Sea, West of Scotland, Skagerrak (4, 6.a and Subdiv. 20)	The NWWAC notes that fishing effort is below FMSY and SSB is well above MSY $B_{trigger}$ although declining. Recruitment in the last few years has been low. Therefore, **the NWWAC recommends following the ICES MSY advice for catches of no more than 87,366 tonnes. The NWWAC stresses that in setting the TAC the split between area 4 and area 6a should be maintained**.
Saithe in the North Sea, Rockall and West of Scotland, Skagerrak and Kattegat (4,6,3.a)	The NWWAC notes that F is above FMSY and SSB just below MSY $B_{trigger.}$ with reasonably positive signs of recruitment in recent years resulting in some reservations on the advice and the scale of reduction advised. According to ICES this is mainly because of a changed perception of exploitation level and stock status due to a reduction of FMSY and increase in Blim and MSY $B_{trigger}$. This rescaling, which is only tersely explained in the advice sheet, leads to a reduction of 19.7% in catch advice compared to 2026, which is a significant reduction coming on the back of a similar reduction in 2026. **Given the significant changes between the previous and revised management frameworks, a more gradual transition could be considered**. An intermediate approach would reduce fishing mortality while allowing the stock to be rebuilt before fully implementing the new reference point regime. **With signs of improving saithe recruitment and the upcoming Management Strategy Evaluation, the potential socio-economic impacts of the proposed TAC reduction should be carefully considered.** Maintaining management stability and avoiding short-term TAC variability would help support both sustainable stock management and industry viability. **The NWWAC stresses that in setting the TAC the split between area 4 and area 6a should be maintained**.

9.2 Celtic Sea

Cod 7e-k	The NWWAC acknowledges the poor state of the stock with F well above FMSY, SSB well below MSY $B_{trigger}$ and virtually no recruitment over a prolonged period. **In the context of the EU-UK negotiations on catch advice for 2027, and to avoid this stock becoming a choke species, the NWWAC recommends setting a bycatch TAC**. The NWWAC notes that the stock is at such a low level and recruitment is being significantly impaired by climate change, it is questionable whether the stock will recover. **The NWWAC acknowledges ICES is working towards a more solid understanding of climate change impacts on fish populations and towards incorporating such effects into the assessment. The NWWAC**

	recommends that this is taken into account when the EU-UK put in place a rebuilding plan for this stock and associated gadoid stocks.
Haddock 7b-k	As with cod, the NWWAC acknowledges the poor state of the stock with F well above FMSY, SSB well below MSY $B_{trigger}$ and virtually no recruitment over a prolonged period. **In the context of the EU-UK negotiations on catch advice for 2027, and to avoid this stock becoming a choke species, the NWWAC recommends setting a bycatch TAC.** The NWWAC notes that the stock is at such a low level and recruitment is being significantly impaired by climate change. **The NWWAC acknowledges ICES is working towards a more solid understanding of climate change impacts on fish populations and towards incorporating such effects into the assessment. The NWWAC recommends that this is taken into account when the EU-UK put in place a rebuilding plan for this stock and associated gadoid stocks.**
Plaice 7fg	The NWWAC notes the ICES advice for catches of no more than 77 tonnes in 2027, a reduction of 32% compared to 2026. NWWAC highlights that the advice does not reflect the perception of the stock observed by the industry. Further, the NWWAC has doubts regarding the accuracy of the survey that is the basis for the assessment and whether it covers the distribution area of the stock. The NWWAC also highlights the contradiction of high discard rates reported by ICES alongside extremely restrictive quotas, noting that survival exemptions under the landing obligation have become essential to maintain mixed fisheries. Survival rates of plaice are not considered in the assessment. **The reduction in advice for 2027 will lead to increased discarding and as a result poorer catch data input into the assessment**.
Plaice 7.h-k (Celtic Sea South, southwest of Ireland)	The NWWAC notes that according to the ICES advice fishing pressure proxy on the stock is below the FMSY proxy, and the stock-size index is above I trigger. Therefore, **the NWWAC recommends following the ICES multi-annual catch advice of 126 tonnes**, a reduction of 3.1% compared to 2026. However, the NWWAC highlights weaknesses in the assessment in that survival rates of plaice are not considered and discarding levels are uncertain.
Plaice 7.b–c (West of Ireland)	**The NWWAC recommends, as this is an EU only managed stock, setting bycatch TAC that allow the continuation of fisheries in the management area. The NWWAC further recommends that ICES reviews the usefulness of continuing to provide advice for category 5 and 6 stocks.**
Pollack 6 and 7	The latest advice shows a significant and continuous decline in total removals since 2016, which has been borne primarily by the commercial fishing sector. However, the advice states that recreational removals account for a substantial proportion of total removals for this stock but were

	not previously included in the assessment. These estimates, based on average proportions observed over the 2022–2025 period, remain uncertain and are re-estimated annually, without taking into account the implementation of management measures. The NWWAC notes that fishing effort is well below FMSY and SSB just above MSY $B_{trigger}$ and increasing. Recruitment in the last few years has increased from low levels. **Therefore, the NWWAC recommends following the ICES MSY advice for catches of no more than 3,216 tonnes. The NWWAC also recommends that future advice clearly specifies the data used in the assessment and an improvement of the collection of information on both retained and released fish in the recreational sector, which is currently a weakness in the assessment given the level of recreational fishing.**
Sole 7fg	The NWWAC notes that fishing effort is slightly above FMSY, and SSB well above MSY $B_{trigger}$ and stable. Recruitment in the last few years has been stable with evidence of a strong 2026-year class recruiting into the stock. ICES has advised FMSY catch advice of 972 tonnes for 2027, which represents a 1.72% reduction compared to 2027. However, the NWWAC highlights that the advice fails to reflect the abundance of sole encountered by fishers at sea, which has been observed continually for the last few years. Examples exist where fishers no longer target sole in order to prolong the quotas availability but still catch it when targeting other species. This impact on the sole CPUE appears not to be taken in to account in the assessment. Therefore, **the NWWAC recommends that in the EU-UK bilateral the FMSY upper option of 1625 tonnes as included in the management options is considered.** A TAC of 1187 tonnes (+20%) would be closer to the reality experienced at sea while maintaining a very low probability of biomass falling below reference points. **The NWWAC recommends that the EU-UK should consider greater flexibility within the range of scientifically acceptable outcomes in such cases where stocks are abundant and fished sustainably.**
Sole 7hjk	**The NWWAC recommends that ICES reviews the usefulness of continuing to provide advice for category 5 and 6 stocks and the application of the 20% precautionary buffer,** which has been applied by ICES to this stock. This is an arbitrary reduction which has no basis given the advice is based on extremely limited catch data. It undermines the confidence of the industry in the scientific process when assessments of data-poor stocks produced conclusions that appeared inconsistent with observations at sea. **The NWWAC therefore recommends that in the context of the EU-UK negotiations on catch advice for 2027 maintaining**

	the TAC 2026 is agreed upon. The NWWAC also noted managers recommending this stock be benchmarked and fully supports this.
Sole 7.b and 7.c (West of Ireland)	**The NWWAC recommends, as an EU only managed stock, setting bycatch TAC that allows the continuation of fisheries in the management area. The NWWAC further recommends that ICES reviews the usefulness of continuing to provide advice for category 5 and 6 stocks**.
Hake 6 & 7 (and 4; 3.a, 8.a–b, and 8.d)	The NWWAC notes that fishing pressure on the stock is at FMSY, and spawning-stock size is above MSY $B_{trigger}$, BPA, and Blim. Recruitment has been below average for the last few years. Given the decline in SSB and the low recruitment, **the NWWAC recommends following the ICES advice of 46,824 tonnes,** representing a reduction of 14.7% compared to 2026. However, given the continued TAC reductions since 2024 and the significant changes in fishing patterns resulting from the closure of VME areas, ICES should review its management approach to ensure it reflects current stock dynamics. This review should include improved monitoring and scientific assessment of closed VME zones, evaluation of fleet displacement impacts on spawning grounds, and consideration of alternative or complementary management measures beyond annual TAC reductions to support both stock sustainability and evidence-based decision-making.
Whiting 7b-c and e-k	The NWWAC acknowledges the poor state of the stock with F below FMSY and a continuous decline in fishing pressure, but SSB well below MSY $B_{trigger}$. While recruitment has been very low, there has been a slight increase in the last few years. This trend is also confirmed by the Ifremer report published at the end of 2024[19]. The report identifies different patterns of fishing activity between the western part of the Celtic Sea and the western English Channel. In the western Celtic Sea, landings have declined sharply since the 2000s. By contrast, in Division 7.e, the decline in landings only began in 2017, following a long period of increasing catches. The report also highlights the existence of a whiting aggregation area where fleet activity is concentrated. Although yields in this area have been declining, they have remained relatively stable in recent years. **In the context of the EU-UK negotiations on catch advice for 2027, and to avoid this stock becoming a choke species, the NWWAC recommends setting a bycatch TAC, whilst taking into account the differing dynamics shown in the Ifremer report.** The NWWAC notes that in contrast to cod and haddock there are signs of recruitment that this stock can recover. **The**

[19] Vermard et al. (2024). Evolution de la dynamique du stock de merlan (*Merlangius merlangus*) en Mer Celtique et Manche Ouest. Réponse à la demande de saisine DGAMPA du 28 octobre 2024. Ifremer P9 24-078

	NWWAC acknowledges ICES is working towards a more solid understanding of climate change impacts on fish populations and towards incorporating such effects into the assessment. The NWWAC recommends that this is taken into account when the EU-UK put in place a rebuilding plan for this stock and associated gadoid stocks.
Black-bellied anglerfish in 7, 8.a–b, and 8.d and **White anglerfish in 7, 8.a–b, and 8.d**	The NWWAC notes that for black bellied anglerfish ICES advises that fishing pressure on the stock is below FMSY, and spawning-stock size is above MSY $B_{trigger}$, BPA, and Blim. Recruitment is stable. NWWAC does not understand how such advice leads to a 14.6% reduction in catch advice stocks. According to ICES this is mainly because of a changed perception of exploitation level and stock status due to a reduction of FMSY and increase in Blim and MSY $B_{trigger}$. This rescaling, which is only tersely explained in the advice sheet, leads to a reduction in catch advice compared to 2026. Such reductions based on positive catch advice undermine the confidence of the fishing industry in the underlining science and should be better explained by ICES. The two anglerfish stocks, black-bellied anglerfish (*Lophius budegassa*) and white anglerfish (*Lophius piscatorius*), are currently subject to two regionalised combined-species TACs, covering the Celtic Seas and the Bay of Biscay, respectively. ICES notes that this approach does not allow effective control of the exploitation rates of each individual species and could, in the long term, lead to the overexploitation of either species. Nevertheless, the NWWAC has reservations about the actual level of fishing pressure exerted on each stock, as the two species are difficult to distinguish in catches and are therefore not reported separately in landing statistics. **In this context, a pragmatic approach to the management of combined TACs appears necessary, as these currently represent the option least likely to result in undesirable consequences**. Thus, considering that a TAC is set in combination with white anglerfish, for which the advice is +2.5%, **the NWWAC recommends following the traditional method in order to limit the reduction of fishing opportunities.**

9.3 English Channel

Lemon sole 4, 3a and 7d	The NWWAC notes that the F and SSB indexes of this category 3 stock are assessed to evolve positively, and adding an SSB rescaling, the ICES catch advice for 2027 is 20% higher compared to 2026. **The AC recommends following this advice but maintains the request for a benchmark aimed at adding this stock to category 1**.

Plaice 7d	The NWWAC notes that for this stock F is assessed to be above FMSY and SSB above Blim, but below MSY $B_{trigger}$. The NWWAC acknowledges the ICES advice of 1328 tonnes, representing a reduction of 4.1% compared to 2026. It is also acknowledged that a high discard rate is taken into account, but contrary to other plaice stocks, no survival. **Also considering that Channel technical measures are planned for implementation soon, the NWWAC recommends no further reduction of the TAC**.
Plaice 7e	ICES catch advice for this stock was for 2026 and 2027. Accordingly, the NWWAC does not expect a TAC change.
Seabass 4b–c, 7a and 7d–h	The 2023–2024 seabass benchmark clarified stock structure, spatial distribution and migration patterns, confirming mixing between the Bay of Biscay stock and neighbouring stocks. It indicates that part of the Bay of Biscay stock catches are taken in divisions 4.b–c and 7.a.d–h. The benchmark revised biological reference points and SSB estimates upwards, showing that SSB has been above MSY $B_{trigger}$ since 2021. This confirms the positive perception of commercial fishers and is consistent with the observed increase in discards. **Considering the improved status of the seabass stock, the NWWAC recommends lifting the current moratorium and adapting EU and national management rules.** **It also calls for a multi-annual, harmonised EU–UK management strategy to ensure stock sustainability and provide greater predictability for fishers.** The current management system by fishing method should be maintained but significantly relaxed, with unavoidable by-catches allowed to be landed, including during the February–March closure. The level of these relaxations should be based on total catches, including landings, discards and catches resulting from migration, while recreational catches should be reassessed and a share reallocated to professional fisheries. Finally, NWWAC members reiterate their concerns about the seabass allocation tool, citing unrealistic assumptions, a lack of seasonality, insufficient consideration of management measures, and perceived unreliable data on recreational catches.
Sole 7d	As last year, NWWAC members still report diverging experiences in different metiers catching this stock, but both Belgian and French fleets are targeting sole 7d to a lesser extent. This is due to the increased presence of cuttlefish

	and squid, and for the Belgian fishers the aim to be able to catch sole year-round, dealing with the quota shortage. This has a substantial impact on the CPUE and on the reported catches, which the scientific model appears to interpret as a drastic reduction of SSB. 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 project[20]. The NWWAC notes that these findings might have contributed to the understanding that a benchmarking is urgently required and is now scheduled for results publication in the first half of 2027. Therefore, **the AC recommends discussing these findings with the UK in the bilateral consultations and, given the severe socio-economic consequences that an 87% TAC-reduction would entail, postponing any amendment to the TAC until new scientific advice becomes available following the benchmark.**
Sole 7e	Despite fishing mortality remaining below FMSY and spawning stock biomass remaining above the relevant reference points, a downward rescaling of the biomass level results in a significant 16% reduction in the catch advice. The NWWAC notes that theoretically such reduction is required to achieve the MSY-target in 2027 but **recommends taking into account the positive status when discussing in the bilateral consultation with the UK**.
Whiting 7d	The NWWAC notes that this North Sea – Eastern Channel single stock has been benchmarked in 2026. This resulted in revised F and SSB reference points, but the assessed F remains substantially below FMSY and the SSB substantially above MSY $B_{Trigger}$. This makes it difficult to explain an advice change of -47%. **The NWWAC recommends a discussion on this in the bilateral consultation with the UK.**

9.4 Irish Sea

Plaice 7a	The NWWAC notes the ICES zero catch advice for this stock based on a perceived reduction in stock size following recent low recruitments. The NWWAC acknowledges that catches have declined and recruitment has been below average. However, the AC notes that in the management options table, ICES has advised a catch option projected to bring the stock to Blim by 2028, this results in a reduction in the catch advice of 48% compared to 2026. ICES has arbitrarily chosen to ignore their own rules and based on the stock assessment showing persistently overestimate SSB in recent years and advice zero catch. **In the context of the EU-UK negotiations on catch advice for**

[20] https://archimer.ifremer.fr/doc/00694/80644/

	2027, and to avoid this stock becoming a choke species, the NWWAC recommends setting a bycatch TAC that allows fisheries in the management area to continue.
Sole 7a	The NWWAC notes that Fishing pressure on the stock is above FMSY and FPA; spawning-stock size is above MSY B_{trigge}r, BPA, and Blim. Recruitment has been stable in the last few years. Therefore, **the NWWAC recommends following the ICES MSY advice for catches of no more than 584 tonnes in 2027,** representing a < 1% increase compared to 2026.
Whiting 7a	The NWWAC notes that advice is expected to be delivered in autumn 2026.
Haddock 7a	The NWWAC notes that this stock has moved from a category 1 assessment in 2025 to a category 5 assessment. ICES should seek to rectify this as quickly as possible, given category 5 advice is based on very limited data. I**n the context of the EU-UK negotiations on catch advice for 2027, the NWWAC recommends setting a TAC at levels that will allow fisheries in the management area to continue. Further, the NWWAC recommends that ICES reviews the usefulness of continuing to provide advice for category 5 and 6 stocks.**
Cod 7a	The NWWAC acknowledges the poor state of the stock even with F being well below FMSY. SSB has remained well below MSY $B_{trigger}$ and there has been virtually no recruitment over a prolonged period. **In the context of the EU-UK negotiations on catch advice for 2027, and to avoid this stock becoming a choke species, the NWWAC recommends setting a bycatch TAC.** The NWWAC notes that the stock has been at such a low level and recruitment has been significantly impaired for many years, it is questionable whether the stock will recover. **The NWWAC acknowledges ICES is working towards a more solid understanding of climate change impacts on fish populations and towards incorporating such effects into the assessment. The NWWAC recommends that this is taken into account when a rebuilding plan for this stock is considered.**

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

ICES published its scientific advice on sprat in areas 7.d and 7.e (English Channel) on 24 April 2025, advising catches of no more than 7 848 tonnes for the period from 1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027, following the MSY approach. This advice is based on a category 3 assessment using a biomass index derived from the PELTIC survey.

In line with the Gentlemen's Agreement between the North Western Waters Advisory Council (NWWAC) and the Pelagic Advisory Council (PelAC), adopted on 31 March 2022, both ACs acknowledge that any recommendation on sprat in areas 7.d and 7.e falls under the direct competence of the NWWAC, in accordance with Annex III of the CFP.

The NWWAC puts forward the following joint recommendation, which is fully endorsed by the PelAC. This is the result of a collaborative effort where the NWWAC advises on bycatch considerations and the PelAC on the directed fishery.

Proposed recommendation for NWWAC (supported by the PelAC):

The NWWAC and PelAC recommend that the TAC for sprat in the English Channel be set according to the latest ICES advice, i.e., no more than 7 848 tonnes for the period from 1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027.

The ACs take note of the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the stock structure of sprat in the Celtic Seas ecoregion, which ICES again highlighted in its 2026 advice. We fully support the continuation and expansion of genetic stock identification work aimed at clarifying stock boundaries in this ecoregion.

The PelAC reiterates its intention to develop a management strategy for sprat in the Celtic Seas once stock identity has been clarified and robust delineation is available. This will help ensure appropriate and precautionary management, particularly in the context of a potential directed fishery.

Given the ecological importance of sprat 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 ecosystem-based approaches for this stock.

Furthermore, we recommend that any spatial or seasonal measures envisaged for sprat be developed by managers in close cooperation with ICES, ensuring a robust evaluation of their biological and ecological impacts—both on the sprat stock itself and on associated fisheries.

Finally, the ACs stress that the current management units for sprat, particularly those used in the ICES advice for subarea 6 and divisions 7.a–c and 7.f–k, should be re-evaluated. The scientific basis for treating these as a single stock remains weak, and the lack of clarity may compromise both sustainability and socio-economic stability. We urge ICES and the European Commission to prioritise stock-ID work in this area before the next advice is issued for these western divisions.

10 Summary of NWWAC recommendations

- The NWWAC reiterates the need to better integrate fishers' local knowledge and operational data into scientific assessments to improve the accuracy and relevance of stock advice, particularly where fishers' observations differ from assessment outcomes.
- In implementing Article 22 of the CFP, the NWWAC recommends placing greater emphasis on retrospective data and quality indicators to better assess fleet viability and the capacity to utilise available fishing opportunities.

- The NWWAC highlights the need to ensure fair incomes, safe working conditions and long-term prospects for all those working in the sector, including young people and women, and expresses concern that increasingly restrictive advice may accelerate skills loss and reduce generational renewal.
- Given the widespread zero-catch advice and significant reductions for several key stocks, the NWWAC urges managers to consider all sustainable management options when setting TACs and quotas for 2027 and to develop adequately resourced plans with meaningful stakeholder involvement. Failure to do so could lead to early fishery closures and increased choke situations.
- The NWWAC encourages ICES, the Commission and Member States to strengthen consideration of climate and environmental factors in both stock assessments and management decisions, while ensuring that any new related management approaches are transparent, scientifically robust, practical and developed in consultation with stakeholders.
- In the context of the 2027 EU-UK consultations, the NWWAC supports addressing any new technical measures for the Celtic Sea, Irish Sea and the Channel through a Member State Joint Recommendation and dedicated Delegated Act rather than initially through the annual Fishing Opportunities Regulation. The NWWAC also reiterates the need for timely, meaningful and transparent stakeholder consultation throughout the process. The NWWAC emphasises the importance of maintaining a level playing field between the EU and the UK.
- The NWWAC encourages considering the full ICES advice for all stocks during bilateral consultations, regardless of existing MAPs or comparable UK legislation, while drawing on the expertise of managers and fishers to determine fishing opportunities.
- The NWWAC recommends addressing mismatches between stock boundaries and management areas.
- The NWWAC calls for an improvement of the presentation and communication of scientific advice to fishers and stakeholders, particularly where reductions in catch advice do not reflect a deterioration in stock status.
- The NWWAC recommends ensuring that precautionary approaches and TACs and quotas better reflect actual fishing opportunities, recognising that disproportionate restrictions, combined with administrative and control burdens, risk discouraging fishers and accelerating their departure from the sector.
- The NWWAC calls for moving away from zero-catch advice and requesting advice on stock recovery potential. Until such approaches are developed, the NWWAC supports the continued use of bycatch quotas and quota pools.
- The NWWAC recommends avoiding repeated precautionary reductions for data-limited stocks and making greater use of fishers' knowledge to address data gaps. The NWWAC recommends that automatic 20% precautionary buffer applied at each assessment cycle should be suspended, as it is based on very limited information, often with no estimate of stock biomass beyond landings data. For stocks caught only as unavoidable by-catch, appropriate by-catch quotas should instead be established in line with the target fisheries in which they occur.

- The NWWAC recommends refraining from deducting assumed quantities of discards exempted from the Landing Obligation when setting EU TACs following agreement on overall TACs with the UK. The NWWAC highlights the importance of addressing Choke Risks associated with Zero-Catch Advice through Bycatch TACs.
- The NWWAC calls for ICES to provide clearer explanations where there is significant variability in advice for Category 1 and 2 stocks, including cases where positive fishing mortality and biomass indicators nevertheless result in reduced catch advice.
- For recommendations on specific stocks, please note bold text in chapter 9.

- END -