IDENTIFICATION

SCIENTIFIC NAME
Trisopterus esmarkii

SPECIES NAME(S)
Norway pout

COMMON NAMES
Norway Pout

STOCK IDENTIFICATION
The Norway pout species is distributed from the west of Ireland to Kattegat, the North Sea to the Barents Sea, and at the Faroe Islands (ICES 2017). The population considered here is that occurring in the northern North Sea and in Skagerrak, correspondent to the ICES assessment unit in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a. There is no known basis at present for separating the North Sea pout component into smaller stock units; although pout in the eastern Skagerrak demonstrate some self-containment, it is only to a very small degree (ICES 2009). Beginning in 2016, ICES stock assessment advice is provided only once annually, while formerly advice and management TACs were revisited biannually (ICES 2016).

Norway pout in this region are taken in a directed fishery and also as bycatch in the blue whiting fishery (ICES 2017). The species is harvested for reduction purposes, nearly exclusively by large vessels from Denmark and Norway using small-mesh gear. Main fishing grounds are in the northern North Sea and particularly at Fladen Ground along the Norwegian Trench.

ASSESSMENT

Strengths
- Scientific advice uses up-to-date age-based methods of assessment.
- The stock, although highly variable due to recruitment variability and a short life span, has been above biomass reference points since 2006.
- Fishing mortality over the past decade has fluctuated at low levels relative to the past 10-year trend.
- Managers' and fishers' compliance is evidenced to be strong: catch limits have not been fully used; discards and bycatch of Norway pout are considered negligible; bycatch regulations are in place and contributing to decrease of relative proportion; sorting grids are mandatory in Norway and Faroe Islands.
- Direct impacts on ETP species are expected to be very small. Interaction with the seafloor ecosystem does occur in the trawl component of this fishery, but is considered to have more limited impact than other demersal fisheries in the North Sea.

Weaknesses
- The stock is shared between the EU and Norway; and while ICES provides annual review of long-term management strategies at the joint request of the EU and Norway, there is no agreed long-term management plan and no harvest control rule for the stock.
- Combined TACs set by the EU and Norway occasionally exceed the total catches advised by ICES, and in rare cases, by a significant amount (e.g. 2014).
- Environmental parameters' influence on recruitment and trophic interactions and dependence are not yet well understood.
- There is no comprehensive strategy in place for managing the impacts on or minimizing mortality of ETP species; and there is insufficient information to quantitatively estimate outcome status of all ETP species with a high degree of certainty.
- There is slight misalignment between the area assessed and the area covered by EU TACs (the latter includes Division 2.a, while the former does not).
- Fishing mortality reference points are not defined.

SCORES

Management Quality:
- Management Strategy: > 6
- Managers Compliance: 9.2
- Fishers Compliance: 10

Stock Health:
- Current Health: 10
- Future Health: ≥ 8

FIPS
- no related FIPs

MSC
- Norway sandeel, pout and north sea sprat: MSC Certified

RECOMMENDATIONS

RETAILERS & SUPPLY CHAIN
- Monitor the progress in closing out conditions placed upon the MSC certification of the fishery and if agreed timelines are met; offer assistance in closing conditions where possible.
- Engage with ICES and fishery management authorities in the EU and Norway to develop a long-term management plan and harvest control rule that considers the impacts of this fishery on the overall ecosystem structure and function.
- Work with scientists to conduct research to better understand the influence of natural factors, such as temperature and predation, on recruitment and population size.
- Implement monitoring, analysis, and assessments to determine the direct and indirect impacts of this fishery on sensitive habitats, endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) species, particularly marine mammals and seabirds.
- Work with scientists and managers to define fishing mortality reference conditions.