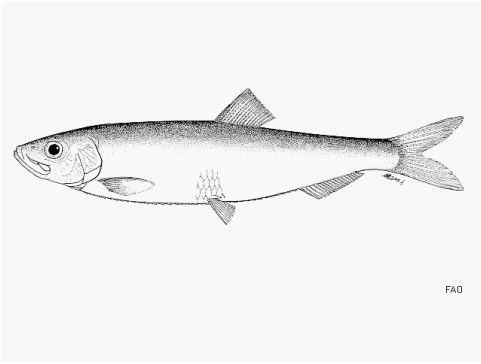


# European sprat North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat

Fishery:  North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat  European Union Subarea 4  Belgium  Midwater trawls

## IDENTIFICATION



### SCIENTIFIC NAME

*Sprattus sprattus*

### SPECIES NAME(S)

European sprat

### STOCK IDENTIFICATION

For assessment purposes, ICES formerly considered sprat in the North Sea as an independent unit. However following results of recent genetic study, ICES determined it appropriate to merge the North Sea (Subarea 4) and Skagerrak and Kattegat (Division 3a) stocks into a single assessment unit ([WKSPRAT 2018](#) [2019](#)). The new area excludes sprat in the Norwegian fjords.

Uncertainty remains with regard to the boundary of this stock with sprat from the Baltic Sea and English Channel ([ICES 2018](#)). Local depletion of sprats is an issue of particular ecological concern in areas where there may be geographically or functionally discrete populations (e.g. coastal periphery of Division 3a, and Norwegian fjords) ([ICES 2018](#))([ICES 2019](#)). Further research is recommended.

In addition to the North Sea and Skagerrak and Kattegat (Subarea 4 and Division 3a) unit; FishSource considers the following assessment units currently defined by ICES:

- [Celtic Sea and West of Scotland \(Subarea 6 and Divisions 7a–c and f–k\)](#)

- [English Channel \(Divisions 7d,e\)](#)

- [Baltic Sea \(Subdivisions 22–32\)](#)



### RELATED LINKS:

- [European Commission \(EC\)](#)
- [International Council for the Exploration of the Sea \(ICES\)](#)

## ASSESSMENT

### Strengths

- Analytical assessment, conducted in the North Sea since 2013; has expanded to include the Skagerrak and Kattegat population in a single unit. Biomass reference points for the new unit were defined in 2018, including a revised fishing mortality cap ( $F_{cap}$ ). The merging of the North Sea and Skagerrak and Kattegat into a single assessment unit has improved the performance of the stock assessment model.
- The newly assessed stock unit is indicated to be in a healthy condition.
- The  $F_{cap}$  is designed to ensure the advice strategy is precautionary, despite uncertainty in forecasts of abundance.
- Since 2017, the timing of TACs and management advice for Subarea 4 in the North Sea (where the majority of the catch occurs) has been aligned for the period 1 July - 30 June of the following year.
- Fisher compliance with set TACs is generally good, despite relatively small overages in the North Sea in 2014, 2016 and 2018.
- Management measures are in place to reduce misreporting and limit bycatch of other species, particularly juvenile herring.
- The EU landing obligation in place (since early 2015), should facilitate continued low discarding; and discards of sprat are considered negligible.
- Direct impacts of the fishery on sea mammals and birds is considered to be very low.

### Weaknesses

- There are no explicit management objectives for this stock.
- TACs have not consistently conformed to catches advised by ICES, and in Division 3a, they have been up to 6 times the advised limit. Further, the TAC timing is misaligned with the advice timing (TAC for the 3a unit is per calendar year, while the advice for the assessment unit is applicable for 1 July - 30 June of the following year).
- Uncertainties in the forecast can lead to unexpectedly high fishing mortality ( $F$ ); in the former North Sea assessment unit, the  $F_{msy}$  proxy,  $F_{cap}$  was often exceeded by relatively large proportions.
- Stock structure is not completely understood, and depletion of functionally discrete local populations in the periphery of the assessment unit is a concern.
- There is concern regarding potential incentive for illegal slippage, and resultant undocumented catch of target and non-target species.
- Research on the indirect impacts of the fishery (i.e., by means of food web relationships) on other fish species, marine mammals and seabirds is still incomplete.
- Although the impact of purse seines and pelagic trawls in bottom habitats is typically assumed to be negligible, it remains to be tested in this specific fishery especially taking into account that the sea bottom might be impacted when fishing in shallow waters.

## SCORES

### Management Quality:

Management Strategy	Managers Compliance	Fishers Compliance
≥ 6	≥ 6	10

### Stock Health:

Current Health	Future Health
10	≥ 6

## FIPS

No related FIPs

## MSC

No related MSC fisheries

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### RETAILERS & SUPPLY CHAIN

- Press ICES to conduct further scientific research to fully define the stock structure to improve management.
- Press regional advisory bodies, national fisheries administrations and the European Commission to develop a multi-species, ecosystem-based management plan, with specific management objectives for the pelagic fisheries in the North Sea and associated areas.
- Ensure that managers set the TAC in line with scientific advice.
- Engage with the EU Pelagic Advisory Council (<https://www.pelagic-ac.org/>) directly or through one of the General Assembly members, to

ensure sustainable exploitation.

- Engage as a stakeholder in all MSC certifications for this stock and support the MSC Client groups to ensure all conditions attached to the Certifications are fully addressed.