

## 16 Plaice in Bay of Biscay and Atlantic Iberian waters

ple.27.89a – *Pleuronectes platessa* in Subarea 8 and Division 9.a

### 16.1 General

**Type of assessment:** no analytical assessment. The Bay of Biscay and Atlantic Iberian waters plaice (*Pleuronectes platessa*) is considered a data-limited stock (DLS) and classified as a category 5.2 stock (ICES, 2012; ICES, 2023a).

**Advice basis:** Precautionary approach. The advice for this stock is biennial<sup>1</sup>.

#### 16.1.1 Stock identity

The stock unit definition of plaice (*P. platessa*) in this area is not clear. WGNEW (ICES, 2014) concluded that in the absence of specific information on stock structure, the ICES ecoregions (North Sea including 7.d, Celtic Seas, and southern European Atlantic) are to be used as minimum level of disaggregation for the definition of stock units (ICES, 2012). This is an interim solution until more information is available on the stock.

#### 16.1.2 Biological reference points

No biological reference points are defined for this stock.

#### 16.1.3 Fishery description

Plaice is caught as bycatch by various fleets and gear types covering small-scale artisanal and trawl fisheries. Portugal and France are the major actors in this fishery.

#### 16.1.4 Summary of ICES advice and management

##### 16.1.4.1 ICES advice for 2024 and 2025

ICES advises that when the precautionary approach is applied, landings in each of the years 2024 and 2025 should be no more than 124 t. ICES cannot quantify the corresponding total catches.

##### 16.1.4.2 Management plan

The EU multiannual plan (MAP) for stocks fished in Western Waters (EU, 2019) takes bycatch of this species into account.

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<sup>1</sup> Note on data revisions: landings for years 1994 to 2000 were included with information available in the ICES historical database. Catches from 2014 to 2000 were extracted from InterCatch.

## 16.2 Fisheries data

### 16.2.1 Commercial landings

Plaice (*P. platessa*) is caught as a bycatch by various fleets and gear types covering both small-scale artisanal and trawl fisheries. Portugal and France are the main countries exploiting the stock with Spain playing a minor role. Landings may contain misidentified flounder (*Platichthys flesus*) as they are often confounded at market auctions in Portugal. The official landings are given in Table 16.1 while the catches submitted to WGBIE are given in Table 16.2. The quantity of discarding is uncertain. It is likely that discards are relatively minor but WGBIE cannot currently conclude that discarding is less than 5% of the catch.

No commercial index is currently available. However, the advice might benefit from commercial LPUE data if these were made available to WGBIE.

Biological information needs to be compiled. Issues concerning the quality of landing statistics in addition to the lack of survey or commercial abundance indices need to be resolved before an assessment can be made. As this species is at the southern extent of its range in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Peninsula (Figure 16.1), perhaps merging the northern and southern stocks would provide a better opportunity to improve the assessment of the stock.

This stock is under the EU landing obligation since 2016 (EU, 2016).

## 16.3 Assessment model, diagnostics, and retrospectives

### 16.3.1 Previous assessment

#### 16.3.1.1 ICES 2020 and 2021 Advice (Published 28 June 2019)

The ICES framework for category 5 stocks was applied (ICES, 2012). ICES advises that when the precautionary approach is applied, wanted catches in each of the years 2020 and 2021 should be no more than 155 t. ICES cannot quantify the corresponding total catches. The stock status relative to reference points remains unknown. The precautionary buffer was not applied in 2017 for the 2018 and 2019 advice and is therefore applied in 2020.

#### 16.3.1.2 ICES 2022 and 2023 Advice (Published 30 June 2021)

ICES advises that when the precautionary approach is applied, landings in each of the years 2022 and 2023 should be no more than 155 t, similar to the last advice provided for this stock. ICES cannot still quantify the corresponding total catches to date.

The ICES framework for category 5 stocks (ICES, 2012) was again applied. For stocks without information on abundance or exploitation, ICES considers that a precautionary reduction of catches should be implemented unless there is ancillary information clearly indicating that the current level of exploitation is appropriate for the stock. The stock status relative to reference points remains unknown. The precautionary buffer was applied in 2019 (for the 2020 and 2021 advice) and is, therefore, not applied this year (ICES, 2023b).

#### 16.3.1.3 Note on Benchmark workshop 2 on the development of MSY advice using SPiCT (ICES 2023)

The WKBMSYSPiCT2 workshop (ICES, 2023c) held in late 2022, evaluated the appropriateness of data and the use of the Surplus Production in Continuous Time (SPiCT; Pedersen and Berg, 2017) model to provide MSY advice for selected stocks and for which this stock was considered.

The conclusion of WKBMSYSPiCT2 benchmark (ICES, 2023c) with regards to this stock was as follows: “It was not possible for the group to recommend or approve a SPiCT assessment model for this stock. The reasons for this included (a) some doubts on whether a LPUE index such as the value derived in the WKBMSYSPiCT2 would appropriately reflect the biomass of a stock essentially caught as a bycatch in mixed fisheries directed on common sole or cephalopods (squids and cuttlefish). Doubts linked to the back-transformation of the LPUE index to the natural scale as well as the severe constraints that needed to be applied to reach convergence and avoid the stock to fluctuate at two different states depending on the initial values. The 'one-way trip' trajectories of landings and biomass indices considerably made the estimation of parameters complicated and contributed to a high level of uncertainty associated with estimated parameters. Alternatively, the use of integrated models could be explored in the future to account for the scarce amount of size and age information available for this stock and identify the spatial differences of the stock’s distribution over the area.”

### 16.3.2 Current assessment

The ICES framework for category 5 stocks (ICES, 2012; ICES, 2023a) was applied. For stocks without information on abundance or exploitation, ICES considers that a precautionary reduction of catches should be implemented unless there is ancillary information clearly indicating that the current level of exploitation is appropriate for the stock (ICES, 2023b). The stock status relative to reference points remains unknown. The precautionary buffer was last applied in 2019 to provide advice for each of the years 2020 and 2021, wasn’t applied during WGBIE 2021 for catch advice 2022 and 2023 and therefore has been used this year.

## 16.4 References

- EU. 2016. Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2016/2374 of 12 October 2016 establishing a discard plan for certain demersal fisheries in South-Western waters
- EU. 2019. Regulation (EU) 2019/472 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 March 2019 establishing a multiannual plan for stocks fished in the Western Waters and adjacent waters, and for fisheries exploiting those stocks, amending Regulations (EU) 2016/1139 and (EU) 2018/973, and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 811/2004, (EC) No 2166/2005, (EC) No 388/2006, (EC) No 509/2007 and (EC) No 1300/2008. Official Journal of the European Union, L83: 1–17. <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2019/472/oj>.<http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2019/472/oj>
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- ICES. 2014. Report of the Working Group on Assessment of New MoU Species (WGNEW), 24–28 March 2014, Copenhagen, Denmark. ICES CM 2014/ACOM:21. 162 pp
- ICES. 2016. Report of the Working Group for the Bay of Biscay and the Iberian waters Ecoregion (WGBIE), 13–19 May 2016, ICES HQ, Copenhagen, Denmark. ICES CM/ACOM:12. 513 pp.
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- ICES. 2023a. Advice on fishing opportunities. In Report of the ICES Advisory Committee. ICES Advice 2023. Section 1.1.1. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.22240624>
- ICES. 2023b. ICES Guidance for completing single-stock advice 2023, 64 pp.
- ICES. 2023c. Benchmark workshop 2 on the development of MSY advice for category 3 stocks using SPiCT (WKBMSYSPiCT2). ICES Scientific Reports. 5:65. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.23372990>
- Pedersen, M.W., Berg, C.W. 2017. A stochastic surplus production model in continuous time. Fish and Fisheries, 18: 226–243.

## 16.5 Tables and figures

Table 16.1. Plaice (*P. platessa*) in Subarea 8 and Division 9a. Official landings by country in tonnes.

Year	Belgium	France	Portugal	Spain	Total
1994		365	33	1	399
1995		319		12	331
1996		248		14	262
1997		255		3	258
1998		219		6	225
1999	1			3	4
2000	15	193		22	230
2001		201		22	223
2002	1	167		11	179
2003	1	217	1	4	223
2004		229	163	7	399
2005	4	186	1	33	224
2006	2	248	1	5	256
2007	5	214	41	4	263
2008	2	98	89	4	193
2009	2	133	101	8	244
2010	2	200	112	12	325
2011	2	208	65	9	283
2012	3	183	63	4	252
2013	0	147	45	5	197
2014	1	164	51	6	222
2015	2	142	45	5	194
2016	1	121	49	4	175
2017	1	98	33	2	134
2018	0	90	39	3	133
2019	0	94	36	3	133
2020	0	76	46	4	126

Year	Belgium	France	Portugal	Spain	Total
2021	0	65	27	4	96
2022	0	48	12	2	62

Table 16.2. Plaice (*P. platessa*) in Subarea 8 and Division 9a. Catches (in tonnes) submitted to InterCatch.

Catch category	Country	Gear	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Discards	France	Nets	-	10.0	3.0	4.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	4.3	0.2
		Other	-	2.0	0	0	0	0	-	0	0
		Trawl	-	4.0	0	1.0	1.0	0	-	0	0
	Spain	Nets	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	0	0
		Trawl	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	0	0
	Portugal	Trawl	X	0*	0*	0*	0	-	-	0	0
Discards Total			0	15.0	3.0	5.0	3.0	2.0	2.0	4.3	0.2
Landings	Belgium	Other	1.0	2.0	1.0	1.0	-	0.4	0.3	0.1	0
	France	Nets	42.0	46.0	48.0	42.0	41.0	38.0	37.0	32.4	25.4
		Other	38.0	21.0	12.0	24.0	6.0	7.0	4.0	3.2	2.3
		Trawl	82.0	74.0	62.0	33.0	44.0	49.0	36.0	29.6	20.3
	Portugal	Other	47.0	44.0	47.0	33.0	39.0	36.0	46.0	27.1	12.0
	Spain	Nets	4.0	3.0	3.0	1.0	2.0	2.0	2.2	2.1	1.8
		Other	1.0	1.0	1.0	0	0	0.2	0.6	0.2	0.1
		Trawl	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.06	0.63	1.2	0.4
Total landings			217.0	193.0	174.0	135.0	133.0	133.0	126.0	96.3	62.3
Total catches			217.0	208.0	177.0	140.0	136.0	135.0	128.0	100.6	62.5
Official Landings**			220.0	193.0	173.0	134.0	133.0	133.0	126.0	96.0	62.0

\* Not available in InterCatch but submitted to (AC).

\*\* Official provisional statistics from ICES website: <http://data.ices.dk/rec12/downloadData.aspx>

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