ICES Advice on fishing opportunities, catch, and effort
Celtic Seas, Faroes, and Oceanic Northeast Atlantic ecoregions
Published 7 June 2024

Blue ling (*Molva dypterygia*) in subareas 6, 7, and 12 and in Division 5.b (Celtic Seas, western Hatton Bank, and Faroes grounds)

ICES stock advice

ICES advises that when the MSY approach is applied, catches should be no more than 11 197 tonnes in 2025 and no more than 11 170 tonnes in 2026. This advice only applies to Division 5.b, subareas 6 and 7, and Division 12.b. ICES does not give advice for blue ling in divisions 12.a and 12.c.
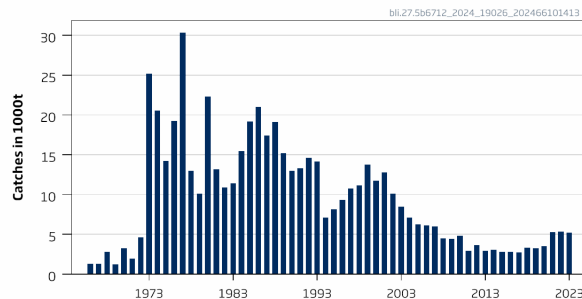
ICES Non-fisheries conservation considerations

ICES has not identified any conservation aspects other than those related to the commercial fisheries.
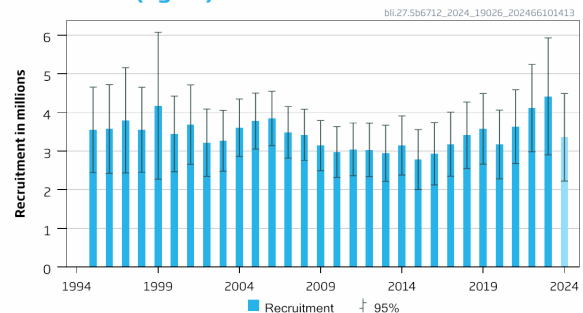
Stock development over time

Fishing pressure on the stock is below F_{MSY} and below F_{pa}. Spawning-stock size is above MSY $B_{trigger}$.
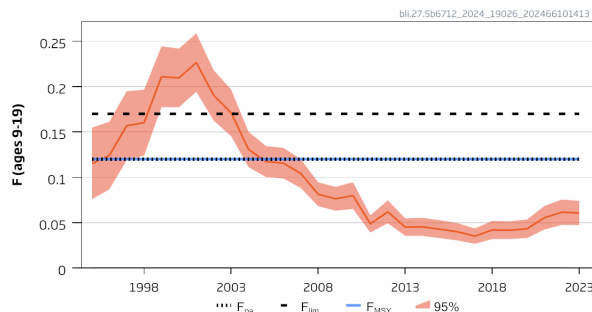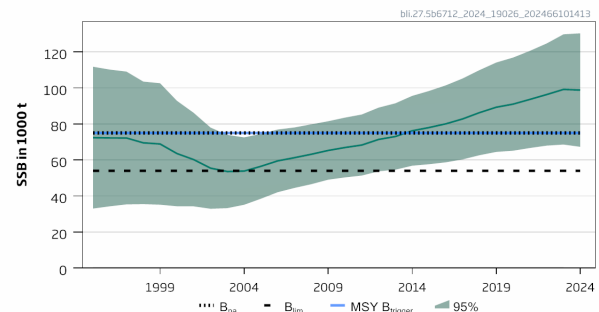

Figure 1   Blue ling in subareas 6–7 and 12 and in Division 5.b. Summary of the stock assessment. Top left: total catches. Top right: recruitment (age 9). Bottom left: fishing mortality. Bottom right: spawning-stock biomass (SSB). The assumed recruitment value for 2024 is shaded in a lighter colour.

Catch scenarios

Table 1 Blue ling in subareas 6–7 and 12 and in Division 5.b. Assumptions made for the interim year and in the first forecast year.

Variable	Value	Notes
$F_{ages\ 9–19}$ (2024)	0.061	$F=F_{sq}=F_{2023}$
$F_{ages\ 9–19}$ (2025)	0.061	F_{sq}, applied to 2025 for forecasting 2026
$R_{age\ 9}$ (2024 and 2025)	3 356 000	Geometric mean of model estimates 1995–2023; in numbers
SSB (2025)	98 695	SSB when fishing at F_{sq} in 2024; in tonnes
Total catch (2024)	5 832	Catches corresponding to F_{sq}; in tonnes
Discards (2024 and 2025)	0	Negligible discards in 2009–2023

Table 2a Blue ling in subareas 6–7 and 12 and in Division 5.b. Annual catch scenarios for 2025. Weights are in tonnes.

Rationale	Catch (2025)	F (2025)	SSB (2026)	% SSB change*	% advice change^
ICES advice basis					
MSY approach ($F_{2025} = F_{MSY}$)	11 197	0.12	93 046	−5.7	2.1
Other scenarios					
$F_{2025} = F_{pa}$	11 197	0.12	93 046	−5.7	2.1
$F_{2025} = 0$	0	0	104 290	5.7	−100
$F_{2025} = F_{lim}$	15 499	0.17	88 735	−10	41
SSB (2026) = B_{pa} = MSY $B_{trigger}$	29 207	0.348	75 037	−24	166
SSB (2026) = B_{lim}	50 413	0.70	54 000	−45	359
$F_{2025} = F_{sq} = F_{2023}$	5 822	0.061	98 440	−0.26	−47

* SSB in 2026 (1 January) in relation to SSB in 2025 (98 695 t).
^ Advice value for 2025 relative to the advice value for 2024 (10 972 t).

Table 2b Blue ling in subareas 6–7 and 12 and in Division 5.b. Annual catch scenarios for 2026 with $F_{2025} = F_{sq} = F_{2023}$. Weights are in tonnes.

Rationale	Catch (2026)	F (2026)	SSB (2027)	% SSB change*	% advice change^
ICES advice basis					
MSY approach ($F_{2026} = F_{MSY}$)	11 170	0.12	92 878	−5.7	−0.24
Other scenarios					
$F_{2026} = F_{pa}$	11 170	0.12	92 878	−5.7	−0.24
$F_{2026} = 0$	0	0	104 101	5.8	−100
$F_{2026} = F_{lim}$	15 461	0.17	88 576	−10.0	38
SSB (2027) = B_{pa} = MSY $B_{trigger}$	29 006	0.35	75 037	−24	159
SSB (2027) = B_{lim}	50 194	0.70	54 000	−45	348
$F_{2026} = F_{sq} = F_{2023}$	5 808	0.061	98 262	−0.24	−48

* SSB in 2027 (1 January) in relation to SSB in 2026 (98 440 tonnes, assuming F_{sq} in 2025).
^ Advice value for 2026 relative to advice value for 2025 (11 197 t).

Basis of the advice

Table 3 Blue ling in subareas 6–7 and 12 and in Division 5.b. The basis of the advice.

Advice basis	MSY approach
Management plan	ICES is not aware of any agreed precautionary management plan for blue ling in this area

Quality of the assessment

In recent years, there has been no fishing in Subarea 12 outside of Division 12.b (ICES, 2022). Historic catches may include catch from divisions 12.a and 12.c. The assessment only applies to Division 5.b, subareas 6 and 7, and Division 12.b. Subareas 12.a and 12.c are considered a separate component, and ICES does not provide advice for this component because of a current lack of information.

Catches are increasingly coming from longline fisheries, which are not sampled. This could introduce bias in the assessment. Selectivity of the fisheries have changed over time, which could violate the assumptions of the current model used.

The assessment has overestimated spawning-stock biomass (SSB) and slightly underestimated fishing mortality, though F has been well below FMSY since 2007. The tendency was less prominent during the last two assessments (Figure 2).
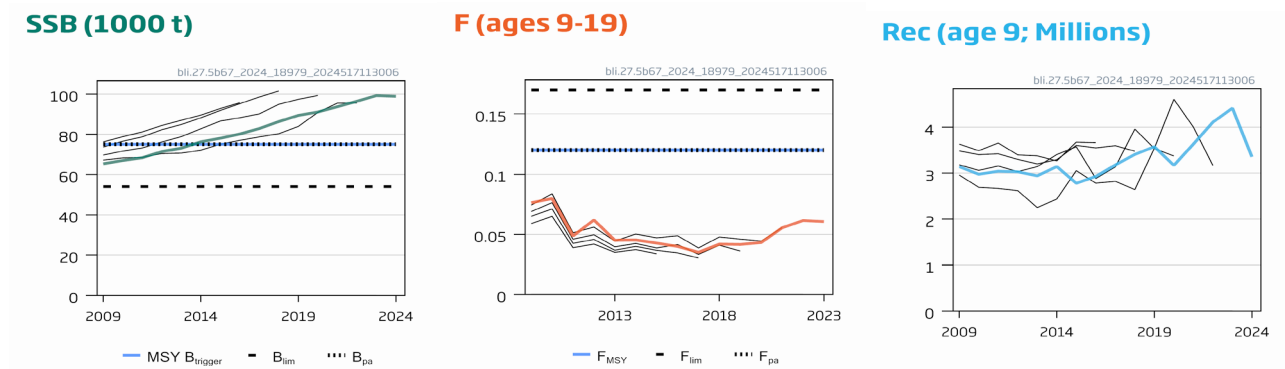

Figure 2   Blue ling in subareas 6–7 and 12 and in Division 5.b. Historical assessment results.

Issues relevant for the advice

Stock units for blue ling have been revised. There was no biological information from Subarea 12, but the review concluded that eastern areas (subareas 1–4 with samples from Norway) should be separated from the Atlantic basin (with samples from Greenland, Rockall, Atlantic slope) (ICES, 2023b, 2024). A consequence of this separation was that it was decided to include Subarea 12 within the bli.27.5b67 stock area, rather than as a standalone stock.

Based on bathymetry and recent distribution of the fishery, it seems likely that blue ling in Division 12.b are the same stock as blue ling in Division 5.b and subareas 6 and 7. Potential blue ling habitats in divisions 12.a and 12.c are separated geographically from Division 12.b, and there is no evidence to suggest that blue ling from divisions 12.a and 12.c are part of the same stock. It may not be possible to split historic catches between Division 12.b and divisions 12.a and 12.c, but it seems likely that most historic catches were from Division 12.b. Therefore, as an interim solution, all landings from Subarea 12 are assumed to have been taken in Division 12.b. When further information on stock structure and historic catches in Subarea 12 becomes available, ICES may re-evaluate the assignment of blue ling in Subarea 12, particularly in divisions 12.a and 12.c. The fishing activity noted in previous years in this area is absent; and, according to satellite (AIS and VMS) data, there continues to be no evidence of fisheries operating in division 12.a (ICES, 2022a, 2022b).

The assessment and advice only applies to Division 5.b, subareas 6 and 7, and Division 12.b. Divisions 12.a and 12.c are considered a separate component, and ICES does not provide advice for this component because of a current lack of information.

Catches lower than the TACs in 2013–2023 are considered to reflect a low level of fishing activity. Protection of spawning areas restricts catch opportunities at times when blue ling has a high catchability. Bigger catches in 2021–2023 are likely due to a combination of increasing stock biomass and increasing activity of longline fisheries, which caught 32% of total landings in 2023 (Table 7), compared to 15% in 2015.

This stock is classified as Category 4 in the NEAFC categorization of deep-sea species/stocks (NEAFC, 2016), which implies that fisheries are primarily restricted to coastal state exclusive economic zones (EEZs). Therefore, management measures are not taken by NEAFC unless complementary to coastal state conservation and management measures.

Reference points

Table 4 Blue ling in subareas 6–7 and 12 and in Division 5.b. Reference points, values, and their technical basis.

Framework	Reference point	Value	Technical basis	Source
MSY approach	F_{MSY}	0.12	F_{MSY} estimated without the advice rule (AR)	ICES (2017)
	MSY $B_{trigger}$	75 037 t	Set equal to B_{pa}	
Precautionary approach	B_{lim}	54 000 t	Set as B_{loss}	
	B_{pa}	75 037 t	$B_{lim} \times e^{1.645\sigma}$; $\sigma = 0.20$	
	F_{lim}	0.17	Based on simulated SSB to B_{lim}	
	F_{pa}	0.12	$F_{lim} \times e^{-1.645\sigma}$; $\sigma = 0.20$	
Management plan	SSB_{mgt}	Not defined		
	F_{mgt}	Not defined		

Basis of the assessment

Table 5 Blue ling in subareas 6–7 and 12 and in Division 5.b. The basis of the assessment.

ICES stock data category	1 (ICES, 2023a)
Assessment type	Multi-Year Catch Curves (MYCC), a model fitted to age composition and total catch so as to estimate annual total mortality ([Z] ICES, 2024)
Input data	International landings 1995–2023; age-at-length from French sampling (2009–2013)
Discards and bycatch	Not included; discarding is considered negligible
Indicators	None
Other information	Last benchmarked in 2014 (ICES, 2015)
Working group	Working Group on the Biology and Assessment of Deep-Sea Fisheries Resources (WGDEEP)

History of the advice, catch, and management

Table 6 Blue ling in subareas 6–7 and 12 and in Division 5.b. History of TACs and quotas, and ICES advice and landings. Weights are in tonnes.

Year	ICES advice	Catch corresponding to advice	EU quota in 5.b (Faroese waters)*	EU and UK TAC in subareas 6 and 7**	Faroese quota in subareas 6 and 7	Norwegian quota in divisions 2.a and 5.b and subareas 4, 6, and 7	EU and UK TAC Inter. Waters 12	ICES landings in Division 5.b and subareas 6, 7 and 12
2003	No direct fisheries^		-	3 240	3 678	940	-		8 467
2004	Biennial^		-	3 240	3 678	900	-		7 127
2005	No direct fisheries^		-	3 240	3 137	900	200		6 250
2006	Biennial^		-	3 065	3 137	400	200		6 151
2007	No direct fisheries		-	3 065	2 510	200	160		6 002
2008	Biennial		-	3 065	2 009	200	150		4 504
2009	No direct fisheries		-	3 065	2 009	150	150		4 433
2010	Biennial		-	2 700	1 732	150	150		4 809
2011	No direct fishery and effort to limit bycatch. A reduction in catches should be considered.		-	0	2 032	0	150	815	2 916
2012	No new advice, same as 2011			0	2 031	0	150	815	3 648
2013	Average catch 2008 to 2011	3 900		0	2 540	0	150	774	2 929
2014	No new advice, same as 2013	3 900		1 500	2 540	***	***	697	3 043

Year	ICES advice	Catch corresponding to advice	EU quota in 5.b (Faroese waters)*	EU and UK TAC in subareas 6 and 7**	Faroese quota in subareas 6 and 7	Norwegian quota in divisions 2.a and 5.b and subareas 4, 6, and 7	EU and UK TAC Inter. Waters 12	ICES landings in Division 5.b and subareas 6, 7 and 12
2015	MSY approach	< 5 046	1 500	5 046	***	***	558	2 760
2016	No new advice, same as 2015	< 5 046	2 100	5 046	***	***	446	2 763
2017	MSY approach	≤ 11 314	2 000	11 314	***	***	357	2 701
2018	MSY approach	≤ 10 763	2 000	10 763	***	***	286	3 334
2019	MSY approach	≤ 11 778	1 885	11 778	***	***	229	3 278
2020	MSY approach	≤ 11 150	1 885	11 150	***	***	137	3 491
2021	MSY approach	≤ 11 522	0	11 522	***	***	96	5 290
2022	MSY approach	≤ 10 859	0	10 859	***	***	77	5 308
2023	MSY approach	≤ 10 952	0	10 952	***	***	77	5 187
2024	MSY approach	≤ 10 972	0	10 972	***	***	62	
2025	MSY approach	≤ 11 197						
2026	MSY approach	≤ 11 170						

* Quota of ling and blue ling combined.
** From 2011, TAC in EU waters and international waters of Division 5.b and subareas 6 and 7.
*** Included in EU TAC.
^ Advice for blue ling in the Northeast Atlantic (not split by different assessment units).

History of catch and landings

Table 7   Blue ling in subareas 6–7 and 12 and in Division 5.b. Official catch distribution by fleet in 2023.

Total catch (2023)	Landings		Discards
5 187t	32% longline	68% bottom trawl	Negligible
	5 187 t		

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Table 8   Blue ling in subareas 6–7 and 12 and in Division 5.b. History of commercial catch by country as estimated by ICES. All weights are in tonnes (time-series revised in 2024 following the addition of Subarea 12).

Year	Estonia	Faroes	France	Germany	Iceland	Ireland	Lithuania	Norway	Poland	Russia	Spain	UK-E & W	UK-SCO	unallocated	Total
1966		0	839	0		0	0	450		0		0	0		1289
1967		0	0	1043		0	0	273		0		0	0		1316
1968		0	0	1838		0	0	949		0		0	0		2787
1969		0	0	309		0	0	910		0		0	0		1219
1970		0	0	348		0	0	2894		0		0	0		3242
1971		0	0	1367		0	0	572		0		0	0		1939
1972		0	696	2730		0	0	1217		0		0	0		4643
1973		51	18080	3009		0	0	4028		0		4	0		25 172
1974		76	15390	3026		0	0	1916		0		167	0		20 575
1975	0	19	7147	4469	0	0	0	2549	0	0		9	0		14 193
1976	0	61	15937	1714	0	0	0	1535	0	0		1	0		19 248
1977	0	29	14953	1340	0	0	0	967	0	12500		560	0		30 349
1978	0	433	8922	3242	0	0	0	347	0	0		56	0		13 000
1979	0	1090	6399	1871	0	0	0	448	0	0		279	0		10 087
1980	0	1223	8378	12204	0	0	0	481	0	0		0	1		22 287
1981	0	1529	4243	7146	0	0	0	276	0	0		0	1		13 195
1982	0	2889	4536	3171	0	0	0	216	0	0		99	1		10 912
1983	0	4396	6144	271	0	0	0	606	0	0		13	2		11 432
1984	0	7343	7449	397	0	0	0	243	0	0		5	0		15 437
1985	0	4501	14126	253	0	0	0	323	0	0		2	0		19 205
1986	0	6756	13760	243	0	0	0	248	0	0		9	2		21 018
1987	0	3920	12645	553	0	0	0	298	0	0		4	10		17 430
1988	0	8289	10464	89	0	0	0	237	0	0	0	11	15	0	19 105
1989	0	4388	10022	75	0	0	0	685	0	0	0	0	16	0	15 186
1990	0	1374	10118	115	0	0	0	1369	0	0	0	0	3	0	12 979
1991	0	1763	11018	60	0	0	0	412	0	0	0	7	72	0	13 332
1992	0	3858	9866	27	0	0	0	828	0	0	0	6	45	0	14 630
1993	0	2975	10222	271	0	3	0	319	0	0	0	114	221	0	14 125
1994	0	1691	4242	156	0	74	0	313	0	0	437	13	143	0	7069
1995	0	2283	4168	191	0	14	0	182	0	0	405	104	796	0	8143
1996	0	1587	4753	99	0	0	0	202	0	0	966	103	1609	0	9319
1997	0	1146	6220	8	1	10	0	150	0	0	601	1039	1609	0	10 784
1998	0	1202	6893	6	122	22	0	88	0	0	539	486	1762	0	11 120
1999	0	2105	5584	6	796	41	0	152	0	0	1121	353	3601	0	13 759
2000	0	1766	5747	97	14	89	0	512	0	1	579	606	2343	0	11 754

2001	85	1649	3627	13	2	819	16	680	0	0	1276	525	4110	0	12 802
2002	0	1101	3140	4	0	579	28	638	0	3	1561	250	2767	0	10 071
2003	5	2472	3687	1	0	30	66	344	16	2	1141	26	677	0	8467
2004	3	1475	3960	1	0	20	38	52	1	25	880	15	657	0	7127
2005	0	1655	3082	0	0	13	9	122	0	15	770	11	573	0	6250
2006	0	1939	3037	0	0	5	2	106	0	20	554	10	478	0	6151
2007	0	1881	3213	0	0	2	1	253	0	37	438	17	160	0	6002
2008	0	975	2501	0	0	0	2	110	0	122	580	2	212	0	4504
2009	0	978	2547	0	0	0	0	83	0	1	478	0	346	0	4433
2010	0	1539	2453	0	0	0	0	160	0	0	297	0	360	0	4809
2011	0	1167	1480	0	0	0	0	104	0	0	91	0	74	0	2916
2012	0	1015	1609	0	0	0	0	102	0	5	443	0	47	427	3648
2013	0	575	1715	0	0	0	0	132	0	3	223	0	205	76	2929
2014	0	880	1741	0	0	0	0	53	0	0	81	3	285	0	3043
2015	0	703	1119	0	0	0	0	366	0	0	189	11	372	0	2760
2016	0	1113	1086	0	0	1	0	111	0	0	171	0	281	0	2763
2017	0	854	1048	1	0	0	0	60	0	0	93	1	644	0	2701
2018	0	969	1290	0	0	0	0	237	0	0	102	0	736	0	3334
2019	0	638	1624	0	0	0	0	155	0	0	142	0	719	0	3278
2020	0	799	1569	0	0	0	0	121	0	0	287	0	715	0	3491
2021	0	848	1955	0	0	0	0	305	0	0	375	0	1807	0	5290
2022	0	639	1781	0	0	0	0	353	0	0	393	0	2142	0	5308
2023	0	575	1424	0	0	0	0	485	0	0	422	0	2281	0	5187

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Table 9   Blue ling in subareas 6–7 and 12 and in Division 5.b. History of commercial catch by area as estimated by ICES. Weights are in tonnes. Time-series revised in 2024 following the addition of Subarea 12.

Year	Division 5.b	Subarea 6	Subarea 7	Subarea 12	Total
1966	1 269	20			1 289
1967	1 244	72			1 316
1968	2 661	126			2 787
1969	1 101	118			1 219
1970	3 066	176			3 242
1971	1 924	15			1 939
1972	3 933	710			4 643
1973	7 147	18 025			25 172
1974	3 798	16 777			20 575
1975	6 186	8 007			14 193
1976	12 938	6 310			19 248
1977	21 318	9 031			30 349
1978	4 898	8 102			13 000
1979	4 878	5 209			10 087
1980	10 019	12 268			22 287
1981	5 027	8 168			13 195
1982	6 457	4 455			10 912
1983	5 724	5 708			11 432
1984	8 094	7 343			15 437
1985	6 054	13 151			19 205
1986	7 821	13 197			21 018
1987	7 139	10 291			17 430
1988	9 526	9 294	22	263	19 105
1989	5 266	9 556	294	70	15 186
1990	4 799	7 405	223	552	12 979
1991	2 962	9 011	212	1 147	13 332
1992	4 702	8 550	407	971	14 630
1993	2 836	7 632	321	3 336	14 125
1994	1 644	4 334	339	752	7 069
1995	2 440	4 900	230	573	8 143
1996	1 602	6 564	365	788	9 319
1997	2 798	7 186	383	417	10 784
1998	2 584	7 497	601	438	11 120
1999	2 931	9 085	390	1 353	13 759
2000	2 524	8 352	284	594	11 754
2001	2 114	9 178	835	675	12 802
2002	2 024	6 053	676	1 318	10 071
2003	3 815	3 338	122	1 192	8 467
2004	2 700	3 459	63	905	7 127
2005	2 575	2 891	74	710	6 250
2006	2 850	2 733	67	501	6 151
2007	3 296	2 188	164	354	6 002
2008	2 060	1 846	34	564	4 504
2009	1 461	2 649	11	312	4 433
2010	2 244	2 478	37	50	4 809
2011	1 469	1 343	49	55	2 916
2012	1 424	1 548	44	632	3 648
2013	1 121	1 519	35	254	2 929
2014	1 523	1 409	31	80	3 043
2015	1 128	1 542	78	12	2 760
2016	1 496	1 228	10	29	2 763
2017	1 154	1 513	6	28	2 701
2018	1 339	1 967	4	24	3 334
2019	1 108	2 121	39	10	3 278

2020	1 475	1 975	28	13	3 491
2021	1 634	3 637	14	5	5 290
2022	1 507	3 796	5	0	5 308
2023	1 950	3 230	7	0	5 187

Table 10   Blue ling in subareas 6–7 and 12 and in Division 5.b. Landings inside and outside the NEAFC regulatory area (RAs) as estimated by ICES as well as official landings. Weights are in tonnes. Time-series revised in 2024 following the addition of Subarea 12.

Year	Inside the NEAFC RAs	Outside the NEAFC RAs	Total landings	Proportion inside the NEAFC RAs (%)
2014	81	2962	3043	2.7
2015	43	2717	2760	1.58
2016	47	2716	2763	1.71
2017	48	2653	2701	1.79
2018	30	3304	3334	0.90
2019	15	3263	3278	0.45
2020	19	3472	3491	0.54
2021	5	5285	5290	0.09
2022	0	5308	5308	0
2023	0	5187	5187	0

Summary of the assessment

Table 11   Blue ling in subareas 6–7 and 12 and in Division 5.b. Assessment summary. Weights are in tonnes, recruitment in thousands. High and Low indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Year	Recruitment			Spawning-stock biomass (SSB)			Catches	Fishing Mortality		
	Low	R age 9	High	Low	SSB	High		Low	F	High
	thousands			tonnes			tonnes	Ages 9–19		
1995	2443	3549	4655	33004	72441	111877	8143	0.076	0.115	0.155
1996	2424	3571	4718	34263	72276	110288	9319	0.087	0.124	0.161
1997	2434	3795	5156	35329	72237	109144	10784	0.119	0.157	0.195
1998	2450	3552	4653	35501	69556	103610	11120	0.124	0.160	0.197
1999	2272	4173	6074	35158	68926	102694	13759	0.177	0.21	0.24
2000	2466	3445	4425	34282	63618	92954	11754	0.177	0.21	0.24
2001	2659	3686	4713	34228	60237	86246	12802	0.194	0.23	0.26
2002	2347	3218	4088	32906	55491	78075	10071	0.162	0.190	0.22
2003	2478	3267	4055	33236	53619	74003	8467	0.145	0.171	0.197
2004	2863	3604	4346	35118	53863	72608	7127	0.111	0.131	0.150
2005	3052	3777	4502	38497	56507	74517	6250	0.100	0.117	0.135
2006	3141	3845	4549	42111	59542	76973	6151	0.099	0.116	0.132
2007	2819	3486	4154	44503	61315	78126	6002	0.088	0.104	0.120
2008	2759	3421	4083	46564	63209	79853	4504	0.068	0.081	0.095
2009	2493	3143	3793	49040	65315	81590	4433	0.063	0.076	0.090
2010	2319	2977	3634	50336	66960	83585	4809	0.065	0.080	0.095
2011	2360	3043	3727	51350	68334	85317	2916	0.039	0.049	0.058
2012	2336	3030	3725	53724	71434	89143	3648	0.049	0.062	0.075
2013	2215	2943	3670	54610	73077	91543	2929	0.035	0.045	0.055
2014	2379	3145	3911	56821	76247	95673	3043	0.035	0.045	0.055
2015	2006	2781	3556	57660	78031	98403	2760	0.033	0.043	0.053
2016	2125	2930	3735	58720	80119	101518	2763	0.030	0.040	0.050
2017	2352	3180	4008	60343	82844	105344	2701	0.027	0.035	0.044
2018	2550	3410	4270	62655	86318	109981	3334	0.032	0.042	0.052
2019	2663	3577	4491	64481	89346	114211	3278	0.032	0.042	0.051
2020	2281	3171	4061	65162	91057	116952	3491	0.033	0.043	0.054
2021	2680	3634	4588	66663	93672	120682	5290	0.042	0.055	0.069

Year	Recruitment			Spawning-stock biomass (SSB)			Catches	Fishing Mortality		
	Low	R age 9	High	Low	SSB	High		Low	F	High
	thousands			tonnes			tonnes	Ages 9–19		
2022	2982	4112	5242	67985	96391	124798	5308	0.047	0.062	0.076
2023	2903	4416	5929	68585	99235	129886	5187	0.047	0.061	0.074
2024	2221	3356*	4490	67325	98870	130416				

*Geometric mean from 1995 to 2023.

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