Blue whiting (*Micromesistius poutassou*) in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14 (Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters)

ICES advice on fishing opportunities

ICES advises that when the long-term management strategy agreed by Norway, the European Union, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and the UK is applied, catches in 2025 should be no more than 1 447 054 tonnes.

Non-fisheries conservation considerations

Conservation aspects and associated management measures may exist at a national or regional level but were not reviewed by ICES.

Stock development over time

Fishing pressure on the stock is above F_{MSY} and F_{pa} but below F_{lim}; spawning-stock size is above MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa}, and B_{lim}.

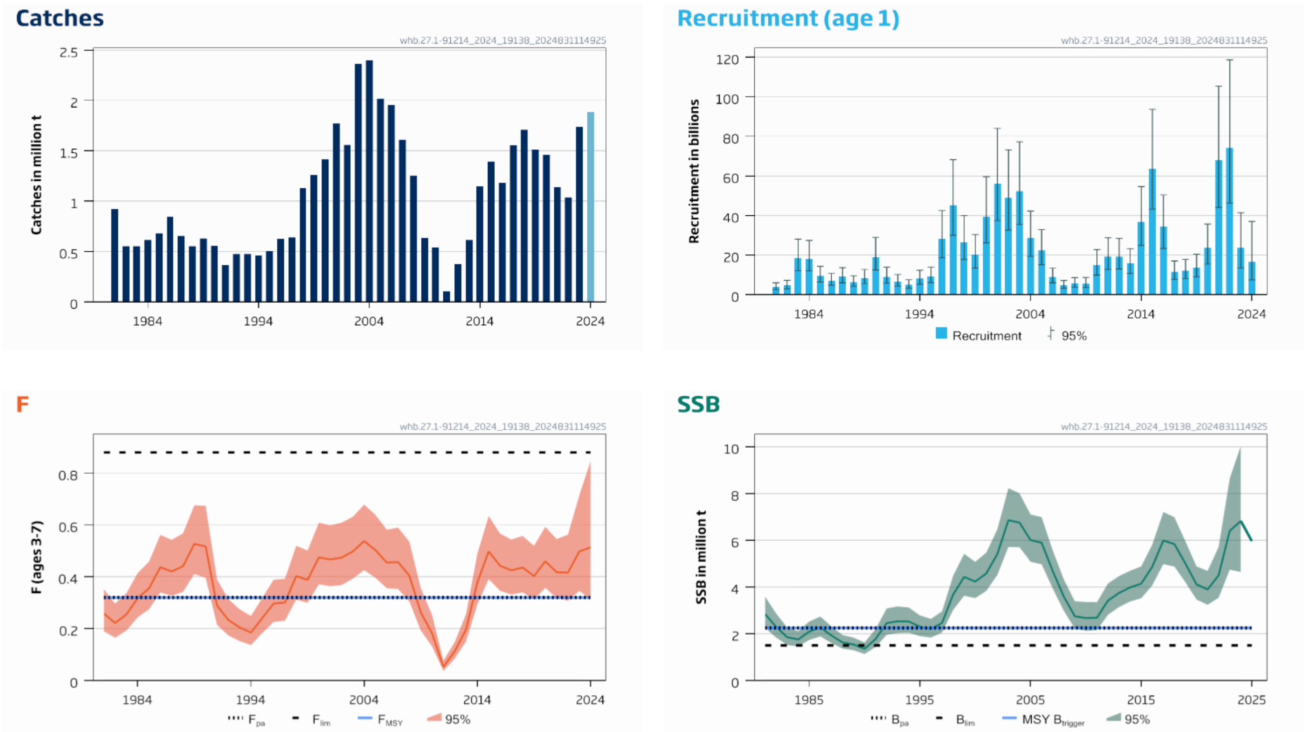

Figure 1 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. Summary of the stock assessment. The catch estimate for 2024 is preliminary.

Catch scenarios

Table 1 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. Values in the forecast and for the interim year.

Variable	Value	Notes
$F_{ages\ 3–7}$ (2024)	0.51	From the assessment (based on assumed 2024 catches)
SSB (2025)	5966970	From the assessment; tonnes
$R_{age\ 1}$ (2024)	16667202	From the assessment; thousands
$R_{age\ 1}$ (2025–2026)	22993253	Geometric mean (1996–2023); thousands
Total catch (2024)	1881072	As estimated by ICES; tonnes

Table 2 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. Annual catch scenarios. All weights are in tonnes.

Basis	Total catch (2025)	F (2025)	SSB (2026)	% SSB change*	% catch change**	% advice change***
ICES advice basis						
Long-term management strategy: $F = F_{mgt}$	1447054	0.32	5761173	−3.4	−23	−5.4
Other scenarios						
MSY approach: F_{MSY}	1447054	0.32	5761173	−3.4	−23	−5.4
F = 0	0	0	7171648	20	−100	−100
F_{pa}	1447054	0.32	5761173	−3.4	−23	−5.4
F_{lim}	3221031	0.88	4064961	−32	71	111
$SSB_{2026} = B_{lim}$^	6098300	3.2	1500000	−75	224	299
$SSB_{2026} = B_{pa} = $ MSY $B_{trigger}$ ^	5206856	2.1	2250000	−62	177	240
$F = F_{2024}$	2154655	0.51	5079233	−14.9	14.5	41
$SSB_{2026} = SSB_{2025}$^	1234726	0.27	5966913	0	−34	−19.3
$Catch_{2025} = catch_{2024}$ ^	1881076	0.44	5342170	−10.5	0	23
$Catch_{2025} = catch_{2024}$ −20%	1504912	0.34	5705194	−4.4	−20	−1.62
$Catch_{2025} = catch_{2024}$ +25%	2351368	0.57	4890792	−18.0	25	54
$Catch_{2025} = advice_{2024}$ −20%	1223855	0.27	5977459	0.20	−35	−20
$Catch_{2025} = advice_{2024}$ +25%	1912196	0.44	5312212	−11.0	1.65	25

* SSB 2026 relative to SSB 2025.
** Advice value for 2025 relative to expected catch in 2024 (1 881 072 tonnes).
*** Advice value for 2025 relative to advice for 2024 (1 529 754 tonnes).
^ SSB_{2026} and $Catch_{2025}$ values are the closest available approximation to either B_{lim}, B_{pa}, $B_{trigger}$, SSB_{2025}, or target catches.

The advice for 2025 is 5.4% lower than that for 2024 because of a decline in biomass caused by a high F and, recent low recruitment (2022 and 2023 year classes).

Basis of the advice

Table 3 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. The basis of the advice.

Advice basis	Long-term management strategy
Management plan	A long-term management strategy was agreed by the European Union, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Norway (Agreed record of conclusions…, 2016) and subsequently by the UK in 2021 (Agreed record of conclusions…,2021). ICES has evaluated the strategy, including clause 6.b, and found it to be precautionary (ICES, 2016a, 2017).

Quality of the assessment

This year's assessment shows consistent estimates of spawning-stock size, fishing mortality, and recruitment compared to previous assessments.

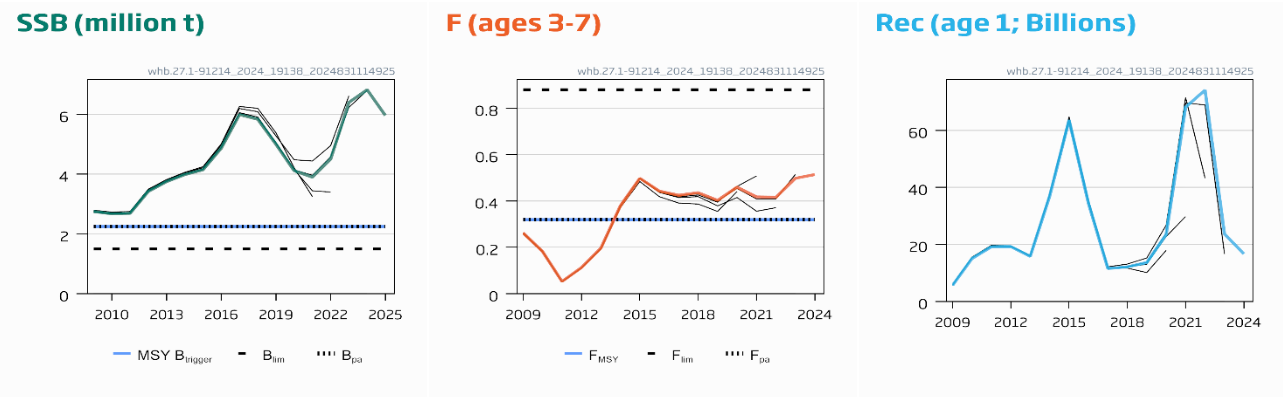

Figure 2 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. Historical assessment results.

Issues relevant for the advice

There have been consistent deviations from the long-term management strategy since 2018 as evident from the sum of unilateral quotas. During the evaluation of the management strategy (ICES, 2016a), the implementation error in the form of a consistent overshoot of the TAC was not included. Therefore, failing to adhere to the advised catches as derived from the application of the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) approach or the long-term management strategy may not be precautionary. Specifically, this may result in an increased risk for the stock to fall below B_{lim} and loss of catch in the long term.

Both the 2020 and 2021 year classes are among the highest in the time-series and are fully recruited to the fishery in 2025. Notably, 31% and 44% of the catch in 2025 is predicted to consist of fish from the 2020 and 2021 year class, respectively. The fishery will depend on these two large year classes in the coming years. The history of the stock shows that subsequent years of low recruitment after a period of high recruitment may cause the SSB to quickly drop to lower levels and would lead to a reduction in future advice. Other surveys, which are not currently used in the assessment, confirm that the 2022 and 2023 year classes are low.

Reference points

Table 4 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. Reference points, values, and their technical basis.

Framework	Reference point	Value	Technical basis	Source
MSY approach	MSY $B_{trigger}$	2 250 000 t	B_{pa}	ICES (2013a, 2013b, 2016a)
	F_{MSY}	0.32	Stochastic simulations with segmented regression stock–recruitment relationship capped to F_{P05}	ICES (2016a)
Precautionary approach	B_{lim}	1 500 000 t	Approximately B_{loss}	ICES (2013a, 2013b, 2016a)
	B_{pa}	2 250 000 t	B_{lim} exp(1.645 × σ), with σ = 0.246	ICES (2013a, 2013b, 2016a)
	F_{lim}	0.88	Equilibrium scenarios with stochastic recruitment: F value corresponding to 50% probability of (SSB < B_{lim})	ICES (2016a)
	F_{pa}	0.32	F_{P05}; the F that leads to SSB ≥ B_{lim} with 95% probability	ICES (2016a, 2021)
EU–Faroes–Iceland–Norway-UK long-term management strategy	SSB_{mgt_lower}	1 500 000 t	B_{lim}	Agreed record of conclusions…(2016)
	SSB_{mgt}	2 250 000 t	B_{pa}	
	F_{mgt_lower}	0.05	Arbitrary low F	
	F_{mgt}	0.32	F_{MSY}	

Basis of the assessment

Table 5 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. Basis of the assessment and advice.

ICES stock data category	1 (ICES, 2023)
Assessment type	Age-based analytical assessment (SAM; ICES, 2021)*
Input data	Commercial catches, preliminary estimate of catch-at-age in the year (Q1–Q2) in which the assessment is carried out. One survey index (International Blue Whiting Spawning Stock Survey [IBWSS; A1142] ages 1–8, 2004–2024, excluding 2010 and 2020). Time invariant maturity-at-age was estimated in 1994 by combining maturity ogives from the southern and northern areas. Time invariant natural mortality fixed at 0.2 for all ages, derived in the 1980s from age compositions before the targeted fishery started.
Discards and bycatch	Discard data since 2014 have been included in the assessment
Indicators	Estimates of recruitment from surveys: Joint Norwegian-Russian survey Barents Sea (G5348), International Ecosystem Survey in the Nordic Seas in May (A3675, [IESNS]), the Faroese bottom-trawl surveys (G1264 [FO-GFS-Q1], G3284 [FO-GFS-Q3]) and the Icelandic bottom-trawl survey in spring (G3239 [IS-SMB])
Other information	The stock was benchmarked in 2012 (WKPELA; ICES, 2012). An interbenchmark protocol was conducted in spring of 2016 (ICES, 2016b).
Working group	Working Group on Widely Distributed Stocks (WGWIDE; ICES 2023b)

*View assessment in Transparent Assessment Framework (TAF)

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History of the advice, catch, and management

Table 6 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. ICES advice and catch. All weights are in tonnes.

Year	ICES advice	Catch correspond-ing to advice	TAC	ICES estimated landings	ICES estimated discards§	ICES catch
1987	TAC for northern areas; no advice for southern areas	950000	-			655000
1988	TAC for northern areas; no advice for southern areas	832000	-			557847
1989	TAC for northern areas; no advice for southern areas	630000	-			627447
1990	TAC for northern areas; no advice for southern areas	600000	-			561610
1991	TAC for northern areas; no advice for southern areas	670000	-			369524
1992	No advice	-	-			475026
1993	Catch at *status quo* F (northern areas); no assessment for southern areas	490000	-			480679
1994	Precautionary TAC (northern areas); no assessment for southern areas	485000	650000*			459414
1995	Precautionary TAC for combined stock	518000	650000*			578905
1996	Precautionary TAC for combined stock	500000	650000*			645982
1997	Precautionary TAC for combined stock	540000	-			672437
1998	Precautionary TAC for combined stock	650000	-			1128969
1999	Catches above 650 000 t may not be sustainable in the long run	650000	-			1256228
2000	F should not exceed the proposed F_{pa}	800000	-			1412927
2001	F should not exceed the proposed F_{pa}	628000	-			1780170
2002	Rebuilding plan	0	-			1556792
2003	F should be less than the proposed F_{pa}	600000	-			2321406
2004	Achieve 50% probability that F will be less than F_{pa}	925000	-			2380161
2005	Achieve 50% probability that F will be less than F_{pa}	1075000	-			2034309
2006	F old management plan	1500000	2100000**			1976176
2007	F should be less than the proposed F_{pa}	980000	1847000***			1625255
2008	F should be less than F_{pa}	835000	1250000^			1260615
2009	Maintain stock above B_{pa}	384000	606000^^			641818
2010	Follow the agreed management plan	540000	548000			526357
2011	See scenarios	40100–223000	40000			103620
2012	Follow the agreed management plan	391000	391000			384021
2013	Follow the agreed management plan	643000	643000			628169
2014	Follow the agreed management plan	948950	1200000			1155279
2015	Follow the agreed management plan	839886	1260000^^^	1389953	6291	1396244
2016	MSY approach	≤ 776391	1147000^^^	1178180	5007	1183187
2017	MSY approach	≤ 1342330	1675400^^^	1556030	2030	1558061
2018	Long-term management strategy	≤ 1387872	1727964^^^	1707152	4325	1711477
2019	Long-term management strategy	≤ 1143629	1483208^^^	1512922	2604	1515527
2020	Long-term management strategy	≤ 1161615	1478358^^^	1492420	2828	1495248
2021	Long-term management strategy	≤ 929292	1157604^^^	1139514	3936	1143450
2022	Long-term management strategy	≤ 752736	752736§§§	1035094	3641	1038736
2023	Long-term management strategy	≤ 1359629	1359629§§§	1733169	3928	1737098
2024	Long-term management strategy	≤ 1529754	1529754§§§			1881072§§
2025	Long-term management strategy	≤ 1447054				

* NEAFC proposal for the northern stock component.
** Agreed TAC from the four Coastal States of 2 million tonnes and an additional allocation of 100 000 tonnes to Russian Federation in the international zone.
*** Agreed TAC from the four Coastal States of 1.7 million tonnes and an additional allocation of 147 000 tonnes to Russian Federation and Greenland.
^ Agreed TAC from the four Coastal States of 1.1 million tonnes and an additional allocation to Russian Federation and Greenland.
^^ Agreed TAC from the four Coastal States of 0.59 million tonnes and an additional allocation of 16 000 tonnes to Russian Federation.
^^^ Sum of unilateral quotas (Note: the Coastal States agree to a TAC of 1 161 615 tonnes for 2020 and 929 292 tonnes for 2021).
§ Discards estimates include BMS landings.
§§ Preliminary.

[§§§] Official TAC agreed between the Coastal States that have signed up to the MP.

History of the catch and landings

Table 7 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. Catch distribution by fleet in 2023, as estimated by ICES.

Total catch (2023)	Landings		Discards
1 737 098 tonnes	97% pelagic trawl	3% other gears	3 928 tonnes
	1 733 169 tonnes		

Table 8 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. History of commercial catch; ICES estimated values are presented for each country participating in the fishery. Discard data are included since 2014. All weights are in tonnes.

Country	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Denmark	48659	18134	248	140	165	340	2167	35256	45178	39395	60868	87348	68716	58997	40321	45644	87119
Estonia													0				
Faroe Islands	317859	225003	58354	49979	16405	43290	85768	224700	282502	282416	356501	349838	336569	343372	202415	217401	394198
France	16638	11723	8831	7839	4337	9799	8978	10410	9659	10345	13369	16784	16095	13769	14612	14202	16989
Germany	34404	25259	5044	9108	278	6239	11418	24487	24107	20025	45555	47708	38244	42362	35327	21667	38718
Iceland	236538	159307	120202	87942	5887	63056	104918	182879	214870	186914	228934	292944	268356	243725	190146	191813	292853
Ireland	31132	22852	8776	8324	1195	7557	13205	21466	24785	27657	43238	49903	38836	40135	39514	28972	54396
Lithuania	9812	5338						4717		1129	5300			9543	21183	13149	32600
Netherlands	79875	78684	35686	33762	4595	26526	51635	38524	56397	58148	81156	121864	75020	62309	62017	63249	84637
Norway	539587	418289	225995	194317	20539	118832	196246	399520	489439	310412	399363	438426	351429	354033	233968	194973	390850
Poland											15889	12152	27185	47616	26077	20948	28276
Portugal	3897	4220	2043	1482	603	1955	2056	2150	2547	2586	2046	2497	3481	2819	2522	2784	3202
Spain	13557	14342	20637	12891	2416	6726	15274	32065	29206	31952	28920	24718	22782	23676	25509	26310	32870
Sweden	464	4	3	50	1	4	199	2	32	42	90	16**	54	25	40	20	377
UK (England & Wales)	12926	14147	6176	2475	27	1590	4100	11	131	1374	3447	1864	4062	7458	8783	7482	7521
UK (N. Ireland)							1232	2205	1119			4508	2899	2958			5299
UK (Scotland)	43540	38150	173	5496	1331	6305	8166	24630	30508	37173	64724	66682	54040	41344	65085	42903	87332
Russia	236369	225163	149650	112553	45841	88303	120674	152256	185763	173655	188449	170892	188006	181496	133605^	128002	153830
Greenland							2133				20212	23333	19753	19611	20190	19218	26031
Unallocated						3499									22137		
Total	1625255	1260615	641818	526357	103620	384021	628169	1155279	1396244	**1183224**	1558061	**1711477**	1515527	1495248	**1121313**	1038736	**1737098**

* Only landings.
^ Russia 2021 preliminary data (Q1+Q2) submitted to Working Group on Widely Distributed Stocks (WGWIDE) 2021.

Table 9 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. ICES estimated catches by main fishing areas. All weights are in tonnes.

Area	Norwegian Sea fishery (subareas 1 and 2; divisions 5.a, 14.a–b)	Fishery in the spawning area (Subarea 12; divisions 5.b, 6.a–b, 7.a–c)	Directed and mixed fisheries in the North Sea (Subarea 4; Division 3.a)	Total northern areas	Total southern areas (subareas 8, 9; divisions 7.d–k)	Total
1988	55829	426037	45143	527009	30838	557847
1989	42615	475179	75958	593752	33695	627447
1990	2106	463495	63192	528793	32817	561610
1991	78703	218946	39872	337521	32003	369524
1992	62312	318018	65974	446367	28722	475026
1993	43240	347101	58082	448423	32256	480679
1994	22674	378704	28563	429941	29473	459414
1995	23733	423504	104004	551241	27664	578905
1996	23447	478077	119359	620883	25099	645982
1997	62570	514654	65091	642315	30122	672437
1998	177494	827194	94881	1099569	29400	1128969
1999	179639	943578	106609	1229826	26402	1256228
2000	284666	989131	114477	1388274	24654	1412928
2001	591583	1045100	118523	1755206	24964	1780170
2002	541467	846602	145652	1533721	23071	1556792
2003	931508	1211621	158180	2301309	20097	2321406
2004	921349	1232534	138593	2292476	85093	2377569^
2005	405577	1465735	128033	1999345	27608	2026953^
2006	404362	1428208	105239	1937809	28331	1966140^
2007	172709	1360882	61105	1594695	17634	1612330^
2008	68352	1111292	36061	1215704	30761	1246465^^
2009	46629	533996	22387	603012	32627	635639^^
2010	36214	441521	17545	495280	28552	523832^^
2011	20599	72279	7524	100401	3191	103592^^
2012	24391	324545	5678	354614	29402	384016*
2013	31759	481356	8749	521864	103973	625837**
2014	45580	885483	28596	959659	195620	1155279
2015	150828	895684	44661	1091173	305071	1396244
2016	59744	905087	55774	1020604	162583	1183187***
2017	136565	1284105	45474	1466144	91917	1558061
2018	143204	1445957	43484	1632646	78831	1711477
2019	68593	1271883	44856	1385333	130194	1515527
2020	92084	1059197	64327	1215608	279640	1495248
2021	112082	801768	39509	953359	190091	1143450
2022	105752	724086	59371	889209	149527	1038736
2023	112352	1115090	99955	1327396	409702	1737098

^ Official catches by area from UK (England + Wales) are not included for this year.
^^ Official catches by area from Sweden and from UK (England + Wales) are not included for this year.
* Official catches by area from Sweden are not included for this year.
** Official catches by area from Sweden and Greenland are not included for this year.
*** The total includes only 1336 tonnes from UK (England + Wales; 2016 total catch from UK [England + Wales] = 1374 tonnes).

Table 10 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. Landings inside and outside the NEAFC regulatory areas (RAs), as estimated by ICES, as well as total landings. Weights are in tonnes.

Year	Inside the NEAFC RAs	Outside the NEAFC RAs	Total catches	Percentage inside the NEAFC RAs
2017	263019	1295042	1558061	17
2018	176399	1535078	1711477	10
2019	340062	1175465	1515527	22
2020	246412	1248836	1495248	16
2021	154661	833047	987708*	16
2022	85618	953119	1038736	8
2023	370280	1366819	1737098	21

* Without the Russian 2021 preliminary catch data (quarter 1 and 2) submitted to Working Group on Widely Distributed Stocks (WGWIDE) 2021 and the area unallocated catch data.

Summary of the assessment

Table 11 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. Assessment summary. The low and high values indicate the 95% confidence intervals.

Year	Recruitment age 1 (thousands)			SSB (tonnes)			Catches (tonnes)*	F ages 3–7		
	Low	Value	High	Low	Value	High		Low	Value	High
1981	2551722	3926845	6043021	2255728	2848892	3598033	922980	0.190	0.259	0.353
1982	2992970	4654237	7237600	1843079	2302292	2875920	550643	0.165	0.222	0.297
1983	12077798	18405152	28047301	1518354	1857051	2271301	553344	0.193	0.255	0.337
1984	12016308	18155595	27431525	1459112	1756978	2115650	615569	0.244	0.318	0.415
1985	6328222	9530567	14353431	1736113	2095589	2529496	678214	0.275	0.356	0.459
1986	4803867	7191160	10764825	1888037	2275099	2741513	847145	0.340	0.437	0.562
1987	6090084	9135654	13704273	1604053	1930088	2322392	654718	0.327	0.421	0.543
1988	4257018	6388336	9586718	1368764	1633741	1950015	552264	0.342	0.441	0.568
1989	5635364	8492077	12796930	1297809	1544593	1838304	630316	0.411	0.527	0.676
1990	12467843	19030268	29046812	1133437	1360151	1632212	558128	0.396	0.517	0.674
1991	5837021	9018525	13934129	1436200	1781013	2208611	364008	0.215	0.290	0.391
1992	4372710	6675905	10192239	1957463	2459569	3090469	474592	0.174	0.234	0.315
1993	3176130	4904147	7572314	2027571	2536344	3172781	475198	0.152	0.205	0.275
1994	5286138	8083361	12360767	2041715	2526866	3127299	457696	0.137	0.185	0.249
1995	6106890	9246748	14000963	1901341	2301943	2786950	505176	0.183	0.241	0.319
1996	18606640	28121180	42500998	1837212	2202930	2641448	621104	0.226	0.297	0.389
1997	30030587	45282850	68281600	2051721	2465258	2962145	639681	0.231	0.301	0.393
1998	17772455	26662834	40000479	3016711	3676469	4480518	1131955	0.312	0.403	0.520
1999	13412216	20193121	30402296	3626526	4435534	5425016	1261033	0.300	0.388	0.502
2000	26170011	39519157	59677612	3526285	4232552	5080275	1412449	0.371	0.475	0.609
2001	37452202	56086117	83991123	3833818	4582269	5476836	1771805	0.364	0.467	0.599
2002	32659078	48895162	73202828	4520799	5411589	6477902	1556955	0.368	0.474	0.609
2003	35501690	52380059	77282815	5713432	6859117	8234540	2365319	0.393	0.498	0.632
2004	19413350	28652562	42288903	5702248	6758279	8009883	2400795	0.426	0.538	0.679
2005	15152560	22322273	32884467	5081389	6009385	7106856	2018344	0.396	0.503	0.639
2006	6066322	9034025	13453556	4971428	5896622	6993995	1956239	0.356	0.455	0.582
2007	3230861	4809843	7160504	3939339	4686309	5574917	1612269	0.353	0.457	0.590
2008	3809263	5742047	8655508	2985192	3598632	4338131	1251851	0.304	0.404	0.535
2009	3628845	5633746	8746335	2225988	2749173	3395325	634978	0.193	0.263	0.357
2010	9894514	15015023	22785446	2125387	2673098	3361955	539539	0.131	0.182	0.253
2011	12759495	19159570	28769879	2155295	2688865	3354527	103771	0.037	0.053	0.077
2012	13029055	19252142	28447573	2815423	3421999	4159260	375692	0.085	0.113	0.149
2013	10736019	15805467	23268662	3144561	3749778	4471478	613863	0.151	0.197	0.257
2014	24896797	36894106	54672696	3382036	3985522	4696694	1147650	0.294	0.379	0.490
2015	43245295	63638331	93648041	3518222	4145565	4884772	1390656	0.391	0.498	0.635
2016	23407091	34357007	50429332	4070140	4867833	5821863	1180786	0.346	0.443	0.567
2017	7787001	11536456	17091283	4977011	5991886	7213706	1555069	0.332	0.425	0.544
2018	8246300	12144271	17884789	4875025	5837165	6989193	1709856	0.340	0.436	0.558
2019	9098684	13658936	20504781	4200420	5002721	5958267	1512026	0.313	0.403	0.520
2020	15488416	23528708	35742849	3464328	4113815	4885065	1460507	0.357	0.460	0.593
2021	44064994	68154846	105414359	3240960	3899370	4691539	1139531	0.319	0.418	0.546
2022	46314949	74145073	118698003	3542301	4503139	5724601	1035891	0.308	0.416	0.563
2023	13559463	23710169	41459761	4740576	6401983	8645654	1735017	0.346	0.498	0.715
2024	7493934	16667202	37069399	4645414	6827792	10035433	1881072***	0.312	0.514	0.847
2025		22993253**			5966970^					

* Catches presented are the sum of product (SOP) values from catch- and weight-at-age used in the assessment model.
** Geometric mean (1996–2023).
*** Preliminary catches.
^ SSB calculated from the assessment and assumed recruitment for 2025.

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