ICES Advice on fishing opportunities, catch, and effort
Celtic Seas, Faroes, Icelandic Waters, and Oceanic Northeast Atlantic ecoregions
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Ling (*Molva molva*) in Division 5.b (Faroes grounds)

ICES advice on fishing opportunities

ICES advises that when the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) approach and precautionary considerations are applied, there should be zero catch in 2027.

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 above F_{MSY} and F_{PA}. Spawning-stock size is below MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{PA}, and B_{lim}.

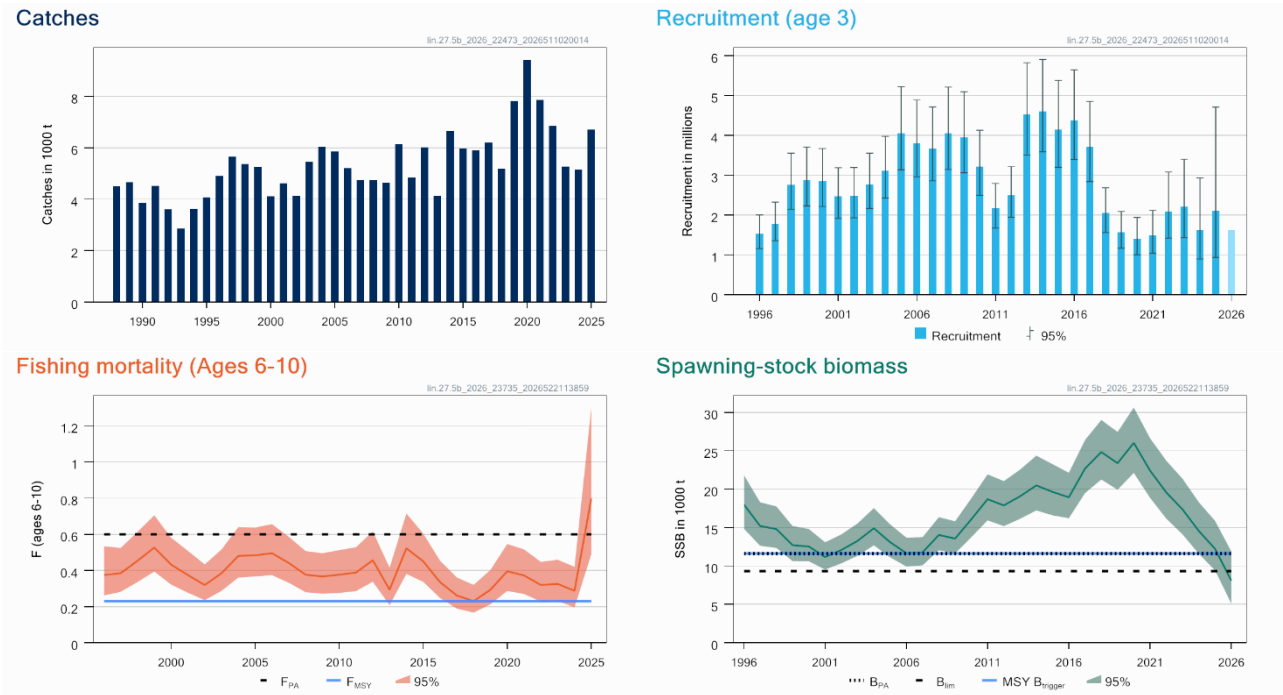

Figure 1 Ling in Division 5.b. Summary of the stock assessment with plots showing 95% confidence intervals. Catches, recruitment (age 3), fishing mortality (F), and spawning-stock biomass (SSB). The assumed recruitment value for 2026 is shaded in a lighter colour.

Catch scenarios

Table 1 Ling in Division 5.b. Values in the forecast and for the interim year.

Variable	Value	Notes
$F_{ages\ 6–10}$ (2026)	0.80	F corresponding to catches of 5 707 t
Spawning-stock biomass (SSB; 2027)	7 132	Short-term forecast; in tonnes
$R_{age\ 3}$ (2026 and 2027)	1 624	Resampled medians from the years 2020–2024; thousands
Catch (2026)	5707	Average catch 2023-2025 in tonnes
Projected landings (2026)	-	ICES cannot estimate projected landings
Projected discards (2026)	-	ICES cannot estimate projected discards

Table 2 Ling in Division 5.b. Annual catch scenarios. All weights are in tonnes.

Basis	Total catch (2027)	Projected landings (2027)	Projected discards (2027)	F_{total} (2027)	Spawning-stock biomass (SSB; 2028)	% SSB change*	% total allowable catch (TAC) change**	% advice change***	Probability SSB < B_{lim} in 2028 (%)^
ICES advice basis									
F = 0	0	-	-	0.0	10 815	52			30
Other scenarios									
ICES maximum sustainable yield (MSY) approach (F_{MSY} × SSB_{2027}/MSY $B_{trigger}$)	1006	-	-	0.14	9715	36	-		47
F_{MSY}	1558	-	-	0.23	9098	28	-		54
F_{PA} = F_{P05}	3359	-	-	0.60	6908	-3.1	-		81
F = F_{2025}	4086	-	-	0.80	6086	-14.7	-		90
$F_{MSY\ lower}$ ^^	-	-	-	-	-		-		-
$F_{MSY\ upper}$ ^^	-	-	-	-	-		-		-
SSB (2028) = B_{lim}	1341	-	-	0.19	9340	31	-		50
SSB (2028) = B_{PA} ^^^		-	-				-		
SSB (2028) = MSY $B_{trigger}$ ^^^		-	-				-		
SSB (2028) = SSB (2027)#		-	-				-		

* SSB_{2028} relative to SSB_{2027}.
** Total catch in 2027 relative to 2026 TAC (2 180 tonnes). ICES does not calculate the percentage change in TAC because Faroe Islands manages fishing effort (i.e. days of fishing), instead of TAC. Other countries (EU, UK, and Norway) have TACs for the stock in this area.
*** The advice value for 2027 relative to advice value for 2026 (0 tonnes).
^ The probability of SSB being below B_{lim} in 2028 presented as a percentage. This probability relates to the short-term probability of SSB < B_{lim} and is not comparable to the long-term probability of SSB < B_{lim} tested in simulations when estimating fishing mortality reference points.
^^ These reference points have not been estimated for this stock.
^^^ There are no catch options able to reach B_{PA} and MSY $B_{trigger}$ in 2028.
# SSB in 2027 is below B_{lim} therefore this catch option is not provided.

The advice for zero catch has not changed.

Basis of the advice

Table 3 Ling in Division 5.b. The basis of the advice.

Advice basis	Maximum sustainable yield (MSY) approach
Management plan	ICES is not aware of any agreed precautionary management plan for ling in this area

Quality of the assessment

In the period 2021–2024, there were changes in the ground gear used in the Faroese groundfish surveys resulting in lower catchability of small ling (< 5 kg). This was countered by downweighing these years in the tunning series used in the assessment (ICES, 2026).

Estimates from this assessment show a tendency to underestimate spawning-stock biomass (SSB) and overestimate fishing mortality; therefore, forecast 2025 F was based on 2025 observed catch and interim year 2026 F was based on average 2023–2025 catch.

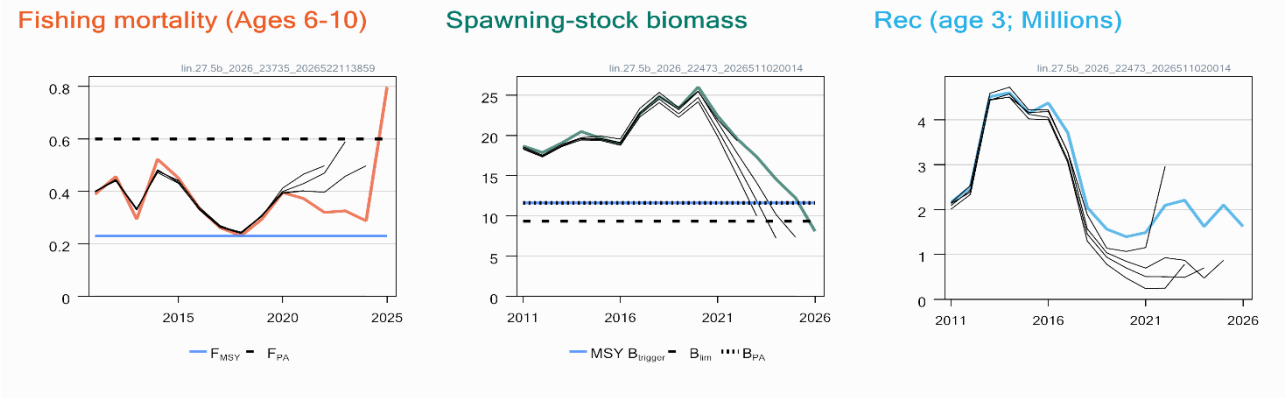

Figure 2 Ling in Division 5.b. Historical assessment results (final-year recruitment and biomass assumptions are included for each line).

Issues relevant for the advice

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

The Faroese fishery for ling in Division 5.b is managed by effort. ICES is not able to provide direct effort advice because the relationship between catch and fishing effort in the commercial fisheries is unknown.

Given the model's observed overestimation of recent fishing mortality, catches were used as the fishing pressure component in projections. Applying a fishing mortality for 2025 based on the observed catch in that year, and taking the average catch 2023–2025 as an assumed plausible catch scenario for 2026, the model forecasts that the stock has a 53% probability of being above B_{lim} at the start of 2028.

However, the stock is currently assessed to be below B_{lim} and is forecast to be below B_{lim} in 2027 based on observed catch through 2025, and the assessment shows declining SSB. The 2028 SSB forecast is sensitive to the assumed catch level in 2026, so ICES advises zero catch based on precautionary considerations until the SSB is above B_{lim} with high probability.

Reference points

Table 4 Ling in Division 5.b. Reference points, values, and their technical basis. Weights are in tonnes.

Framework	Reference point	Value	Technical basis	Source
Maximum sustainable yield (MSY) approach	MSY $B_{trigger}$	11 627	B_{PA}	ICES (2021)
	F_{MSY}	0.23	Stochastic simulations (EqSim) with segmented regression fixed at B_{lim}	ICES (2021)
Precautionary approach	B_{lim}	9 340	$B_{lim} = B_{PA}/\exp(\sigma \times SSB \times 1.645)$, $\sigma = 0.13$	ICES (2021)
	B_{pa}	11 627	$B_{PA} = B_{loss}$ lowest observed spawning-stock biomass (SSB; 2001) from benchmark assessment	ICES (2021)
	F_{PA}	0.60	F_{P05}; The F that leads to SSB ≥ B_{lim} with 95% probability	ICES (2021)
Management plan	SSB_{mgt}	Not defined		
	F_{mgt}	Not defined		

Basis of the assessment

Table 5 Ling in Division 5.b. Basis of assessment and advice.

ICES stock data category	1 (ICES, 2025)
Assessment type	Age-based analytical assessment (SAM, Nielsen and Berg, 2014) that uses catches in the model and in the forecast (ICES, 2026).
Input data	Commercial catches (mainly Faroese catches, ages and length frequencies from catch sampling); survey indices from the Faroese groundfish spring survey (G1264) and the Faroese groundfish summer survey (G3284); time invariant maturity ogive; natural mortalities set at 0.15 (ICES, 2023)
Discards and bycatch	Discarding is considered negligible
Indicators	None
Other information	This stock was last benchmarked in 2021 (ICES, 2021)
Working group	Working Group on the Biology and Assessment of Deep-Sea Fisheries Resources (WGDEEP)

History of the advice, catch, and management

Table 6 Ling in Division 5.b. ICES advice, total allowable catches (TACs), and official landings. All weights are in tonnes. Note that the Faroe Islands manages by fishing effort (i.e. days of fishing) instead of TAC.

Year	ICES advice	Catch corresponding to advice	TAC EU/UK Subarea 5 (UK and international waters)*	TAC EU Division 5.b (Faroese waters)**	TAC UK Division 5.b (Faroese waters)**	TAC Norway Division 5.b (Faroese waters)**	ICES landings
2003	30% reduction on fishing effort***		54	3 600			5 453
2004	Biennial***		54	3 600		2 200	6 039
2005	No increase in effort		48	3 600		2 200	5 849
2006	Biennial			3 065		2 457	5 213
2007	No increase in effort	-	34	3 065		2 406	4 731
2008	Biennial	-	34	3 065		2 525	4 747
2009	No increase in effort	-	34	3 065		2 525	4 643
2010	Biennial	-	34	2 700		2 425	6 129
2011	No increase in effort and a reduction in catches should be considered	-	33	0		-	4 843
2012	No new advice, same as 2011	-	33	0		-	6 011
2013	20% decrease in effort	-	33	0		-	4 133
2014	No new advice, same as 2013	-	33	-		1 250	6 655
2015	Same effort advised as for 2013	-	33	-		1 900	5 974
2016	Adjust effort corresponding to catch advice	6 730	33	2 000		2 000	5 890
2017	Biennial	6 730	33	2 000		2 000	6 195
2018	Adjust effort corresponding to catch advice	≤ 5 196	33	1 885		2 200	5 185
2019	Biennial	≤ 5 196	33	1 885		2 300	7 816
2020	Adjust effort corresponding to catch advice	≤ 4 157	33	1 885		2 500	9 427

Year	ICES advice	Catch corresponding to advice	TAC EU/UK Subarea 5 (UK and international waters)*	TAC EU Division 5.b (Faroese waters)**	TAC UK Division 5.b (Faroese waters)**	TAC Norway Division 5.b (Faroese waters)**	ICES landings
2021	Biennial	≤ 4 157	32^	0		2 500	7 869
2022	Maximum sustainable yield (MSY) approach	≤ 5 636	32^	0	225	3 000	6 843
2023	MSY approach	≤ 3 552	32^	0	180	3 000	5 269
2024	MSY approach, zero catch	0	5^	0	180	2 600	5 144
2025	MSY approach, zero catch	0	5^	0	160	2 500	6709^^
2026	MSY approach, zero catch	0	5^	0	80	2 100	
2027	MSY approach, zero catch	0*					

* Prior to 2021, this TAC was for the EU in Subarea 5 (EU and international waters).
** Combined TAC for ling and blue ling. In 2026 only for ling.
*** Advice for ling in the Northeast Atlantic.
^ For 2021 to 2023: TAC UK 6 tonnes + EU 26 tonnes. For 2024, 2025 and 2026: TAC UK 1 tonne + EU 4 tonnes.
^^ Preliminary value.

History of the catch and landings

There are no reported catches in the NEAFC regulatory areas (RAs).

Table 7 Ling in Division 5.b. Catches inside and outside the NEAFC regulatory areas (RAs) as estimated by ICES.

Year	Inside the NEAFC RAs (t)	Outside the NEAFC RAs (t)	Total catches (t)	Proportion inside the NEAFC RAs (%)
2023	0	5 269	5 269	0
2024	0	5 144	5 144	0
2025*	0	6 709	6 709	0

*preliminary

Table 8 Ling in Division 5.b. Catch distribution by fleet in 2025 as estimated by ICES.

Catch (2025)	Landings		Discards
6 709 tonnes	Bottom trawl 23%	Longline 77%	Negligible
	6 709 tonnes		

* Version 2: The catch corresponding to advice was corrected from ≤1,310t to 0t following the identification of an error in Table 6.

Table 9 Ling in Division 5.b. History of ICES estimated commercial catch presented by area for each country. Weights are in tonnes.

Year	Subdivision 5.b.1									Subdivision 5.b.2					Division 5.b
	Denmark *	Faroe Islands	France	Germany	Norway	UK (E&W) **	UK (Scotland) **	Russian Federation	Total 5.b.1	Faroes	France	Norway	UK (Scotland)	Total 5.b.2	Total 5.b
1988	42	1383	53	4	884	1	5		2372	832		1284		2116	4488
1989		1498	44	2	1415		3		2962	362		1328		1690	4652
1990		1575	36	1	1441		9		3062	162		633		795	3857
1991		1828	37	2	1594		4		3465	492		555		1047	4512
1992		1218	3		1153	15	11		2400	577		637		1214	3614
1993		1242	5	1	921	62	11		2242	282		332		614	2856
1994		1541	6	13	1047	30	20		2657	479		486		965	3622
1995		2789	4	13	446	2	32		3286	281		503		784	4070
1996		2672			1284	12	28		3996	102		798		900	4896
1997		3224	7		1428	34	40		4733	526		398		924	5657
1998		2422	6		1452	4	145		4029	511		819		1330	5359
1999		2446	17	3	2034		71		4571	164	4	498		666	5238
2000		2103	7	1	1305	2	61		3479	229	1	399		629	4109
2001		2069	14	3	1496	5	99		3686	420	6	497		923	4609
2002		1638	6	2	1640	3	239		3528	150	4	457		611	4139
2003		2139	12	2	1526	3	215		3897	624	4	927		1555	5453
2004		2733	15	1	1799	3	178	2	4731	1058	3	247		1308	6039
2005		2886	3		1553	3	175		4620	575	7	647		1229	5849
2006	3	3563	6		850		136		4558	472	6	177		655	5213
2007	2	3004	9		1071		6		4092	327	4	309		640	4731
2008		3354	4		740	32	25	11	4166	458	3	120		580	4747
2009	13	3471	2		419		270		4174	270	1	198		469	4643
2010	28	4906	2		442		121		5500	393	1	236		630	6129
2011	49	4270	2						4321	522	< 1			522	4843
2012	117	5452	7						5576	434	1			435	6011
2013	3	3734	7						3745	387	1			388	4133
2014		5653	10		308		0	13	5983	276		389	7	672	6655
2015		4375	16		993	1	0	6	5391	244	1	337	3	585	5976

Year	Subdivision 5.b.1									Subdivision 5.b.2					Division 5.b
	Denmark *	Faroe Islands	France	Germany	Norway	UK (E&W) **	UK (Scotland) **	Russian Federation	Total 5.b.1	Faroes	France	Norway	UK (Scotland)	Total 5.b.2	Total 5.b
2016		4214	8		855	< 1	103		5180	569	4	126	11	710	5890
2017		4371	4		864		54		5294	359		542		901	6195
2018		3836	2		793		42		4673	428		78	6	512	5185
2019		4861	25		1983		27		6895	338		580	2	920	7816
2020		5642	16		2537		83		8277	1015		128	6	1149	9427
2021		5074	11		1444		0		6529	1268		72		1340	7869
2022		4503	3		895		113		5513	1200		89	40	1330	6843
2023		3679	6		323		97		4106	567		553	44	1163	5269
2024		3064	1		1571		69		4706	244		163	31	439	5144
2025^		4132	3		1990		96		6221	286		170	32	488	6709

* Includes Greenland.

** Includes Subdivision 5.b.2 until 2014.

^ Preliminary.

Summary of the assessment

Table 10 Ling in Division 5.b. Assessment summary. "High" and "Low" indicate 95% confidence intervals. Recruitment is in thousands. SSB and catch in tonnes.

Year	Recruitment (age 3)			Spawning-stock biomass (SSB)			Catch	Fishing mortality (ages 6–10)		
	Low	$R_{age\ 3}$	High	Low	SSB	High		Low	$F_{ages\ 6–10}$	High
1988							4488			
1989							4652			
1990							3857			
1991							4512			
1992							3614			
1993							2856			
1994							3622			
1995							4070			
1996	1160	1525	2005	14849	18014	21854	4896	0.26	0.38	0.54
1997	1359	1779	2329	12627	15205	18309	5657	0.28	0.39	0.53
1998	2147	2764	3557	12353	14813	17764	5359	0.34	0.45	0.61
1999	2230	2874	3706	10623	12714	15216	5238	0.39	0.53	0.71
2000	2218	2854	3672	10611	12542	14826	4109	0.32	0.43	0.58
2001	1916	2472	3189	9532	11175	13101	4609	0.28	0.38	0.51
2002	1932	2484	3194	10346	12087	14121	4139	0.24	0.32	0.43
2003	2168	2776	3555	11329	13277	15559	5453	0.29	0.39	0.52
2004	2429	3107	3976	12688	14920	17544	6039	0.36	0.48	0.64
2005	3137	4047	5221	11129	13106	15435	5849	0.37	0.48	0.64
2006	2963	3807	4891	9930	11667	13709	5213	0.37	0.50	0.66
2007	2860	3672	4714	10084	11782	13766	4731	0.33	0.44	0.59
2008	3146	4050	5213	12050	14044	16368	4747	0.28	0.38	0.51
2009	3063	3950	5095	11638	13574	15832	4643	0.27	0.37	0.50
2010	2497	3212	4131	13745	16086	18826	6129	0.28	0.38	0.51
2011	1675	2164	2796	15939	18700	21938	4843	0.29	0.39	0.53
2012	1947	2503	3218	15188	17885	21060	6011	0.34	0.46	0.62
2013	3507	4519	5824	16143	19083	22560	4133	0.21	0.29	0.42
2014	3589	4604	5906	17227	20492	24375	6655	0.38	0.52	0.72
2015	3199	4148	5379	16595	19649	23265	5976	0.34	0.45	0.61
2016	3396	4378	5643	16211	18946	22142	5890	0.25	0.34	0.46
2017	2842	3713	4853	19486	22689	26418	6195	0.19	0.26	0.36
2018	1563	2049	2686	21253	24836	29023	5185	0.17	0.23	0.32
2019	1172	1565	2092	19921	23388	27459	7816	0.21	0.29	0.40
2020	1003	1396	1941	22111	26028	30639	9427	0.29	0.40	0.55
2021	1044	1487	2119	18866	22422	26648	7869	0.27	0.37	0.52
2022	1424	2095	3083	16157	19574	23713	6843	0.23	0.32	0.45
2023	1436	2210	3401	14107	17364	21373	5269	0.23	0.33	0.46
2024	900	1624	2931	11584	14568	18322	5144	0.20	0.29	0.42
2025	938	2102	4710	9425	12241	15897	6709*	0.49	0.80	1.30
2026		1624		5103	8098	11920				

* Preliminary

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Download the stock assessment data and figures

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