

Sea bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*) in divisions 8.a–b (northern and central Bay of Biscay)

ICES advice on fishing opportunities

ICES advises that when the EU multiannual plan (MAP) for Western Waters and adjacent waters is applied, total removals[†] in 2024 that correspond to the F ranges in the plan are between 2249 and 2642 tonnes. This applies to the sum of the commercial and recreational catches.

ICES advice on conservation aspects

ICES has not identified any conservation aspects.

Stock development over time

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

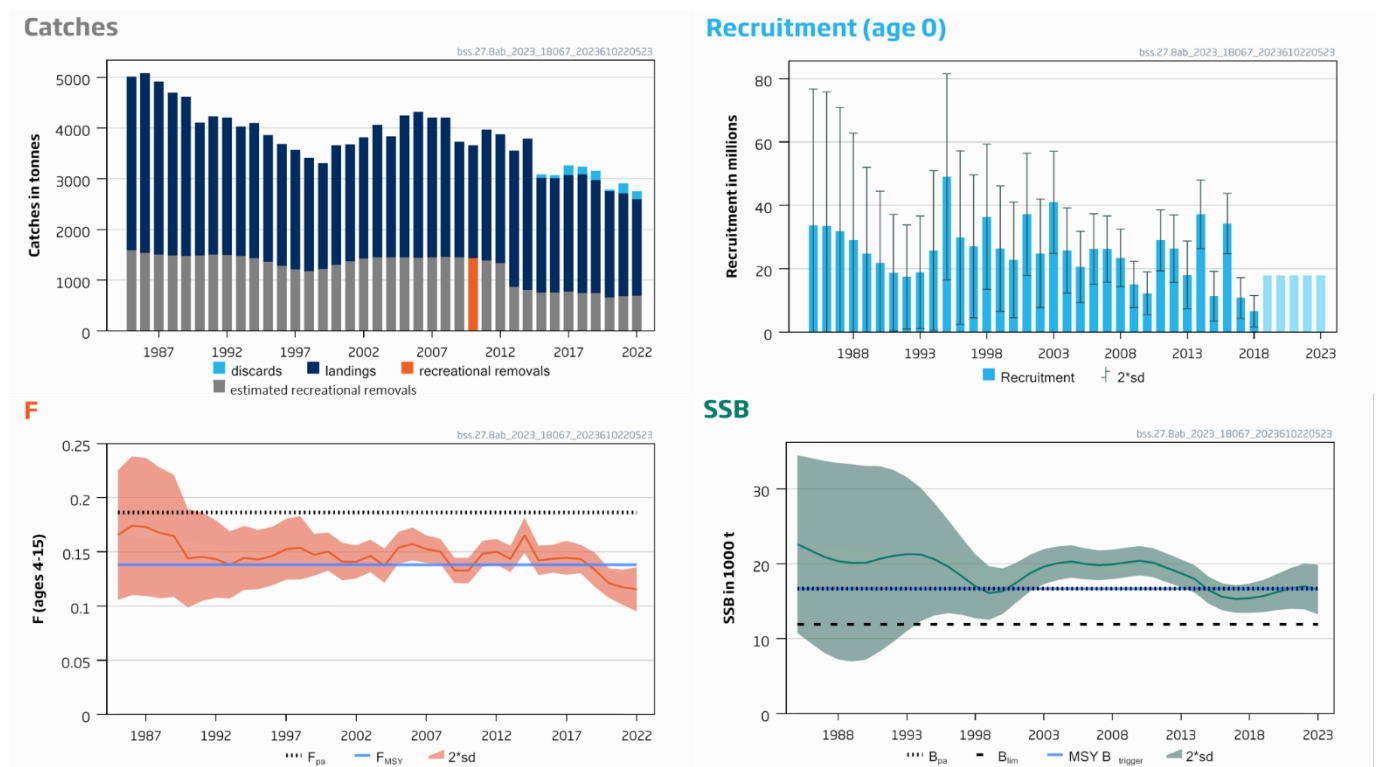


Figure 1 Sea bass in divisions 8.a–b. Summary of the stock assessment. Commercial landings, discards, and recreational removals (observed only in 2010, and estimated for the remaining time-series shown in gray). The assumed recruitment values for 2019–2023 are shaded in a lighter colour.

Conservation status

ICES is not aware of any information on stock specific conservation status.

[†] Total removals include both commercial and recreational catches, taking mortality of released fish into account (estimated at 5.73%).

Catch scenarios

Table 1 Sea bass in divisions 8.a–b. Values for the forecast and the interim year.

Variable	Value	Notes
$F_{\text{ages 4–15}}$ (2023)	0.115	Total F: average $F_{2020–2022}$ scaled to F_{2022} (0.085) for the commercial fishery plus $F_{\text{rec}} = 0.031$ for the recreational fishery (bag limit of 2 fish/day).
SSB (2024)	15569	Short-term forecast (STF); in tonnes.
$R_{\text{age 0}}$ (2019–2023)	17928	Geometric mean of recruitment (GM, 2008–2018); in thousands.
Total removals (2023)	2414	STF; in tonnes.
Projected commercial landings (2023)	1765	STF; in tonnes.
Commercial discard rate (2023)	5.73	Average discard rate (2015–2022) relative to commercial landings; in percentage.
Projected recreational removals (2023)	649	STF; in tonnes.

Table 2 Sea bass in divisions 8.a–b. Annual catch scenarios. All weights are in tonnes.

Basis	Total removals (2024) [#]	Commercial landings * (2024)	Recreational removals * (2024)	Commercial discards (2024)	F_{total} (2024)	$F_{\text{commercial landings}}$ * (2024)	$F_{\text{recreational removals}}$ * (2024)	SSB (2025)	% SSB change ^{##}	% advice change ^{###}
ICES advice basis										
EU MAP [^] : $F_{\text{MSY}} \times \text{SSB}_{2024} / \text{MSY } B_{\text{trigger}}$	2642	1906	620	116	0.129	0.098	0.031	14509	-6.8	-22
$F = \text{MAP}^{\wedge} : F_{\text{MSY lower}} \times \text{SSB}_{2024} / \text{MSY } B_{\text{trigger}}$	2249	1530	626	93	0.109	0.078	0.031	14816	-4.8	-22
Other scenarios										
MSY approach : F_{MSY}	2820	2077	617	126	0.138	0.107	0.031	14370	-7.7	-17.0
$F = 0$	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16593	6.6	-100
$F = F_{\text{pa}}$	3722	2940	603	179	0.186	0.155	0.031	13669	-12.2	9.5
$\text{SSB}_{2025} = B_{\text{lim}}$	5994	5115	568	311	0.32	0.29	0.031	11920	-23	76
$\text{SSB}_{2025} = B_{\text{pa}}^{\wedge\wedge}$										
$\text{SSB}_{2025} = \text{MSY } B_{\text{trigger}}^{\wedge\wedge}$										
$\text{SSB}_{2025} = \text{SSB}_{2024}$	1287	610	640	37	0.061	0.03	0.031	15569	0	-62
$F = F_{2022} = F_{\text{sq}}$	2379	1660	618	101	0.115	0.085	0.031	14714	-5.5	-30

[#] Includes commercial landings, recreational removals, and commercial discards computed assuming an average ratio of 5.73%.^{##} SSB 2025 relative to SSB 2024 (15 569 tonnes).

^{###} Advice values for 2024 are relative to the corresponding 2023 values (MAP advice of $F_{\text{MSY}} \times \text{SSB}_{2023} / \text{MSY } B_{\text{trigger}} = 3398$ tonnes and $F_{\text{MSY lower}} \times \text{SSB}_{2023} / \text{MSY } B_{\text{trigger}} = 2897$ tonnes, respectively; all other values are relative to F_{MSY}).

* The split of catch and F into commercial and recreational components in the short-term forecast accounts for the recreational removals' multiplier in 2023, which corresponds to a two fish-bag limit (status quo) as requested by the EU Commission.

[^] EU multiannual plan (MAP) (EU, 2019).

^{^^} The B_{pa} , and $\text{MSY } B_{\text{trigger}}$ options were left blank because none of them can be achieved in 2025, even with zero catch in 2024.

The advice is 22% lower than last year mostly due to the downward revision of the recruitment in years 2017–2021.

Basis of the advice

Table 3 Sea bass in divisions 8.a–b. The basis of the advice.

Advice basis	Management plan approach
Management plan	The EU multiannual plan (MAP) for stocks in the Western Waters and adjacent waters applies to this stock. The plan specifies conditions for setting fishing opportunities depending on stock status and making use of the F_{MSY} range for the stock. Full details of the plan are described in Regulation 2019/472 (EU, 2019). Full details of the plan are described in Regulation 2019/472 (EU, 2019).

Quality of the assessment

Recreational removals are based on one year of data only and extrapolated to the rest of the time series.

The quality of the assessment may improve when recruitment information from scientific surveys becomes available. Annual surveys have been conducted by France in the Bay of Biscay (Baie de Douarnenez, Loire, and Gironde estuaries) since 2016.

Due to the high uncertainty in recruitment estimates, the last 5 years of numbers at age 0 are now replaced by its long-term geometric mean from 2008 to 2018 (ICES, 2023c). Sea bass enter the fishery at ages 3–4 and there is hardly any information available on recruitment of age 0 fish.

There is evidence (ICES, 2023b) that the northern and southern sea bass are not distinct populations but a meta-population made up of specific subpopulations with connectivity. Potential inclusion of subpopulations in the assessment is under consideration in the ongoing ICES benchmark for this species in the Northeast Atlantic.

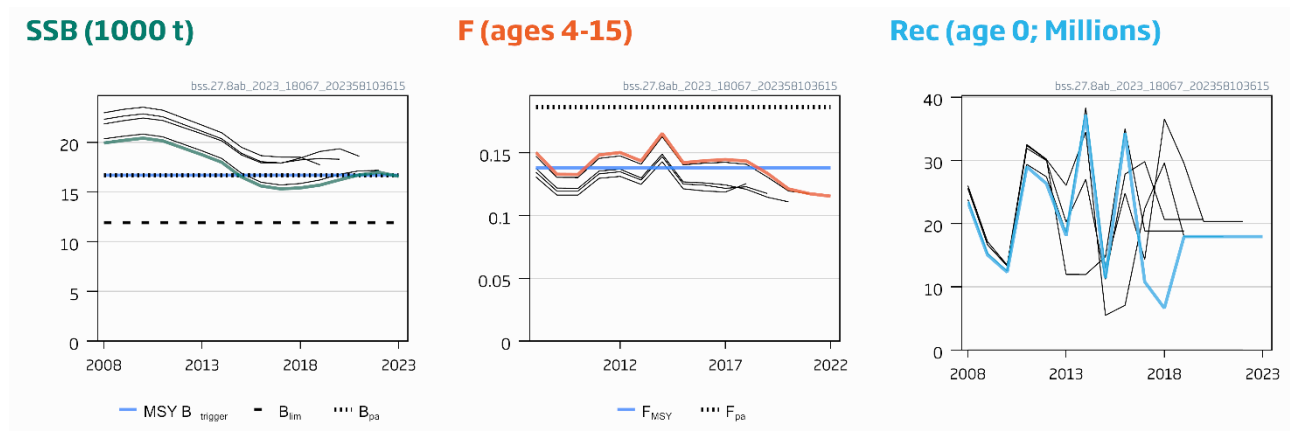


Figure 2 Sea bass in divisions 8.a–b. Historical assessment results (three final-year recruitment assumption included for each line, except the last with a five final-year recruitment assumption).

Issues relevant for the advice

There is no TAC for sea bass in this area. The fishery is regulated by technical measures.

On request from the EU Commission the total removals for 2024 has been divided into commercial and recreational catch based on a continuation of the present regulation (bag limit of 2 fish/day). The mortality of released fish has been taken into account in the calculation of the catch scenarios.

Reference points

Table 4 Sea bass in divisions 8.a–b. Reference points.

Framework	Reference point	Value	Technical basis	Source
MSY approach	MSY $B_{trigger}$	16688	B_{pa} ; in tonnes.	ICES (2018a)
	F_{MSY}	0.138	The F that maximizes median long-term yield in stochastic simulations under constant F exploitation; constrained by the requirement that $F_{MSY} \leq F_{pa}$.	ICES (2018a, 2021)
Precautionary approach	B_{lim}	11920	$B_{pa}/exp(1.645 \times \sigma)$, $\sigma = 0.2045$; in tonnes.	ICES (2018a)
	B_{pa}	16688	Lowest observed SSB; in tonnes.	ICES (2018a)
	F_{lim}	Undefined	F_{lim} (0.172) is no longer considered appropriate given the estimate of F_{pa} .	ICES (2021)
	F_{pa}	0.186	F_{P05} with advice rule (AR): the F that provides a 95% probability for SSB to be above B_{lim} .	ICES (2021)
Management plan	MAP MSY $B_{trigger}$	16688	MSY $B_{trigger}$	EU (2019)
	MAP B_{lim}	11920	B_{lim}	EU (2019)
	MAP F_{MSY}	0.138	F_{MSY}	EU (2019), ICES (2021)
	MAP range F_{lower}	0.117	Consistent with ranges provided by ICES (2018b), resulting in no more than 5% reduction in long-term yield compared with MSY.	ICES (2018a), EU (2019)
	MAP range F_{upper}	0.151	Consistent with ranges provided by ICES (2018b), resulting in no more than 5% reduction in long-term yield compared with MSY.	ICES (2018a, 2021), EU (2019)

Basis of the assessment

Table 5 Sea bass in divisions 8.a–b. The basis of the assessment.

ICES stock data category	1 (ICES, 2023a).
Assessment type	Age- and length-based analytical assessment (Stock Synthesis) that uses commercial landings and recreational removals in the assessment and commercial discards are then included to calculate a catch forecast (ICES, 2023c).
Input data	Commercial landings since 1985, age-at-length and length frequencies from catch sampling; growth and maturity data from sampling of commercial catches and surveys; natural mortality (0.24); recreational removals and length composition for 2010 estimated from a recreational fishery survey; French commercial LPUE series inferred from logbook data.
Discards and bycatch	Discards are not included in the stock assessment.
Indicators	None.
Other information	Last benchmarked in 2018 (ICES, 2018a, 2018b).
Working group report	Working Group for the Bay of Biscay and the Iberian Waters Ecoregion (WGBIE).

History of the advice, catch, and management

Table 6 Sea bass in divisions 8.a–b. History of ICES advice, the agreed TAC, and ICES estimates of commercial landings, commercial discards, and recreational removals. All weights are in tonnes.

Year	ICES advice	Catch corresponding to advice	Agreed TAC	Official commercial landings	ICES commercial landings	ICES commercial discards	ICES recreational removals
2000	-	-	none	2147	2362		
2001	-	-	none	2091	2306		
2002	No increase in effort or F	-	none	2113	2392		
2003	No increase in effort or F	-	none	2931	2616		
2004	No increase in effort or F	-	none	2657	2380		
2005	-	-	none	3258	2796		
2006	-	-	none	3487	2875		
2007	-	-	none	3060	2751		
2008	-	-	none	1653	2745		

Year	ICES advice	Catch corresponding to advice	Agreed TAC	Official commercial landings	ICES commercial landings	ICES commercial discards	ICES recreational removals
2009	-	-	none	2534	2278		
2010	-	-	none	2489	2229		1430 [^]
2011	-	-	none	2848	2575		
2012	No increase in catch	-	none	2535	2549		
2013	20% reduction in catches (last three-years' average)	< 6000 ^{^^}	none	2660	2685		
2014	20% reduction in catches (last three-years' average)	< 1890 ^{^^^}	none	3015	2991		
2015	Same advice as last year	< 1890 ^{^^^}	none	2287	2264	68	
2016	Precautionary approach	< 2634 ^{^^^}	none	2206	2252	65	
2017	Precautionary approach	< 2634 ^{^^^}	none	2211	2295	196	
2018	Precautionary approach	≤ 2440 ^{^^^}	none	2288	2338	155	
2019	MSY approach (commercial + recreational)	≤ 2495	none	2213	2227	183	
2020	Management plan	2533 (range 2417–3075) [#]	none	2056	2090 ^{##}	41	
2021	Management plan	3108 (range 2966–3770) [#]	none	1997	2032	196	
2022	Management plan	3156 (range 2692–3422) [#]	none	1894	1906	160	
2023	Management plan	3398 (range 2897–3398) [#]	none				
2024	Management plan	2642 (range 2249–2642) [#]	none				

[^] Recreational removals were only observed in 2010. Estimates derived from the 2010 data for the time-series are shown in Table 9.

^{^^} ICES advice prior to 2014 was for European sea bass in the Northeast Atlantic. Since 2014, the advice is for sea bass in divisions 8.a–b.

^{^^^} Catch advice for commercial catches only.

[#] Catches corresponding to F_{MSY} , EU MAP range in brackets (MAP; EU, 2019).

^{##} Data for France re-estimated (ICES, 2023b).

History of catch and landings

Table 7 Sea bass in divisions 8.a–b. Catch distribution by fleet, landings, discards, and estimated recreational removals in 2022 as estimated by ICES. All weights are in tonnes.

Total removals	Commercial landings						Commercial discards	Recreational removals*
	35% nets	38% lines	20% bottom trawl	3% pelagic trawl	3% Danish seine	1% purse-seine		
2757							160	691
	1906							

* Recreational removals are estimates derived from the 2010 observed data.

Table 8 Sea bass in divisions 8.a–b. History of the official commercial landings presented for each country participating in the fishery. History of the total ICES estimated commercial landings. All weights are in tonnes.

Year	Belgium	France	Netherlands	Spain	UK (England, Wales, N. Ireland, and Scotland)	Total official landings	Total ICES estimated landings
1985	0	2477	0	0	0	2477	3420
1986	0	2606	0	0	0	2606	3549
1987	0	2474	0	0	5	2479	3417
1988	0	2274	0	0	15	2289	3217
1989	0	2201	0	0	0	2201	3144
1990	0	1678	0	0	0	1678	2621
1991	0	1774	0	17	0	1791	2734
1992	0	1752	0	14	0	1766	2709
1993	0	1595	0	14	0	1609	2552
1994	0	1708	0	17	0	1725	2668
1995	0	1549	0	0	0	1549	2492
1996	0	1459	0	0	0	1459	2402
1997	0	1415	0	0	0	1415	2358
1998	0	1261	0	27	0	1288	2231
1999	0	NA	0	11	0	11	2091
2000	0	2080	0	67	0	2147	2362
2001	0	2020	3	68	0	2091	2306
2002	0	1937	0	176	0	2113	2392
2003	0	2812	0	119	0	2931	2616
2004	0	2561	0	96	0	2657	2380
2005	0	3184	0	74	0	3258	2796
2006	0	3318	0	167	2	3487	2875
2007	1	2984	0	74	1	3060	2751
2008	0	1508	0	145	0	1653	2745
2009	1	2339	0	194	0	2534	2278
2010	0	2322	0	165	2	2489	2229
2011	1	2536	0	311	0	2848	2575
2012	1	2325	0	204	5	2535	2549
2013	0	2504	0	156	0	2660	2685
2014	0	2926	0	89	0	3015	2991
2015	0	2216	0	71	0	2287	2264
2016	0	2121	0	85	0	2206	2252
2017	0	2146	0	65	0	2211	2295
2018	0	2204	0	84	0	2288	2316
2019	0	2116	0	97	0	2213	2227
2020	0	2032	0	24	0	2056	2090
2021*	0	1956	0	41	0	1997	2032
2022*	0	1861	0	33	0	1894	1906

*Preliminary official landings.

Summary of the assessment

Table 9 Sea bass in divisions 8.a–b. Assessment summary. ‘High’ and ‘Low’ refer to two standard deviations (sd) confidence intervals. All weights are in tonnes; recruitment in thousands.

Year	Recruitment			Biomass			Fishing pressure			Catch		
	Low	R _{age 0}	High	Low	SSB	High	Low	F _{ages 4-15}	High	Rec. removals*	Comm. landings	Comm. discards
1985	0	33684	76721	10773	22651	34528	0.106	0.166	0.23	1593	3420	
1986	0	33554	75845	9395	21770	34145	0.110	0.174	0.24	1541	3549	
1987	0	31874	70833	8084	20921	33758	0.109	0.173	0.24	1501	3417	
1988	0	28986	62799	7224	20353	33482	0.107	0.168	0.23	1482	3217	
1989	0	24829	52016	6952	20133	33314	0.108	0.165	0.22	1474	3144	
1990	0	21842	44469	7201	20145	33088	0.099	0.144	0.189	1485	2621	
1991	398	18794	37189	8261	20663	33065	0.105	0.146	0.187	1501	2734	
1992	974	17398	33823	9579	21075	32570	0.108	0.143	0.179	1499	2709	
1993	1129	18895	36660	11008	21300	31592	0.107	0.138	0.169	1481	2552	
1994	598	25807	51015	12337	21260	30183	0.115	0.145	0.174	1435	2668	
1995	16470	49020	81569	13102	20630	28157	0.116	0.143	0.170	1367	2492	
1996	2497	29839	57180	13404	19651	25897	0.119	0.146	0.173	1287	2402	
1997	4534	27079	49625	13210	18371	23532	0.124	0.153	0.181	1215	2358	
1998	13512	36429	59346	12717	17000	21282	0.124	0.154	0.183	1179	2231	
1999	6579	26370	46161	12520	16101	19682	0.128	0.147	0.167	1219	2091	
2000	4554	22805	41056	13318	16362	19407	0.133	0.150	0.168	1298	2362	
2001	17916	37189	56462	14849	17519	20189	0.124	0.141	0.158	1371	2306	
2002	7733	24854	41974	16322	18783	21244	0.126	0.141	0.156	1422	2392	
2003	24861	40974	57087	17295	19638	21982	0.131	0.146	0.161	1448	2616	
2004	12364	25797	39231	17836	20089	22343	0.121	0.137	0.153	1455	2380	
2005	9359	20596	31833	18151	20323	22496	0.139	0.154	0.168	1451	2796	
2006	15125	26260	37394	17928	20009	22090	0.142	0.157	0.173	1444	2875	
2007	15788	26216	36644	17822	19823	21824	0.140	0.153	0.165	1452	2751	
2008	14347	23448	32549	17958	19934	21910	0.139	0.150	0.162	1460	2745	
2009	7750	15041	22332	18221	20197	22173	0.121	0.133	0.145	1453	2278	
2010	5536	12299	19062	18454	20420	22387	0.121	0.133	0.145	1430	2229	
2011	19351	28982	38613	18205	20149	22092	0.136	0.148	0.160	1391	2575	
2012	15670	26313	36957	17536	19446	21355	0.138	0.150	0.162	1335	2549	
2013	7392	18081	28771	16883	18749	20615	0.131	0.144	0.156	868	2685	
2014	26334	37176	48017	16158	17989	19819	0.149	0.165	0.182	804	2991	
2015	3502	11346	19191	14705	16513	18321	0.129	0.142	0.156	754	2264	68
2016	24795	34280	43766	13803	15608	17413	0.131	0.144	0.157	754	2252	65
2017	4321	10775	17229	13460	15314	17168	0.129	0.145	0.160	772	2295	196
2018	1653	6601	11549	13450	15418	17386	0.130	0.143	0.157	748	2338	155
2019		17928**		13552	15701	17851	0.118	0.134	0.149	748	2227	183
2020		17928**		13819	16233	18647	0.108	0.121	0.135	659	2090	41
2021		17928**		13998	16727	19456	0.101	0.117	0.134	681	2032	196
2022		17928**		13932	16993	20053	0.095	0.115	0.136	691	1906	160
2023		17928**		13257	16571	19885						

* Recreational removals are estimates derived from the 2010 observed data.

** Geometric mean 2008–2018.

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