

Sea bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*) in divisions 4.b–c, 7.a, and 7.d–h (central and southern North Sea, Irish Sea, English Channel, Bristol Channel, and Celtic Sea)

ICES advice on fishing opportunities

ICES advises that when the MSY approach is applied, total removals[‡] in 2025 should be no more than 2 776 tonnes.

ICES notes the existence of a precautionary management plan, developed and adopted by one of the relevant management authorities for this stock.

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

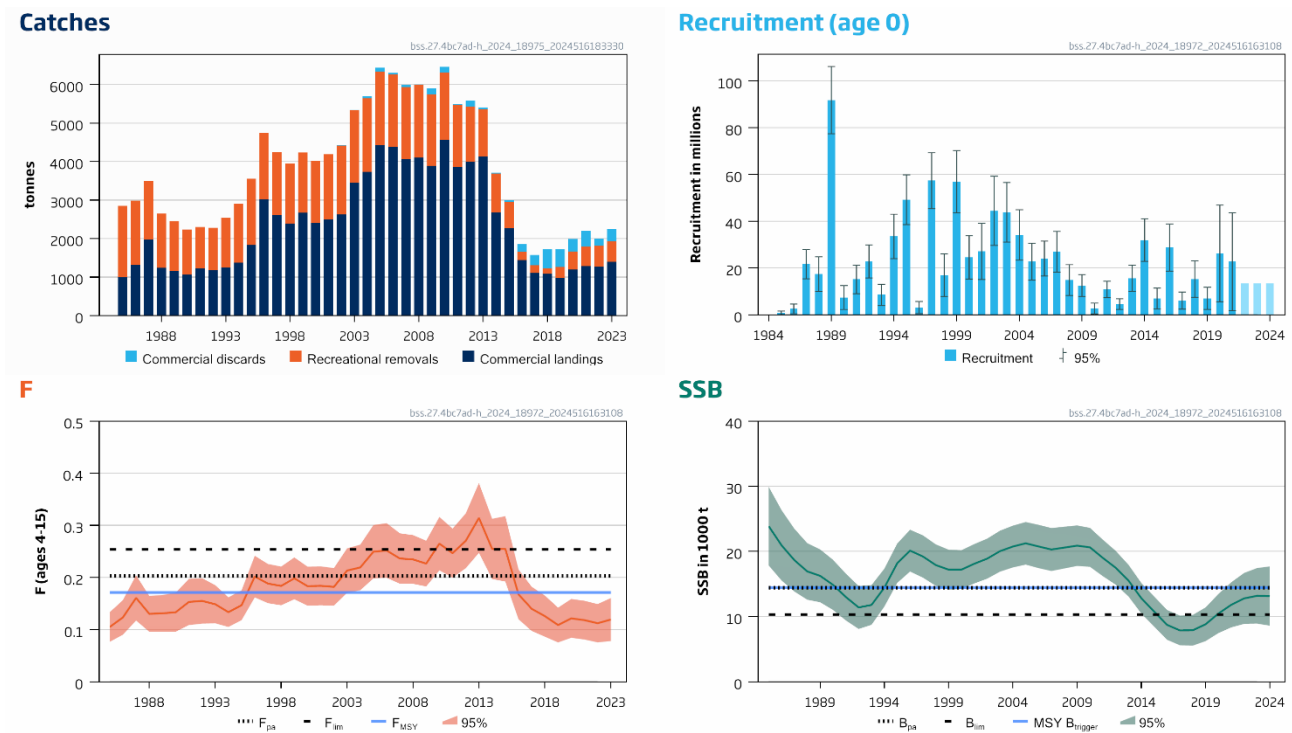


Figure 1 Sea bass in divisions 4.b–c, 7.a, and 7.d–h. Summary of the stock assessment. Recreational removals are model estimates based on a survey in 2012 and implemented management measures. Discard estimates are available since 2002. Fishing mortality (F) is shown for the combined commercial and recreational fisheries. The assumed recruitment values for 2022–2024 are shaded in a lighter colour.

[‡] Total removals include both commercial and recreational catches, taking mortality of released fish into account (estimated at approximately 5%).

Catch scenarios

Table 1 Sea bass in divisions 4.b–c, 7.a, and 7.d–h. Assumptions made for the interim year and in the forecast.

Variable	Value	Notes
F _{ages 4–15} (2024)	0.117	Total F, average F _{commercial} (2021–2023; 0.086), plus F _{rec} = 0.031*, assuming full compliance of recreational fisheries in 2024
SSB (2025)	13 358	Short-term forecast; in tonnes
R _{age 0} (2022–2025)	13 308	Geometric mean (2012–2021); in thousands
Total removals (2024)	2011	Short-term forecast fishing at F = 0.117; in tonnes
Total landings (2024)	1253**	Short-term forecast; in tonnes
Discards (2024)	134**	Short-term forecast; in tonnes
Recreational removals (2024)	624	Short-term forecast assuming an F _{rec} = 0.031* ; in tonnes

* Recreational F as estimated in 2012 (0.067, reduced [by 54%]) to account for management measures since 2012.

** The split of total commercial F into commercial landings and commercial discards in the interim year is estimated by the model.

Table 2 Sea bass in divisions 4.b–c, 7.a, and 7.d–h. Annual catch scenarios. Weights are in tonnes.

Basis	Total removals* (2025)	F _{total} (2025)	SSB (2026)	% SSB change**	% advice change***
ICES advice basis					
MSY approach: F = F _{MSY} × SSB ₂₀₂₅ /MSY B _{trigger}	2776	0.159	13477	0.89	14.1
Other scenarios					
EU MAP [^] : F _{MSY} × SSB ₂₀₂₅ /MSY B _{trigger}	2776	0.159	13477	0.89	14.1
EU MAP [^] : F _{MSY lower} × SSB ₂₀₂₅ /MSY B _{trigger}	2330	0.131	13827	3.5	-4.2
EU MAP [^] : F _{MSY upper} × SSB ₂₀₂₅ /MSY B _{trigger}	2776	0.159	13477	0.89	14.1
F = F _{MSY lower}	2506	0.142	13689	2.5	3.0
F = F _{MSY}	2984	0.1713	13315	-0.32	23
F = F _{MSY upper}	2984	0.1713	13315	-0.32	23
F = 0	0	0	15672	17.3	-100
F _{pa}	3486	0.203	12923	-3.3	43
F _{lim}	4265	0.254	12319	-7.8	75
SSB ₂₀₂₆ = B _{lim}	6893	0.45	10313	-23	183
SSB ₂₀₂₆ = B _{pa}	1553	0.086	14439	8.1	-36
SSB ₂₀₂₆ = MSY B _{trigger}	1553	0.086	14439	8.1	-36
F = F ₂₀₂₄	2082	0.117	14022	5.0	-14.4
SSB ₂₀₂₆ = SSB ₂₀₂₅	2928	0.168	13358	0	20

* Includes commercial catch and recreational removals (taking mortality of released fish into account, estimated at approximately 5%).

** SSB 2026 relative to SSB 2025.

*** Advice value for 2025 relative to the advice value for 2024 (2432 tonnes).

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

The change in advice (+14.1) is due to the 2020 and 2021 recruitments being higher than the recent average.

Basis of the advice

Table 3 Sea bass in divisions 4.b–c, 7.a, and 7.d–h. The basis of the advice.

Advice basis	MSY approach
Management plan	ICES is aware of the multiannual management plan (MAP) that has been adopted by the EU for this stock (EU, 2019) and that ICES considers to be precautionary. There is no agreed shared management plan between the EU and UK for this stock, and ICES provides advice according to ICES MSY approach. Catch scenarios consistent with the MAP F _{MSY} ranges are provided.

Quality of the assessment

Fishery sampling rates have been variable over time for all countries. Limited sampling of the discards and recreational removals leads to uncertainty in catch data and increases the uncertainty in the assessment. The discard values are estimated from sampling programmes and more recently from a combination of sampling programmes and logbooks, where sampling is variable across fleets and years. Estimates of discards are available only from the early 2000s, but these do not cover all fisheries, are imprecise, and are only included for some fleets in the assessment.

The modelled estimated discards are much lower than the observed discards.

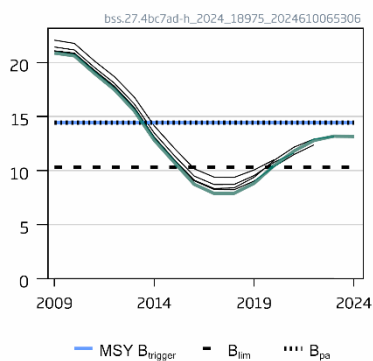
In 2024, landings from the Netherlands were updated for the years 2015–2022. A sensitivity analysis showed that this had a negligible effect on the stock assessment.

Recreational removals in 2012 were estimated from surveys by several nations. The fishing pressure from recreational removals in 2012 (including post-release mortality estimated at 5%) was estimated at $F_{rec}=0.067$. This estimate underpins the calculations of F_{rec} in the assessment. For the period 1985-2014 (excluding 2012), F_{rec} is assumed to be the same as estimated for 2012. For the period 2015–2023, F_{rec} is scaled based on F_{rec} in 2012 and implementation of management measures e.g. bag limit, in these years, assuming full compliance.

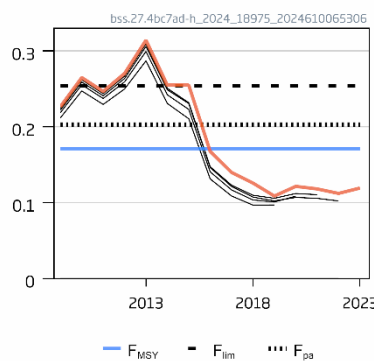
Additional information on recreational removals from all countries is needed to provide more robust estimates and in turn the stock assessment model.

Stock structure remains an issue, and connectivity with adjacent stocks is a source of uncertainty (ICES, 2023a).

SSB (1000 t)



Fbar (ages 4-15)



Rec (age 0; Millions)

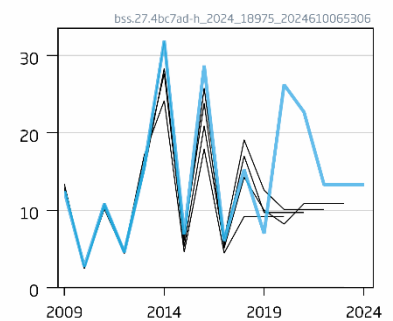


Figure 2 Sea bass in divisions 4.b–c, 7.a, and 7.d–h. Historical assessment results (final-year SSB estimates and final three years of recruitment assumptions are included).

Issues relevant to the advice

Coinciding with the prohibition of the directed sea bass fishery since 2015, observed discards have increased.

ICES does not provide any split in the catch scenarios table, as the recreational fishing pressure cannot be allocated in the absence of known management measures in 2025 (e.g. bag limit) and given the limited data on recreational removals.

Reference points

Table 4 Sea bass in divisions 4.b–c, 7.a, and 7.d–h. Reference points, values, and their technical basis.

Framework	Reference point	Value	Technical basis	Source
MSY approach	MSY $B_{trigger}$	14439	B_{pa} ; in tonnes	ICES (2019)
	F_{MSY}	0.1713	Stochastic simulations (EqSim)	ICES (2019)
Precautionary approach	B_{lim}	10313	B_{loss} (lowest value in the time-series, SSB in 2018 as estimated by the WGCSE 2019 assessment); in tonnes	ICES (2019)
	B_{pa}	14439	$B_{lim} \times 1.4$; in tonnes	ICES (2019)
	F_{lim}	0.254	Stochastic simulations (EqSim)	ICES (2019)
	F_{pa}	0.203	F_{P05} ; the F that leads to $SSB \geq B_{lim}$ with 95% probability	ICES (2019, 2021)
Management plan*	MAP MSY $B_{trigger}$	14439	MSY $B_{trigger}$; in tonnes	EU (2019)
	MAP B_{lim}	10313	B_{lim} ; in tonnes	EU (2019)
	MAP F_{MSY}	0.1713	F_{MSY}	EU (2019)
	MAP range F_{lower}	0.142	Consistent with ranges provided by ICES (2019), resulting in no more than 5% reduction in long-term yield compared with MSY	ICES (2019) and EU (2019)
	MAP range F_{upper}	0.1713	Consistent with ranges provided by ICES (2019), resulting in no more than 5% reduction in long-term yield compared with MSY	ICES (2019) and EU (2019)

* EU multiannual plan (MAP) for the Western Waters and adjacent waters (EU, 2019).

Basis of the assessment

Table 5 Sea bass in divisions 4.b–c, 7.a, and 7.d–h. Basis of the assessment and advice.

ICES stock data category	1 (ICES, 2023b)
Assessment type	Age- and length-based analytical assessment (Stock Synthesis 3; NOAA Toolbox; ICES, 2024)
Input data	Commercial landings (international landings, ages, and length frequencies from catch sampling); commercial discards (UK bottom otter trawl and nets and combined French fleet, length frequencies from catch sampling); one recruit survey (UK Solent autumn survey [G9863], 1986–present, excluding 2010 and 2012); one bottom trawl survey (Channel Groundfish Survey [G3425], 1988–2014); one commercial tuning fleet (2001–present); growth and maturity data from sampling of commercial catches and surveys; natural mortality (inferred from life-history parameters and maximum observed ages)
Discards and bycatch	Discards included in the model and forecast for some of the fleets
Recreational	Used in the model and in the forecast
Indicators	None
Other information	Benchmarked in 2018 (ICES, 2018)
Working group	Working Group for the Celtic Seas Ecoregion (WGCSE)

History of the advice, catch, and management

Table 6 Sea bass in divisions 4.b–c, 7.a, and 7.d–h. ICES advice, official landings and ICES estimates of commercial landings, discards and recreational removals. Weights are in tonnes.

Year	ICES advice	Catch corresponding to advice*	Official commercial landings	ICES commercial landings	ICES commercial discards [^]	ICES recreational removals
2000	-	-	2100	2407		
2001	-	-	2200	2500		
2002	No increase in effort or F	-	2400	2622	17	
2003	No increase in effort or F	-	2900	3459	16	
2004	No increase in effort or F	-	3000	3731	59	
2005	-	-	3200	4430	96	
2006	-	-	3396	4377	53	
2007	-	-	3521	4064	50	
2008	-	-	3027	4107	8	
2009	-	-	4288	3889	151	
2010	-	-	4952	4562	148	
2011	-	-	4183	3858	22	
2012	No increase in catch	-	3982	3987	157	1440
2013	20% reduction in catches (average of the last three years)	< 6000**	4243	4137	53	
2014	36% reduction in commercial landings (20% reduction, followed by 20% precautionary reduction)	< 2707**	2816	2682	25	
2015	MSY approach	< 115***	2081	2273	40	
2016	MSY approach	≤ 541***	1300	1446	199	
2017	Precautionary approach	0	1027	1106	271	
2018	MSY approach	≤ 880 ^{^^}	931	1084	482	
2019	MSY approach	≤ 1806 ^{^^^}	970	978	464	
2020	Management plan	1634–1946 ^{^^^}	1175	1195	325	
2021	Management plan	2000 (range 1680–2000) ^{^^^}	1275	1281	412	
2022	MSY approach	≤ 2216 ^{^^^}	1273 ^{^^}	1276	196	
2023	MSY approach	≤ 2542 ^{^^^}	1379 ^{^^}	1397	316	
2024	MSY approach	≤ 2432 ^{^^^}				
2025	MSY approach	≤ 2776 ^{^^^}				

* Advice prior to 2014 was provided for sea bass in the Northeast Atlantic.

** Commercial landings.

*** Total landings (commercial and recreational landings).

[^] Incomplete for some fleets 2002–2008.

^{^^} Preliminary.

^{^^^} Includes commercial catch and recreational removals (taking mortality of released fish into account, estimated at approximately 5%).

History of the catch and landings

Table 7 Sea bass in divisions 4.b–c, 7.a, and 7.d–h. Commercial catch distribution by fleet in 2023 as estimated by ICES and estimated recreational removals.

Total catch	Commercial landings						Commercial discards	Recreational removals*
	Lines	Bottom trawlers	Other gears	Fixed/drift nets	Danish seine	Pelagic trawlers		
2251 tonnes	31%	31%	3%	23%	11%	< 1%	316 tonnes	538 tonnes
	1397 tonnes							

* Derived from the 2012 survey estimate (1440 tonnes).

Table 8 Sea bass in divisions 4.b–c, 7.a, and 7.d–h. History of commercial landings by country and ICES estimates of landings. Weights are in tonnes.

Year	Belgium	Denmark	Germany	France	UK	Netherlands	Channel Is.	Total official	ICES landings
1985	0	0	0	620	105	0	18	743	994
1986	0	0	0	841	124	0	15	980	1319
1987	0	0	0	1226	123	0	14	1363	1980
1988	0	18	0	714	173	8	12	925	1239
1989	0	2	0	675	192	2	48	919	1161
1990	0	0	0	609	189	0	25	824	1063
1991	0	0	0	726	239	0	16	982	1227
1992	0	0	0	721	148	0	36	906	1186
1993	0	1	0	718	230	0	45	994	1255
1994	0	1	0	593	535	0	49	1178	1371
1995	0	1	0	801	708	0	69	1579	1835
1996	0	1	0	1703	563	8	56	2331	3022
1997	0	1	0	1429	561	1	74	2066	2620
1998	0	2	0	1363	488	48	79	1980	2390
1999	0	1	0	-	685	32	108	826	2670
2000	0	5	0	1522	407	60	130	2124	2407
2001	0	2	0	1619	458	77	80	2236	2500
2002	0	1	0	1580	627	96	73	2377	2622
2003	154	1	0	1903	586	163	84	2891	3459
2004	159	1	0	1883	617	191	159	3010	3731
2005	206	1	0	1937	512	327	220	3203	4430
2006	211	2	0	2116	736	308	23	3396	4377
2007	178	1	0	2075	873	376	18	3521	4064
2008	187	0	0	1506	934	380	20	3027	4107
2009	174	0	0	2904	801	395	15	4288	3889
2010	216	4	0	3441	879	399	14	4952	4562
2011	152	2	0	2688	928	395	17	4183	3858
2012	154	3	0	2492	946	376	12	3982	3987
2013	146	4	2	2868	841	370	12	4243	4137
2014	148	1	1	1322	1080	253	11	2816	2682
2015	40	0	0	1113	701	218	9	2081	2273
2016	23	0	1	545	551	156	24	1300	1446
2017	22	0	0	423	438	132	12	1027	1106
2018	18	0	0	297	432	172	11	931	1084
2019	19	0	0	309	411	209	22	970	978
2020	24	0	0	387	526	223	15	1175	1195
2021	45	0	0	385	613	231	1	1275	1281
2022*	24	1	1	404	617	225	1	1273	1276
2023*	32	2	2	437	675	231	<1	1379	1397

* Preliminary official landings.

Summary of the assessment

Table 9 Sea bass in divisions 4.b–c, 7.a, and 7.d–h. Assessment summary. Weights are in tonnes and recruitment in thousands. “High” and “Low” refer to 95% confidence intervals.

Year	Recruitment age 0			SSB			Total $F_{ages\ 4-15}$			F_{bar} commercial catch	F_{bar} recreational removals	Commercial landings	Commercial discards*	Recreational removals**
	Low	Value	High	Low	Value	High	Low	Value	High					
1985	71	823	1575	17845	23880	29914	0.077	0.105	0.133	0.037	0.068	994		1857
1986	457	2512	4567	15538	20935	26332	0.090	0.123	0.157	0.055	0.069	1318		1671
1987	15374	21647	27920	13846	18658	23471	0.117	0.161	0.20	0.092	0.069	1979		1522
1988	9947	17376	24805	12592	16934	21275	0.096	0.130	0.165	0.062	0.069	1239		1411
1989	77450	91834	106217	12203	16258	20314	0.096	0.131	0.166	0.063	0.068	1161		1303
1990	2253	7362	12470	11032	14879	18726	0.096	0.133	0.171	0.065	0.068	1064		1170
1991	9040	15129	21218	9418	13012	16606	0.109	0.153	0.197	0.085	0.068	1226		1072
1992	15728	22798	29869	8106	11404	14701	0.111	0.155	0.199	0.086	0.069	1186		1097
1993	3968	8514	13060	8747	11792	14838	0.112	0.149	0.185	0.080	0.069	1256		1280
1994	24006	33516	43026	11538	14449	17359	0.105	0.134	0.162	0.066	0.068	1370		1538
1995	38602	49250	59898	15167	18186	21205	0.118	0.147	0.175	0.079	0.068	1835		1721
1996	467	3073	5680	16917	20127	23337	0.162	0.20	0.24	0.133	0.069	3022		1725
1997	45446	57414	69382	15978	19225	22471	0.151	0.188	0.23	0.120	0.069	2620		1629
1998	7770	16916	26062	14731	17910	21089	0.147	0.184	0.22	0.115	0.069	2390		1566
1999	43581	56900	70219	14144	17208	20271	0.158	0.198	0.24	0.129	0.069	2670		1564
2000	15270	24541	33811	14233	17212	20192	0.146	0.183	0.22	0.115	0.069	2407		1614
2001	15079	27098	39118	15096	18115	21134	0.147	0.184	0.22	0.115	0.069	2500		1696
2002	29682	44493	59305	15820	18893	21967	0.146	0.182	0.22	0.113	0.069	2622	17	1790
2003	31105	43854	56603	16899	20043	23187	0.171	0.21	0.26	0.144	0.069	3459	16	1871
2004	23323	34125	44926	17546	20751	23956	0.176	0.22	0.26	0.150	0.069	3731	59	1914
2005	14872	22727	30582	17980	21248	24516	0.198	0.25	0.30	0.180	0.069	4430	96	1909
2006	16585	24059	31534	17441	20764	24087	0.199	0.25	0.30	0.183	0.069	4377	53	1878
2007	18217	26947	35677	16999	20296	23592	0.188	0.24	0.28	0.168	0.069	4064	50	1877
2008	8229	14837	21445	17384	20591	23797	0.188	0.23	0.28	0.166	0.069	4107	8	1886
2009	7800	12467	17134	17776	20883	23990	0.183	0.23	0.27	0.158	0.069	3889	151	1860
2010	404	2703	5001	17642	20631	23619	0.21	0.26	0.32	0.196	0.069	4562	148	1757
2011	7309	10834	14359	16209	19014	21819	0.20	0.25	0.29	0.178	0.069	3858	22	1608

Year	Recruitment age 0			SSB			Total $F_{ages\ 4-15}$			F_{bar} commercial catch	F_{bar} recreational removals	Commercial landings	Commercial discards*	Recreational removals**
	Low	Value	High	Low	Value	High	Low	Value	High					
2012	2282	4582	6882	14907	17503	20100	0.22	0.27	0.32	0.202	0.069	3987	157	1440
2013	10034	15615	21195	13096	15528	17960	0.25	0.31	0.38	0.245	0.069	4137	53	1220
2014	22828	31938	41048	10472	12818	15164	0.197	0.25	0.31	0.187	0.068	2682	25	1005
2015	2453	6903	11354	8454	10769	13084	0.192	0.25	0.32	0.199	0.056	2273	40	682
2016	18635	28721	38807	6446	8735	11023	0.120	0.168	0.22	0.148	0.019	1446	199	205
2017	2355	6054	9752	5601	7881	10162	0.098	0.140	0.182	0.121	0.019	1106	271	202
2018	7414	15254	23093	5543	7899	10256	0.087	0.126	0.165	0.113	0.013	1084	482	150
2019	2259	6994	11729	6239	8824	11409	0.075	0.109	0.142	0.087	0.022	978	464	281
2020	5536	26244	46953	7468	10473	13477	0.084	0.122	0.159	0.090	0.032	1195	325	472
2021	1736	22694	43653	8350	11812	15274	0.081	0.118	0.155	0.086	0.032	1281	412	510
2022		13308^		8887	12794	16700	0.076	0.112	0.149	0.080	0.032	1276	196	530
2023		13308^		8930	13190	17451	0.078	0.119	0.161	0.087	0.032	1397	316	538
2024		13308^		8610	13158	17706								

* Incomplete for some fleets 2002–2008.

** All values were derived from the 2012 survey estimate (1 440 tonnes).

^ Geometric mean recruitment (2012–2021).

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