

FISH

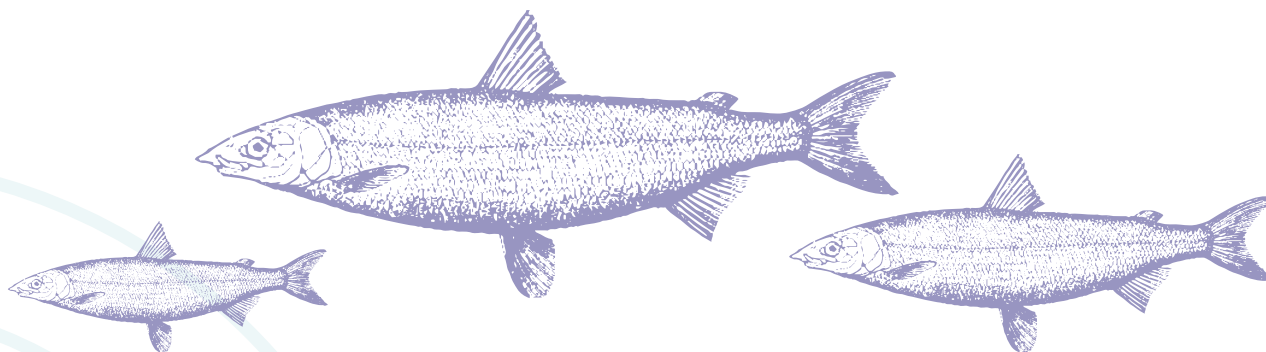
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Fish are an essential part of the marine ecosystem, providing many ecosystem functions. Society has a need for fish as a vital source of food and commercial fishing provides for that societal need.

An integrated assessment of species / stock status found that marine fish were not in good environmental status despite the improving status of many individual fish stocks over recent years. This finding was common to coastal, demersal and pelagic fish in the Greater North Sea, Celtic Seas, Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast Regions and for deep-sea fish across the North-East Atlantic. A separate assessment for the Norwegian waters in OSPAR Arctic Waters showed mixed results, with commercial stocks in both good and not good status. The overall status of fish was assessed by integrating the OSPAR Common Indicator for the recovery of sensitive fish species with third-party assessments of commercial fish stocks produced by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). This is the most comprehensive fish status assessment by OSPAR to date, and the first to integrate commercial fish stocks.

The regulation of fishing activities lies outside of OSPAR's competence, but a requirement to cooperate with other competent bodies exists. Fisheries management regulations have successfully brought the harvesting of some fish stocks to sustainable levels, but many stocks are still overexploited. Measures are now also being taken with an ecosystem perspective, including the introduction of some intended to protect vulnerable habitats and species. However, concerns remain. For its part, OSPAR has focused on 22 fish species (all part of the OSPAR List of Threatened and/or Declining Species and Habitats) and has taken national and collective actions to protect and conserve almost all of these species. With the exception of some skates and rays, most of the OSPAR listed fish species are assessed as having poor status and there are still gaps in the OSPAR Marine Protected Area (MPA) network for almost all of these fish species.

In response to the findings of this assessment, OSPAR will initiate discussions on regional-scale ecosystem-based management, including through the 'Collective Arrangement' and in cooperation with fisheries management bodies and other competent organisations; this will include initiatives to minimise, and where possible eliminate, incidental by-catch of fish.



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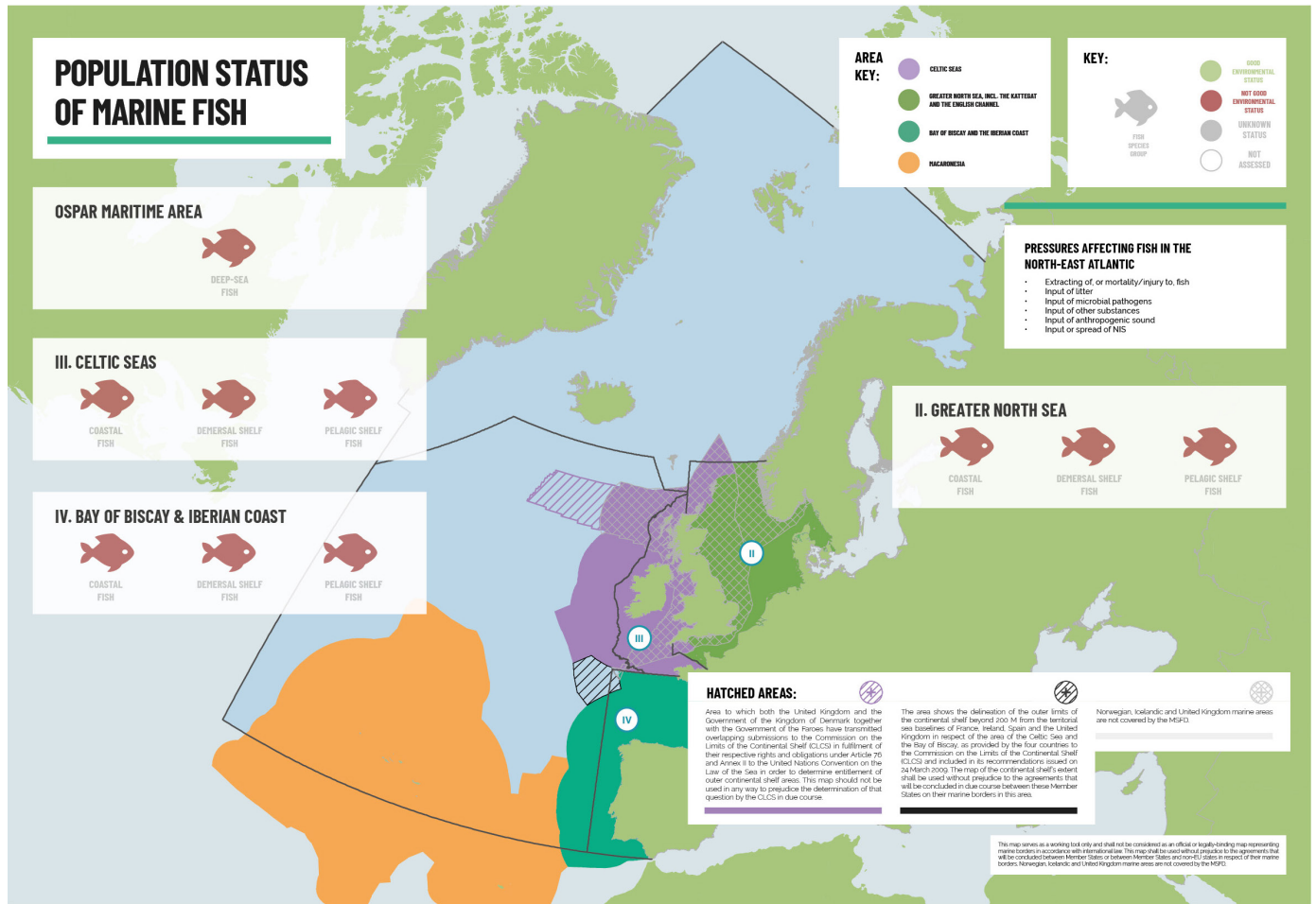
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