

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 2025 that correspond to the F ranges in the plan are between 2 631 tonnes (corresponding to $F_{MSY} \times SSB_{2025}/MSY \ B_{trigger}$) and 2 241 tonnes (corresponding to $F_{MSY \ lower} \times SSB_{2025}$ / MSY $B_{trigger}$). This applies to the sum of the commercial and recreational catches.

Non-fisheries conservation considerations

ICES has not identified any conservation aspects other than those related to the commercial and recreational fisheries.

Stock development over time

Fishing pressure on the stock is below FMSY, and spawning-stock size is below MSY Btrigger and between Bpa and Blim.

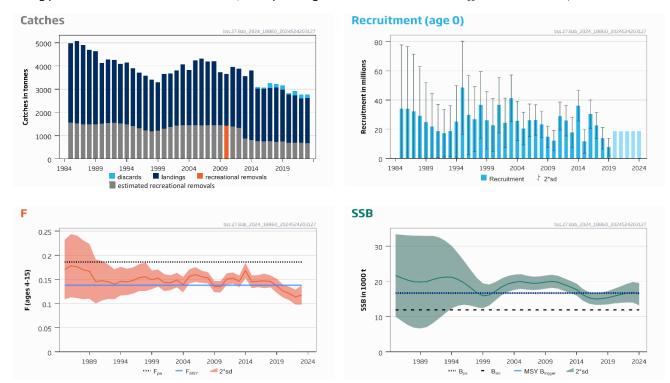


Figure 1 Sea bass in divisions 8.a–b. Summary of the stock assessment. Commercial landings, discards, and recreational removals (observed only in 2010 and estimated for the remaining time-series, shown in gray). The assumed recruitment values for 2020–2024 are shaded in a lighter colour.

[†] Total removals include both commercial and recreational catches, accounting for mortality of released fish (estimated at 5.88% for the commercial fishery discard rate and 5.00% for recreational post-release mortality).

Catch scenarios

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

Variable	Value	Notes
F _{ages 4–15} (2024)	0.117	Total F: average $F_{2021-2023}$ (0.094) for the commercial fishery plus F_{rec} = 0.023 for the recreational fishery (bag limit of 1 fish/day)
SSB (2025)	15426	Short-term forecast (STF); in tonnes
R _{age 0} (2020–2024)	18687	Geometric mean of recruitment (GM, 2008–2019); in thousands
Total removals (2024)	2440	STF; sum of commercial landings and recreational fishery
Projected commercial landings (2024)	1952	STF; in tonnes
Commercial discard rate (2024)	5.88	Average discard rate (2015–2023) relative to commercial landings; in percentage
Projected recreational removals (2024)	489	STF; in tonnes

Table 2 Sea bass in divisions 8.a—b. Annual catch scenarios. Weights are in tonnes.

Jea bass in divisions 6.a					-	-	-		0/ 665	0/ 1:
	Total	Commercial	Recreational	Commercial	Fages 4-15	F _{ages 4–15}	F _{ages 4–15}		% SSB	% advice
Basis	removals	landings*	removals*	discards	total	commercial	recreational	SSB (2026)	change	change
	(2025)#	(2025)	(2025)	(2025)	(2025)	landings* (2025)	removals* (2025)		##	###
ICES advice basis	ES advice basis									
EU MAP [^] : F _{MSY} × SSB ₂₀₂₅ /MSY B _{trigger}	2631	2041	463	128	0.128	0.105	0.023	14525	-5.8	-0.42
$F = MAP^*: F_{MSY lower} \times SSB_{2025}/MSY B_{trigger}$	2241	1669	467	104	0.108	0.085	0.023	14827	-3.9	-0.36
Other scenarios										
MSY approach : F _{MSY}	2833	2233	461	140	0.138	0.115	0.023	14368	-6.9	7.2
F = 0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	16581	7.5	-100
$F = F_{pa}$	3736	3093	450	193	0.186	0.163	0.023	13672	-11.4	41
SSB ₂₀₂₆ = B _{lim}	6029	5275	424	330	0.320	0.300	0.023	11920	-23	128
$SSB_{2026} = B_{pa}^{^{^{^{^{^{^{^{^{^{^{^{^{^{^{^{^{^{^{$										
SSB ₂₀₂₆ = MSY B _{trigger} ^^										
SSB ₂₀₂₆ = SSB ₂₀₂₅	1470	936	476	58	0.07	0.047	0.023	15426	0	-44
$F = F_{2023}$	2431	1847	469	115	0.117	0.094	0.023	14679	-4.8	-8.0
Total removals advice (2025) = total	2642	2051	463	128	0.128	0.105	0.023	14516	-5.9	0
removals advice (2024)	2042	2051	403	120	0.128	0.105	0.023	14516	-5.9	U

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The advice value for 2025 is between 0.37% and 0.42% lower than the advice value for 2024. The catch scenarios were run with a one-fish bag limit for the recreational fishery, assuming the continuation of the 2024 regulation, instead of the two-fish bag limit assumed in last year's advice.

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[#] Includes commercial landings, recreational removals, and commercial discards computed assuming an average ratio of 5.88%.

^{##} SSB 2026 relative to SSB 2025 (15 389 tonnes)

^{###} Advice values for 2025 are relative to the corresponding 2024 values (MAP advice of $F_{MSY} \times SSB_{2024}/MSY B_{trigger} = 2 642$ tonnes and $F_{MSY lower} \times SSB_{2024}/MSY B_{trigger} = 2 249$ 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 2024, which corresponds to a one-fish bag limit (status quo) as requested by the EU Commission.

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

^{^^} The B_{pa}, and MSY B_{trigger} options were left blank because none of them can be achieved in 2026, even with zero catch in 2025.

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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 areas 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.

Because of the high uncertainty in recruitment estimates, the last five years of numbers at age 0 are now replaced by its long-term geometric mean from 2008 to 2019 (ICES, 2024). Sea bass enter the fishery at ages 3–4, and there is hardly any information available on recruitment of age 0 fish.

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. Potential inclusion of these surveys in the assessment is under consideration in the ongoing ICES benchmark.

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.

This year's assessment is consistent with last year's assessment.

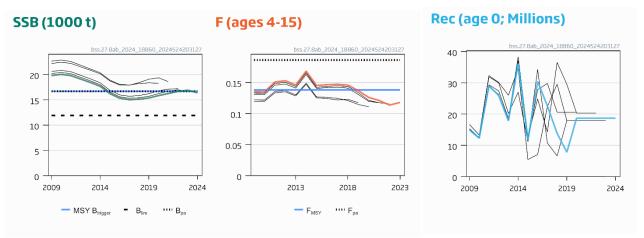


Figure 2 Sea bass in divisions 8.a—b. Historical assessment results (three final-year recruitment assumption included for each line, except the last, which has a five final-year recruitment assumption).

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 2025 has been divided into commercial and recreational catch based on a continuation of the present regulation (bag limit of one fish per 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 B _{trigger}	16688	B _{pa} ; in tonnes	ICES (2018a)
MSY approach	F _{MSY}	0.138	The F that maximizes median long-term yield in stochastic simulations under constant F exploitation; constrained by the requirement that $F_{MSY} \le F_{pa}$	ICES (2018a, 2021)
	B _{lim}	11920	B_{pa} /exp (1.645 × σ), σ = 0.2045; in tonnes	ICES (2018a)
	B _{pa}	16688	Lowest observed SSB; in tonnes	ICES (2018a)
Precautionary approach	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)
	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)
Management plan	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 5Sea bass in divisions 8.a-b. The basis of the assessment.

ICES stock data category	1 (<u>ICES, 2023a</u>)
	Age- and length-based analytical assessment (Stock Synthesis) that uses commercial landings and
Assessment type	recreational removals in the assessment. Commercial discards are then included to calculate a catch
	forecast (ICES, 2024).
	Commercial landings since 1985, age-at-length and length frequencies from catch sampling; growth and
Input data	maturity data from sampling of commercial catches and surveys; natural mortality (0.24); recreational
input data	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. Weights are in tonnes.

		Catch	Agreed	Official	ICES	ICES	ICES
Year	ICES advice	corresponding to	TAC	commercial	commercial	commercial	recreational
		advice	IAC	landings	landings	discards	removals
2000	-	ı	none	2147	2362		
2001	-	Ī	none	2091	2306		
2002	No increase in effort or F	T.	none	2113	2392		
2003	No increase in effort or F	Ī	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		

		Catch	Agreed	Official	ICES	ICES	ICES
Year	ICES advice	corresponding to	TAC	commercial	commercial	commercial	recreational
		advice	IAC	landings	landings	discards	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	2218###	2295	196	
2018	Precautionary approach	≤ 2440^^^	none	2288	2338	155	
2019	MSY approach (commercial + recreational)	≤ 2495	none	2187###	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	1936	1949	148	
2024	Management plan	2642 (range 2249–2642)#	none				
2025	Management plan	2631 (range 2241–2631)#					

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

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 2023 as estimated by ICES. Weights are in tonnes.

Total removals		Commercial landings								
2773	37% nets	38% lines	18% bottom trawl	2% pelagic trawl	3% Danish seine	1% purse-seine	1% others	148	676	
				1949						

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

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

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

 $^{^{\}sharp}$ Catches corresponding to F_{MSY}, EU MAP range in brackets (MAP; EU, 2019).

^{##} Data for France re-estimated (ICES, 2024).

^{###} Data were revised in 2024.

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. Weights are in tonnes.

fishery. History of the total ICES estimated commercial landings. 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	2081**	0	11	0	2092**	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	72**	0	2218**	2295		
2018	0	2204	0	84	0	2288	2338		
2019	0	2090**	0	97	0	2187**	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		
2023*	0	1910	0	26	0	1936	1949		

^{*}Preliminary official landings.

^{**}Data were revised in 2024 (ICES, 2024).

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. Weights are in tonnes, recruitment in thousands.

	thousands.												
		Recruitment		Stock size			Fishing pressure			Catch			
Year	Low	R _{age 0}	High	Low	SSB	High	Low	F ages 4-15	High	Recreational removals*	Commercial landings	Commercial discards^	
1985	0	34145	77732	10018	21703	33388	0.109	0.170	0.23	1560	3420		
1986	0	33953	76670	8782	21007	33232	0.113	0.178	0.24	1520	3549		
1987	0	32168	71376	7600	20333	33065	0.112	0.176	0.24	1491	3417		
1988	0	29160	63045	6855	19922	32989	0.109	0.170	0.23	1483	3217		
1989	0	24897	52034	6684	19836	32988	0.110	0.167	0.22	1491	3144		
1990	0	21842	44352	7022	19954	32886	0.100	0.146	0.191	1516	2621		
1991	502	18752	37002	8157	20551	32945	0.106	0.147	0.188	1546	2734		
1992	1076	17318	33561	9533	21011	32489	0.110	0.145	0.181	1554	2709		
1993	1269	18722	36175	10997	21256	31515	0.109	0.140	0.171	1536	2552		
1994	827	25315	49803	12339	21214	30089	0.117	0.147	0.176	1486	2668		
1995	16626	48476	80326	13099	20566	28034	0.117	0.145	0.172	1408	2492		
1996	2797	29796	56795	13383	19564	25745	0.121	0.148	0.175	1316	2402		
1997	4575	26862	49149	13167	18260	23353	0.126	0.154	0.182	1228	2358		
1998	13888	36641	59394	12652	16867	21082	0.126	0.155	0.185	1182	2231		
1999	6503	26133	45763	12415	15933	19451	0.130	0.149	0.169	1214	2091		
2000	4716	22813	40909	13154	16136	19118	0.135	0.153	0.171	1296	2362		
2001	17585	36561	55538	14629	17230	19831	0.126	0.143	0.161	1370	2306		
2002	7620	24444	41267	16074	18458	20842	0.128	0.143	0.159	1423	2392		
2003	25208	41175	57142	17036	19298	21560	0.134	0.149	0.164	1451	2616		
2004	12365	25732	39099	17580	19750	21920	0.123	0.139	0.155	1456	2380		
2005	9281	20455	31628	17901	19990	22078	0.142	0.156	0.171	1450	2796		
2006	15116	26224	37331	17670	19666	21662	0.145	0.160	0.175	1441	2875		
2007	15978	26393	36809	17539	19450	21361	0.143	0.155	0.168	1447	2751		
2008	14262	23305	32347	17656	19535	21414	0.141	0.153	0.165	1457	2745		
2009	7659	14877	22096	17926	19798	21671	0.124	0.135	0.147	1452	2278		
2010	5578	12306	19033	18180	20039	21897	0.123	0.135	0.147	1430	2229		
2011	19486	29032	38578	17953	19785	21617	0.139	0.151	0.163	1392	2575		
2012	15452	25908	36365	17307	19102	20896	0.141	0.153	0.165	1342	2549		
2013	7324	17831	28338	16683	18426	20170	0.134	0.146	0.158	873	2685		
2014	25679	36148	46616	15985	17684	19383	0.152	0.168	0.185	811	2991		
2015	3585	11788	19991	14552	16220	17888	0.132	0.145	0.158	765	2264	68	

ICES Advice 2024

	Recruitment			Stock size			Fishing pressure			Catch			
Year	Low	D	High	Low	SSB	High	Low	F	∐iah	Recreational	Commercial	Commercial	
	LOW	R _{age 0}	підіі	LOW	330	підії	LOW	ages 4-15	High	removals*	landings	discards^	
2016	20821	30434	40047	13668	15320	16972	0.134	0.146	0.159	757	2252	65	
2017	13668	22606	31543	13349	15027	16705	0.132	0.147	0.162	765	2295	196	
2018	6521	13851	21181	13366	15122	16879	0.134	0.146	0.158	735	2338	155	
2019	1761	7804	13848	13485	15373	17261	0.122	0.137	0.152	749	2227	183	
2020		18687**		13753	15840	17927	0.113	0.126	0.139	690	2090	41	
2021		18687**		13916	16253	18590	0.107	0.121	0.135	702	2032	196	
2022		18687**		14042	16675	19309	0.098	0.114	0.129	700	1906	160	
2023		18687**		13968	16908	19848	0.098	0.118	0.138	676	1949	148	
2024		18687**		13213	16387	19560							

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

^{**} Geometric mean 2008–2019.

[^] Commercial discards are reported here, but not used in the assessment.

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Sources and references

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