

Agreement on fishing opportunities in the Atlantic, North Sea, Mediterranean and Black Sea for 2021



PUBLISHED DEC 17, 2020
BY [EUROPA](#)

Following a two-day intense negotiation, ministers reached an agreement on the catch limits for over 200 commercial fish stocks in the Atlantic, the North Sea, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea for 2021 and, in the case of deep-sea species, for 2021 and 2022. More than 100 of these stocks in the Atlantic and North Sea have been co-managed with the UK during the last decades; given the ongoing EU-UK negotiations on their future relationship, ministers agreed to set provisional quotas for the fish stocks shared with the UK. The provisional quotas are designed to ensure the continuation of sustainable fishing in the concerned areas until consultations with the UK are concluded. A similar approach was agreed for the stocks co-managed with Norway.

The provisional quotas include a proportionate roll-over of the existing 2020 fishing opportunities for the first three months of 2021 (applying a 25% ratio of the total existing Union quota). Ministers agreed on certain exceptions to this approach based on seasonality (certain stocks are mainly fished at the beginning of the year e.g. mackerel and blue whiting) and scientific advice (drastic cuts for some stocks e.g. northern prawn).

To safeguard the stocks, ministers agreed to reduce catch limits for, inter alia, plaice in Kattegat, Norway lobster in Skagerrak, hake and pollack in the Southern part of the Atlantic and several deep-sea species, including one stock of roundnose grenadier and black scabbardfish.

Regarding the fishing opportunities in the Mediterranean and Black Seas, ministers agreed to further reduce demersal fishing efforts in western Mediterranean by 7.5% with a view to sustaining fish stocks in the area. This reduction is part of the

commitment for an overall and gradual reduction of up to 40% until the beginning of 2025 to progressively reach maximum sustainable yield for all stocks concerned in these highly mixed fisheries.

The Council agreement confirmed to a large extent the initial Commission proposals, which established fishing opportunities mainly in the form of yearly total allowable catches (TACs) and quotas by fish stocks in the different fishing zones. TACs and quotas concern stocks that the EU manages either autonomously or jointly with third countries, for instance with Norway and the UK mainly in the North Sea, Celtic Sea and the Skagerrak, or through agreements reached in the framework of Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs). The proposal for the Mediterranean and the Black Sea includes fishing effort and other technical provisions.

The setting of TACs and quotas is an annual, and in the case of deep-sea species a biennial, management exercise decided upon by the Council in accordance with Article 43(3) of the TFEU.

Press release distributed by Media Pigeon on behalf of Europa, on Dec 17, 2020. For more information subscribe and [follow](#) us.

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