

Seabass Position Paper

EAA calls

1. The EAA proposes a total catch that would stabilize SSB, ie 3431 tonnes in 2027. Bigger stocks and a more natural stock structure with more big fish serve anglers interests
 2. Angling, together with small scale fisheries, has by far the largest socio-economic benefit to society while having a small environmental footprint. The EAA calls for this to be recognised and acknowledged when deciding on fishing opportunities for 2027.
 3. The EAA calls on the Commission to take note of the December 2025 Ifremer study¹ that estimates that SSB will fall below Blim by 2031 if MSY policy continues. Future stock crashes that may be induced by this policy must be avoided with a timely adjustment to the seabass fishing opportunities policy.
 4. EAA opposes new gear types to enter the seabass fishery.
 5. The EAA opposes any further bycatch relaxations and calls management to take the 'unavoidable' part of the legislation more seriously. ICES expects discards to grow to 796 tonnes under FMSY in 2027 – despite a high 20% bycatch allowance
 - a. To that point, the EAA calls Commission and Council to look at alternatives to ever increasing bycatch allowances as these have failed as the intended solution to discarding:
 - i. Adopt policy that requires vessel operators to actively avoid areas where sea bass are caught as bycatch
 - ii. Adopt technical measures that would release seabass and other round fish bycatch from gear types such as flyshoot and otter trawls
 6. To avoid the targeting of vulnerable species such as sharks or other non-quota species to maximize seabass bycatch volumes, the EAA proposes to switch bycatch allowances to a landings value based percentage to avoid such unintended consequences.
 7. EAA calls upon the Commission to be pro-active and make sure management areas cover the fish wherever they go, anticipating the increasing effects of climate change on stock distribution.
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EAA sea bass fisheries extended position paper for 2027

The **ICES MSY advice for 2027** leads to a nearly **7% decrease in SSB**, which is almost a constant of the ICES model outcomes for seabass. For the last 5 of 6 years when the stock was still below Btrigger, the ICES MSY advice *decreased* SSB. Although the EAA prefers to further grow the stock, we propose a total catch that would stabilize SSB, ie of 3431 tonnes. We note that at FMSY lower the stock would still shrink by 4,3 %.

The reason we prefer stock growth over landings is that for seabass our members prefer a larger stock size and better odds to catch a fish to a bigger bag limit. A bigger stock size could also help attain a more natural stock structure with bigger fish, that are equally appreciated by anglers.

In their study¹ published in December '25, **Ifremer flags that seabass is at risk of collapse under FMSY.** Ifremer estimates that fishing at FMSY with 2021-2024 average recruitment will drive the stock below Blim by 2031.

'Catch opportunities drop sharply and consistently after the big increase in 2026'.

Their findings over a range of possible scenario's are summarized in the graph below.

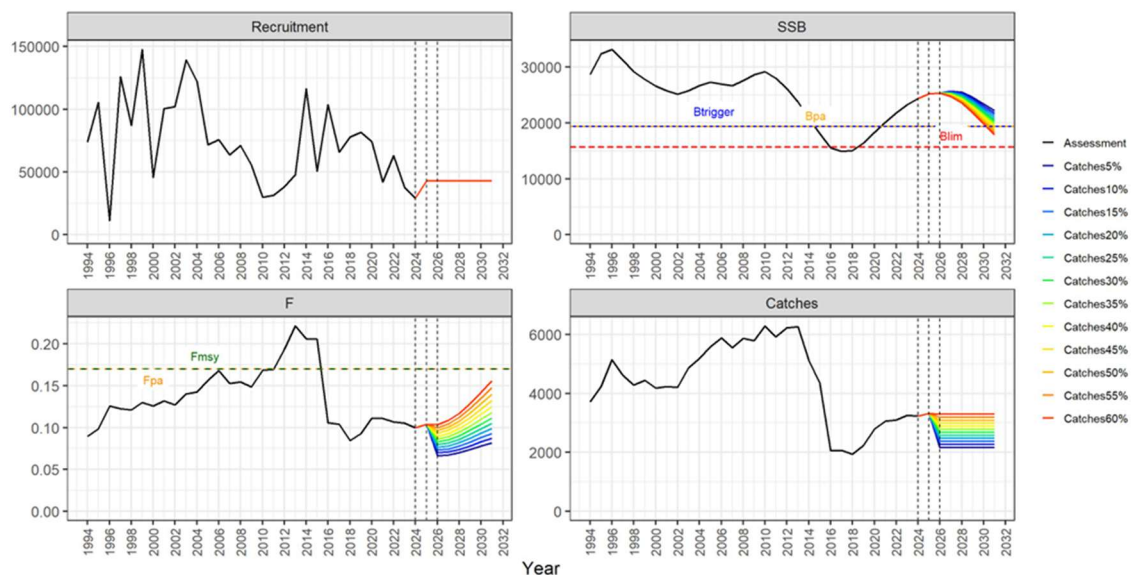


Figure 2.9. Recrutement, Biomasse féconde, mortalité par pêche et prélèvements totaux pour le stock de bar de la mer Celtique, Manche et mer du Nord sous préconisation pluriannuelle (2026-2031) avec un scénario d'augmentation des captures de 5% à 60% et de recrutements fixés à la moyenne arithmétique des années 2021-2024.

Figure 2.9. Recruitment, biomass, mortality and recovery for the seabass stock in Celtic sea, Channel and North Sea under multi-year recommendations (2026-2031) with a scenario of increased catches of 5% to 60% and recruitment set at the arithmetic mean of the years 2021-2024.

The EAA calls on the Commission to take note of this study and integrate it in future decision making for seabass catch opportunities, avoiding a FMSY induced stock crash.

For obvious reasons, EAA also opposes new gear types to enter the seabass fishery.

Stock size changes in 2025/2026 ICES advice are largely perceptual changes

Increases in SSB levels since the 2025 ICES advice are to a large extent an outcome of the benchmarking process for the seabass stock. Rather than a sudden and spectacular increase in the stock size, our *perception* of the stock size has changed and can be seen as a hindsight correction of numbers that were historically too low. This technical detail has important implications for discards management (next item).

A change in discards policy is needed

The narrative to successive extensions of bycatch allowances to now 20% by weight per fishing trip was always to reduce discarding. This goal was not attained as discards have not gone down during the years that the bycatch percentage was step by step increased.

Year	Total landings 4bc7ad-h (official)	ICES discards of the 4bc7ad-h stock
2019	970	623
2020	1175	497
2021	1261	626
2022	1278	526
2023	1478	513
2024	1418	728
2025	1513	629

Data taken from table 9 of the 2027 ICES seabass adviceⁱⁱ

According to the same advice, discards are expected to grow to 796 tonnes under FMSY in 2027 – despite the current 20% bycatch allowance. Here comes into play that the increased ICES stock size can not explain away the rising discard figures as SSB stock growth is largely perceptual and not a real growth year over year (see previous point).

The EAA opposes any further bycatch relaxations and calls management to take the 'unavoidable' part of the legislation more seriously.

To that point, the EAA calls Commission and Council to look at alternatives to ever increasing bycatch allowances or as has even been suggested, opening up the closed period for seabass in February and March:

1. to actively avoid areas where sea bass are caught as bycatch, especially for high-risk gear types/fisheries such as flyshoot/board fishing for squid and other NQS. This has been done before, eg in France, to avoid sole catches and can be done for seabass as well according to Ifremer researchers. The recently produced ICES tool B-useful could be employed for this purpose – part of its 300 species rich database details species distribution and could help building avoidance strategies.
2. In Norway, research has been carried out to keep larger round fish bycatch species out of flyshoot nets with the help of cameras and panels.

Such measures would also help to address the risk involved in the uncertainty of actual discard numbers flagged by ICES. It is also noteworthy that larger demersal landings of seabass put a downward pressure on seabass prices caught with small scale handline and gillnet gear.

Targeting low-value non-quota stocks to increase seabass bycatch

EAA has been receiving signals that low (sales) value but vulnerable shark species such as dogfish (signaled in the UK) and starry smooth hound (signaled in the Netherlands) are targeted to increase legal bycatch tonnage of seabass. This not only could threaten these slow growing species but also threatens flourishing catch and release recreational fisheries eg in The Netherlands.

One way of avoiding unwanted consequences of the current policy would be to switch to a bycatch % based on landings value. This would also reduce financial incentives of illegally targeting seabass to maximize bycatch value.

Climate change - expanding management areas to where the stock is moving

Seabass (and other stocks) have been moving beyond their current management area, eg into

Norwegian waters, Kattegat, Skagerak and Baltic. There is little to no protection like minimum legal sizes or fishery specific regulations in place, meaning the fish can be legally caught and sold without gear or landing limitations.

As climate effects speed up, particularly in the North Sea, a fit for purpose fisheries management needs to reflect the changing realities in our seas. EAA calls upon the Commission to be proactive and make sure management areas cover the fish wherever they go.



The European Anglers Alliance (EAA) is a pan-European organisation for recreational angling, which defends European recreational anglers' interests at the European level and beyond.

The EAA was launched in Brussels in 1994. The organisation is registered in Germany (pdf), Offenbach am Main. The EAA headquarters are in Brussels. The EAA is recognised as a NGO (non-governmental organisation) and registered as a not-for-profit organisation. There are about 3 million affiliated members to EAA's 17 member organisations and affiliates from 15 European countries.

ⁱ <https://archimer.ifremer.fr/doc/01007/111841/125830.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://ices-library.figshare.com/ndownloader/files/66101426&usg=AOvVaw1O9UCG0tNpv2woVCeRDHQf&opi=89978449>