

Questions and Answers on the Commission's proposal for Atlantic and North Sea fish quotas (TACs) in 2018

How many fishing quotas (also referred to as Total Allowable Catches or TACs) are there in the Atlantic and North Sea?

Fishing opportunities for 78 TACs are being proposed today by the Commission for the Atlantic and North Sea:

- 36 TACs are based on Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) advice
- 42 TACs concern so-called data-limited stocks. This means that scientists cannot make a full assessment. Of these 42 TACs, the Commission is proposing to keep 28 at the same level of 2017 (20 are included in the agreement with the Council to keep them stable unless scientific advice shows that the stock is deteriorating. These stocks are by-catches in mixed fisheries and the TACs are rather small).

The remaining TACs are to be filled in at a later stage.

Why is it important that quotas are in line with Maximum Sustainable Yield levels?

Proposing fishing quotas or TACs at Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) levels means phasing out unsustainable fishing. Fishing at this level allows the fishing industry to take the highest possible amount of fish from the sea while keeping fish stocks healthy.

In December 2014 the EU set 36 TACs in line with MSY. In December 2016 this number was increased to 44 TACs. This is coming from a situation where 5 TACs were set in line with MSY in 2009. The Commission is again proposing to reach MSY exploitation rates by 2018 for all the stocks for which scientists have given advice. The number of Total Allowable Catches (TACs) in line with MSY will ultimately depend on the decision made by the Council in December.

What is the monetary value of the 2018 proposal compared to this year's quotas?

As several high value or high volume TACs (e.g. some nephrops and sole TACs) are still missing from the proposal, comparing the monetary value to last year's quotas is not possible. However, the overall value of 2017 TACs (for the Baltic, North Sea and Atlantic) was around EUR 5 billion, corresponding to EUR 1.5 billion in profits.

What's new in the fishing opportunities for 2018?

Since 2015, fish that in the past would have been discarded has to be landed. This transition is implemented gradually, starting with fishermen in the pelagic and industrial fisheries and in fisheries of the Baltic Sea who have

been asked to land all catches as of 1 January 2015. Fishermen in the North Sea and the Atlantic have been asked to land all catches of certain demersal species, since 1 January 2016.

The demersal landing obligation will be extended further in 2018, as defined in the [‘discard plans’](#). This applies for example to additional fisheries for whiting and saithe in the North Sea, the fisheries for saithe, black scabbardfish and roundnose grenadier in the North-Western waters and additional fisheries for anglerfish, plus fisheries for black scabbardfish, red seabream and blue whiting in the South-Western waters. To compensate the industry for the extra effort in adapting to the landing obligation, the Commission proposes the so-called “TAC top-ups” for fish stocks that fall under the landing obligation. The “top-ups” reflect the level of catches formerly discarded. This approach stems from the Basic Regulation article 16, para 2. The demersal fisheries required to land all fish in 2018 were agreed by the three regional groups of North Western Atlantic, South Western Atlantic and North Sea. These provisions are incorporated into EU law through the delegated acts on ‘discard plans’.

How will the calculation of TAC top-ups be done?

The TAC top-ups will be determined on the basis of how much the fleets that come under the landing obligation from 2017 onwards contribute to total catches and discards. When calculating the TAC top-ups this will also take into account the ‘de minimis’ percentages of discards which will still be allowed. ‘De minimis’ can be applied where it is very difficult to increase selectivity or where the costs of handling unwanted catches would be disproportionate. The ‘de minimis’ exemption is deducted from the top-up in order not to increase overall fishing mortality.

The Commission has asked the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) to analyse all fleet segments on the basis of expected discards. Whenever discard data and information per fleet segment are incomplete, the Commission asks STECF to advise on the risks associated with using the discard average given by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) for the whole stock to calculate TAC top-ups. This risk analysis will guide the Commission’s proposals for TAC adjustments. If on the other hand information on catches and discards by fleet segment exists, TAC adjustments can be calculated without the risk of increasing fishing mortality.

Why are “TAC top-ups” not yet included in the Commission proposal?

The Commission has asked for advice on the appropriate level of top-ups to the advisory body STECF. The advice is expected at the beginning of November. Therefore for the stocks that will be under the landing obligation in 2018 only the basic fishing opportunities, stemming from the ICES advice, are included in the Commission proposal. The Commission will table a non-paper with all the TAC top-ups as soon as possible after receiving the advice from STECF. This approach will allow discussions to start as soon as possible in preparation of the December Council.

How will the Commission avoid the ‘choking’ of certain fisheries under the landing obligation?

One of the main challenges arising from the landing obligation is the ‘choking’ phenomenon: sometimes fishing for a certain species does not make economic sense because the bycatch is high and the TAC for that bycatch is low – hence the ‘choking’ of the fishery. The Commission is consulting with stakeholders and looking for practical and sound solutions to this, solutions that must keep fishing both economically viable and sustainable. With this in mind, the TAC for **dab** and **flounder** in the North Sea was deleted this year, as it was shown to have no conservation effect. Furthermore, the tools for implementing the landing obligation should be fully explored by stakeholders, including adopting multiannual management plans to take into account the specificities of regional fisheries.

Why are there so many figures missing in the proposal?

The Commission negotiates on behalf of the EU a number of quotas for fish stocks shared with third countries (Norway, Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland and Russia). The same is the case for the stocks in international waters and for highly migratory species such as tuna, where the Commission negotiates fishing opportunities in regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs). The gaps will be filled as soon as these negotiations are concluded. In addition, for some stocks advice was received too late to include figures in the proposal.

For more information

[TACs and quotas](#)

[Press Release](#) on Commission’s proposal on fishing opportunities in the Atlantic and North Sea for 2018

More information on [Quota Top-ups](#)

Scientific advice: the proposed TACs take due account of the [scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea \(ICES\) and the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries \(STECF\)](#).

Stakeholders were also consulted, based on the [Commission’s Consultation document](#)

[Multiannual management plans](#)

[Map of fishing areas](#)