

North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group (NAPA)

STATEMENT TO THE PRESS:

Golden opportunity for Northeast Atlantic blue whiting: “Don’t blow it” say top seafood supply-chain businesses

Talks to secure a quota sharing arrangement for Northeast Atlantic blue whiting are set to take place in London this week. The world’s top blue whiting buyers – [Skretting](#), [Cargill](#), and [Biomar](#) – are calling for the Coastal States fishing for this stock to seize a rare, golden opportunity to scale back their allocations. The stakes are high. Squander the opportunity, and the market will walk.

Date: 31 January 2023

Contact: Fiona Birch fiona@mindfullywired.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Blue whiting: A narrative of mismanagement.

Blue whiting is a prized, pelagic quota species of the Northeast Atlantic, predominantly used for fish oil and feed for salmon aquaculture. After more than a decade of mismanagement, the principal buyers of this stock are setting an ultimatum for change.

Blue whiting was stripped of its Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification in 2020, and no longer boasts the widely recognised blue tick that consumers have come to know and trust as a symbol of sustainability assurance.

This triggered a domino effect, and the loss of its MarinTrust certification – a unique certification authenticating the sustainability of marine ingredients, including blue whiting. Despite this wake-up call, the Coastal States continue to engage in overfishing, and the blue whiting stock was fished above sustainable levels yet again, by 30% in 2021 and 47% in 2022. For companies sourcing from this fishery, the lack of political cooperation poses an unacceptable threat to their wider commitments to responsible business practices.

Dr Dave Robb, Sustainability Program Lead at [Cargill](#): *“The spotlight is on aquaculture to develop sustainably and a key part of that requires sustainably managed feed ingredients. Fisheries around the world are under pressure and we should be able to look to the European Coastal States for leadership on responsible and sustainable management of shared fisheries resources such as Northeast Atlantic blue whiting, mackerel, and herring – especially when the premiers of three of the States are represented in the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy. Blue whiting has been a key part of the development of a sustainable aquaculture sector in Europe – especially the salmon sector in Norway. But Norwegian fish farmers have already shown that they would not buy fishmeal from blue whiting which is not responsibly managed across the fishery. Now is the time for the governments from the Coastal States to act and show leadership for sustainable fishing.”*

Our call to action.

Cargill, together with two further top seafood processors – [Skretting](#) and [Biomar](#) – who collectively purchase the majority of blue whiting from this fishery, are unimpressed.

We, the [North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group](#) (NAPA), are a collective of seafood businesses including Cargill, Skretting, and Biomar, that represent the unified voice of the global marketplace for sustainable seafood in the Northeast Atlantic. Together, we are calling for action.

Our partners want to see the Coastal States put aside their politics, take cooperative steps to agree on quota shares that follow scientific recommendations, and commit to long-term fisheries management plans. To accomplish this, we have established a [blue whiting Fishery Improvement Project \(FIP\)](#) – a blueprint to guide political action towards responsible decision-making that champions sustainable stocks.

Dr Dave Robb from Cargill: *“When the MSC certification for blue whiting was withdrawn in 2020, we publicly recorded that we stopped buying material from blue whiting caught after that date. Establishing a Fishery Improvement Program through the North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group provides a highly credible way for regulators, fishing associations, and fishers to engage to find a solution that delivers a long-term solution for sustainable management of shared stocks. We call on all stakeholders to engage actively and sincerely in the progress in line with broader commitments to ocean stewardship as part of a sustainable economy.”*

Our ultimatum for change.

To highlight their commitments to driving positive, political change, Cargill, Skretting, and Biomar have publicly committed to cease sourcing from the fishery if the Coastal States fail to put sustainability first:

“If the FIP should fail, we will stop purchasing blue whiting as we, our customers, and stakeholders follow the highest ethical and sustainability standards. It is vital that an agreement on the distribution of quotas can be achieved, and we urge the Coastal States to find a resolution promptly to avoid any potential risks of overfishing and therefore failure of the current FIP.” – **Biomar**

More blue whiting for everyone?

In October 2022, the latest scientific advice for blue whiting was published. High levels of recruitment into the fishery last year meant that stock numbers have boomed, and are now estimated to be at a historical high. Consequently, the scientific advice for the catch in 2023 was 81% higher than in 2022 – surely, this naturally means higher catches for all Coastal States?

It’s not that simple.

In recent years, each State has allocated itself a share of the catch – or a slice of the blue whiting “pie” – because they were unable to collectively agree on sustainable allocations. Unfortunately, the sum of the allocations in 2021 was 130% – 30% above scientific advice, and common sense. In 2022, this increased to 147% – 47% above scientific advice, and a further demonstration that Coastal States are not taking the wider picture into account. In simple terms: they are taking more slices than the pie has to offer.

Dr Tom Pickerell, NAPA Project Lead: *“Einstein reputedly once said that insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. Should the States continue to take the same size slice of pie, they will continue their overfishing. We have calculated that each State could lower their allocation (their pie slice) by 23% to ensure that the sum of all allocations is 100% – or to put it another way, to stop overfishing. Because of the increase in the scientific advice, such a reduction would still actually result in an increase in catch for each State of approximately 12%! It’s a win-win.”*

Golden Opportunity.

The boom in blue whiting numbers offers a golden opportunity for the Coastal States to take that smaller slice, and scale back their allocations. They could take advantage of the boom in the stock size, – adopting a more ‘precautionary’ approach and opting for a sustainable TAC level – without having to cut their catches. It’s pure common sense.

Leif Kjetil Skjæveland, Manager of Sustainability and Public Affairs at Skretting: *“We want to continue to use blue whiting as a raw material. It is an excellent and sustainable marine ingredient, but only if the fishery is well managed. The lack of progress among the Coastal States might cause us to stop using blue whiting, and this is in a time where locally sourced food and sustainable raw materials are more important than ever. So, to the governments in the Coastal States: please start talking to each other and work out an allocation! This ball is too important to drop.”*

****ENDS****

For further information, images or quotes, please contact:

- Fiona Birch, NAPA Communications
 - fiona@mindfullywired.org
- Sara Mynott, NAPA Communications
 - sara@mindfullywired.org
- Dr Tom Pickerell, NAPA Project Lead
 - tom@tomolamolaconsulting.com

Notes to Editors:

More on NAPA

The [North Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group](#) (NAPA) is a collective of up to 60 global retailers, food service companies, and suppliers with the shared aim of sourcing sustainable and certified seafood in order to supply a growing demand for sustainable, ecolabelled fish products. NAPA’s reach extends across the world, attracting members from Japan, Asia, USA, and Africa, as well as the EU and UK. It represents an unprecedented coalition of business leverage, pushing hard to prevent overfishing of three iconic pelagic stocks – North East Atlantic mackerel, Atlanto-Scandian herring, and North East Atlantic blue whiting. As a collective, NAPA is using its voice to advocate for long-term, science-based management of these stocks: for prospering oceans and fisheries, and business security. To achieve this, NAPA is seeking an agreement on total allowable catches for North East Atlantic pelagic fisheries in line with scientific advice, and for a long-term science-based management agreement.

Further detail can be found at:

- NAPA website: <https://www.seafish.org/responsible-sourcing/fisheries-management/north-atlantic-pelagic-advocacy-group/>
- Twitter: [@NAPAFisheries](https://twitter.com/NAPAFisheries)