

EAA and EFTA position paper on Seabass fishing opportunities for 2026

This position paper sets out the EAA and EFTA position paper on Seabass fishing opportunities for 2026.

Stock

- The EAA and EFTA welcome the 2026 ICES advice that suggests the seabass stock has reached a safer level (above *Btrigger*).
- The EAA and EFTA support maintaining closed seasons that apply equally to both recreational and commercial fisheries.
- The EAA and EFTA advocate for leveraging the opportunity to further rebuild the stock, aiming to increase CPUE and enhance the social and economic benefits for coastal communities.
- However, the stock estimate carries a high degree of uncertainty - approximately 10,000 tonnes - which EAA and EFTA believes warrants a more precautionary approach to management in 2026.
- EAA and EFTA therefore urge fishery managers not to adopt the ICES MSY advice for 2026, which recommends doubling the catch. Such an increase is highly likely to deplete the stock, reduce CPUE, and undermine social and economic gains.
- EAA and EFTA note that a significant contributor to the higher stock estimate is the upward revision of recreational catch figures.
EAA and EFTA request further refinement of these estimates, particular in countries such as the Netherlands and France where sample sizes have been limited.

Catch allocation

- The recovery of the seabass stock to a safer level has been achieved through:
 - Restructuring the fishery to allow only recreational fishers and commercial hook and line fishers to target seabass.
 - Strictly limiting landings by other métiers (e.g. gillnets, trawlers and seiners) that have the capacity to remove large quantities of seabass.
 - Prohibiting landings by métiers historically associated with targeting spawning aggregations (e.g. pair trawlers and drift nets).
- It is essential to broadly maintain the current structure of catch limits for seabass
- However, it is now appropriate to increase the recreational bag limit, in recognition of:
 - The assessments improved perception of the stock status
 - For five years the recreational bag limit have remained unchanged, despite annual increases in commercial quotas - including not only bycatch allowances but also targeted increases for hook and liners.
 - The comparatively higher social and economic value generated per tonne of sea bass landed by recreational fisheries.
- A significant increase in seabass landings by other métiers would undermine the profitability of small-scale fishers who rely on maintaining high market prices. It would also negatively influence the recreational sector that derives economic benefit from larger fish due to this being an important driver of angler satisfaction.
- This reinforces the need to keep bycatch limits tight.
- EAA and EFTTA note that since the 2019 development of the Sea Bass Allocation Tool, the high capacity seine fleet has changed substantially- from [21 vessels in 2019](#) to [over 80 vessels](#) in 2025¹ - greatly increasing its potential impact on the sea bass stock.
- Regarding the Sea Bass Catch Allocation Tool, EAA and EFTTA recommend ICES, COM and the UK to collaborate swiftly in establishing a project management timeline, including key milestones and a clear completion date.
- To mitigate the risk of increased discards as the stock grows, the EAA and EFTTA calls for the implementation of real-time area closures to prevent the most harmful bycatch.

¹ reference (in Dutch) excludes 11 German vessels