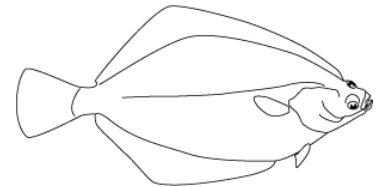


Explanations on the ICES Advice for 2026



Flatfish Baltic Sea

Five species of flatfish are commercially exploited in the Baltic Sea: plaice, flounder, dab, brill and turbot. Only plaice is subject to quotas. Flatfish were mainly by-catch in cod fisheries; there were only small targeted fisheries, e.g. for turbot. Since the closure of the two cod fisheries, flatfish are among the few exploitable target species in the western Baltic Sea. The two plaice stocks in the Kattegat, Belts and Sound and in the Baltic Sea were merged again in 2025 to form a single stock, the "Baltic Sea plaice".

The combined stock is also well within safe limits, with low fishing pressure and high biomass. Plaice seem to benefit in particular from the much lower competition for food due to the poor condition of cod. Reproduction remains strong. The catch recommendation for 2026 is slightly lower than for 2024 and 2025. The catches include discards, which have been largely illegal since 2017 and yet still account for over 20% of the catch from the area.

Since 2022, the plaice caught have been getting thinner, meaning their body condition factor is deteriorating. It is not yet possible to say what role density effects and deteriorating environmental conditions, as in the case of cod, are playing here. The resulting marketing difficulties are making plaice fishing increasingly unattractive. As a result, the maximum catch for plaice is not only far from being exhausted, but is also continuing to decline.

The other flatfish stocks in the western Baltic Sea are also in good condition. However, the income that can be generated from flatfish fishing cannot even begin to compensate for the losses in herring and cod catches.

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<https://www.thuenen.de/en/thuenen-topics/fisheries/understanding-fish-stock-developments-scientific-basis-for-sustainable-use/ices-advice-on-fishing-opportunities-whats-behind-it>