

Explanations on the ICES Advice for 2024

Herring Western Baltic Sea



Western herring is the most important target species of the German coastal fishery, especially on the coast of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. Since about 2004, recruitment has been steadily declining and it took some time before catch levels were sufficiently adjusted to this situation. One main cause of the declining recruitment has been largely elucidated in 15 years of directed [research](#): Later and warmer winters cause a mismatch between herring larvae and their most important food; most of the larvae starve to death.

As a result, the stock has declined sharply, and temporary was only half the limit reference value. ICES has therefore advised for the closure of the fishery for many years. For the Western Baltic management area, this recommendation was largely followed: Total allowable catches were reduced by 94% between 2017 and 2021. In contrast, in the northern part of the range (Kattegat and Skagerrak), where herring stay to feed in summer and fall, legal catches remained far too high: They were only reduced by 57% between 2017 and 2021. As a result, the German coastal fishery was deprived of its basis, but total outtake from the stock still remained so high that the stock could not recover. Only for 2022, Germany, Sweden, Denmark and Norway were able to agree on further drastic cuts in catches in the Kattegat and Skagerrak area as well. More than 80% of the catch is now taken in the eastern North Sea (under the North Sea Herring quota), and less than 10% in each of Kattegat/Skagerrak and the western Baltic Sea, respectively.

The stock remains far below the limit value, but appears to have increased over the past year. Fishing mortality has continued to decline in 2022 and is now for the first time sufficiently low to allow the stock to recover. This may take several years, and even then the stock can only provide half of the catch that could be sustainably fished in the 1990s. ICES maintains its recommendation for 2024 to close the fishery throughout its range.

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