



Regarding the loss of MSC certification for parts of Norwegian Northeast Arctic cod/skrei and haddock

As of the 15th of August 2021, the inshore Northeast Arctic (NEA) cod and haddock fishery lost its MSC certification. An inshore fishery is defined as fish caught within 12 nautical miles of the shoreline, which is where around 60 percent of the NEA cod fishery is conducted. The remaining 40 per cent of NEA cod is caught outside of 12 nautical miles and continues to hold its MSC certification.

The Northeast Arctic cod and haddock are both viable fish stocks

It is important to underline that Norway's NEA cod stock, also known as skrei in some markets, is the world's largest cod stock and is considered viable by both The International Council for Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and The Norwegian Institute of Marine Research.

The healthy condition of both the NEA cod and haddock stocks is a result of years of investments in marine research, science-based quota setting, regulations and international fisheries cooperation. Of all four cod stocks found in Norwegian waters, the NEA cod represents around 90 per cent of all landings and exports.

Why are parts of the world's largest cod stock losing its certification?

The loss of MSC certification for the inshore NEA cod and haddock fishery comes as a result of Norway not being able to meet the MSC's requirements relating to another cod stock - the coastal cod. The less abundant coastal cod is a well-known bycatch in the inshore NEA cod fishery.

When Norway entered the MSC partnership for NEA cod and haddock, the MSC required Norway to be able to rebuild the coastal cod stock back to a measurable level eligible for MSC-certification, or to establish a system for separation at landing guaranteeing a coastal cod inclusion rate of less than 2 per cent in the main NEA cod fishing season.

Why can't Norway just catch the cod outside of the 12 nautical mile limit, where it is still certified?

The simple answer is that inshore is where the fish is during the skrei season. Roughly two thirds of Norwegian cod is caught within 12 nautical miles, during the traditional skrei fishing season from January to April.

The skrei spawning grounds around the Lofoten archipelago are some of the world's richest fishing grounds. Every year the migratory NEA cod swims in their millions all the way from the Barents Sea, arriving in the coastal areas outside Northern Norway in their physical prime. The fish, known as skrei, is caught close to shore, enabling fast handling, preserving the quality for Europe's most discerning seafood markets.

Catching skrei when it arrives in Northern Norway in its prime, is not only a matter of quality. Norwegian skrei is also of immense cultural value and has been, and continues to be, a vital lifeline for communities along the long Norwegian coastline. To

NORWEGIAN SEAFOOD COUNCIL

this day the vast majority of the coastal skrei fishing comprises of small boats, often with crews of 1-2 people onboard. Closing the entire coastal NEA cod fishery would be devastating to the industry and coastal communities dependent on it for their livelihood.

Why has Norway not been able to rebuild the coastal cod stock?

Since entering the MSC-partnership, numerous rebuilding measures have been implemented, such as fishing bans in certain coastal areas, as well as regulatory measures for different vessel groups designed to reduce the catches of coastal cod.

Despite efforts to rebuild the coastal cod stock, best available scientific data has not been able to demonstrate that the coastal cod has met the necessary target level, which is unfortunate for stakeholders requiring MSC-certified fish.

Why has the industry not been able to establish a separation system, separating NEA cod and coastal cod at landing?

The NEA cod and coastal cod are visually identical and can only be separated by DNA testing. Coupled with the enormous volumes being landed in the skrei season (150 000 – 200 000 tonnes depending on quotas), and the importance of swift value chain handling at the landing sites, conducting DNA tests would be practically challenging. More importantly, it would also be damaging to the quality of the fish as swift but careful handling and transport is key to product quality.

How much coastal cod is landed in the NEA fishing season?

Decades of catch data based on DNA testing indicate that around 1 out of 20 (5 %) landed cod, originates from the coastal cod stock (including non-commercial catches).

Is there any work being carried out to address the coastal cod situation or certification?

ICES recently (2021) conducted a revision of the Norwegian coastal cod stocks, which demonstrated that there is likely more coastal cod along the Norwegian coast than what prior stock data indicated. The Institute of Marine Research is also currently reviewing models and data to evaluate harvesting strategies. The Norwegian Seafood Council is positive to the work being carried out, which will hopefully lead to MSC-recertification for the entire Northeast Arctic Cod and haddock fishery.

Given a revised and approved rebuilding plan, the certification process will take some time, which means that for now, parts of the NEA cod and haddock does not qualify for certification.

In the meantime, The Norwegian Seafood Council urges all stakeholders to look into all available scientific data to make informed decisions about their seafood purchases, as it will clearly demonstrate that both NEA cod and haddock are sustainable stocks. We are confident that the absence of MSC certification for parts of the world's largest cod stock will be temporary.

How is data and regulation used in Norway's responsible fisheries management?

For decades, Norway has heavily invested in marine research. This has provided, not

Page 2

NORWEGIAN SEAFOOD COUNCIL

just insight about our most economically important stocks, but also sub stocks, such as the coastal cod. This broader approach is the core of Norway's ecosystem-based fishery management practice, where not only specific fisheries are evaluated, but the greater ecosystem at large, be it bycatch or other effects of a fishery. The discards ban introduced in 1987 (no discarding of any bycatches) and DNA testing have provided more reliable data on all our species, enabling Norway fisheries management to keep track of more than just a single species or fishery.

As such, Norway has not lost its MSC-certification due to any lack of responsible fishing practices, nor because of the underlying condition of the sustainable NEA cod stock, which continues to hold the status as the world's largest cod stock.

Sources

[Latest advice from ICES North East Arctic cod](#)

[Latest advice from ICES coastal cod](#)

[Latest advice Northeast Arctic haddock](#)

[How Norway and Russia Made A Cod Fishery Live and Thrive - Yale E360](#)

For any questions regarding Norwegian cod or haddock, please contact The Norwegian Seafood Council.