

American plaice in Division 3M

Advice June 2026 for 2027-2029

Recommendation for 2027 - 2029

Scientific Council is not in a position to apply the PA framework due to inability to estimate the PA reference points at this time.

The stock has increased to above the time series mean, but this increase has been slow and dependent on past good recruitments and low levels of removals. Stock growth has been observed under current catches (200-400 t), but recruitment has been poor since 2018. Scientific Council considers that there is no sufficient supporting evidence that the stock would be able to sustain increased removals at this time.

Management objectives

No explicit management plan or management objectives have been defined by the Commission. Convention general principles are applied.

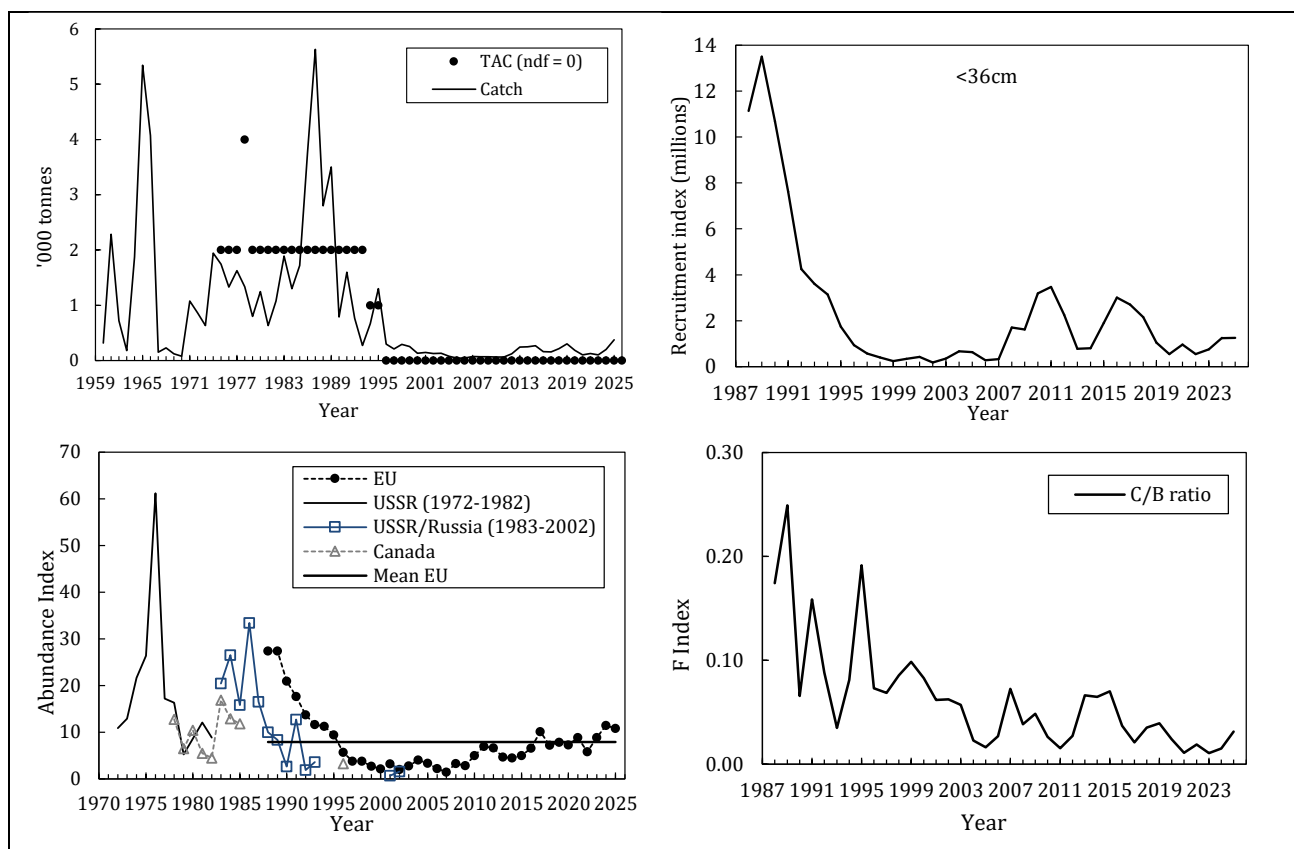
Convention Principle	Status	Comment	
Restore to or maintain at B_{msy}		$B_{trigger}$ and B_{lim} undefined, stock status unknown	 OK  Intermediate  Not accomplished  Unknown
Eliminate Overfishing (Stock)		F_{lim} undefined, no directed fishing, F is low	
Eliminate Overfishing (Ecosystem)		Total EPU catches < 2TCI	
Apply Precautionary Approach		No reference points defined	
Minimize harmful impacts on living marine resources and ecosystems		No directed fishing	
Preserve marine biodiversity		Cannot be evaluated	

Management unit

The American plaice stock on the Flemish Cap (Div. 3M) is considered to be a distinct population.

Stock status

The survey biomass index increased from 2007 mainly due to two recruitment pulses in 2008-2012 and 2015-2018, and increased to levels above the average for the entire series. However, recruitment has been poor since 2018 and the fishing mortality index remains around low levels within its time series.



Reference points

Scientific Council is not able to provide proxies for biomass or fishing mortality reference points at this time.

Projections

Quantitative assessment of risk at various catch options is not possible at this time.

Assessment

No analytical assessment was performed. Survey indices and fishery data were used to monitor the stock.

The next full assessment is planned for 2029.

Human impacts

Mainly fishery related mortality. Other sources (e.g. pollution, shipping, oil-industry) are undocumented.

Biological and environmental interactions

The stock occurs mainly at depths shallower than 600 m on the Flemish Cap. American plaice diet in the Flemish Cap (3M) EPU is typically dominated by invertebrates. Brittle stars and sea urchins are the most common prey but shrimp and amphipods have also been important.

The Flemish Cap (3M) Ecosystem Production Unit (EPU), with the exception of a short-lived increase in 2005-2009, has shown a fairly stable total biomass over time despite the changes in individual stocks. This indicates no major changes in overall ecosystem productivity.

Ecosystem sustainability of catches

The impact of bottom fishing activities on VMEs in the NRA was last assessed in 2021. The risk of Significant Adverse Impacts (SAIs) on sponge and large gorgonian VMEs was assessed to be low, while this risk for sea pen VMEs has been assessed as intermediate. The risks of SAIs on small gorgonian, black coral, bryozoan and sea squirt VMEs were assessed as high. A number of areas in the Flemish Cap (3M) EPU have been closed to bottom fishing to protect VMEs.

Div. 3M American plaice is included in the benthivore guild of the Flemish Cap (3M) Ecosystem Production Unit (EPU). The other NAFO managed stock in this guild and EPU is 3M shrimp. The Catch/TCI for 2025 was below the 2TCI ecosystem reference point (3M Benthivore $\text{Catch}_{2025}/\text{TCI}=0.02$).

Fishery

American plaice is caught as bycatch in otter trawl fisheries, mainly the cod and redfish fisheries. From 1979 to 1993 a TAC of 2 000 t was in effect for this stock. A reduction to 1 000 t was agreed for 1994 and 1995 and a moratorium was agreed to thereafter.

Recent catch estimates and TACs ('000 t) are as follows:

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
TAC	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf
Catches ¹	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.4	

ndf No directed fishing.
 1 CESAG estimates

Special comments

No special comments

Sources of information

SCR Doc. 23/024; 26/03, 20; SCS Doc. 24/06, 11; 25/08,09; 26/05, 06, 10