

SMALL FISH, BIG IMPACT: TIME FOR ECOSYSTEM-BASED MANAGEMENT

Event hosted by MEP Isabella Lövin (Verts/ALE) supported by FishSec, Blue Marine Foundation & Irish Wildlife Trust as part of the Brussels Ocean Week.



DATE & TIME: October 16, 2025, 12:30 PM - 2:00 PM

LOCATION: European Parliament, Room 4F384

FORMAT: In-person with lunch provided

ABOUT THE EVENT:

Within the framework of Ocean Week, this event aims to bring attention to the important role that small pelagic fish, also called forage fish, play in the wider marine ecosystem health across Europe. Forage fish include species such as sprat, herring and sandeel and are both exploited commercially for direct human consumption and for the production of fishmeal and oil. In addition to their key role as prey for larger fish such as cod, seabirds and marine mammals, forage fish are planktivores that act as a link for energy and nutrients between tiny plants and animals and large predators. The health of forage fish populations is critical, not only for their own sustainability but also for the broader marine ecosystem.

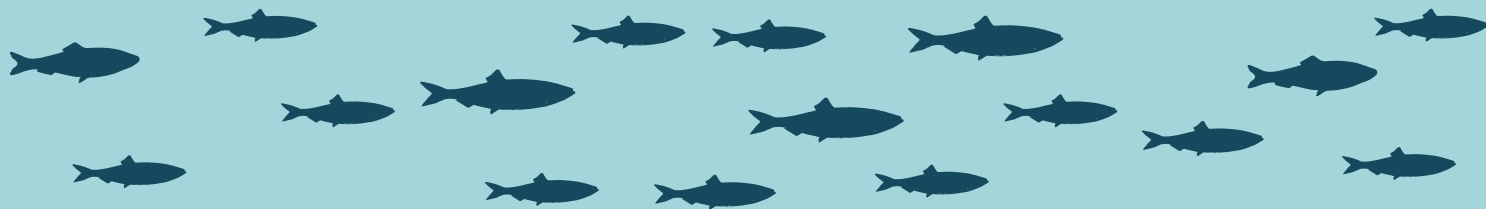
Unlike species such as cod, tuna and salmon, these small fish mainly stay out of the spotlight of the general public and decision makers even though they represent significant economic value to the European fisheries sector.

This event aims to shed light on both the importance of these small fish for the wider marine ecosystem, and also highlight why these fish must be managed sustainably and within the principles of the ecosystem-based approach to management. With examples of management in the Baltic Sea and the lack of management in the seas around Ireland, the event will explore weaknesses in the current management regimes as well as key recommendations for ensuring more sustainable exploitation. Finally, the event will also explore the infamous UK-EU dispute over the closure of the sandeel fishery in British waters.

AGENDA:

- 12:30** Welcome and keynote speech by Isabella Lövin
- 12:40** FishSec introduction and launch of report
- 13:00** Blue Marine Foundation presents EU-UK sandeel challenge
- 13:20** Irish Wildlife Trust presents sprat management in Irish waters
- 13:40** Q & A's
- 14:00** Closing remarks and end

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PRESENTATIONS:

LAUNCH OF NEW REPORT “SMALL FISH WITH A BIG IMPACT”: WHY THE BALTIC SEA’S FORAGE FISH NEED URGENT PROTECTION

LINA BIRGERSSON & CATHRINE PEDERSEN SCHIRMER, FISHSEC

The new report published by FishSec will be presented, which emphasises the key role that forage fish play in the Baltic Sea. The report shows that changes in their stock status have not been sudden but rather the result of ongoing longer-term processes, driven by high fishing pressure in combination with other factors such as increasing water temperatures, lower salinity and changes in food availability. This decline is affecting both the Baltic ecosystem and the fishing sector in the region. The report makes the case as to why Baltic Sea forage fish need to be managed in a much more precautionary way that ensures resilience. Improved management of Baltic sprat and herring stocks offers clear benefits, not only for the health of the Baltic Sea ecosystem and the recovery of its predators, but also for the viability of fisheries in the long term.

THE EU-UK SANDEEL CHALLENGE AS A FISHERIES MANAGEMENT LEARNING TOOL

DR JULIETTE SCOTT, BLUE MARINE FOUNDATION

The EU-UK sandeel challenge was unique in many ways, but most importantly because it brought to light the key importance of ecosystem-based approaches to managing fisheries. This talk will draw from evidence submitted and will argue that it is urgent for such approaches to be transposed to other fisheries contexts.

- What constitutes ‘best scientific advice’
- Digging into what the precautionary approach means in practice
- Seeking ICES advice, framing it, and using it appropriately
- One-shot measures vs the ecosystem approach to fisheries management: how more stable fish populations can benefit the fishing industry and ensure a sustainable future
- Less siloing and more holistic fisheries governance as a sine qua non

SIX MILES OUT: THE FIGHT FOR SUSTAINABLE SPRAT FISHING IN IRISH WATERS

GRACE CARR, THE IRISH WILDLIFE TRUST

New measures have been announced to protect sprat in Ireland’s inshore area. Vessels over 18m will have a TAC of 2000 tonnes for sprat from October 2025 and in October 2026 they will be banned from trawling within 6nm of the Irish coast. However, Ireland still falls short when it comes to establishing effective management plans for inshore species. Unfair quota allocation and failure to fully enact Article 17 of the CFP results in smaller inshore vessels having greater reliance on non quota species. This complicates the issue further, putting marine ecosystems, cultural heritage and inshore fishing communities livelihoods at stake.