Ending the Blame Game Carousel: Norway, the EU and UK Have All Been Overfishing for 20 Years

Agreed TACs compared to ICES scientific advice in the EU-Norway Agreement

Briefing by Our Fish, contributing author Griffin Carpenter

Background

This study analyses the total allowable catches (TACs) agreed between the EU and the Norwegian Government as part of the annual EU-Norway Agreement. These TACs are of critical importance for the sustainability of European waters. Indeed, the EU-Norway Agreement TACs are simply approved at the EU's December Council. In analysing the EU-Norway Agreement TACs, this study also draws attention to the role of Norway as an actor in the TAC setting process, whereas previous analysis has mainly focused on the EU due to its larger size and number of TACs.

Methodology

The data used in this study comes from the New Economics Foundation's 'Landing the blame' dataset. This dataset covers twenty years (2001-2020) of agreed TACs and scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES). From this dataset it is possible to discern which TACs are set above scientific advice and the countries that receive those TACs. The underlying assumption (as TAC negotiations are held in private closed-door sessions) is that the recipients of the TACs in excess of ICES scientific advice are responsible for the outcome and have either argued for or accepted TAC level.

Using the recent editions of the EU-Norway Agreement, a new classification is applied to the Landing the blame dataset by assigning TAC codes as either 'Norway joint management' for those TACs that are jointly managed by the EU and Norway, or 'Norway joint quotas' for those TACs that are not jointly managed but are joint stocks that have quotas swapped as part of the EU-Norway Agreement (Table 1).

Table 1: TAC codes classified as part of the EU-Norway Agreement

TAC code	Simplified TAC name	Agreement name
COD/2A3AX4	North Sea & Skagerrak cod	Norway joint management
HAD/2AC4.	North Sea haddock	Norway joint management

HER/4AB.; HER/4CXB7D	North Sea herring	Norway joint management
PLE/2A3AX4	North Sea plaice	Norway joint management
POK/2C3A4	North Sea saithe	Norway joint management
WHG/2AC4.	North Sea whiting	Norway joint management
COD/03AN.	Skagerrak cod	Norway joint management
HAD/3A/BCD	Skagerrak & Kattegat haddock	Norway joint management
HER/03A.	Skagerrak & Kattegat herring	Norway joint management
PLE/03AN.	Skagerrak plaice	Norway joint management
PRA/03A.	Skagerrak northern prawn	Norway joint management
SPR/03A.	Skagerrak & Kattegat sprat	Norway joint management
WHG/03A.	Skagerrak & Kattegat whiting	Norway joint management
ANF/2AC4-C	Anglerfish 4	Norway joint quotas
BLI/5B67-	Blue ling 4, 5b, 6, 7, 2a	Norway joint quotas
JAX/4BC7D	Horse mackerel 4b,c	Norway joint quotas
LIN/04-C.	Ling 4	Norway joint quotas
NEP/2AC4-C	Norway lobster 4	Norway joint quotas
NOP/2A3A4.	Norway pout 4	Norway joint quotas
POK/56-14	Saithe 6a	Norway joint quotas
PRA/2AC4-C	Northern prawn 4	Norway joint quotas
SOL/24-C.	Common sole 4	Norway joint quotas
USK/04-C.	Tusk	Norway joint quotas
USK/567EI.	Tusk	Norway joint quotas

This classification excludes three other categories of TACs from the analysis: EU and Norway exclusive stocks where quota swapping takes place between the EU and Norway (e.g. Arcto-Norwegian cod, shrimp in Greenland waters), TACs set by the EU council without any quota swapping with Norway (eg. southern hake, western Baltic cod, western English Channel plaice), and TACs covered by the Coastal States Agreement (mackerel, blue whiting, Atlanto-Scandian herring) including those included as joint quotas in the EU-Norway Agreement.

As the UK is an independent Coastal State for 2021 and is therefore an independent party in TAC negotiations, this study analyses the UK as a distinct entity alongside the EU and Norway. The position taken by the UK regarding European fish stocks will be much more important in the years to come.

Results

On average, TACs as part of the EU-Norway Agreement exceed ICES scientific advice by an average of 11% (from 2001 to 2020). This percentage is the same whether calculated for stocks under joint management or stocks with joint quotas.

As each TAC has differing quota shares between the parties and a different assessment compared to ICES scientific advice, it is possible to make this calculation for the EU, the United Kingdom, and Norway.[1] The results reveal that whereas the EU and the United Kingdom are slightly above the 11% average for both the joint management and joint quotas in the EU-Norway Agreement, Norway is below the average, exceeding ICES advice by 9% for jointly managed TACs and 8% for joint quotas (Figure 1).

[1] This approach follows the methodology of the New Economics Foundation's Landing the blame report series for TACs agreed by EU Council. https://neweconomics.org/campaigns/landing-the-blame

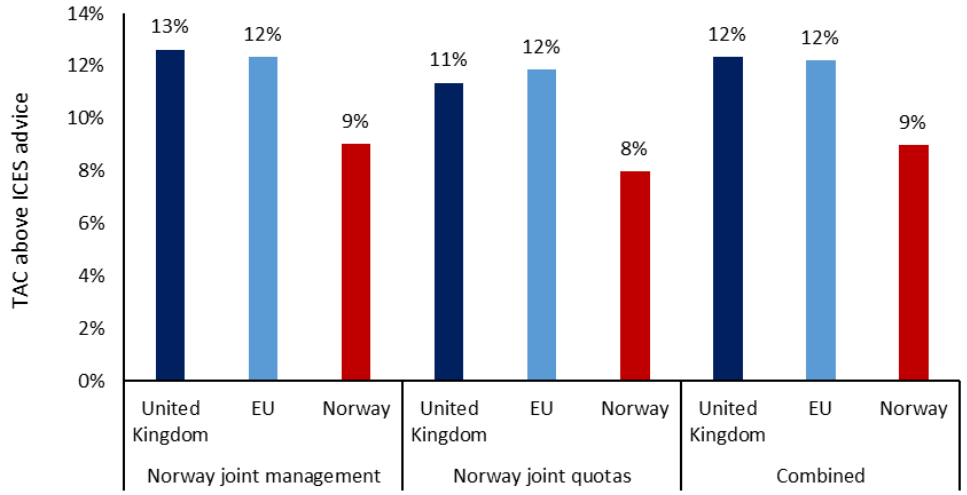

Figure 1: TACs from the EU-Norway Agreement compared to ICES advice (2001-2020 combined)
Source: Author's calculations based on the New Economics Foundation – Landing the blame dataset 2001-2020

When analysed over time, the percentage that TACs exceed ICES advice shows a variable but downward sloping trend (Figure 2).[2] It also appears that not only does the Norwegian TAC exceed advice by a smaller percentage than the EU TAC or the UK TAC when all years are combined (Figure 1), this result is consistent across almost all years from 2001 to 2020 (Figure 2) – with 2012 and 2019 as notable exceptions.

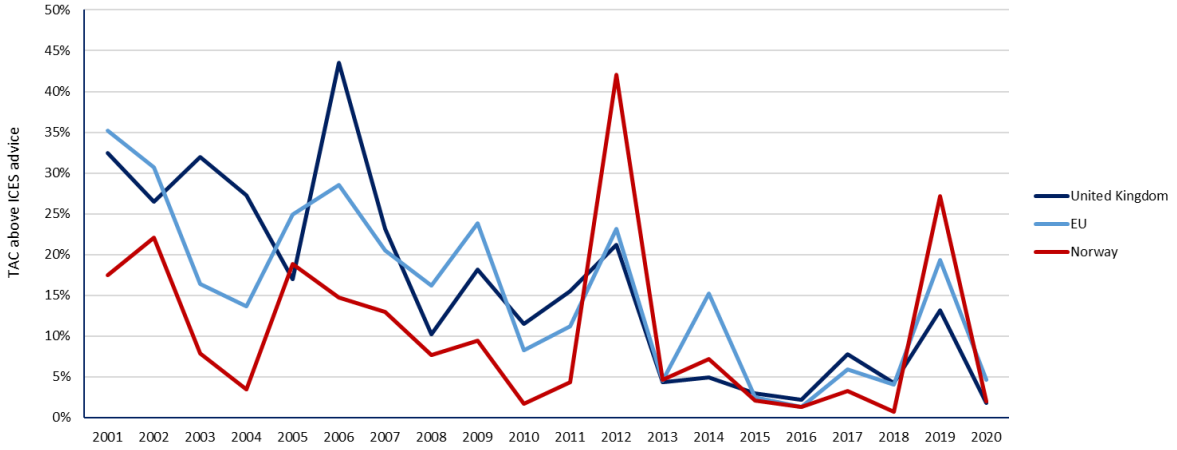

Figure 2: TACs from the EU-Norway Agreement compared to ICES advice
Source: Author's calculations based on the New Economics Foundation – Landing the blame dataset 2001-2020

Under this methodology, all TACs are combined by weight to calculate one excess TAC percentage, which gives large TACs a significant influence on the outcomes. This is appropriate as they are a significant representation of European waters, but analysing each TAC separately can also yield important information on TAC setting behaviour by providing multiple datapoints.

Analysing each TAC separately in terms of its adherence to ICES scientific advice (taking an average of 2001-2020) and percentage TAC share by country reveals that there is no clear and uniform relationship between the two. For the EU and the UK, when their percentage share of a TAC increases (horizontal axis in Figure 3) it is unclear whether the TAC above scientific advice either

[2] This is consistent with research on TACs agreed by EU Council in the Landing the blame reports.

increases or decreases (vertical axis in Figure 3). For Norway there may be a negative relationship, but it is extremely weak (R^2 of 0.06).

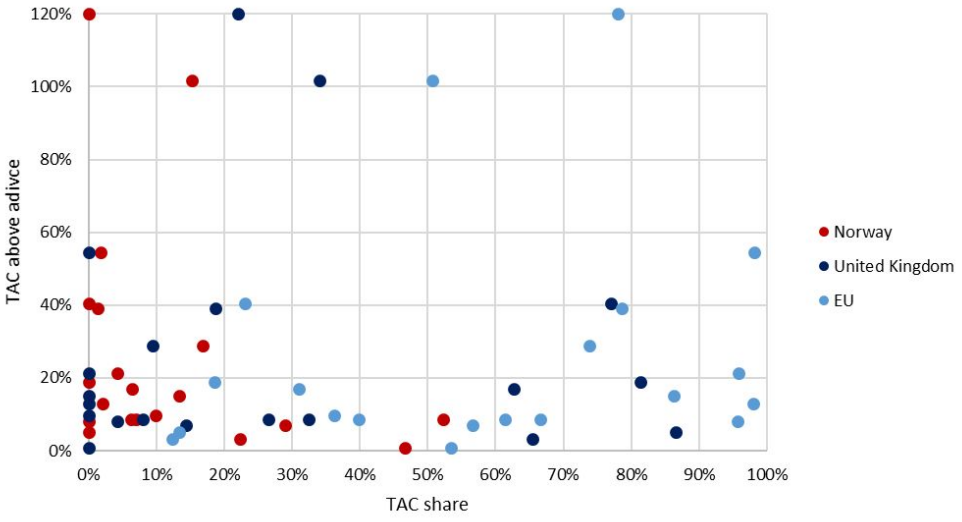

Figure 3: Individual TACs from the EU-Norway Agreement by TAC share and compared to ICES advice
Source: Author's calculations based on an average from 2001-2020 for each TAC from the New Economics Foundation – Landing the blame dataset. Note: Northern prawn 4 is set infinitely above advice (since advice is zero catch) but is capped at 120% to fit in the figure.

The same relationship between TAC shares by country and TACs set above scientific advice can be analysed by specific TAC to yield additional insights (Figure 4). From the results, two key findings emerge. First, the weak relationship between TAC share and TAC above ICES scientific advice is still present, with a decline in Norwegian share of a TAC weakly correlating with an increase in the percentage that the TAC exceeds ICES scientific advice.

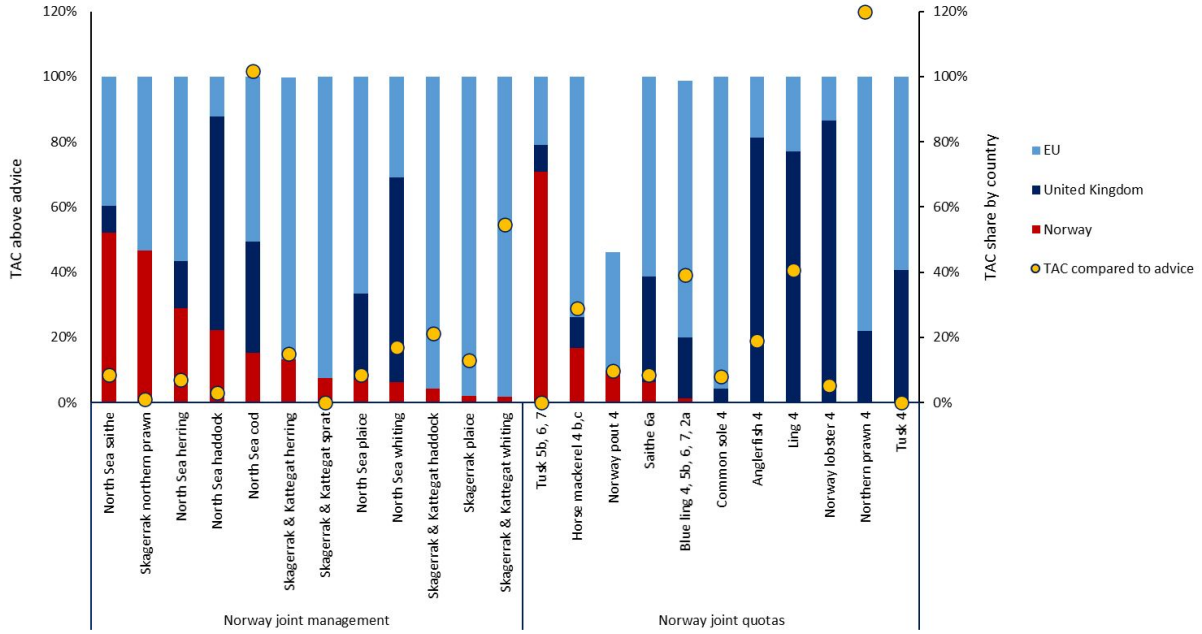

Figure 4: TACs from the EU-Norway Agreement by TAC share and compared to ICES advice
Source: Author's calculations based on an average from 2001-2020 for each TAC from the New Economics Foundation – Landing the blame dataset. Note: Northern prawn 4 is set infinitely above advice (since advice is zero catch) but is capped at 120% to fit in the figure.

Secondly, there are two notable exceptions where there is a large Norwegian share of the TAC and the TAC exceeds ICES advice by a large percentage: North Sea cod, which is jointly managed, and horse mackerel in area 4b,c (southern North Sea), which has joint quotas and an annual transfer of quota from the EU to Norway. In these two cases it can be questioned whether the voice of Norway in the quota negotiations had been calling for TACs in line with ICES scientific advice (although the TAC for horse mackerel has followed advice in recent years).

Although the joint quotas represent both transfers from the EU to Norway for the EU zone (Norway pout 4; blue ling 4, 5b, 6, 7, 2a; ling 4, 5,b, 6, 7, 2a; tusk 4, 5b, 6, 7, 2a; horse mackerel 4b,c) and transfers from Norway to the EU for the Norwegian zone (northern prawn 4; anglerfish 4; Norway lobster 4; ling 4; tusk 4; saithe 4), there is no clear trend in whether one arrangement is more likely to increase TACs above ICES scientific advice than the other.

Analysis compiled for Our Fish, 2020, contributing author Griffin Carpenter

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