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Small Pelagics Market Analysis 2025: Denmark

Small market changes hide a struggle for sustainable herring and mackerel

CONSUMPTION OF SMALL PELAGIC SPECIES in Denmark is dominated by herring and mackerel. While Denmark has a rich herring fishing tradition going back to the Middle Ages, today most of the herring eaten on the Danish lunch tables are caught in the Northeast Atlantic, from the stock known either as Atlanto-Scandian Herring or Norwegian spring spawning herring. This herring is favored in marinated herring products due to its size and fat content. Mackerel is also primarily fished in the Northeast Atlantic waters.

On page 11 in this yearbook, you can read about the fisheries in the Northeast Atlantic that are threatened by overfishing. For several years, the states fishing in the northeast Atlantic have not been able to reach an agreement on how to share these vital stocks between them, leading to catches exceeding the scientific advice by over 30%, which has resulted in the loss of MSC certification in 2020.

The Atlanto-Scandian herring stock collapsed in the 1970s, leading to a fishing ban from 1972 to 1976, and it took over 24 years for the stock to recover. Sales of MSC labelled products have dropped accordingly.

· In 2019 more than 2000 tons of MSC labelled mackerel products were sold in Denmark. Today there

is no MSC labelled mackerel on shelves, even though an alternative source of MSC certified pacific jack mackerel is available.

· In 2019 more than 6000 tons of MSC labelled herring products were sold in Denmark. Today only 500 tons of MSC labelled herring from the North Sea is sold in Denmark. Mostly in canned products.

Despite the fact that the fish stocks are being exploited far beyond scientific advice and the fisheries have lost MSC certification, there is no indication that overall sales of herring and mackerel in Denmark have dropped or that producers and retailers have sought to diversify to sustainable alternatives, thus contributing to the problem of overexploitation and lack of sharing agreement on these vital fish stocks.

Retailers and producers in our neighboring countries, who also have a long tradition of eating herring, have been much more proactive in switching to sustainable sourcing. In Finland the market has consistently kept MSC certified herring on the plates of the Finnish consumers. Suomen Sillikonttori, the only herring processor processing Atlantic herring in Finland, went through significant efforts to keep all their products MSC certified. In retail, both Kesko and Lidl have done the same. ●





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Find out more: <https://www.msc.org/species/small-pelagic-fish>

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