

Navigating Changes in Small Pelagic Fish and Forage Communities: Climate, Ecosystems, and Sustainable Fisheries

Attendees

203 Total Participants
46 % Early Career (ECOP)

Presentations

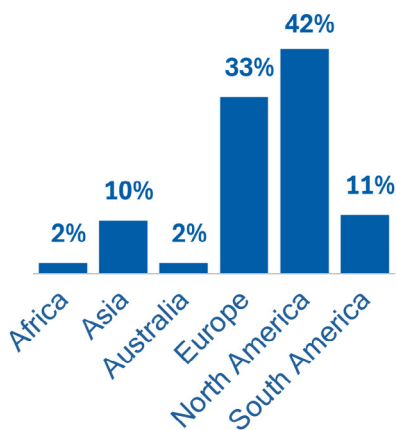
174 Oral Presentations
56 Poster Presentations

Events

9 Topic Sessions
8 Workshops
Early Career Mentoring Event

Global Participation

31 Countries
130 Organizations



Primary International Organizations



Summary

This international symposium, held in La Paz, Mexico from 4-8 May, 2026, was the third meeting in the Small Pelagic Fish Symposium series where scientists and managers from around the world come together to share the latest research on the ecology of small pelagic fish, how they respond to environmental variability, and what that means for fisheries and ecosystems.

Diverse Perspectives from Science, Policy, and Industry

A consistent theme throughout the symposium was the need for stronger interdisciplinary and cross-sector collaboration to address small pelagic fisheries challenges. The closing panel reflected this theme, bringing together participants from academia, industry, international organizations, and applied fisheries science to share perspectives on key challenges and opportunities. The panel represented a broad range of geographic contexts, including Europe, Asia, South America, and global institutions, as well as both developed and developing fisheries systems. It also included a mix of career stages, from early-career researchers to senior scientists and institutional leaders.



Panelist Discussion

Bridging Science and Policy: Strategies for Uptake

While small pelagic fish science has advanced rapidly since previous symposia, management progress has lagged behind. One challenge to overcome is that scientists, managers, industry and policymakers work to different goals and timelines — researchers aim for long-term understanding, while decision-makers need clear, immediate guidance. A dedicated two-day session highlighted advances in tools such as Management Strategy Evaluation, multi-model ensembles, and integrative environmental indicators, which provide practical pathways for linking ecological knowledge to decision-making. The closing panel emphasized that uptake remains limited due to entrenched paradigms, differing values, political constraints, and risk aversion. Overall, improving the science-policy interface will require better alignment across stakeholders, clearer communication of uncertainty, and a balance between model complexity, usability, and sustained interdisciplinary collaboration.

Improving Assessment of Small Pelagic Fishes Using Environmental Indicators



Workshop discussion on environmental indicators

A workshop on improving small pelagic fish stock assessments using environmental indicators brought together ~78 participants from diverse regions. Discussions drew on global case studies, including the Canary and California Currents, as well as broader experience from the Pacific, Atlantic, Mediterranean, Baltic, and North Seas. Participants identified challenges such as the scale mismatch between processes and models and the need for standardization, reproducibility, and interdisciplinary communication. The workshop also developed practical guidance, including recommended work-flows for selecting environmental variables and integrating them into assessment models.

Looking Ahead: The Future of Small Pelagics

Over the next four years, panellists expect that changes in science and management of small pelagic communities are likely to be incremental rather than transformative, with steady progress in integrating environmental information, strengthening collaboration, and improving communication with managers. Advances are expected to come primarily from better alignment between research and management objectives, increased stakeholder engagement, and more effective knowledge sharing across disciplines and regions. In contrast, at multi-decadal scales, perspectives diverged but pointed toward more substantial shifts driven by climate change, technological innovation, and evolving socioeconomic conditions. Some envisioned increasingly automated, technology-driven fisheries, while others stressed the importance of sustaining artisanal fisheries, improving equity, and enhancing the value of small pelagic species for local communities. Across these views, there was broad agreement that progress in management will also benefit from expanding science communication, adapting to environmental shifts and rethinking how fisheries, markets, and communities interact.

More symposium details on the website: <http://www.pices.int/smallpelagics2026>

Small Pelagic Fish Career Contribution Award

Awarded to Dr. Jürgen Alheit, a retired German fisheries biologist recognized for his work on climate variability and small pelagic fish ecosystems. He played a key role in sustaining international collaboration by initiating the Small Pelagic Fish Symposium series and convening the first meeting in 2017 (Victoria, Canada).



Dr. Jürgen Alheit

Acknowledgments

We extend our sincere thanks to the primary organizing partner organizations, [ICES](#) and [FAO](#), as well as local organizing institutions, [\(CIBNOR\)](#) and [\(IPN-CICIMAR\)](#), and many additional [co-organizing](#) partner organizations. We are also grateful to the numerous individuals who contributed to the symposium, including members of the Scientific Steering Committee, Symposium Convenors, panellists, and sponsors. Special appreciation to Alexander Bychkov (PICES), Rubén Rodríguez-Sánchez (CICIMAR), and Salvador Lluch-Cota (CIBNOR) for their dedication and contributions.



2021 United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2030

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