



# species factsheet

## | species introduction |

**Common name: Atlantic halibut**

Scientific name: *Hippoglossus hippoglossus*

The classification of this species is: Class: Actinopterygii (ray-finned fishes) > Order: Pleuronectiformes (Flatfishes) > Family: Pleuronectidae (Righteye flounders) > Sub-family: Pleuronectinae

This species reaches a maximum length of 470cm (male/unsexed); 300cm TL (female); the maximum published weight: 320kg; the maximum reported age: 50 years.

Its distribution in the Eastern Atlantic is from the Bay of Biscay to Spitsbergen, Barents Sea, Iceland and Eastern Greenland. In the Western Atlantic it is from South-western Greenland and Labrador in Canada to Virginia in the USA. At birth, they have an eye on each side of the head, and swim like a salmon. After six months, one eye migrates to the other side, making them look more like flounder. At the same time, the stationary-eyed side darkens to match the top side, while the other side remains white. This colour scheme disguises halibut from above (blending with the ocean floor) and from below (blending into the light from the sky) and is known as counter shading.



Atlantic halibut. Photo: Atlanterhavsparken - Aalesund Aquarium

## | status in the wild |

Red List Category & Criteria: Endangered A1d ver 2.3, the main threat is overfishing. It has a very low resilience with a minimum population doubling time of more than 14 years, which is why its conservation is important.



Growth rate varies according to population density, competition and availability of food. Due to their low growth rate and late onset of sexual maturity, halibut populations can be seriously affected by overfishing.

### **| species reproduction |**

Halibut do not reproduce until they are about 76cm long. Males reach sexual maturity at 7-8 years and females at 10-11 years. Halibut are batch spawners over open water/substratum where they scatter their eggs. They are non-guarders of their eggs/fry. Spawning happens from December to April, near the sea bottom (300 to 700m), at temperatures between 5 and 7°C. Egg size is between 3.0 - 3.8mm, larval size at hatching is 6.5mm.

### **| species habitat |**

Adults are benthic but occasionally pelagic. Halibut live at depths ranging from a few to hundreds of metres, and although they spend most of their time near the bottom, halibut may move up in the water column to feed.

### **| species food |**

Halibut feed on almost any animal they can fit into their mouths. Juvenile halibut feed on small crustaceans and other bottom-dwelling organisms. Animals found in their stomachs include sand lance, octopus, crab, salmon, hermit crabs, lamprey, sculpin, cod, pollock, herring, and flounder, as well as other halibut. In most ecosystems, the halibut is near the top of the marine food chain.

### **| threats |**

Traditionally the main threat to halibut is overfishing and habitat destruction from destructive fishing practices. Although climate change is not specifically listed as a threat to this species, its northerly range and pelagic larval stage suggests that warmer seas will restrict its range and prevent dispersal.

### **| conservation |**

There is currently no management plan in place for this fish and it is therefore thought probable that numbers of Atlantic halibut will continue to decline. It has been argued that Atlantic halibut are unlikely to recover simply by banning halibut landings or designating protected areas. Rather, the recovery and survival of this Endangered flatfish species will depend on reducing its bycatch in other highly exploited fisheries.

### **| find out more |**

- [www.fishbase.org](http://www.fishbase.org)
- [http://www.gma.org/fogm/Hippoglossus\\_hippoglossus.htm](http://www.gma.org/fogm/Hippoglossus_hippoglossus.htm)
- <http://www.arkive.org/atlantic-halibut/hippoglossus-hippoglossus>
- <http://www.iucnredlist.org>

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For more information go to [www.poletopolecampaign.org](http://www.poletopolecampaign.org) or email [info@poletopolecampaign.org](mailto:info@poletopolecampaign.org)