

Performance Review of the Pelagic Advisory Council

External evaluation conducted by Oxford Research AB



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Pelagic AC Performance Review External evaluation report from Oxford Research AB to the Pelagic AC

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Executive Summary

Oxford Research has conducted an external performance review of the internal functioning of the Pelagic Advisory Council with the purpose of identifying strengths and areas for improvement. The performance review has focused on four main criteria: relevance, operational effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence. It has also explored how the Pelagic AC can respond effectively to post-Brexit related issues. The review was completed between July and October 2021.

The Pelagic ACs work is relevant to stakeholder needs and has a high level of operational effectiveness

The performance review has found that the Pelagic AC's work is relevant to member needs, providing a stakeholder forum that enables its members to impact EU policy. The Pelagic AC is also relevant to external stakeholder needs, such as the Member States, and organisations such as ICES and DG Mare, particularly due to the high quality of its evidence-based advice. The quality of the produced advice is also an indication of the Pelagic AC's operational effectiveness, in that the collaborative procedures for producing unanimous advice show that the Pelagic AC are doing the right things to achieve desired results. In addition, the Pelagic AC's organisational structure is considered to contribute to its overall effectiveness, as is the work performed by the Secretariat, Chairmanship, and Management Team.

The Pelagic AC is efficient, collaborative and is aligned with the Common Fisheries Policy

The organisational structure is conducive to the Pelagic AC's ability to deliver results. Meetings run in an efficient manner, successions within the Secretariat have been seamless and Focus Groups are created and disbanded based on current needs. Members consider the Pelagic AC's decision-making processes to be inclusive and of a high quality, largely due to the focus on advice being based on member consensus. As such, members are satisfied with the formal processes for internal collaboration and have also developed methods for informal collaboration. External collaborations, however, present at more diverse picture where members find collaboration with ICES to be highly successful, while the relationships with DG Mare and Member States are more difficult. The performance review has also found that the Pelagic AC adheres to the Common Fisheries Policy, being strongly aligned to its key tasks.

Brexit will have a substantial impact on the Pelagic AC

The performance review has highlighted how Brexit has already had a substantial impact on the Pelagic AC. The composition of the AC, member participation and potential impact

have all been affected by the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. Members worry that the Pelagic AC's impact will diminish and mandate decrease. At the same time, stakeholders see that the Pelagic AC continues to be highly relevant as a stakeholder forum focusing on common goals in fishery management. While the Pelagic AC may not be able to fully mitigate the impact of Brexit, members are open to increasing collaboration and dialogue with non-EU stakeholders, to continue working towards common goals of sustainable pelagic fishery.

Pelagic AC best practices

The performance review has highlighted that the Pelagic AC currently has several best practices that are well-established within the organisation.

Organisational best practices

- The Pelagic AC facilitates constructive dialogue among internal stakeholders.
- The Pelagic AC creates a forum with established procedures for issuing unanimous advice.
- The Pelagic AC has a well-functioning Secretariat and Chairmanship.

External partnerships

- The Pelagic AC's advice is based on scientific evidence, which increases its impact and relevance for recipients.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the performance review, Oxford Research offers the following recommendations concerning the future practices and organisation of the Pelagic AC.

The Pelagic AC's practices

- Issue advice and draft recommendations that are based on 1) the principle of unanimity, 2) scientific evidence.
- Continue serving as a meeting forum for stakeholders.
- Prioritise continued collaboration with external stakeholders, even when the response is low.

The Pelagic AC's organisation

- Develop a succession planning programme for the organisation's key positions.
- Consider the post-covid reality for the organisation going forward.
- Consider the balance and potential implications of the current imbalance between NGOs and industry members in the Management Team.

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List of acronyms

CFP: Common Fisheries Policy

DG Mare: Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

ICES: International Council for the Exploration of the Sea

NGO: Non-governmental organisation

OIG: Other Interest Group

PelAC: Pelagic Advisory Council

1. Introduction

1.1 Aim and purpose of the evaluation

In 2021, Oxford Research was commissioned to conduct an external performance review to evaluate the internal functioning of the *Pelagic Advisory Council* (Pelagic AC) and identify strengths and areas for improvement. The evaluation was also tasked with exploring possible structural and organisational changes to ensure that the Pelagic AC can respond effectively to post-Brexit related issues. On this basis, Oxford Research conducted an external assessment of the Pelagic AC's performance, practices, and the potential impacts of Brexit. The evaluation was completed between July and October 2021. This report presents the results of the evaluation, providing recommendations for improvements concerning the Pelagic AC's organisation, quality of advice, collaboration, and other potential issues.

The report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 1:** Provides a short presentation of the aim and purpose of the evaluation, the evaluation methods, and key background aspects of the Pelagic AC
- **Chapter 2:** Presents the empirical results of the performance review, focusing on the Pelagic AC's operational effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence, as along with the current and potential impacts of Brexit.
- **Chapter 3:** Summarises and presents the analysis of the findings presented in Chapter 2. This chapter also includes conclusions and recommendations for the structure and organisation of the Pelagic AC and its activities going forward.

A thorough description of the performance review's design and methodologies, as well as the complete results from the survey conducted as a part of this study, can be found in the appendices.

1.2 Evaluation methods

Several data collection tools were used to investigate the performance review's research questions. To ensure reliable results, a combination of data collection tools were used to triangulate the collected data:

- **In-depth interviews** with stakeholders. Interviews were conducted with internal stakeholders (members of the Pelagic AC) and external

stakeholders (partner organisations, Member States). The interviews provided qualitative and in-depth information about the Pelagic AC.

- A short, structured **document study** was conducted on material linked to the Pelagic AC. The purpose was to gain insights mainly concerning the internal and external coherence of the Pelagic AC.
- An **online survey** was used to gain a broad and representative perspective on Pelagic AC's members' views on the research questions.

Four criteria from the EU Better Regulation Guideline Toolbox have been used to interpret the performance review's findings: relevance, operational effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence.

It should be noted that the limited scope of this study has affected the scope of the document study, which has primarily been used to inform the evaluation criteria of coherence. It should also be noted that while the performance review has captured the perspective of members through interviews and the survey, external stakeholder perspectives were limited to three interviews. Consequently, we urge the reader to exercise a degree of caution in interpreting the external stakeholder opinions, which, while valid, cannot be considered to be fully generalisable or representative of all external stakeholders.

1.3 Short description of the Pelagic AC

The Pelagic AC is one of 11 stakeholder-led Advisory Councils¹ for fisheries that constitute a key mechanism for achieving the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The Pelagic AC was established in 2005 with the main objective of advising the EU Commission, Member States, and other stakeholders on matters relating to pelagic fishing. It provides a platform for dialogue and collaboration with national and international policymakers as well as the scientific community. Members of the Pelagic AC often participate in both EU-funded research projects and meetings with the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES).

The Pelagic AC has a strong history of collaboration between industry members and other interest groups (OIGs) such as NGOs and sport fishing federations, as well as of producing consensus-based advice. The Pelagic AC's work is organised through a General Assembly, an Executive Committee, two Working Groups and several thematic Focus Groups. Members represent stakeholders concerned with the pelagic fishery in the EU and related issues, such as the environment. Members primarily consist of producers

¹ Aquaculture AC, Baltic Sea AC, Black Sea AC, Long Distance AC, Market AC, Mediterranean Sea AC, North Sea AC, North-western Waters AC, Outermost Regions AC, Pelagic Stocks AC, South-western Waters AC

through e.g., industry organisations, and civil society stakeholders through NGOs. The council is funded jointly by the EU, Member States, and organisation members through an annual membership fee.

2. Key findings and results

This chapter presents the key findings and results of the performance review, organised according to the evaluation criteria: relevance, operational effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence. In addition, the chapter presents findings on how members and external stakeholders perceive the effects and impact of Brexit on the Pelagic AC.

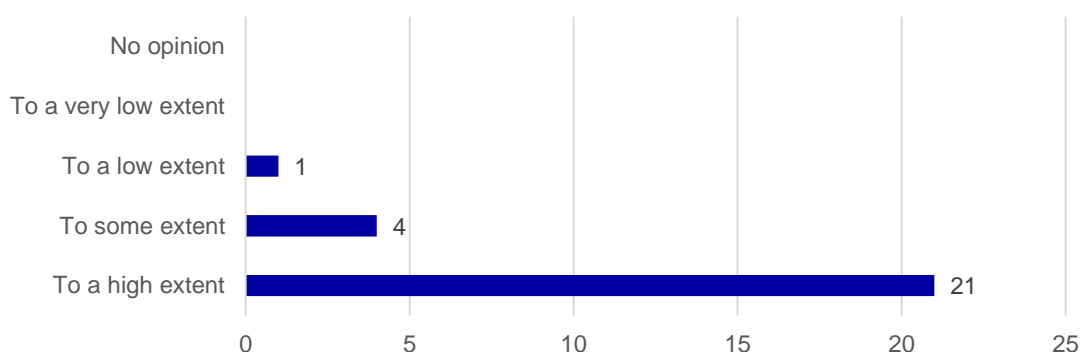
2.1 How relevant is the Pelagic AC?

This section covers the Pelagic AC’s relevance in relation to the needs of members and external stakeholders.

The Pelagic AC’s work is relevant to stakeholder needs

The Pelagic AC’s members find the AC’s work and practices to be highly relevant in relation to their organisation’s needs. This is demonstrated through survey results, where a majority of members (80 percent, see Figure 1) concur that this is the case. The relevance has also been confirmed by the interviewees, which assert that the Pelagic AC’s relevance for them lies in its policy impact, and in providing a platform for a stakeholder forum.

Figure 1. “To what extent is the Pelagic AC’s work and practices relevant in relation to your organisation’s needs?” n=26. Source: Survey directed towards internal stakeholders



Both members and external stakeholders assert that, when it comes to policy impact, the Pelagic AC produces relevant advice on management plans for pelagic fish stocks. They also highlight that the advice provided is based on science.

Interviewees expressed that the relevance of the Pelagic AC lies in it being a stakeholder forum, which is relevant for both members and external stakeholders. The Pelagic AC gathers stakeholder perspectives on policy and legislation affecting the pelagic fishing industry. This means that the stakeholders can collectively invest resources in science and for policy-impact work. This also means that the European Commission receives advice and recommendations from stakeholders as a collective that have been agreed upon and which represent joint standpoints on issues, thereby increasing the validity and potential impact.

Many members of the Pelagic AC are also involved in other ACs. Several mentioned that they find the Pelagic AC to be a more relevant forum to participate in compared to other ACs and forums where the stakeholders participate with similar aims and purposes. This is mainly due to the Pelagic AC's scientific focus, which they perceive makes the Pelagic AC more likely to influence EU policy. Unsurprisingly, members who are more involved in pelagic fishery also find the Pelagic AC to be the most relevant to their needs.

The Pelagic AC's work has a positive impact on external stakeholders

The external stakeholders interviewed responded that the Pelagic AC has a positive impact on their organisations. They find the Pelagic AC to be a well-functioning AC with high-quality outputs that meet both the members' and collaboration partners' needs and expectations.

While all external stakeholders find the Pelagic AC to be a relevant forum producing useful outputs, there are some discrepancies in terms of how different external stakeholders perceive engagement in the Pelagic AC's activities and respond to its outputs. ICES, on the one hand find their interaction with the Pelagic AC to be efficient and positive. The relationship between DG Mare and the Pelagic AC, on the other hand, is not considered as effective by either party. This is primarily due to DG Mare's limited participation and engagement in meetings and other forums. Member states most commonly take on a role as observers in the Pelagic AC forums, and while they also generally hold positive views about the Pelagic AC, engagement with and views about the impact of the Pelagic AC vary.

2.2 How effective is the Pelagic AC?

This section covers the Pelagic AC's operational effectiveness, i.e., whether the organisation does the right things to achieve the desired results.

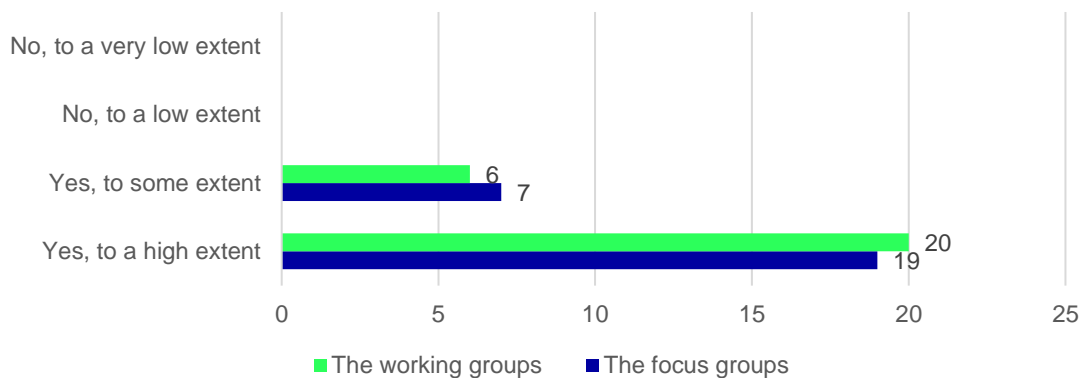
The Pelagic AC produces high-quality advice

Respondents consider the Pelagic AC's output in the form of advice and recommendations to be of high quality. Interviewees noted that the advice and

recommendations are important in formulating management plans for fish stocks and are also used frequently as input to the work of external organisation.

According to interviewees, the Pelagic AC’s procedure for drafting advice is very straightforward. They find this to be a result of the established trust between member and stakeholders, the organisational structure, and work carried out by the organisational units (Secretariat, Management Team, and Chairmanship). It is also a result of member engagement, the advice’s adherence to scientific evidence, and the Pelagic AC’s practice of producing unanimous advice, based on member consensus. This is confirmed by the member survey which showed that both Working Groups and Focus Groups produce high-quality drafts. More than 75 percent of respondents believe to a high extent that Working Groups and Focus Groups produce high quality advice drafts (see Figure 2). Members also highlight that the drafts usually do not need much refinement by the Executive Committee.

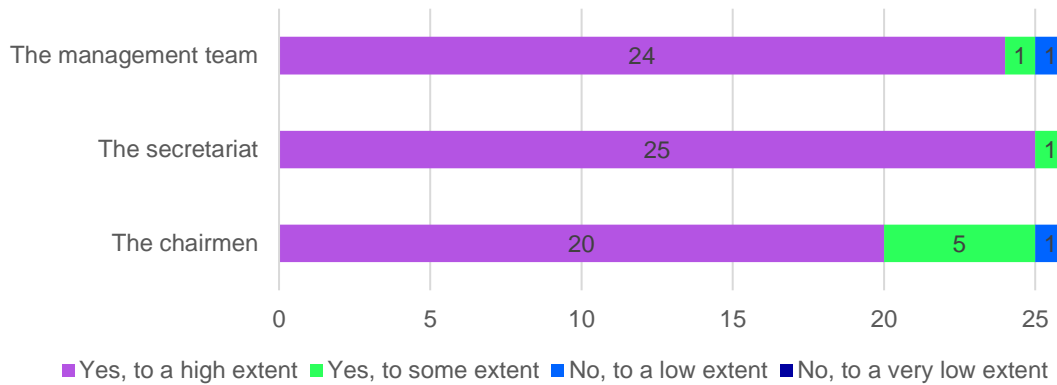
Figure 2. “I believe that the following groups produce high quality advice drafts”
n=26. Source: Survey directed towards internal stakeholders



The Pelagic AC’s Secretariat, Chairmanship, and Management Team perform well

Both members and external stakeholders consider the Secretariat’s, Management Team’s, and Chairmanships’ working practices to be well-functioning, and appropriate in relation to their organisations’ expectations on the Pelagic AC (see Figure 3). Each grouping participates in driving the organisation forward in a smooth and efficient manner.

Figure 3. “Do you perceive the working practices of the following bodies to be appropriate in relation to your organisation’s expectations on the Pelagic AC?”
 n=26. Source: Survey directed towards internal stakeholders



Interviews with the Pelagic AC’s members showed that there is high confidence and trust in the work of the Chairmanship. Members frequently mentioned the neutrality and unbiasedness of the Chairmanship’s work as important. Members also emphasised their high confidence and trust in the work of the Secretariat in ensuring organisational effectiveness, efficiency, and transparency in all lines of their work. Members also expressed a high level of confidence and trust in the work of the Management Team. However, the work of this body is less apparent to members. While the Management Team is perceived to have an important role in planning and strategically managing the organisation, members find their work and practices less transparent and suggested a need for clearer communication concerning the Management Team’s work.

2.3 How efficient is the Pelagic AC?

Efficiency is about how resources are used and how work is done in achieving results.

The Pelagic AC’s organisational structure is conducive to delivering results

Stakeholders consider the organisational structure of the Pelagic AC to be well-functioning. Within the Pelagic AC organisation, there is a general understanding from members of how everything is organised. The organisational structure is rarely questioned by either members or external stakeholders. Members describe the Pelagic AC’s organisation as “smooth” and “efficient”. In addition, documentation shows that the Pelagic AC’s meetings take place on a regular basis and in a timely manner. There are clear procedural rules, making the meetings efficient and result oriented. In addition, the meetings are organised to ensure that the decision-making process is efficient, e.g., the Executive Committee regularly meets the day after Working Group meetings to formalise suggested recommendations made by the Working Groups.

The efficiency of the organisation is visible in several ways. Interviewees mentioned the transition and succession from the old to the new Secretariat as an example. Working methods and practices as well as the function of the Secretariat have seamlessly flowed through the organisational change where important individuals within the organisational unit have been replaced. Another example is the organisation's iterative response to the need and relevance of establishing and disbanding Focus Groups in advice and recommendation areas to reflect changes in the organisation's environment, such as Brexit.

The Pelagic AC's decision-making processes are high-quality and inclusive

Respondents consider the Pelagic AC's decision-making processes to be high quality and inclusive. There are several reasons for this. According to respondents, the Pelagic AC prioritises the practice of unanimous advice, upholds a high quality in documentation and communication with internal and external stakeholders, and is transparent.

The advice produced and published by the Pelagic AC is always the result of a consensual decision from all members. This practice of unanimity is ensured by holding open forums and meetings, a clear and efficiently communicated agenda before meetings, as well as detailed meeting notes of decisions and action points after meetings. The drafting process also includes a period after meetings when decisions are open to objection or correction from members before the advice is finalised.

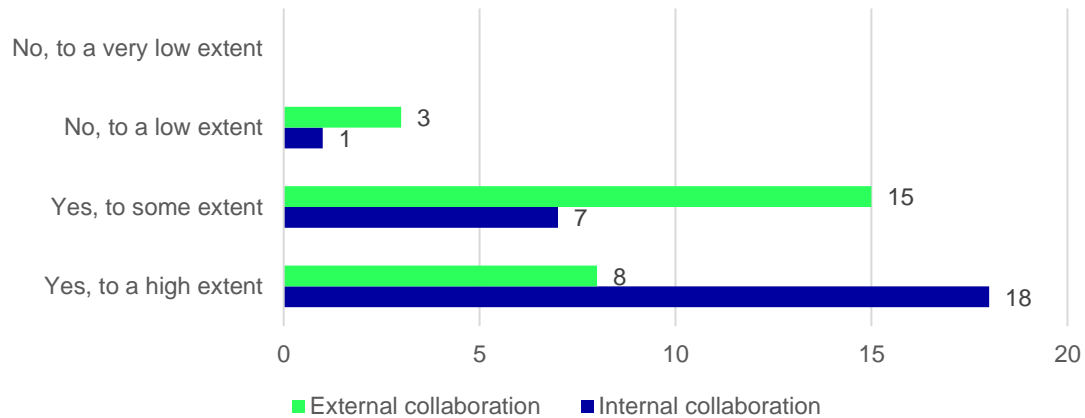
The respondents perceive the organisation to have a high level of transparency. The unanimous approach to advice also ensures the members' ability to influence the results from the Working Groups and Focus Groups. The only issue of concern raised by respondents about the organisation's decision-making processes is that the composition between NGO and industry members in the Management Team does not reflect the Pelagic AC's overall composition of 40 percent NGOs and 60 percent industry members. One reason provided to explain this is that NGO members often have less time and resources to prioritise their engagement in the Pelagic AC.

Members are satisfied with processes for internal collaboration

In both interviews and the survey members expressed their satisfaction with the processes for internal collaboration within the Pelagic AC (see Figure 4). Unlike many other ACs, respondents find that the Pelagic AC has a good organisational culture that prioritises respect for all members and their points of view. Member participation tends to be horizontal throughout the organisation's groupings: General Assembly, Executive Committee, Working Groups, and Focus Groups. This serves the organisation's efficiency but also enables groups to take advantage of synergies and interlinkages. The

information flows in a constructive way between members and the Secretariat, Management Team, and Chairmanship.

Figure 4. *I believe that the collaboration internally with other members and stakeholders is well functioning*
 n=26. Source= survey directed towards internal stakeholders



Members assert that the Pelagic AC’s activities, such as meetings run smoothly. But interviews also show that the Pelagic AC as a forum is efficient in generating other benefits for its members. As well as being a stakeholder forum that addresses issues concerning pelagic stocks and the pelagic fishery, the Pelagic AC is an important place for members and external stakeholders to network and maintain contact with relevant partners.

Furthermore, members expressed in responses that it is important that they work toward a collectively approved management approach to pelagic stocks. They also find that the scientifically based advice is an important factor for the stakeholder collaboration. These incentives for collaborating on advice within the stakeholder group has resulted in members forming subgroups to decide on standpoints before official meetings, resolving most of the potential issues and conflicts of interest before meetings in focus and Working Groups.

The pandemic has had a substantial influence on the way the Pelagic AC’s meetings are run and organised. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, most Pelagic AC meetings took place in-person at various physical locations. Throughout the pandemic, meetings have been held virtually. Mixed views on how well this has worked were revealed by the interviews, with members both appreciating and complaining about the new setup. Members have surmised that while physical meetings on the one hand create the opportunity for small talk, informal meetings outside session and a more inclusive discussion, digital meetings, on the other hand, have been efficient, enabling a higher rate of meeting participation, lower costs and less time spent.

There is a mixed picture about how satisfied members are with external collaboration

Members are generally satisfied with the Pelagic AC's collaboration with external partners, but less so than for their satisfaction about internal collaboration. Almost 60 percent of respondents felt that external collaboration was only satisfactory 'to some extent' (see Figure 4). However, interviews also revealed that the levels of satisfaction vary depending on which external stakeholders are being considered.

Members are very satisfied with the relationship and engagement with and by ICES. In both the survey and interviews, however, the relationship between the Pelagic AC and Member States, as well as the Pelagic AC and DG Mare is viewed in less positive terms. Members are less satisfied with how Member States respond to and act according to the submissions made by the Pelagic AC. The survey points to there being a lack of knowledge among Member States regarding how to make use of the Pelagic AC advice. Interviews also show that the relationship between the Pelagic AC and DG Mare is not as efficient as it could – or has previously – been. DG Mare's interest in the Pelagic AC's activities and outputs as well as their participation in meetings has varied over time. Members express that they are dissatisfied with DG Mare's current level of engagement, with limited meeting attendance and response to advice.

Members have varying resources to dedicate to the Pelagic AC

According to interviewees, members have varying resources to dedicate to participating in the Pelagic AC's forums and internal groupings. This inequality affects members' possibility to participate in the organisation's leadership, e.g., the Management Team, but also to actively engage in the work conducted by Focus Groups and Working Groups. Industrial members generally have more time and resources to participate in the Pelagic AC forums and groups than NGOs. Both industry and NGO members expressed a wish to enable more equal opportunities for participation and engagement for all members.

2.4 How coherent is the Pelagic AC?

Coherence is about how well (or not) different actions work together to achieve the Pelagic AC's objectives, and how the Pelagic ACs activities and are objectives are in common with external factors.

The Pelagic AC's members' positions are coherent across channels

Members commonly express their positions to the EU Commission, Member States and fisheries managers through multiple channels. Among the survey respondents, 69 percent express their positions on the same issues dealt with by the Pelagic AC through additional channels to the EU Commission. The vast majority of respondents that express their positions through other channels align the positions with the agreed Pelagic AC

recommendations to different extents. The few that reported that they do not, either highlighted that the issues they express standpoints on are not the focus of the Pelagic AC, or that they align with the positions of other ACs rather than the Pelagic AC.

The Pelagic AC strongly adheres to the Common Fisheries Policy

The current CFP regulation reflects the importance of ACs in several places e.g., when talking about dialogue with stakeholders, in Article 3 on principles of good governance, in Article 6 on general provisions, and in Article 18 on regionalisation. Article 44 of the CFP sets out the tasks of the ACs, which include:

- Submitting recommendations and suggestions on matters relating to the management of fisheries and the socio-economic and conservation aspects of fisheries and aquaculture to the Commission and to the Member State concerned.
- Informing the Commission and Member States of problems relating to the management and the socio-economic and conservation aspects of fisheries.
- Contribute, in close cooperation with scientists, to the collection, supply and analysis of data necessary for the development of conservation measures.

Documentation and interviews confirm that the Pelagic AC's organisational structure and goals strongly adhere to the CFP. The Pelagic AC submits advice and recommendations based on consensus-driven decision-making to the Commission and Member States. The Working Groups and Focus Groups focus on issues relevant to management of pelagic fisheries as well as both socio-economic and conservation aspects of fisheries. In addition, interviews and desk research show that the Pelagic AC's advice and recommendations are based on scientific evidence, and that the Pelagic AC has a deep level of cooperation with ICES relating to their relevant research.

2.5 How will Brexit affect the Pelagic AC?

Internal and external stakeholders were asked how Brexit and the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement could impact the structure and functioning of the AC.

Insecurities concerning Brexit affect all areas of the Pelagic AC

Both members and external stakeholders lack concrete knowledge of the implications Brexit could have on the Pelagic AC. They do, however, agree that the insecurities concerning Brexit affect all areas of the Pelagic AC's work. The organisation's composition, member participation, decision-making processes, and potentially the quality of advice have all been mentioned as examples of areas that may be negatively

affected by UK members leaving the Pelagic AC. Furthermore, members expressed that the Pelagic AC's mandate, the impact and demand of the work and its raison d'être are all threatened by the Pelagic AC's decreased areas of influence in pelagic fishing waters.

The Pelagic AC must adjust to Brexit terms and the impact on pelagic fisheries

Respondents agree that the Pelagic AC must adjust to Brexit terms and conditions and the impact they have on the pelagic fishing industry. The UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement has been ratified, but fisheries remain a very sensitive political area. This leaves little room for the organisation to manoeuvre and control its own future. Nevertheless, both members and external stakeholders still assert that there is a high relevance to continuing to work together in the Pelagic AC. The interviewees state that the Pelagic AC holds a unique and important role as a stakeholder forum that impacts policy and legislation. They would like to see that the Pelagic AC continues to ease collaboration across countries and political borders, especially among industry members, where they believe that focus should be on common goals in fishery management.

Mitigating the impact of Brexit is difficult but the Pelagic AC has some potential for influence

Meeting this new area of fishery policy for the UK and the EU and mitigating the impact of Brexit is difficult. However, the Pelagic AC does have some areas of potential influence. Industrial members state that they are open to collaboration between the EU and the UK, as well as with other non-EU-Member States. This willingness to work together is rooted in common goals of reliable and predictable management of the fishery industry concerning stocks and quotas but is also a result of "old habits" and a perceived need for continuous dialogue and collaboration, as well as an ambition to mitigate climate change-related risks and other sustainability issues.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter presents Oxford Research's conclusions and recommendations for the Pelagic AC based on the performance review's empirical results. The chapter consists of our main conclusions in relation to the evaluation criteria – relevance, operational effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence – as well as the impacts of Brexit on the Pelagic AC. We then present the Pelagic AC's current good practices, followed by recommendations relating to the future structure of activities and organisation of the Pelagic AC.

3.1 Main conclusions

Conclusions concerning the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence of Pelagic AC

The Pelagic AC is relevant in relation to the needs of its members and external stakeholders. For members and external stakeholders alike, the Pelagic AC's relevance lies in its advice, which is deemed to be high quality and scientifically grounded. For external stakeholders, the Pelagic AC is a partner that contributes positively to their needs concerning pelagic fishery management. Members, additionally, find the Pelagic AC to be relevant as a stakeholder forum that facilitates welcome dialogue and discussions between industry actors and OIGs. It enables the members to act collectively, giving them a stronger voice than they would have had as individual organisations and increasing their opportunities for impact.

The Pelagic AC has a high level of operational effectiveness. This is based on two key aspects: the uniformity and quality of produced advice, and the organisational bodies' performance in relation to members' expectations. We conclude that the Pelagic AC's work is relevant to member needs and has a positive impact on external stakeholders. We can also conclude that the Pelagic AC produces advice that is both uniform and high quality, and that the organisational bodies, such as the Secretariat, Chairmanship, and Management Team, have a high level of performance.

The Pelagic AC's efficiency is high. The evaluation has considered whether the Pelagic AC's organisational structures are conducive to delivering results, the quality and inclusiveness of the decision-making process, interna and external collaboration, as well as the capacity of members to contribute to and engage in organisational activities. We find that the Pelagic AC's organisational structure is conducive to delivering results, the decision-making processes are high-quality and inclusive, and members are satisfied with processes for internal collaboration. However, there is a more mixed response on member

satisfaction pertaining to collaboration with external stakeholders, and some concern of the consequences of members having varying resources to dedicate to the Pelagic AC.

The coherence of the Pelagic AC is high. We conclude that the Pelagic AC's organisation is highly coherent with the needs of its members. The high degree of coherence regarding the Pelagic AC's members is also important to highlight. Furthermore, the Pelagic AC's work and organisation are strongly coherent with the CFP and its goals.

Conclusions concerning Brexit and the post-Brexit era

Brexit has impacted – and will continue to impact – the Pelagic AC's organisation to a high extent. We find that the challenges that stem from Brexit are several, and that there are various aspects concerning the future of the Pelagic AC that will spring from the post-Brexit era, such as discussions concerning the Pelagic AC's continued relevance, competences and ability to influence pelagic fishery policy. Our interpretation of the survey results is that insecurities concerning Brexit already affect all areas of the Pelagic AC and that the Pelagic AC must adjust to Brexit terms and the impact it will have on the fishing industry. This is, however, a highly complex challenge and there is a need for the organisation to continue to adapt to future challenges and changes in a resilient manner.

3.2 The Pelagic AC's current good practices

The performance review has shown that the Pelagic AC has many good practices. We find that the Pelagic AC has several practices that contribute to the Pelagic AC's effectiveness and efficiency. Most of the practices identified are currently formally established in the organisation and are important to retain in the future.

The Pelagic AC has a well-functioning organisational structure

The Pelagic AC's organisational structure is well-functioning. This is due to several correlating practices in the organisation: constructive dialogue among internal stakeholders, the practice of unanimous advice; and a well-functioning Secretariat and Chairmanship.

- **The Pelagic AC facilitates constructive dialogue among internal stakeholders.** Internal stakeholders agree that a key strength of the Pelagic AC lies in the continuous constructive dialogue between members, both industry and NGO. The constructive dialogue enables a smooth drafting process and makes sure that energy and time is put toward creating the desired organisational output: advice. We find that the high quality of the Pelagic AC's output stems from this constructive dialogue, and that the Executive Committee and other organisational units rarely need to

intervene with the advice drafts, ensuring and enabling organisational effectiveness and efficiency.

- **The Pelagic AC creates a forum with established procedures for issuing unanimous advice.** Another current best practice is the practice of producing unanimous advice. Members work together to create the organisational output and feel that they can express their own standpoints on issues.
- **The Pelagic AC has a well-functioning Secretariat and Chairmanship.** Just like the internal stakeholders and unanimous advice process, a well-functioning Secretariat and Chairmanship is key to the Pelagic AC's ability to produce high quality outputs. Internal stakeholders agree that the Secretariat are efficient in their work and make participation in the Pelagic AC smooth. The Chairmanship enable and facilitate constructive conversations that lead to desired results.

The Pelagic AC has strong external partnerships and impacts in its areas of expertise

We assess another important category of best practice at the Pelagic AC to be the organisation's strong external partnerships and impacts in its areas of expertise. This is due to both the previously mentioned unanimous advice, but also due to the Pelagic AC's advice based on scientific evidence. This is a key added value in the Pelagic AC's advice.

- **The Pelagic AC's advice is based on scientific evidence.** External parties take inspiration from the Pelagic AC's work and the Pelagic AC participate in fostering the dialogue on pelagic fishery management. The output from the Pelagic AC is considered to be of high quality and has relevance for its policy area due to the advice being strongly grounded in scientific methods and evidence.

3.3 Recommendations for the Pelagic AC's continued work and development

Based on our conclusions regarding the evaluation criteria, Brexit and the post-Brexit era's impact on the Pelagic AC and the identified good practices, Oxford Research provides the following recommendations to the Pelagic AC:

The Pelagic AC's practices

- **Issue advice and draft recommendations that are based on 1) the principle of unanimity, 2) scientific evidence.** These practices are the key factors enabling high quality, relevant advice as well as facilitating a

good working atmosphere among members. We strongly recommend that the Pelagic AC continues to adhere to these principles, ensuring that the voices of all stakeholders are heard and considered in the decision-making process, while lending the strength of a collective voice to pelagic fishery issues and that the advice is scientifically grounded.

- **Continue serving as a meeting forum for stakeholders.** Internal and external stakeholders both value the opportunity to meet, discuss, and agree upon advice for management plans and other issues concerning the pelagic fishery industry. The Pelagic AC also creates a platform for pooling resources, enabling scientific studies to be conducted. Regardless of how Brexit may affect the Pelagic AC's opportunity to influence pelagic fishery, we recommend that the Pelagic AC continue to serve as a stakeholder forum where members can exchange ideas and reach a consensus on relevant issues.
- **Prioritise continued collaboration with external stakeholders, even when the response is low.** Low engagement from external stakeholders in the Pelagic AC's activities are not due to the quality of output or relevance of advice. Nevertheless, external stakeholders may not prioritise participating in Pelagic AC activities. We recommend that the Pelagic AC work to make activities as accessible as possible to lower the threshold for participation and uphold the dialogue with external parties by, e.g., making it possible to participate in meetings digitally.

The Pelagic AC's organisation

- **Develop a succession planning programme for the organisation's key positions.** In order to develop the organisation's current best practices, the current structure and use of practices needs to be maintained. Ensuring that competence, working methods and internal coherence stays within the organisation even if individuals leave is hence key for the Pelagic AC's long-term success. This recommendation is particularly important now, given the loss of competencies following Brexit. Key aspects of the Pelagic ACs relevance and work lies in well-functioning meetings, agendas, Chairmanship, and dialogue among stakeholders.
- **Consider the post-covid reality for the organisation going forward.** The performance review shows that members would like to combine physical and virtual meetings moving forward, considering positive and negative experiences of the past year and a half.
- **Consider the balance and potential implications of the current imbalance between NGOs and industry members in the Management Team.** Members have expressed concerns regarding the imbalance of

NGO and industry members in the Management Team. A follow-up assessment and deeper analysis of this concern and its implications for the Pelagic AC's work is recommended for the organisation's future.

Appendix 1: Evaluation design and methods

Data was collected through document studies, interviews, and a survey. The survey results and interview material were processed using an analytical framework based on the EU Better Regulation Guideline Toolbox. The data collection and analysis took place between July and September.

Explorative interviews and document studies

Exploratory interviews with 1-2 key stakeholders were conducted. In addition, a brief analysis of key documentation and legislation that is relevant to understanding the Pelagic AC's role and context was performed. These initial interviews and document studies helped to ensure that interview guides and survey questions covered all relevant issues and perspectives.

In-depth interviews

The main objective of the in-depth interviews was to obtain in-depth knowledge and stakeholder perspectives on the performance of the Pelagic AC. Ten interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders covering members of the Management Team, Executive Committee and General Assembly, Working Groups, and Focus Groups. The interviews covered members from different member countries as well as Committee Chairs, Secretariat, and ordinary members. Three interviews were conducted with external stakeholders covering DG Mare, ICES, and a representative from the Member States (Denmark). The external interviews were conducted to obtain the interviewee's perception of the Pelagic AC's work and practices and the quality of their advice and recommendations.

All interviews, except one, were carried out through telephone or using digital tools such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom. The exception was one internal interview that was conducted via email. The interviews gave us in-depth knowledge of the nuances and dynamics of the Pelagic AC and its activities. An advantage of interviews was that they allowed us to gain an in-depth understanding, as well as providing a neutral space for Pelagic AC stakeholders and members to express thoughts and concerns related to the performance, organisation, and quality of the Pelagic AC.

The interviews were semi-structured and were used to explore how stakeholders and members perceive the functioning of the Pelagic AC's organisation, participation, decision-making processes, and quality of advice. The interviews also focused on questions about internal and external collaboration including trust and cooperation as well as their thoughts on the Pelagic AC's post-Brexit organisation and structure. By using

semi-structured interviews, it was also possible for the interviewer to explore new topics or angles directly in the interview situation.

Survey

The purpose of the survey was to complement the in-depth interviews by gaining a broader and representative perspective on the performance review's research questions from members and stakeholders of the Pelagic AC. We sent out a 12-question survey that also gaged members' involvement in Pelagic AC.

The survey was designed to give broad insights into the evaluation themes and was also used to pinpoint the extent of concerns or issues identified in individual interviews. The survey was distributed electronically through Oxford Research's online software SurveyXact. The survey was piloted by the secretary as well as the review's expert to ensure that the questions posed fully captured those aspects of the Pelagic AC's performance that they endeavoured to.

Forty-nine people received the survey. The response rate was 55 percent (26 respondents). Survey results are presented in Appendix 2.

Structured document studies

The document studies entailed an analysis of available documentation about the performance review's key research questions. The analysed documentation included:

- The annual working programmes for 2020-2021 and 2021-2022
- Working group meeting notes
- Final Technical Report and Financial Statements for 2018-2019 and 2019-2020
- The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) by EU 2015
- The UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement Summary (section: fisheries, pp. 24-25)

The document studies focused primarily on the evaluation criteria of coherence. The studies were structured in the sense that they follow a guide of questions to "ask" the material to ensure that we captured information and details relevant to the performance review.

Appendix 2: Survey questions and answers

To what extent is the Pelagic AC's work and practises relevant in relation to your organisation's needs?

	Percent	Respondents
To a high extent	80,8%	21
To some extent	15,4%	4
To a low extent	3,8%	1
To a very low extent	0,0%	0
No opinion	0,0%	0
Total	100,0%	26

I believe that the Focus Groups produce high-quality advice drafts

	Respondents	Percent
Yes, to a high extent	19	73,1%
Yes, to some extent	7	26,9%
No, to a low extent	0	0,0%
No, to a very low extent	0	0,0%
Total	26	100,0%

I believe that the Working Groups produce high quality advice drafts

	Respondents	Percent
Yes, to a high extent	20	76,9%
Yes, to some extent	6	23,1%

No, to a low extent	0	0,0%
No, to a very low extent	0	0,0%
Total	26	100,0%

I believe that the Executive Committee refines the advice drafts in a high-quality manner

	Respondents	Percent
Yes, to a high extent	18	69,2%
Yes, to some extent	7	26,9%
No, to a low extent	1	3,8%
No, to a very low extent	0	0,0%
Total	26	100,0%

Do you perceive the working practices of the chairmen to be appropriate in relation to your organisation's expectations on the Pelagic AC?

	Respondents	Percent
Yes, to a high extent	20	76,9%
Yes, to some extent	5	19,2%
No, to a low extent	1	3,8%
No, to a very low extent	0	0,0%
Total	26	100,0%

Do you perceive the working practices of the Secretariat to be appropriate in relation to your organisation's expectations on the Pelagic AC?

	Respondents	Percent
Yes, to a high extent	25	96,2%

Yes, to some extent	1	3,8%
No, to a low extent	0	0,0%
No, to a very low extent	0	0,0%
Total	26	100,0%

Do you perceive the working practices of the Management Team to be appropriate in relation to your organisation's expectations on the Pelagic AC?

	Respondents	Percent
Yes, to a high extent	24	92,3%
Yes, to some extent	1	3,8%
No, to a low extent	1	3,8%
No, to a very low extent	0	0,0%
Total	26	100,0%

I believe that the set-up and composition of the different bodies of the advisory council is conducive to a constructive dialogue

	Respondents	Percent
Yes, to a high extent	14	53,8%
Yes, to some extent	12	46,2%
No, to a low extent	0	0,0%
No, to a very low extent	0	0,0%
Total	26	100,0%

I believe that the collaboration internally with other members and stakeholders is well functioning

	Respondents	Percent
Yes, to a high extent	18	69,2%
Yes, to some extent	7	26,9%
No, to a low extent	1	3,8%
No, to a very low extent	0	0,0%
Total	26	100,0%

I believe that the collaboration externally with stakeholders is well functioning

	Respondents	Percent
Yes, to a high extent	8	30,8%
Yes, to some extent	15	57,7%
No, to a low extent	3	11,5%
No, to a very low extent	0	0,0%
Total	26	100,0%

To what extent are you happy with the responses to, and subsequent action by, the commission to submissions made by the Pelagic AC

	Respondents	Percent
To a high extent	3	11,5%
To some extent	16	61,5%
To a low extent	4	15,4%
To a very low extent	3	11,5%
No opinion	0	0,0%

Total	26	100,0%
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To what extent are you happy with the responses to, and subsequent action by, the EU Member States to submissions made by the Pelagic AC

	Respondents	Percent
To a high extent	2	7,7%
To some extent	10	38,5%
To a low extent	9	34,6%
To a very low extent	3	11,5%
No opinion	2	7,7%
Total	26	100,0%

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