



# PELAGIC ADVISORY COUNCIL

Newsletter 3 / 2022

September - December 2022

Pelagic  
ADVISORY  
COUNCIL



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# PELAC MEETINGS

## HERRING 6A, 7BC FOCUS GROUP (29-09-2022, ONLINE)

The PelAC 6a 7bc Herring Focus Group convened as agreed at the previous meeting a year prior, to take stock of the comments and recommendations that arose from the benchmark meeting was held in February 2022. The main outcome of the benchmark was that the split between the 6a North and 6a South 7bc stocks was successful, but only for category 3 assessments. The Focus Group meeting covered an update on the genetic stock ID-work to date, the 6a North and 6a South 7bc industry acoustic surveys and established priorities for future work to support the transition from a category 3 to a category 1 assessment for both stocks.

Ed Farrell updated the FG on the genetics work. The assignment model worked well but the main issue in the assignment was the inability to distinguish between late spawning 6a South and the 6a North spring fish. This needed to be addressed. There was also an issue related to the unassigned portion from the MSHAS survey, consisting of spring spawners, which needs to be resolved in order to bring the data into future assessment models. When the monitoring fishery stops in 2023, sampling should continue to make sure the data will be treated in the assessment. A few more samples are needed to determine if the differences are temporally stable and robust enough to refine the assignment model.

Farrell outlined a number of new projects that have started that were undertaking genetic stock-ID in herring in a number of specific areas. All these projects were genotyping in the same way using the same panel by IdentoGEN, ensuring that all the data resulting from the different projects is readily comparable and combinable. These projects should generate enough preliminary results ready for HAWG in 2023 and for the workshop WKSIDAC2 for some feedback, which would be a good opportunity to show the utility of these genetic methods to the wider ICES community and secure buy-in from other countries.

With regard to the acoustic industry surveys, the benchmark concluded the time series for both surveys were too short, and required a minimum of 10 years of data to be properly evaluated in the assessment. During the update on the 6a North acoustic survey, frustrations were expressed in relation to the ongoing working process with Marine Scotland. The collaboration was becoming more dispersed, causing issues in the continuation of the survey in 6a North. There was an urgency to get clarity on the Marine Scotland position on future science and monitoring. It was decided Marine Scotland to update PelAC on internal discussions on using 'small vessel approach' moving forward (similar to Irish model) for data gathering on West Coast herring surveys.

For 6a South, the survey was being done with smaller vessels and the coverage was good. Discussions between the MI and the industry were ongoing for the continuation of the survey to extend the time series and adding on a sampling element for genetic analysis.

It was agreed that the main objective for the Pelagic AC was to concentrate on transitioning the stocks from a category 3 to a category 1 assessment. FG participants elaborated on a numbers of issues to address in this regard, namely compensating for low catches from the monitoring fishery, sorting out the ageing and maturity issues and the split survey cohort tracking in the 6aS assessment. It was thought projections using 'dummy data' would be a way to resolve these issues. This would be worked on in time for HAWG 2023, where this will be brought in. Based on the outcomes of the 2023 HAWG meeting, the need to organise another Focus Group meeting for 6a Herring will be determined.

This was the last 6a Herring Focus Group meeting chaired by Sean O'Donoghue, as he would be stepping down as Working Group II Chair as of October 2022.

Detailed minutes can be found on the website: [Report-6a-7bc-herring-FG-meeting-29-09-2022](#)

# PELAC MEETINGS

## WORKING GROUP I (05-10-2022, THE HAGUE)

The PelAC Working Group I meeting took place in-person in the Hague, where the main agenda item were the presentation of ICES on widely distributed stocks, the formulation of PelAC TAC recommendations and an update from the Commission on the upcoming autumn negotiations.

ICES presented the catch advice for blue whiting, which indicated an 81% increase from the 2022 TAC following the MSY advice. The LTMP in place for the stock was evaluated in 2021 but one specific clause, stating that when stock size deviates by more than 40% from the catch advice of the preceding year, that the catch constraints on annual TAC variation in the LTMS no longer apply, was not part of this evaluation. For this reason, the MSY approached was used for the headline advice. The need for a full evaluation of the LTMP was addressed in the PelAC recommendations. The meeting also decided to discontinue the blue whiting Focus Group.

On Atlanto-Scandian herring, ICES proposed to follow the LTMP, representing a decrease in catches of 15% compared to the previous year.

In the update from the Commission, a discussion was held on the Commission objectives in advance of the bilateral, trilateral and Coastal States consultations. The Commission assured to explore tools in the toolbox for reaction to the unilateral quota setting of Coastal States, and that it aimed to meet the strict negotiation deadlines and thereby avoid the setting of interim-TACs to the extent as possible.

The PelAC discussed recommendations for the stocks covered by the remit of the WG, namely blue whiting, Atlanto-Scandian herring, North Sea horse mackerel, North Sea autumn spawning herring and Western Baltic spring spawning herring, to put forward to the Executive Committee for adoption.

An update was given on the work of the Ecosystem Focus Group, chaired by Goncalo Carvalho. A draft joint-advice with the NWWAC on underwater noise impacts on relevant fish stocks was presented and adopted by the Working Group for endorsement by the Executive Committee. The advice followed from a joint-workshop on the topic co-organised with the NWWAC earlier in the year. It was decided to move forward with the organisation of another joint-workshop with the NWWAC, covering the Irish Marine Planning Act and its impacts on the wind energy developments in the Irish EEZ. Finally, an update was provided on the planned workshop on the EAFM foreseen in February 2023, and the internship project which was due to kick off in December 2022.

Detailed minutes can be found on the website: [WGI-Report-PelAC 05.10.22](#)

## WORKING GROUP II (05-10-2022, THE HAGUE)

This was the first Working Group II meeting presided over by the new Chairman, Jerome Jourdain. The main agenda item for this meeting were the presentation of ICES advice for 2023 on widely distributed stocks and the formulation of PelAC TAC recommendations for the stocks under the remit of the Working Group.

ICES presented advice for Northeast Atlantic mackerel, which indicated a 2% reduction in TAC compared to the previous year. A discussion with ICES on mackerel fecundity was held, where members asked why there was no mention of the results of a recent publication from 2021 in the mackerel assessment. ICES explained that the formal procedure to incorporate new significant information to an assessment is through a benchmark. Members raised that in light of the unilateral quota setting by other Coastal States, waiting for a benchmark meeting would take too long and the information on fecundity was considered timely and urgent. It was questioned if a mechanism could be considered by ICES whereby new urgent information can be incorporated to an assessment outside of the benchmark process. This point was

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subsequently taken onboard in the drafting of the PelAC recommendations for this stock. An update by WGMEGS was received, but could not be completed due to technical issues. It was decided to recap the presentation and continue the discussion during the 2023 February PelAC meetings.

A lengthy discussion was held on Western horse mackerel as well, for which ICES advised a zero TAC in 2023 due to a retrospective revision in the assessment, leading to a change in perception of the stock. The stock was now found to be below Blim. The catch option for the PelAC rebuilding plan was included in the ICES advice, though the headline followed the MSY approach because the plan had not been accepted by all parties. In the recommendations for this stock, PelAC members agreed to send an urgent letter to the Commission separately from the TAC recommendations, urging the Commission to seek acceptance of the rebuilding plan by the UK in the upcoming bilateral consultations. Particular concerns were raised by Spanish members regarding this stock, emphasising the socio-economic impact of a zero-catch advice. Members also recommended that an urgent benchmark for the mackerel take place as well as a combined benchmark for the three horse mackerel stocks.

On herring in 6aN and 6a South 7bc, it was recommended to ask what would be necessary to transition the stocks to a category 1 assessment. On boarfish, the PelAC recommended to ask ICES for the possibility to include inter-annual updates of data into the assessment and to give an indication how this would have influenced the second year of the two-year advice for this stock. Finally, the updates on sprat and greater silver smelt in areas 6 and 7 were postponed to the February 2023 meetings due to time constraints.

Detailed minutes can be found on the website: [PelAC-WGII-Report-05.10.22](#)

## **GENERAL ASSEMBLY (06-10-2022, THE HAGUE)**

During the General Assembly meeting, an overview of the PelAC activities was provided as detailed in the final report, including the PelAC achievements and a listing of the different recommendations. Highlights included the PelAC's initiative to set up the Inter-AC Brexit Forum, a collaboration between the ACs impacted by Brexit, which was making good progress and through which a very positive working relationship with the Commission was developed on EU-UK matters.

Other highlights included the amount of work delivered by the Ecosystem FG such as the joint-workshop on noise impacts with the NWWAC and the PelAC's contributions to Commission consultations such as the MSFD review and the Action Plan to conserve fisheries resources. It was noted the collaboration between the PelAC and other ACs was fruitful in the delivery of a number of joint-advises on topics of common interest.

The final report and the budget were approved, and the Chairman announced his decision to step down as PelAC ExCom and GA. The GA hence elected Sean O'Donoghue as the new interim-Chair of the PelAC GA and Executive Committee.

A demonstration was provided by MWC on the new web-based tool developed for the NWWAC offering interactive information layers. The tool was positively received by PelAC members and it was decided to look into the details for developing an add-on to this tool for pelagic fisheries.

Detailed minutes can be found on the website: [PelAC-GA-Report-06.10.22](#)

## **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (06-10-2022, THE HAGUE)**

During the Executive Committee, an update was given on the Inter-AC Brexit Forum meeting held in September. Members considered the format for the Brexit Forum useful, and a discussion was held on the

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confidentiality of certain topics and positions discussed, leading to a decision to update the wider PelAC verbally during meetings rather than broadly circulating meeting minutes. It was announced that the PelAC would organise the next Forum meeting on 20 October.

The majority of the meeting focused on finalising and fine tuning the 2023 PelAC recommendations for TACs for the stocks under its remit. While most recommendations were agreed swiftly, a lengthy discussion was held on the TAC recommendation for Western horse mackerel, where the Spanish sector held a strong divergent position compared to the rest of the PelAC members, in light of the ICES advice for a zero TAC. The Spanish industry insisted on exploring advising other catch options than the proposed rebuilding plan catch option, but in the spirit of securing the submission of a consensus recommendation, the proposed PelAC recommendation was finally agreed under the condition that the concerns from the industry would be underlined in the recommendation.

The Executive Committee also adopted the draft joint-advice with the NWWAC on the impacts of underwater noise and agreed to write a letter to ICES setting out the PelAC's concerns about the effectiveness of their current methods of engagement and attendance at AC meetings. Further, the Executive Committee agreed to explore in detail how the NWWAC web-GIS tool could be developed to suit the needs of PelAC stakeholders under the auspices of Working Group I. A final action was taken for the PelAC to organise a workshop on Energy transition in the pelagic sector, in conjunction with the April 2023 meeting. A detailed Terms of Reference on the scope and objectives for this workshop would be developed by the secretariat.

Detailed minutes can be found on the website: [PelAC-ExCom-Report-06.10.22](#)

All meeting minutes can be accessed on our PelAC website: [Past Meetings - The Pelagic Advisory Council \(pelagic-ac.org\)](#)

# EXTERNAL MEETINGS

## **ICES ADG WIDE (13/16-09-2022, ONLINE)**

Sean O Donoghue attended virtually as an observer on behalf of the PelAC at the ADGWIDE from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> September 2022. There were four stocks of relevance to PelAC dealt with at ADGWIDE namely mackerel, western horse mackerel, blue whiting and Atlanto Scandia herring.

### **Mackerel**

The 2022 mackerel egg survey showed a 26% increase on the last egg survey in 2019 and the annual summer survey (IESSNS) a 43% increase in abundance in biomass compared to 2021. The ADGWIDE proposed an advice of 782066 tonnes for 2023 a 2% decrease compared to 2022.

### **Western Horse Mackerel**

There were some major issues with this assessment with the rescaling downwards of the biomass with each new set of data and the confidence limits were outside the bounds. It was agreed that a benchmark was required as soon as possible. The proposed advice was a zero catch option for 2023 but it covered the PelAC rebuilding plan in the catch options table.

### **Blue Whiting**

There was general agreement that the blue whiting assessment was a good assessment. The 2022 International blue whiting acoustic survey also confirmed the large increase in biomass. There was a very large recruitment two years ago but due the absence of the International survey in 2021 it was not picked up until the survey this year. The proposed advice was for a 81% increase.

### **Atlanto Scandia Herring**

The catch is now 50% dependant on the 2016-year class which is a cause for concern. The proposed advice is for a 15% reduction for 2023 at 511,171 tonnes.

## **SWW MEMBER STATE GROUP (07-10-2022, ONLINE)**

Joint Recommendation on reducing Cetacean Bycatch, as a follow-up of the work done in 2021: they are still waiting for new ICES advice, but the expectation is that it won't be very different from the previous advice. COM was present and reinforced the need to implement new and additional measures.

Joint Recommendation on Directed Fisheries, as a continuation of the work previously done: the EU and STECF rejected the proposal made by the regional group and they are now working to revise it. But it will take time. They will share again the proposal and the STECF report.

## **INTER-AC MEETING WITH COMMISSION (11-10-2022, ONLINE)**

Update on the upcoming CFP evaluation Report by Vincent Guerre:

There is still no clear date for the adoption but it should happen before the end of the year. The report will be adopted in the form of a communication to be accompanied by a staff working document (with relevant information for stakeholders as well). The Commission thanked the ACs for their contributions.

The communication will be focused on the policy tool and its governance (not the state of the stocks). It will be the start of a process to improve the communication with stakeholders and mainly the ACs. In response to a concern voiced by Mo Mathies (NWWAC) on the lack of dialogue with the Member States

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Group (MSG) in the process of preparing the contribution to this report, Valérie Tankink answered that the report will also mention the role of Member States (MS) and MS regional groups and how their participation in the dialogue could be encouraged.

The CMO report, on the other hand, will be a formal report informing about the state of play of this policy. The CFP communication will be setting where we are going next.

Valérie Tankink insisted on the fact that DG MARE would like that ACs collaborate more on topics of common interest rather than having DG MARE attending individual AC meetings. The NWWAC mentioned that it has several joint Focus Groups with other ACs, like the PelAC and the NSAC. The MAC would be interested in addressing topics such as IUU, the revision of the Control Regulation, taxonomy and the technical screening criteria with other ACs. Some ACs insisted on the importance of organising this direct contact between DG MARE with AC members, which is not possible if some topics are only brought up during the Inter-AC meetings. Wider events on horizontal topics, such as climate change and Maritime Spatial Planning would be appreciated by all. Marzia Piron (MEDAC) asked whether the Commission has criteria to decide whether to organise hybrid or in-person meetings. The answer was that each AC should find what is most suitable to its needs and means.

Questions and answers related to finances:

- Documents to be submitted at the end of ACs financial year: A question was posed to be informed about the documents that will have to be produced at the end of the financial years. Pascale Colson answered that the annexes 4 and 5 of the grant contract signed. They are models for the technical report, focusing on the operational implementation of the grant. The objective is to control which activities have been carried out.
- In the case of underperformance regarding the Work Programme: the budget can only be cut by 50% max in the worst case scenario. However, DG MARE encourages the Secretariats to get in touch immediately in case of unforeseen circumstances leading to an incapacity to fulfil at least 50% of the WP.
- On the matter of ACs organising interpretation/translation for EC events: it's up to the ACs to decide whether there is a possibility in their budget to do so, saying no is a possibility. The ACs also requested a longer-term notice of these meetings to be able to anticipate these costs in their budgets.
- DG MARE confirmed that the 2% indexation of the amount of lump sums should be confirmed in the FPA but they will come back to us with more details.
- Daniela Costa (CCRUP) raised the issue of having many reports and studies published by the EC in English only. Discussions are still ongoing regarding the translation of CFP report, as the staff working document in particular is a very extensive document.

Other questions and answers:

- Pedro Santos (MAC) explained that although sending questions in writing to the EC was encouraged at one of our previous meetings, the answers were not quick enough and sometimes there is no answer at all. ACs were allowed to follow up on the answers to these questions with the policy officers in charge – but always putting MARE AC in copy.
- On how to request EC attendance to ACs meetings: Desk officers should not be approached individually. Only Heads of Unit can be addressed directly with desk officers and MARE AC in copy. This is because ultimately, it is the Head of Units that decide who attends meetings.
- OIG membership within ACs: DG MARE is aware of the issue of the difficulty to recruit new OIG members. Actions are foreseen in the CFP report on this issue and Vincent Guerre is the person who will be following up on this.

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- Member States involvement with ACs: Several secretariats stressed on the lack of uptake of their recommendations by the Member States. DG MARE answered that the importance of ACs and of their advice will be underlined in the CFP report as well.

The PelAC will organise the next Inter-AC secretariats meeting with DG MARE.

## **SCIAENA SEMINAR ECOSYSTEM (19-10-2022, HYBRID)**

On October 19, in London, a workshop entitled “To ensure thriving marine life and resilient fisheries in the Northeast Atlantic, Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management Needed” took place, organized by PelAC members Sciaena and the Pew Charitable Trusts. During the event scientists, stakeholders, and managers from the EU, UK and Norway presented and discussed the importance of adopting ecosystem-based management approaches, the recent progress made in the northeast Atlantic, and next steps needed for fisheries managers to accelerate the implementation of EBFM in the region. PelAC WG I Chair Esben Sverdrup-Jensen and PelAC Vice-chair Gonçalo Carvalho made presentations at the event. While several challenges were identified during the discussions, there was broad agreement that effectively moving towards EBFM in the Northeast Atlantic is much needed.

## **NWW MEMBER STATE GROUP (24-10-2022, ONLINE)**

Jérôme Jourdain attended by virtual means on behalf of the PelAC to the NWW high level group meeting. At this meeting Jérôme Jourdain covered the PelAC's letters which expressed its great disappointment over EFCA and the regional groups' refusal to publish the full report on the evaluation of compliance with the landing obligation for mackerel in NS and NWW 2015-2017. While the PelAC's request for the publication of this first report still stands, the ongoing review of the evaluation by the regional groups is an opportunity to rectify this situation and ensure full transparency. Once the review of the new report will be completed, Jérôme Jourdain asked the High-Level regional groups to authorize and instruct the EFCA to publish not only the executive summary but also the integral report, regardless of its conclusions.

## **EFCA ADVISORY BOARD (24-10-2022, VIGO)**

Jose Beltrán attended this meeting as representative of PelAC. There were three subjects to be discussed.

### **1. State of play from Advisory Councils**

- PelAC:
  - Jose Beltran reminded EFCA to PelAC's previous April meeting in which Jose mentioned certain problems for the fleet and the enterprises due to several circumstances (because despite the start of the post-covid recovery the problems of the war continues and with it, the economic blockades).
  - During the last months, PelAC has held its “face-to-face” meetings (July and October), and has been maintaining its usual operations.
  - In accordance with the recommendations made by PelAC in its usual communication with the Commission during this period of the year, we have expressed our surprise that there is no clear reference to Brexit and the management of fisheries between the EU and the UK in its communication for 2023. We reject the new proposals for TACs and quotas for most of the stocks, without having once again concluded the negotiations and bilateral agreements. We are concerned about the situation in the Atlantic North, in the face of what has already become a

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common practice of some third countries that set their quotas unilaterally endangering the management of fisheries.

- Economic performance of the fleet: We regret once again that the guidance on fishing opportunities is based on economic data from two years ago, compared to the current data. A better alignment with the scientific data and future projections of the STCEF is necessary.
  - Landing Obligation: regarding the Commission's finding that bycatch remains high in mixed fisheries, the PelAC wonders whether the proportion of bycatch includes species that are discarded under an exemption or is related to species of undersize that are landed.
  - Once again, we want to highlight the "LO report of the mackerel fishery" issue. During the last meeting, Leon Bouts informed us that the Regional Groups are reviewing the issue and whether the conclusions are different, the previous version would be modified. Although there is a commitment from EFCA to change the procedure from now on, PelAC will remind the Commission and Regional Groups, because this is a matter of transparency.
  - Energy transition: it is important to ensure that the energy transition meets the needs of the fisheries sector. The Commission seems to ignore the loss of profitability of the fishermen.
  - Science paper: as a general principle, PelAC believes that CPC, being based on science, must guarantee its highest quality to support scientific advice, and this is something that the current policy does not reflect.
  - TAC 2023 proposals: the key role of pelagic species as a source of food security is noteworthy. So, PelAC wants to be part of the ICES process to incorporate information from stakeholders.
  - The main stocks under the PelAC's remit were reviewed and immediate action against Norway and Faroe was requested.
  - Cooperation with other ACs on issues of common interest.
  - Developing projects to improve knowledge of our fisheries.
  - PelAC appreciates the participation of the EU, ICES and of course the EFCA in PelAC meetings, hoping this cooperation will continue.
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- CCRUP: It highlights the need to strengthen control within the framework of IUU fishing. They have been working together with the MAC in a process to establish MPAs in the outermost regions, they also analyzed the situation of aquaculture in these regions, as well as conservation and control measures updated by the EU in preparation for ICCAT 22. The possibility of studying VMEs in these regions have also been observed. They asked ECFA if the mandate has been modified to operate in the outermost regions. Susan Steele replied that although they would like to contribute in this regard, up to now they have focused on training for MS authorities.
  - MAC: Highlights the low supplies and higher prices, especially for demersal fisheries. Also factories and processing plants are effected. About LO implementation, the main priority was to minimize unwanted catches and prevent a market for undersized fish. Worried about IUU fishing.
  - BISAC: Activity of the AC continue on a hybrid mode. Fishing activity decreased because the risk of finding mines at sea but the main reason now is the fuel cost. They has issued recommendations on minimum reference size for mullus barbatus in Black Sea. They recommend EFCA to participate in their meetings.
  - LDAC: Participation in the 5th Year Independent External Evaluation of EFCA. Advice for NAFO 44 and ICCAT. They organized a first FG meeting about small pelagic and other species in West Africa, focusing on multilateral cooperation, improving science on the stocks, management and control measures. They sent a letter to the Commission requesting the designation of European fishers as

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essential workers, and issued an advice on Social Dimension of the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements. They are working on an advice on China's global distant fleet and their influence in EU fleet and market. Working regularly with other organizations as FAO, ECOFISH. They are interested in PESCAO activities and other programs.

- MEDAC: Proposal to enhance the role of EFCA in fighting against IUU fishing, and training Mediterranean third countries to improve control capacity. Claiming more efforts on reviewing catch certificates for third countries in Mediterranean. Standardization of the Level Playing Field and reinforce activity in the Strait fo Sicily.
- NSAC: Cooperation with NWWAC in social aspects, gender issues, education, operational health and safety. FG on climate change. Complications with the shared stocks (EU-UK-NO). Different legislation in one fishing trip. Discard plan for NS will be ready in 2023. Organizing a workshop on LO for the next January. The industry is not happy with a project launched by the Danish authorities for monitoring and control of the LO.
- NWWAC: Highlighted the good collaboration with NSAC, PelAC and MAC. Interest about a workshop on the evaluation of compliance with the LO in spring. The article 27 of Technical measures is still not clear. A georeference tool for fisheries was presented.
- BSAC: Improving of LO in Baltic, reducing the bycatch of cod in the gillnet fishery. Implementation of TM rules for demersal, problems with the predation by seals and cormorants. According pelagic fisheries, highlighted the rebuilding plan for western herring, Environmental WG is working on windfarms.
- SWWAC: Bluefin tuna is a priority for ICCAT. MS regional group is following the dolphin bycatch. Waiting for the update of ICES on VMEs regulation.

## 2. EFCA's single programming documents. Multiannual program 2023-2027

Susan Steele presented the work starting with an exchange of views around the table:

- ACs inquired about the level of playing field in the treatment of 3rd countries (Mediterranean and North Sea).
- ACs are having some concerns about participation of EFCA in LO FGs. EFCA responded that they try to attend as most meetings as possible. LO is a priority in EFCA due to the low compliance observed.
- BSAC inquired on bilateral meetings with Russia. EFCA replies that due to Covid these meetings were cancelled and are still suspended.

## 3. Rotation of the Adv. Board representative in the Administration Board

Currently the representative is the MAC and the alternate LDAC until 1 March 2023. Next period, LDAC will be the representative and CCRUP the alternate.

## SWW MEMBER STATE GROUP (11-11-2022, ONLINE)

On cetacean bycatch, there were presentations by France and Spain, presenting updates and new possible solutions to avoid by catch. A reference to project Cetambicion was made.

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Scheveningen group produced templates to deal characterize directed fisheries and the SWW technical group is going to analyse them and see if they can be adapted to the fisheries in the region.

Goncalo Carvahlo made a question about pelagic de minimis exemptions and mentioned that the work on directed fisheries may be relevant to PelAC, as some of the stocks under our remit are caught in multispecies fisheries, namely southern and western horse mackerel. Alda (Member State Portugal) answered that the continuation of the de minimis exemptions for pelagics is going to be pursued by the SWW HLG. Pauline (Member State France) confirmed all the exemptions will be reviewed and that the Commission underlined that there will be a need to revise the current de minimis on a more profound level. Indications should come out soon at STECF Plenary.

### INTER-AC MEETING WITH COMMISSION (17-11-2022, ONLINE)

The PelAC was represented by Sean O'Donoghue, Goncalo Carvalho, Esben Sverdrup-Jensen and Anne-Marie Kats.

DGMARE organised an Inter-AC meeting on 17 November 2022, to update the Advisory Councils on ongoing policy files. An update on the lump-sum financing of the ACs was also provided.

In her opening statement, the Director-General emphasized holding dear to the relationship with ACs and underlined the importance of their feedback for policy development at the Commission, thought to benefit policy makers with knowledge and expertise from the field. What is most appreciated is that ACs provide solutions. She referred to the meeting with the Commissioner planned on December 5 with the Chairs and vice-Chairs of the ACs underlining the importance of the timing to ensure consultation right before December Council. She mentioned a number of ongoing key policy developments at DGMARE, such as Energy transition, the Action Plan to conserve fisheries resources, review of the functioning of the CFP and CMO, and the deep-sea access regulation.

The PelAC expressed its appreciation for the participation by the Commission to PelAC meetings, but raised the dissatisfaction that exists in this regard with ICES. The PelAC asked for support from the Commission to influence ICES' participation at key PelAC meetings in person, which was fully supported by the NWWAC in relation to their own meetings as well.

An update was provided on the review of the CMO. The Commission broadly went over the comments received during the targeted consultation on the CMO implementation. Based on the replies received, the Commission concludes that overall the CMO is considered fit for purpose and to effectively contribute to the CFP objectives such as ensuring competitiveness and information to consumers. Main challenges identified were alignment with other EU legislation, the structuring of seafood supplies by POs and differences in the treatment of POs at MS level in terms of financing and implemented methods in production and marketing plans. The report was now being finalised was expected to be released early 2023. The Commission underlined the report would duly reflect stakeholder feedback.

Next, a quick update was provided on the STECF Annual Economic Report (AER), where the Commission noted the increasing importance of economic analysis in light of the current energy crisis. The AER aims to provide an extensive analysis of the socio-economic performance of the EU fleet. The report has improved over the years and the exchange of ideas on how the report can be further improved is a continuous process. In light of ongoing developments, requests have been made for more analysis of emissions and estimates for impacts of fuel prices on the profitability of the fleet. The results of the AER feed into the Commission socio-economic analysis of the CFP, bringing together environmental, social and

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economic dimensions of fisheries. The Commission explained a TOR for the next report was being developed but managed expectations that perhaps not all requests could be delivered.

The PelAC welcomed the uptake by the Commission of the PelAC request for continuous inclusion of a pelagic chapter in the AER, which was a welcome improvement of the report. For a number of years the PelAC has commented that the AER report has a two-year lag compared to the current situation, and in light of covid, Brexit and the war in Ukraine ‘now-casting’ was becoming increasingly relevant. The PelAC emphasized that the AER needed to get aligned with the scientific stock advice and welcomed an update on the AER at a PelAC future meeting.

The Commission continued with an update on the Sustainable Food System, stemming from the Farm to Fork Strategy, where it indicated an impact assessment was underway, and a proposal was expected to be adopted by the second half of 2023. The proposal would provide a general framework for policy makers for favourable food environment provisions. Examples of options being looked at by the Commission are provisions to shift more responsibility to producers (through due diligence requirements) and setting minimum sustainability requirements for foods, with the aim to progressively eliminate the most unsustainable food from the EU market. Options for mandatory/voluntary harmonised sustainability labels were among the considerations.

On the implementation of the deep-sea access regulation, the Commission was waiting on the VME assessment from ICES. The Commission underlined that the involvement of stakeholders in this process was key.

Next, the Commission presented a recent study published on the implementation of the EAFM, conducted in part to address the lack of “mapping” of approaches already in place. There is a need for a more systematic evaluation, to identify gaps and allow progress towards the implementation of EAFM in the EU.

The Commission study set out to define a frame for EAFM, develop the knowledge base, assessing and weighing the EAFM alternative scenarios using the knowledge base and appropriate tools (this results in scientific advice that identifies preferred management and policy approaches), implement a specific management plan, and follow-up with an assessment of the state of affairs pertaining to the implementation of EAFM. This includes both the EAFM process, including the preceding steps, as well as its performance in achieving the specific policy objectives or societal goals. These five stages represent one EAFM cycle where the follow-up step provides the basis for the advancements in the next EAFM cycle (adaptive process). The method employed for this study was a literature review, identifying a hierarchical typology of EAFM challenges that distinguished three main types of EAFM challenges:

- 1 - Challenges to mitigate fishing impacts
- 2 - Challenges to improve the advisory process and its knowledge base
- 3 - Challenges to improve the decision-making process.

The role of the EAFM context was further explored through 12 in-depth case studies, exploring various combinations of measures, EAFM challenges and fisheries, used to provide insight into the advisory and decision-making process used to identify and implement measures, and used to identify potential best practices and the important roles of uncertainty and disagreement within these processes, drawing attention to the role of science as well as other knowledge types.

The overall conclusion of the study was that current fisheries management is dominated by conventional single-species advice on which the TAC/quota management is based. The first step toward more EAFM is through the implementation of TCMs to mitigate by-catch. The following three main categories of EAFM

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challenges were identified: mitigating fisheries impact on the ecosystem, the advisory process, the decision-making process.

EAFM requires explicit distinction between the management measures and the policy instruments as the means to implement them. Separating them has many practical advantages as the two operate in distinct parts of the social-ecological system, require different expertise and scientific disciplines, and/or involve different governance actors. This study provided a first tentative typology of policy instruments, considering their importance in EAFM. The study recommends addressing the different EAFM challenges and to (further) expand the policy objectives beyond the commercial species, to improve the knowledge base and seek to address obstacles within the existing advisory and decision-making processes, (e.g. request more interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary research and advice), and improve collection of information on fisheries management measures in place (the study was hampered by a lack of a comprehensive overview). To improve the implementation of EAFM, a combination of output measures – input measures – ecosystem restoration measures were advised. Emphasis was placed on more interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary research and advice.

The PelAC explained that it was actively involved in EAFM work through a dedicated Ecosystem Focus Group. The PelAC remarked that for EAFM in particular, it is important that definitional aspects are sorted out from the very beginning, noting contrasts with the 3 pillars identified by the Commission compared to the pillars in the FAO guidelines on fisheries management. A clear understanding is needed on what constitutes the 3 pillars for EAFM, where the PelAC felt a holistic view on EAFM was needed. The PelAC has repeatedly cited in its recommendations the work carried out by WKIRISH, taking a holistic view of the management in the Irish Sea and forming a good foundation for the implementation of EAFM. The PelAC referred to the workshop it intends to hold on this topic in 2023.

Finally, update was provided on the lump-sum financing method for ACs effective since this year. A key point raised by DG Mare was the handling of underspent money under the new method. The Commission highlighted that any underspent money would not be retrieved by the Commission, but needed to be communicated to DGMARE as it might impact the amount of lump sum amounts granted in the following year. This raised many questions from all the ACs, who had originally understood this rule differently. Due to the amount of questions from the different ACs and time constraints of the meeting, a separate meeting with the different AC secretariats and the Commission would be held on the short term to clarify any confusions.

The next Inter-AC meeting will be physical in Brussel and take place on 24 March 2023.

### **ICES SUBGROUP STAKEHOLDER INFORMATION (18-11-2022, ONLINE)**

Following the 2022 MIACO meeting, ICES organised a subgroup together with stakeholders to discuss the approach for informing ICES advice with stakeholder views. This was a direct result of the MIACO meeting where participants stressed the need for ICES to account for stakeholder perceptions into advice.

The meeting was chaired by ICES and aimed at exploring the issues around stakeholder information in advice, and how to deal with perceptions of the stocks that are possibly different from the advice. In the scientific community, while for a long time it was considered that science is 'right', there now is more acknowledgement that a plurality of knowledge may exist and that assumptions by scientists can lead to discrepancies from what is seen on the ground. Mackerel and blue whiting were highlighted as examples. ICES expressed its commitment to take steps together with stakeholders to build more robust 'sense testing' and underlined this meeting was the first step of a long process, aimed to kick-off the discussion.

First, ICES gave an extensive overview of recent/ongoing initiatives and workshops aimed at utilising data obtained from stakeholders to inform ICES advice, such as the research roadmap for mackerel (2029),

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and more the recent the research roadmap for cod which explored similar issues, and sought to answer the following questions: how well models fit input data, how credible are industry perceptions, do model diagnostics point to misspecifications, do models tally with industry perceptions? Another ICES workshop in the pipeline aims to provide guidance on the integrity of scientific information submitted to ICES by data providers, which moves into the issue of ensuring information and data are considered credible and of integrity. A final relevant ongoing workshop was mentioned on evaluating the utility of industry derived data, covering self-sampling and co-sampling with industry. The report would be released in a few weeks' time.

In 2021, ACOM considered key issues in terms of stakeholder information in for sense checking:

- Assessment input – via influence on model specification and parameterization.
- Quality and credibility of the assessment and advice (Are the population and fisheries trends estimated by ICES similar to those experienced by fishers, how does ICES monitor those experiences, can ICES reconcile or explain any divergent narratives?)
- Risk associated with uncertainty in advice – the consequence of leading to a bad out-come, or missing a good one.
- Palatability of the advice – when alternative perceptions of the state of stock mean the advice is not easy to swallow, they may become a source of resentment and contention. How does ICES deal with this?

Through this introduction ICES aimed to present the collection ongoing initiatives/workshops related to data provision in 'classic scientific ways' and to distinguish between data-driven initiatives as opposed to introducing stakeholder perceptions into advice. None of the initiatives presented address the sense testing the MIACO meeting brought forward.

In advance of the subgroup meeting, ICES asked ACs to consider three questions:

- Are the population and fisheries trends estimated by ICES similar to those experienced by fishers?
- How can ICES and the ACs monitor and report those experiences?
- Can any divergent narratives be reconciled or explained?

The PelAC had submitted input highlighting the examples of mackerel in 2028, where the advice was completely at odds with the perception of fishermen. Another example was the value of genetic stock-ID work supported by the PelAC, which initially received very little credence within ICES. Nowadays there is more recognition for its value. The PelAC also submitted a survey template developed by the secretariat, aimed to distribute to skippers and collect perceptions at sea on an annual basis, for the purpose of 'sense-checking' advice. The example is still basic, was developed to enable analysis of the received input, and could be applied to different stocks depending on the specificities.

During the meeting, the PelAC remarked that it has been at the forefront of this initiative and felt an important distinction needed to be made between data vs. perception, as the ICES presentation risked merging both together. The incorporation of industry-derived data is well underway, but is a separate matter from reflecting perceptions of fishermen in the advice. The PelAC is disappointed that ICES decided to remove the stakeholder information section in ICES advice sheets. Looking at the example of mackerel, the PelAC feels there should be a mechanism, as discussed in the mackerel workshop in 2019, that enables ICES to answer the question: how come the ICES advice is so different from the perception of fishermen at sea? In most cases, there should be no divergence between the advice and fishermen's perception, but this may not always be the case, as some examples have shown. The PelAC suggested the

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workshop to focus on the situation when industry perceptions do not match the advice, how this is signal can reach ICES.

ICES agreed with the distinction between sense testing/perception from incorporating industry data to advice. For ICES it is important to consider elements in terms of how stakeholder information is collected, how is it brought together and how it is introduced to ICES advice. It also needs to fit with ICES advice principles. The OIG representatives in the group underlined that it should be understood that stakeholder perceptions account for all stakeholders, not just industry.

The participants were split into breakout groups to discuss the 3 questions raised by ACOM. In the breakout group, the PelAC highlighted the survey template the secretariat had developed, which sought to collect views from fishermen in terms of their perceptions on abundance, fish size, recruitment, distribution and how easy it was to catch the quota compared to the previous year. This information is intended to mirror the advice with non-quantitative/anecdotal information. The intent was to keep the survey as simple as possible to ensure it would be used by fishermen. The information is not intended to feed into the analytical assessment, but should enable a trigger to check where there might be an issue if the perception deviates from the advice. In the breakout discussion there was a unanimous view that whatever sense checking is developed, it should be proactive and come before the assessment, not after, the idea of a pre-assessment was mentioned.

In other groups the North Sea survey was brought forward as a successful example. While there were issues with the survey that led to it being dropped, it was felt it left a basis that can be improved based on lessons learned. What is key in terms of fitting in the current system: if a survey approach chosen, when designing utility it is important to ensure the survey fits into the science as well.

ICES agreed to write a report of the main conclusions from this subgroup meeting that would be presented to MIACO in January 2023, along with a proposal to hold a specific workshop to expand this topic further and look into what was discussed here in more details and the ways to bring it forward. It was also agreed to involve a social scientist into this discussion, to benefit from experience in the analysis of qualitative information.

### **SCHEVENINGEN MEMBER STATE GROUP (15-09-2022, 13-10-2022 AND 24-11-2022, ONLINE)**

PelAC participated in meetings of the Scheveningen Member States technical group on the above dates. At all three meetings only a very short timeslot was made available for the ACs. At the November meeting only AC and the French chair participated. At all meetings no pelagic items were on the agendas, as focus was on demersal issues. However general issues, such as the Control Regulation and discard plans were briefly discussed. MS plan a thorough revision of existing discard plans and de minimis provisions in 2023 where Denmark takes over the chair from France. Member States invite ACs to actively participate in the work. PELAC to open dialogue with Danish presidency.

### **ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION WITH COMMISSIONER SINKEVICIUS AND ACS (05-12-2022, BRUSSELS)**

PelAC representative: Sean O'Donoghue. Commissioner Sinkevicius of Environment, Oceans and Fisheries invited every Chair and vice-Chair of the different ACs to a roundtable discussion on fishing opportunities in Brussels, on December 5 2022. Amidst preparations of the decisions on the fishing opportunities for next year for fish stocks in the EU waters, the Commissioner asked each AC to put forward key issues

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ahead of December Council. In his introduction, he raised two key stocks relevant for the PelAC in this context: mackerel and blue whiting.

Sean O'Donoghue, Chair of the PelAC, took the floor to raise a number of key points that were included in the PelAC recommendations on fishing opportunities sent to the Commission in October. First, he welcomed this initiative taken by the Commissioner to engage with ACs in this format at this occasion, as it reflected the importance of ACs as vehicles to consult stakeholders during the complex process of negotiations on fishing opportunities. On behalf of the PelAC, the Chair highlighted the following key recommendations that were agreed in October:

As general issues, O'Donoghue emphasized the importance of ensuring quality assurance maintains its momentum as a point for improvement at the level of ICES. He also noted the importance attributed by the PelAC to the topic of energy transition, as well as the PelAC's intention to further develop input into this policy file in 2023. He invited the Commission to engage with the PelAC during this exercise.

O'Donoghue further recalled the PelAC recommendation in relation to the nowcasting of the information of the STECF report, noting the two-year time lag that now exists between the STECF future socio-economic projections and the scientific advice data.

On stock specifics, O'Donoghue brought forward the key recommendations in relation to blue whiting, mackerel and horse mackerel. He emphasized the importance of taking action against Norway and Faroes to stop the setting of unilateral catches of mackerel. On horse mackerel, the key recommendation to expedite an ICES benchmark meeting jointly dedicated to the three horse mackerel stocks (Western, Southern and North Sea) was reiterated. This request formed one of the PelAC's key priorities, as the benchmark outcomes are also needed in order to update the evaluation of the PelAC rebuilding plan. The final species specific point raised by O'Donoghue was to pursue together with ICES, the progress of moving the 6a North and 6a South 7bc herring from a category 3 to a category 1 stock.

### NORTH SEA AC CLIMATE CHANGE AND FISHERIES WEBINAR (07-12-2022, ONLINE)

On December 7 2022, the NSAC held a webinar addressing both the impacts of climate change on fisheries in the North Sea, as well as how fisheries impact the climate.

In response to the increasing uptake of the climate change related topics in international and EU for a, the NSAC set up a Climate Focus Group in March 2022. Through the FG, the NSAC seeks to follow and contribute to ongoing and upcoming EU initiatives, such as the Biodiversity Strategy. The FG works on a variety of issues related to climate change, such as decarbonisation, migration etc. As a first step, the NSAC completed an extensive advice on decarbonisation in the North Sea fisheries, to feed into ongoing Commission policy work such as the recently launched call for evidence for an initiative on energy transition in the fisheries sector.

Through this webinar, the NSAC aims to tackle a wide range of issues in order to get a broad overview for the North Sea area, and set the scene to seek compromises between fisheries and NGOs.

As a first speaker, ICES demonstrated that climate related changes in fish stocks are already visible: Surveys are picking up changes in productivity (stocks going up or down) or changes in range (changed distribution, where they are caught and how they are managed) in different stocks. ICES went on to highlight the outcomes of two EU projects on the impacts of climate change on fisheries in the North Sea: Climefish, and CERES. Both projects predict that the warm productivity in the NS will change and suggested potential consequences for NS stocks. According to CERES, some of Europe's most 'climate change vulnerable' marine communities are in the North Sea. There will be almost no change in sprat and

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mackerel abundance, but the flatfish abundance will change. CERES also claims that the anchovy and NS herring abundance will go down by 2050, though ICES remarked it would challenge a number of these statements.

ICES explained that the ecosystem objectives under EAFM are based on their ability to achieve ecological and human wellbeing, and that there is a need to establish how climate change impacts this, and risks achieving these objectives. Nowadays community and society measures are already impacting fishing. For example, the large scale installation of offshore wind parks are currently affecting the whole system in various ways. According to ICES, when looking at the attributes of climate resilient fisheries, it's not just about healthy fish, limited environmental impacts and wealth of fishermen, but there is also a need for flexibility in the governance system to respond to environmental or social change. Measures for mitigation are influenced by a changing risk profile and evaluating feasibility of the measures. ICES's take-away message was that change is happening and will continue to occur. It's not a high priority on the list, but some mitigations such as expansion of RE is pushing it up on list. Governance management systems are formalised and rigid, and climate change is challenging this system. Reform must be cross-jurisdictional and accounting for impacts of wider system.

Grégory Beaugrand from Lille University presented the FishClim model, which was developed to consider the joint influence of fishing and climate, and to separate their respective effects on fish stocks. While difficult to apply, it can be seen from the model that even properly managed stocks can face overexploitation due to the effects of climate change. Adaptive management will pay off: while some stocks go down, others can appear. As climate will warm, it needs to be recognised that some stocks will disappear, with or without fishing. FishClim can be applied to many stocks (exploited species for which there is enough knowledge of the biology and the ecology), and adding climate components in the management of fish stocks could be a way forward to more resilient fisheries.

Michael Andersen representing the Danish fishing industry, underlined that any food production system has its impact on the environment, and the impact of fishers is relatively low compared to other food production sectors. He noted the CFP poses obstacles to achieving more efficient fisheries, and therefore needs review. Another reality to face might be to reconsider relative stability.

Rebecca Hubbard, from Our Fish, illustrated the importance of fish in nature, and that good fisheries is good carbon management.

Giovanni Codotto from Aalborg University presented a project on LCA, that has recently started where it becomes clear that there is no one size fits all approach. A second element the project is looking into is how existing ecolabels relate to climate impacts. The aim of the study is to produce an evidence-based LCA model, identify climate-friendly practices, gears and labels, thereby contributing to the green transition of fisheries and to inform current fisheries policies, practice, and labelling advise consumption in the direction of climate change mitigation

According to Kenn Skau Fischer, Chair NSAC, fisheries has a relatively limited contribution to climate change, but will be significantly impacted by it. The possibilities to innovate and adapt are limited, partly because existing policy measures and other influences hinder the allocation of space for fisheries.

François Bastardie from DTU Aqua looked for the win wins. His research shows that in the context of decarbonisation, fishing less with larger meshes will earn more because it consumes less fuel. The sector needs to think about fishing differently and more efficiently to save operating costs and at the same time support ecosystem services. Decarbonation is a win/win both for stocks and profits. His message was to step up management and anticipation, where knowledge is key. Solutions for improved efficiency exist and should be taken up.

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The NSAC advice on decarbonisation sought to understand the EU framework on energy transition and other related initiatives, with a focus on blue sectors. The documents sets out the state of play for decarbonisation in maritime sector, alternatives to fuels, and energy efficiency in fishing sectors, as well as the funding possibilities. It concludes with recommendations to address the challenges identified. Although there are possibilities and technologies for improved energy efficiency and fuel alternatives, for example from the shipping sector, in most cases they are not yet adapted to fishing sectors. There is also a need to consider the impacts of alternatives to the surrounding ecosystems, such as the toxicity of ammonia as an alternative fuel. The NSAC advises to focus on short term energy efficiency of the existing fleet with the objective to reduce fossil fuel consumption, while carrying out research on fuel alternatives.

In conclusion, looking at these new elements, the CFP is not fit for purpose in terms of environment and global warming. A review of the CFP will be complicated discussion, and will need the support of science to bring in the knowhow and the active participation by stakeholders to advise on the development of an improved policy that is more fit for purpose. For this review to be successful it must be effective and realistic, and require a significant effort to work for.

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### CHRISTMAS BREAK

The Secretariat **will be closed** from 27 December 2023 until 6 January 2023.

We wish you all a Merry Christmas and a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year! We are looking forward to continue working with you in 2023!



# UPCOMING MEETINGS

## **22 FEBRUARY 2023:**

### **WORKING GROUP I & II, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING**

These meetings will be held in-person at a new meeting venue: Karel V in Utrecht with interpretation in French and Spanish.

Please note that it is obligatory to register online, the deadline for registration is 19 January 2023: [Meeting Registration](#)

## **23 FEBRUARY 2023:**

### **WORKSHOP ECOSYSTEM APPROACH TO FISHERIES MANAGEMENT (EAFM)**

This workshop will be held in-person at a new meeting venue: Karel V in Utrecht with interpretation in French and Spanish.

Please note that it is obligatory to register online, the deadline for registration is 19 January 2023: [Meeting Registration](#)

## **19 APRIL 2023:**

### **WORKING GROUP I & II, AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

These meetings will be organised online.

## **20 APRIL 2023:**

### **WORKSHOP ENERGY TRANSITION**

This workshop will be organised online.

## **6 AND 7 JULY 2023:**

### **WORKING GROUP I & II, AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:**

These meetings will be held in-person, we will inform you about the meeting venue in due time.

## **3 AND 4 OCTOBER 2023:**

### **WORKING GROUP I & II, GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:**

These meetings will be held in-person, we will inform you about the meeting venue in due time.

**For more information please visit our website:**

[Upcoming Meetings - The Pelagic Advisory Council \(pelagic-ac.org\)](#)

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