



PELAGIC ADVISORY COUNCIL

Newsletter 1 / 2023

January – March 2023

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PELAC MEETINGS

NWWAC AND PELAC BRIEFING ON THE IRISH MARITIME AREA PLANNING ACT 2021 AND ITS IMPACTS ON FISHING AREAS IN THE IRISH EEZ (19-01-2023, DUN LAOGHAIRE (IE) / HYBRID)

The meeting took place on 19 January 2023 in a hybrid format. The purpose of the meeting was to share information about large-scale offshore developments planned for the Irish Sea, Celtic Sea, and off the North and North West of Ireland. There was good attendance from all the main players and Departments involved, and all those who attended reflect that the meeting was very useful.

The first action agreed during the briefing was to request for AC involvement in the Seafood-offshore renewable energy WG (Seafood ORE), a consultation body that includes fisheries stakeholders. The PelAC and NWWAC followed this up with Robert McCabe (Seafood ORE Chairman) and requested membership of the Seafood ORE stakeholder group in Ireland in writing.

A second action agreed specified that the ACs would be included in a consultation entitled 'offshore renewable development phase two'.

Thirdly, the establishment of a new agency in Ireland to facilitate the granting of licenses called the Marine Applications Regulatory Authority (MARA). Details of this will be shared with the PelAC in time.

The meeting had successfully put the ACs on the map, clearly demonstrating their remit under the CFP and their right to be included in consultations.

Please read the full report [here](#).

WORKING GROUP I (22-02-2023, UTRECHT)

The WGI meeting of 22 February commenced with an update on industry derived data collection and sampling methodologies by Martin Pastoors from the Pelagic Freezer Trawler Association. His presentation emphasised that fishers can best contribute to science (and vice-versa) through the harmonisation and quality control of self-sampling programs. Catch sampling programs can act as an "entry ticket" for vessel engagement and help to facilitate relationship building with vessels for the collection of a range of data, such as catch composition, acoustic and biological data, as well as promoting information and knowledge exchange.

Subsequently, Jon Helge Vølstad presented the Catch Sampling Lottery's (CATSAM) probabilistic method for "ordering" biological samples from pelagic fisheries in Norway. The aim of the project is to move away from ad-hoc, expert sampling and progress towards a more optimised and systematic method of data collection using samples collected from hauls from pelagic fishing vessels. The scheme has been highly successful and is mandatory for all pelagic fishing vessels >15m in length in Norway, a step which has been widely supported by the Norwegian fishing industry.

The meeting also focused on the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) decisions following the release of the ICES advice in 2022, including the recommendations for each relevant stock that the PelAC had made in October 2022, and priorities for coming months in preparation for drafting TAC advice in October 2023. The main priorities for each stock were agreed as follows:

- Atlanto-Scandian herring - PelAC to push for Coastal States to secure an agreement on a sharing arrangement.
- North Sea herring - Focus on drafting comments on the Trilateral Herring Working Group report and follow developments on the long-term management strategy between the EU, UK, and Norway.

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- Western Baltic spring spawning herring - There was an agreement to cease developing recommendations on this stock and support the BSAC in its advice where relevant.
- Blue whiting - Encourage a sharing agreement on management between Coastal States.
- North Sea horse mackerel - Follow up several PelAC recommendations, including the proposition to progress the stock to a category 2 or 1.

Ana Leocadio from the European Commission shared an update on the report of the Trilateral Herring Working Group. The report provides a comprehensive overview of the distribution and stock status of the two key herring stocks – North Sea Autumn Spawners (NSAS) and Western Baltic Spring Spawners (WBSS). It also provides a description of the activity of herring fleets and fisheries, and discusses management approaches and challenges.

There was an extensive update on the Ecosystem Focus Group. This facilitated the agreement of the draft terms of reference for the PelAC workshop on the energy transition, and an update on a briefing meeting on the Irish Maritime Planning Act of 2021, held between the PelAC, NWWAC, and Irish policy-makers. On the back of this meeting, the PelAC's request for involvement in the Seafood-offshore renewable energy (Seafood ORE) Working Group was approved.

The PelAC also received a presentation from Hans Slabbekoorn of Leiden University on the acoustic ecology of pelagic fish communities, as part of the interdisciplinary APELAFICO project. He shared his research methods investigating the effectiveness of acoustic deterrent devices through in-basin and at-sea tests, as well as assessing the presence of pelagic fish species during different phases of wind farm development. The findings will be written into two research papers, expected to be submitted later in 2023.

Annebelle Jonker, MSc student from Wageningen University and Research (WUR), concluded the meeting by presenting her proposal for her MSc thesis on mapping essential fish habitat for herring and mackerel in European waters, which is being carried out under both the WUR and the PelAC.

WORKING GROUP II (22-02-2023, UTRECHT)

The WGII meeting of 22 February focused on the outcomes of the latest ICES advice, including the recommendations for each relevant stock that the PelAC had made in October 2022, as well as priorities for coming months for each stock, in preparation for giving TAC advice in October 2023.

Ed Farrell presented updates from various genetics projects, including assembly of the northeast Atlantic mackerel genome and work on western horse mackerel stock characteristics. Genetic stock identification work for Celtic and Irish Sea herring stocks was helping to characterise the different stocks and degree of mixing. Genetics work on greater silver smelt, a stock that the PelAC had recently agreed to take on, was in its preliminary stages.

Gersom Costas presented on outcomes of the ICES Working Group on Mackerel and Horse Mackerel Egg Surveys. For northeast Atlantic mackerel, the aim is to produce a spawning stock biomass (SSB) index. Two different methodologies have been used to calculate egg production, which make different assumptions about fecundities, and will be compared to examine which best fits past stock trends.

A top priority to call on Coastal States to agree on sharing arrangements for northeast Atlantic mackerel was identified. If agreement was reached, preparing a long-term management plan would be emphasised as the next priority.

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For horse mackerel, the top priority remained to call for an urgent benchmark covering all three horse mackerel stocks (western, southern, and North Sea). The setup of a joint NWWAC-SWWAC Horse Mackerel Focus Group would help prepare for this.

Herring in 6a North had transitioned from a monitoring TAC to a full TAC, informed by data from genetic sampling and acoustic surveys. It was recommended that these surveys were continued for both the 6a North and 6a South 7bc herring stocks. The PelAC recommends advancing scientific work to investigate the degree of mixing of these stocks.

Work had been undertaken to develop a benchmark for the boarfish stock, but modelling work had so far not yielded useful outcomes; though a length-based model, to be presented at WG WIDE, was promising.

Sprat in areas 6 and 7 had been taken on by the PelAC as extra stocks, in agreement with the NWWAC. An ICES workshop (WKRRCSS) had assessed the knowledge base regarding these stocks, and consensus was that there are several distinct populations of sprat, but further work is needed to divide them into stocks.

An update on the Landing Obligation indicated that all de minimis exemptions are to be reviewed and their renewal considered. It was felt that none were directly relevant for the PelAC, given exemptions apply only for demersal vessels. A consultation review on Multi Annual Plans was also deemed not relevant for the PelAC.

Martin Pastoors is investigating spatial displays of ICES data to assess stock distribution and other variables. The PelAC was interested in such efforts and it was agreed to keep the PelAC informed about developments.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (22-02-2023, UTRECHT)

Annual Economic Report (AER) by Raul Prellezo. He provided a number of headline statistics demonstrating the performance of the EU's pelagic fishing fleet, noting that the pelagic fleet is particularly important in Denmark and The Netherlands. In terms of contributions to the EU as a whole, the pelagic fleet accounts for 1% of total landings, 2% of landing weight, 6% of revenue, 11% of gross profit, and 1% of employment. The greatest challenge facing the fleet at present is the cost of energy; the gap between the price of landings and energy cost is higher now than it has ever been. The PelAC agreed to submit a request for the pelagic chapter to become a permanent part of the AER going forward.

The attendees heard updates on the most recent Inter-AC Brexit Forum and MIAC and MIACO meetings, both of which are operating in a constructive way. A notable highlight of the MIACO meeting was a decision on the inclusion of stakeholder information in ICES advice. It was agreed that a stakeholder information workshop will take place in 2023, to be chaired by Steve Mackinson.

The final re-scoping of PelAC WGs was also confirmed and implemented.

All of the following recommendations from both WGI and WGII were adopted:

WGI

- Include industry sampling methods in the PelAC work programme.
- Terms of Reference for the PelAC workshop on energy transition in the pelagic sector: for approval by ExCom.

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- Set up a dedicated Focus Group (under ExCom) to develop PelAC responses to the Commission's CFP Package Documents.

WGII

- Endorse decision for PelAC to not respond to the Commission targeted consultation on revision of the MAPs for North Sea, Western Waters and adjacent waters.

The upcoming meetings dates for 2023 were shared, all of which will take place in The Netherlands, apart from the April meetings, which will take place fully online as part of the PelAC's commitment to reduce carbon emissions from EU fisheries.

PELAC WORKSHOP ON EXPLORING THE APPLICATION OF EAFM IN PELAGIC STOCKS IN NEA (23-02-2023, UTRECHT)

The workshop held on 23 February 2023 was well attended with participation by the Commission, ICES and several key involved scientists

The first sessions was dedicated to presentations on the SEAwisE project, the 2022 Commission's study on EAFM and ICES's view on the use of MSEs to explore ecosystem scenario's.

The second portion of the workshop explored several case studies by scientists as examples how the ecosystem-approach could be applied, which included:

- Cod/capelin in the Barents Sea
- Atlantic Menhaden fishery USA
- EAFM in the Irish Sea
- Balanced Harvest

During the plenary discussion, a key fundamental point was highlighted on the 'three-legged stool' when tackling EAFM (i.e. the ability to achieve ecological and human wellbeing) which is an issue in the implementation of EAFM, in part due to the lack of appropriate socio-economic data. It was underlined that EAFM should be tackled holistically.

Discussion on challenges and difficulties for PelAC in multi-species management was held, when stocks in predator/prey relationship impact stocks outside remit of PelAC and due to widely distributed nature of pelagic stocks (requiring international management with CS).

The outcomes of the WKIRISH project for developing and implementing "Feco" was identified as a key approach to further explore in a pelagic context – building on from work done on Irish Sea herring.

The workshop identified the following gaps to further explore moving forward: defining the socio-economic dimension and the incorporation ecological parameters into MSEs.

It was suggested for the PelAC to ask for insights on criteria for the overall composition of the ecosystem and dealing with different types of strategies.

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

EXTERNAL MEETINGS

INTER-AC MEETING WITH CHAIRS AND SECRETARIATS (11-01-2023, COPENHAGEN)

In November 2021, the Secretariats of the different ACs agreed to hold meetings at regular intervals to discuss horizontal issues of common interest and identify potential areas for joint work. It was agreed that the AC Chairs should attend these meetings once per year, and that this meeting would be held annually in January. The main objective of this annual meeting would be to compare work programmes, discuss ongoing administrative matters and exchange views on areas where the ACs could collaborate on.

On 11 January 2023, this meeting was held in Copenhagen, hosted and Chaired by the BSAC, prior to the MIAC and MIACO meetings. First, actions of the last meeting in January 2022 were listed and discussed, which had mostly been followed up on. The BSAC Secretariat had developed a table depicting the main topics of interest per AC, according to their work plans. The ACs were invited to comment to fill any gaps or elaborate on any item further.

From the BSAC overview, it was clear that areas of interest to all ACs were the European Green Deal, the Biodiversity Strategy, the Farm to Fork Strategy and Blue Growth. To some extent the landing obligation was applicable to most ACs though it was remarked that each ACs deals with very different elements of the landing obligation. Other topics of interest to a majority of the ACs were climate change, reducing emissions, the Action Plan to conserve fisheries resources and preserve marine ecosystems, the control regulation and social aspects.

The LDAC brought a specific topic forward on RFMOs and deep-sea mining. The NWWAC highlighted the uncoordinated approach by MS on marine spatial planning as a key issue for more ACs. The NSAC highlighted the work by STECF on selectivity and remarked that there were limits to the extent ACs could work together, noting the difficulties in getting joint advices approved and reaching consensus.

The MAC, having a rather different scope than most ACs clarified its focus on food labelling and information to consumers, food contact materials, market impacts of the landing obligation, the control regulation from a traceability perspective etc. The MAC further highlighted the issue of socio-economic impacts, which is expected by the Commission and the MAC is struggling with. The Commission asks the MAC the market effects of the landing obligation for example, but this is difficult to determine because it has not been implemented long enough. The MAC proposed to cooperate better between the ACs on socio-economic effects and to align approaches. The approach may vary between regions but it was felt there are elements the ACs have in common that they can work on, such as recruiting and maintaining people in the sector.

The LDAC remarked that even if basins are different many socio-economic indicators are the same, such as net profit, exploitation costs, trends, profitability and employment. LDAC supported a common method to establish how something will impact a fleet or segment, which could add value to AC cooperation.

The NWWAC mentioned that it was working on including socio-economic data into the choke mitigation tool, and indicated it would be shared with the other ACs soon. The NWWAC invited the different ACs to be updated through presentations on this. In addition, the NWWAC recently submitted a joint advice with the NSAC on social aspects, which will be part of further discussions in a dedicated Focus Group. On Marine Spatial Planning, the NWWAC added that a detailed briefing would be held the following week in Ireland on the implementation of the Maritime Planning Act in the Irish EEZ. The impacts for both the Irish and other EU fisheries operating in these areas are expected to be significant, so the NWWAC called on all ACs to participate and be informed.

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The AAC stated that there was potential to collaborate on the decarbonisation agenda, from the aquaculture perspective. Other topics such as socio-economics and issues such as recruitment were also highlighted.

Further to the topics already covered, the BSAC also highlighted the socio-economic impact of the war in Ukraine. Some MS around the Baltic have lost their market of pelagic fish in Ukraine, combined with covid impacting the supply of raw material of pelagic stocks in the Baltic.

The second main portion of the agenda was dedicated to discussing tools for improved collaboration between the ACs. In general the ACs were very pleased overall with the functioning of these Inter-Secretariats meetings, which they found useful to exchange views, and felt information collaboration between the Secretariats was already working well.

The PelAC underlined that significant improvements were made in the last years in aligning approval procedures while developing joint advice. It was important to distinguish between procedures of co-developing detailed joint-advice through dedicated joint Focus Groups, following internal approval procedures, and special cases where there is a need to adopt a joint letter urgently on a specific single-issue, which would be stronger when carried by more ACs. There was still room for improving such fast-track procedures, without necessarily amending internal rules of procedure.

The NSAC mentioned it produced a newsletter every month, which takes stock of agenda items at the level of the Commission. The NSAC thought it would be helpful to exchange newsletters to get a better sense of topics the different ACs are working on.

A brief update was provided on the Inter-AC Brexit Forum, to which the ACs impacted by Brexit are participating in. There is still an ongoing discussion at the Forum as to how to organise the secretariat (e.g. establish a permanent one, a periodic one, or simply rotate the organisation between ACs) and there is an understanding with the Commission that minutes of the meeting are not to be circulated beyond the AC MTs, but that updates to members should be given orally during AC meetings. The NSAC is set to organise the next Forum meeting end of January. CC-RUP voiced an interest in participating the next meeting, which would require a revision of the ToR.

A discussion was held on the Inter-AC meetings of the Commission, where all ACs agreed that Forum should not be a mechanism for the Commission to cease participating in individual AC meetings. It was remarked that many key elements are often covered at the InterAC meeting with the Commission, no longer at the level of the ACs, so it was key to ensure that discussions at Inter-AC were thoroughly communicated to the entire membership.

A discussion was held on code of conduct of AC members, rules for external representation and other relevant procedures, following internal issues voiced by CC-RUP. Another discussion was held on the per diem rates where a number of ACs indicated an intent to raise the ceiling for hotel costs to levels in accordance with the Commission guidelines for their staff, as rates can vary significantly between countries.

The NWWAC proposed to draft a joint letter to the Commission requesting more efforts to increase the visibility of ACs by the Commission, for example with more explicit recognition of the work, in order to help attracting new members. This was agreed and the NWWAC would supply a first draft to be shared with the other ACs.

CC-RUP proposed to hold the next meeting between AC secretariats in the Azores, which all other ACs agreed to.

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MIAC (12-01-2023, COPENHAGEN)

CC-RUP organised and Chaired the 2023 MIAC meeting, in Copenhagen, which is held prior to MIACO to ensure specific topics from the ACs can be dealt with in enough depth separately from the MIACO meeting.

Socio-economic dimension VMEs

The NWWAC brought forward a query on the inclusion of a socio-economic dimension to ICES advice on VMEs. ICES explained that no socio-economic analysis was foreseen in the assessment, as STECF will provide this element for the deep-sea access regulation. ICES explained it lacked data on bottom trawling fishing intensity and how likely VMEs can be persistent in a specific area. The NWWAC then asked to what extent new scientific evidence was expected that may lead to an updated advice, and to what extent the methodology would differ from the previous advice.

ICES explained that it provided an advice framework in 2021 to establish how to advise on VME, using very extreme scenario's and where ICES tried to give a range of options. When developing the advice, bottom trawling was top of mind, but three separate footprints were considered for the implications of bottom trawls, long lines and a combination of both. For 2023, ICES indicated the advice release was postpone to April instead of end of January. The ADG is still in session and more data from VMEs and VMS is expected. ICES underlined that any communication on discussions ongoing at the ADG, to which observers are welcome, should stay in the ADG until the advice is published.

Status guidelines for evaluation rebuilding plans

ICES took the floor to explain that a workshop was planned for the month of March (WKREBUILD2), which would follow up on the work from the previous workshop to develop guidelines for the evaluation of rebuilding plans. Among the stocks to be considered was Western horse mackerel.

The PelAC explained that the issue was not so much the workshops but the lack of existing guidelines, affecting the development of management and rebuilding plans, Western horse mackerel being a key example. The PelAC asked where ICES was at in the development of these guidelines. In addition, the PelAC referred to the footnote in the UK/EU agreement stating the need for holding a benchmark for this stock in 2023. The PelAC asked to what extent this has been communicated with ICES and if there are plans in development for this.

ICES replied that the benchmark still needs to be approved and will be considered in conjunction with recommendations from other groups, an update on this would be provided during MIACO. ICES further explained that benchmarks are internally derived from Expert Groups and ACOM, therefore external proposals for benchmarks are not accepted. ICES confirmed Western horse mackerel has been put forward by the relevant Expert Group, but ICES is still in the process of deciding when this meeting should take place. As things now stand, it was likely the benchmark would start end of 2023 and finish in 2024.

Quality Assurance

The PelAC brought the issue of quality assurance forward to ICES as a continuous point, specifically asking to what extent ICES plans on indicating in advice sheets if a stock has gone through the TAF system. ICES indicated that an extensive update on quality assurance would be given at MIACO, with a plan proposed by WGQUALITY. While quality assurance is progressing at ICES, there are still issues with the lack of feedback loops or performance indicators. ICES proposed to divert this update to MIACO.

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Notification of corrected advice on ICES website

The PelAC moved on to explain an issue regarding the notification of corrected advice on the ICES website. ICES explained the procedure of notifying changes to advice requesters and interested stakeholders once an advice is corrected, but the PelAC insisted any correction in the advice should become more noticeable on the ICES website as well. At this stage changes only become apparent when clicking on the advice document. ICES said it would look into what changes to the website could be considered to address this.

ICES participation in AC meetings

Both the NWWAC and the PelAC brought forward the issue of remote ICES advice presentations at AC meetings, which have led to a number of issues. The ACs asked ICES to allow the designated ACOM member to travel to at least one AC meeting per year to present the advice in person.

ICES referred to its travel policy and commitment to reduce emissions, but acknowledged there was a weakness in the system through remote participation only. ICES was pleased with the suggested compromises in the PelAC letter. The ACOM vice-Chairs have agreed to travel to one AC meeting per year, but called on the ACs to liaise with the corresponding ACOM members to facilitate scheduling and locations as much as possible, especially for those travelling long distance. For the PelAC, ICES has agreed to travel to the October meeting in the Netherlands. It was agreed informally that a remote presentation on the herring stocks would be provided in July, but that the discussion would be held during the October meeting along with the discussion on widely distributed stocks.

Mackerel fecundity

ICES explained that WGWIDE has asked for a benchmark in 2023 for mackerel together with a workshop reviewing the stock components. This benchmark has not been approved yet, and still needs to get through the system. Fecundity relates to stock components as well. Fecundity has been revised and there are a number of available methods to account for fecundity. Overall, it was felt the assessment model was working well. The expected timeframe for the mackerel benchmark was 2024.

The PelAC raised the query whether a mechanism could be developed to incorporate data of urgent nature as it becomes available, without having to wait for a full benchmark in order to utilise it. ICES replied that it works on a best available science basis, thus any new science needs to undergo a thorough benchmark process and peer review, otherwise best available science nor quality assurance be ensured. ICES needs to respect internal guidelines and processes.

Reflections PelAC LTMS workshop

ICES offered elaborate reflections on the main elements that emerged from the PelAC workshop on LTMSs, extracted from the workshop report. ICES acknowledges its strong focus on numerical values when estimating risk, and the workshop showed some interesting examples that for e.g. use relative values, though to apply this would need further analysis. To some extent, it may be possible to make a LTMP more independent, and ICES has taken note of this.

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One other point raised at the workshop was the inconsistency in the terminology used when discussing LTMS, causing confusions. ICES agreed it was important to avoid misunderstandings and took note of this comment, as an item for a future ICES workshop on MSEs.

With regard to the life span of LTMS, ICES acknowledged that in many cases plans are not 'long-term'. But 'long-term' applies not just to the plan itself but also to the reference points. The MSY approach can be applied annually, while reference points for LTMS should apply several years.

As regards simplifying approaches following the examples from Iceland or ICCAT, ICES explained these approaches were very different from what ICES follows. ICES focusses on finding the best model that fits the data, to establish what is reality. This is the case for category 1 stocks. While short-cut approaches may use simpler HCRs, these can still have complex simulations behind them, so simplifying may not always be most efficient, and needs further exploration.

The PelAC thanked ICES for the comprehensive reply, and added that the rationale for raising this point at MIAC was that workshop had identified a number of key areas for future reflection. The PelAC is keen not to lose that momentum and to maintain the conversation with ICES. The PelAC asked how to take this forward so the conclusions can be followed-up on. ICES indicated it would reflect about a suitable way forward and get back to the PelAC.

Herring and sprat areas 6 and 7

The PelAC asked how can be ensured that the herring stocks in 6a North and 6a S 7bc can progress their transition to a category 2-1 assessment. ICES explained it has been looking into using herring in areas 6a 7bc in a full analytical assessment but there are issues with the model and the data, so while the stock was split, a category 3 assessment is still needed. Given the current scheduling and the manner through which benchmarks operate, ICES thought it was unlikely for a benchmark for this stock to take place for another 3 years.

The PelAC indicated that it was collaborating with a number of institutes involved in this stock, which were working on addressing the issues in the model and the data identified in the 2022 benchmark. The PelAC was pleased with the benchmark outcome that the stocks could be split, but was under the impression that if these issues were addressed a benchmark would still be needed to progress to another data category. ICES confirmed changes in model categories needs a benchmark.

For sprat, the workshop for developing a data roadmap for sprat was very successful, but only after HAWG 2023 there will be a clearer picture for what is needed for the analysis of this stock to progress.

Action points

- ICES to look at possibilities for better visible advice changes on ICES website
- Rebuilding plans: workshop in March 2023 will give more updates on the criteria for evaluation
- ICES to participate to 1 AC meeting per year to present ICES advice (PelAC: October)
- Benchmark for mackerel to take place in 2024
- ICES to reflect and discuss internally on a follow-up with PelAC on LTMP workshop and inform PelAC
- MIAC 2024 will be organised by the BSAC.

EXTERNAL MEETINGS

MIACO (12-01-2023 – 13-01-2023, COPENHAGEN)

The annual meeting between ICES, ACs and other observers was held on 12-13 January 2023 in Copenhagen. PelAC representatives in Copenhagen were Sean O'Donoghue and Anne-Marie Kats. Tim Heddema, Gonçalo Carvalho and Jérôme Jourdain attended the meeting online.

Review of 2022

In 2022, ICES produced 197 advices on fishing opportunities, with a large increase in MSY advice for data limited stocks, and new precautionary HCRs implemented for others. A number of MSEs were carried out, as well as an advice on impact of 0 TAC, seasonal re-opening and area flexibility and discarding. A lot of work on bycatch is to be expected soon. More work has been done on the impacts of fishing (VMEs, bottom trawling, bycatch), a new ecosystem overview has been applied to the Celtic and Greater North Seas, and an aquaculture overview for the Celtic Seas has been produced.

The key requesters of advice were the EU, Norway, Greenland, Iceland, Faroes, NEAFC, NASCO, OSPAR, UK and HELCOM. ICES highlighted some new developments in the advice process: such as a benchmark for methods on VMEs, the completion of the stakeholder engagement strategy and further implementation of ensemble approaches for stock assessments and forecasts. In terms of strengthening the science network, ICES formed an expert group on MPA and OECMs, performed an evaluation of the impacts of windfarms and did work on further operationalising EBFM.

In 2022, 42% of category 3 stocks were issued an MP or MSY advice, compared to 4% in 2021. In 2022, 21 stocks went through a benchmark and in 2023 there are plans to benchmark 33 stocks. In 2022 there have been 9 changes in published advice, related to either adjustments in model settings or changes to input data. There was one change in the basis of the advice. As a provider of advice on EBFM, ICES has held a number of presentations externally such as at the UN, the Convention on Biological Diversity, European Parliament (Pêche Committee), two ACs meetings and a training course for DG MARE.

Looking ahead at 2023, ICES expects to release a new version of online advice, to place further emphasis on quality assurance (through TAF and RDBES), make further progress on reference points, guidelines for rebuilding plans, multiannual fishing advice, spatial stock assessment and EBFM, to publish new guidelines for benchmarking of advice on fishing opportunities and ecosystem effects, as well as finalise the WLCLIMAD report that will influence the next generation of ICES advice on climate. The evaluation of impacts of wind farms will be further expanded in 2023. Finally, in 2023 ICES expects to pursue the sense-testing of stakeholder perceptions on fisheries and fish dynamics through a workshop. In response of a question from the PelAC if participation in the training for DG MARE on EBFM could be extended to ACs as participants, ICES responded that it was open to a discussion on this possibility.

Update on quality assurance

ICES moved on to present the progress on quality assurance processes, underlining ICES' clear commitment to the topic. The stalled progress during the covid-crisis is now regaining momentum. ICES' data center holds data from a large number of organisations, which ICES does not own but needs to make sure is appropriate in quality. Operational processes are being developed to address changes in the advice (input/model settings, but not for basis of the advice). A large benchmark programme is being developed as well as with new guidelines for benchmarks, in an attempt to resolve retrospective inconsistencies.

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WGQUALITY is working on a quality manual that documents the overall approach of quality managing advice. The scope is quality management system concerning production of advice - from data management, data integration, data analysis, & data use, to the process of translating that data into ICES advice. The manual is expected to be completed by end of 2023.

ICES has been accredited by Core Trust Seal. It plans to revive TAF in 2023 from core funding from the ICES Secretariat and to continue working with the network to increase support. It will finalise benchmark guidelines requiring the use of TAF. A full data call will be made, requiring all participating countries to provide all data types for NE Atlantic & Baltic Sea into the ICES Regional Database & Estimation System (RDBES). These can be used in the assessments and flows directly into TAF. The system will run live and in parallel with existing systems in 2023.

The PelAC praised ICES for this progress in relation to QA, underlining the fundamental importance of QA in the work of ICES. The PelAC queried whether the robustness of the overall system was also being looked at by a competent entity. The PelAC also asked for the reason why ICES is not able to indicate whether a stock has gone through the TAF system in the ICES advice. ICES replied that this was a matter for ACOM to decide on and that there were some reservations within the ACOM leadership, disagreeing with such an indication as ICES operates under the best available science principle, which is considered state of the art. ICES took the point onboard for the ACOM agenda.

Furthermore, ICES has worked on the development of the data profiling tool, which is applicable to the data acquisition phase. The tool addresses the issue that ICES uses data that is not part of the ICES data management system. Some of these data are used in ICES advice products which can come from a wide range of potential sources (biology, economy etc) which is why the profiling tool took a long time to develop.

Through the data profiling tool, ICES hopes to improve the consistency and traceability for data input from external sources. The tool provides evidence on how data has been collected, transformed, and transmitted. It is a checklist feeding scientific or advice outputs through ICES expert groups, aiming to document and evaluate data flow and use the evaluation to assess completeness of the data flow and document ICES efforts to quality assure all aspects of its advice production. Submissions will be routinely reviewed and evaluated. The tool will be continuously improved as new data sets and services are registered.

Advice on conservation aspects

ICES advice on conservation aspects emerged from the need for evidence to inform the advice with conservation elements. ICES explained it only provides advice on conservation aspects where clear, demonstrable management action can be recommended for any non-catch anthropogenic pressure. It can also be used to highlight clear demonstrable sensitivity to climate change. Discussions within ACOM led to decision to develop advice on conservation aspects, where ICES makes it clear to managers that this advice is still in very early stages in the advice process, and that the process is iterative. The advice on eel was a first example and was found useful, though ICES is mindful advice can result in unforeseen consequences for management.

EXTERNAL MEETINGS

ICES stakeholder engagement strategy

Stakeholder engagement is captured in the most recent ICES strategic and advisory plans. To formalise stakeholder engagement, mission and goals need to be better defined, as well as who holds a stake. ICES defines stakeholders as those who affect or are affected by a decision, process or action of ICES (including scientists and knowledge providers).

The goals of engagement are to ensure input from various communities of knowledge; to engage stakeholders and advice requesters to develop and deliver current/future advice products for changing priorities of managing marine activities; to increase legitimacy, ownership and accountability for creation of knowledge and to facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration when addressing operational, tactical and strategic challenges, thus enhancing innovation and social learning.

Principles of stakeholder engagement must ensure consistency with the impartiality of ICES. Years ago, it was thought any engagement with stakeholders corrupts the credibility of ICES.

ICES explained that the strategy differentiates the roles of stakeholders by engagement: either a formal role or more flexible role depending on the type of engagement (i.e. in an ICES expert group, Advice Drafting Group, workshop ... etc) where both stakeholders and ICES scientists need to abide by the duties and responsibilities set out in the engagement strategy, such as setting a clear rationale for stakeholder engagement before the process is initiated. In 2023 ICES will resume the work in implementing the strategy.

The PelAC asked if stakeholders can be engaged during the implementation phase of the plan. ICES explained that the drafting of the strategy took place in a closed process limited to academics, but that the implementation process was expected to be more open. ICES indicated a new workshop was underway in 2023.

ICES Subgroup stakeholder information

Following up on an action from the MIACO 2021 meeting, ICES organised a subgroup meeting with interested MIACO participants in November 2022 to kick off the discussion on the incorporation of stakeholder perceptions and fish dynamics into ICES advice.

Through breakout discussions, the subgroup explored what kind of information from stakeholders could be collected, how it can be monitored and how it could be considered. The subgroup concluded with the proposal to organise a workshop that would progress the discussion on such sense-testing mechanisms in more detail, such as by following the example of the North Sea survey. Steve Mackinson from the SPFF has volunteered to Chair the workshop which will be held sometime in 2023.

The PelAC raised the importance of distinguishing between ongoing work at ICES involving the uptake of data from the fishing industry, and the inclusion of stakeholder perceptions into ICES advice. These are two separate issues where the former seeks to complement the stock assessment process with fisheries data, while the latter looks to maintain the possibility to include stakeholder views in ICES advice sheets. The PelAC re-emphasised the need for ICES to reconsider reinstating this paragraph in advice documents as was common practice before its removal in 2020, and asked whether this was a possible outcome of the process.

EXTERNAL MEETINGS

ICES replied that this process must first finish before it can reconsider reinstating the paragraph, but it took a note to raise the matter with ACOM to discuss the possibility as a potential outcome of the process. This could mean having to provide additional preambles to clarify the workshop is a road to positively bring the sense testing into the ICES advice system.

Updates on reference points and guidelines for rebuilding plans

ICES briefly went over the progress in relation to the work on reference points and developing guidelines for the evaluation of rebuilding plans.

On reference points, ICES organised two workshops in November 2021 and January 2022 that compared the ICES procedures for estimating reference points to other methods used worldwide. Key differences identified between the ICES approach and others is that ICES does not use target biomass reference points, it has a range of methods to estimate the limit biomass reference point Blim and often uses direct estimates of FMSY, whereas elsewhere FMSY is often replaced by more conservative biological proxies. Key recommendations from the workshop were to explore a simplification for how Blim is derived, that FP05 should be calculated without Btrigger, to include a biomass target (Btrg) in the reference point framework that corresponds to the FMSY, and that ICES guidelines include the possibility to use an Feco approach to adjust F based on ecosystem model information. Finally, the workshop proposed a framework for reference points which will be tested in the first half of 2023. A third workshop is planned for mid 2023.

On rebuilding plans, a workshop took place in January 2020 that attempted to define criteria to evaluate rebuilding plans (WKREBUILD). Rebuilding strategies are needed when SSB is found below Blim. During this workshop, rebuilding plan methods worldwide were reviewed and guidelines to define and evaluate rebuilding strategies were proposed.

In the current framework, non-zero catch is advised as long as the probability of recovering the SSB above Blim is higher than 50% at the end of the advice year. Unless the conditions in the field are more favorable than those in the forecast, this threshold does not promote recovery above Blim. Occasionally, below Btrigger the current advice rule generates a catch advice that produces a decrease in biomass at the end of the advice year. A second workshop will take place in March 2023 which will explore how rebuilding plan elements could be included into the ICES advice rule. The advice rules will be tested in several test cases using a simulation tool specifically developed for this purpose.

The PelAC asked to what extent the results of the workshop in March will impact ICES advice coming out in June 2023. ICES explained the aim was to supply expert groups with results of both workshops as much as possible, but that this may not be feasible for all. ICES confirmed a third WKREF workshop was planned for after the summer in 2023, where guidelines for the application of Feco will be discussed. DG Mare asked if there would be a chance to discuss any changes in the estimation of reference points before they are implemented. ICES confirmed that a subgroup of MIRIA will meet to discuss the results.

Renewable energy opportunities and challenges

MIACO engaged in an interactive exercise with ICES on the challenges and opportunities of renewable energy developments. The outcomes will feed into a recently launched process initiated with Chairs of the groups on renewable energy. A small internal workshop will be held in March 2023 to develop a roadmap for further activities, such as workshops with stakeholders and managers.

EXTERNAL MEETINGS

Benchmarks and reviews

ICES is currently developing guidelines for benchmark meetings which are expected to be implemented in benchmark processes in 2024. The guidelines aim to provide clarity in the benchmark process and to be applicable in all form of recurrent advice, giving expert groups more flexibility and responsibility.

The guidelines distinguish between 3 types of processes: expert group, review and full benchmarks. Small, single issues of technical nature can be dealt with directly in the expert group. This process can be completed within a year and includes examples such as fixing small data points. The review process looks at some larger issues within the expert group that require external peer review. The expert group will be the main body responsible for the review process, which would take about a year to complete. A full benchmark process requires oversight governance from the Benchmark Oversight Group (BOG) and is reviewed by ACOM. This process is external to the expert group and requires a full review of the method, data and underlying assumptions. Generally, such processes take more than a year to complete. The proposed guidelines communicate a list of benchmarks to advice requesters and stakeholders, including a list of issues to be considered. At conclusion of the benchmark process, the new methods are communicated.

The PelAC welcomed the proposed new guidelines and asked on what basis ICES decides whether a review or a full benchmark should take place. In addition, the PelAC raised the footnote included in the EU-UK agreement concluding on the need for a benchmark on Western horse mackerel in 2023, and asked if this has been communicated to ICES. ICES replied that the decision for the type of process is still a grey area but can be compared to how either benchmarks or inter-benchmarks are currently decided. The expert groups have a responsibility to make ACOM aware of a need for review. When it is obvious an issue requires a full benchmark, this will be decided by ACOM. On Western horse mackerel, ICES clarified that it does not take requests for benchmarks, but benchmarks arise based on scientific needs from the expert groups. WGWISE has proposed a benchmark for Western horse mackerel so it is on the list for 2023, but ICES is still deciding on it based on the resources available.

Benchmark prioritisation scheme

ICES has worked on a scheme that will help determine prioritisation for benchmark meetings where factors such as assessment quality and opportunity to improve come into play: if an assessment is in poor shape and inadequate to provide advice, it will score high on the scheme. If the assessment is in poor shape but there is nothing available to improve it, it will receive a lower score. Attributes related to the importance for management, the stock status and how long it has been since the previous benchmark also have weight in the scoring for benchmark.

NWW MEMBER STATE GROUP (03-02-2023, ONLINE)

Sean O Donoghue attended the virtual NWW MS Technical Group meeting on the 3rd February.

The Irish Chair covered the items the Technical Group had dealt with in their morning session particularly the discards plan. They indicated that the Commission was planning a full review of the exemptions this year and that they should have a draft discards plan available in mid-April which will be sent to the ACs. The 1st May is set as the deadline for submission to the Commission.

EXTERNAL MEETINGS

Sean O'Donoghue brought up a number of PelAC issues such as by-catch quota for western horse mackerel, the consultation on Multi Annual Plan and the involvement of the NWWMS Group on ORE developments in light of the Joint NWWAC/PelAC on the 19th January. These issues had not been considered yet by the MS Group.

Sean O'Donoghue also outlined a number of issues in the PelAC annual work programme that should be of interest to NWWMS Group such as the ICES zero catch advice for horse mackerel, the boarfish closure, energy transition, the ecosystem approach to fisheries management and ORE developments. The Chair noted these issues for future consideration by the NWWMS group.

Sean O'Donoghue mentioned two upcoming PelAC workshops on 1. Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management and 2. Energy Transition in Pelagic Fisheries and agreed to circulate the details to the Chair for distribution to the NWWMS Group members.

SCHEVENINGEN GROUP (20-02-2023, ONLINE)

Esben Sverdrup-Jensen and Anne-Marie Kats attended the Technical Group meeting of the Scheveningen Group on 20 February 2023.

The Scheveningen Group updated the ACs on their plans to review all the current exemptions in the North Sea discard plan this year, and welcomed any feedback from ACs on the utilization of exemptions as well as scientific justifications regarding selectivity, and evidence of disproportionate costs associated with the handling of discards. The group did not go into details on the exemptions yet, but indicated this information would be gathered to justify the continuation of existing exemptions.

Further to this, the Scheveningen Group was working on a formal response to the targeted consultation by the Commission on the Multiannual plan for the North Sea.

The Scheveningen Group also indicated it was comparing the different approaches being taken at national level by different MS on the implementation of the bycatch quota for Western horse mackerel, but could not go into specifics at this stage. The PelAC welcomed the fact that this discussion was taking place and emphasized the importance on receiving clear guidelines from the Commission on this, to ensure a level playing across Member States.

The Scheveningen Group indicated it would circulate a draft JR for a revised discard plan to the ACs sometime in March.

INTER-AC BREXIT FORUM (24-02-2023, ONLINE)

The meeting on 24 February 2023 was online and facilitated by the NSAC.

The following meeting scheduled for 20 March (facilitated by the MAC) was postponed due to lack of progress discussions at SCF. The meeting is set to be rescheduled closer to WG meeting in April.

EXTERNAL MEETINGS

Key topics of focus for 2023 WG and SCF meetings:

- ICES advice turbot, brill, lemon sole and witch; skates & rays
- Scoping of review of the footnotes
- Advance discussions Celtic Sea technical measures
- Notification procedures
- Guidelines special stocks
- Non-quota species
- Control, enforcement and data sharing issues

SWW MEMBER STATE GROUP (01-03-2023, ONLINE)

Gonçalo Carvalho attended the virtual SWW MS Technical Group meeting on the 1st March.

All the current di minimis are up for renewal, including the bycatch of small pelagics in demersal fisheries. No deletions and no additions have been made by the Member States so far (meaning they will go for the exact ones that are currently in place).

As was the case for other HLGs, the request this year goes into additional detail, and the message from the Commission has been that they will be more demanding on the justifications to keep each of the di minimis.

The SWW Group will share the draft JR with the ACs so we can see what they are preparing. PelAC members are welcome to point towards additional justifications and details to co-substantiate the exemptions.

INTER-AC MEETING WITH COMMISSION (09-03-2023, BRUSSELS)

PelAC representatives: Anne-Marie Kats; Goncalo Carvalho (remote)

The first in-person Inter-AC meeting in over 3 years covered the MARE work programme, a presentation of the CFP Package by the Director-General, the Mission Ocean programme and the court of auditors report on IUU fishing.

Presentation MARE work programme

The MARE work programme has a strong emphasis on the blue economy, including aquaculture, with new sectors emerging such as renewable energy, bio blue economy and biotechnology that all make use of marine resources. The Commission has shifted their approach from addressing and accommodating blue growth, to striving to reach a sustainable blue economy. These sectors need to produce income and jobs, and offer perspective for future generations in these sectors. A key guiding principle in the sustainable blue economy is the need to take an inclusive approach, that includes fisheries and aquaculture as well.

DG MARE is working on enablers on many fronts, such meeting climate neutrality targets through offshore renewable energy. But also emphasis will be put on marine plastics and recycling gear. The Commission underlined the need to take into account biodiversity, which is being addressed through the marine Action Plan. Climate related aspects will be looked at as well as aquaculture, feed and seaweed farming.

Seafood plays a key role in food security, so there is also work in this context through Farm to Fork, where the Commission strives to improve the information to consumers, and looking into sustainability aspects of seafood labelling.

EXTERNAL MEETINGS

In the context of the blue economy, DG MARE is taking initiative, developing rules and guidance but noted that in some areas the lead lies with other DGs, such as DG Research, Environment or Innovation. These DGs work together to ensure a coherent approach in maritime aspects in other policies. Oceans are transversal with cross cutting issues between different sectors. The Commission acknowledges the need to not only work sector by sector but also transversely.

In this regard the Commission identified 4 key enablers:

- Knowledge supply
- Research
- Financing
- Skills to transform the sectors, and making them attractive to youth

The Commission is working on a proposal for an ocean observation to provide data, and contribute to more cooperation among ocean observers in the Union. The Commission will also perform an analysis of the socio-economic aspects, with an annual publication which will give a snapshot of activities in the Union, provide the best available reliable data and show trends.

Finally, decarbonisation efforts will form a new key component of MARE's work programme, which will bring important opportunities for research through the Restore Our Oceans initiative, which aims to address the challenges with respect to decarbonisation in our oceans and approaches it in a comprehensive and inclusive manner.

The Blue Invest programme is an important enabler to finance investment, this is the first programme focussing on financing the blue economy sector. It aims to support SMEs and inform investors on opportunities in the blue economy.

Finally, the Commission highlighted that decarbonisation in the fisheries sector will be a specific topic in the Commission blue economy report.

Presentation CFP Package by DG Charlina Vitcheva

Charlina Vitcheva welcomed the ACs and underlined their importance for the Commission. They are essential vehicles for transmitting relevant expertise and points of view to the Commission services, knowledge that is crucial for policy makers. The Inter-AC is an important forum to exchange on common challenges. These discussions are important for the Commission's future work, and the ACs are instrumental in advising the path the Commission should follow. They hold a key place in the regionalisation process.

She noted the Commission would repeat events in its annual cycle such as ensuring exchanges with ACs in important moments such as before December Council. The Commission makes systematic reference to the ACs: the staff working document on the CFP communication dedicates an entire section to the ACs. The Commission also offers the possibility for ACs to present a key advice to DG MARE staff, to establish a stronger link between the Commission staff and the ACs. The first session was held with the NSAC on its decarbonisation advice and it was found to be a stimulating exercise which will be continued.

The CFP Package has recently been presented to the EP and will soon be presented to the Council of ministers. The package is composed of 4 pillars: a communication on energy transition, an action plan for marine resources, a plan on the functioning of the CFP, and a communication on the CMO. The Commission voiced appreciation for the contributions received to the energy transition consultation.

EXTERNAL MEETINGS

CFP communication

The CFP communication consists legally binding documents, developed because the Commission was bound to undertake a stock taking exercise 10 years after the reform of the CFP was adopted. This exercise aimed to look into how the reform functions, whether it has delivered on what it has set out and to identify what could be improved. The Commission tried to analyse what has been achieved and saw that progress was tangible. The reform has made a huge leap towards more sustainable fisheries and thanked all the stakeholders that have contributed to this outcome. In 2013, only 5 stocks were harvested sustainably, now there are more than 60, and progress still continues. The commitment in the CFP to achieve MSY has been key to deliver this. Fleet resilience was another important tangible improvement: analysis shows the link between sustainable stocks and profitability of the sector. Overall, the fleet has increased in resilience and stayed profitable, despite issues such as the covid crisis. The legal framework also provided the tools to deal with crisis situations. The EMFF was amended quickly which allowed the Commission to take the needed measures.

On the basis of this analysis and input to the consultation, the Commission concludes that the CFP provides a framework that is fit for purpose, and there is not need for an immediate reform. However, there are still areas that can be improved further.

The landing obligation came into full force in 2019, but has not yet been fully implemented on the ground. The implementation will become a key focus. The Commission encourages all efforts to improve selectivity and thanks stakeholders for the progress made so far. More progress is yet to be made, and key to this is data. The Commission invites stakeholders to provide all data they have, as this is relevant help assess the impact and give insights on a better implementation.

There are a number of challenges to address at the level of fishing, processing and aquaculture, such as generational renewal and assessing attractiveness for future generations. The stock taking exercise was set up on the basis of consultation with stakeholders, through a consultation and the stakeholder meeting in June 2022. The Commission wants to start a higher level of debate on the future of this sector, through a bottom up approach.

The Commission identified 3 elements to devote more attention to: the social dimension, the ecosystem-based approach and climate change. On the social dimension, the Commission will look into social indicators and assessing the long term economic sustainability of measures taken. On EAFM, the Commission acknowledges the need to go beyond the focus it has long had on single stock approaches, and the growing need to take into account other ecosystem dynamics, such as climate or food web interactions.

With regard to governance, the Commission has had to defend the regional approach, because at the same time there is a need to be more coherent. Similarly in the allocation of fishing opportunities there is a need for more transparency. The Commission is committed to develop a guidance on good practices on transparency.

As regards biodiversity, climate change impacts are becoming visible through changing fishing patterns. Enormous challenges lie ahead, that need to be tackled with a higher level of cooperation. That is the reason for developing the Fisheries and Ocean Pact, where the Commission proposes to further reflect on specific elements of the CFP, the future of the sector, the landing obligation, generational renewable, funding, fleet capacity.

The CFP staff working document contains much more details on the CFP communication.

EXTERNAL MEETINGS

Action plan to conserve marine resources

The Action Plan is the environmental pillar of CFP package, containing key chapters on bycatch of sensitive species and seabed habitats. If the seabed is not nurtured, the real issues are not tackled as fish need healthy ecosystems to survive. The action plan covers the use of more selective gear, to catch only what you want to target, where innovation is key. Another important focus of the AP is the designation of marine protected areas by 2030 and to address the knowledge gaps that exist in this regard. Scientific advice and advice from the ACs will be needed and will contribute to the Commission's assessment of the appropriateness of measures taken.

There was a comprehensive stakeholder consultation in 2022, which was a solid mapping exercise. The AP sets out obligations for Member States as well. It sets thresholds for maximum level of mortality of sensitive species, following a gradual approach starting with the harbour porpoise in the Baltic/Black Sea. To ensure a level playing field, the AP sets out that by March 2024 Member States should designate at least 20% of their waters as protected areas, and 30% by 2030. The AP contains actions to ensure this transition, where accompanying measures are an important component.

Vitcheva encouraged the use of the regional development funds, she noted innovation funds were enormous and extend further than EMFAF. Knowledge and innovation should be at the forefront.

Energy transition in fisheries and aquaculture sector

This pillar was considered so important that it was upgraded to a communication. It is considered essential to tackle decarbonisation, especially in the context of profitability and resilience. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has accelerated the need to make this transition happen, as there is an urgent need to reduce energy dependency. This also applies to aquaculture. If carbon footprint is reduced, it will increase credibility of the end product, and profitability by extension. There is a need to switch to carbon free ways of powering engines, where smart solutions must be developed some of which already exist. Alternative fuels from renewable sources will help the sector achieve carbon neutrality and a more profitable sector. The communication sets a wider vision for the vessel of the future, and the Commission has the funding for this.

On the one hand there is a need for innovation and technologies, but on the other hand there are barriers. The Commission wants to be exhaustive in understanding and knowing all the barriers, as well as the knowledge gaps and the needed skills to develop these innovations. A stakeholder platform on energy transition, bringing together stakeholders to share visions of a carbon neutral sector. The knowledge gaps need to be further developed and disseminated, regional cooperation must be strengthened, accessible financial opportunities must be made available. The Commission will produce guidance for funding. The EMFAF cannot finance the whole transition, so more financial instruments will need to be used. The targets set out in the energy transition document are not binding, but the Commission looks forward to engaging with the ACs on energy transition, to see what can be achieved.

Presentation EU Mission to Restore our Oceans

A presentation was held on the Mission to Restore our Oceans programme. At the heart of the EU Green Deal and the UN Sustainable Development goals, this mission that tries to address the health of the oceans and fresh waters and aiming to reach societal objectives by 2030. The mission rests on three pillars: protect and restore freshwater and marine ecosystems, reduce marine and freshwater pollution and making the blue economy circular and carbon neutral.

Under the first pillar, the objectives are to protect at least 30% of the EU's seas and protect 10% strictly. The programme aims to restore 25.000 km of free flowing rivers and sets marine nature restoration targets (incl. degraded seabeds and coastal ecosystems).

EXTERNAL MEETINGS

Under the second pillar the programme aims to reduce plastic litter by at least 50%, reduce microplastics by at least 30%, reduce nutrient losses by at least 50% and chemical pesticides.

In the context of the blue economy and climate neutrality, the ocean aims to achieve net zero maritime emissions, work towards zero carbon aquaculture and low-carbon multipurpose use of the marine space.

Mission Oceans has a strong regional dimension through four 'lighthouses', which are pilot sites to demonstrate, develop and deploy Mission activities across EU seas and river basins. These lighthouses include the Baltic & North Sea basins, the Mediterranean, the Danube river, the Atlantic & the Arctic coast.

In terms of key features of the Mission Ocean programme, it follows the impact-driven logic of Horizon Europe and European Missions:

It supports major EU policy objectives: EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, EU Action Plan toward Zero pollution, the Communication on a Sustainable Blue Economy, The Nature restoration Law.

Innovation Actions and the main implementation modality go beyond the R&I constituency. They demonstrate the technical, economic and/or societal viability of innovative solutions in a (near to) operational environment (validation, testing, demonstration, prototyping, piloting, and market replication activities).

At least 5 'associated regions' are involved to show case the feasibility, replicability and scale-up of innovative solutions.

The Mission goes back to research agenda, but it wants to involve different types of people, end users, citizens, authorities as well as stakeholders. AC advice is valued by policy makers. They can benefit from the research and innovation to address specific challenges.

Different calls on several topics have been launched. The project on the Blue economy in the Baltic sea has a focus on MPAs. The only requirement is that 3 MS or associate countries from the basins take part in the project, to ensure change does not only happen at the local level.

Missions Oceans is bigger than a research programme, it's a mega project and needs to end in action.

In order to align interests of stakeholders, a mission charter has been launched to establish joined commitment. It is accessible online. 300 submissions have been received, which are regularly looked at.

How can stakeholders contribute?

- Show political engagement and convergence of efforts by adhering to the Mission Charter and/or promote submissions.
- Share your views on needs and challenges the Mission can contribute to
- Support participation of fisheries and maritime stakeholders in Mission calls, projects and activities
- Promote the involvement of "associated regions" in Mission projects
- Exchange with the Mission Board members: the Mission Advisory body
- Join our Mission events. The next one in Bucharest for the launch of the Danube and Black Sea basin lighthouse, on 3-4 April 2023.

EXTERNAL MEETINGS

Presentation IUU report and sanctions

The European Court of auditors report on EU action to combat illegal fishing recently concluded that control systems are in place, but are weakened by uneven checks and sanctions by Member States. The report has recently been released and was now being presented by DG MARE. The Commission noted that the Council did not agree and did not proceed on any conclusions because of the internal procedures. The Commission presented the main elements of the report.

The scope consisted of the effectiveness of control systems for preventing the import of fishery products stemming from IUU fishing, and the effectiveness of Member States' control systems for checking national fleets and waters.

The main issue identified by the Court was an uneven implementation at MS level of EU fisheries control rules, in terms of checks and modifications. The Court of auditors looked at control systems of MS from a financial perspective: First to see whether resources from the EMFAF was used for control purposes, then to check on the efficiency of the oversight by the European Commission and lastly looked at the sanctioning systems by MS.

The court made some positive findings. A fair share of funds were used for control purposes (for technology, covering operational costs etc) but findings were less positive on the sanctioning systems: The Court found that the criteria for determining serious infringements, were applied unevenly between MS. Also, the penalty systems were not applied in an even way between MS and sanctions imposed were not large enough to tackle IUU. This conclusion was based on findings from a study sponsored 3 years ago. More specifically, the study found that infringements led to investigations, in turn to sanctions in a short period of time but the study found serious infringements were determined based on very different national criteria. Essentially, the Court concluded there was a lack of level-playing field how MS sanction the IUU rules as well as a lack of deterrent effect of the different sanctions imposed.

The Court made the following key recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Monitor that Member States reinforce their control systems to prevent the import of fishery products stemming from IUU fishing.

(a) pursue the digitalisation of the catch certification scheme and develop automated checks and risk alerts to support control activities

(b) work with Member States towards the uniform use of risk identification criteria and monitor whether checks and verifications by Member States focus on the risks identified

(c) monitor that the scope and quality of checks applied by Member States are sufficient to address the risks, and take necessary action to remedy any shortcomings.

Recommendation 2: Member States to apply dissuasive sanctions against illegal fishing

(a) checking that Member States apply sanctions for serious infringements

(b) checking that the value of the sanction applied by Member States is no less than the economic benefit derived from the infringement and is dissuasive enough to prevent repeat infringements

(c) checking that Member States to apply dissuasive sanctions against illegal fishing (Target implementation date 2024)

(d) take necessary action to remedy any shortcomings (Target implementation date 2026)

EXTERNAL MEETINGS

SCHEVENINGEN MEMBER STATE GROUP (23-03-2023, COPENHAGEN/HYBRID)

The PELAC was represented by Esben Sverdrup-Jensen. The Danish presidency gave a short summing up of the work at the meeting and gave the floor to the ACs for comments.

Discard plan 2023

State of play: Proposal on a joint recommendation to the current discard plan.

The ACs took note of the information and stated that a general provision regarding an exemption from the landing obligation when doing research experimental fishing was needed.

New discard plan 2024

The Scheveningen group was still awaiting the STECF terms of reference for the evaluation of the discard plan. However, the Scheveningen group had all on the other hand been busy gathering new and updated data relevant for the evaluation. STECF had specifically made it clear that there was no reason to repeat old data.

France was working on a possible new exemption for spurdog to be part of the plan 2024.

STECF had expressed that they would like to see a more simplified text in general, among other things not repeating already existing text in the technical measures.

Draft of Joint Recommendation for the Discard Plan will be ready around 1st of April and will be sent to the ACs for advice. Expected 2 weeks time for hearing. The Discard Plan is to be sent to the Commission May 1st.

It could be an option to have an open-ended discard plan, but there is also a wish for a period review, so otherwise the discard plan will be for 3 years.

ACs welcomed the information and would do what was possible to deliver a timely advice.

Implementing acts of the technical measures regulations

There was no news on Commission work on delegating acts.

The work on recommendation regarding the squid mesh sizes is ongoing – awaiting information from the NWW.

CFP evaluation (fisheries package)

The Group took note that the present Swedish EU presidency would be aiming at making Council Conclusions at the end of the presidency on the fisheries package that the Commission just published and therefore the Scheveningen Group would not make any specific work on the package on their own.

UK unilateral measures

The Scheveningen Group would like to see the Commission to take much more charge regarding public hearings in the UK, like on MPAs and technical measures.

The Scheveningen Group would like to write this to the Commission, together with Member States from the SWW as it was not possible to agree with the Member States from the NWW on such a letter.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

ICES STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOP (16 – 18 MAY 2023, COPENHAGEN)

Please be informed that ICES will organise a workshop on the Implementation of the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy (WKSTIMP) on 16-18 May in Copenhagen. For more information please click here: <https://www.ices.dk/community/groups/Pages/WKSTIMP.aspx>.

If interested, please inform the PelAC Secretariat.

DG MARE EVENT ON THE EU TRANSITION OF EU FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE SECTOR (16 JUNE 2023, BRUSSELS)

The Commission is pleased to announce that the event for the launch of the partnership on the Energy Transition in the EU fisheries and aquaculture sector will take place in Brussels on the 16 of June 2023.

With this event they will kick-off the process for a roadmap on the energy transition of the sector together with all the stakeholders.

More information will be available shortly, including the detailed programme.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

6 JULY 2023

WORKING GROUP I & II

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

Please note that it is obligatory to register online. A registration link will be shared by email and on our [website](#), closer to the meeting date.

7 JULY 2023

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING:

This meeting will be held in-person at the meeting venue: Grand-Hotel Karel V in Utrecht with interpretation in French and Spanish.

Please note that it is obligatory to register online. A registration link will be shared by email and on our [website](#), closer to the meeting date.

3 & 4 OCTOBER 2023

WORKING GROUP I & II, GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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

Please note that it is obligatory to register online. A registration link will be shared by email and on our [website](#), closer to the meetings date.

For more information please visit our website:

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

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