



# PELAGIC ADVISORY COUNCIL

**Newsletter 3 / 2023**

September – December 2023

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# PELAC MEETINGS

## ECOSYSTEM FOCUS GROUP (14 SEPTEMBER 2023, ONLINE)

The PelAC Secretariat and EFG Chair developed two detailed proposals for draft advice documents for the consideration of the Ecosystem Focus Group: the first on the implementation of the ecosystem-approach to pelagic fisheries management, the second on the energy transition of the pelagic sector. Both draft advices were developed following a set of workshops on both topics held over the course of 2023, which generated material for further reflection on the PelAC's positions. Due to other priorities and lack of time, it was not possible to hold separate EFGs in between workshops, so it was decided to advance on the drafts offline for presentation to the EFG during a single meeting to ensure efficiency and timely adoption before the PelAC October meetings.

Both drafts were circulated to the EFG members ahead of the Focus Group and the primary aim of the meeting was to go through the documents in detail, and resolve any points of non-consensus. The EFG aimed to finalise the advice documents in the following weeks for approval at the October 2023 PelAC meetings.

The draft advices were in detailed shape, so the discussion focused around formulation, tweaks in the text and seeking compromises between industry and NGO members on contentious themes. Examples included the capacity framework of the CFP and the obstacle it poses to developing vessels with engines running on renewables, generally requiring more space onboard. There was also discussion around the uptake of genetic research in the advice on the ecosystem approach, forming an important prerequisite before undertaking further work on developing Feco ranges for certain pelagic species.

Following the EFG meeting, the EFG members finalised the revised drafts through written procedure, in time for timely submission to the Executive Committee for review and adoption at the PelAC meetings on 3-4 October 2024.

Please find both advices here:

[PelAC recommendation on the ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management](#)

[PelAC recommendation on the energy transition in pelagic fisheries](#)

## WORKING GROUP I (3 OCTOBER 2023, UTRECHT - NETHERLANDS)

The Working Group I meeting on 3 October provided an opportunity to review the latest ICES advice for 2024 on WGI stocks, including blue whiting, Atlanto-Scandian Herring (ASH), boarfish and herring in the North, Irish and Celtic Seas. Dorleta Garcia from ICES presented the advice. The PelAC raised a request for Garcia to return at a future meeting to present a detailed overview of the different Category stock assessments methods as well as lim-based fishing pressure assessment methods to enhance Members understanding of the advice given. The draft PelAC recommendations for these stocks were met with agreement, with only minor revisions to the language of the advice.

Thomas Bregeon from the European Commission presented an update on the bilateral, trilateral and coastal states consultations. He highlighted that several challenges remain across these consultations but reiterated the Commission aims to secure an agreement with the UK and Norway which is fair and equitable for all. Regarding the Coastal States consultations he highlighted that three consultations are being undertaken at the same time for blue whiting, ASH and mackerel, which were often complex discussions.

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Gonçalo Carvalho presented an update from the Ecosystem Focus Group which focused on approval of PelAC advice for the Ecosystem-based Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) and Energy Transition in pelagic fisheries. Minor amendments were made concerning the language of the advice and were moved for approval at the Executive Committee.

Carvalho also provided an update on joint working on Spatial Dimension (particularly seismic and offshore wind farms) between the PelAC and the NWWAC. The Terms of Reference were adopted in July and a call for interest in participation has been circulated to the two AC members. A first meeting is foreseen in December 2024, followed by a joint Horizontal Focus Group in March 2024.

Carvalho went on to propose the creation of an Ecosystem Working Group from the Focus Group to reflect the scale of work undertaken. The PelAC discussed the potential increase in time requirements if this is approved, including additional meetings. It was suggested that the three Working Group meetings could still take place in one day as WGI and WGII currently are. The full proposal was circulated and moved for approval at the GA.

Once available the full report will be published on the PelAC website [\[link\]](#).

### WORKING GROUP II (3 OCTOBER 2023, UTRECHT - NETHERLANDS)

The Working Group II meeting on 3 October provided an opportunity to review the latest ICES advice for 2024 on WGII stocks, namely Northeast Atlantic mackerel, Western horse mackerel and North Sea horse mackerel. Dorleta Garcia from ICES presented the advice. For Northeast Atlantic mackerel, the 2024 ICES advice represents a 5% decrease in the catch advice compared to last year. The PelAC reiterated its concern given the consistent levels of overfishing facing Northeast Atlantic mackerel by Coastal States. For Western horse mackerel, ICES recommends that catches in 2024 should be zero. With zero catch, a 5% increase in Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB) is projected. For North Sea horse mackerel, the 2024 advice represents an 8.5% increase in the advice compared to 2023. Subsequently, the draft PelAC recommendations for these stocks were met with agreement, with only minor revisions to the language of the advice.

Aril Slotte from the Institute of Marine Research presented Northeast Atlantic mackerel research areas of relevance for advisors, policy makers and managers. He provided an in-depth insight into fish stock representation, and sources of uncertainty and bias in assessing, harvesting and managing a dynamic, migratory stock such as Northeast Atlantic mackerel.

Following a review of outcomes from the WKAFPA workshop, which stands for 'Workshop on Accounting for Fishers and other stakeholders' Perceptions of the dynamics of fish stocks in ICES Advice', WGII agreed to circulate a survey to fishermen through member organisations to evidence anecdotal stakeholder information that could serve to 'sense check' ICES advice.

Ed Farrell shared an update on horse mackerel genetics research, which takes a 'whole genome sequencing' approach, involving large-scale genotyping to assess the horse mackerel samples. The research has helped to unearth new insights on Southern, North Sea and Western horse mackerel stocks regarding their genetic make-up and origins.

Updates on the Landing Obligation and Control Regulation were also shared, including an update on the PelAC's request for the release of an evaluation report on the implementation of the Landing Obligation

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in pelagic fisheries authored by the Control Agency, as well as information regarding UK consultations on Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) in English waters.

Once available the full report will be published on the PelAC website [\[link\]](#).

### GENERAL ASSEMBLY (4 OCTOBER 2023, UTRECHT - NETHERLANDS)

Highlights from the PelAC's annual General Assembly meeting on 4 October included an overview of the final technical report of the year 2022-23. The PelAC successfully fulfilled all predicted recommendations and meetings and submitted a further six additional recommendations. The PelAC demonstrated strong levels of collaboration with other partners over the year, especially the scientific community and ICES through research projects and workshops. Collaboration with the Commission, Member State Groups and other ACs (particularly the NWWAC and SWWAC) also improved.

A review of the PelAC's finances for 2022-23 demonstrated an overall deficit. This was due to several factors namely elevated operational costs of audiovisual technology, contracting costs of essential services such as interpretation, and staff costs. Fortunately, it was possible to alleviate the deficit by drawing from the PelAC's reserve fund. Furthermore, the Commission has provisionally approved the PelAC's 2023-24 budget and confirmed that it will rise to meet the higher realised costs.

The PelAC welcomed two new members to the Other Interest Group (OIG) category – Aquatic Life Institute (ALI Fish) and Stichting Vissenbescherming. Both organisations are working to improve animal welfare in capture fisheries and are keen to engage with members of the Fishing Sector to lead the conversation in this area.

The elections of the Executive Committee members 2023-26 was a continuation of the status quo and the new candidacy was adopted. A proposal was approved in relation to the introduction of a 'rotating seat' procedure for the nomination of ExCom members from the same country, and an increase to PelAC member reimbursement rates was granted.

In a historical moment for the PelAC, a new Ecosystem Working Group was approved. This group will work on recurring environmental themes and feature updates from relevant projects and reports on the work streams of the Ecosystem FG and joint NWWAC FG on Spatial Dimension. It will be held in conjunction with other Working Groups (I and II) at regular PelAC meetings.

Coordination of the joint NWWAC-PelAC 20 year Anniversary Event is progressing, with several high-profile Commission representatives invited to attend. Event sponsorship from member organisations would be welcomed.

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

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (4 OCTOBER 2023, UTRECHT – NETHERLANDS)

The Executive Committee meeting on 4 October provided insights into a wide variety of topics of interest to PelAC members. Martin Pastoors presented the pelagic Work Packages of the CIBBRiNA project, which stands for 'Coordinated Development and Implementation of Best Practice in Bycatch Reduction in the North Atlantic, Baltic and Mediterranean regions'. CIBBRiNA's aim is to bring fishers, authorities and

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relevant stakeholders together to develop solutions to minimise/eliminate incidental bycatch of priority Endangered, Threatened and Protected (ETP) marine species.

The members also received updates on the Commission CFP Package and Inter-AC Brexit Forum. Notable meetings included the Joint Special Group on the Marine Action Plan, the first workshop of the Energy Transition Partnership (ETP) on financing and the Inter-AC Brexit Forum meeting on 9 October, chaired by the PelAC. Members were also made aware of UK consultations on Fisheries Management Plans, remote electronic monitoring and the discards reform.

PelAC comments on the Commission consultation on fishing opportunities with regards to orientations for 2024 were unanimously adopted. The topics covered by the consultation include: Landing Obligation; economic performance of the EU fleet; management of shared stocks; long-term management strategies; ecosystem approach to fisheries management; Role of science; make marine areas and EU fisheries fit for future.

There were several recommendations from WGI such as the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM), Energy Transition, as well as the WGI stocks: Atlanto-Scandian herring, North Sea autumn spawning herring, Herring in 6a North, Herring in 6a South and 7bc, Celtic Sea herring, Irish Sea herring, Blue whiting and Boarfish. All recommendations were formally adopted, subject to minor wording revisions for the Boarfish advice. The recommendations from WGII focused on the relevant stocks: Northeast Atlantic mackerel, Western horse mackerel, Southern horse mackerel, North Sea horse mackerel, Chub mackerel and incorporated some general remarks on horse mackerel stocks. The PelAC reiterated its concern given the consistent levels of overfishing facing North East Atlantic Mackerel, Blue Whiting and Atlanto-Scandian Herring. Subject to minor amends to the advice for Northeast Atlantic mackerel and Western horse mackerel, the recommendations for all WGII stocks were formally adopted.

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

All meeting minutes can be accessed on the [PelAC website](#).

# EXTERNAL MEETINGS

## DEFRA - UK FISHERIES PACKAGE MEETING (6 SEPTEMBER 2023, BRUSSELS/ONLINE)

In July 2023, the UK launched a Package of measures through a number of consultations, thereby entering a first phase in its regulatory autonomy. The Commission organised a meeting with Advisory Councils in Brussels to which Defra was invited to present the consultations.

In its presentation, Defra underlined that this consultation phase was key for stakeholders to make their views heard and assured that contributions will be well considered. Defra relies on scrutiny to help shape new policies. Defra also assured the UK will remain mindful of the TCA and non-discrimination as well as the need to take evidence-based decisions, when developing measures. The harmonisation of measures will be taken into account where possible, such as the different minimum landing sizes for fish that now exist. Defra highlighted the diverse nature of UK fisheries and the UK's management will be developed to reflect this. Nonetheless, the main message Defra conveyed to EU stakeholders was that change is coming, with the UK now free to develop measures as an independent Coastal State.

The SCF has been established and is making good progress. Defra recognized the importance of continuing work through the SCF but noted this may not always be possible. In the SCF, both the UK and EU agreed to develop a multi-year strategy for King scallops, which was unsuccessful. This demonstrates that divergence will continue to happen as the UK puts its strategy in place.

The UK Fisheries Package consists of the following consultations:

- For 6 fisheries management plans
- Reform on discards
- REM in English waters

Defra aimed to have these proposals implemented this year, through a phased-in approach. UK law requires the production of fisheries management plans, and the UK intends to develop plans that will help stocks reach sustainable states or to be maintained at sustainable levels. The UK published 6 fisheries management plans, which were selected on the basis of either being valuable or exhibiting poor or fragmented management. The management plans covered demersal species.

The REM proposal sets out to implement the application of a range of technologies (including camera's, gear sensors, GPS...) onboard vessels over the medium-long term, to collect data on fishing activity. The overall aim of the measures is to get better information on what is happening at sea, taking into account the specificities of the different fisheries. This includes full catch composition, discards, bycatch of sensitive species etc.. Defra recognizes that new technologies will require time to implement appropriately. Through the REM consultation, the UK is proposing a phased introduction of REM in English waters by priority fisheries, and following a set of criteria. The selection of priority fisheries is based on data gaps. The first stage will be a voluntary introduction of technologies, but in due course, the measures are expected to become mandatory.

The REM proposal sets out a targeted approach to implementing REM starting with specific priority fisheries that will come online in stages over the next five years. The first priority fisheries will be pelagic trawl vessels (over 24 meters) fishing in English waters. Implementation of REM will begin with the voluntary sign up of vessels, as early adopters. The voluntary phase for pelagic vessels will start from January 2024 and would remain in place until the implementation issues have been addressed. The next phase will be the mandatory implementation of REM. There would be a minimum of 24 months lead time before mandatory requirements are introduced, to ensure the industry has time to adapt to the changes.



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The Scottish government recently published their response to the consultation. The biggest priority in Scotland is the scallop fleet, which needs to implement REM by the end of the year. REM on pelagic vessels will become mandatory over the course of the next two years.

The consultation on the discards reform sets out to count all catches and landings of discards against the quota, so that fishing within agreed limits can occur. The proposal includes the setup of working groups to develop measures to reduce unwanted catches, updating exemptions from the landing obligation and developing discard prevention schemes. The reform on discards will follow a tailored approach per vessel. Even if the measures are ineffective to reduce discarding, they will form part of a broader approach of discard management and fully documented fisheries.

Scotland has published a consultation report in August, with more focus on increased selectivity, spatial measures and on the plans to organise workshops to improve understanding, following an approach per fleet segment.

The floor opened for questions and the following comments were raised by the PelAC:

The PelAC asked for the envisaged timeframe before the mandatory application of the discard measures. In addition, the PelAC raised concerns over possible divergent rules between the EU and the UK, which could in theory result in the need for fishermen to change gear each time they cross a line. This question is only relevant once the rules become mandatory, but the PelAC still wondered how the UK envisaged to handle this.

Defra responded briefly that following the indicative timelines, REM is looking to become mandatory by 2028 for the priority fisheries, but Defra noted this is subject to the consultations. The UK will take technical issues, inter-operability and boundary crossing into consideration.

### **JOINT SPECIAL GROUP MARINE ACTION PLAN (6 OCTOBER 2023, ONLINE)**

The first meeting of the Joint special group in support of the implementation of the Action Plan to conserve fisheries resources and to protect marine ecosystems took place on the 6th October 2023. 5 observers per AC: Jérôme Jourdain (UAPF), Serena Rivero (NSF), Ed Farrell (KFO) and Henrique Folhas (Sciaena) attended on behalf of the PelAC.

The meeting was jointly chaired by DG MARE and DG ENV and attended in person by representatives from each member state. Stakeholders were accommodated as observers through online attendance.

The meeting started with an introduction by the Commission in which they highlighted that fisheries are not the only stressor in the marine environment. There are many other pressures but in this forum they were only looking at fisheries as this is the topic of the Marine Action Plan. Reducing the impact of bottom trawling was only one of dozens of actions proposed. They further highlighted that the group needed to look at all actions and shift the public attention from just bottom trawling. The discussions within the forum would help with the preparation of National Roadmaps. There was a mention of the CIBBRiNA project and how it was a good example of working together.

The objectives and administration of the special group were then outlined. The rules of procedure were discussed and it was clarified that the group had no regulatory authority and was only there for discussion. The Irish delegates raised the point that they had not received the rules of procedure. Spain



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confirmed they did not receive either and said they would not agree with adopting rules of procedure. Italy shared the Spanish position. Further member states queried this and adopted a similar position to Spain.

An overview of the Marine action plan was then presented. Again it was stressed that fishing is not the only pressure and there is other work is focussed on the other pressures. The Policy context of the action plan is the European Green Deal, which has the target of protecting 30% of seas with 10% strictly protected by 2030. Each of the pillars of the Action Plan was discussed in detail:

1. Gear selectivity and sensitive species – data has to be at the basis of the decisions
2. Protecting the seabed – March 2024 roadmap to phase out bottom trawling in MPAs by 2030. Also national measures/proposals for Natura 2000 sites under habitats directive

### Protecting the seabed


Why?	How?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Essential habitats, fish nurseries &amp; spawning areas, carbon sink</li> <li>• Existing obligations under the Birds and Habitats Directives to manage Natura 2000 sites and under the MSFD to achieve good environmental status.</li> <li>• Fisheries management measures to be taken under the CFP: Commission staff working document on the procedures under the CFP (Article 11), new guidance in preparation.</li> </ul>	<p>Transition to better protection of the seabed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• March 2024 → national measures/proposals for joint recommendations for all Natura 2000 sites under Habitats Directive (HD) protecting the seabed and marine species</li> <li>• March 2024 → roadmap for all MPAs by 2030</li> </ul>



3. Fair transition –

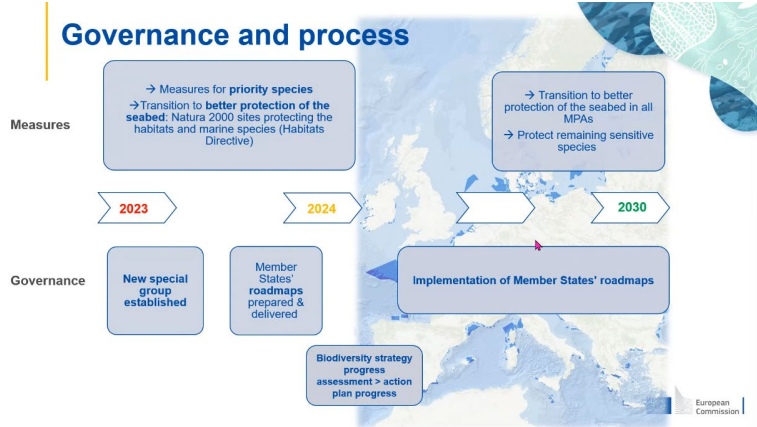
### Fair transition

Why?	How?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposed <b>transition</b> will have beneficial returns but will also entail social and economic impacts on operators and communities: from small shifts in fishing operations to larger changes, all actors would need to adapt.</li> <li>• In line with one of the pillars of the European Green Deal, this transition should be <b>inclusive and fair</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage with fishing communities in the transition to more selective, less harmful and less fuel-consuming fishing practices.</li> <li>• Ensure the relevant actors have <b>access to corresponding</b> EU, national, and private <b>resources</b> to support the use of less damaging fishing techniques and projects that implement the Natura 2000 network and meet the Action Plan objectives</li> <li>• The Commission will facilitate a <b>workshop on access to funding opportunities by end 2023</b>, working closely with Member States. It will implement smart specialisation strategies and set up direct management grants to over €7m.</li> </ul>



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## 4. Governance and Process



## 5. Roadmaps – content and priorities – template sent out

### Roadmaps – content and priorities

- **Template** provided to ensure comparability and transparency
- **Focus on key measures**: selectivity, sensitive species, seabed and research/innovation
- Short-term measures and long-term planning for **2030**
- **Co-creation** of the roadmap with other Member States and stakeholders
- Commission ready to **support**



There followed a tour de table with each Member States making an intervention to answer three questions posed by the Commission:

- Governance is a key factor for success: how does your Member State envisage coordination between national (and regional where relevant) authorities, between Member States, between the Commission and the Member States and with 3 stakeholders? Does your Member State have best practices to share with the group?
- How does your Member State envisage implementing the actions related to gear selectivity, protection of sensitive species and protection of the seabed under the action plan?
- What best practices and challenges has your Member State identified related to the implementation of the action plan or parts thereof?

Many of the member states were represented by a delegate from their fisheries department and a delegate from their environmental department. The following are the main items repeated by multiple member states in their responses.

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1. The action plan is not legally binding but the plan can promote cooperation between the different ministries and sectors.
2. Need for significant funding in addition to EMFAF funding
3. Stakeholder participation as opposed to consultation is needed for successful outcomes.
4. Most of the governance issues within member states are resolved
5. Most countries are already undertaking gear selectivity studies
6. March 2024 is not realistic date for the initial closures of areas to bottom fishing if a national plan is not developed already.

Stakeholders were then given an opportunity to make an intervention, with one individual per organisation asked to make the contribution. The key messages were :

1. There is a need to find a balance between conservation and socioeconomic considerations and food security.
2. There needs to be active and meaningful stakeholder engagement.
3. Action plan is creating a narrative against bottom trawling which is causing confusion.

### **INTER-AC BREXIT FORUM (9 OCTOBER 2023, ONLINE)**

PelAC representatives: Sean O'Donoghue, Esben Sverdrup-Jensen and Anne-Marie Kats.

Following the rotation system in place between the ACs, the PelAC organised the Inter-AC Brexit Forum meeting of 9 October 2023.

The Commission representative introduced a new member of the team and gave an extensive update on the items covered during the last Working Group and SCF meetings held in July and September. The Commission and the UK would enter into the annual consultations as of October 2023, so no further work would be undertaken at the level of the SCF for the remainder of the year.

Detailed updates were provided on the notifications of management measures, review of the footnotes, TAC alignment, technical measures in the Celtic Sea, guidelines on special stocks, the discussion on skates and rays, deep-sea stocks, non-quota stocks and some updates on individual species. A Q&A between the Commission and the Forum members followed. Further details on these updates can be provided by contacting the Secretariat.

The Forum and the Commission also discussed the possibility to organise an annual planning meeting with the Forum in January, to debrief on the consultations and discuss the planning of activities and work for the coming year. This was thought to enable the Forum to streamline meeting timelines, help the Forum become more proactive in its engagement with the Commission and in its contributions to ongoing work at the SCF.

The next Inter-AC Brexit Forum meeting will be held in January 2024 and will be organised by the NWWAC.

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## INTER-AC MEETING WITH COMMISSION (10 OCTOBER 2023, ONLINE)

PelAC representatives: Sean O'Donoghue, Gonçalo Carvalho and Anne-Marie Kats

- **Opening address by Director-General Charlina Vitcheva**

DG Charlina Vitcheva welcomed the Advisory Councils to the Inter-AC and presented the Commission policy work over the past six months. She noted the next Inter-AC meeting was set to take place physically in Brussels in May 2024, underscoring the value of face-to-face encounters. She announced her intent to attend one meeting of each AC in the years to come. The value of Advisory Councils to the Commission cannot be overstated, necessary to assess the extent to which planned policy is in tune with the realities of stakeholders. She stressed the importance of consensus advice provided by the ACs, noting they are very helpful for the Commission to prepare its positions.

Next year, upcoming elections will bring about new institutional changes and while it is difficult to predict how the European Parliament will evolve, the Commission reassured the ACs of the Commission's strong experience in accommodating these transitions, and that it is now already reflecting on its future mandates.

The previous Inter-AC meeting held in March 2023 focussed primarily on the CFP Package, the aim of which is to launch a constructive dialogue with all fishery stakeholders and to make the fishery profession more attractive for future generations. Several European Fisheries Council meetings were held at the time and ended with conclusions in June. The Joint Special Member State Group first met on 6 October, to which many ACs participated as observers. The Committee of Regions also plans to deliver its opinion on the Package later this year. The European Parliament is currently working on 3 initiative reports: On the functioning of the CFP, the CMO and another one on the marine action plan.

The Commission is also continuing its work on the implementation of the Package. There will be a strong focus on the development of implementing acts for the new control regulation. The control regulation forms an important part of the EU Green Deal and constitutes the Commission's top legislative priority moving forward. The Commission was pleased that a political agreement was reached after five years of trialogue negotiations and believes the final regulation significantly improves controls, creating potential for implementation inside and outside EU waters. It is the most significant revision since the CFP reform. The Commission called on the ACs to support the Commission in the implementation phase, which will be cross-cutting and horizontal across all fleets.

Further actions are foreseen on eel management and on the Technical measures regulation. The first report on the implementation of the TM regulation in 2021 formed the basis of the marine action plan. The Commission is now compiling a second report focussing on the implementation of the TM regulation in recent years, where the Commission will focus on innovative gears in the implementation of the marine action plan. A questionnaire on the TM regulation has been circulated to stakeholders and the Commission invited all recipients to respond with careful analysis.

Vitcheva highlighted the Fishers for future foresight project under the Fisheries and Oceans package, to which ACs were welcome to contribute. A contractor was currently underway to carry out the project, and the outcomes would be presented to the ACs when available.

Since 2019, the Commission is working together with STECF to build a refined social knowledge base through the development of social indicators, to feed into future proposals.

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The last topic to highlight was energy transition. The Commission is addressing the sector's dependency on high energy prices and initiated a communication on energy transition, which it plans to accelerate by developing means to incentivise the sector to switch to alternative renewable sources. The Commission underlined the many solutions that already exist, for all vessel types. Vitcheva warmly thanked the recommendations received by several Advisory Councils and their engagement in this theme. The ETP will provide an essential cooperation platform, the first meeting expected in November 2023 which will be followed up by a series of workshops in 2024. The Commission aims to produce a roadmap for the transition next year, and various guidance documents. The first ETP meeting in November will focus on developing a guidance on financing the transition.

Finally, the contribution of the CFP to food security is high on the Commission's agenda, which will be projected into the next mandate of the Commission. MS clearly signalled that sustainability is essential to food security and that a level playing field is key to ensure competitiveness. The EU will be setting sustainability standards internationally and increase the potential for EU aquaculture, the development of which is key in the context of food security.

In light of this work ahead, a participatory approach will be essential to achieve these goals together. The sector must become resilient to face challenges that will impact all, such as climate change, maritime security, natural disasters or health emergencies.

The PelAC thanked DG Vitcheva for the extensive intervention, and noted the detailed set of recommendations on the CFP Package sent to Member States over the summer. Three key points from these recommendations are worth highlighting as important areas that the PelAC was disappointed in, the first being Brexit and the significant impact it had on fisheries governance and related activities. There was hardly mention of the new reality of Brexit in the Package documents. The second issue was regionalisation. The PelAC has a real issue with the current regionalisation format and has repeatedly called to address the fact that pelagic fisheries are currently split into three different regional groups. The PelAC had hoped the Package would reflect on reforming this structure. The third issue was related to financing. The actions set out in the Package document imply an significant added work load, notably for the ACs, but there is no mention of additional funding possibilities. The PelAC has advocated to access to capital funding of the EMFAF for the last number of years.

The PelAC recently adopted its 2024 TAC recommendations and highlighted two key recommendations: the situation with the mackerel fishery in the Northeast Atlantic in terms of excessive unilateral quota setting by Norway and the Faroe islands. The mackerel is the main economic driver for the EU pelagic industry and the PelAC fears another consecutive year of excessive quota's exceeding scientific advice would potentially lead to the collapse of the stock. The Commission must take action to avoid another year of this happening. The second recommendation related to the benchmark of Western horse mackerel, and the PelAC recognized the huge effort taken by the Commission to get the benchmark prioritised with the UK. The PelAC underlines the importance of agreeing with the UK to adjust the TAC for the stock as soon as the benchmark results become available.

Finally, the PelAC expressed its deep appreciation for the Commission's active participation in the Inter-AC Brexit Forum and asked for the Commission to consider holding an Inter-AC meeting annually in January to have an exchange on planning and avoiding the busy autumn period. Such an annual planning meeting has now been agreed to be held with the Inter-AC Brexit Forum.

In response to the various interventions made by the ACs the DG confirmed it was in the process of agreeing on mandates with the Member States for the upcoming consultations. The negotiations with

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third countries were not easy but she expected it would be possible to strike a deal on time with the UK. Unity has always been highlighted by Member States and unity is an important part of the success of the EU's negotiating strategy. With regard to the proposal to move the autumn Inter-AC meetings to January, Vitcheva replied she would discuss possibilities for this with the teams involved noting there was never a time in the year when the Commission was not 'super busy'. With regard to the mackerel overfishing, Vitcheva underlined her personal commitment to end these practices and noted very strong letters were written by the EU to the respective parties about this. She mentioned her plans to travel to Norway the following week precisely to discuss this matter, illustrating her level of engagement to invest in this. There is a clear shared understanding with MS with regard to Norway and she hoped the following week would lead to productive outcomes.

- **Update on the functioning of the Advisory Councils**

The Commission provided an update on the state of play regarding the functioning of the Advisory Councils and explained that the relevant unit had been dealing with significant changes in the financial management with the transition to the lump sum system and also the restructuring of the financial team as a result of staff changes. The Commission explained the switch to the management of lump sums was a big change for DG MARE staff members in addition to the changes within the team. The situation had started to stabilise and the processes are now slowly adapting to the new realities. The Commission recognized there were 'hiccups' in the process and poor communication from DG MARE to the Advisory Councils, and apologised for the difficulties endured. DG MARE was now confident the new management was up and running so the process should run smoother going forward.

Moving forward, the Commission aims to systematically acknowledge receipts of grant applications received to make ACs aware the applications were being processed, and to give an indication for approval timelines for signature and payments. In addition, DG MARE plans to hold bilateral meetings with the individual ACs routinely every quarter to invest in regular dialogue with the unit. The Commission is convinced the lump sum system will simplify processes in the long run but in the transition those involved need to adapt which takes time.

The Commission went on to address some of the feedback received by the different Advisory Councils over the course of the last months. It was noted that the guidelines included the need to submit a midterm progress report, to which the Commission confirmed this was not required for a fixed budget with a duration of a maximum of 12 months. Under the current lump sum system there is therefore no need to submit a progress report and the guidelines will be adjusted accordingly.

Regarding attendance of DG MARE to AC meetings, the Commission called on the ACs to streamline requests better and identify where ACs work on the same topic. Streamlining such requests would be useful to avoid duplication. When it comes to responding to AC recommendations, the Commission is aware of the requirement to reply within two months and tries its best to achieve this. However, it should be noted that colleagues involved in international negotiations can often not respond in writing within that timeframe as this could disclose sensitive negotiation strategies. In which case, the recommendation will be followed up on once the negotiations conclude.

The Secretariats from all the ACs present commented on the new process for reviewing grant applications, noting the delays encountered which often lead to cash flow problems. It was felt the Commission and particularly staff members involved in reviewing the work programme should be made aware of the fact that such delays directly impact AC staff, notably in their ability to pay salaries. It was recognised that the Commission experienced a difficult transition and offered suggestions to help. The PelAC, LDAC and MAC commented on the new process of reviewing the work programme, which is now



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sent to a large number of individuals across different units for comments. This significantly adds to the delays already in place. The PelAC questioned the rationale for the need for such a broad review. It leads to back and forth exchanges to respond to a large number of comments and questions from staff members that are not necessarily aware of the background of long standing topics, nor of the structure of the organisation. While it could be beneficial to hold such exchanges in another format, to increase the visibility of the AC areas of work, it was such a broad review round was counterproductive and not fitting as a condition for work programme acceptance. The PelAC proposed an idea to hold annual briefing meeting between AC Secretariats and interested MARE staff members to present work programmes in detail and answer questions on the content. The LDAC proposed a process of coming to a 'pre-agreement' on the recommendations in the work programme to set the process in motion, subject to adjustment or addressing comments at a later stage.

A number of ACs also mentioned overspending this year's budget due to inflation and associated higher costs. In addition, it was felt the requirement to provide hybrid facilities at AC meetings further adds to the problem, as such facilities are expensive. The LDAC called on the Commission to review the 2% annual inflator rule to ensure the ACs can continue to perform their activities in the coming years. The NSAC and MEDAC called for more time for Q&A and time restrictions at Inter-ACs to make sure all ACs can be heard.

The Commission took note of the comments made by the ACs. On the work programme, the Commission clarified their need to consult relevant colleagues on certain topics because it becomes a legal document under the MGA. On inflation, the Commission explained the ACs can either to submit the best estimate each year, or apply the 2% inflator to the entire budget. Both will not be accepted.

- **Presentation on the control regulation**

Francesca Arena, Head of the Control Unit, presented the new fisheries control system and the main changes this will entail to the current system. Arena noted that each Advisory Council contributed significantly to the process when the proposal was adopted, and last May a political agreement on the final text was reached. The Commission expects the publication of the final text in December with a formal entry into force on the 1st of January 2024. It is important to note that not all provisions will become applicable at the same time. The majority of provisions will come into effect in two years' time and some will become applicable in 2030.

The revision of the fisheries control system was a complex exercise involving the amendment of six regulations. The focus of this presentation will lie on the fisheries control regulation. The Commission estimates that around 70% of the provisions in the current control regulation have been amended, which can be separated into the following blocks of topics:

- Digitalisation
- New control tools/data
- External fleet/sanctions
- Derogations
- Traceability

The main novelties include the expansion of the requirements to small scale and recreational fisheries, and the transition to a full digital system moving away from paper entirely. Provisions with regard to geo-localisation and electronic catch reporting will now apply to the small scale fleet and recreational fisheries. Commercial operators engaged in shell gathering, spare fishing, fishing from shore, ice fishing... are required to record catches electronically once a day and submit this data to Member States.



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New control tools include CCTV and REM. Vessels above 18 meters considered at 'high risk' of discarding illegally have an obligation to install REM/CCTV from 2028 onwards. Secondary legislation will be needed on fleet segments, technical specification, exchange of and access to data. On engine power, continuous monitoring will be required for certain categories of vessels 4 years after entry into force.

The log book requirements (fishing ID-numbers) have been expanded to include reporting requirements on sensitive species by-catch and lost gear. For vessels above 12 meters, there is now an obligation to report on a haul-by-haul basis.

With regard to the external fleet, the main novelty is the need for prior notification. For landings in non-EU countries, there is a 48h notification requirement to the flag Member State prior to landing. For transshipment outside the EU and in non-EU ports, authorisation is necessary by the flag MS before transshipment. Transshipment in EU waters remains banned.

The requirement for AIS concerns any vessel, and if switched off for exceptional circumstances the action and reasons need to be reported to the flag Member State and when relevant the Coastal State. This provision applies immediately as of January 2024.

The major improvement on sanctions and enforcement is improved harmonisation, which will ensure operators are treated equally across Member States. The new regulation also provides lists and criteria for infringement categories. New infringements are also included on the list, such as conducting fisheries with forced labour or illegally disposing of fishing gear at sea. Co-legislators agreed on a minimum level or standard rates for sanctions. Finally, the point system has been adapted with further harmonisation and empowerment of the Commission to adopt Delegated Acts on the registration of masters and recording points assigned to masters. In an effort to simplify, the IUU provisions will now also fall under the control regulation.

In terms of derogations, the margin of tolerance to deviate between quantities onboard and logbook recordings is 10% per species. Species caught in quantities below 100 kg can apply a margin of tolerance of 20%. For unsorted small pelagics by industrial and tropic purse seiners, the rules are only applicable upon fulfilment of certain conditions adopted in the Delegated Acts 6 months upon entry into force. The Commission will adopt a list of ports fulfilling such conditions.

On traceability, required information needs to be transmitted digitally within two years. The mixing of lots is authorised after sale, if the information on the composition of the lot is available.

In terms of the work ahead, Arena explained that the Commission will adopt conditions for weighing and listed ports, launch a traceability study and launch IT tool development for the small scale fleet. The study on traceability is aimed to be finalised by 2025, as the Commission plans to take outcomes onboard before adopting a Delegated Act that ensures the rules can be implemented five years after entry into force.

In the medium term, the Commission will review the existing implementing acts to be split between implementing and delegated Acts, and adopt new rules as necessary (e.g. logbooks, weighing plans). In the long term, the Commission will focus on catch reporting on the small scale fleet and the implementation of REM and CCTV on different fleet segments.

Arena underlined this regulation had no element of regionalisation and therefore pleaded the Advisory Councils to coordinate amongst each other to streamline the work. She felt more work was needed to improve how the Commission and the ACs can work together on this file. Arena concluded that a 'clean'

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version of the text that is finalised 'in substance' is publicly available on the Council website. The final text with all translations should be uploaded on the website of the EP this week.

The LDAC asked if the criteria for the 'high risk' fleet will be developed in consultation with stakeholders and enquired on the envisaged approach. LDAC also asked how transshipment notifications will be envisaged.

Concerns were also expressed regarding the interpretation of infringement categories and the potential differences between MS in terms of what is considered 'serious;' potentially leading to situations where local control authorities adopt different approaches based on interpretations by Member States.

Arena replied that REM will become compulsory from January 2028, and Member states cannot be notified 3 months before which vessels will be affected, this information needs to be available well before this date. On CCTV and REM the Commission plans to undertake a risk assessment, which needs to be performed in accordance with inspection programmes and discussed with EFCA. It will be based on the likelihood of discarding. Arena did not expect a regional methodology, the likelihood of discards will be different depending on the fleet segment.

- **Update on the STECF opinion on VMEs**

The Commission provided an update on the STECF opinion on VMES.

In 2016, the deep-sea access regulation was adopted, and the ICES advice on VME locations was released in June 2018. The implementing act was adopted in September 2022 and an updated ICES advice with scenarios on closures was published in April 2023. The STECF opinion released in July 2023, reviewed the socio-economic impact of the closures and provides a good overview of the impacts per area. According to the opinion, the overall socio-economic impact is relatively limited in 87 areas. The closures could impact more gear in other scenarios if ICES advice is implemented in certain areas. The impacts are most important in the North of Spain and the South of Portugal.

The Commission recognized the limitations in the data sets, which is not ideal at the start of such a new file. Further consultation with stakeholders will be undertaken to ground the results and review 87 areas to establish the socio-economic impacts in future closures.

On a local basis where VMWs have been listed in the current 87 areas or future ones, closures can be lifted locally provided that conservation and management measures are in place that ensure VMEs can continue living in the safest way possible.

- **AOB: Involvement of stakeholders in drafting requests to ICES**

This AOB item was introduced by the NSAC, stressing the strong desire for the Commission to engage with appropriate ACs in the drafting of requests to ICES.

The Commission replied this was a sensitive matters where it wants to strike a delicate balance between involving stakeholders and maintaining impartiality in the request drafting process.

The Commission suggested to organise a dedicated meeting on this topic with ACs and discuss how to improve the involvement of stakeholders in such processes.

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## EFCA ADVISORY BOARD MEETING (19 OCTOBER 2023, ONLINE)

Anne-Marie Kats attended the meeting on behalf of the PelAC.

Susan Steele Executive Director at EFCA Chaired the meeting. The ACs were invited one by one to share a state of play of ongoing work at the AC since the last EFCA Advisory Board meeting in April, and the main priorities defined for the coming year.

The PelAC reported it had recently finalised a number of different recommendations to the Commission such as the annual TAC recommendations for 2024 for the stocks under its remit, an advice on the ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management and an advice for Energy transition in the pelagic fleet. Before the summer, the PelAC submitted an advice to the Commission with a request to call on Member States to seek a harmonised approach when implementing the bycatch TAC for Western horse mackerel. In 2023, the bycatch TAC set for Western horse mackerel following the zero catch advice for this stock, led to unforeseen issues affecting the level playing field for certain industries across different MS. Finally, the PelAC developed detailed recommendations on the Commission's CFP policy Package which were shared submitted to MS.

In terms of the work ahead, the PelAC underlined its priority to prepare and contribute to the benchmark process for horse mackerel foreseen in 2024, and to start internal reflections on developing a management strategy for mackerel. The PelAC also highlighted joint work planned with the NWWAC on marine spatial planning. On control and enforcement, the PelAC highlighted the control regulation and the development of resulting implementing Acts as another key focus area for the coming year. The PelAC will also continue to work on ensuring compatibility of control measures between EU and UK measures through the work of the Inter-AC Brexit Forum. Finally, the PelAC raised the recent letter sent to the NWW group requesting an urgent decision with regard to the publication of the evaluation of compliance with the LO report 2018-2020, which the PelAC is eager to discuss with EFCA and the relevant MS groups in the coming year.

EFCA welcomed the feedback received from the different ACs and acknowledged the control regulation would be a key horizontal file for the coming year which will not only impact all ACs but will also have significant implications for EFCA and the way the agency operates. EFCA remarked the adoption of the regulation and its implementation will result in a significant changes to the agency involving new tasks, including the assignment of EFCA staff as Union Inspectors in EU waters.

EFCA presented the Single programming Document (SPD) for 2024 to the ACs.

The SPD covers a 5-year period (2024-2028) and the first was draft adopted by the Administrative Board in October 2023 and notified to the EU institutions in January 2023. A written opinion on draft SPD 2024 was issued by the Commission in 23 June 2023 and the comments received were taken on board. Additional comments from DG MARE were received on 16 October 2023.

The SPD is in line with the guidelines described in the Communication C(2020) 2297 for the year 2024-2028. The SPD 2024-2028 follows the structure of 2023 and gives a picture of the mid-term operational activities according to EFCA's strategic areas, consolidating EFCA's priorities and projects that are currently running.

EFCA's multiannual objectives are summarised as follows:

- Enhanced coordination of fisheries monitoring and surveillance

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- Promote compliance through and effective and harmonised application of Union inspection procedures
- Assist the EU in its international dimension in accordance with article 30 of the CFP
- Provide operational support to national authorities in Coast Guard functions

For its 2024 work programme, EFCA has defined the following objectives:

- Effective coordination of joint fisheries control operations
- Development of methodologies and fisheries information systems in support of MCS activities
- Development of training on MCS activities
- Charter of fisheries control means
- Analysis for the weighing process of fisheries products in the Member States and strategy
- Support the EU in the implementation of the external dimension of the CFP
- To strengthen compliance through the implementation of EU international projects as regards fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance
- Support to fisheries control and other national authorities working in the field of Coast Guard functions
- Implementation of the Coast Guard handbook and the results of the Coast Guard qualifications Network

And the following horizontal tasks:

- Promote a culture of compliance of the Common Fisheries Policy and foster the European Union value
- Ensure the smooth and secure functioning and availability of administrative and operational applications
- Ensure sound management and efficiency in key governance and administrative processes

Next, EFCA gave a brief update on the work done this year through the six Joint Deployment Programmes (JDP), the international dimension and gave an update on EFCA's new organisation.

EFCA implemented six JDPs in European waters and International waters in 2022:

- Baltic JDP:

6 specific actions conducted or ongoing focused on COD closure, recreational bag limit, misrecording of unsorted landings of small pelagics and SAL catches, and compliance with LO of demersal fleet. Fixed wing aircraft (FWA) were deployed in the Baltic Sea for 3 weeks, with main focus on control of illegal discarding, presence of non-quota species on pelagic catches, compliance with cod spawning closure, and the recreational fishery closure.

- North Sea JDP:

7 specific actions planned for 2023 (3 finished and 4 ongoing) related compliance with Lot, misreporting and use of illegal gear. FWA deployed in the NS for 3 weeks, with main focus on control of use of illegal gear, discard practices and incursions into MPAs. 17 RTC were established in 2023. Use of EFCA IMS as monitoring tool.

- Western Waters JDP:

15 specific actions conducted / ongoing focused on illegal gear and attachments on TBB, ADD with GN, misrecording of species for mackerel and ANF, LO (discarding and the failure to report exemptions) for

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ANF and mackerel. A FWA deployed 1 week in January for NWW and planned to be deployed for 3 weeks in November for SWW.

Other JDPs include the NAFO & NEAFC, the Mediterranean & Eastern Atlantic JDP and the Black Sea JDP.

The JDPs will summarise infringement inspections through the different sea basins. The percentages of non-compliance with reporting rules are different for the different areas. Non-compliance with the landing obligation is the highest in the North Sea in terms of suspected infringements. The annual report will come out early 2024 and will contain the full data.

EFCA gave a brief update on its organisational change. The agency has grown in terms of resources and means, has a wider international scope, interagency cooperation, and new project. Over the last year there was a growth of 23 members of staff and per January 2024 there will be a change in roles and contact points for the different sea basins.

Finally, the rotation system for the ACs in the EFCA Administrative Board was presented. Following the rotation scheme the LDAC will be the representative for the ACs in the Administrative Board until March 2024, to be followed on by CC-RUP from March 2024 onwards.

### ICES WKREBUILD2 WORKSHOP (6 – 10 NOVEMBER 2023, HYBRID)

PelAC representative: Ines Grandal Rodriguez (ACERGA) attended the workshop online, on behalf of the PelAC.

ICES highlighted article 4.4 of the Code of Conduct. ICES bases its reports in transparency, accountability and impartiality. It is compulsory to avoid a conflict of interest, and it is essential that experts contributing to the science and advice maintain scientific independence, with integrity and impartiality.

The WKREBUILD2 workshop TOR sets out to address the need for rebuilding advice: There is a historical focus on  $SSB > MSY$  Brigger while many stocks are around or below it.

For category 1 stocks ICES catch advice is focused in a long term goals (MSY). ICES advice rule (AR) is only tested in the steady state. The AR is not ensured far from the steady state ( $< B_{trigger}$ ), because it is precautionary and promotes recovery. ICES needs to reformulate the ICES AR in the  $0 < SSB \sim MSY$  Btrigger.

ICES will not define: rebuilding strategies

It will define best practice to: assess risk when stocks need rebuilding.

### Evaluation of western horse mackerel (WHOM) rebuilding plan 2021

Process

- 2019-2020 - PELAC Technical Focus Group carried out an evaluation of a potential rebuilding plan for WHOM
- July 2020 – plan submitted to the EC – forwarded to ICES for scientific review
- ICES WKWHMRP
  - Established Jan 2021 with 2 external reviewers
  - Initial feedback - insufficient material was presented to allow for an evaluation. Request for additional work formulated.

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- Focus group provided additional analyses via working document
- Final WK meeting March 2021
- ICES advice published April 2021

### **SUMMARY of the evaluation:**

1. Better documentation on the simulation approaches, the parameterization of the models, the results achieved, and the metrics being used (specifically the rebuilding metrics)
2. Exploration of the sensitivity of the results to the assessment year (2019 or 2020)
3. Exploration of the sensitivity to the recent (relatively stronger) recruitment via reduced recruitment assumptions
4. Exploration of the sensitivity to the uncertainty and autocorrelation in the (short cut) assessment error
5. Exploration of the sensitivity to the reference points used

### HCRs

- Constant  $F_{target}$
- ICES AR type
  - Fixed  $F_{target}$  when  $SSB > B_{trigger}$
  - Linear decline to origin
- Double Breakpoint
  - Fixed  $F_{target}$  when  $SSB > B_{trigger}$
  - Linear decline to 20% of  $F_{target}$  when  $SSB < B_{lim}$

Proposed rebuilding plan HCR

Double breakpoint + 20% TAC change limitation

### Conclusions

- Rebuilding plan suggested by PELAC (double breakpoint)
- Successful attempt to carry out evaluation of rebuilding plan
- Based on adapted EqSim software
- Accepted by ACOM as basis for advice
- Evaluation not taken up in 2021 advice as headline advice

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## CONCLUSIONS workshop

The WKREBUILD toolset that has been developed by Iago Mosqueira. FLR was tested in practice in three case studies: Celtic Sea whiting, Western horse mackerel and Western Baltic spring spawning herring. The tests have highlighted that the tool is capable of generating realistic and plausible patterns in stock development and exploitation levels, based on assessment outputs with uncertainty and under different productivity assumptions. Further testing is required to streamline the method such that users would have minimal coding requirements and all relevant options could be embedded in parameter settings.

Evaluation of rebuilding plans is highly dependent on estimation of starting conditions with appropriate levels of uncertainty. During WKREBUILD2 uncertainties in starting conditions were generated with a hindcast methodology.

Four different types of HCRs were tested during WKREBUILD2

In the test cases two major productivity assumptions/stock recruitment curves were used: 1) same assumption as during estimation of reference points, 2) using low recruitment only. It was found that in one case (western horse mackerel), the low recruitment scenario did not lead to rebuilding even in the absence of fishing. In other cases, rebuilding was achieved with a zero catch scenario and some scenarios could be generated with non-zero catches that would still achieve rebuilding within an appropriate timeframe.

The indicator for rebuilding in the current toolset is 95% probability of being above Blim. WKREBUILD concluded that rebuilding would be better described by achieving a biomass target with at least 50% probability because this is also useable in the context of normal stock assessments. The indicator for achieving rebuilding could be framed such that the stock is above the target for a consecutive number of years (e.g. 3, or equivalent to the age where 50% of the stock is mature).

The ICES MSY Advice Rule (AR) is currently the basis for the ICES advice in case that there is no management strategy implemented that has been evaluated as consistent with the Precautionary Approach. When the SSB is below Blim and the stock cannot move back to Blim in the forecast with a non-zero catch, then ICES will recommend a zero catch and the development of a rebuilding plan.

WKREBUILD2 discussed the development of the capacity to evaluate rebuilding plans in two contexts:

- When clients would request ICES to evaluate specific rebuilding plans to assess whether they can be used as the basis for advice (hence in agreement with the ICES guidelines on rebuilding plans)
- To update the current ICES AR to include more conservative management advice when stocks are assessed to be below MSY Btrigger.

In the first option ICES would deliver advice in evaluating the proposed rebuilding plans through MSE procedures. In the second option, ICES would embed a strict response to lower SSB in the de-facto HCR of the ICES AR. This requires a thorough scientific analysis demonstrating why such a stricter approach is warranted as part of the overall precautionary approach.

## Time frame leading to a rebuilding plan

The development of rebuilding plan options should be initiated, when not already in the management plan, as soon as the median SSB of a stock is estimated below MSY Btrigger at the beginning of the advice year and the forecast based on the ICES rule (F from the slope) does not reverse the decline in SSB at the end of the forecast year. The WKREBUILD tool could be used to explore rebuilding plan elements.



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### **When should a stock exit a rebuilding plan?**

The exit strategy should be embedded in the rebuilding plan. Exiting the rebuilding plan too early or too late should be avoided. The exit strategy should preferably contain elements on how to ensure a “smooth” transition between the rebuilding phase and the post-rebuilding phase (i.e., ICES advice rule or a LTMP) to reduce the risk of inversion of positive trends.

The exit from a rebuilding plan should be robust to uncertainty in the estimation of the stock status to reduce the risk of falling back to a rebuilding phase soon after the exit. Robustness to uncertainty could include setting a certain probability of SSB being above rebuilding reference points, being above rebuilding targets for a number of consecutive years possibly linked to the life history of the stock, a consistent positive trend in SSB, evidences of a strong year class confirmed by independent observations (i.e., survey and commercial fishery) and through time, a rebuilt demographic structure informed by age based indicators.

Maintaining  $F$  below  $F_{MSY}$  for a sufficient time (at least one generation) then smoothly transitioning to  $F_{MSY}$  could also be a possible strategy to exit a rebuilding plan.

### **ETP WORKSHOP ON FINANCING THE ENERGY TRANSITION FOR FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE (28 NOVEMBER 2023, HYBRID)**

PelAC representative: Anne-Marie Kats

On 28 November 2023, DG Mare organised the first meeting of the newly set up stakeholder forum, the Energy Transition Partnership. The PelAC has indicated its willingness to take part in this forum and will thereby be following the course of these discussions. The kick-off meeting was entirely devoted to the financing of the energy transition.

Delilah Al Khudhairy, Director for Maritime Policy and the Blue Economy Units at DG MARE, opened the workshop and highlighted the importance of accelerating the energy transition now, to achieve EU targets of becoming carbon neutral by 2050. The sector's vulnerability to fossil fuels was revealed by a number of external factors in recent years beyond the sector's control, such as the covid-19 crisis and the war in Ukraine. The communication on energy transition released by Commission early 2023 aims to help the sector become more resilient to external pressures.

The transition to decarbonisation will require cooperation across the value chain. The Commission also acknowledged that this transition will be challenging, while the fisheries and aquaculture sectors already have challenges of their own. The Commission sets out to link the priorities detailed in the action plan closely to the challenges, and what is needed to overcome them. Facilitating businesses' access to financing to support the investment and development of solutions, is an important example.

There are public funding opportunities as well as a variety of complementary EU funds. There is so much available, that the landscape can be confusing. The workshop today was dedicated to explore which solutions the Commission could provide to improve the access to existing financing opportunities. The discussions from the meeting will serve as material for the development of a roadmap that the Commission plans to deliver by the end of 2024.

Among the many presentations held during the workshop, the Commission presented its plans to develop a guidance to the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, specifically tailored to support energy transition

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projects. It will cater to a wide range of stakeholders, and will help stakeholders navigate through specific existing funds to help determine the extent of their applicability. The guide was expected to be delivered in the short term.

Another presentation by the Commission was held on the potential of the EMFAF fund to support energy transition. It was noted the EMFAF differed from the EMFF in that the EMFF prescribed measures that Member States could roll-out for their beneficiaries. By contrast, the EMFAF offers more flexibility to Member States and stakeholders to determine what is funded, so there is more room to be creative. Under the EMFAF there are opportunities to fund projects that improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon footprint. Projects aimed at modernising engines, changing vessels to install new engines as well as improvements in hydrodynamics are within the range of opportunities. The EMFAF fund can be accessed through the management authorities in the relevant Member State. It was noted that there is a certain aversiveness to taking risks both at the level of companies as well as investors. Discussions are still ongoing on which alternative fuel to invest in, and whether the port infrastructure will adapt to accommodate the required changes. The EMFAF is limited in scope (€94.8 million) and financing is subject to certain conditions; such as eligibility limited to the first acquisition of a fishing vessel, and limited to the repowering (under conditions) of fishing vessels of less than 24 metres.

Consultancy BlueInvest provides support in match-making between companies and investors in blue innovation as well as improving SME's access to financing. It focusses on energy transition in fisheries and aquaculture. Other presentations by the EIB highlighted the difficulties with co-financing projects with the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. EIB operates through direct or intermediate financing with a minimum of €15 million for direct financing, which is often too significant for SMEs in the fishing sector.

The presentation sessions closed with two examples of successful projects carried out in Brittany on energy transition in fisheries under the EMFF, one focussed on the aquaculture sector and another (€1.5 million project) aimed at the deployment of a hydrogen powered trawler vessel of 17 meters. The project found that replacing a vessel with a hydrogen engine is more expensive than building a new one. In addition, one of the key outcomes was that while a hydrogen powered engine increased energy efficiency, it also increased fishing capacity.

After the presentations, breakout groups followed in the afternoon covering the following issues:

- What solutions would to overcome the challenges and obstacles in the financing?
- Role of public funding: where does private funding come into play?

Frangiscos Nikolian from DG Mare, closed the workshop and thanked the participants for their engagement in this first ETP session. He thought very fruitful discussions were held on financing with good take ways – which will be wrapped up and made available. He underlined that the Commission wants to continue working and communicating with stakeholders. The aim today was to gather views from the EMFAF, from the EU Investment Bank. The suggestion from the breakout groups to include a view from the commercial banking sector was well noted and would be further explored as a contribution for a future meeting.

Nikolian shared that a 'huge' call (for €4 billion) for innovation in the maritime sector was launched two days ago dedicated to energy transition. He underlined that the funds were there, and while the EMFAF has its limitations, he encouraged participants 'to not only think in terms of public money'.

Moving forward, the Commission plans to organise another two ETP workshops in 2024:

- 28 February: second workshop on innovation and research
- April (date t.b.d.): third workshop on skills

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A study on technological burdens and costs for fisheries and aquaculture would soon be published (by the end of the year) and the outcomes would be communicated at the next workshop.

With the establishment of the ETP, the Commission needs to appoint a steering committee (a so-called 'support group') for the ETP and asks stakeholders to support the Commission in these discussions. The support group will consist of 5 members and the Commission will launch a call among ETP members to form a group consisting of representatives from industry, NGOs, academia, port sectors, aquaculture sector etc.

The breakout groups often mentioned the need for a 'roadmap' for the transition and Nikolian assured this was part of the process. The discussion of today's workshop is 'food for the roadmap' which the Commission plans to publish by the end of 2024, and which will include milestones and visions. There will be no compulsory milestones except the milestones already included in the fit 55 package: with the ambition to reduce emissions by 35% by 2030 and to achieve a carbon neutral sector 2050.

The Blue observatory website will be a communication vehicle on energy transition, where information can be shared. This platform will be online and interactive.

### **NORTH WESTERN WATERS MEMBER STATES GROUP (30 NOVEMBER 2023, ONLINE)**

PelAC representatives: Jerome Jourdain, Anne-Marie Kats

The Dutch Presidency of the NWW group updated the Advisory Councils on the TG's agenda.

The Delegated Acts on the landing obligation detailing 2024 discard plans had been published following the scrutiny period by the European Parliament. The exemptions in the discard plans would be valid until end of 2027. The link to the publications would be provided to the AC Secretariats for wider circulation.

A discussion was also held on the publication of two reports developed by EFCA on the evaluation of compliance with the landing obligation for the mackerel and demersal fisheries in the NWW region. The publication of the report on mackerel was approved by the HLG and the report would be published on the EFCA website on the short term. The TG group insisted, that while the PelAC representatives in the TG meeting were provided with a draft version of the report, this draft was not to be circulated further until formal publication by EFCA. The HLG had not yet reached a decision with regard to the publication of the report on demersal fisheries.

The PelAC/NWWAC invitation of the Ministers to the Anniversary event in Dublin in March 2024, was also discussed within the TG, and decisions with regard to attendance would be confirmed to the ACs at a later stage.

Finally, the TG had been working on drafting rules of procedure for the newly setup Special Member States group for the marine Action Plan, which held a first meeting on 6 October, which were near finalisation.

The PelAC representative offered some first thoughts and reflections as regards the content of the report of the evaluation of compliance with the LO for mackerel – sharing concerns over the subjective nature of the methodologies applied. The TG could not comment in detail on EFCA's methodology, but indicated discussions on the results were held within the regional group as well. The TG welcomed the planned exchange between EFCA and the PelAC in January 2024 to discuss the PelAC comments in more detail.

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### **NORTH WESTERN WATERS MEMBER STATES GROUP (4 DECEMBER 2023, ONLINE)**

PelAC representative: Anne-Marie Kats

The Dutch Presidency provided the ACs with a recap on the discussion points of this HLG meeting, confirming once more the publication of the Delegated Acts on the discard plans and the decisions with regard to the publication of the evaluation of compliance with the LO reports for the mackerel fishery and demersal fisheries, respectively. No objections were raised to the publication of the report on mackerel, which would be published soon on the EFCA website. The Scheveningen group has already endorsed the publication of the report at an earlier stage.

Updates were also provided on Technical Measures in the Celtic Sea (particularly on sea bream), and a proposal for a JR on squid.

Finally, the HLG informed the ACs that France will take over the Presidency of the NWW regional group as per January 2024.

The PelAC thanked the HLG for the updates provided and for positive decision with regard to the publication to the mackerel report. The PelAC explained that having access to the full details behind the methodologies applied has been a long standing request, so that the members could discuss the conclusions appropriately with EFCA. A preliminary response on the mackerel report content was provided at the last TG meeting, and it was likely more responses of the kind would follow during the planned exchange with EFCA on the report on January 17 in Copenhagen. Any key outcomes of the discussion would be reverted back to the HLG at a future meeting. The PelAC asked to be notified once EFCA publishes the report, so that it can be widely shared with members. The PelAC are referred to the meeting planned on 17 of January with EFCA and asked for the possibility to ensure publication takes place before this date, so that members can prepare the discussion.

The ACs thanked the Dutch Presidency and welcomed France as the next in line to Chair the NWW Regional group.

# UPCOMING PELAC MEETINGS

## MEETING DATES 2024

**17 January 2024** – Workshop between EFCA and the PelAC on monitoring, control and compliance with the landing obligation  
Location: Copenhagen, Denmark.

**18-19 January 2024** – MIAC and MIACO meetings with ICES  
Location: Copenhagen, Denmark.

**28 February 2024** – PelAC Working Group I & II and Executive Committee  
Location: Paris, France

**14 March 2024** – NWWAC/PelAC Anniversary Event  
Location: Dublin, Ireland

**23 & 24 April 2024** – PelAC Working Group I & II and Executive Committee  
Online

**4 & 5 July 2024** – PelAC Working Group I & II and Executive Committee  
Location: The Netherlands

**2 & 3 October 2024** - Working Group I & II, General Assembly and Executive Committee  
Location: The Netherlands

**For more information on the upcoming meetings please visit our [website](#).**

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### CHRISTMAS BREAK

The Secretariat **will be closed** from 25 December 2023 until 5 January 2024.

We wish you a Merry Christmas and a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year!

We look forward to working with you again in 2024!



## CONTACT INFORMATION

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