

**Ms Charlina Vitcheva**

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BELGIUM

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PelAC reference: 2526PAC10

Subject: **Northeast Atlantic Mackerel – Urgent EU action, stock sustainability and restoration of a credible multilateral framework**

Dear Ms. Charlina Vitcheva,

On behalf of the Pelagic Advisory Council (PelAC), I am writing to share our views and concerns regarding the ongoing negotiations with Coastal States on the management of the Northeast Atlantic mackerel stock. We stand ready to contribute constructively to the definition of the position to be defended by the European Union at this critical juncture in these negotiations given the importance of this stock to the EU fishing industry.

The Agriculture and Fisheries Council of 26 January 2026 marked an important milestone in the Northeast Atlantic mackerel dossier. The clear call from Member States for urgent EU action reflects a shared recognition that the situation has become both environmentally and economically concerning as well as politically unsustainable. In this context, PelAC would like to acknowledge the proactive and dynamic approach taken by the European Commission in the Coastal States negotiations to date. This engagement sends an important and positive signal to the other parties for the need to restore a credible framework for dialogue.

Nevertheless, the most recent round of Coastal States consultations held on 26–27 January 2026 confirmed the scale of the challenges ahead. In the absence of any concrete decisions, discussions resulted only in commitments to continue exchanges, with a further meeting envisaged at the beginning of March. This very tight timetable is now critical. Without rapid and tangible progress, the EU risks remaining locked into a situation in which four other parties effectively dictate mackerel stock management. The EU's current share of 21.85% is under threat and with the 4-party agreement between the UK, Norway, Iceland and the Faroes having signalled their intention to set the TAC at a higher level than the EU, a materially unlevel playing field in the fishery has been created to the detriment of the EU pelagic fishing industry. A situation where the EU adopts a lower TAC and reduces its baseline share as part of a negotiating strategy is untenable and will open the door for the other parties to benefit once again at the expense of the EU industry. In this regard, the PelAC calls on the





Commission to provide an update on the state of play regarding the possible activation of Regulation (EU) No 1026/2012.

In this context, the PelAC wishes to stress that the protection of the mackerel stock must remain a central concern for all parties. Prolonged confrontations over a depleted resource benefit no one. The current situation is the result of systematic and significant unilateral catch overruns in recent years, which have been a key contributor to the reduction in biomass and reduced recruitment. The European Union has remained a compliant party and is now paying the price for overfishing by other Coastal States. Non-EU parties that have contributed to creating this situation bear a clear responsibility to contribute to correcting it.

Against this background, the EU needs to move beyond the isolated position it held in the autumn of 2025 and restore a credible balance of power in Coastal States negotiations. The first and most immediate solution remains a return to a comprehensive sharing agreement on the overall TAC. Such an agreement is a prerequisite for any balanced discussion on key issues, including respect for historic sharing arrangements, the development of a long-term management strategy, and the rebuilding of the stock to sustainable levels.

In the longer term, it is unrealistic to assume that effective management of the mackerel stock can be achieved without the full participation of the European Union. Current arrangements increasingly combine discussions on overall catch levels, allocation keys and requests for management strategy evaluations. These processes require robust scientific, technical and institutional capacity. Without the EU's full involvement, multilateral management of the stock is objectively less effective, to the detriment of both sustainability and stability.

PelAC also wishes to underline the central role of EU–UK relations in this context. In accordance with the provisions of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), the European Union and the United Kingdom are obliged to consult on TAC levels. This bilateral dimension is inseparable from the wider multilateral negotiations between Coastal States and must be fully mobilised in the coming weeks. The urgency is real: rapid clarification is essential to provide fishing enterprises with a minimum level of visibility for the current fishing season—which has already commenced for certain Member States and will continue during Q1 and Q2 of the year.

At this decisive stage, PelAC encourages the European Commission to maintain and strengthen its engagement by translating the political call from Member States—namely, the need to ensure a level playing field and to defend the EU's current sustainable share—into a strong, coherent and responsible negotiating position. This is essential not only for the sustainability of the mackerel stock, but also for the international credibility of the European Union and for the economic and social future impact of the coastal communities and beyond that depend on this fishery.

The PelAC also calls on the European Commission and the Member States to anticipate and address the socio-economic consequences that may arise from the current deadlock and from any necessary adjustments in fishing opportunities. The pelagic fleets that depend on this fishery are already facing a high level of uncertainty, with immediate effects on planning, market stability and employment. In this context, it is essential that adequate and timely support mechanisms be made available, including where appropriate through existing EU financial instruments, in order to mitigate the economic impact on operators who have acted responsibly and in compliance with agreed rules.





Ensuring such support will be critical to maintain the resilience of the sector while negotiations towards a fair and sustainable agreement continue.

Additionally, PelAC would like to raise your attention to other important considerations on the short-, medium- and long-term management of Northeast Atlantic mackerel stock, which can be found in the “Recommendations” section of our advice on the Benchmark report on Northeast Atlantic Mackerel<sup>1</sup>, published in July 2025.

Kind regards,

Esben Sverdrup-Jensen  
Chair of the Pelagic Advisory Council

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.pelagic-ac.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/2425PAC80-PelAC\\_MAC\\_benchmark\\_advice.pdf](https://www.pelagic-ac.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/2425PAC80-PelAC_MAC_benchmark_advice.pdf)

