

## Executive Committee Minutes

Friday 29 May 2020

10:00-12:30 CET

Interactio online meeting

Welcome from the Chair, Guus Pastoor

Adoption of agenda and minutes last meeting (30.01.20): adopted

New members of the General Assembly – Information Point

- **Asociatia pentru Promovarea Alimentului Romanesc (APAR)**

Click [here](#) to access the Secretariat's presentation.

The Secretary General recalled that a membership application from APAR, a Romanian association, had been endorsed by the Executive Committee through urgent request via email. A new application has been received from ClientEarth, an international NGO focused on environmental matters from a legal perspective. In about a month, following the endorsement by the relevant national authority, the Executive Committee will be asked for their endorsement.

The Chair expressed satisfaction with the new application.

**Administrative Matters**

- **Presentation by Pedro Reis Santos, Secretary General:**
  - **Mid-Term Report to the Commission of Year 4 (2019-2020)**

The Secretary General recalled that the Secretariat must send a mid-term progress report to the European Commission, which does not require approval by the Executive Committee or the General Assembly, in order to request the second financial instalment of Year 4. The report was submitted on 16 April 2020. The Secretary General provided an overview of the status of the priorities and deliverables for Year 4, as described in the mid-term progress report. At the next Executive Committee, it will be important to discuss the priorities for Year 5.





Market Advisory Council

- **Presentation by Panos Manias, Financial Officer:**
  - **Update on Accounts of Year 4 (2019-2020)**

Click [here](#) to access the Financial Officer's presentation.

The Financial Officer informed that there were no major developments on the budget since January due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The fixed costs had raised in accordance to the budget. It is expected that, until the end of the year, more meetings will take place. There has been an increase in financial contributions by Member States, thanks to the efforts of the Secretary General who contacted almost all of the Member States. There were also new members in the MAC. The Secretariat has sent the mid-term progress report to the Commission and applied for the second financial instalment. The report was approved and the second instalment has been received.

The Chair highlighted that, due to the ongoing sanitary crisis, the depletion of the budget will be different than previous years. The position from the Commission seems to be no physical meetings until the end of August, which means that the MAC will probably not hold in-person meetings in the following months. There will be online Working Groups and Executive Committee meetings. Online meetings represent significant costs, but not as much as the in-person meetings, since there is no travelling. There is a high likelihood of a surplus, but the MAC will not be the only AC in that situation. This is will probably be discussed at the June financial workshop between the Commission and the Secretariats. During the next months, there should be as many meetings as needed by the Working Groups. At the end of the year, it will be assessed with the Commission how the allocation of next year's budget will be solved.

#### **Future allocation of funds to the Advisory Councils**

- **Update: Letter of opposition by the MAC**

The Chair recalled that the Commission announced a new methodology and that a letter was sent by the Executive Committee, since it was difficult to understand the reasoning and the procedure followed. There was no reply yet.

Pascale Colson (European Commission) informed that their reply was ready, but had not been sent due to the management changes in DG MARE. It will be sent soon. The Commission representative highlighted that there might be some margin, since the operational years of the different ACs start in different dates and the MAC luckily starts at the end of the calendar year. Since the MAC's operational begins in October, the representative invited the MAC to contact the Commission services in September to see about a potential additional allocation. The Commission looked closely at the arguments of the Executive Committee and will provide an explanation. With the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, it can be expected that there will be additional funding available as the funds consumption will be lower.



The Chair proposed to wait for the Commission's reply, in order to have a more informed discussion. The Chair expressed satisfaction with the flexibility expressed by the Commission.

**H2020 Project: TRACTION - Micro- and nano-plastics in our environment: Understanding exposures and impacts on human health (Servicio Galego de Saúde)**

- **Update: Letter of commitment to join External Advisory Board**

The Secretary General recalled that the MAC received an invitation to join the external advisory board from ANFACO-CECOPECA on 31 March. The project coordinator is the Galician healthcare service. The letter of commitment was approved by urgent request via email. The MAC's representative is Benoît Thomassen, Chair of Working Group 3. The representative will be expected to participate in one meeting per year. The project will cover the expenses connected with this meeting. At the moment, it is necessary to wait for the potential approval of the project and its budget.

Felicidad Fernández (ANFACO-CECOPECA) highlighted that it is an European project with representatives from Spain, Italy, Sweden, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, and Czech Republic. The project is under assessment by the Commission for approval. Once there is a decision, it will be communicated to the MAC.

**COVID-19 Pandemic**

- **Presentation by Commission Representative**

Click [here](#) to access the presentation.

The Chair recalled that short weekly informal discussions with DG MARE's Unit A.4 (Economic Analysis, Markets and Impact Assessment) took place. There were reports prepared by the Secretariat. The Chair emphasised that this dialogue was very constructive, since it was an unprecedented situation with major disturbances in the market. There were very severe impacts in the market throughout the entire supply chain. Both the Commission and the Member States have been working hard to address the situation. In his personal view, there will be a long-term disturbance in the market. Even with the reopening, the situation will remain difficult for HORECA. The financial situation is also quite difficult for many operators.

Pascale Colson (European Commission) emphasised that DG MARE has been in contact with many stakeholders, in order to support and to mitigate the effects. There was the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative to reshuffle the unspent money from the structural funds. Then, there was the SURE scheme dedicated to unemployment. Later, the temporary state aid framework. Specific measures under the EMFF were also adopted.

The Chair suggested to elaborate on this point in the different Working Groups. Each WG should



assess the impact of COVID-19 from the perspective of its topics, in order to determine if further work is needed on behalf of the MAC.

Katarina Sipic (AIPCE-CEP) requested more information on the different ceilings of state aid for the different food sectors. They argued that the provisions available for processors, particularly traders, are not sufficient to handle a crisis. The EMFF should include general provisions in case of crisis for enterprises further down the chain. They wondered if the MAC could do a general analysis of the management of the COVID-19 crisis for the sector. There could be guidelines or advice on mechanisms to be automatically triggered to ensure food security and food safety in the EU. This would allow more efficiency in another crisis. On the accessibility of aid, they highlighted that there are too many administrative hurdles to access the funding. They called for more simplicity in language, in order to avoid different interpretations in situations of crisis. The new article introduced for processors under the EMFF has been interpreted differently in different Member States.

Pim Visser (VisNed) thanked the Commission for the swift decision-making process that allowed Member States to use existing budgets for the relief of the eminent needs of the fisheries sector. They agreed with the previous intervention. They highlighted that the aid money was money already allocated to existing programs. They urged the Commission to allow more money and compensate the money used, so that the Member States have funding for the initial use. In the long-term, there is a need for more support. In a recession, if the consumption of fish reduces, action will be necessary. The Commission should allow fishers to use unused quotas from the present year through a 20% carry-over to the next year.

Pascale Colson (European Commission), concerning state aid, explained that, effectively, there is a temporary state aid framework adopted by the Commission with different possibilities. The threshold is for fisheries. The Commission recognises that the impact of the crisis is very significant, which is why the Commission is announcing €750 billion under Next Generation EU.

Fragkikos Nikolian (European Commission) stated that the informal exchanges with the MAC representatives on the impact of COVID-19 were very useful for the Commission, which helped them understand the situation on the ground and to shape legislative proposals. On the state aid framework, for fisheries, the maximum amount is €120.000, meaning that it was raised four times. The agricultural sector does have a €800.000 ceiling. Undertakings with a primary activity in the agricultural sector, but with activity in fisheries, cannot claim both amounts. On the EMFF amendment, under Article 69, the amendment for processors, the same possibilities are provided for working capital as for aquaculture. If there are different interpretations in the Member States, it should be cleared. The provisions for compensation for processors are the same as for aquaculture producers. He mentioned the Commission proposal for a recovery fund. There will be conditionalities, but it will be up to Member States to determine the priorities. In normal times, under the different programming periods, it is observed that 10% to 15% of the allocated funds are



not absorbed.

Pim Visser (VisNed) highlighted that, under the €750 billion programme, seafood is not mentioned, so it will depend on the will of the Member States. The 10% is the normal friction in the system, because there are always projects that do not use their budget in full or are not approved. It does not mean that there is not enthusiasm or interest in the projects. Merely, Member States are not allowed to overcommit close to 100%.

### **Farm to Fork Strategy**

- **Presentation by Commission representative**

Please click [here](#) to access the presentation.

Anne-Laure Gassin (European Commission) presented the Farm to Fork strategy, which was developed in cooperation between DG SANTE, DG AGRI and DG MARE. It is a key element under the EU Green Deal, which aims to create a healthy and environmentally-friendly food system. They presented on the challenges of the EU food system, the green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the overall goals, the 2030 targets for sustainable food production, the integrated approach, actions for various actors in the food system, actions for sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, actions to reduce food loss and waste, measures to enable the transition, and benefits and opportunities of sustainable food systems.

Dora Barreira Ramos (European Commission) explained that the importance of fisheries and aquaculture is acknowledged in the strategy. All the targets are relevant for the seafood sector. The shift towards sustainable food production needs to be accelerated. Fish stocks need to reach sustainable levels through the CFP, by avoiding discards and fisheries management needs to be strengthened in the Mediterranean Sea. There is the revision of the EU fisheries control system, which will allow an enhanced traceability system. There are actions to support sustainable fish farming. The aquaculture guidelines ensure that the principles of the strategy are well reflected. The Farm to Fork strategy also covers an algae strategy, which relates to the relevance and acknowledgement of seafood as a low-carbon impact food.

Anne-Laure Gassin (European Commission) provided an overview of other actions under the strategy. They emphasised the international dimension of developing sustainable food systems. Plus, the importance of a collective approach by inviting all stakeholders to engage in the debate.

- **Exchange of views**

The Chair emphasised that the MAC should concentrate on market topics, such as consumer



information, traceability, and food waste.

Pim Visser (VisNed) wanted to know more regarding the specifics for the fresh seafood market. They also wanted to know more about the societal aspect of eating healthy food, particularly how the MAC and the fishers could be involved.

Daniel Voces (Europêche) highlighted that, in the mission letter given to Commissioner Sinkevičius, it is stated to draw from the potential of sustainable seafood as a low-carbon food source. Considering the strategy's focus on traceability and consumer information, they wanted to know how the Commission envisages to promote seafood as a sustainable low-carbon food source in the EU and elsewhere.

Christian Verschuern (EuroCommerce) wanted to know more about sustainability and nutritional labelling. In relation to front-of-pack labelling, they wanted to know if it would be an harmonised labelling or harmonised methodology, particularly the connection with nutri-score.

Andrew Kuyk (AIPCE-CEP) emphasised that fish is a low-carbon impact food, intrinsically nutritious and healthy. The overall objectives of the Farm to Fork Strategy resonates with the MAC members, since it is an opportunity for seafood products when compared with land-based protein. There will be some difficult issues connected with consumer information and comparison with different production system. There are also questions related to marine environment, particularly MPAs and the use of marine space for windfarms and energy, leading to a potential conflict of interests. COVID-19 demonstrated that food security and resilience are paramount. There will be questions of level playing field between the different food systems.

Hans Nieuwenhuis (Marine Stewardship Council) highlighted the relevance of addressing the carbon footprint of seafood when compared with other protein sources.

Emiel Brouckaert (EAPO) wanted to know if the Farm to Fork Strategy did not consider the current CFP to be sufficient to achieve the sustainability objectives. They were pleased that a connection with stakeholders will be maintained. They also wanted to know how the ACs will be involved in the specific policy goals under the strategy, while also considering the link with other DGs.

Katarina Sipic (AIPCE-CEP) wanted to know more information on the nutritional labelling. If these systems and algorithms do not go through a scientific review, an incomplete or misleading image could be given to the consumer. For instance, Nutri-Score does not consider some of the important nutritional values of fish, such as omega 3. They suggested that this topic should be in the MAC's Work Programme under the framework of the Farm to Fork Strategy.

Anne-Laure Gassin (European Commission) emphasised that nutrition education involves many actors and the Commission does not necessarily have competence. On labelling, it will be a gradual process. Clarity for consumers is important. There is a proliferation of labels, which can be confusing for consumers. The timetable is currently 2024. On front-of-pack labelling, the



Commission will come forward with a proposal, but the details and the design will be subject to stakeholder discussion and impact assessment. On the different aspects of sustainability, the Commission believes that it is important to have an overarching approach to sustainability to align policy areas and to determine possible tensions. On animal welfare, fish would be part of the work.

Dora Barreira Ramos (European Commission) clarified that the strategy states that the CFP works, but it is about stepping up the efforts and continuing to implement it, particularly addressing implementation gaps, such as in the Mediterranean Sea. They highlighted the connection between food resilience and the foreseen action on a contingency plan to remediate situations of crisis. The strategy passes the message that seafood is a low-carbon impact food, which needs to be further promoted. One of the ways to be considered is investing in low valued species. Actions on labelling and nutri-scores can have a positive impact on promoting seafood further.

- **Way forward: definition of priorities for the MAC**

The Chair emphasised the importance of this topic for the MAC and proposed to include it in the next Executive Committee's agenda, in order to determine further action points.

### **Relationship between Focus Groups, Working Groups, and Executive Committee**

- **Exchange of views**

The Chair emphasised that the intention is to see how to optimise the work, since the MAC should aim to be more efficient. There have been issues arising from the lack of meetings during the COVID-19 crisis. The Chair underscored that the rules of procedure are clear, which include General Assembly, Executive Committee, Working Groups, and Focus Groups. Guidelines for the Focus Groups have been approved. The Management Team is not a formal body of the MAC, but it is recognised in the Work Programme to coordinate the meetings. According to the rules of procedure, the Executive Committee installs WGs, which led to permanent WGs. The practice has been to establish FGs through WGs. In past files, there has not always been clear terms of reference for the FGs. The Executive Committee has not always decided clearly the objectives.

For the Farm to Fork Strategy, there should be first a proper discussion on the MAC's strategy and approach. After it has been defined, it can go to the level of the WGs to look at certain areas. Then, perhaps there could be FGs for specific issues to have a technical debate. In practice, FGs were missing guidance from the WG and the Executive Committee. There were different interpretations among the members. FGs should not be asked to debate very large topics. Strategic discussions should be determined by the Executive Committee. In the FG, there is a smaller number of members, so not everyone is represented. It is important to streamline the work from the top.



The MAC has produced good papers, but, on marketing standards, the Chair and the WG1 Chair were disappointed. If the different opinions had been known at the WG's level, then a better paper could have been produced. There could have been a better integrated paper with the different views. It is important to ensure coherence, even if there are different views in the paper.

Christian Verschuern (EuroCommerce) highlighted the importance of best practices and appreciated the efforts to streamline. Excess of bureaucracy should be avoided. It is important for the Secretariat to streamline and bring the key points forward for discussion, to resolve dispute, and to guide work. The Executive Committee should focus on the quality presentations, like the Commission ones, and not too much on administrative and financial matters.

Sean O'Donoghue (EAPO) emphasised the importance of the Executive Committee having a full and frank discussion on this topic. The MAC seems to be lacking the capacity to get the different numerous parties to reach reasonable compromises to have an unanimous position to put forward to the Commission and the Member States. Consensus should be the norm, even though full consensus will not always be possible. The rules of procedure on FGs and WGs are quite clear. The main driver in an AC should be the WGs. If the WGs require particular expertise on a specific issue, then FGs should be established. The FG is not a decision-making body. Members of FG should participate based on expertise.

In relation to the WG, the COVID-19 crisis is an unprecedented situation, which requires more virtual meetings and virtual correspondence. The lesson learnt is that the written procedure should be the last resort. There should be Executive Committee and WG meetings to address these issues. The decision-making body in the MAC is the Executive Committee. However, it is quite difficult for the Executive Committee to operate in an efficient manner, if there is an unanimous position in the WG and then there is a second or third change in point-of-view.

As a practice, MAC has prepared very long documents with recommendations in the last 2 pages. The final documents coming out of the Executive Committee should fundamentally be the recommendations. If there is agreement with the recommendation, but not with the previous pages, then there is no problem. The Secretariat should have increased authority to concise the documents. It is important to reach a mutual understanding of the work and for the members to trust each other.

Pim Visser (EAPO) expressed support for the previous comments. The FG on Marketing Standards dedicated a lot of effort to produce the advice. In their experience from other ACs, the positions expressed in the FG are maintained or only suffer minor alterations. It is important to ensure trust between members and to not change substantially an advice in the Executive Committee.

Vanya Vulperhost (Oceana) explained that, due to the general situation with COVID-19, it was difficult to engage in the FG and in the WG. Later, they realised that the advice was not in line with their views on sustainability criteria. They felt it did not reflect previous advice from the MAC, such



as the one on level playing field and the advice on marketing standards for processed products. They will make an effort to engage more. They suggested that the Secretary General could take a more active role in contacting the NGO members, when these are not being responsive.

Daniel Voces (Europêche) agreed that a better coordination in the internal work, including better instructions from the Executive Committee to the WGs and FGs. The advices might be too long. European-umbrella organisations must also reflect internally to better coordinate the position of their members. This would be a very important way to collaborate and build trust between members. A change of opinion between FG and WG on the same group makes it quite difficult to achieve consensus. It is good to have a mandate for the FG, but should not jeopardize the efficiency of the work of the ACs, due to the limited number of meetings. It is important to reflect on how to provide this mandate in an accelerated manner, so that the advice does not reach the Commission too late. The Secretary General should have more competence in drafting the advices, in order to be more accurate and easier to read. Concerning the marketing standards, it was unfortunate that consensus was not possible and that some organisations agreed on a minority position. This was just a reflection of a previous advice on the same topic. Several members of the MAC individually submitted their own opinion to Commission's consultation, which should not happen. The views of the members should be reflected in the MAC's advice.

Christine Absil (Good Fish Foundation) agreed with the previous speakers. In relation to the marketing standards, they highlighted that the topic is relevant for other WGs. Issues connected to sustainability, traceability, consumer information are relevant for several WGs. Therefore, the Executive Committee should decide on how these topics will be dealt with. Perhaps all these topics should be addressed under a Farm to Fork WG, in order to avoid issues missed by one FG.

The Chair, based on the previous interventions, highlighted that all the members want a well-functioning MAC. It is important to ensure that there is a strategic view on the way forward developed by the Executive Committee, then it will be up to the WGs to further develop on the different issues. There should not be as many written procedures. The MAC should have as many videoconferences as needed. Different points-of-view is not an issue, it is a matter of exchanging views, through an open discussion in the WG. It is a good suggestion to develop shorter papers and to focus more on the recommendations. The Chair agreed that the Secretariat, beyond the formal tasks, should provide papers, ease-out the differences and develop the right wording. The objective is to be more timely with the adoption of the advices. The Chair emphasised the importance of focusing on smaller topics. At the next Executive Committee, the Farm to Fork should be taken as a new challenge, in order to take a strategic view.

## EFCA

- **Reporting back – Advisory Board Meeting (17.03.20): Daniel Voces (Europêche)**

Daniel Voces (Europêche) explained that he participated at the last EFCA Advisory Board meeting.



At the meeting, he presented a summary of the MAC's work, focusing on the level playing field advice and the reply provided by the Commission and the advice on trade & development agreements with ACP countries. The minutes of the meeting from EFCA are available online.

- **EFCA Advisory Board Terms of Reference**

The Secretary General informed that EFCA is producing new terms of reference for their Advisory Board, so the way that they communicate with the ACs. These will be published in the beginning of June. Issues that EFCA is assessing is how the Advisory Board can better advise EFCA, how can EFCA contribute to receiving better data, how to ensure that all sectors are represented, how to ensure that EFCA is useful to the ACs, and how can EFCA better address control issues. The Secretary General explained that LDAC produced a detailed advice to EFCA on these terms of reference. Therefore, the MAC must determine if they would like to send something to EFCA. The timeline would be very short, since EFCA is aiming to publish these terms of reference on 1 June, even though it was not a set deadline.

The Secretary General suggested, considering the timeline, that members could express their views and the Secretariat could inform EFCA informally by email or Daniel Voces could communicate these at the next EFCA Advisory Board meeting. It would also be possible to endorse the LDAC's advice.

Alexandre Rodriguez (LDAC) explained that the LDAC produce a comprehensive advice based on his own feedback participate in the Advisory Board. He encouraged the MAC members to read this advice. EFCA's consultation seems to be rather informal, so if the MAC produces its own advice soon, it would be good. These will probably be discussed at the next Advisory Board meeting in September/October.

Sean O'Donoghue (EAPO) argued that the timeframe was too short. They suggested to analyse the advices from the LDAC, the PELAC and the BSAC. In relation to the Farm to Fork Strategy, they suggested that one of the WG should take it over and should be dealt with horizontally.

Juan Manuel Trujillo Castillo (ETF) suggested that the best option would be for the MAC to endorse the LDAC's advice. It is important the Commission knows the position of the MAC.

The Chair proposed to assess the advices from the other ACs and potentially endorse or collect additional comments. There will be time to react less formally in September.

#### **AOB**

None.



## Summary of action points

- **Future allocation of funds to the Advisory Councils:** Wait for the European Commission's reply. To be discussed at the next Executive Committee meeting.
- **H2020 Project: TRACTION - Micro- and nano-plastics in our environment: Understanding exposures and impacts on human health (Servicio Galego de Saúde):** Wait for the potential approval of the project.
- **COVID-19 Pandemic:** Discussions will continue. WGs should consider how to devise work on this issue from their perspective.
- **Farm to Fork Strategy:** To be discussed at the next Executive Committee meeting. To decide how to organise the work and which elements should be the priority for the MAC.
- **EFCA:** Analyse the advices from the other ACs and consider endorsement.
- **Relationship between Focus Groups, Working Groups, and Executive Committee:** Aim to work in a more efficient and cooperative manner under the Farm to Fork Strategy.



## List of attendees

Representative	Organisation
Alexandre Rodríguez (observer)	Long Distance Advisory Council's Secretariat
Andrew Kuyk	AIPCE-CEP
Anna Boulova	FRUCOM
Anne-Laure Gassin	European Commission
Béatrice Gorez	CFFA-CAPE
Cécile Fouquet (observer)	Aquaculture Advisory Council's Secretariat
Christian Verschueren	EuroCommerce
Christine Absil	Good Fish Foundation
Christophe Vande Weyer	EuroEuropean Commission
Daniel Voces de Onáindi	Europêche
Daniel Weber	European Fishmeal
Dora Barreira Ramos	European Commission
Els Bedert	EuroCommerce
Emiel Brouckaert	EAPO
Felicidad Fernández	ANFACO-CECOPECA
Fragkiskos Nikolian	European Commission
Gaël Lavielle	Les Pêcheurs de Bretagne
Georg Werner	Environmental Justice Foundation
Gerd Heinen	European Commission
Guillaume Carruel	EAPO
Guus Pastoor	AIPCE-CEP
Hans Nieuwenhuis	Marine Stewardship Council
Haydeé Fernández Granja	CONXEMAR
Juan Manuel Trujillo Castillo	ETF
Katarina Sipic	AIPCE-CEP
Katrin Vilhelm Poulsen	WWF
Laurène Jolly	European Commission
Massimo Bellavista	COPA COGECA



<b>Representative</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Mirta Novak (observer)	Croatia
Panos Manias	Market Advisory Council
Pascale Colson	European Commission
Pedro Reis Santos	Market Advisory Council
Pim Visser	VisNed
Rosalie Tukker	Europêche
Sean O'Donoghue	EAPO
Vanya Vulperhost	Oceana

