

Terms of Reference for STECF EWG 22-12

Validation of selected sustainability indicators and underlying methodologies for the revision of the EU marketing standards for fisheries products

Background and general objectives

One of the measures established under the common market organisation (CMO) are regulatory marketing standards for fishery products. The current marketing standards¹ lay down uniform quality characteristics for certain fishery products sold in the EU, whatever their origin. The 2019 evaluation² of the marketing standards framework concluded that the current standards do not sufficiently contribute to supply the market with sustainable products. Consequently, the revision of the marketing standards is included as an initiative under the Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system³.

In May 2021 the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) released a report on “Criteria and indicators to incorporate sustainability aspects for seafood products in the marketing standards under the Common Market Organisation”⁴ (STECF 20-05). This report proposes transparent methods of measuring and communicating along the supply chain some sustainability aspects of FAPs, based on scientifically sound, simple and verifiable criteria and indicators. Among the eight criteria suggested by the STECF report, three have been identified by the Commission as key sustainability hotspots for a potential first stage of the revision of the marketing standards: (i) fishing pressure (impact on the targeted stock), (ii) impact on the seabed and (iii) impact on sensitive species.

Based on STECF 20-05, two separate expert teams have defined specific indicators for criteria (i) and (ii) above and developed a methodology for the grading of each of these indicators. An indicator for criterion (iii) still needs to be developed.

The Commission would like to engage a STECF EWG to assess and potentially complement the findings of the two ad-hoc expert teams mentioned above. For that purpose, the STECF EWG will be able to build on the preparatory work of the two previous ad-hoc expert teams. This preparatory work consists of a report and an Excel database for the sustainability criteria (i) fishing pressure and (ii) impact on the seabed.

The EWG should also discuss and define an approach for establishing an indicator for (iii) the impact on sensitive species.

¹ Council Regulation (EC) No 2406/96 of 26 November 1996 laying down common marketing standards for certain fishery products, OJ L 334, 23.12.1996, p. 1–15

Council Regulation (EEC) No 1536/92 of 9 June 1992 laying down common marketing standards for preserved tuna and bonito, OJ L 163, 17.6.1992, p. 1–4.

Council Regulation (EEC) No 2136/89 of 21 June 1989 laying down common marketing standards for preserved sardines and trade descriptions for preserved sardines and sardine-type products, OJ L 212, 22.7.1989, p. 79–81.

² [Seafood markets \(europa.eu\)](https://seafood-markets.europa.eu/)

³ [Communication from the Commission to the EP and Council - Farm to Fork Strategy](#)

⁴ [EN \(europa.eu\)](#)

Specific objectives

- Assess and validate the findings of the work-streams (i) and (ii) mentioned above
- Complement or propose adjustments to the proposed methodologies, if needed.
- Kick-off a process to develop an indicator on the impact on sensitive species.

Tasks

Task 1: Assess and validate the findings of work-streams (i) and (ii)

The EWG should review the reports and data output of the two expert teams that proposed indicators and underlying methods for fishing pressure and impact on the seabed. This should include a high-level assessment of the resulting gradings for each indicator across various key fisheries products. The EWG should also review the methodology to update these grading and assess the reproducibility over time.

On that basis, the EWG should validate the proposed indicator and underlying methodology or identify potential shortcomings.

Task 2: Complement or propose adjustments to the proposed methodologies

In case shortcomings have been identified in the previous task for one or several indicators, the EWG should make concrete technical suggestions, how these shortcomings could be resolved. This concerns in particular the indicator on fishing pressure, which is limited by the number of stocks with individual stock assessment by ICES etc. In that context, the EWG should make a comparison of complementary grading methods for non-assessed stocks, in particular:

- the ‘system 1’ approach suggested by STECF 20-05
- an alternative system 1 approach suggested by the ad-hoc expert team in their report
- a proposed approach for LCA-based fisheries assessments⁵, and
- any other methodology that the EWG may identify.

The EWG should identify a preferred methodology and describe how that methodology would consolidate within the overall grading and its consequences in term of comparability and incentives.

Task 3: Kick-off a process to develop an indicator on the impact on sensitive species

The EWG should discuss and define a possible process for establishing an indicator on the impact on sensitive species. Subsequent to the EWG, an ad-hoc team of four experts would be set up to develop the indicator on that basis.

For this task, the report STECF 20-02 on the review of technical measures could serve as a useful basis. The work of the ad-hoc expert teams (i) on fishing pressure and (ii) on seabed

⁵ Hélias A, Langlois J, Fréon P. (2018) Fisheries in life cycle assessment: Operational factors for biotic resources depletion. Fish Fish.

impact should also be taken into account. The EWG should identify available sources of data which could be used to develop the indicator.