



MINUTES

INTER-ADVISORY COUNCILS (INTER-ACs) MEETING 17 November 2022 - 09:30-17:00

1. Welcome and adoption of the agenda

Mr. Eoin Mac Aoidh (DG MARE/D/3, Deputy Head of Unit), welcomed participants to the third inter-Advisory Councils meeting of 2022. He explained that Mrs. Andersson Pench (DG MARE/D Director) was unable to chair the meeting due to an unexpected event. The agenda of the meeting was adopted.

2. Common Market Organisation (CMO) report – summary of consultations

The meeting started by a presentation by Mr Frangiscos Nikolian (DG MARE/A/4 – Economic Analysis, Markets and Impact Assessment), who gave an update on the CMO report and informed the Advisory Councils (ACs) on the results of the public consultation, launched in December 2021 together with the public consultation on the functioning of the CFP. The online questionnaire followed the CMO chapters. Marketing standards were subject to a different public consultation in view of their possible revision. In total, the Commission (COM) received 125 contributions, most of them with qualitative comments. One third came from Spanish stakeholders, all them referring to the same set of objectives. Most comments were very extensive, which is very useful. The MAC detailed advice was much appreciated.

This questionnaire started with a list of general questions about the relevance of the CMO regulation. Replies showed that the Regulation effectively contributes to the achievement of the CFP objectives, especially in terms of competitiveness, market stability, and transparency. It ensures a diverse supply of seafood products towards consumers. The contribution of the CMO Regulation to competitiveness through a common legislative framework was underlined and praised.

Mr Nikolian pointed out several challenges, in particular regarding professional and producer organisations. First, there are differences between Member States on the level of financing granted and the eligibility of measures implemented by Producer Organisations (POs) in their PMPs. He also mentioned that the support for the establishment and financing of national professional organisations could be improved.

Regarding information to consumers, replies and feedback underlined that the CMO Regulation is considered as fit for purpose. There are however some challenges requiring attention. Some outlets are not covered, such as restaurants, and there is a clear delineation between the CMO consumer information and the food information regulation. Stakeholders expressed different views according to their role in the supply chain. These related mainly to the need to introduce new mandatory information (such as date of catch, date of harvest, origin, flag state), or the need for a harmonization of labelling requirements between processed and unprocessed products.

On competition rules, limited input was received. The CMO Regulation allows for a derogation to competition rules. It was confirmed that the ability for POs to programme quantities to put on the market by their members, is an assessment tool that helps maintaining good prices and avoiding food waste.

Finally, on market intelligence, which is mainly delivered by our market observatory (EUMOFA), stakeholders highlighted that they appreciated the services delivered, in particular during the COVID crisis and the current war in Ukraine.

At this moment, COM is drafting and finalizing the CMO report together with the report on the functioning of the CFP. COM assured that it understood the different views and concerns, and that after almost a decade of the reformed CMO, the report will duly reflect feedback received, which will be taken into consideration.

Guus Pastoor (MAC Chair) thanked COM for its presentation and highlighted how much MAC had worked to provide the right input and show its support to the CMO regulation. He reminded that a good regulation is necessary to reach the goals of the CFP, and that he was convinced that the CMO regulation might be improved by taking into account some of MAC recommendations. He invited COM to come and present the report to MAC once it is published.

Mr Nikolian stressed that MAC advice was highly appreciated and confirmed that COM had tried to take all the advices into consideration when drafting the report. The purpose is not to revise the CMO report, but to identify challenges and actions to be implemented in the future. He confirmed that COM was ready to visit all the ACs once the report is published and to discuss the way forward. The report should be published in the beginning of 2023, together with the report on the functioning of the CFP. Mr Nikolian continued with the third item on the agenda related to STECF AER data.

3. STECF AER data

Mr Nikolian gave an update on STECF AER (Annual Economic Report) data and reminded that the AER is an extensive report in which the socio-economic performance of the EU-fleet is analysed. Its results are feeding the socio-economic analysis of the CFP. COM is glad that economic analysis is getting more importance. Over the last 12 years, the report has been improved. As there is a continuous exchange of ideas through the ACs on this report, contacts with stakeholders could be improved. COM is grateful for the ACs having offered to cooperate with STECF.

Mr. Mac Aoidh emphasized that Annual Economic Data are important for stakeholders and COM to understand how the sector is moving and developing. This economic analysis was critical in the Commission decisions to make extra support available under the EMFF and EMFAF following the crisis in Ukraine as well as to extend the temporary crisis state aid framework and raise the attached ceiling.

Mr Pedro Reis Santos (MAC) thanked COM for the presentation and emphasized that the STECF fleet, processing and aquaculture reports are highly appreciated by MAC. The point on the methodology for the CO₂ calculation was sent too late in 2022 by MAC to be taken on board for the 2022 report. In next January, the 2023 report will be discussed, and MAC will try to send its suggestions earlier. MAC wondered whether the Commission could elaborate on the timeline for the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the STECF working group. Mr Nikolian mentioned that ACs shall send their feedback as soon as possible, and

in any case before the end of the year. The ToR will be prepared in the beginning of January and discussed with the STECF bureau around that time.

Mr Jarek Zielinski (BSAC Chair) thanked COM and mentioned that he appreciated that critical data are used to take further steps in improving the situation or in protecting the European market. He underlined that fleet reports present information that need to be followed up in further discussions. The small scale Baltic fleet is currently about to collapse. He asked COM to start discussing with BSAC and BaltFish on which steps could be taken and how the EU legislation could be reviewed in order to help fishermen, processors and the market. BSAC is also looking forward to receiving the report on the performance of Baltic Sea processors. There has been tremendous changes going on due to the changes in the fleet.

Mr Alexandre Rodríguez (LDAC Secretary) thanked COM for the presentation and mentioned some points for improvements based on his experience as designated expert and main coordinator of the Regional Chapters for the Distant Water Fleets in the STECF AER EWG in the last 5 years. First of all, he pointed out the increasing number of topics and requests that are coming up every year which makes it difficult to provide in-depth analytical assessment on trends and performance of the fishing fleets. This ambition is on the one hand positive, but also puts more pressure and workload on the same few experts. Furthermore, he proposed to have a dedicated training session with all interested STECF experts to ensure that more stakeholders get familiar with the methodology and tasks involved in engaging in the drafting of the STECF report and can have better informed experts ready to help in future reports. He also mentioned that the content of the AER is very comprehensive, but that most of the wording is replicating in words what is already reflected in the repository of data. The report could become more user-friendly with self-explanatory graphics and concentrate more the efforts of the experts in the interpretation of trends and drivers; as well as provide explanations on data gaps, changes of economic behaviour over different years; as well as forecasting the outlook for future years. This is a qualitative assessment that requires time and resources.

Mr Sean O'Donoghue (PELAC Chair) emphasized that the AER report is an important report and mentioned they appreciated the pelagic chapter. He however pointed out that unfortunately, the AER report uses data that are two years behind. He said that forecasting became really relevant during COVID, Brexit and the war in Ukraine. He recognized the difficulties with this, but emphasized to try to get the AER report on the same level as the scientific advice, since this gives new concrete information on stock advice. Moreover, he invited COM to come to a PELAC meeting and present the pelagics chapter.

Mr Nikolian mentioned that he highly appreciated the LDAC involvement in the drafting of the STECF AER as they are very helpful to improve quality of data interpretation and identifying economic performance of distant water fleets. He agreed with Mr Rodríguez that the STECF experts' workload is high. The proposal of a training for stakeholders is appreciated, but will depend on whether experts have time to provide these trainings. He committed to reflect and look into this. Regarding the volume of the report, he explained that every year, a leaflet with the main results is presented as well. Moreover, COM is working with the JRC on a new joint platform, named 'The blue observatory', on which all results will be presented in an easy and user-friendly way. On data forecasts, COM is operating under the data collection framework and trying to remove this gap with a now cast. Every year, projections are checked for correspondence with reality. COM is quite satisfied with the outcome since the now cast differs around 2% from reality.

Mr Nikolian reminded that the socio-economic analysis is taken into account in decision-making when decisions may have an impact on the fleet or on market. This was the case with the decisions on the crisis mechanism and on the temporary framework for support adopted further to the Ukraine invasion. Member States are responsible for their own operational programs, and should take these aspects into consideration when discussing the support to the sector. He also mentioned that the aquaculture report is expected to be published before the end of 2022 and the processing report early 2023. Mr. Mac Aoidh concluded the presentation in reminding that the CFP is about the environmental, social and economic balance, and builds on the best available scientific advice. These data are used for the now casting and the forecasting.

Mr Antonio Marzoa Notlevsen (MEDAC Chair) pointed out that Working Group 5 is carrying out work on socio-economic aspects and is looking at available trends. The aim of this study is to look at the effect of management tools that have been implemented. Based on these info the MEDAC is working on a draft advice based on official data and the trend of the Mediterranean fleet main indicators that shows that we are deepening in a critical situation. However, the group also looks at what information is available and what is happening on vessels. The first data indicate a downward trend in the number of vessels, an increased age of fishers, and problems with getting the new generation in. This is probably due to the current image of fishers and fisheries. He pointed out that the sector is still suffering from the pandemic and the fuel crisis, which led to a drop in vessels. However, food security and food sovereignty need to be taken into account as well. Mr Nikolian explained that correct decisions have to be taken, based on a robust model and intelligence. Europe has the biggest seafood sector in the world, responsible for 60 to 65 billion euros. The Commission works towards a better market.

4. Opening address – Mrs Charlina Vitcheva

Ms. Charlina Vitcheva (DG MARE, Director General) joined the meeting and gave an opening address. She welcomed participants at the Inter-AC meeting, **and in particular the recently appointed Chairs**. She was very delighted to be there, since the inter-AC gives the opportunity to exchange good practices, discuss common challenges and the latest and future developments regarding key policy files.

She highlighted the fact that the meeting had to be virtual again due to organisational reasons, and explained that **the next meeting in March will be physical**. Many meetings of the ACs have already been taking place physically. She thanked the ACs that decided to organise some of their meetings in Brussels to facilitate COM participation. **DG MARE colleagues will continue doing their best to participate in person** when these meetings take place in Brussels. She explained that when it comes to meetings outside Brussels, the margin is unfortunately limited due to extreme restrictions in the mission budget. Nevertheless, COM is working closely with the secretariats towards the most efficient planning possible in order **to ensure an appropriate participation of the Commission**. Colleagues will attend meetings whenever possible, but that this is of course not always possible given the heavy workload and limited resources.

COM holds dear the privileged relationship with the ACs. ACs catalyse stakeholder's involvement in fisheries management and enable policy-makers to benefit from knowledge and expertise on the ground. She highlighted that the ACs also build collaboration and mutual understanding between all actors concerned by fisheries management.

The consultation process with the ACs is of utmost importance for COM. She explained that COM takes it very seriously and that the ACs are systematically consulted

when key legislative or policy texts are drafted. COM always answers to recommendations and shares its view with the ACs. She reminded that the ACs were consulted on the Implementing Act for the Deep-sea Access Regulation during the inter-ACs meeting of 19 January 2022. All ACs members were given the opportunity to ask questions. She reiterated how much the Commission expected the ACs to engage fully so that all communities are represented.

She also said that ACs are solutions providers. Solutions in terms of conservation, marketing, technology and collaboration. This is why it is essential for COM to discuss with them the latest developments of key policy files, as will done again at this inter-ACs. **With the crisis, solutions are needed, on a long-term perspective.**

Ms Vitcheva also explained that **ACs recommendations always considered when preparing new legislation**. Recommendations received in relation to the implementation of the European Green Deal, the Biodiversity Strategy or the Farm to Fork Strategy raised very relevant concerns or issues. Advices provided on issues such as climate change, blue economy, or Maritime Spatial Planning were also highly appreciated, as well as contributions during the course of this year for the upcoming Communication on the Functioning of the Common Fisheries Policy.

She explained that COM needs the ACs' insight in the decision-making. That is why **Commissioner Sinkevičius invited the ACs to a first meeting in December** to prepare negotiations on fishing opportunities and hear their views. All Chairs as well as the vice-Chairs in each AC representing environmental NGOs or other Interest Groups should be invited to that meeting. She encouraged the ACs to use this opportunity to have a dialogue with the Commissioner.

Ms. Vitcheva highlighted that **the fisheries and aquaculture sectors are going through challenging times** in the context of high prices of energy and raw materials. She explained that this situation is establishing itself as the new normal. It puts businesses at very serious risk, with profit margins collapsing. COM quickly activated financial support mechanisms, but even with these supports, the situation is not sustainable in the long term. **We have to face that new normal into the way we manage fisheries and aquaculture.**

In this context, COM expects intense exchanges with the ACs next year to follow-up on **four important communications and reports** that will adopted in the coming weeks (probably January):

1. **A Communication on energy transition in the fishery and aquaculture sector**, to accelerate the necessary transformation in the context of the much higher prices of fossil fuels. This transition is needed to make the sector more efficient and at the same time to help achieving the EU climate objectives. COM will work together with the ACs to accelerate technology development, facilitate investment and remove existing bottlenecks. The idea is to use new technologies and solutions, but also other existing solutions that are not used, to increase resilience and profitability and manage climate change.
2. **An Action Plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems**. It will aim at further strengthening synergies between fisheries and environmental policies towards better science and stronger protection of sensitive species and of the seabed. It will notably insist on the improvement of governance to beef up collaboration between fisheries and environmental authorities and stakeholders.

3. **A Communication on the functioning of the Common Fisheries Policy.** This will report on the implementation of the fisheries management tools of the CFP and will address emerging trends and challenges. It will notably highlight improvements in the existing governance framework, including as regards better involvement of stakeholders.
4. **A report on the functioning of the common organisation of the markets,** to take stock of the performance of our market instruments. This links with the upcoming Commission's initiative on sustainable food systems, which is also on the agenda of our meeting today.

The main ingredients for effective sustainable fisheries and aquaculture management are **cooperation and trust between all stakeholders**: public authorities at all levels, the scientific community, fishers and aquaculture farmers and their organisations, and the civil society. Enhancing a culture of cooperation and trust calls for **mutual understanding, shared ownership and commitment to act**. This is exactly what Advisory Councils try to put in motion every day. In this spirit, COM wants to **improve the visibility and follow-up of your recommendations**.

Therefore, **COM will invite the ACs regularly to present their most important recommendations at informal conferences with DG MARE staff**. It is important that the ACs insights reach a broader audience and help COM making links across topics. This will also be an opportunity for the ACs to connect with more people in COM. COM will come back soon to the ACs with more details on the process for those conferences.

2023 will be the **European Year of Skills**. This will be devoted to promote skills in all economic sectors of the EU. Skills are essential for the digital and green transitions we are undergoing. Under the Year of Skills, we will work towards better investment in skills, matching the aspirations of businesses and people, and promoting cross-cutting awareness raising. Among the flagship activities bearing the label of the Year of Skills, we also have our Blue Careers call funder under the EMFAF.

Ms. Vitcheva explained that she is happy to see that **recent changes made to the rules on the functioning of the Advisory Councils have resulted in improvements**. There is still work ahead of us, in particular to have a vice-Chair representing environmental NGOs or Other Interest Groups nominated in each Advisory Council. A reflection is needed on how to encourage Other Interest Groups to get involved in the Advisory Councils work and occupy posts in Executive Committees. This issue will also be discussed later during the meeting.

She mentioned that the **shift to lump sums** for grants facilitates a smoother preparation of grant agreements. This will result in a smoother daily functioning, leaving more space and time to focus on your recommendations and the achievement of consensus. She thanked the ACs for their cooperation and trust in adapting to these changes.

She concluded by saying that **the main ingredient for a good collaboration is trust**. COM and the ACs are in the same boat and work towards more sustainable and attractive fisheries and aquaculture. She explained that she relies on the spirit of responsibility of the ACs to inform policy-makers in an honest manner. COM will always ensure that policy decisions are based on evidence and consultations with stakeholders. This is the Commission's guiding principle for a good governance of the CFP. COM counts on all stakeholders to make their voice heard.

Q&A

Kenn Skau Fisher (NSAC Chair) thanked Ms. Vitcheva for her presentation and for encouraging words to the ACs work. He mentioned that NSAC developed two new Focus Groups in 2022, one on climate change and one on the social dimension of fisheries. The climate change focus group wrote a paper and host a seminar in December, focusing on the impact of climate change on the North Sea. There is a need for change in the fisheries sector, but the possibilities of the fisheries sector to adapt are limited. He emphasized that the sectors needs respect and effort from the EU. Moreover, NSAC set-up a Focus Group together with the NWWAC on the social aspect of fisheries. This group is necessary in light of the sector transition and to recruit among the young generation. Social aspects and social sustainability of fisheries need to be taken into account in all the work in the upcoming European Year of Skills. Ms. Vitcheva promoted the establishment of both focus groups, since these are important topics.

Paul Thomas (MAC member) thanked COM for the swift response regarding fuel prices and for the budget made available to Member States. He referred to the online consultation on Energy Transition and questioned whether the consultation time could be extended till the end of the year, since November and December are very. Ms. Vitcheva highlighted that the Communication on energy transition was not expected at the beginning of 2022, and that the current deadline is a regular deadline that cannot be extended. However, she emphasized that this Communication is a start for further discussions and that **the ACs can continue sharing information after the deadline to provide as much information as possible.**

Guus Pastoor (MAC Chair) thanked Ms Vitcheva for her presentation, and highlighted that the fisheries sector is in special times with a lot of market disruption due to COVID and the continuing war in Ukraine. There is a worrying perspective for the short-term, and the objectives set in the EU Green Deal are contrary to movements that the economic situation of the sector is now taking. He highlighted the good collaboration with DG MARE, and appreciated the initiative to give the opportunity to the ACs to present their work at DG MARE. He mentioned that during COVID, MAC had weekly phone calls with DG MARE to discuss the situation, and would appreciate continuing these phone calls in the current times as well. Using updated information is necessary in these challenging times, and MAC can be of help in this. On the long term, there is a good perspective for the seafood sector, but the current period hurts a lot of people. Ms. Vitcheva agreed on the current situation of the sector and stressed that in 2023, a stagnation of the economic growth is expected, but that the situation should become better in 2024. A further increase of energy prices is not expected. **She insisted on the need to use as updated information as possible for forecasts and mentioned that the Communication on the energy transition is part of the answer to the Green Deal objectives.**

Sean O'Donoghue (PELAC Chair) thanked the Director-General for her comprehensive presentation. He stressed the need to have a discussion with the Commission and the ACs on the consultation process regarding the deep sea regulation. A more robust consultation system could be put in place. Moreover, he asked to extend the time of the energy transition online consultation. He recognized the contribution of the Commission to the work of the ACs but pointed out the limited attendance of ICES during Advisory Councils meetings. Since the ACs are highly dependent on scientific advice, he requested to have a requirement for ICES to join key meetings at least once a year. Ms. Vitcheva answered that the deep sea regulation came-up four years ago, and that the Commission didn't totally anticipate its complexity. This year, stakeholders are sending in more information through

the Call for Evidence. The new act will be based on this Call for Evidence that ends at the end of 2022. Ms. Vitcheva highlighted to stick to the facts and stressed that COM wants to dive into further dialogue on VMEs. The moment new advice comes in (probably in January), COM will engage with the ACs and work on an amendment to this implementing act. She also highlighted that she understands the point of the ACs on ICES participation to meetings, especially when sensitive topics are discussed, and will pass the message. However, ICES is an independent body, and the Commission cannot oblige anything.

Pedro Reis Santos (MAC Secretary) thanked Ms Vitcheva for the words on the ACs work. He emphasized that it is a good idea to have presentations on the most important files from the ACs during internal meetings of DG MARE.

Alexandre Rodriguez (LDAC Secretary) thanked Ms. Vitcheva for her words. He highlighted the problems regarding the uneven level playing field between the non-EU and the EU distant water fleets. Moreover, he emphasized that when working on sensitive topics (such as the deep-sea regulation and the expansion of areas designated as VMEs), COM needs to make sure that the ACs are timely informed and can pass this information on to their members in due advance. Time is needed to provide the best possible advice, especially when it is about very technical matters. Ms. Vitcheva endorsed the situation of lack of level playing field and understood the concerns of the EU long distance water fleet. She explained that, in the remit of the North East Atlantic, she is having both bilateral and multilateral discussions with UK, Norway and Iceland to support the EU position. She agreed on the need for a level playing field and reminded that, among the agreements made in RFMOs such as GFCM in the Mediterranean, 19 out of 21 were EU initiatives. She mentioned that negotiations will be difficult, but that the Commission will make its position as best as possible, and requested the ACs to provide all necessary information.

Vanya Vulperhorst (LDAC Vice-Chair representing OCEANA) flagged the LDAC statement submitted for the UN SDG14 Ocean Conference in Lisbon in June. She explained that the existence of ACs in Europe is quite new and this is not common in other parts of the world. She encouraged the spirit of compromise and the way the ACs give advice. Moreover, she mentioned that the topic of the level playing field is very important, and that transparency of fisheries activities is key from this perspective. She added that an increased transparency was also a key achievement reached at the recent GFCM annual meeting: knowing who fishes, where and what, especially for the non-EU states, is very important. Moreover, she reminded that the LDAC called in its response for increased transparency in the SFPAs in the stakeholder consultation launched in occasion of the future CFP report. The LDAC praised the adoption by the EU of the Sustainable Management of External Fishing Fleet Regulation (SMEFF) in 2017, as it contributed to increase transparency and called to put this legislation into full effect by increasing available information on fishing authorisations including a searchable database that would allow for historic data on a vessel basis and for on beneficial ownership for both EU flagged and non-EU flagged vessels. Ms. Vitcheva valued the way the achievements mentioned were put in a wider context of international fisheries and ocean governance. She explained that the EU regulates in a very advanced and transparent way, which can mainly be seen outside the EU. **She agreed on the point raised regarding transparency in SFPAs and encouraged the ACs concerned to give suggestions on how to increase transparency.**

Ola Oberg (AAC member) excused his Chair for not being able to speak up and explained that many members are changing the fuel type from fossil fuels to wind-energy and solar

power. Through this, there is also a possibility to buffer energy. It is very positive to decrease the dependency on fossil fuels. Ms. Vitcheva supported this development highly.

5. European Sustainable Food System

DG MARE/A/4 (Economic Analysis, Markets and Impact Assessment) explained that COM wants to set-up a new framework legislation that will promote a shift towards sustainability of all EU legislation related to food. This framework is a flagship of the Farm to Fork strategy, led by DG SANTE, with MARE and ENV as co-lead. JRC supports the work on impact assessments. The overarching objective of this framework legislation is to include sustainability in all dimensions of the EU food system.

COM identified ‘push’ measures, which aim at progressively phasing out the least sustainable food product and operations from the EU market. COM also identified ‘pull measures’ to encourage more sustainability, and will indirectly act to make sustainability more attractive for business operators and consumers. An important part for DG MARE is sustainability labelling.

MARE/A/4 explained that an extensive public consultation has been taking place on this framework from 28 April 2022 until 21 July 2022. In total 2670 responses were received. Furthermore, different workshops as well as targeted stakeholder consultations have been taking place. The impact assessment is ongoing, including an analysis of the economic, environmental and social impact of the different options.

Pedro Reis Santos (MAC Secretary) thanked COM for the presentation, and stressed the importance of this file for MAC. MAC gave an advice in February, but there are still discussions on labelling, and COM will soon receive a new advice. The most important points for MAC are the support for smaller actors in the transition, and the need to involve all members. In principle, there is support for adopting this framework, but there are some difficulties regarding consumers, such as price, transparency and level of understanding. There are also different views on whether the labelling needs to be mandatory. Moreover, there is an agreement to include schools and cases under public procurements. He highlighted the fact that it is good that special attention is paid to coherence, since discussion on this framework have been taking place for a long time.

Peter Breckling (NSAC vice-Chair representing the industry) thanked COM and asked two questions. First, NSAC was wondering whether the aspects of food safety and security play a role in the sustainability plans. He emphasized that due to the recent developments under the war conditions it was observed that sustainability also has to do with food safety and safety of supply. Secondly, NSAC wondered what the Commission thinks of the level of imports of fish products from third countries to the EU market.

COM explained that food safety and security are also considered. Food security is part of the three sustainability pillars and will be considered in the impact assessments. The import from third countries is important and will be considered as well.

Ola Oberg (AAC member) appreciated the focus on public procurement. AAC emphasized that primary producers such as aquaculture companies are producing sustainable products, although having difficulties to sell it. When working under public procurement this could be possible. This also shows that public procurement is leading in sustainable transition.

6. Key points for AC work in 2023

Strategic foresight initiatives:

Mr. Stephen Davies (DG MARE Adviser) presented strategic foresight initiatives and stressed that foresight can be reached through Horizon Scanning, Megatrends analysis, Scenario planning and Visioning. Embedding strategic foresight in EU policy-making enables to build and use collective intelligence to anticipate developments and prepare for new opportunities and challenges; to make it integral to Better Regulation toolbox, to inform the annual State of the Union address, Commission Work Programmes and multi-annual programming exercises; and to foster foresight cooperation and alliances with EU institutions and partners, Member States and other key stakeholders.

The MARE foresight hub established the program ‘Fishers of the Future’. The program will be launched mid-2023 and the results are planned for 2024. **COM invited the ACs to give input on what issues such a study should cover.**

Ola Oberg (AAC member) mentioned that the AAC would like to see ‘Aquaculture of the Future’ as well. The Commission emphasized that aquaculture is part of the reflection and promotes the AAC to look at foresight opportunities for aquaculture as well.

Sean O’Donoghue (PELAC Chair) asked about what time horizon this program looks at. COM mentioned that the project is still in the design phase, but the objective is to look far in the future.

Giampaolo Buonfiglio (MEDAC vice-Chair) mentioned that when defining strategic plans in fisheries, there is a possibility to overgeneralize situations. He emphasized that it is important to look specifically to small-scale fisheries, since the socio-economic implications are very different. When generalizing, there is a risk of losing the specificity of the fisheries sector and the various parts of it. COM emphasized that foresight is not the only tool, but comes together with other tools that provide for better information for policy-making.

European year of skills

COM explained that 2023 is the European Year of Skills. This was chosen since the European Union is undergoing difficult times; to tackle these challenges, the EU needs to take stock of necessary skills. In 2023, COM will undertake actions in light of this European Year of Skills. First, it will invest in skills, by increasing investments in training in all sectors. Moreover, COM wants to make skills more relevant to the labour market needs and make sure that people skills are matching the job market, with a focus on young people, women and uneducated people. COM also wishes to attract people from third countries having the skills that could match to the EU market. It is important to take up such measures also in the fisheries sector. This will be done by mapping all the existing skills and those that are required to boost this sector. The ACs are crucial in this since they have a good idea of what is needed in the sector. COM will focus on supporting these actions through the EMFAF and **would appreciate to hear from the ACs about such initiatives and how these can be linked to the field of skills.**

Giampaolo Buonfiglio (MEDAC vice-Chair) asked whether this is about existing skills or about necessary skills. He also asked whether the training is focusing on new skills or improving existing skills. COM explained that the initiative is about both types of skills.

7. Deep-sea access implementation: stakeholder feedback mechanisms in view of the upcoming ICES advice

Mr Donatella (DG MARE-C/Director) reminded that the implementing act, adopted on 15 September, is based on an innovative scientific advice looking at how much fishing takes place in a specific area before recommending whether or not to close it to protect Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs). The logic of this innovative science is to maximize conservation and minimize the economic impact. COM expects ICES to follow the same path when delivering its new scientific advice.

He informed the ACs that the new ICES advice, announced for mid-December, will be delivered in January. ICES has informed COM about the delay due to an addition in the peer-review process with Regional Experts to review the VMEs assessments before release. A few weeks will not make a difference in the process, but will allow scientists to perform this additional review by Regional Experts. This new scientific advice, like the former, will be based on data provided by Member States on the fishing activity of their bottom fleet as part of the April 2022 data call.

He stresses that COM is committed to immediately start the process of revision afterwards. It will analyze the ICES advice, ask for STECF opinion and then kick-off the process for the revision. If the list needs to be modified (i.e. we need to re-open certain zones or close new ones), COM will convene a meeting of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Committee for a vote on such a proposal. This is the Committee where all Member States are represented and which was convened on this file on 28 June.

For COM, the cooperation with the ACs is of utmost importance in this process. This is why the implementing act was already presented to the Inter-AC of 19 January 2022. COM will come back to the ACs to present the new ICES advice. COM will quickly reach out to the ACs with a more precise timeline.

Afterwards, COM expects to hear from the ACs what the real impact of the new advice will be, as well as how many vessels could be affected and what the ACs suggest as a way forward to deliver on our collective commitment to protect VMEs while continuing fishing.

In that context, COM welcomed the joint letter from the North-Western Waters AC and South-Western Waters AC received on 10 November, whereby they ask to “get involved” and would like “to be invited to participate in future ICES Advice Drafting Groups on Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs)”. It is totally possible for the ACs to take part by requesting an observer status with ICES – there is an open policy to grant such status and the Commission services stand ready to point you to the relevant information. The ICES scientific meeting is taking place from 29 Nov to 2nd December, which is a public information.

Coming back to the past consultation, COM stressed that this process is based on scientific advice. COM explained the implementing act in many instances and consulted many fora, with however very little feedback. COM understood that stakeholders in the fishing sector had a lot of issues to deal with during the string of crises (Brexit/Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine), and it seems that the opportunities offered in the consultations were not used by all. Therefore, **the ball is in the hands of the ACs to make proposals and explain how they wish to contribute to the consultation.**

Q&A

Javier López (SWWAC vice-Chair representing OCEANA) stressed that more open words are necessary. He mentioned that only a very little technical impact assessment was performed and that COM has not been using the best scientific data or the most appropriate data. He asked the ACs to use this time to provide as much information as possible. However, he stressed that COM should not name this an “innovative” Implementing Act for the future.

Jean-Marie Robert (SWWAC member) referred back to the issues and the impact assessment that have been developed by COM based on stakeholders’ information and the ACs. The outcome depends on the availability of data and on what the data is. Producer organisations can provide this information, but not everyone is able to do this. If COM wants to have a proper image of VMEs, it needs to be based on proper data.

COM explained that this subject is brought to the table to show the importance of stakeholder consultation before the advice is available. COM wants these discussions to be held well in advance and before engaging discussions on options. However, any debate should be based on facts, figures and a proper advice, to make sure that we can talk about substance, concrete elements and reality.

María José Rico Fernández (SWWAC Member) emphasized that not only some of the fleets are directly impacted, but all fleets since more fleets will start fishing at the places that are left. Moreover, ACs may have data from their own fleet, but don’t have information on all EU fleets. Therefore, it is difficult to judge all the options. Currently old data are used to make decisions, instead of the best available scientific data.

COM assured that up-to-date data are used. **The point of the exercise for the ACs is to assess whether they feel that the most important elements are taken into account or not.**

8. Ecosystem based Approach to Fisheries Management

COM gave a presentation on a study on the Ecosystem-Based Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM). The EAFM is an integral part of the CFP since 2013 and puts emphasis on mitigating the negative impact of fishing activities. This study answered a need for a more systematic evaluation, to identify gaps and to allow progress towards the implementation of EAFM in the EU.

The objectives of the study were to assess the current state of the implementation of EAFM with focus on measures and the governance required, in terms of their operational readiness, and to provide recommendations to advance the implementation of EAFM in order to address identified challenges and achieve the CFP objectives and other policies’ objectives.

The overall conclusions show that current fisheries management is dominated by conventional single-species advice on which the TAC/quota management is based. The first step towards more EAFM is through the implementation of Technical Measures to mitigate by-catches. The three main EAFM challenges are:

1. mitigating fisheries impact on the ecosystem,
2. the advisory process,
3. the decision-making process.

EAFM requires explicit distinction between management measures and policy instruments as the means to implement them.

Therefore, it was recommended to:

1. address the different EAFM challenges and (further) expand the policy objectives beyond the commercial species,
2. improve the knowledge base and seek to address obstacles within the existing advisory and decision-making processes, (e.g. request more interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary research and advice),
3. improve collection of information on fisheries management measures in place (the study was hampered by a the lack of a comprehensive overview).

Sean O'Donoghue (PELAC Chair) explained that PELAC has a focus group on EAFM and emphasized that it is important to have a holistic approach to fisheries management. COM supported this work and this approach highly.

Antonio Marzoa Notlevsen (MEDAC Chair) thanked COM for the work done and mentioned that there is also cross-disciplinary research in order to foster a better understanding in view of the various policies. He emphasized that it is important to assure fisheries to be sustainable, but it is important not to rush. Time is needed to make sure that management policies are appropriate for resources and built on the three pillars of the CFP. Moreover, he mentioned that COM has to make plans with a deadline later than 2030 such as the new GFCM recommendations where it is stated that it is necessary to be prudent, to be cautious when it comes to defining management measures and their application to fishing activities.

Kenn Skau Fisher (NSAC Chair) mentioned that in the North Sea, this is an important issue and the NSAC is touching upon this in different ways. However, it is also difficult when the ocean is shared with third countries such as the UK and Norway. He wondered how COM will deal with shared waters and stock in terms of the EAFM approach.

9. Financial and organisation matters

a. AC membership

Mo Mathies (NWWAC Secretary) gave a presentation on the issue of membership reduction in the ACs. NWWAC experienced a reduction in membership due to the loss of NGOs. NWWAC Secretariat developed a Strategic Membership Drive, identifying key audiences and messages. Moreover, it developed a press release, sent invitations to 13 NGOs and made extensive use of social media. The NWWAC received no responses on press releases. Zero NGOs were able to join the AC (mainly due to over-subscriptions, no capacity and no resources). NWWAC will continue its work but asks the Commission to contribute as well and called for COM to continue putting emphasis on the work of the ACs when communicating with stakeholders, to publish the annual overview of the Advisory Councils recommendations and their direct impact on policy development, and to potentially set-up a strategic social media campaign focusing on and highlighting the work of the Advisory Councils.

Pedro Reis Santos (MAC Secretary) thanked NWWAC for the efforts. He explained that MAC experienced the same issues, but also others. MAC also has difficulties with attracting NGOs, mainly in terms of the market, since most are not focused on market

policy for seafood. MAC encouraged COM to raise awareness on the ACs when having individual meetings with stakeholders.

Rosa Caggiano (MEDAC Secretary) made a few proposals to NWWAC since they experienced the same issues. First of all, the annual membership costs were reduced for all the members, which made it possible to attract more organisations. Mo Mathies replied that this was not an option for the NWWAC, since the members were not in favour of this. COM reminded that the new delegated act on the functioning of the ACs introduced rules on equitable membership fees enabling a wide representation of all stakeholders.

Ola Oberg (AAC member) emphasized that COM can highlight the diversity of the members within the Advisory Councils as well.

b. Financial matters

COM gave a presentation on the ACs financial matters and thanked them for having made it possible to move to lump-sums. COM decision authorising the use of lump sums for the ACs operating grants under the EMFAF was signed on 19 April 2022. All ACs, for which the financial period 2022-2023 started after 19 April 2022, have started implementing the lump sums as of 2022 with the exception of CC RUP that will start applying lump sums later, when more data on amounts spent are available.

For each lump sum grant, DG MARE received a detailed budget estimate from the ACs. Following assessment of the ACs' budget estimates and exchanges between COM and each AC, the individual lump sum amounts for the period 2022-2023 were agreed. For 2023, the ACs will be called to submit their budget estimates together with their application.

Substantial deviations compared to the planned activities as indicated in the annual work programmes should be communicated to DG MARE. **Funds granted under lump sums and unused by the ACs cannot be recovered by COM as long as the milestones of the adopted annual work programme have been achieved.** COM could however be notified of these amounts for the calculation of the grant for next year in order to prepare a budget which would be as close as possible to the expected real costs.

Mo Mathies (NWWAC Secretary) pointed out that notifying COM in case of underspending was not discussed before, since it was agreed to do this exercise every four years. This makes it look like the Commission wants the money back when not everything is spent. COM reminded that the lump sum amount remains a fixed amount covering the annual costs and cannot be taken back by the Commission. However, if the ACs come back to us with a lower amount for the following year given an unspent amount, COM will not ask to give back money, but this will influence the future grant to be received.

Pedro Reis Santos (MAC) emphasized that it was often mentioned that the lump sum would be valid for four years. COM explained that the budget of the Commission for the current period is based on a 2%-inflation rate. At the start of the negotiations, 15 months ago, it was the intention to save administrative work of the secretariats. However, the Commission budget is not able to give more money regarding the current rate of inflation. When the Advisory Councils provide a forecast, the given solution is a middle ground and hopefully a good solution for everyone.

It was agreed that this point will be discussed during the next secretariats meeting.

AOB

- At their request, the NWWAC showed their AC FISHMAP project, an online tool developed by the NWWAC on the results of a scoping study and aiming at visualising different geographic datasets – such as jurisdictional boundaries, regulatory measures, and other marine users – with the aim of providing a user-friendly means to identify the different designations at play, and inform members' activities, in given areas of marine space. This tool is to be published on 1 December 2022.
- The next inter-AC meeting should take place on 9 March 2023 physically. ACs were reminded to use their lump sum to cover the mission costs. COM reminded that it aims to have three to four inter-ACs meetings per year, with secretariats meetings in between.