



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,  
MARE/C.5/PV/EL/vr

Dear Mr Emiel Brouckaert,  
Dear Mr Kenn Skau Fischer,  
Dear Ms Yobana Bermúdez,

Thank you for the letter of 22 September 2023 regarding the joint advice provided by the North-western Waters Advisory Council (NWWAC), North Sea Advisory Council (NSAC) and Market Advisory Council (MAC) on brown crab (*Cancer pagurus*).

Your letter provides useful background information related to brown crab fisheries, research, threats to stock status, management, supply chain and market issues. I acknowledge the activity and dynamism of the NWWAC / NSAC / MAC Focus Group Brown Crab and the “Brown Crab Workshop” held in Paris on 16 May 2023. At this workshop, where DG MARE made a brief presentation on brown crab fisheries in the context of EU-UK shared non-quota stocks (NQS), there were valuable discussions providing an excellent basis for the present joint recommendations.

DG MARE is fully aware of the complexity of managing NQS, which frequently concern data-poor species with variable management measures at national / regional level.

Mr Emiel Brouckaert (NWWAC Chair)  
North Western Waters Advisory Council - NWWAC  
IRELAND  
[emiel.brouckaert@rederscentrale.be](mailto:emiel.brouckaert@rederscentrale.be)

Mr Kenn Skau Fischer (NSAC Chair)  
North Sea Advisory Council - NSAC (7<sup>th</sup> floor)  
THE NETHERLANDS  
[ksf@dkfisk.dk](mailto:ksf@dkfisk.dk)

Ms Yobana Bermúdez (MAC Chair)  
Market Advisory Council - MAC  
BELGIUM  
[yobana.bermudez@conxemar.com](mailto:yobana.bermudez@conxemar.com)

Commission européenne/Europese Commissie, 1049 Bruxelles/Brussel, BELGIQUE/BELGIË - Tel. +32 22991111  
Office: J-99 05/014 - Tel. direct line +32 229-50483

[charlina.vitcheva@ec.europa.eu](mailto:charlina.vitcheva@ec.europa.eu)

In this context, it is worth emphasising the challenges posed by the interplay in the management of EU-UK shared NQS, with parallel initiatives at EU-level (e.g. Joint Focus Group Brown Crab), UK-level (Fisheries Management Plan for crab and lobster) and ongoing commitments in the EU-UK Specialised Committee on Fisheries (Multi-Year Strategies for conservation and management of NQS).

We are aware of the reported threats to brown crab stock status, including reduced recruitment and increased fishing pressure, as well as emerging issues resulting from new diseases / parasites and effects from climate change. We therefore fully agree that it is crucial to improve the current knowledge and fill information / data gaps on brown crab stocks and fisheries, including through EU funded research projects. In addition, the Commission also encourages stakeholder initiatives to improve fisheries sustainability, especially when underpinned by robust scientific evidence, such as those included in the present recommendations.

Likewise, the Commission supports proposals to evaluate and monitor the fishing effort and respective spatial-temporal distribution, as an approach to eventually limit the fishing effort through closures in the crab fishery. Such work could also help assess the possible impacts of spatial squeeze and displacement of fishing effort stemming from other activities, such as offshore renewable energy structures.

The Commission recognises the importance and usefulness of the harmonisation of some management measures, namely the species minimum conservation reference size (MCRS) among Member States and ideally also with the UK. Except for tailored measures that address regional / local specificities in species growth and maximum size, such harmonisation would support the stability and predictability for the sector across sea basins. Moreover, it would facilitate control and enforcement, as well as improve the traceability of brown crab catches throughout the supply chain.

I would like to conclude by reiterating my support to your initiatives aiming at improving the current information on this fishery and stock status, which demonstrate your commitment to refining fisheries management and enhancing the sustainability of the fishing sector. I also welcome your continued engagement in the discussions on NQS in the Specialised Committee on Fisheries, given the shared responsibility for these stocks.

Should you have any questions on this reply, please contact Mr Paulo Vasconcelos (Paulo.VASCONCELOS@ec.europa.eu) and Ms Julia Rubeck, coordinator for the Advisory Councils (functional mailbox: [MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu](mailto:MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu) ), who will forward them to relevant colleagues.

Yours sincerely,

Charlina VITCHEVA

c.c.:

Mo Mathies: [mo.mathies@nwwac.ie](mailto:mo.mathies@nwwac.ie)

Matilde Vallerani: [matilde.vallerani@nwwac.ie](mailto:matilde.vallerani@nwwac.ie)

Tamara Talevska: [tamarat@nsrac.org](mailto:tamarat@nsrac.org)

Kateryna Urbanovych: [katerynau@nsrac.org](mailto:katerynau@nsrac.org)

Pedro Reis Santos: [secretary@marketac.eu](mailto:secretary@marketac.eu)