

## General Assembly

### Minutes

Wednesday, 31 January 2024 (13:30 – 14:30 CET)

Copa Cogeca (Meeting Room A), Rue de Trèves 61, 1040 Brussels

Interpretation in EN, ES, FR

#### Welcome from the Chair, Yobana Bermúdez

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

**Adoption of the agenda and of the last meeting's minutes (30.09.23):** adopted

#### Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

- **Presentation of the priorities by Belgian representative**

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

Helene Deruwe (Government of Flanders) presented the priorities of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the EU fisheries and aquaculture sectors. Following an overview of the Belgian fishing fleet and aquaculture sector, Ms Deruwe emphasised that the Presidency's priorities<sup>1</sup> were to protect these EU sectors from external pressures, strengthen them through legislation and actions, and prepare them for future challenges such as spatial constraints, decarbonisation, and climate change. She added that the mentioned topics would be politically addressed at both directorate- and ministerial levels, including at an informal meeting of fisheries ministers on 24-25 March 2024 in Brugges.

Ms Deruwe proceeded with an overview of various tools that demonstrate how the Belgian fisheries and aquaculture sectors are implementing initiatives to promote sustainability, traceability, and innovation. Based on eleven indicators of ecological, social, and economic sustainability, the VALDUVIS tool assesses and visualises the sustainability of Belgian fishing activities. Participating vessels receive a yearly score indicating their progress and weak points to be addressed, in close cooperation between scientists and fishers. These vessels are formally recognised under the 'Visserij Verduurzaamt' programme – a programme that aims to encourage fishers to implement sustainability measures. Several indicators, such as the 'bottom impact' indicator, are currently being reevaluated. Ms Deruwe also mentioned VISTools, an automatic collection and reporting tool that improves precision fishing, VISIM, an AI tool which assists auctioneers in measuring and identifying fish, and GeoVis, which allows for spatial visualisation of fisheries-related data and marine spatial planning.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://belgian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/media/3kajw1io/programme\\_en.pdf](https://belgian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/media/3kajw1io/programme_en.pdf)



Ms Deruwe concluded her presentation by emphasising the importance of collaboration between and among fishers, scientists, and policymakers as part of the solution for problems faced by the EU fleet, such as quota fluctuations, increased control commitments and monitoring obligations, the landing obligation, the sustainable transition of the fleets, among others. She highlighted the need for mutual trust, innovation, and traceability in driving the transition to more sustainable production systems and fishing gears.

- **Exchange of views**

Pierre Commère (ADEPALE) thanked Ms Deruwe for the data on the Belgian primary production of fisheries and aquaculture, noting that it was difficult at times to obtain accurate figures on fish consumption in Belgium. Mr Commère asked Ms Deruwe to elaborate on the percentage of Belgian production destined for the EU's internal markets versus external markets as well as the proportion of the fish processing sector in Belgium.

Helene Deruwe (Government of Flanders) informed that the information was available on the statistical website of the Flemish Government<sup>2</sup>.

Bruno Guillaumie (EMPA) highlighted that, in relation to the third presidency priority (*preparing the EU fisheries and aquaculture sectors for future challenges*), a project combining wind farming with large shellfish farming had been developed in Belgium, expressing hope that similar initiatives would be followed in France. Mr Guillaumie wondered if, under the open method of coordination for aquaculture policy, Belgium would be sharing the example with the other Member States, expressing hope that Belgium would report and share the good practices. He asked for information on the expected market for the farmed mussels.

Helene Deruwe (Government of Flanders) stated that she would relay Mr Guillaumie's feedback on the windfarm-shellfish project to the aquaculture specialists within the relevant ministry. Ms Deruwe commented that a significant portion of the mussels' production would likely go to the Belgian market and expressed availability to come back with a clearer figure.

Patrick Murphy (IS&WFPO) expressed satisfaction that the Belgian authorities were taking measures to protect, strengthen, and prepare the sector, expressing hope that other Member States would follow. Mr Murphy inquired whether, based on the data gathered by Belgian authorities on sustainability indicators, any trends relating to industry interest retention had been identified. Mr Murphy wanted to know whether fishing opportunities and participation in the fishing industry had decreased in Belgium, as it has in other Member States, and how Belgium planned to address this issue. He added that the fishing industry was not attractive to the younger generations due to a reduction in remuneration, which translated into difficulties in finding new entrants.

Helene Deruwe (Government of Flanders) emphasised that while data collection is still ongoing, preliminary data indicates that Belgium faces the same generational renewal issues as other Member States due to lack of attractiveness of the sector. Ms Deruwe commented that a Belgian TV show that

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<sup>2</sup> <https://landbouwcijfers.vlaanderen.be/visserij>



aired in early 2023 depicting the life of fishers at sea had resulted in a doubling of sector training applicants, which demonstrated that an emotional connection helps increase the attractiveness of the sector. Nevertheless, it was unlikely to be a long-term solution.

As for fishing opportunities, Ms Deruwe emphasised that the Belgian authorities wanted to gather as much data as possible, since there was a potential for more accurate and real time fishing advice.

Pim Visser (VisNed) highlighted that, in the context of fisheries policy, the Netherlands and Belgium were working together on impact assessments. Mr Visser asked Ms Deruwe about the policy priorities that the Belgian Presidency hoped to achieve.

Helene Deruwe (Government of Flanders) explained that the Belgian Presidency aimed to highlight quota fluctuations and provide more certainty to the fishers. In addition, the Presidency would strive to provide input on how the current EU fisheries legislation could become more workable for the incoming Commission.

Pim Visser (VisNed) flagged that the Dutch and Belgian fleets' sole quotas had been reduced by 66% in the previous year, which had a devastating effect on the fleet and the market.

The Chair encouraged Ms Deruwe to closely follow the “Fishers of the Future” project launched by the European Commission.

## Finances

- **Presentation of balance sheet by Dawlat Bik, Finance Officer**

The Finance Officer delivered a presentation of the financial situation, including the balance sheet at the year of financial year 7 (2022-2023), income sources and expenses, and budgeted and actual expenditures. The expenditure was divided across six categories: staff, participation in meetings, logistical costs for preparation of meetings, operating costs, interpretation and translation, and other contracts. Mr Bik recalled that the accounts of year 7 were independently audited. The report of the external financial auditor was circulated to the members prior to the meeting.

Guus Pastoor (Visfederatie) thanked Mr Bik for the clear overview. Mr Pastoor expressed concern that, due to the accumulation of a surplus every year, which the MAC was allowed to keep, the Commission might seek a reduction in the annual operating grant.

The Finance Officer underscored the need for a surplus to ensure the financial liquidity of the association. Mr Bik mentioned that the current surplus was not excessive and that measures were in place to ensure that no unwarranted buildup occurred.

The Secretary General expressed agreement with Mr Bik about the importance of ensuring liquidity. The Secretary General recalled that build-up had developed across various financial years and that, under financial year 7 (2022-2023), the budget implementation was almost 97%. Due to the approved increase in the reimbursement rates for the participation in meetings by members, the implementation of the budget for 2023-2024 was expected to be close to the budgeted expenses.



- **Discharge of the accounts of Year 7 (2022-2023)**

*The General Assembly approved the discharge of the accounts of Year 7 (2022-2023)*

**AOB**

None.



## Attendance List

Representative	Organisation	Role
Adrien Simonnet	Union du Mareyage Français (UMF)	Member
Alen Lovrinov	Omega 3 Producers Organisation	Member
Amelie Laurent	Oceana	Member
Anna Boulova	FRUCOM	Member
Anna Rokicka	Polish Association of Fish Processors (PSPR)	Member
Aodh O'Donnell	Irish Fish Producers Organisation (IFPO)	Member
Bruno Guillaumie	European Molluscs' Producers Association (EMPA)	Member
Christine Absil	Good Fish	Member
Dawlat Bik	Market Advisory Council (MAC)	Secretariat
Gaëtane Le Breuil	European Fishmeal	Member
Helene Deruwe	Belgium	Observer
Janne Posti	Conxemar	Member
John Lynch	Irish South and East Fish Producers Organisation (ISEFPO)	Member
Juana María Parada Guinaldo	OR.PA.GU.	Member
Julien Daudu	Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF)	Member
Julien Lamothe	Association Nationale des Organisations de Producteurs (ANOP) / European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO)	Member
Katarina Sipic	EU Fish Processors and Traders Association (AIPCE) / European Federation of National Organizations of Importers and Exporters of Fish (CEP)	Member
Guus Pastoor	EU Fish Processors and Traders Association (AIPCE)	Member
Jacopo Pasquero	Conxemar	Member
Jean-Marie Robert	Les Pêcheurs de Bretagne	Member
John Lynch	Irish South and East Fish Producers Organisation (ISEFPO)	Member
Julien Lamothe	European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO)	Member
Laure Guillevic	WWF	Member
Linda Duvnjak	Ribarska Zadruga Friska Riba	Observer





Market Advisory Council

Representative	Organisation	Role
Mariano García García	Cofradía de Isla Cristina	Observer
Massimo Bellavista	COPA COGECA	Member
Maximilian Schwarz	Market Advisory Council (MAC)	Secretariat
Patrick Murphy	Irish South & West Fish Producers Organisation (IS&WFPO)	Member
Paul Thomas	European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO)	Member
Pedro Reis Santos	Market Advisory Council (MAC)	Secretariat
Pierre Commère	ADEPALE / Eurothon	Member
Pim Visser	VisNed	Member
Quentin Marchais	ClientEarth	Member
Rosalie Tukker	Europêche	Member
Sergio López García	OPP Burela	Member
Vanya Vulperhorst	Oceana	Member
Xavier Pires	ALIF	Member
Yobana Bermúdez	EU Fish Processors and Traders Association (AIPCE)	Chair

