

Working Group 1: EU Production

Minutes

Wednesday, 4 February 2026 (10:00 – 13:30 CEST)

European Food Centre (Wandelaarkaai 7 / 61, 8400 Oostende)

Interpretation in EN, ES, FR

Welcome from the Chair, Julien Lamothe

[Presentation](#)

Adoption of the agenda and of the last meeting's minutes (02.12.25): Adopted

Action points of the last meeting (02.12.25)

- **State-of-play of the action points of the last meeting – information**
- Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries:
 - Secretariat to circulate a questionnaire to the members to collect feedback, which will serve as a basis for future draft advice on the Terms of Reference of the next edition of the Annual Economic Report on the EU Fishing Fleet.
 - Questionnaire circulated from 18 December 2025 to 12 January 2026
- Terminology:
 - Maintain the use of the term “fishery and aquaculture products”
 - Ongoing

Catch Welfare Platform

- **Presentation on an introduction to catch welfare and welfare in fisheries by Michelle Boonstra (Catch Welfare Platform)**

[Presentation](#)

Michelle Boonstra (Catch Welfare Platform) explained that the Catch Welfare Platform is an industry–science initiative jointly founded by Wageningen University, the Norwegian Institute for Marine Research, NOFIMA, and herself. She emphasised that the platform is not an NGO nor a lobbying group, but a neutral structure meant to guide the fishing industry through the transition toward improved welfare in wild-capture fisheries. While aquaculture welfare has been addressed for a longer time, fish welfare in fisheries is still new, and the initiative seeks to integrate this dimension from the beginning.

Ms Boonstra highlighted that consumer interest is growing, with nine out of 10 consumers believing fish deserve the same welfare protection as other farmed animals, and that governments — notably the UK —



increasingly include the topic in political agendas. She drew attention to the link between welfare, sustainability, and product quality, highlighting that that reduced stress and injury improve survival of released species, enhance meat quality, and decrease food waste due to longer shelf life.

Ms Boonstra explained that welfare in fisheries focuses on minimising stress and injury during the capture process, acknowledging that fishing represents an end-of-life phase for most fish. The platform considers welfare for the entire catch, including target species, bycatch, discards, and animals affected by ghost fishing. Survey results presented indicated that public concern for fish welfare is high across the EU and the UK, and even in China and the USA, challenging stereotypes about regional differences.

Ms Boonstra presented evidence linking fishing practices to product quality: stressed fish (e.g. mackerel, red mullet, plaice, and tuna) show visible deterioration such as gaping, scale loss, fin damage, haemorrhages, or “burnt tuna syndrome”. Improved practices, such as innovative harvesting systems, lead to substantially better quality and commercial value.

Ms Boonstra outlined the goals of the Catch Welfare Platform: ensuring industry participation in the welfare debate, maintaining discussions rooted in science rather than emotion, facilitating international knowledge exchange, and developing practical, profitable welfare solutions. The platform organises expert groups by fishery type and thematic issues (e.g., crustaceans, stunning and slaughter), open to all supply-chain stakeholders.

Ms Boonstra described ongoing case studies on skipjack tuna, Norway lobster, and mackerel, each analysed using a risk-assessment framework that maps welfare hazards from the moment gear is deployed to the moment the animal dies. Outcomes lead to best practices and operational welfare indicators, which can be translated into criteria for certification schemes, seafood guides, and retailer policies, with the aim of setting realistic, evidence-based expectations.

Ms Boonstra drew attention to ongoing global initiatives, including standards development by Friends of the Sea, welfare integration by GDST, a new ICES working group on welfare, and a collaboration with the University of Zhejiang in China addressing welfare within its distinct cultural context. The Catch Welfare platform also produces educational materials, shares scientific findings, and hosts conferences, sessions, and podcasts to disseminate knowledge on welfare and its economic impacts.

- **Exchange of views**

Julien Daudu (Environmental Justice Foundation) asked for information on the members based in China participating in the initiative.

Michelle Boonstra (Catch Welfare Platform) responded that the Chinese participants in the working group were mainly from academia. A large eel producer was involved, but no fishing company yet.

Pim Visser (NOVA) requested more information about the origin of the funding and the expected duration. Mr Visser also requested information on the cost for industry representatives to participate in the initiative.

Michelle Boonstra (Catch Welfare Platform) responded that participation in the Catch Welfare Platform is free of charge for industry members, and that conferences organised by the platform were also free to attend. Ms Boonstra explained that the initiative is funded by Open Philanthropy (now “Coefficient Giving”),



an American organisation linked to the Effective Altruism movement. The platform operates under a four-year funding framework, currently in its third year, with the aspiration to transition into a more permanent foundation or institute once the initial cycle is completed.

Pim Visser (NOVA) wondered about the risk of the outcomes being influenced by the funding, as there could be American interests in trying to influence EU policy.

Michelle Boonstra (Catch Welfare Platform) stressed that Open Philanthropy operates strictly through unrestricted grants (“gifts”), meaning the donor does not intervene in the project’s activities once the initial plan has been approved. Ms Boonstra emphasised that the funders maintain a very distant stance, to the point of never attending platform conferences or meetings. The only interaction consists of an annual update report submitted by the platform, with no operational or strategic interference from the donor. She clarified, however, that she could only speak for her own project and funder, not for other initiatives financed by US organisations.

Patrick Murphy (IS&WFPO) asked what policy outcomes the platform expects from its work and what should happen next, given the diversity of fishing gears and species, which lead to different technical measures. Mr Murphy wondered how welfare measures could be implemented in practice without adding excessive administrative or economic burdens to an already overloaded EU regulatory framework.

Michelle Boonstra (Catch Welfare Platform) clarified that the platform does not advocate for additional regulation, and that industry participation is essential to ensure welfare improvements are practical, realistic and aligned with operational realities. To manage the diversity of fisheries, the platform works metier by metier, using tools, such as spider-web assessments, that evaluate proposed improvements against factors like workload, costs, and impacts on other parts of the fishing operation, ensuring solutions are tailored and feasible. Under the first conference of the platform, impacts on labour and prices were discussed.

Patrick Murphy (IS&WFPO) asked whether the platform has sufficient long-term funding to apply its welfare work across all metiers and species, given the vast complexity of fishing methods and the risk of developing concepts that may later become impractical policy. Mr Murphy also wanted to know whether the initiative has assessed costs, legal implications, labour constraints, and consumer willingness to pay, stressing that without proof of value and feasibility, such measures could become burdensome or impossible for many fishers depending on fleet size and gear type.

Michelle Boonstra (Catch Welfare Platform) explained that the platform works step by step, metier by metier, helping the industry navigate ongoing changes by combining scientific insights and technological input to keep solutions practical and to manage—and sometimes temper—expectations from policymakers, retailers, and NGOs. Ms Boonstra added that many questions and initiatives already come from the industry itself, and that the platform also aims to prevent poorly tested technologies (such as inadequate stunning or slaughter devices) from entering the market by supporting proper testing and evidence-based guidance.

Yannis Pelekanakis (Hellenic Aquaculture Producers Organisation) wanted to know whether, to avoid duplication of work, the Catch Welfare Platform was in cooperation with the EU Reference Centre for Animal Welfare.



Michelle Boonstra (Catch Welfare Platform) confirmed that the mentioned collaboration was taking place. Ms Boonstra highlighted that there was a limited number of specialised experts on animal welfare.

The Chair mentioned that several members of the MAC were participating in the Catch Welfare Platform. As it is an ongoing initiative, the Chair stated that it was relevant to continue monitoring developments and operational next steps.

VeriFish

- **Presentation on the work of the project by Sara Pittonet Gaiarin (VeriFish)**

Presentation

Sara Pittonet Gaiarin (VeriFish) explained that VeriFish is a two-year project funded by the European Commission, under Horizon Europe – Mission Ocean, aimed at improving, through simplification and standardisation, communication for sustainable fishery and aquaculture products by creating a transparent, verifiable indicator framework for fisheries and aquaculture. The project addresses the current lack of unified indicators and the complexity of existing datasets by consolidating scientifically validated environmental, nutritional, and socio-economic data into a single digital knowledge base.

Ms Pittonet Gaiarin further explained that the VeriFish framework brings together “Tier 1 data”, meaning public scientific data and “Tier 2 data”, meaning producer-specific data, organised across major categories: environmental impacts (e.g. habitat, welfare, resource use), stock and ecosystem indicators, nutritional profiles, and socio-economic attributes such as governance and labour conditions. The Framework covers 36 attributes on nutrition and health, 21 environmental attributes for aquaculture and another 21 for fisheries, and a combination of eight socio-economic attributes. She outlined the data sources and content.

Ms Pittonet Gaiarin informed that a prototype web application demonstrates how these indicators can be accessed by species and used across the value chain, with case studies on skipjack tuna, Norwegian salmon farming, and Vietnamese shrimp aquaculture illustrating real-world application. The app provides information describing the status of stocks, activities, food composition information, biological characteristics of species as well as environmental information, to guide users towards informed choices.

Ms Pittonet Gaiarin highlighted that the project allows producers to input their own sustainability data through structured forms, supporting integration of operational practices into the framework. She clarified that VeriFish does not create new scoring systems, but compiles verified datasets that can support communication campaigns, assessments, marketing tools, or policy work. The project is also developing guidelines for stakeholders, a CEN Workshop Agreement for good practices in sustainability communication, and outreach materials for citizens, including games, cookbooks and educational content.

Ms Pittonet Gaiarin invited the members to attend to the final public event in Brussels on 10-12 March 2026, where the full results, recommendations, and tools of the VeriFish project would be presented.

- **Exchange of views**

Marine Cusa (Oceana) asked why aquaculture feed impacts, particularly the major Life Cycle Assessment-relevant factors, such as fishmeal and fish oil inclusion rates, do not appear in VeriFish’s Tier 1



or Tier 2 aquaculture sustainability indicators. Ms Cusa wanted to know whether this omission was intentional, or whether such feed-related data is included elsewhere and she may have missed it.

Sara Pittonet Gaiarin (VeriFish) explained that aquaculture feed impacts were not excluded intentionally but require data that the project could not obtain within its current scope and timeline. Ms Pittonet Gaiarin added that such information may be integrated in the future, as its omission is mainly due to limited data availability, not because it is considered irrelevant.

Anne-Mette Bæk (EFFOP) informed that her organisation was available to submit their Lyfe Cycle Assessment data. Ms Bæk argued that existing assessments show that fishmeal and fish oil to have among the lowest climate impacts compared with other feed ingredients.

Sara Pittonet Gaiarin (VeriFish) expressed availability to collaborate with EFFOP.

Laure Guillevic (WWF) wanted to know how the VeriFish project aligned and interacted with the ongoing work of DG MARE on the sustainability assessment of fishery and aquaculture products, particularly whether there was coordination or complementarity. Ms Guillevic asked about the post-2026 continuity of VeriFish, specifically whether the indicator catalogue and tools presented would remain accessible in the long-term, once the project's funding period concludes.

Sara Pittonet Gaiarin (VeriFish) answered that the project was collaborating with the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee of Fisheries (STECF) and had begun integrating some of their sustainability data into the VeriFish system for some species, while continuing to align with FAO's Global Record as the core reference. Regarding continuity, Ms Pittonet Gaiarin confirmed that both the knowledge base and the web app would remain accessible for at least five years after the project ends in April 2026, with efforts underway to explore partnerships for further development.

Patrick Murphy (IS&WFPO) asked how the VeriFish framework is benchmarked against other global sustainability systems, and whether including elements such as fish welfare risks turning the tool into a quasi-policy instrument that operators may eventually be required to comply with to sell their products. Mr Murphy also asked about how the scoring takes account of economic and regulatory differences across countries, and what the ultimate objective is for consumers, industry, and policymakers, specifically whether the framework could lead to mandatory sustainability criteria or distort the level playing field.

Michelle Boonstra (Catch Welfare Platform) clarified that VeriFish is meant to help producers communicate their sustainability efforts, not to create new policy requirements. Buyers may choose to use the indicators, but the tool's purpose is simply to provide clear, verifiable fact sheets, not mandatory thresholds.

Christine Absil (Good Fish Foundation) emphasised that the project related to communication. VeriFish was not meant to be an ecolabel or certification tool, as there was no chain of custody verification.

Sara Pittonet Gaiarin (VeriFish) informed that, by April 2026, the team plans to produce storytelling factsheets showing how stakeholders can highlight positive aspects using verified indicators.

Patrick Murphy (IS&WFPO) argued that the system would need to be flexible to include the different metiers. Mr Murphy expressed concern that VeriFish could eventually evolve into a *de facto* sustainability accreditation system, potentially used by DG MARE to judge whether a fishery is "sustainable". The tool could



potentially impact market access. He provided the example of organic certification in aquaculture that led to exclusions from the market. In his view, unclear criteria, differing methodologies, and the administrative burden of feeding data into such systems could create real-world barriers and inconsistencies, especially for smaller fisheries, mirroring past experiences where producers were temporarily excluded from markets despite unchanged practices.

Sara Pittonet Gaiarin (VeriFish) acknowledged that, theoretically, VeriFish could be relevant in market access contexts, but that was not the purpose. The tool did not require producers to undertake certification. The tool did allow producers to provide information on their existing certifications.

Michelle Boonstra (Catch Welfare Platform) added that some indicators, like stock status, were automatically pulled from FAO/GRSF, so could not be influenced by individual fishers, whereas others are metier-specific and can be adjusted through Tier-2 inputs to reflect gear settings or mitigation measures, without creating any form of accreditation.

Gerd Heinen (DGMARE) emphasised that the project was for communication purposes. There was no plan to use VeriFish for policy purposes.

Yannis Pelekanakis (Hellenic Aquaculture Producers Organisation) expressed confusion about the objective and added value of the project, as it was neither a scoring system nor a verification tool, and merely collects data without providing certification. Mr Pelekanakis argued that producers already communicate sustainability through many existing schemes, making it unclear what gap VeriFish fills.

Sara Pittonet Gaiarin (VeriFish) explained that the objective of VeriFish is to let producers build and document their sustainability narrative using verified data, showing why certain impacts or scores arise rather than assigning a final judgement. This is the first time all sustainability dimensions are brought together in one place, allowing claims to be transparently backed by data, even if the tool itself does not certify or score products.

Bertrand Charron (ASC) wanted to know how the project would address claims based on the tool. Mr Charron wondered how the tool would align with the Green Claims Directive and the Directive on Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition, which would restrict the use of broad, generic sustainability claims.

Sara Pittonet Gaiarin (VeriFish) explained that the project's recommendations were still being drafted and were expected to remain high-level, but the team acknowledged that the legal framework on claims would be taken into account and referenced. The purpose was not to produce recommendations on which claims or tools to use, but rather guidelines on how to use the available data and tools.

The Chair asked for information on the interplay between VeriFish and the information / scoring tool currently being developed by DG MARE.

Gerd Heinen (DG MARE) explained that the information tool being developed by DG MARE had a narrower scope than the VeriFish project. The tool was focused on two fisheries-specific indicators on stock sustainability and seabed impact. The tool did not cover aquaculture production, nutrition, or socio-economic aspects. Mr Heinen informed that there had been exchanges with the VeriFish project team to ensure methodological alignment, where possible. He added that the DG MARE tool was meant to be an



informational product-based resource for consumers and other stakeholders, plus that the launch of the tool was still subject to internal discussions.

The Chair acknowledged that, as the project sat at the intersection of research and communication, the expected future use of VeriFish remained unclear for some members.

European Market Observatory for Fisheries and Aquaculture

- **Presentation on the work programme of EUMOFA by Christophe Vande Weyer (MARE A4)**

Christophe Vande Meyer (DG MARE) informed that an update to the EUMOFA website was being finalised and expressed availability to present the changes at the next meeting. Furthermore, webinars directed at stakeholders will be organised by DG MARE.

Mr Vande Weyer, concerning the work programme of EUMOFA, explained that DG MARE took into consideration the suggestions of the MAC, alongside requests from Member States and from the internal services, which was why there was some delay in the letter of reply. When integrating them into the work programme, some of the suggestions from the MAC were adapted. For example, requests for price transmission analyses covering only one Member State were converted into case studies as part of the Monthly Highlights of EUMOFA, to ensure compatibility and feasibility. He added that the work programme had a rolling nature, so some space was left for urgent requests.

Mr Vande Weyer, concerning the suggestions for price transmission analyses, encouraged the members to express their preferences between one dedicated to octopus and one dedicated to squid. In the view of DG MARE, it would be more relevant to prioritise octopus. There were increased in Atlantic landings and emerging trade flows, which were linked to climate change with impacts on EU supply. On the other hand, the market of squid is dominated by diverse imported products, requiring a more complex analysis of the supply chain. Concerning the request for a price transmission analysis on shrimp and prawns, he encouraged the members to indicate their preferred species and products of focus.

Mr Vande Weyer informed that the request for a thematic analysis on the Croatian market would be addressed via a case study to be published in August 2026. The request for a thematic analysis on the impact of Brexit on the EU market would be covered via a comprehensive assessment of EU market developments in the context of recent crises as well as via a specific case study on EU-UK trade flows. He informed that EUMOFA would not proceed with the requested study on Norwegian salmon of “production” quality, as, even though there was interest internally in DG MARE, there was a lack of robust data, plus political sensitivities. EUMOFA would also not proceed with the requested study on Joint Fisheries Ventures, as the topic was deemed to fall outside its market-intelligence mandate.

Mr Vande Weyer recalled that the letter of reply to the MAC advice included an annex listing the 2026 work programme of public studies of EUMOFA. He emphasised the work programme would continue to evolve throughout the year.

- **Exchange of views**



Pim Visser (NOVA) highlighted the relevance of market intelligence on squid for the Dutch market. The supply of squid had significantly increased, and the market showed an impressive level of adaptation. Mr Visser added that octopus was relevant for the province of Urk.

Nicolás Fernández (OPP72) emphasised the importance of a study on octopus, particularly focusing on the Algarve and Cadiz. Mr Fernández highlighted that, in the recent years, there was a significant decrease in the production of octopus, which was linked to ecosystem changes, impacting the prices. As octopus is both produced in the EU and imported into the EU, production was also impacted by economic factors.

Janne Posti (Conxemar), on the refusal to proceed with an EUMOFA study on Joint Fisheries Ventures, asked for information on the most appropriate manner to proceed, particularly the entity that could undertake such a study. Mr Posti emphasised the importance of addressing the trade flows related to Joint Fisheries Ventures. He also argued for the importance of proceeding with a price transmission analysis on squid, taking into account the added value of the specie for processing, distribution, and retail.

Julien Daudu (EJF) expressed support for a price transmission analysis on squid.

Pieter Roden (Foodrise EU), concerning the price transmission analysis on shrimp, called for the inclusion of white-leg shrimp, which should cover the connections to the South American market, including potential impacts on the local communities. Mr Roden asked for more information on the timeline for the publication of the mentioned study.

Marine Cusa (Oceana) mentioned that the visit to the fish auction of Ostend showed an increase in the availability of both squid and octopus in Belgium. Local squid was mostly exported, while squid was also imported for consumption. In her view, it would be relevant to proceed with a price transmission analysis on squid, even though it would also be relevant to study the octopus market.

Sergio López García (OPP Puerto Burela) wanted to know the status of the expected study on mackerel. Mr López underscored the importance of studying the Norwegian market, as Norway had a significant impact on shared fishery stocks.

The Chair recalled that additional suggestions could be integrated into a new piece of advice on the work programme of EUMOFA.

Christophe Vande Meyer (DG MARE), on the shrimp and prawns study, responded that a timeline was not set yet, as it was necessary to determine the species and products of focus. Concerning the preferences between a price structure analysis on squid or on octopus, Mr Vande Weyer acknowledged that there was interest in both. He committed to discussing with the EUMOFA experts about proceeding with a price transmission analysis on squid, while also undertaking a more synthetic publication on octopus. Concerning the request to study the Joint Fisheries Ventures, he committed to discussing internally, as it would likely require a procurement procedure for an external study. As for Norway, he acknowledged that it was a very sensitive topic, which was being closely followed by DG MARE. While no specific studies on Norway were foreseen, the Commission services could consider how to look into the matter, following further inputs.

Emiel Brouckaert (EAPO) called for a study on cuttlefish.



- **Way forward**

The Chair responded that Mr Brouckaert’s suggestion could be integrated into the next piece of advice on suggestions for the work programme of EUMOFA. Concerning the species for the price transmission analysis on shrimp and prawns, the Chair suggested that the Secretariat should consult the most interested members directly and then communicate the preferences to DG MARE. He recalled that, in accordance with the annual work programme, at the June 2026 meeting, draft advice with additional suggestions would be considered.

Flags of Convenience

- **Presentation of the study “Beyond the flag: who really owns the world’s large-scale fishing fleet” by Vanya Vulperhorst (Oceana)**

Presentation

The Chair recalled that, in the past, the topic of flags of convenience had been addressed under Working Group 2, but that, for agenda reasons, the presentation was scheduled under Working Group 1.

Vanya Vulperhorst (Oceana) commented that the topic of flags of convenience was also relevant for EU production, as it covered EU owned vessels with foreign flags, whose products entered the EU market. Ms Vulperhorst recalled, that since 2023, the European Commission was preparing a study on flags of convenience, which was published two weeks before. She underscored that the topic was directly relevant to the MAC due to the market implications and due to the competition with the EU fleet. She explained that both the Commission’s study and Oceana’s analysis highlight the role of open registries and flags of convenience, which are often characterised by lax regulatory frameworks, limited enforcement capacity and weak labour, environmental and monitoring standards, in enabling vessel operators to avoid controls, obscure beneficial ownership, and potentially facilitate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

Ms Vulperhorst summarised the Commission’s key findings, including the concentration of global fishing capacity under the top thirty-five flag states and the identification of major flags of convenience, such as Panama, Liberia and the Marshall Islands, many of which do not comply with genuine-link requirements under UNCLOS. These flag states were found to be associated with poor safety conditions, tax avoidance, weakened oversight of quota management and, in certain cases, risks of smuggling or money-laundering. She stressed that the weaknesses of these systems affect the EU market directly, as several of these States are key trading partners whose products enter the EU supply chain through imports or direct landings.

Ms Vulperhorst, concerning the Oceana study, explained that it analysed EU-owned vessels operating under high-risk flags, using the EU list of tax havens, yellow-carded countries under the IUU Regulation, and the International Transport Workers’ Federation list of flags of convenience. The study identified 104 EU-owned vessels operating under these flags, linked to twenty high-risk states, including several countries with which the EU maintains access agreements. She highlighted that 33 of these vessels were authorised to export to the EU, potentially enabling the laundering of illegally caught products through complex global supply chains involving transshipment, processing and re-export. She drew attention to specific cases, such as EU-owned vessels flagged to Panama landing in Ecuador—both considered high-risk—which could create vulnerabilities, despite the EU’s stringent import control system. She also referred to Belize-flagged vessels



operating in Mauritania in direct competition with EU-flagged vessels that must comply with far stricter monitoring and reporting requirements.

Ms Vulperhorst the study's recommendations, calling for strengthened inspections of imports and direct landings from high-risk flag states, improved transparency and mandatory registration of EU beneficial ownership of foreign-flagged vessels, and enhanced scrutiny by Member States when products originate from jurisdictions with weak control systems. She emphasised that better access to information is essential for detecting irregularities and ensuring a level playing field between EU and non-EU flagged operations supplying the EU market.

- **Exchange of views**

Janne Posti (Conxemar) mentioned that the study was based on assumptions, such as links to “yellow-carded countries” and tax havens. In his view, there was some contradiction in relation to Spain. The Spanish import controls system on catch certificates is recognised as a solid system against IUU fishing practices. At the same time, the list of offenders in the study indicates a high number of Spanish-linked vessels. He wanted to know how many fishing vessels were actually proven to be linked to flags of convenience.

Vanya Vulperhorst (Oceana) clarified that the report uses the term “presumed ownership” because beneficial ownership of foreign-flagged vessels is not publicly accessible. Oceana relied on Lloyd’s List data and direct confirmation from the companies named. There were cases of vessels there were not authorised to export to the EU. Ms Vulperhorst stated that Spain’s strong IUU-control framework is acknowledged in the study. Since Spain is a key fishing nation, it automatically means that there are more related fishing vessels. Existing enforcement gaps related to several high-risk flag States needed to be faced, including through stricter rules on ownership by natural persons. While Spain investigated cases of flags of convenience based on the IUU lists of RFMOs, it was also important to consider fishing activities outside RFMO areas. Furthermore, there were several cases of “yellow-carded” countries, such as Panama, Belize, and Senegal, exporting to Spain.

Pieter Roden (Foodrise EU) requested information on the contents of the vessels exporting to the EU. Mr Roden wondered whether, in the case of the vessels from Mauritania, the exports were linked to the fishmeal and fish oil industry. Mr Roden also requested more information on the data availability and assumptions.

Vanya Vulperhorst (Oceana) explained that, of the identified vessels, only 44 broadcasted AIS signals and that no detailed landing data are available, which meant that it was challenging to determine their fishing patterns or whether their catches are destined for fishmeal, fish oil or other products.

Patrick Murphy (IS&WFPO) asked whether the report assessed the proportionality of the identified vessels compared to the overall fleet, and whether their number is significant relative to all fishing vessels of different nationalities.

Vanya Vulperhorst (Oceana) responded that the study looked at EU owned vessels linked to high-risk flag States. A previous study had looked into countries with a high level of foreign ownership. Foreign ownership is widespread, particularly in Africa and Oceania. While foreign ownership could be beneficial, it could also undermine fisheries management, if the profits are not flowing to the local communities. While the proportion varies across fleets, in general, most fishing vessels are linked to the countries of base.



Anne-Mette Baek (EFFOP) expressed surprise at the identification of the Faroe Islands as a high-risk flag State in the context of the study.

Nicolás Fernández (OPP72) expressed concern about the presentation of studies based on assumptions and suppositions, which could unfairly stigmatise certain countries or operators without sufficiently robust evidence. Mr Fernández acknowledged the importance of fighting IUU fishing and of banning products that do not follow the EU's standards, but argued that the EU fleet was already under significant pressure from the European Commission and from the Member States. In the case of the tuna fleet in Ecuador, as demonstrated by the Ibero-American Network of Small-Scale Artisanal Fisheries, there were controls on the corresponding fleets. There was a risk of undermining the credibility of Spanish and other operators based on a reduced number of fishing vessels.

Janne Posti (Conxemar) argued that a “yellow card” did not necessarily mean that all fisheries in a certain country were deemed to be illegal. Ecuador and Panama were both “yellow carded”, but their tuna fisheries were certified by MSC as being sustainable.

Pieter Roden (Foodrise EU) requested information on potential links to countries in Southern Africa.

Juan Manuel Trujillo Castillo (ETF) clarified that the use of flags of convenience is not illegal in itself and can have benefits, but can also create competitive distortions, as EU-flagged vessels operate under much stricter labour, social and safety standards. Mr Trujillo stressed that, while most operators act responsibly, the flexibility of current legislation enables practices that undermine compliant fleets, and cited several Spanish enforcement cases to illustrate both the challenges and the country's leading role in combating IUU fishing.

Vanya Vulperhorst (Oceana) expressed appreciation for the feedback received, indicating availability for further exchanges. Concerning the Faroe Islands, Ms Vulperhorst explained that the classification was based on the list of the International Transport Workers Federation due to documented labour-related issues. On the assumptions, she emphasised that Oceana had been working on the report for half a year. Oceana used data from a private company, which illustrates the importance of data collection by the Member States, including to ensure fair competition with EU vessels. When there were cases of vessels not following the law, it was important to proceed with sanctions. There were cases, such as pelagic tuna vessels with Belizean flag operating in non-RFMO waters, lacking investigation. The study did not claim that all Spanish vessels operating in Ecuador and Panama were a problem, it simply acknowledged that there was a higher risk. In her view, it was important to address “flag hopping”.

The Chair thanked Ms Vulperhorst for the exchange. The Chair recalled that, in 2021, the MAC adopted advice jointly with the Long Distance Advisory Council on the impact of flags of convenience. In the future, it would continue to be relevant to monitor developments on the matter.

Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries

- **Consideration of draft advice on the Terms of Reference of the 2026 edition of the Annual Economic Report on the EU Fishing Fleet**

The Chair recalled that the Secretariat circulated a questionnaire from 18 December 2025 to 12 January 2026 to assist in the development of advice on the Terms of Reference of the 2026 edition of the Annual Economic Report on the EU Fishing Fleet. The original version of the draft advice was based on a reply from EAPO.



Afterward, preliminary feedback was submitted by Europêche. The Chair encouraged the members to share their views on the text, including potential validation of the recommendations.

Pim Visser (NOVA) expressed concern about how the Commission’s push towards a zero-emission fishing fleet overlooked the sector’s negligible share of maritime emissions, the major technical and economic challenges involved, and the risk that decarbonisation costs would ultimately be passed on to consumers. Mr Visser called for a more balanced and forward-looking assessment of these efforts.

The Chair acknowledged Mr Visser’s concerns. The Chair explained that the topic of data on emissions was already integrated into the draft advice, particularly the importance of considering the sector’s initial baseline. Forward-looking analyses had previously proven technically complex and assumption-driven, but agreed that a broader study on the future socioeconomic prospects of the fleet would be highly relevant given the constraints faced by the industry.

Daniel Voces (Europêche) drew attention to the continuous absence of data on the Greek fleet under the various editions of the Annual Economic Report. Mr Voces highlighted the existing inconsistencies in the definition of “active vessel”. He expressed surprise regarding the press release issued by DG MARE. While the report showed that, in 2023, there was an historically low economic performance, including both in profits and fleet size, the press release focused on positive outlooks based on forecasting. In the recent years, the fleet decreased from 42600 to 41100 vessels and then to 37000, representing a very significant decline.

The Chair thanked Mr Voces for the detailed observations, acknowledging the importance of communicating potential inconsistencies in the report to STECF. In his view, the issue of the Commission’s communication practices were outside of the scope of the draft advice under discussion. The issues raised by Mr Visser could potentially be addressed in a future advice on socioeconomic analysis and greenhouse gas emissions.

Laure Guillevic (WWF) requested additional time to redraft the final paragraph, which had been proposed by Europêche ahead of the meeting. In her view, the reference to the socioeconomic objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation should be reframed in a more neutral manner.

The Secretary General recalled that DG MARE prepared the Terms of Reference of the Annual Economic Report in the beginning of the year. Therefore, for the advice to be taken into account, it was important to proceed with the adoption as soon as possible. He suggested that Ms Guillevic and Mr Voces could coordinate ahead of the meeting of the Executive Committee, which would take place the next day.

The Working Group reached agreement, in general, on the draft advice on the Terms of Reference of the 2026 edition of the Annual Economic Report on the EU Fishing Fleet.

- **Way forward**

The Chair proposed to, following the redrafting of the last paragraph by Europêche and WWF, to put forward the draft advice to the Executive Committee for consideration and potential adoption.

AOB

None.





Summary of action items

- Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries
 - o Following the redrafting of the last paragraph by Europêche and WWF, draft advice on the Terms of Reference of the 2026 edition of the Annual Economic Report on the EU Fishing Fleet to be put forward to the Executive Committee for consideration and potential adoption



Attendance List

Representative	Organisation	Role
Adrien Simonnet	Union du Mareyage Français (UMF)	Member
Alen Lovrinov	Producer Organisation Omega 3	Member
Alessandro Manghisi	Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC)	Member
Alonso Abreu Lozano	Asociacion de Armadores de Punta Del Moral	Member
Anna Rokicka	Polish Association of Fish Processors (PSPR)	Member
Anne Mette Baek	EFFOP	Member
Arthur Yon	FROM Nord	Member
Benoît Thomassen	Federation of European Aquaculture Producers (FEAP)	Member
Caroline Gamblin	PACT'ALIM	Member
Christine Absil	Good Fish Foundation	Member
Christophe Vande Weyer	European Commission	Expert
Daniel Voces	Europêche	Member
Emiel Brouckaert	European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO)	Member
Gerd Heinen	European Commission	Expert
Guus Pastoor	Visfederatie	Member
Janne Posti	Conxemar	Member
Jean-Marie Robert	Les Pêcheurs de Bretagne	Member
João Pereira	FRUCOM	Member
John Lynch	Irish South and East Fish Producers Organisation (ISEFPO)	Member
José Carlos Escalera	FECOPESCA	Member
José Maria Gallart	OPP Almería	Member
Juan Manuel Trujillo Castillo	ETF	Member
Jules Danto	European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO)	Member
Julian Daudu	Environmental Justice Foundation	Member
Julian Lamothe	European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO) / ANOP	Chair



Representative	Organisation	Role
Juliette Margueritte	ESSA	Member
Katarina Sipic	Seafood Europe	Member
Laura Harpøth	EFFOP	Member
Laure Guillevic	WWF	Member
Linda Zanki Duvnjak	OP Friska Riba	Member
Linne Verkoeven	Seafood Europe	Member
María Luisa Álvarez Blanco	FEDEPESCA	Member
Marine Cusa	Oceana	Member
Mariola Valero	Spain	Observer
Matthew Greant	Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF)	Member
Michelle Boonstra	Catch Welfare Platform	Expert
Nicolás Fernández	OPP72 – Conil	Member
Patrick Murphy	Irish South & West Fish Producers Organisation	Member
Pedro Hernandez Saez	CARBOPEPESCA	Member
Pedro Luis Casado López	OPP80	Member
Pedro Reis Santos	Market Advisory Council (MAC)	Secretariat
Pierre Commère	Seafood Europe	Member
Pim Visser	NOVA	Member
Sara Pittonet Gaiarin	VeriFish	Expert
Sarah Hautier	EuroCommerce	Member
Sergio López García	OPP7 Burela	Member
Stefan Meyer	Fischverband	Member
Sylvie Becaus	VVV	Member
Tamas Eisenbeck	Seafood Europe	Member
Thomas Kruse	Danish Pelagic Producer Organisation	Member
Thibault Pivetta	EMPA	Member
Vanya Vulperhorst	Oceana	Member
Xavier Pires	ALIF	Member



Representative	Organisation	Role
Yannis Pelekanakis	HAPO	Member
Yobana Bermúdez	Seafood Europe	Member

