

Executive Committee

Minutes

Tuesday, 24 March 2026 (14:00 – 16:00 CEST)

Zoom

Interpretation in EN, ES, FR

Welcome from the Chair, Yobana Bermúdez

[Presentation](#)

Adoption of the agenda and of the last meetings' minutes (05.02.26): Adopted.

Action points: None.

Self-Sufficiency of the EU Market

- **Presentation of the European Parliament's study "Assessing the impact of seafood imports on EU self-sufficiency" by Tim Huntington (Poseidon Europe)**

[Presentation](#)

Tim Huntington (Poseidon Europe) informed that the study "Assessing the impact of seafood imports on EU self-sufficiency" had been prepared for the European Parliament's Committee on Fisheries and had been published the previous month. Mr Huntington recalled that, in 2023, the EU supply of fishery and aquaculture products for human consumption had totalled 12.38 million tonnes, with 8.48 million tonnes (68%) originating from imports and 3.9 million tonnes (32%) from EU production. This had resulted in an EU self-sufficiency rate of 38.1%, down from previous years. He provided an overview of the objectives of the study: to provide an updated assessment of the impact and evolution of extra-EU imports and to examine options to increase the EU's self-sufficiency in various market segments.

Mr Huntington explained that the mentioned self-sufficiency rate masked the composition of EU imports and consumption. Assuming all production remains within the EU, the EU domestic supply represents 31% of the total available supply. After EU exports, EU domestic production covers only 14% of total EU consumption. Major supplier countries to the EU include Chile, Türkiye and Morocco, together with Norway and Iceland. In the case of imports Norway and Iceland, the production was characterised by higher wages and more efficient and modern fishing fleets. In comparison, the EU had an ageing fleet. He highlighted that groundfish, such as cod, hake and others, accounted for significant volumes consumed in the EU, but EU production of these species represented only a small fraction. He also drew attention to the decrease in EU landings, as landings under quota species had decreased by 43% between 2020 and 2023. Mr Huntington emphasised the impact of external factors, such as inflation and raw material constraints, for



example due to the war in Ukraine and Brexit, which contributed to a reduction in the EU consumption of fishery and aquaculture products and an increase reliance on cheaper non-EU imports.

Mr Huntington explained that EU aquaculture production was dominated by mussels, trout, seabream and seabass. The competitiveness of EU aquaculture had been challenged by a combination of rising costs, environmental challenges and imports from third countries, such as Türkiye and Chile. The study included a case study on Turkish seabass/seabream farms and a case study on the cost of mussel production in Galicia in comparison with imports of bulk-produced mussels from Chile. The study also demonstrated the importance of innovation in expanding EU aquaculture production and competitiveness. This included the potential to relocate bivalve production offshore, even though there were significant technical and logistical challenges. The study showed the possibility of upscaling production through more advanced recirculated aquaculture systems (RAS). Innovation would also be applied to increased automation, resilience, and remote monitoring.

Mr Huntington, taking into account policy and regulatory mechanisms, highlighted the mismatch between the standards applied to EU producers and those applied to imported fishery and aquaculture products. In his view, ensuring a level-playing-field remained essential. He outlined multiple policy recommendations, which focusing on strengthening direct support, encouraging innovation, improving regulatory coherence, and ensuring that imported fishery and aquaculture products meet standards consistent with the EU's commitments.

- **Exchange of views**

Janne Posti (Conxemar) commented that the study seemed to suggest that imports were the main reason for the EU's low self-sufficiency rate and wondered about internal constraints on EU production. As an example, in 2024, only 66% of the attributed fishing quotas were utilised. Mr Posti wanted to know whether consumer demands and preferences were considered, since some species were not sufficiently available in the quantities demanded by EU consumers. In his view, the impact of environmental rules on the EU catching sector should also be considered. Mr Posti expressed interest and asked for more information on the study's finding that Norway and Iceland had higher operating costs but remained more competitive than the EU fishing fleet. He wanted to know whether stakeholders from the processing, trading, and retail sectors were consulted during the development of the study. He also wanted to know how the proposed recommendations would work in practice, particularly the definition of sustainability standards applicable to imported products. Furthermore, he wondered about impact assessments on the competitiveness of the processing sector, as there could be increased costs and the risk of relocation.

Tim Huntington (Poseidon Europe) acknowledged that imports were not necessarily bad. Several of the consumed species were not available domestically, so trade played a legitimate role. In his view, the main issue impacting the competitiveness of the EU primary producers was the low productivity. Iceland and Norway were operating with newer and more extensive fishing fleets, which were more cost-efficient. Mr Huntington clarified that the study looked into environmental constraints, particularly on aquaculture production, which did constitute barriers to the competitiveness of EU production. He added that DG MARE was aware of these constraints and was aiming to reduce burdens on aquaculture production. He explained



that the study was a desktop study with limited time for stakeholder consultations. No impact assessment was conducted, as it was outside the Terms of Reference. The focus was on understanding the situation, including through case studies, to identify strengths and weaknesses.

Guus Pastoor (Seafood Europe) commented that the study included several valid recommendations, but, in agreement with Mr Posti, raised doubts about the framing. In his view, the title of the study should be reversed, as the focus should be on the effects of the EU production on the self-sufficiency rate. The approach in the study seemed rather defensive. More attention should have been given to market demand for imports. As an example, salmon was not a cheap product but continued to gain momentum in the market due to availability, producers, logistics, and consumer preference. Mr Pastoor emphasised that consumers were shifting their protein intake, so the nutritional benefits of fishery and aquaculture products should be recognised, including through more supply for the market. Such an approach could also drive product investments and stronger supply chains. While market demand could drive innovation, in the EU, due to policy and environmental constraints, catches continued to decrease.

Tim Huntington (Poseidon Europe) expressed agreement with Mr Pastoor. Mr Huntington explained that the Terms of Reference were set by the European Parliament, demonstrating the MEPs' concern with competitiveness. While the policy recommendations could be perceived as generic, these had been considered useful. On the development of the market to drive production, he exemplified that the development of seaweed farming and low-trophic species aquaculture would depend on market developments. He expressed availability to share the comments with the staff of the European Parliament's Committee on Fisheries.

Thibault Pivetta (EMPA) expressed appreciation for the study, particularly the recommendations on shellfish farming. In his view, it was important to further discuss how offshore aquaculture could adapt to the increasing pressures on coastal areas. "Offshore" covers a broad range of situations, facing challenges that required innovation and investments. Mr Pivetta highlighted the direct impact of product prices on the production costs of the shellfish sector. He argued that it was also necessary to address how access to research funds impacts competitiveness, as many operators struggled to benefit from the available funding. It would be relevant to analyse how existing funding instruments, such as Horizon Europe, the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund, or national programmes, were used and how efficient they were.

Tim Huntington (Poseidon Europe) acknowledged that moving aquaculture production offshore was complex, but highlighted that there were intermediate models, so a mixture of models could be pursued. Concerning competitiveness, Mr Huntington argued that SMEs took the brunt of regulatory requirements, struggling the most to remain competitive. On access to funding, he mentioned that there was a lack of desegregated FAMENET data per segment. He added that DG MARE was about to launch a study on investments in aquaculture.

María Luisa Álvarez Blanco (FEDEPESCA) emphasised that the specialised retail sector in Spain had been heavily affected by policy inefficiencies over time. Many actors throughout the value chain had disappeared. While the sector was not inherently uncompetitive, it faced exceptionally challenging conditions. Microenterprises faced particularly harsh constraints. Since some products received funding, while others



did not, the sector was not operating in an adequate policy environment. In her view, the impact of the described constraints should be acknowledged. Structural challenges should not be mistaken for weaknesses.

Katarina Sipic (Seafood Europe) called for a calculation of the cost of regulatory policy on competitiveness. Ms Sipic wondered about the size of EU production in comparison with the production from third countries. Despite representing a small fraction of the global market share, the EU continued to demand that the rest of the world meets the EU's standards. Considering the political nature of the study, she wondered about the added value for EU operators.

Bertrand Charron (ASC) expressed general agreement with the recommendations of the study. Mr Charron wanted to know whether the study had examined the proportion of certified fishery and aquaculture products. Since the study advocated for support for certification, he wanted to know more about what EU mechanisms could be mobilised to encourage such development.

Tim Huntington (Poseidon Europe) acknowledged the existence of structural barriers, adding that DG MARE was aware of them. Mr Huntington explained that the study did not examine the cost of policy regulation, which would be a rather challenging and highly political exercise. He informed that he was not aware of the proportion of certified EU production. According to estimates from the MSC, around 25% of catch fisheries were certified globally.

Ocean Diplomacy

- **Presentation of the European Parliament's own-initiative report on the role of ocean diplomacy for the competitiveness of EU fisheries and aquaculture by MEP Željana Zovko**

Željana Zovko (European Parliament) presented the European Parliament's own-initiative report on the role of ocean diplomacy for the competitiveness of EU fisheries and aquaculture. Ms Zovko emphasised that the ocean was not only an environmental and economic issue, but also a geopolitical space, playing also a role in international trade. The EU is a global maritime actor with the world's largest Exclusive Economic Zone. Thanks to its regulatory framework, the EU is among the most sustainable actors globally. Nevertheless, the EU sector remained under pressure, facing significant challenges linked to competitiveness, including a growing dependency on imported fishery and aquaculture products and the persistent threat of IUU fishing. As the EU sector operates under high environmental and social standards, the level-playing-field should be strengthened. Sustainability should be reflected across the EU's external action, including trade, diplomacy, and ocean governance, for example via Free Trade Agreements, multilateral negotiations, and market access.

Ms Zovko underscored that ocean diplomacy should be used as a practical tool to promote the EU's standards globally. She called for strengthening the fight against IUU fishing through the robust use of the existing tools. The power of the market should be used to reinforce sustainability, including through strong traceability, effective implementation of the catch certification scheme, and ensuring that imported products meet equivalent standards to those of EU products, including via mirror measures. International partnerships, including Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements, should be reinforced. These partnerships allow for



access to resources, but also a framework for cooperation and transparency, addressing sustainability, fairness, and the proper integration of local producers.

Ms Zovko emphasised the importance of addressing the competitiveness of the sector, including through funding and an increased attractiveness for the younger generations. She highlighted the importance of stakeholder involvement, including those from the Outermost Regions, in the development of policy actions. The Advisory Councils were essential to ensure that policies remained grounded, adding that she welcomed the participation of Croatian stakeholders in the MAC. She stressed that, through the ocean diplomacy, the EU could lead globally, aligning competitiveness and sustainability, while acting against disloyal competition. She expressed availability for further exchanges and bilateral discussions.

- **Exchange of views**

The Chair thanked Ms Zovko for the presentation. The Chair expressed availability to share the contact details of Ms Zovko's office, in case of questions from the members.

Working Groups

- **Reporting by Julien Lamothe (Chair of Working Group 1)**

Julien Lamothe (EAPO) informed that, at the meeting of 23 March 2026 of Working Group 1:

- A DG MARE representative delivered a presentation on the preparatory work for the upcoming EU Strategy for Coastal Communities and the EU Strategy for Islands – the Secretariat would be circulating a questionnaire to the members for the preparation of draft advice on the matter;
- The scheduled presentation on budget expenditure tracking and performance framework under the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework by a DG MARE representative had not been possible, but the Secretariat would collect inputs from DG MARE and reschedule;
- A DG MARE representative delivered an update on the outcomes of the EU Aquaculture Campaign, which would also be relevant for the campaign on aquatic foods planned for 2027;
- A DG MARE representative and EUMOFA experts presented an updated version of the website of EUMOFA – stakeholders could also benefit from planned dedicated webinars;
- EUMOFA experts delivered a presentation 2025 edition of the “Fishmeal and fish oil study”;
- Janne Posti, as Support Group Coordinator for the Processing Industry of the Energy Transition Partnership, provided an update on recent developments and market-related aspects of the initiative.



- **Reporting by Stefan Meyer (Chair of Working Group 2)**

The Secretary General, on behalf of the Chair of Working Group 2, informed that, at the meeting of 23 March 2026 of Working Group 2:

- DG MARE representatives presented the results of a questionnaire circulated to stakeholders in December 2025 on traceability, which highlighted that a new delegated act would be expected in the near future – the Working Group committed to working on a new piece of advice on traceability, once the draft delegated act became available;
- A DG MARE representative provided an update on the latest trade developments, which covered the conclusion of the EU-India Free Trade Agreement, the decisions on the partnership and the interim trade agreement with Mercosur, and the internal procedures to implement the framework agreement reached with the USA;
- A Seafood Europe representative presented a proposal of draft advice on the implementation of CATCH – as several members requested additional time to consider the text, the Working Group agreed to proceed with an ordinary written procedure, which would be followed by urgent written procedures, if needed;
- A representative of the IUU Fishing Coalition presented a guide developed by his organisation titled “The Fisheries Import Control Scheme Handbook”;
- The Working Group exchanges views on the due diligence, particularly focusing on the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive and the upcoming sector-specific reporting standards – the Working Group agreed to continue gathering information, with the aim of developing draft advice in the near future.

- **Reporting by Benoît Thomassen (Chair of Working Group 3)**

Benoît Thomassen (FEAP) informed that, at the meeting of 24 March 2026 of Working Group 3:

- A DG SANTE representative provided an update on sanitary and phytosanitary requirements and the imports of shrimps and prawns from India;
- EFFOP representatives delivered a presentation on the climate footprint of marine ingredients;
- Members considered draft advice on fishery and aquaculture products under the EU-UK Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures Agreement;
- Members considered draft advice on competitiveness, simplification, and reduction of administrative burden;
- Members considered draft advice on competitiveness and the upcoming studies on the Fisheries Control Regulation – due do significant preliminary feedback submitted ahead of the meeting, the



Working Group agreed to procedure with a written procedure, aiming to conclude the document as soon as possible;

- Members considered draft advice on the biochemical interaction between selenium and mercury in fishery and aquaculture products;
- Members considered draft advice on Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS).

The Executive Committee endorsed the advice on “Negotiation of the EU–UK SPS Agreement”, the advice on “Competitiveness of the EU Market of Fishery and Aquaculture Products – Simplification and reduction of administrative burden”, the advice on “Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)”, and the advice on “Biochemical Interaction between Selenium and Mercury in Fishery and Aquaculture Products”.

European Maritime Day

- **Update on the joint Advisory Councils workshop by Pedro Reis Santos (Secretary General)**

The Secretary General recalled that, every year, the European Commission held the European Maritime Day, which included various panels and workshop. In 2026, the event would take place on 21 and 22 May in Limassol, Cyprus. As standard practice, the event would include a workshop organised by the Advisory Councils. The Secretary General informed that the Secretariats of the Advisory Councils agreed that, from 2026 onward, the annual workshop would be coordinated by three to four Secretariats.

The Secretary General further informed that, for the workshop of 2026, the coordinating Advisory Councils were the Mediterranean Advisory Council, the Baltic Sea Advisory Council, the North Western Waters Advisory Council, and the North Sea Advisory Council. The four organising Advisory Councils agreed that the workshop would be about Marine Spatial Planning. The Secretary General mentioned that, even though the MAC was not participating in the organisation, he would attend the session. The planned speakers included representatives from various NGOs and from small-scale fishers.

The Secretary General highlighted that registrations for the European Maritime Day were already open. The preparations for the workshop were ongoing.

AOB

- **Potential cooperation with the CCRUP and the AAC on *de minimis* State aid for aquaculture production**

The Secretary General informed that, at the request of the Outermost Regions Advisory Council, he attended an exchange of views on ceiling of *de minimis* State aid for aquaculture production under, which took place under the most recent meeting of the Aquaculture Working Group of the Outermost Regions Advisory Council. The Secretary General recalled that, under the EU legislative framework, there were various ceilings for support depending on the economic sector. The ceiling for the fisheries and aquaculture sector was €40 000 per single undertaking over any three years period. On the other hand, for agricultural production, the ceiling was €50 000, for road freight transport was €100 000, while the general ceiling was of €300 000.



The Secretary General explained that the Outermost Regions Advisory Council would like to request an increase of the ceiling for aquaculture production. According to them, in cases of crises, insurers usually did not cover the production, but only the infrastructure. In the case of aquaculture production in the Outermost Regions, insurers usually did not even want to cover the infrastructure due to the frequency of natural disasters, such as cyclones. Therefore, aquaculture operators were significantly dependent of State aid. While, in a crisis situation, it was theoretically possible to use the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund, in practice, it remained challenging when rapid assistance was needed. The Outermost Regions Advisory Council wanted to include the Aquaculture Advisory Council in the development of advice, but also the MAC, in case the processing and trading of aquaculture products was covered.

The Secretary General informed that, at that stage, only an exchange of views had taken place, so the development of a draft text was still pending. The Secretary General encouraged the members to share their views on whether the MAC should be involved.

Daniel Voces (Europêche) wanted to know whether the planned draft advice would also cover the fisheries sector, arguing that the existing ceiling of €40 000 per undertaking over a three-year period was not high enough. Mr Voces further argued that, as demonstrated by the fuel crisis following the war in Ukraine, the provision of State aid “per undertaking” was a major problem, as one company could own more than one fishing vessel. He added that the future advice should also cover the exploration of emergency measures by the European Commission in the context of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

The Secretary General responded that the aim proposed by the Outermost Regions Advisory Council was exclusively focused on aquaculture production, but he expressed availability, in case there was interest from the Executive Committee, to contact the Secretariats of the other Advisory Councils to expand the advice to cover also the fishing sector as well as emergency measures to face the ongoing conflict.

María Luisa Álvarez Blanco (FEDEPESCA) stated that she was not opposed to the provision of assistance to aquaculture producers. Nevertheless, in her view, the provision *de minimis* State aid should be done in a way that ensures a level-playing-field across the fisheries and aquaculture value chain, avoiding distortions in the market.

Katarina Sipic (Seafood Europe) expressed interest in the development of the advice, even though it would depend on the framing. Ms Sipic recalled that, during the COVID-19 crisis, in the case of the processing sector, there had been significant differences in the access to aid, particularly when comparing the processing of seafood and the processing of agricultural products. In her view, the issue should be monitored closely.

Thibault Pivetta (EMPA) expressed support for the development of joint advice, as there were specificities of the aquaculture sector that should be addressed. While the processing sector also had specificities, in his view, it would be possible to develop a text covering the specificities of all the relevant sectors.

The Chair proposed to proceed, in an urgent manner, with an expansion of the aim of the draft advice.

- **European Ocean Board**



The Secretary General recalled that, recently, several Advisory Councils submitted a joint letter to Commissioner Kadis requesting collaboration with the European Ocean Board, specifically membership. The MAC sent a separate letter, aiming instead for an observer role. While an official reply remained pending, at a recent meeting of the North Western Waters Advisory Council, the Commissioner encouraged the Advisory Councils to apply, in a coordinated manner, to be observers.

The Secretary General informed that, to account for the deadline for applications, the Secretariat, in coordination with the Chair, submitted an official request for the MAC to be an observer to the European Ocean Board. Following a suggestion from the Management Team, he was indicated as the main representative for the MAC. The Secretary General encouraged the members to share their views on the participation of the MAC, as an observer, in the European Ocean Board.

The Executive Committee expressed agreement with the participation of the MAC, as an observer, in the European Ocean Board.

- **10th Anniversary of the Market Advisory Council and of the Aquaculture Advisory Council**

The Chair recalled that, on 10 June 2026, in Brussels, a special conference would be taking place to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the MAC and of the Aquaculture Advisory Council. The Chair encouraged the members to attend.

The Secretary General informed that the event would be during the afternoon at the Palais des Académies. The programme was almost finalised. At the beginning of the event, there would be speeches by the European Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans, the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Ocean, and the Assistant Director-General of the FAO. Two roundtables were planned. The first roundtable would have a retrospective perspective on the role of the MAC and of the Aquaculture Advisory Council, while the second roundtable would have a forward-looking perspective on the future of aquaculture production and of the market of fishery and aquaculture products. The roundtables would count on participation from national administrations, DG MARE, the European Fisheries Control Agency, a Vice-Chair of the Parliament's Committee on Fisheries, and various experts. The conference would be followed by a reception, which would include a cultural performance. He recalled that, over the course of the following two days, the usual meetings of the Working Groups and of the Executive Committee would take place.

- **Organisation of the meeting**

María Luisa Álvarez Blanco (FEDEPESCA) expressed disappointment that, despite the significant interest from the members, under the agenda point “self-sufficiency rate of the EU market”, there had been insufficient time for all members to intervene effectively. In her view, among the members that requested the floor, the speaking time had not been well balanced. She asked for, in future opportunities, the debate to be organised differently.

The Chair acknowledged that the exchange of views under the mentioned agenda point could have been better organised. The Chair mentioned that the limited availability of MEP Zokvo made it difficult to further extend the preceding agenda point. The Chair underscored the importance of all members having the



opportunity to intervene. In the future, efforts could be made to limit the number of questions per intervening members, to allow the participation of more members.

The Secretary General expressed availability to share the contact details of Mr Huntington, in case Ms Álvarez was interested in following up bilaterally.

Summary of action items

- AOB
 - Secretary General to contact the Secretariats of the other Advisory Councils to expand the planned collaboration on the ceilings of *de minimis* State aid to cover also fisheries production as well as the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.



Attendance list

Representative	Organisation	Role
Alen Lovrinov	Production Organization Omega 3	Member
Alessandro Manghisi	Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC)	Member
Alexandre Bonneau	SNCE	Member
Andrea Fabris	Associazione Piscicoltori Italiani (API)	Member
Angels Segura Unió	AECOC	Member
Anna Rokicka	Polish Association of Fish Processors	Member
Aodh O Donnell	Irish Fish Producers Organisation (IFPO)	Member
Benoit Thomassen	FEAP	Member
Bertrand CHARRON	Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC)	Member
Christine Absil	Good Fish	Member
Claudio Pedroni	Associazione Piscicoltori Italiani (API)	Member
Daniel Voces de Onaindi	Europêche	Member
Dominic Rihan	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation	Member
Gerd Heinen	DG MARE	Expert
Grace Howe	The Nature Conservancy (TNC)	Member
Guus Pastoor	Seafood Europe	Member
Jacob Armstrong	WWF	Member
Janne Posti	CONXEMAR	Member
Javier Ojeda	FEAP	Member
Jean-Marie Robert	Les Pêcheurs de Bretagne PO	Member
John Lynch	ISEFPO	Member



Representative	Organisation	Role
Jules Danto	EAPO	Member
Julien Lamothe	ANOP	Member
Katarina Sipic	Seafood Europe	Member
Laura Harpøth Espensen	EFFOP - Marine Nutrients Europe	Member
Laure Guillevic	WWF European Policy Office	Member
Linda Zanki Duvnjak	OP Friska Riba	Member
Linne Verhoeven	Seafood Europe	Member
María Luisa Álvarez Blanco	FEDEPESCA	Member
Marine Cusa	Oceana	Member
Matthew Gréant	Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF)	Member
Nila Silovic	European Parliament	Observer
Pedro Hernández Saez	CARBOPECA OPP 66	Member
Pedro Reis Santos	Market Advisory Council (MAC)	Secretariat
Pier Salvador	COPA COGECA	Member
Poul Jensen	Danish Seafood Association	Member
Roberto Alonso	ANFACO-CYTMA	Member
Tamas Eisenbeck	Seafood Europe	Member
Thibault PIVETTA	EMPA	Member
Tim Huntington	Poseidon	Expert
Violaine De Neef	Market Advisory Council (MAC)	Secretariat
Yobana Bermúdez	Seafood Europe	Chair
Željana Zovko	European Parliament	Observer

