

**EU ADVISORY
COUNCILS:**
STAKEHOLDER
ENGAGEMENT IN
POLICYMAKING
FOR
SUSTAINABLE
**FISHERIES &
AQUACULTURE**
PRODUCTION
AND VALUE
CHAINS



As foreseen under the **Common Fisheries Policy** Regulation, the Advisory Councils are stakeholder-led organisations composed of representatives of the fisheries and aquaculture value chain (e.g., primary producers, processors, retailers, trade unions) and Other Interest Groups (e.g., environmental and development NGOs, recreational fisheries associations). The **Advisory Councils** provide advice and suggestions to the European Commission and to the EU Member States on matters related to the management and the socio-economic and conservation aspects of fisheries and aquaculture, in line with the objectives of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy. When developing advice, members aim for consensus, considering the best available science, their empirical knowledge, as well as wider environmental, social, and economic sustainability concerns.

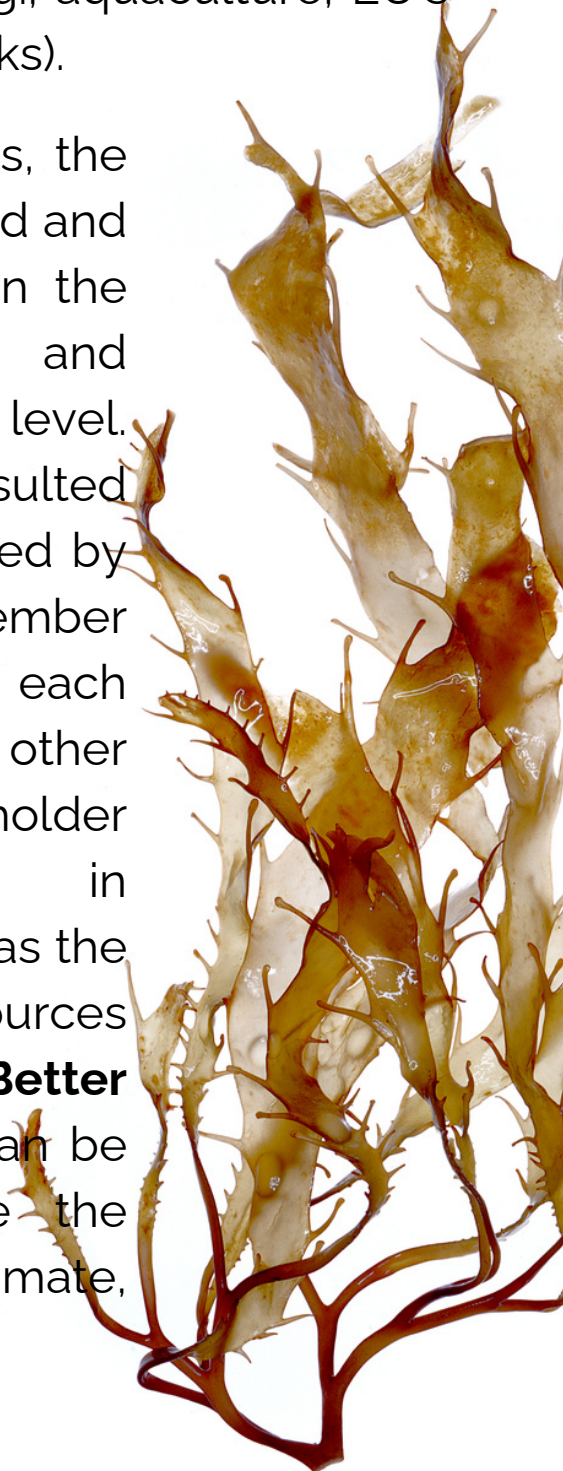
The Advisory Councils are recognised as bodies pursuing aims of general European interest, co-funded by the European Commission.



What are Advisory Councils and what do they do?

The Advisory Councils were established with the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy of 2002 and further developed by the reform of 2013. In total, there are **11 different Advisory Councils**, today. The majority provides advice on specific European regional sea basins (i.e., Baltic Sea, Black Sea, Mediterranean, North Sea, Northwestern Waters, Outermost Regions Waters, South Western Waters), while others have specific thematic remits (e.g., aquaculture, EU's long-distance fleet, market, pelagic stocks).

With the creation of these organisations, the European Union policymakers introduced and **formalised stakeholder involvement** in the policy making process for fisheries and aquaculture matters, at regional and EU level. Legally, Advisory Councils shall be consulted on a number of regulatory texts prepared by the European Commission and the Member States. In a truly **bottom-up approach**, each Advisory Council can also advise on any other policy area it considers relevant. Stakeholder consultation and engagement in policymaking is now widely recognised as the best practice for public policies and resources management, also recognised in the **Better Regulation** initiative. In many ways it can be argued that these organisations are the building blocks of a good policy: legitimate, effective and sustainable.



Aquaculture policy being a matter managed via the Open Method of Coordination, it is of utmost importance for the EU stakeholders to bring together the best practices and recommendations for the implementation of EU regulations in their respective Member States, or to reach the EU policy objectives.

Representatives of both the **fisheries and aquaculture** value chain and Other Interest Groups (including environmental NGOs) meet and discuss various topics sharing their experiences and expertise, building trust, discussing trade-offs and aiming for a common understanding. In many instances, the Advisory Councils play a role of a “think tank”, organising events, providing **consensus** views, where possible, and reinforcing links between people and ideas. It is important to note that ACs are **not lobby groups** as they do not have a partisan economic interest.



What have the Advisory Councils achieved?

Over the last two decades, the Advisory Councils advised the EU Commission and EU Member States on a **wide range of topics** relevant to EU fisheries and aquaculture policy, such as fishing opportunities, sustainable aquaculture, marine spatial planning, environmental protection, water quality, international ocean governance, fight against IUU fishing, trade policy, consumer information, food safety, good husbandry practices, technological innovations, technical measures, recreational fishing, ecosystem-based fisheries management, fisheries science, socio-economics of fisheries, offshore windfarms and others. When members are not able to reach consensus or compromise positions, the dissenting views are recorded whenever justified, ensuring that the positions of the Advisory Councils always contain the input provided by the members.

The **number of advice** has been growing with years, with currently **1714 advice** submitted amounting to an average of 119 advice per year.



How does it work in practice?

In cooperation with the European Commission, the Advisory Councils adopt annual work programmes. Dedicated topic based or regional **working groups** and smaller **focus groups** are established to cover the topics proposed by members or requested by the European Commission for the preparation of the draft texts that will lead to advice. In terms of structure, **60%** of the seats of the Executive Committee are allocated to the representatives of the fisheries and aquaculture value chain, while **40%** of the seats are allocated to the Other Interests Groups. An **independent Secretariat** facilitates discussions and is responsible for administrative, financial and organisational matters. The Chairs and Secretariats have a vital function as they must be impartial and independent from particular interests. Their role is to mediate positions, achieving consensus and mitigating potential conflicts of interest within their membership and observers.

When relevant, Advisory Councils can formally support **scientific and technical research projects** by communicating their results and incentivising members to contribute to these. Some Advisory Councils are also partners of **EU-funded projects** related to the scope of their work.



The Advisory Councils **cooperate** with a wide range of partners, including the European Commission, national and regional governments, research institutes and scientific bodies (i.e. **ICES, STECF, SAC/GFCM**), Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (e.g. **GFCM, NAFO, NEAFC, ICCAT, IOTC** etc), Regional Sea Conventions (i.e. **OSPAR, HELCOM, Barcelona Convention** etc) and the European Fisheries Control Agency (**EFCA**).

Members benefit from access to information on the topics of competence of the Advisory Councils, including via the sharing of **news and reports**. Most importantly, members can take part in the discussions, voice concerns directly to decision makers, and participate in a broad network in their area of activity.



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