



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

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

Dear Mr Kenn Skau Fischer,

Thank you for the letter of 23 October 2023 regarding the advice provided by the North Sea Advisory Council (NSAC) on climate change and North Sea fisheries (NSAC Advice Ref. 17-2223).

Firstly, the Commission recognises the relevance given by the NSAC to the subject of climate change and its implications and potential impacts on the North Sea environment, stocks and fisheries. The creation of the thematic NSAC Climate Change Focus Group in 2022 and the organisation of a specific webinar on the North Sea Fisheries and Climate Change on 7 December 2022 further shows this importance.

Your letter provides useful background information and overview of the main issues at stake. The Commission particularly appreciates your thorough efforts in digesting the knowledge and developing concrete advice how to improve fisheries management and science, linking it to carbon footprint and mitigation.

Over the past years, there has been a growing recognition of climate change impacts on the marine environment, species distribution and population dynamics<sup>(1)</sup>, fisheries management and sustainability, as confirmed by diverse initiatives, reports and EU-funded research projects on this particular subject<sup>(2,3,4,5)</sup>. Abrupt changes in seawater

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<sup>(1)</sup> Townhill, B.L.; Couce, E.; Tinker, J.; Kay, S.; Pinnegar, J.K. 2023. Climate change projections of commercial fish distribution and suitable habitat around north western Europe. *Fish and Fisheries*, 24 (5): 848-862. <https://doi.org/10.1111/faf.12773>

<sup>(2)</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Forging a climate-resilient Europe - the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0082>

<sup>(3)</sup> European Commission, European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency, Bastardie, F.; Feary, D.; Kell, L. *et al.*: Climate change and the common fisheries policy – Adaptation and building resilience to the effects of climate change on fisheries and reducing emissions of greenhouse gases from fishing – Final report, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2926/155626>

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temperature in the Greater North Sea ecoregion <sup>(6)</sup> have also coincided with reported changes in the composition, spatial, temporal and/or depth distribution of fish prey and fish assemblages.

Consequently, as discussed in the Workshops on Fish Distribution Shifts (WKFISHDISH) <sup>(7,8)</sup>, there is increasing evidence of potential impacts of climate change on the distributional footprint of some fish stocks in the Northeast Atlantic, prompted by changing environmental conditions mostly linked to sea surface temperature, which have triggered changes in the distribution and intensity of fishing effort.

It is paramount to hold informed debates on how the short- to long-term influences of climate change on ecosystems and fisheries can be included in the advisory framework and accounted for in ICES scientific advice on fishing opportunities, as recently discussed in the ICES Workshop on pathways to climate-aware advice (WKCLIMAD) <sup>(9)</sup>.

Your reflections and recommendations on this relevant subject are very timely and highlight the NSAC dynamism and commitment to address climate change implications for the fishing sector in the North Sea. In particular, we note that most recommendations in your advice emphasise the need for more flexible and adaptive management, as well as an ecosystem approach to fisheries management, in order to ensure better stakeholder involvement. Moreover, we also recognise your support to industry-science collaboration through participatory mechanisms that would allow further improving the contribution of the fishing sector for data collection and scientific advice.

The Common Fisheries Policy provides some tools to assist adaptation to climate change and to support impact mitigation, namely through science-based management strategies, flexible quota management and targeted structural support. Nevertheless, the Commission, driven by our Green Deal ambition, has been and is still developing ways to further improve our existing fisheries management systems so that they can adapt to climate change. New technologies, innovation and research are key for adaptation and mitigation towards climate change. For this reason, the Commission recognises the need

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<sup>(4)</sup> Project: Climate Change and Future Marine Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity (FutureMARES). Climate ADAPT - Sharing Adaptation Knowledge for a Climate-Resilient Europe. <https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/en/metadata/projects/climate-change-and-future-marine-ecosystem-services-and-biodiversity>

<sup>(5)</sup> Project: Co-creating a decision support framework to ensure sustainable fish production in Europe under climate change (ClimeFish). Climate ADAPT - Sharing Adaptation Knowledge for a Climate-Resilient Europe. <https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/en/metadata/projects/co-creating-a-decision-support-framework-to-ensure-sustainable-fish-production-in-europe-under-climate-change>

<sup>(6)</sup> ICES. 2022. Greater North Sea ecoregion - Ecosystem overview. In Report of the ICES Advisory Committee, 2022. ICES Advice 2022, Section 7.1, <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.21731912>

<sup>(7)</sup> ICES. 2017. Report of the Working Group on Fish Distribution Shifts (WKFISHDISH), 22–25 November 2016, ICES HQ, Copenhagen, Denmark. ICES CM 2016/ACOM: 55. 197 pp. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.3798>

<sup>(8)</sup> ICES. 2023. Workshop 2 on Fish Distribution (WKFISHDISH2; outputs from 2022 meeting). ICES Scientific Reports. 5:7. 127 pp. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.21692246>

<sup>(9)</sup> ICES. 2023. Workshop on pathways to climate-aware advice (WKCLIMAD). ICES Scientific Reports. 5:25. 99 pp. <http://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.22196560>

to monitor future developments in this field and to take them into account in future policy changes.

We will continue to follow closely all developments on this global issue of climate change, in terms of its effects on fisheries sustainability and of its potential impacts on stability and predictability for the fishing sector, and will continue to engage with Member States and Advisory Councils on these matters.

I am looking forward to our continued and fruitful cooperation. Should you have any questions on this reply, please contact Mr Paulo Vasconcelos ([Paulo.VASCONCELOS@ec.europa.eu](mailto: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)).

Yours sincerely,

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