

REPORT

Meeting: **Inter-AC meeting with DG MARE and AC Secretariats**

Parties: **DG MARE, AC Secretariats**

Date: **7 May 2024**

Location: **Webex**

Chair: **Valérie Tankink, DG MARE**

Rapporteur: **NSAC Secretariat**

1. Welcome and introduction

Valérie Tankink opened the meeting, introducing the present DG MARE team and announcing Julia Rubeck's return from sick leave. Tankink outlined the meeting's objective: to brief Advisory Councils on recent developments, focusing on the evaluation of the CFP and other pertinent dossiers.

2. Evaluation of the CFP Regulation - Information from the Commission of the planning of work and involvement of the Acs

In February 2023, the Commission adopted the Fisheries and Oceans package, assessing the current status of the CFP. This launch spurred discussions on the challenges facing Europe's fisheries, prompting calls for reform from stakeholders. Following these discussions and internal considerations within DG MARE, an evaluation of the CFP was announced in April 2024. This evaluation coincides with ongoing assessments of the EMFF, EMFAF, the Landing Obligation, and the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership agreement.

The timing of the evaluation is significant, given the upcoming elections that will shape the next programming period. Launching the evaluation at this point aims to provide a foundation for the next mandate and facilitate forward planning.

The **evaluation will determine if the CFP remains fit for purpose** and identify areas for improvement. Guided by Commission's better regulation principles, it will analyze all provisions, assessing their performance over the past decade and specific impacts. Evaluation criteria include effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and EU added value.

The evaluation will be focus on **six main blocks**: managing fisheries measures for the conservation and sustainable exploitation of marine biological resources, governance (regionalization and stakeholder involvement), common market organization, external policy, aquaculture, and control & enforcement.

Considering future planning, a **supporting study will begin before summer 2024**, including **stakeholder consultation by end of 2024**, and **finalized by summer 2025**. The evaluation's findings, presented as a staff working document, will inform decision-making for the next college, whether it involves revision or not.

The evaluation builds upon ongoing discussions involving several ACs, with their inputs integral to the process. It encompasses all aspects of DG MARE's work.

AC Secretariats raised several points for clarification:

- Concerns about the **timing of the evaluation** coinciding with the end of the current Commissioner's mandate;
- How the evaluation will **align with the incoming Commissioner**;
- Clear **ways of engagement** with ACs and specific input;
- Updates on the ongoing **LO evaluation**;
- The connection between the new **Control Regulation** and the CFP evaluation;
- Considerations regarding **AC functioning** within the CFP evaluation.

Tankink explained the **timing** of the CFP evaluation is influenced by the current Commissioner's focus on implementation of the CFP. However, input from various stakeholders, including the Parliament and Member States, underscored the need for broader considerations beyond implementation. Compliance with better regulation requirements necessitates swift evaluation to inform future actions under a new Commissioner.

Regarding the **alignment with the new Commissioner**, the timing of the evaluation will coincide with meetings with the new Parliament in Autumn, allowing the incoming Commissioner to incorporate new insights. Recommendations from ACs and stakeholder consultations will further inform the evaluation process.

Regarding **AC engagement**, DG MARE is exploring options for targeted exchanges with the ACs, planned for Autumn 2024 after the elections and advancement of the evaluation. Consideration will be given to whether ACs will be consulted separately or together.

The ongoing **LO evaluation study** will contribute to the CFP evaluation, with the electronic questionnaire set to be distributed mid beginning of May 2024 for an 8-week period. It will include general and specific questions to establish a baseline for data triangulation. Further engagement with FG groups is planned after Summer.

Recent changes to the **Control Regulation** will feed into the CFP evaluation, ensuring no duplication of work.

A **study on fleet management** will complement ongoing efforts on energy transition, addressing capacity ceilings and safety on board concerns. It will assess current practices and available data to inform future actions.

The evaluation of the governance block of the CFP will address the current setup and **functioning of ACs**. Ongoing evaluations of funding, as well as considerations for future funding, are also linked to the financing of ACs.

Tamara Talevska took the floor on behalf of the NSAC. The NSAC Executive Committee meeting in July, scheduled in San Sebastian, won't engage the Commission as it's deemed premature for CFP discussions. In September, a conference on the CFP's future, coinciding with NSAC's 20th Anniversary, will focus on concepts like EBFM, co-management, technology, and governance. It comprises two panels: science and governance, beneficial to kickstart Autumn discussions. While no other NSAC meetings are planned, Talevska inquired about feedback opportunities on the evaluation by end of 2024.

Regarding past AC advice, Talevska highlighted constraints imposed by the CFP, suggesting future advice might diverge. After the CFP conference, a NSAC CFP Focus Group might be established to discuss the matter further. Additionally, she suggested that an Inter-AC meeting could be organized by the ACs to discuss specific topics of interest, inviting DG MARE officials based on pertinent questions.

Tankink mentioned that advice for the evaluation can be submitted until mid-2025. Regarding the idea of an Inter-AC conference, Tankink responded positively, emphasizing openness to ideas from ACs on how to better tackle the evaluation.

Evelien Ranshuysen from DG MARE expressed interest in upcoming advice for the CFP evaluation. At the same time, she clarified that the evaluation is an evidence based assessment which looks back over the past 10 years. Nevertheless, ACs are encouraged to forward novel recommendation and feedbacks.

Tankink added that ongoing evaluation of the MSFD by DG ENV will also be relevant to the CFP evaluation.

3. Social Dimension of Fisheries - Update from the Commission

Joan Roussoulière-Azzam (DG MARE) updated participants on Commission's work on the Fisher of the Future foresight study, transposition of the STCW-F Convention and the next steps following the consultation on social indicators and Article 17.

The social dimension is a key objective of the CFP. The Fisheries Package reaffirmed the importance of the social dimension, aiming to address emerging needs and challenges within the community. Specific commitments include considering the implementation of STCW-F into EU law, further developing social indicators for socio-economic analysis, creating a Vademecum on allocation fishing opportunities (Article 17 CFP Regulation), and conducting the foresight study on fishers of the future.

Given the challenges faced by fishers, there's a strong emphasis on skill development to cope with changes. The current international **standard for training and certification** of fishers, **STCW-F** of the IMO, was recently revised, with revision to be adopted in May 2024, and entry into force by 2026. While primarily for large vessels (24m+), it includes basic safety requirements for all vessels. With only 10 MS having ratified STCW-F, the Commission is pushing for further ratification and considering its implementation into EU law. A baseline study

will take place to gather comprehensive data on existing requirements across MS, infrastructure, and potential mutual recognition schemes.

As social considerations are challenging to quantify, efforts are focused on acquiring comprehensive social data with scientific grounding. This includes aspects beyond employment, such as working conditions, societal position, training levels, and sector attractiveness. Understanding local communities dependency on fishing, vulnerability, adaptability, mobility, and management measure impacts is also crucial.

Several initiatives are underway to enhance social knowledge:

- 4 STECF Expert Working Groups on social data convened in 2019, 2020, 2022, and 2023, with the next scheduled for May 13-17, 2024.
- **National Fisheries Profiles**: 3 completed (Spanish, Danish, and Dutch) out of 10 planned, set to be reviewed by STECF soon. The goal is to have profiles (providing national context about the fisheries (upstream & downstream), processing and aquaculture sectors, and their interlinkages) for all Member States by end of 2024, providing comprehensive information for stakeholders.
- Development of **social data indicators**, with stakeholder consultations in February 2024 to prioritize their inclusion in data calls and pilot projects.
- Initial work on **Community profiles** in 2019 and 2020, to be aligned with ICES work and integrated into existing models.
- Analysis of **Fishing opportunities allocation** by Member States to improve transparency in the allocation process and understand how allocation systems work across MS.

Lastly, the **Fishers of the Future** foresight study examines EU fishers' hopes, fears, expectations, and needs, with Phase 1 establishing baseline profiles of fishers' experiences (now [online](#)) and Phase 2 (ongoing) investigating driver of changes and long-term trends. Phase 3 will focus on developing profiles of future fishers, with **stakeholder consultations planned for Autumn 2024** and the final report due around November, allowing for feedback.

AC Secretariats sought clarification on:

- Inside knowledge into the reasons behind Member States' reluctance or acceptance of common training standards implementation;
- The distinction between Community and National Fisheries profiles and whether Advisory Councils and stakeholders are involved in their development.

In response, it was explained that reasons for MS ratification or reluctance are not fully understood yet. Some MS may not prioritize it, while others believe their systems surpass STCW-F standards. This issue is being discussed in exchanges with MS. The planned baseline study will identify current practices and assess MS with higher standards than STCW-F.

Regarding the differences between National and Community Fisheries profiles, the National profiles originated as a pilot project in the Netherlands, focusing on the national fisheries sector and its management systems. STECF researchers are currently developing these profiles,

which will undergo review before publication to gather feedback. Engagement has been limited thus far due to ongoing research. Feedback will be sought from stakeholders soon. Community profiles are less developed, with only preliminary work completed. The aim is to align this work with ICES efforts and integrate it with National profiles. This integration will help identify the unique needs of each country's fisheries and communities, enabling the proposal of context-specific measures.

Regarding training and certification, Talevska mentioned that the issue of Member States having higher standards arose during the recent joint NSAC/NWWAC Social Aspects FG meeting. For instance, Denmark would not support the standard as it might mean a step back for them. She questioned whether **the directive would only establish minimum standards, thus affecting MS with lower standards**. The FG considered submitting advice on the STCW-F, but doubted if it aligned with the Commission's current work.

In response, Roussoulière-Azzam suggested waiting for the study to start to assess if advice from the group would be necessary and on what exactly. The baseline study will consider all MS, and advice could help close knowledge gaps. She confirmed that the directive would indeed set minimal standards, and the level of ambition will be determined based on an impact assessment study.

4. Format of Inter-AC Meetings

Tankink announced that the next Inter-AC meeting will be held online in early October, with a specific date to be confirmed soon. Additionally, consideration is already underway for an in-person Inter-AC meeting in early 2025.

Tankink encouraged ACs to share suggestions on how to improve future meetings, emphasizing the importance of addressing topics relevant to all ACs. She also sought feedback on the usefulness of meetings such as the day's one.

Talevska shared **conclusions from the Secretariat's recent meeting** regarding the format of Inter-AC. DG MARE's prompt response to discussions at the latest Inter-AC was appreciated, along with the informative follow-up email on ongoing initiatives and future meetings. She acknowledged the time investment and attention of services for organizing meetings between Secretariats and DG MARE. While the address of the Director General is highly valued, there was consideration that at the last two Inter-ACs, the exchange was overly lengthy and felt more like one-way communication rather than an exchange of views.

From the **NSAC perspective**, regular exchanges with DG MARE services have diminished. Though it is acknowledge that this is due to reduced funding, it has led to members feeling resigned and less engaged, with discussions shifting from technical issues to DG MARE updates. This poses a challenge for Secretariats in maintaining engagement. The issue may be addressed within the framework of the evaluation of the CFP and the functioning of ACs, as it represents a significant challenge, undermining the purpose of ACs in providing grounded experiences to inform policymaking. Meanwhile, coordinating technical representation at Working Group meetings would be beneficial for NSAC members.

On **ways forward**, Secretariat have agreed on the following points:

- **Improved coordination of agendas** is deemed useful. While ACs are invited to propose topics, it might be that members provide limited feedback, possibly due to reduced commitment and time constraints for relaying concerns and exchanging feedback. Coordination on meeting agendas could be enhanced through **designation of a lead AC** for each Inter-AC meeting to aid organization and gather agenda points. Secretariats can leverage their position to propose topics in advance.
- A **clearer agenda** with explanatory notes and **specified time slots** per speaker, ensuring equal allocation for each AC, and distinguishing between active and observer participants, would be beneficial.
- More time for the **exchange of views** and follow-up questions is requested.
- Establishing **fixed recurring dates** for Inter-AC meetings, such as one in Spring and one in Autumn, could improve planning.
- **Implementing a standardized format** with a primary focus on one priority topic, supplemented by additional sub-topics if necessary, would be beneficial.
- **Regular updates from DG MARE** on ongoing and future initiatives, event dates, and documents are deemed helpful.
- **Involving other DGs** (e.g., DG ENV, DG TRADE) when necessary is recommended.

Rosa Caggiano (MEDAC) noted that MEDAC sent a letter to DG MARE on March 8th but hasn't received a response yet. While acknowledging the value of the Director General's presence at AC meetings, she emphasized the importance of ACs being able to express their thoughts and seek clarifications. A more fluid and active debate is needed to prevent frustration.

Pedro Reis Santos (MAC) appreciated efforts made post the last Inter-AC meeting. He suggested dividing the Director General's address into thematic blocks to allow for multiple intervention points during the speech, facilitating a better exchange of views.

Tankink acknowledged the challenges of recent Inter-AC meetings, noting that the limited availability of the Director General for only a couple of hours makes meaningful dialogue difficult. She stressed the importance of managing expectations realistically and will forward NSAC comments in order to drive relevant DG MARE units to engage with ACs as much as possible. At the Inter-AC meetings, efforts are made to encourage Unit's directors' participation, though availability varies. Tankink welcomed the idea of engaging ACs further in advance and making meetings more interactive from the beginning.

Regarding fixed meeting dates, Tankink stated it's a possibility but challenging due to other events and the Director General's schedule.

Rubeck confirmed plans to re-establish bilateral meetings with each AC Secretariat, building on discussions started last autumn. She noted that suggestions for improvement, such as earlier agenda distribution and breaking speeches into focused segments, will be considered for future meetings.

Cécile Fouquet (AAC) also emphasized the importance of communication. She appreciated the video made after the latest Inter-AC, featuring the Director General's summary of the day's events. However, she suggested that next time, Tankink's team could draft the speech script to ensure comprehensiveness and inclusivity.

Tankink noted efforts to promote the role of ACs through various means. In view of this, she acknowledged the significance of the workshop organized by ACs during the coming European Maritime Days (EMD) in Denmark.

Talevska thanked DG MARE and the Director General for providing ACs with the opportunity to organize a workshop in the context of the EMD, and commended all ACs for their efforts in organizing the event.

To finalize the agenda point, Tankink stated that DG MARE will continue providing regular updates and emails on relevant matters and will encourage colleagues from different units to share information. In the coming weeks, they will reflect further on meeting strategies and will address points raised by Talevska in more detail.