

REPORT

Meeting: **European Maritime Day**
Parties: **DG MARE, AC secretariats, stakeholders**
Date: **30-31 May 2024**
Location: **Svendborg, Denmark**
Chair: **Steven Davies, DG MARE**
Rapporteur: **NSAC Secretariat**

Tamara Talevska and Kateryna Urbanovych represented the North Sea Advisory Council at the European Maritime Day (EMD) in Svendborg, Denmark. Attendees also included representatives from the Secretariat of the Market AC, Long Distance AC, South Western Waters AC, Aquaculture AC, Baltic AC, Outer Most Regions AC, and Mediterranean AC. The significant attendance was driven by the first-time opportunity given to ACs to organize a workshop at the event.

The workshop, titled "EU Advisory Councils: Stakeholder Engagement in Policymaking for Sustainable Fisheries & Aquaculture Production and Value Chains," highlighted to the wider public engagement examples in the ACs and allowed for reflection on their functioning. In connection to the workshop, a [brochure](#) illustrating the role of ACs was published.

Overall, the EMD2024 featured 20 workshops, 8 pitches, 2 high-level panels, 4 special sessions, and 84 exhibition stands, welcoming in total more than 1100 participants. The event focused significantly on energy transition, Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) and regional basin planning strategies. Multiple workshops and projects addressed the fisheries sector, giving voice to both large-scale and small-scale fisheries representatives. Attention was also given to involving local authorities and communities in decision-making processes to improve policy effectiveness.

The opening session featured speeches by Commissioner Sinkevičius, DG MARE Director General Charlina Vitcheva, Danish Minister for Industry, Business and Financial Affairs Morten Bødskov, and Svendborg Mayor Bo Hanson.

In his online address, Commissioner Sinkevičius reflected on his mandate, marked by challenges such as Brexit, the pandemic, and Russia's war against Ukraine. He emphasized significant achievements towards the European Green Deal, which include a new approach to a sustainable blue economy and integrated maritime policies, resulting in concrete initiatives and enhanced maritime research. The pioneering [EU Mission: Restore our Ocean and Waters](#) aims to improve and restore ocean's health. Fisheries have become more sustainable and energy-efficient, supported by the establishment of the Energy Transition Partnership (ETP) for knowledge sharing, financial guidance, and skill-building. The updated Control regulation, in effect since January, modernizes fishing regulations, prevents overfishing, and promotes fairness among sea basins and fleets. Finally, the recently announced evaluation of the

Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) will consider its continued relevance. Additional accomplishments include improved EU ocean governance, EU Arctic policy, EU leadership in the historic High Seas Treaty, an €816 million pledge for ocean protection, and a revised EU maritime security strategy to address new geopolitical challenges.

The Director General highlighted ongoing efforts to shape future priorities in view of the forthcoming new Parliament and college while maintaining daily operations. Though strategic priorities cannot be known until after the elections, the focus remains on resilience and reducing the maritime sector's climate footprint by transitioning to cleaner energy sources and collaborating with local authorities. This is being aided by the ETP, which recently published a guide to help navigate EU funding and attract private investment. A pilot project for retrofitting a fishing vessel, valued at €2.2 million, is currently underway. DG MARE is also drafting a common roadmap for energy transition, aiming for carbon neutrality in the maritime sector by 2050.

Another key project is the EU Digital Twin of the Ocean, which gathers ocean knowledge to aid conservation and economic use. A prototype demonstration will take place on June 13th in Brussels. This tool will simulate ocean functions and future scenarios to guide policies.

The European Blue Forum, launched last year, is receiving positive feedback. It is mainly putting emphasis on the importance of developing synergies, multi-use maritime zones, and reconciling competing sea uses. This year, there is a focus on strengthening maritime regional cooperation across all EU sea basins, including the newly announced Greater North Sea Basin Initiative.

Finally, Vitcheva reaffirmed DG MARE's commitment to climate action and ocean restoration, aiming to prevent pollution, restore ecosystems, and preserve marine biodiversity. Efforts are also being intensified to make the blue economy circular and regenerative, boosting competitiveness through enhanced knowledge and security.

High-level panel: Sea Basin Strategies as key enablers for the implementation of the Sustainable Blue Economy

Moderated by the Director General, the session explored the critical role of EU Sea Basin Strategies in advancing the Sustainable Blue Economy policy framework, setting new goals, and identifying areas for future policy cooperation.

Panel speakers included:

- Andreas Nordseth, Director General of the Danish Maritime Authority, presenting the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI).
- Eric Banel, Director General for Maritime Affairs, Fisheries, and Aquaculture, representing the French Presidency in the Atlantic Initiative.
- Marisa Lameiras da Silva, Director-General for Maritime Policy and Steering Committee Co-chair in the WestMed Initiative.

- Grigore Stratulat, State Secretary, representing the Moldovan Chairmanship in the Black Sea Common Maritime Agenda.

The speakers emphasized the importance of cooperation, trust-building, and political support to advance blue economy initiatives. They stressed the need for cohesive strategies linking blue and green transitions, supporting entrepreneurs, and addressing challenges like congested seas and excluding stakeholders. In this regard, Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) development in the North Sea was especially highlighted, as it initially sidelined the fishing industry, overlooking the importance of fostering synergy among stakeholders. Collaboration among sea basin strategies is essential, with MSP playing a crucial role in coordinating efforts and avoiding isolated solutions. Lessons learned include the effectiveness of the sea basin strategy model, the necessity of inter-basin collaboration, and the importance of enhanced communication and collaboration across initiatives.

At the end of the discussion, the Director General announced plans for formalized discussions on sea basin strategies, set to take place during every EMD, starting from the following year. Additionally, she announced the publication of a [Blue Economy Report](#).

EU Advisory Councils workshop: Stakeholder engagement in policymaking for sustainable fisheries & aquaculture production and value chains

Moderator Mark Dickey-Collas, former Chair of the ICES Advisory Committee, welcomed participants on behalf of the 11 ACs that have co-organized the workshop.

The workshop was divided into three sections:

- Moderator's brief presentation on the history and functioning of advisory councils;
- Speakers' experiences with stakeholder engagement;
- Interactive session with participants led by AC Secretaries.

Final result of the workshop will be a policy recommendation built on results from the interactive session.

Dickey-Collas outlined the history and function of regional ACs, initially established in 2003 to advise the EU Commission and Member States on fisheries. With legislative changes, ACs expanded to cover broader topics. Comprising 60% of fisheries and aquaculture stakeholders and 40% of Other Interest Groups (OIG) representatives, including NGOs, ACs collaborate with knowledge providers, fisheries management bodies, and regional conventions. They serve as think tanks, developing consensus-based advice through working groups or focus events. ACs engage with diverse stakeholder groups, necessitating varied techniques as stakeholders respond differently. This often leads to challenges in meeting strict deadlines, as more time is required for engagement with different stakeholders.

Moving onto the next section, three speakers shared real-life cooperation examples, addressing shortcomings and suggesting improvements in decision-making.

Antonia Leroy, Head of Ocean Policy at WWF European Policy Office, emphasized the rarity and importance of ACs, providing a unique global perspective for policymakers. She highlighted the positive exercise of aiming for consensus in advice development. ACs engage in dialogue between industry and OIGs to reach agreement where possible, which has been successful in instances like the EU fisheries Control regulation & RFMOs advice. However, there have been challenges with timely consideration of full stakeholder advice by the EC for certain RFMOs meetings.

While agreeing to disagree can foster understanding, challenges arise when discussions become overly intense or adopt inappropriate tones. NGOs, with limited capacity, may struggle to effectively participate, leading to power imbalances. Leroy noted improvement in this regard over the years, aided by Chairs and Secretariats facilitating constructive discussions.

Looking ahead, Leroy suggested that ACs would benefit from more technical discussions and stakeholder learning in an open dialogue, with reduced political discourse. Regular updates from the Commission and maintaining open dialogue are key aspects of ACs that should be preserved.

Jesper Raakjær (Group Chief Visionary Officer at Port of Aalborg & Professor in Fisheries Governance & Port Development at Aalborg University) reflected on ACs' functioning based on his extensive experience. As a former member and Executive Committee Chair of the Pelagic AC, he described the PelAC as a well-functioning and homogeneous group. Fishers actively participated in meetings, and there was effective representation of both the industry and OIGs. Appropriate representation of OIG views was also facilitated by collaborative approach in chairing Executive Committee meetings, with both the industry ExCom Chair and the OIG vice-chair involved. This, together with the positive work culture and coordinated positions, facilitated discussions. Efforts were made to reach consensus and avoid political views, although often required significant effort.

However, Raakjær also pointed out some constraints. PelAC must interact with three different regional groups — the Scheveningen Group, NW Waters Group, and SW Waters Group — which has proven troublesome due to a lack of coordination among them. He mentioned that the 2013 CFP reform represented a step back, as the good relationship established between the Commission and ACs during the initial period slowly deteriorated. After the reform, DG MARE became less involved in negotiations, discussions, and deliberations in PelAC, showing less interest in engaging in technical discussions. Additionally, there was a large turnover of Commission staff attending meetings.

Marta Ballesteros, Marine Social Scientist at IEO-CSIC Spain and Expert in Fisheries Governance and Management, emphasized the crucial role of ACs in the marine governance system. While acknowledging their importance, she noted room for improvement in their functioning and in the larger system they belong to. ACs facilitate iterative and structured dialogue, replacing previously fragmented stakeholder interactions with transparent and accountable processes.

Since their creation in 2003, ACs have represented a diverse reality with legal statutes based on their founding locations. The legal framework influences their operations. Balancing

efficiency and democracy is a constant challenge due to time constraints. While ACs face numerous barriers, they cannot solve all problems. Ballesteros highlighted that while changes in the governance system impact their effectiveness, maintaining legitimacy is crucial.

Dickey-Collas organized participants into four groups based on their familiarity with ACs: two unfamiliar, one moderately informed, and one well-informed group. Each group, led by AC Secretariats, engaged in discussions and questions on AC functioning or, if unfamiliar, other stakeholder fora. Responses and questions were recorded in real-time in a shared document. After interactive sessions, the document was processed through Chat-GPT to create a dummy advice, quickly presented to the public. AC Secretariats will use this input to develop a joint recommendation for submission to the Commission and Member States.

Workshop: Small Scale Fisheries – From vision to practical implementation

The workshop explored implementing national and EU regulations to support Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF), aiming to design practical examples of transitioning fishers and communities into low-impact fisheries. Speakers included Kaija Barisa of the Blue Marine Foundation (BMF), Troels Jacob Hegland of Aalborg University, and Hanne Winter (FSK-PO).

Barisa emphasized the importance of a just transition, requiring policies that consider socio-economic impacts and heritage elements. Regulation enforcement, data availability, and impact assessment are crucial.

Winter highlighted the environmental and cultural aspects of transitioning to low-impact fisheries, including preserving traditional fishing methods and cultural heritage along the coastline.

Hegland highlighted the establishment of a Danish Fisheries Commission post-Brexit, comprising experts tasked with providing recommendations for the future of Danish fisheries. One recommendation suggested designating areas within 12 nautical miles to SSF to maximize socio-economic benefits. However, while some recommendations support SSF, others may pose risks to them.

A report of the Danish Fisheries Commission can be downloaded [here](#).

Barisa presented BMF's strategy to restore and protect ocean life, which involves securing ocean protection, tackling overfishing and exploitation, supporting low-impact fishing, equitable sea use, and restoring ecosystems. In this, a key action is supporting low-impact fishing through policies aiding SSF, backing the UK's new management plans, creating a just transition framework, and fostering collaborative inshore fisheries management.

Barisa highlighted the Lyme Bay model for sustainable fisheries management. Designated as a no-trawl and no-dredge zone in 2008, static gears were initially allowed but their expansion put in jeopardy the closure of the area. In 2011, BMF formed a working group with fishers and the government to develop best practices. A voluntary Code of Conduct was created to limit pots and net lengths. This collaboration improved fishers' income, well-being, and job satisfaction, showing a win-win for fisheries and conservation. The successful Lyme model

was then expanded across the UK, starting with the Sussex IFCA Nearshore Trawling Byelaw in March 2021.

Barisa stressed that to enable a just transition, a framework needs to be developed to assess the costs and benefits of moving from high-impact fishing activities to lower-impact gear or away from fishing entirely, using various indicators. This framework would quantify the practical costs of transitioning, provide evidence, and outline potential financial support for fishers undergoing such changes. A study testing the Fisheries Transition Analysis Framework in four case studies will be published in the coming months.

After the presentations, breakout groups discussed practical ways in which national and EU regulations could support small-scale, low-impact fisheries. They explored different scenarios, such as the closure of an area to trawling, etc.

High level panel: Our Mission, Restore our Ocean and Waters – Cities in the rescue

The panel highlighted five strategies of coastal cities for sustainable development in the blue economy and energy transition. Coastal cities, home to a significant portion of the population, face crucial challenges due to their proximity to water and exposure to pollution and global warming. This dual position allows them to raise awareness about these challenges and act as hubs for generating solutions. Effective budgeting is essential to address these issues, advancing green ambitions and implementing practical solutions. EU Missions must go beyond research and innovation, bringing together a wide range of stakeholders.

The challenges of maintain sustainability for nature, citizens, and tourists were addressed, with emphasis on the need to reduce nutrient pollution from farming and suggestion to increase group effort with stakeholders for supportive actions. The ocean's dual role as a global challenge and foundational element for port cities was highlighting, citing innovation as a key catalyst. Stress was put to include the fishing industry in discussions about ORE installations around ports to ensure a just transition.

Workshop: eMSP in a nutshell

As the eMSP NBSR project ended, the workshop aimed to present identified gaps and corresponding solutions. The project, covering the North Sea and Baltic Sea regions, ran from September 2021 to March 2024, addressing five key MSP topics: Ocean Governance, Ecosystem-based Approach, Sustainable Blue Economy, Monitoring & Evaluation, Data Sharing, and Climate Change. The project focused on the European Green Deal and climate neutrality targets in MSP. Policy briefs, developed through a community of practice (CoP) approach and containing several recommendations, were [published](#) in January 2024 and will be sent to national governments and EU institutions.

A short overview of the policy briefs was presented:

- **Towards a Sustainable Blue Economy:** The growing use of marine space can increase pressure on marine and coastal ecosystems. However, innovative infrastructure designs can mitigate this impact. A notable concept is the 'MariPark,' a nature-inclusive business area with infrastructure for controlled economic activities, enhancing security, safety, and environmental impact.
- **Ecosystem-Based Approach (EBA) for MSP:** Recommendations include strengthening links between MSP and spatial nature protection, integrating MSP into the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), enhancing the precautionary principle in MSP, developing a joint Strategic Environmental Assessment framework, and boosting international cooperation.
- **Climate change in MSP:** Climate change impacts, such as rising sea temperatures, necessitate adaptive and anticipatory MSP. Recommendations focus on integrating climate change considerations into planning, supporting greenhouse gas reduction or storage efforts, mitigating negative impacts, and enhancing climate resilience through cooperation and knowledge sharing.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** In the context of rapid change, M&E ensures MSP is evidence-based, achieves its objectives, and demonstrates benefits to politicians and the public. Recommendations are based on current M&E practices, addressing practical questions from planners and reflecting diverse approaches in different countries.

After the presentation, participants engaged in an interactive discussion on the presented results and future actions for effective MSP implementation. Main discussed topics were:

- What is the most important action to strengthen an ecosystem-based MSP?
- What is needed to have a climate-smart MSP?
- On what should monitoring & evaluation programmes concentrate on, considering the varying challenges of MSP?

Discussion also revolved around the concept of multiuse, emphasizing the need to consider cumulative impacts. The eMSP NBSR should guide Member States on proper multiuse implementation to prevent abuse, adhering to the precautionary principle. Currently, multiuse often means designating single-use areas and squeezing in other uses, which requires significant coordination and support from authorities. Users should support each other, turning one sector's waste into another's resource to avoid overuse.

Strengthening ecosystem-based MSP involves aligning it with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). Many Commission representatives see MSP as a planning tool rather than a protection tool. Aligning MSP with the MSFD is crucial to understanding its protective role.

A participant emphasized the importance of integrating stakeholders into MSP for comprehensive information gathering. Trust is essential for successful MSP, making it crucial to ensure everyone feels a sense of ownership in the process.

Workshop: Greater North Sea Basin Initiative – Involving Stakeholders

The workshop focused on advancing stakeholder engagement in the GNSBI, bringing together panellists from three key sectors: wind energy, nature preservation/restoration, and fisheries/aquaculture to discuss the importance of stakeholder integration in fostering coordinated efforts. The panel included Esben Sverdrup-Jensen (EAPO president & CEO DPPO), Liselotte Hohwy-Stokholm (CEO Tænketanken HavPhil), and Phil Cole (Director of Industrial Affairs WindEurope).

The GNSBI has set several goals for 2024 and beyond, including a ministerial meeting between nature and fisheries administrations in November 2024 to exemplify four key goals, clarify GNSBI's position within existing networks, secure political commitment, and enhance stakeholder involvement.

GNSBI is organized into six working tracks: governance, nature restoration and conservation, multi-use of space, cumulative impact, long-term perspective for fisheries, and knowledge sharing. These tracks are interconnected, and best practices for knowledge sharing are being explored.

Stakeholder engagement is a priority for GNSBI, with ongoing efforts to develop an engagement plan, by first scanning and identifying all relevant stakeholders. Efforts are underway to establish a cooperative website and launch a newsletter.

Considering main challenges, the speakers highlighted:

- Stakeholder involvement is tough in practice despite its importance; actionable solutions are needed.
- While there's interest in green energy among fishers, particularly on land, managing stakeholder interests is complex. Understanding baseline science and impacts is crucial.
- The wind industry supports energy transition to reduce sea pollution, emphasizing the need for societal participation.
- As the EU aims to triple green energy production by 2030, achievement of this requires involvement from all sectors.
- Since nature does not have a voice, including both industries and nature perspectives is essential for establishing strict protected areas effectively.

Peter de Jong from Natuur & Milieu presented the [North Sea Vision for 2040](#), compiled by the Natuur & Milieu, Stichting de Noordzee, Vogelbescherming Nederland, and WWF. This vision outlines a new, healthy ecosystem for the North Sea and the actions needed by 2040 to achieve it. The document emphasizes the importance of preventing natural areas from becoming industrial zones to avoid further ecosystem impact. Strategic planning across all sectors, including shipping and sand extraction, is crucial. The vision, developed through sector consultations, identifies six avenues for a sustainable future: international master planning, spatial measures (eMSP), quality enhancement, monitoring and adjustment, a nature investment fund, and policy harmonization.

On ways forward for the GNSBI, the panel emphasized understanding the environmental impacts of large infrastructure projects like wind farms, particularly on stable areas like spawning and nursery grounds. A science-based approach is crucial for establishing a baseline in the North Sea and strategically planning protected areas. Stakeholder involvement should extend to decision-making, fostering responsibility. The North Sea Advisory Council provides a platform for direct engagement with fisheries representatives. Involving citizens in the rollout of wind energy is essential for fostering interest and participation in green energy initiatives. Harmonizing consideration of minimal criteria for nature preservation and addressing cumulative effects of wind farms requires political focus and collaboration across Member States.

A participant from the audience suggested onboarding the GNSBI into the EU Mission Oceans & Waters during the Blue Mission Banos event on 26-27 November in Amsterdam. This event will address critical blue economy issues in the North Sea region and facilitate stakeholder collaboration to develop guidance for the area.

The audience also called for clarification of stakeholders' mandates and ensure resources are utilized effectively. A distinction between national-level responsibilities and those at the project level should be made. Additionally, establishing platforms for stakeholder involvement and organizing bilateral meetings with smaller stakeholders was proposed.

Workshop: Planning & Implementing Equality in the Blue Economy

Co-organized by WINBLUE and WIN-BIG, the workshop aimed to engaging stakeholders and projects in the Blue Economy (BE) to promote women's empowerment and gender equality. The first session introduced challenges in integrating women into this sector.

Margherita Zorga (SBEP - Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership Secretariat) emphasized the importance of data on gender equality in the BE. Comprehensive data is essential for understanding gender representation, disparities, and barriers, informing policies effectively. The SBEP, an EU-funded project with 74 partners across 29 countries, prioritizes gender equality to drive sustainable and inclusive growth. It aligns with Horizon Europe's guidelines, integrating gender dimensions into research and innovation efforts, requiring SBEP partners to provide Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). Additionally, the SBEP ensures gender-inclusive reporting and communication among its collaborators.

Challenges in women's empowerment and inclusion in the BE persist despite increasing participation. Unequal access to resources, social barriers, and gender stereotypes limit women's involvement and leadership roles, perpetuating gender inequality and hindering economic empowerment. Addressing these challenges requires multifaceted approaches, including access to resources, tailored training, and challenging gender norms. Innovative solutions are needed to promote entrepreneurship among women. Promoting justice, equality and inclusion, can serve as inspiration for the younger generation, highlighting opportunities for positive change.

The WINBLUE project aims to empower women in five male-dominated blue economy sectors: circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology, aquaculture and fisheries, offshore renewable energy, sustainable coastal tourism, and cutting-edge enabling technology for restoring marine ecosystems. Objectives include filling data gaps, creating an EU inclusive blue economy observatory, selecting existing good practices, upgrading skills, supporting women's participation in governance structures, and engaging stakeholders to maximize impact. WINBLUE collaborates with private organizations to integrate GEPs, providing guidance on strategic frameworks, critical self-analysis, targeted actions, and flexibility. It [shares](#) results, documents, events, and news, including gender equality training courses.

As part of the project, WINBLUE conducted a quantitative and qualitative assessments of inclusion of women in the beforementioned BE sectors. The study, soon to be published, revealed that gender is still not a priority. Key points include the lack of data, challenges in data collection, and the need to establish data gathering practices and monitoring mechanisms.

The WIN-BIG project aims to address knowledge gaps on women's participation in the BE across Europe. Through surveys and data mining, it wishes to provide comprehensive data on gender status and women's involvement in emergent sectors across six EU sea basins. Expected outcomes by April 2024 include mentoring future network mentors, a capacity building roadmap, a living Blue Economy Gender Database, a Women in BE Inspirational Book, and an online forum for sharing job opportunities. Current project deliverables include newsletters, the [Women in BE Forum](#) launch, and engagement with sister projects. Other outputs include the start of a systematic peer review based on 650 papers, a [survey](#) launch (so far 700 replies), and a creation of a directory of over 900 organizations across EU MS.

After the presentations, workshop participants played an active role in exploring Gender Knowledge mapping, discussing the establishment of best practices in systematic data collection processes, and considering methods to facilitate the creation of equality and inclusive plans in both public and private organizations.

The next EMD2025 will take place in Cork, Ireland, from the 22 to 23 May 2025!