

REPORT

Meeting: **Inter-AC meeting**
Parties: **DG MARE, ACs**
Date: **4 October 2024**
Location: **INTERACTIO**
Chair: **Stylianos Mitolidis, DG MARE**
Rapporteur: **NSAC Secretariat**

1. ACs Exchange with MARE Director General

Charlina Vitcheva, Director General of MARE, began by addressing the Commission's current transition, with the **new Commissioner-designate, Kostas Kadis**, preparing for November hearings (4-12).

On the **CFP evaluation**, the DG noted that the Commissioner's mission includes shaping a vision for the CFP with a projection for 2040, involving strategic collaboration with ACs and stakeholders. The first phase of targeted consultations has concluded, resulting in 87 recommendations. A wider public consultation will be announced in November.

On behalf of the **North Sea Advisory Council**, Secretary General **Tamara Talevska**, standing for Chair of Executive Committee Kenn Skau Fischer, thanked the Director General for accommodating the request to change the meeting format, and for attending **NSAC's 20th anniversary event** in Edinburgh. The outcomes of the related CFP conference will feed into **NSAC's advice on the CFP evaluation**.

Food security is expected to be a key focus in the advice, aligning with the Commission's new direction. NSAC is keen to meet with the new Commissioner after his formal appointment to discuss his 2040 Strategy and other relevant matters.

In parallel to the CFP advice, NSAC is also discussing on developing **advice on blue foods** and their contribution to climate objectives. Also discussed is the **funding of energy transition**. She flagged members' observations that even in major sectors like shipping, there is still considerable uncertainty about the best transition pathways, fuels, and technologies to adopt.

Regarding the **Control Regulation**, NSAC is collaborating with other ACs on the NWWAC's initiative for a joint workshop in spring 2025.

Furtherly, NSAC is finalizing **Joint-AC advice on improving stakeholder engagement in scientific advice formulation**.

Work is also being done on the **mapping of important fishing grounds** in relation to MSP – a crucial effort due to the shrinking fishing space in the North Sea. A comprehensive advice is expected by the end of the year.

Recently, NSAC submitted **Joint-AC advice on valorisation of fisheries and aquaculture byproducts**, supporting the circularity principle in fisheries and aquaculture and providing concrete measures that can be taken to improve the competitiveness of the EU blue bioeconomy.

Lastly, she noted that industry members remain concerned about several streams of **transformations and transitions** that the sector is or will be undergoing and the related costs.

In response, Ms. Vitcheva thanked the NSAC for the invitation to the events in Edinburgh. She highlighted the importance of **Marine Spatial Planning (MSP)**, especially given the congestion in the North Sea, and mentioned that DG MARE will attend the upcoming GNSBI meeting in Lille, where directors will collaborate on inclusive decisions for shared maritime use.

She welcomed the focus on food security, noting its importance in the Commissioner's mission letter, and stressed the need to **ensure aquatic food has a proper place in global food security discussions**, as 50% of global protein intake comes from aquatic sources. She also expressed support for NSAC's work on circularity, which is vital for coastal and fisheries sectors.

Other ACs raised the following key issues:

- Importance of maintaining a **meeting with the Commissioner** before the December Council.
- Ongoing impact of the **war and invasion of Ukraine** on local and global fisheries.
- **Decarbonization** must account for vessel capacity; older vessels cannot easily adapt to hydrogen engines or heavy equipment, requiring new vessels.
- The need to strengthen the **external dimension of the CFP** to promote EU values on sustainable ocean conservation and resource management globally.
- Increased **dialogue** with the **Commission and EFCA** to ensure proper implementation of the revised Control Regulation.
- Concerns about the "**Fishers of the Future**" foresight study, particularly its methodology and relevance to real-world fisheries. Any strategic planning based on this study should be carefully debated with stakeholders.
- Clarification on the **ETP** for EU Fisheries and Aquaculture, especially regarding the Support Group's work and AC engagement.
- Concerns over **trade relations with Norway**, calling for a balanced approach to ensure fair competition for EU fisheries and aquaculture.

- Need to reduce **excessive reliance on third countries** for primary food and essential supplies.
- **Decarbonization** efforts must not hinder economic growth or place an excessive burden on the sector.
- Calls for the **CFP evaluation** to result in updates reflecting changes over the past 10 years.
- Concerns about the use of **external consultancies for evaluations**, emphasizing the expertise available within DGs, Member States, and scientific bodies.
- Support for the **Inter-AC Brexit Forum**, noting the need to address the **review of the TCA** by 1 July 2026.
- Concerns over the **lack of AC consultation** prior to the publication of implementing acts on margins of tolerance; ACs should be involved in significant decisions.

The Director General thoroughly addressed all AC questions, with key points relevant for North Sea AC members summarized below:

- **UK Relations:** Engaging closely with UK colleagues, including discussions with the Scottish minister at NSAC's 20th Anniversary. Post-2026 access to waters remains a priority, seeking a stable, long-term decision rather than annual negotiations. Cooperation with the UK, particularly on ecosystem-based approaches and MPAs, is essential for alignment, and dialogue will continue via annual consultations and the Special Committee for Fisheries. The EU doesn't intend to renegotiate the TCA post-2026, but this is the UK's aim. The EU will maintain quota transfers without trading stability in access to waters.
- **Control Regulation:** Welcomed the idea of a Joint-AC workshop to enhance clarity and transparency. The goal of the regulation is to reduce the burden through digital technologies and automation. Member States are involved in consultations on implementing acts, and ACs are encouraged to contribute ideas.
- **Stakeholder Involvement:** The Director General will convey to the new Commissioner to meet with ACs before the December Fisheries Council, emphasizing the value of stakeholder input.
- **Fishers of the Future:** Relevant insights will be incorporated into the foresight project. The outcomes will be taken into account for future planning.
- **Energy Transition:** Committed to collaborating with all ACs on the energy transition, ensuring a just and fair process with adequate funding.
- **ETP:** Acknowledged resource constraints in ACs. The roadmap is designed to assist with milestones and deadline for feedback will be extended to ensure alignment and successful implementation.
- **Fisheries Management and Market Access:** Timely consultations with Norway are important, and a unified message is being passed by ACs and Member States.

2. Update on VMEs socio-economic analysis

Ralph Doering, Chair of the STECF expert group on VMEs socio-economic analysis, provided an update on the group's progress in **assessing the socio-economic impacts of VME closures**. Preliminary work has already begun, including literature reviews, data collection, and initial modelling efforts. Some Member States and scientists have already analysed these impacts, particularly focusing on displacement effects and small-scale/coastal fisheries, though data on the latter is limited.

Doering encouraged stakeholders to **submit any socio-economic impact data**, including qualitative information, in response to specific questions that will be circulated in October. He also mentioned plans for interviews with sector experts to evaluate the modelling results. Stakeholders are invited to observe the expert group's February meeting, with up to three participants allowed per AC. A final report will be prepared for the STECF plenary and published in March/April.

3. Functioning of the ACs – taking stock of the implementation of Delegated Regulation 2022/2024

Julia Rubeck, Policy Coordinator at DG MARE, provided an update on developments within the Delegated Regulation 2022/2024 since 2022.

The original Delegated Regulation 2015/24 oversees the functioning of ACs, but issues of clarity and interpretation led to the 2022 amendment. Key changes made in 2022 aimed to balance representation between sector organizations and other interest groups, clarify chairing roles and classification criteria, and ensure better compliance with CFP objectives. Provisions for regular performance reviews were also added.

Rubeck posed several questions to the AC Secretariats to gather feedback on the amended delegated regulation:

- **Balance in Chair and Vice-Chair Positions:** Are you satisfied with the new rules, and have they helped rebalance the chairing positions?
- **Classification:** What are your thoughts on the annex to the regulation and the selection criteria? Has it clarified the classification process?
- **Balanced and Wide Representation:** How do you view the adequacy of representation and the handling of minority opinions?
- **Working Methods:** How have the working methods, processes, workload, efficiency, organization of meetings, and prioritization evolved over the past two years?
- **Performance Reviews:** Have you conducted a performance review recently? Has it helped identify dysfunctions, and what lessons have been learned?
- **Funding & Lump-Sum:** What are your thoughts on the simplification measures related to financing?

Looking ahead, DG MARE will hold sessions on the CFP evaluation. The supporting study will be launched in October 2024 and run until October 2025, with a 12-week public consultation starting in November.

Talevska emphasized the importance of receiving questions in advance and a more detailed agenda for future meetings. In response to Rubeck's questions, Talevska provided the following insights:

- **Balance in Chair and Vice-Chair Positions:** The NSAC has recently elected a female OIG vice-chair after a three-year hiatus, but there are currently no vice-chairs in working groups. This limitation will be addressed under the new Rules of Procedure.
- **Classification:** There are no issues, but the Secretariat lacks the capacity to verify funding for all organizations.
- **Balanced and wide representations:** OIGs face resource constraints. Minority positions are always included, though they are rare.
- **Working methods, workload:** The NSAC and its Secretariat have significantly suffered from Brexit and loss of membership. Working methods are clearly defined in the Rules of Procedure and are being followed closely.
- **Performance review:** One was performed internally 5 years ago and a new one will be conducted in the 2024/25 FY.
- **Funding and lump sum:** the current system provides the NSAC with considerable flexibility, and the financial unit in MARE is responsive.

Talevska also followed up on the initiative regarding the **positioning of ACs vis-a-vis other stakeholders**, in particular on platforms where a joined-up approach would benefit the overall exercise. She emphasized the need for ACs to have a special regard in the Joint Special Group on Marine Action Plan. She expressed concern that without addressing the underlying issues of AC positioning, efforts will be ineffectual and merely symbolic.

The Secretariats of other ACs shared key points, summarized as follows:

- **Changing Priorities:** The shift in priorities from those outlined in the grant agreement makes it difficult to fulfill all commitments, which are planned a year in advance. Greater flexibility is needed as program priorities may change.
- **Funding Timeline:** There is a significant delay, sometimes 4-5 months, between application submissions and funding decisions for some ACs.
- **Member Classification Criteria:** While the criteria for member classification are helpful, the implementation of paragraph D may create confusion, potentially excluding certain organizations.
- **NGO Representation:** There are ongoing challenges in attracting new NGOs, leading to their underrepresentation. Concrete proposals are needed to achieve the desired 60/40 balance within the advisory councils. The issue of NGO participation, particularly regarding workload and resources could be addressed by considering potential use of EU funding such as LIFE programs.

Overall, the amended regulation has improved the functioning of the ACs, which are essential to the CFP. The various interactions today highlighted important issues, and the submitted letter from the advisory councils will be reviewed and addressed.

4. AOB

4.1 Energy Transition Partnership

Roubeck took the floor to address the multiple questions raised about the **ETP** and the joint AC letter sent to the Director General. She informed that the response to the letter will be shared broadly due to significant interest.

The **Assistance Mechanism** will consist of a Secretariat to support a consultative process, utilizing a segmented approach focused on various topics relevant to ACs.

Members will be able to join **support groups**. Coordinators of the support groups are expected to hold one in-person and three online meetings per year per WG. These meetings will yield sector-level recommendations contributing to the ETP's final energy transition roadmap. Coordinators are also required to attend five webinars on specific themes and meet with the Assistance Mechanism Secretariat every two months.

Regarding the **roadmap**, its postponement is necessary to align with ongoing CFP evaluation work. The Commission has engaged with various stakeholders, including ACs, through three thematic workshops focusing on financing, innovation, and skills. The Assistance Mechanism will aid ETP members in structuring dialogue and gathering input to develop a roadmap for achieving climate neutrality in the sector by 2050.

There has been a lack of clarity about **how ACs can join** different WGs. The separation of stakeholders within WGs complicates targeted participation for ACs. ACs may participate in a WG as coordinators or as regular members. This process will be clarified once the assistance mechanism is operational.

Budget limitations prevent remuneration for work done, but travel and accommodation costs for support group coordinators are covered by the ETP assistance mechanism.

To enhance representation, **translation and interpretation** services will be offered. However, the role of support group coordinators requires regular communication with the ETP Secretariat, necessitating proficiency in English.

The Assistance Mechanism will launch in the coming weeks, with more information about the Secretary's role to follow. Questions can be directed to the functional mailbox: **MARE-ENERGY-TRANSITION@ec.europa.eu**

4.2 Article 17: Vademecum on fishing rights allocation

Niki Sporong from BSAC inquired about the progress on Article 17 regarding the vademecum for fishing rights allocation.

Eoin Mac Aoidh, Deputy Head of MARE Unit D3, explained that the vademecum is part of the Fisheries and Oceans package. Earlier this year, consultations were held with Member States, ACs, and STECF. Currently, the focus is on enhancing transparency in quota allocation, examining good practices in managing changes, and exploring the involvement of Producer Organizations. **Next steps will be determined by the upcoming college.**

5. Next meeting

The **next meeting is foreseen in Q1 2025.**