Summarized STATEMENT

Meeting: **High-Level Roundtable – Fishers and Oceans Dialogue: Helping Design the European Oceans Pact**
Parties: **DG MARE, stakeholders**
Date: **21 February 2025**
Location: **Brussels, BE**

Firstly, I would like to thank Commissioner Kadis and DG MARE for recognizing the importance of stakeholders in providing input for the development of the European Oceans Pact and applying a bottom-up approach in the development of EU policies. This is and will be of crucial importance for the implementation of policy tools and mechanisms and their uptake. Advisory Councils must remain the key mechanisms to channel that input and feedback, providing essential knowledge in the development of management strategies and constituting a reality check for the implementation of proposed measures.

Opportunities and Challenges in Ocean Governance
The North Sea is a vital ecosystem facing pressures from climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and competing maritime industries. However, we must not forget foods are crucial in addressing climate commitments, contributing to SDGs and the European Green Deal. Fragmented EU governance, spanning the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), the Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) Directive, the Nature Restoration Law (NRL), and other frameworks creates challenges in implementation and achieving coherence between environmental and human needs. Working in isolation will not bring the necessary progress towards needed environmental, social and economic sustainability.

Innovation and Regulatory Challenges
Innovation, a key tool in addressing marine challenges, is often hindered by rigid regulations. More flexible processes are needed to allow fishers to adopt more efficient and selective gears. Additionally, a shift in narrative around monitoring tools like Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) can enhance integration and acceptance through incentives rather than enforcement. Positive examples in science-industry partnerships should be promoted to this end.

Climate Change and Shared Management
In recent years, a major source of uncertainty has been the impact of climate change on fish stocks distribution, production and growth. Engagement and dialogue between researchers, stakeholders, decision-makers, and citizens, is required to ensure effective integration of climate in fisheries management. Additionally, Brexit has furtherly complicated North Sea governance, highlighting the need for continued dialogue with third countries like the UK and

Norway to ensure trust for effective fisheries management, avoid overfishing, and ensure fair and continuous access to fishing grounds and markets.

Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management

To holistically address current challenges, protect marine biodiversity, and ensure the long-term viability of fish stocks, fisheries management must take an ecosystem-based approach, integrating high-quality data and systematic, transparent and inclusive stakeholder engagement. Inclusive governance, particularly in MPAs, ensures conservation goals align with socio-economic viability. Offshore wind farm expansion in the North Sea also requires cross-border collaboration to assess impacts on marine life. The Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI) is a prominent example of how to (attempt to) manage a sea basin holistically, addressing food, environment and energy supply simultaneously, at the highest political level.

Ensuring a Viable Future for EU Fisheries

Over the past years, the NSAC has worked to elevate the social dimension of fisheries management, often overlooked compared to environmental and economic aspects. Currently, the fisheries sector is facing challenges in workforce attraction, an aging fleet, and difficult working conditions. The European Oceans Pact should promote clear social objectives alongside environmental and economic ones to keep the sector attractive to younger generations. Ensuring fair working conditions and long-term economic viability is crucial for a resilient fisheries sector.

Conclusion

The European Oceans Pact is an opportunity to unify sustainability, governance, and economic growth under a comprehensive strategy. The NSAC is committed to contributing stakeholder insights to ensure a resilient and secure future for the EU fisheries and ecosystems. For more a comprehensive overview, I encourage to consider NSAC's detailed advice on the Oceans Pact, to be submitted shortly to the Commission.