



North Sea Advisory Council
Performance Review Report
2020-2025

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Key findings

NSAC remained a relevant and productive advisory body over 2020–2025. It continued to provide evidence-informed advice across an increasingly complex policy portfolio, supported by functioning structures. It had a capable Secretariat, an active Executive Committee (ExCom), Working Groups and Focus Groups, and sustained engagement with the European Commission and wider advisory processes.

The evaluation identified four main weaknesses. First, NSAC has lost representational balance. It does not reflect its required 60:40 structure of industry representation and other interest group (OIG) representation. OIG membership varied between 26–30% over the evaluation period and only 7% OIG presence on the Executive Committee at the start of 2026. Environmental NGOs are absent from the NSAC. This weakens plurality and makes consensus more fragile and closer to majority control. Second, decision-making processes work in low-stress conditions but becomes fragile under pressure. Third, delivery has become concentrated in the ExCom, Secretariat, and a small core of members. Fourth, impact of the NSAC on the Common Fisheries Policy is real but often diffuse, reactive, and hard to demonstrate.

Progress since the 2021 review has been uneven. Improvements are clearest in systems, process and technical output. Less progress has been made on governance, representation, trust and internal relationships. The main issue is now adaptation, not basic capacity.

Executive summary

This report provides an evidence-based evaluation of NSAC performance between 2020 and 2025, assessing its effectiveness, efficiency and alignment with the objectives of the EU Common Fisheries Policy. The overall conclusion is that NSAC remained a relevant and productive advisory body during a demanding period, but that its performance has become more uneven under pressure.

NSAC should be recognised for maintaining continuity, visibility and output through Brexit, relocation, governance strain and an expanding agenda. It continued to provide a practical forum for exchange, problem-solving and advice development. Its core structures remained functional, its evidence base remained strong, and its ExCom, Working Groups, Focus Groups and Secretariat continued to support delivery. These are important organisational assets.

The review also found a set of linked constraints that now limit performance. Representational balance has weakened substantially. This affects plurality and makes consensus more fragile. Decision-making is less robust in contested

settings, responsibilities are concentrated in a small core, and impact, while real, is often diffuse and hard to demonstrate. Progress since the 2021 review has been uneven. Improvement is clearest in systems, procedures and technical delivery, while less progress has been made in governance, representational balance, trust and internal relationships.

NSAC will need to adjust its model if it is to remain credible, balanced and effective in a more demanding policy environment. This report therefore sets out practical and actionable recommendations to strengthen representational balance, improve the handling of disagreement, broaden ownership, and build greater resilience for the future. It also highlights that the tone of interactions in some meetings needs to change.

Looking ahead, the NSAC has a credible basis on which to strengthen its role. The main message from this evaluation is not that the organisation lacks capacity or value. It is that it needs to extend its proven operational strengths into more challenging areas of representational balance, consensus under pressure, wider ownership, and governance resilience. If it can do this, the NSAC is well placed to remain an important forum for regional dialogue and to become a stronger, more visible and more durable platform for North Sea fisheries governance in a changing policy context.

Acknowledgements

We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who took part in and contributed to this evaluation. NSAC members showed strong engagement with the performance review, sharing important perspectives and feedback through the online survey, and interviews. We are also deeply grateful to the Secretariat for their continuous support and willingness to engage in open, ongoing dialogue throughout the process.

1. Introduction

1.1 Objective

This is an independent performance evaluation of the North Sea Advisory Council (NSAC) for the 2020–2025 period. The review was commissioned in the context of the 2022 Delegated Act requirement for an external assessment of Advisory Council performance, and follows the earlier internal review completed in 2021. Its purpose is to provide an external and objective assessment of how the NSAC's internal bodies and procedures function in practice, with a focus on three questions: effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence with relevant EU provisions. The review also aims to identify challenges, examples of good practice, areas for improvement, and practical recommendations for action.

The terms of reference require the evaluation to examine the functioning of the NSAC structures, including the relevance of topics addressed, organisation of meetings, and the extent and quality of member participation and evidence-based input. They also require assessment of decision-making processes, including openness to members, time for discussion and consultation, treatment of consensus and diverging views, use of evidence, and the role of written and urgent procedures. In addition, the review considers representation of different interests, including the balance between sector and other interest groups, the position of small and large organisations, geographical representation, common identity, and the added value of membership.

The review also covers leadership, delivery, external relations, transparency and contribution to CFP objectives. It examines how NSAC's chairs and Secretariat perform their roles, how it works with the Commission and Member States, how transparent its information and membership are, and how far it contributes to environmental, social and market objectives under the CFP.

The review is based on a mixed evidence approach set out in the terms of reference and methods section. This included analysis of relevant legislation and NSAC documentation, inclusion on the mailing list, structured interviews with NSAC and institutional participants, an online survey, and meeting participation by the reviewers. Taken together, these sources provide the basis for an evidence-based assessment of how NSAC has functioned, what value it has generated, where constraints remain, and where targeted improvement is now needed.

1.2 Reading guide

The Key findings and Executive summary provide the main messages of the evaluation. Section 2 describes the NSAC and sets the context in which it operates. Section 3 examines internal functioning, including decision-making, representation and transparency. Section 4 looks at structures and leadership in practice. Section 5 considers external relations and contribution to CFP objectives. Section 6 explores progress since the last review in 2021. Section 7 sets out the main highlights and development needs. Section 8 presents recommendations, and Section 9 gives the conclusions. Section 10 explains the methods, while Section 11 provides glossary. The terms of reference are included at the end of the document.

2. Key features of the NSAC

The North Sea and fisheries setting

The NSAC was established to prepare and provide advice on the management on the fisheries of the North Sea on behalf of stakeholders, to achieve the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy.

The North Sea is one of the most anthropogenically impacted seas in the world, with a very high spatial overlap of activities in a heavily exploited shelf sea. At the basin scale, the North Sea is experiencing a swift expansion of offshore renewables. There is strong science coordination, with weaker integration of decision-making, although many developed institutional players (national and international). Most of the pressures are already regulated (or highly regulated), yet biodiversity and fisheries productivity are continuing to decline. There is intense public, political, and media scrutiny of activities and management.

Fisheries in the North Sea face challenges and are demonstrating some resilience. ICES states that *"Fishing continues to be the main threat to ecosystem health. This is despite a decrease in fishing pressure in recent decades as can be observed from two of its main pressures, i.e. species extraction and physical seabed disturbance."* The number of fishing vessels is declining, STECF estimate that there were approximately 2,000 vessels from the EU in 2023 operating in the North Sea (47% from coastal small-scale fleet), giving employment to approximately 3,000 full-time equivalents, the lowest number recorded in recent times. EU catches of approximately 740 kt in 2023 with first-sale value of approximately €950 million and gross added value of €460 million. The North Sea could be considered a 'dual-track economy' with the "small-track" consisting of thousands of coastal boats using static gears for local high-value markets, while the "large-track" consists of a few hundred larger trawlers with high tonnage of herring, sandeel, mackerel, and demersal fish (97% of landed weight). The dominant fisheries use mobile gears with a range of pelagic and demersal gears. Static gears are mostly used by smaller coastal vessels. The demersal fisheries are mixed fisheries, and as such they are prone to management measures on specific species that result in choke species limiting catches of other more abundant species (e.g. cod).

Since BREXIT, around 21% of the area of the North Sea is in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of EU Member States (Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Sweden). The remaining area is part of the EEZs of the United Kingdom and Norway. This creates a geopolitically diverse and complex management landscape. According to OECD, fisheries play a limited role in overall employment across member states (approximately 0.2% of employment),

but they support specific local communities and are closely tied to cultural identity, tradition and national cohesion.

The NSAC in a complex governance system

The EU Advisory Councils were created by the 2002 reform of the CFP (Figure 2.1). The NSAC was one of the first advisory councils and was established in 2004 (initially as the North Sea Regional Advisory Council) and, for much of its early life, was anchored administratively in Aberdeen, where it remained registered until 2019. The speed at which the NSAC became operational was due to the existence of a precursor, namely the North Sea Commission Fisheries Partnership (NSCFP): a North Sea-wide forum set up in the early 2000s to improve working relations between fishers and scientists. Following the Brexit vote, the NSAC repositioned its legal and operational base, relocating in 2018 to Zoetermeer, the Netherlands, to maintain a workable EU-facing platform. In 2025, the NSAC repositioned again to Brussels, Belgium. The NSAC is required to operate under specific conditions. Fisheries management in the North Sea operates through layered bilateral and trilateral arrangements between the European Union, the United Kingdom and Norway, rather than a single integrated system. Core decisions on access, TACs and quota shares are negotiated annually through EU–UK, EU–Norway and UK–Norway processes, with trilateral coordination required where shared stocks cut across all three jurisdictions. Within the EU, the Scheveningen Group provides a regional platform for Member States to develop joint recommendations, translating EU objectives into sea-basin specific technical measures. Since Brexit, the Trade and Cooperation Agreement has added a formal legal layer, fixing principles, timelines and dispute mechanisms, but not removing the need for continuous negotiation. The result is a governance system that is rule-based yet highly relational, stable in structure but sensitive to trust, alignment and annual political trade-offs. A performance review of the NSAC was published in 2021.

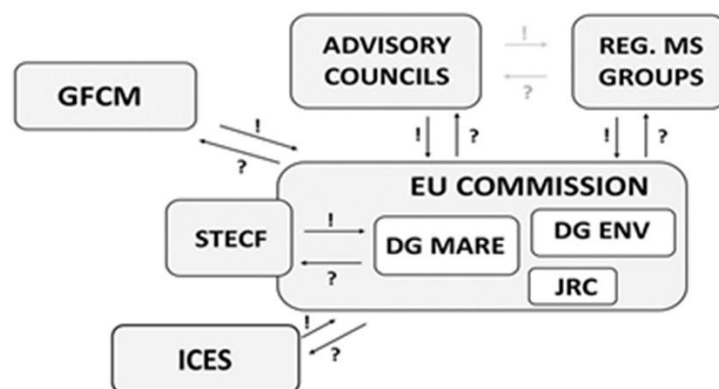


Figure 2.1. Main aspects of the advisory system of the CFP. “?” indicates request for advice. “!” indicates delivery of advice. Reg. MS Groups are the Regional Groups of the MS. Source: adapted from Ballesteros et al. 2018.

Basin wide coordination of marine environmental objectives is provided by the regional sea organisation OSPAR. Meanwhile IMO sets the rules and standards for international shipping, also a key player in the use of the North Sea as it ranks among the busiest sea areas for shipping globally.

Evidence, policy pressure, and changing advisory demands

Internally EU and national pressures are challenging the NSAC. Its workload is increasing as it engages with a wider and more complex policy landscape, spanning the Common Fisheries Policy, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Nature Restoration Regulation, Maritime Spatial Planning Directive, the Ocean Pact (forthcoming Ocean Act) and the Blue Economy agenda. In parallel, the fisheries sector remains under sustained structural strain. Stock status, ecosystem change, invasive species, labour constraints and climate impacts combine to heighten economic risk. New societal priorities, notably offshore renewable energy, add further pressure, challenging the long-term viability of fisheries and stretching the capacity and resilience of existing advisory arrangements. Together, these intersecting frameworks and pressures have expanded both the scope and intensity of NSAC advisory responsibilities. Another key feature for the NSAC is the strong and diverse evidence base that it can draw upon. North Sea is underpinned by one of the strongest and most mature scientific evidence bases globally, centred on long-running surveys, routine analytical stock assessments and transparent advisory processes coordinated by International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES). As an intergovernmental organisation working to coordinate science in the North Atlantic, ICES provides a durable platform that ensures that despite BREXIT, the scientists from all North Sea countries collaborate and cooperate. The average age of the fisheries institutes around the North Sea is around 110 years old. Time series often extend back decades, enabling clear trend detection, risk-based reference points and explicit management strategy evaluation. Compared with many other EU sea basins, the North Sea benefits from dense monitoring, sustained funding and close science–management feedback loops. Globally, few regions combine this level of data richness with formal harvest control rules and annual, peer-reviewed advice applied across most major stocks. This does not remove uncertainty, but it allows uncertainty to be managed explicitly.

Social and economic evidence is less systematic and less operationalised than the biological science. Economic data on fleet performance, costs, profitability and employment are routinely compiled through EU data collection frameworks and national statistics. Social evidence, covering community dependence, labour conditions, skills, safety and cultural value is more fragmented, often qualitative, and used unevenly in decision-making. Compared with the biological advice produced by ICES, social and economic inputs tend to inform context and trade-offs rather than drive rules. Relative to many other EU and global regions,

however, the North Sea still performs strongly: data coverage is broader, methods are more transparent, and links to management decisions are clearer. The gap is not absence of evidence, but its weaker translation into explicit objectives and decision criteria. The NSAC benefits from an evidence-informed, operational fisheries management.

Participation, governance strain and future viability

Within the NSAC, the participation of non-fisheries interest groups has diminished following sustained tensions between different stakeholder constituencies. This is further explored in this evaluation but broadly, the fishing sector representatives have raised concerns about clarity of representation, mandate and accountability, while environmental NGOs have pointed to challenges in influence, bias, working culture and the practical value of engagement. These dynamics have contributed to the gradual withdrawal of most non-fisheries organisations, leaving the Council with limited OIG participation. While this has reduced overt conflict in deliberations, it also narrows the range of perspectives available and presents a strategic trade-off between internal cohesion and broader representational balance in advisory processes.

These trends raise a more basic question about viability. The NSAC now covers a smaller formal part of the North Sea, carries a broader and more complex portfolio, and does so with a much narrower stakeholder base than its design intended. Unless it can rebuild plurality, focus its effort, and show clear added value in this changed setting, the issue will not only be how well it performs, but whether its current model remains sustainable and credible over time.

The NSAC structure and function is broadly defined by Common Fisheries Policy Regulation 1380/2013. This regulation gives the ACs general flexibility to build structures and processes that are specific to the devolved needs of each specific AC. The NSAC describes its work as supporting *“the European Commission and Member States in providing advice on issues relevant to the North Sea.”* It says that it takes *“a regional approach to our work by providing advice on matters pertaining to specific stocks, habitats, fishing interests and other environmental issues related to fisheries in the North Sea region.”* It does this through working groups that pass information, views and documents to the Executive committee (Figure 2.2). The roles and responsibilities of the differing bodies in the AC are set out in Box 2.1. Some ACs have more formalised focus groups, which are cross cutting the working groups, that NSAC has a more informal approach to the focus groups (exampled by the focus groups not being listed on the NSAC website and the Executive committee denoting them as ‘active’, ‘dormant’ or not active’). In some years the NSAC has had what it terms *“advice drafting groups”*, apart from 2021/2022, these advice drafting groups are generally not active.

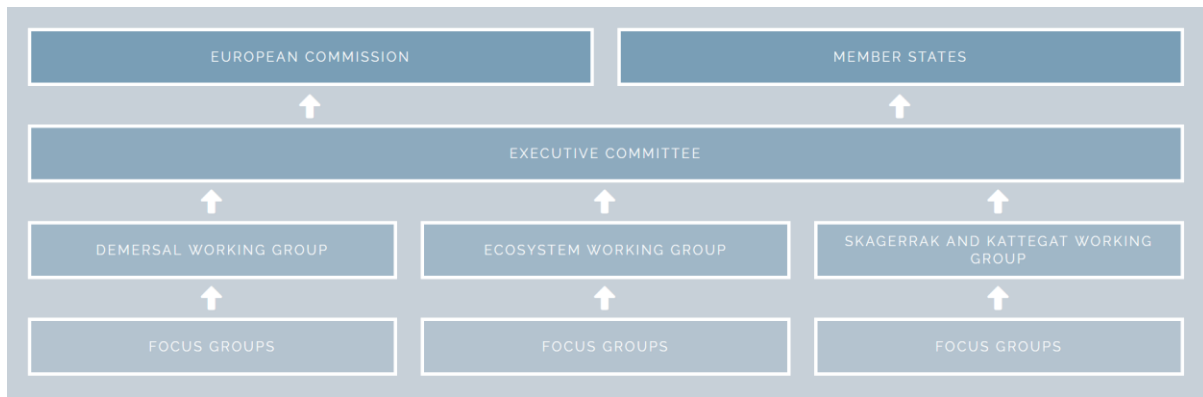


Figure 2.2. Schematic of the internal structure of the North Sea Advisory Council (taken from the NSAC website; <https://www.nsrac.org/>).

Box 2.1. The roles, responsibilities, reporting and membership of NSAC internal structures (based on the rules of procedure and synthesised into a 2015 secretariat descriptive document)

General Assembly: All NSAC members are members of the General Assembly. A meeting of the General Assembly is held at least once a year. The purpose of the General Assembly is to set the strategic direction for the work of the Advisory Council (AC). Members of the General Assembly approve the annual work plan and budget.

Executive Committee: There are 25 seats on the Executive Committee, 15 for fishing organisations and 10 for organisations with non-fishing interests. Members of the Executive Committee are appointed by the members of the General Assembly. The Executive Committee meets at least three times a year. Its purpose is to decide general policy, direct the affairs of the AC, and approve NSAC advice.

Working Groups: The work of the NSAC is delivered through three Working Groups: Demersal, Skagerrak & Kattegat, and Ecosystem. These groups each meet two to four times a year to consider and discuss current and emerging topics and to develop advice and policy on behalf of the NSAC membership. Once finalised, advice developed by the Working Groups is presented to the Executive Committee for approval. Members of Working Groups should be nominated by members of the General Assembly and appointed by the Executive Committee.

Focus Groups: A Working Group may be supported by a number of Focus Groups. Focus Groups are smaller groups set up to draft advice on a specific topic. They are flexible in their approach, drawing in representatives and experts from a range of sources, including scientists, fishers, environmental specialists, economists, and others. Focus Groups are short-lived and conclude once the piece of work they are addressing is finalised. Where a Focus Group has a high number of members, a smaller group may be appointed to undertake the drafting of advice. The structure of Focus Groups should aim to reflect the 60:40 representation of fishing industry and other interest groups in the NSAC.

Closed meetings: Focus Groups and Working Groups may be closed to observers if this is considered to be in the best interests of completing a specific piece of work. The decision to hold a members-only meeting is at the discretion of the group Chair.

Membership of Working and Focus Groups: Membership of Working and Focus Groups has to date operated on an informal basis, with all NSAC members able to attend meetings as group members. Once an organisation attends a Working Group or Focus Group, it is deemed to be a group member.

During the evaluation period, NSAC experienced governance issues that tested Board-level decision-making. These pressures were most visible during the relocation, when legal drafting, questions over seat allocation, and tight timelines increased the need for clear procedures and disciplined communication. This took place alongside strained internal working relations and weaker leadership continuity, including resignations and unfilled roles. Many of the interactions associated with these issues were outside the evidence base of this evaluation (informal conversations, private emails). The evaluators therefore did not assess the drivers for the tension but assumed that the events and fallout were indicators of a system under strain, with structural problems and weakened resilience of governance effectiveness.

Despite these challenges, NSAC has maintained a strong and visible position through routine engagement in key EU policy and science interfaces, backed by a high volume of advice and sustained participation in external meetings. Regular Inter-AC work and joint formats extend its reach and show its positions beyond its own forum. This visibility is also reflected in the continued goodwill of UK former members, many of whom remain engaged as observers and value NSAC as a practical platform for regional dialogue and workable solutions.

3. Internal functioning and decision making

While the statutes and Rules of Procedure formally guide the operations and decision-making within the NSAC, the evidence provides contrasting views on the internal functioning of the NSAC. The online survey portrays decision-making as broadly clear, fair, and effective to active members. While the interviews and meeting observations show the decision-making as becoming contested and less decisive in practice under pressure, with weak closure, blurred roles, and dominance by a few voices. The online survey mainly reflects the views of long-standing, active members, primarily from the fisheries sector, and asks about general satisfaction, while interviews and observations capture high-tension episodes and real-time behaviour.

Legitimacy in the NSAC is now expressed mainly through adherence to process. However, the plurality of voices has disappeared and the statutory 60:40 make-up of fisheries and other organisations is absent. Consensus is the working method of an Advisory Council as described in Rule 29 of the NSAC Rules of Procedure (RoP). Though an operational definition of 'consensus' is not described in the RoPs, or in regulation of the Common Fisheries Policy, the common meaning in governance contexts is often broad agreement that everyone can accept, even if it may not be their first choice.

With regards to process the evidence flags procedural fragility. The broadening remit, constrained effort has led to a strain on deliberation and to shortcuts becoming common.

Across the members, there is some lack of clarity of the rules of procedure, and the rules of procedure have been used as mechanisms to block action, rather than as tools for the NSAC to deliver its objectives. The NSAC should use the Rules of Procedure as a practical and shared reference to guide and facilitate the work in a transparent manner. A clear fallback pathway should be developed to support operations when rules are disputed. It should also foster a working culture that assumes that disagreement is inherent across its members and thus develop procedures and working method to develop consensus, especially mindful of the likely reduced impact of advice that is not based on consensus.

3.1 Decision-making process

Decision-making in NSAC is generally structured and operates reasonably. Most active members report clear and transparent procedures, agendas are usually purposeful and well supported by the Secretariat, and the working groups and focus groups provide a practical route to turn technical discussion into advice. However, that strength relies on stable conditions, and initial consensus, especially when time pressure rises or disputes spill into organisational-governance questions. This results in closure becoming weaker, and a few voices can dominate. Crucially the decision-making system relies on process rather than demonstrated representativeness, which can quickly erode confidence in the decisions.

The core processes of the NSAC are open to members available to participate. The online survey results indicate broad satisfaction with decision-making. Survey respondents report clear and transparent decision-making (83%). They report satisfaction with how decisions are made (75%). They report drafting procedures are effective (88%). Over the evaluation period, written and urgent procedures increased, with a peak in 2023–2024. This signals sustained time pressure on deliberation and drafting, with implications for procedural tension, and reduces the time needed to build consensus.

The evidence points to an increasing stress point on dissent and decision legitimacy. Meeting observations illustrated a repeat weakness when tension rises. Process is often too weak to convert disagreement into clear decisions, with owners, and timelines.

Minority statements, small scale fisheries (SSF) representation, and mandates between internal NSAC structures were observed creating procedural debate that crowded out decision-making. A practical improvement would be to improve the utility of the Rules of Procedure as the default reference point in

meetings. A clear fall-back decision pathway would reduce circular exchanges when statutes or procedures are contested. A solution could be to make the decision rules for minority statements public and minute that they were agreed.

Consensus is a directed functional aim of all Advisory Councils, as outlined in Annex III of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013. However, the interviewees diverged on whether consensus in NSAC Advice reflects broad agreement or majority control with minority caveats. Consensus is not an indicator of genuine trust. This matters for legitimacy and also for the willingness of OIGs and NGOs to invest in the NSAC. It also matters when the NSAC is externally perceived as a plural consensus-based advisory body. In terms of formal decision making, the NSAC should assume that dissent will occur. It would be helpful to build a decision-making process on the assumption that people will disagree at first. The process should start by capturing the different positions clearly, then test options against shared evidence and agreed decision criteria. Interviewees reported that initiatives to provide training on consensus-building were “laughed away”.

A consistent message from DG MARE is that robust evidence associated with advice makes the difference. This needs to be reflected in the advice and the decision-making process. Generic claims reduce the usefulness of advice. The cultural norm of the NSAC is to showcase and use science and evidence from a wide range of skilled and effective experts. This is a key strength of the NSAC. It effectively uses this base to inform its membership of relevant science advances and solutions. Critiques that the NSAC too often provides unhelpful general statements, not evidence, or uses clichés do not match the analysis of NSAC advice documents. Analysis suggests that any more clichéd statements are rarely used without some supporting evidence. The advice usually draws conclusions from specific datasets, procedural records, or fishers' observations. DG MARE and NSAC both value evidence-based advice, but they differ in what evidence is most visible in the final product. There is a need to agree shared notions of how evidence is brought into the advice and how to link the datasets and observations to each piece of advice at a glance. This could be achieved through structured dialogue which commonly defines different types of evidence and data, acceptance criteria for different data types, and outlines how conflicting evidence will be handled.

3.2 Representation of different interests

In principle, the NSAC provides a consistent forum where a wide range of North Sea fisheries and other interest groups can meet, explore evidence, and shape advice through working groups and open discussion. Its working aim is consensus. However, the legitimacy of the NSAC is existentially challenged by its failure to achieve and maintain membership of organisations representing 60%

fisheries interests and 40% other interest groups (OIG). Balance and diversity remain weak. There has been a loss in the plurality of the membership. Membership data indicate OIG representation around 26–30% over the 2020–2025 period. OIG membership of the executive committee at the start of 2026 is 7%. The 2021 review committed the NSAC to active outreach to rebuild membership balance. It urged the NSAC to attract new members, especially small-scale organisations and OIGs. The situation has worsened since then, reflecting that this failure to reach statutory requirements cannot be addressed through business as usual or solely “must try harder” solutions.

The evaluation framework disclosed a number of potential reasons for the exodus of OIGs from the NSAC. These included:

- organisation’s structure with OIGs being locked into a permanent minority,
- in-meeting culture and behaviour of members,
- perceived reduction in impact after BREXIT, creating a feeling of high-cost and low-return
- weak handling of dissent by chairs
- centralised drafting and agenda control which reduced plurality of input,
- time allocation and closure practices that have sidelined minority concerns,
- rising demands associated with NSAC participation, alongside shrinking OIG resources,
- use of institutional power dynamics of some in leadership positions,

Perceptions matter as much as facts, because they shape trust, behaviour, and willingness to engage. Currently the NSAC is a fishing industry-dominated forum relative to its legal design. With reduced representation, processes to account for minority views need to be strengthened. This is not happening. Visible, well-argued minority positions should be valued when representation is incomplete. In some working groups, no room is being given to dissenting voices.

Some industry interviewees justified their dominance through asymmetric economic risk (a perspective that industry has more to lose economically than other stakeholders). NGO voices framed the same dominance as structural exclusion. It is important not to explain the exit of OIGs as a rational time-allocation decision, when many of the other underlying organisational and cultural issues have not been addressed.

The meeting culture is mixed, with some focus groups run with great informality, and a more candid and collaborative environment. These with time could also develop into closed clubs, with implicit rules of behaviour. Whereas flippancy and ridicule “as a joke” were regularly observed in some working groups and the ExCom. Members were observed being challenged about the right to sit at the table.

Only about half of survey respondents rate the collaborative spirit as good. The online survey results are more positive on balance in speaking time, with 74% agreeing it is balanced. However, the survey reported perceptions of exclusion “sometimes” at 30%, and misuse of time at 39%. Offensive language was reported sometimes at 17%. The observing of meetings recorded some instances where just a few voices dominated (table 10.4.1). This is amplified during hybrid sessions and the tolerance of informal “jump in” behaviour. These dynamics narrow the range of perspectives captured in decisions and advice, even with high attendance. Newer members may learn the borders of what it is wise to say. This narrows the usable evidence base and weakens ownership of advice.

It is difficult to address gender representation when self-identified gender disaggregated data is not systematically collected and NSAC membership of bodies are listed only by organisation. Tracking internal gender representation and publishing an annual stock take would enable NSAC to monitor and progress the 2021 call for more balanced gender representation. This data could help support proactive encouragement of NSAC member organisations to nominate candidates of all genders, and support evidenced-based gender-equality advocacy.

Based on an internally conducted performance evaluation in 2021, the NSAC challenged itself to address the key failing on representation, and the since then the situation has become worse. New strategies and practices are needed to ensure that the plurality of stakeholder voices can be heard and can contribute to the advice. Other than committing to try to recruit harder through outreach and engagement, the NSAC has not brought in safeguards to substitute for the missing balance nor address the underlying causes of the OIG loss. The expected workload is a hidden constraint on smaller, less well-resourced organisations.

The cultural norms of the meetings must be adapted. Ridicule and flippancy, and undermining language should be noticed and addressed. An informal analysis of the transactional costs of membership would be helpful. This could consider what process and structural components deter smaller organisations (fees, travel costs, meeting load, drafting burden, and document overload). Once OIG participation has increased further examination should consider namely who holds seats, who turns up, who speaks, and who shapes text. OIGs need to feel that transactional costs provide valued contributions.

It would be helpful to build structural mechanisms to provide security to OIGs such as explaining how OIGs reach chair positions and ExCom roles. Also stating what mechanisms exist to avoid OIG leadership collapsing when numbers fall. Representation needs to be assessed across processes, behaviour, participation, and influence on drafting, and the NSAC should publish a simple annual picture of each so gaps are made visible and thereby more fixable.

3.3 Transparency

NSAC routinely makes its advice and formal correspondence public on the website, so external users can trace what was recommended, when it was sent, and how it was framed for the institutions. Most substantive work is visible through working groups and focus groups. Board meeting minutes are descriptive and decision records provide a clear audit trail. Making documents available is access; transparency is when the purpose, evidence, trade-offs, and decision steps are clear enough that an outsider can understand why the outcome was reached. The document and decision system of the NSAC focuses on access rather than transparency. Overall, because some agendas and papers often sit as stand-alone upload files, circulated by email, rather than being consistently linked from each meeting entry, transparency depends on users already knowing what to search for.

The website provides accessible and traceable advice. The core governance documents are public. The newsletter provides detailed updates on activities, however the issue frequency is inconsistent. Also, representation is disclosed through members page with current seat occupancy and vacancies. In addition, external engagement is documented. However, meeting agendas were circulated by email and not always publicly posted on the website in advance of working group meetings. Some partners noted frustration at some lags in keeping information updated on the website.

The main mechanism for documents sharing is via email. This challenges the open of drafting processes and also version control. In practice reliance on email distribution overwhelms inboxes and weakens transparency of the drafting decision-making processes.

A practical transparency gain is a structured, access-controlled document space that supports GDPR compliance. Such an approach would reduce email volume and make participation more traceable. Clarity is also needed on focus group membership and activity, since this is not always visible to members or external users.

4. Performance structures and leadership

NSAC has a solid operating base, with active working groups, a Secretariat that keeps the system moving, and a proven ability to produce advice across a demanding policy portfolio. These strengths matter because they show that the NSAC can deliver when roles are clear and meetings are well managed. The next step is to look more closely at performance and leadership, since recent governance tensions and uneven meeting practice suggest that outcomes now

depend heavily on how chairs, coordinators and the Executive set tone, protect process, and secure closure when pressure is high.

Over the evaluation period, NSAC faced governance pressures that tested Board-level decision pathways. These pressures became more visible during the relocation, where legal drafting, seat allocation questions, and compressed timelines increased the need for clear procedure and disciplined communication. This coincided with periods of strained internal working relations and reduced leadership continuity, including resignations and vacant roles. The Board responded by pausing decisions when confidence was reduced, re-running procedures where needed, and considering safeguards to support professional working relations and protect delivery.

Some Board deliberations and internal correspondence were not available to the evaluators and may also sit outside the performance evaluation terms of reference. Even so, the recent period indicates a need to stabilise governance arrangements, so decisions are robust under pressure and less dependent on individuals. Changes in personnel may help, but they are unlikely to address all underlying drivers on their own. A short, independent governance review, focused on roles, procedures, escalation routes, and decision recording, could support this stabilisation.

Across the evaluation it was noted that influence is often exercised through practical levers such as agenda setting, drafting capacity, and mandate interpretation, with tight deadlines and workload tending to concentrate decisions and text development in a small core group. In this setting, clear roles are what keeps the advice on track. Where boundaries blur, including chairs moving into stakeholder positions or unclear Chair–Secretariat divisions of labour, decision making becomes less predictable and outcomes depend more on individuals than procedure. The evaluation highlighted a strong and effective secretariat, and a small core of members, but this reliance on an overworked small group reduces the overall resilience of the NSAC. To improve resilience and build a shared direction, NSAC needs broader ownership of both process and content, so advice is co-produced across members rather than carried by a small core. Simple routines can help, including earlier member evidence inputs, clearer chair-led closure, and structured space for minority views, so more voices shape outcomes without slowing delivery.

4.1 Functioning of the Executive Committee, Working Groups, General Assembly and Focus Groups

NSAC's internal structure provides the practical machinery to turn diverse stakeholder views into programmatic advice. The Executive Committee provides a standing route for oversight and coordination. The Working Groups and Focus Groups create the practical space where members and invited experts can test

evidence, develop options, and shape draft advice. The General Assembly provides a forum for accountability and legitimacy, and it anchors the Council's rules, representation, and strategic direction. Taken together, these structures give NSAC multiple entry points for participation and a consistent pathway from technical discussion to agreed advice.

The evaluation suggests that overall, the internal structures are sound. Survey respondents report strong perceived value of the working groups, with 100% agreeing they contribute to effectiveness. The focus groups also score highly at 91% and are repeatedly cited in the interviews as a flexible way to concentrate effort and bring in external expertise. These structures provide clear entry points for members. They also create a repeatable pathway from technical discussion to agreed advice. Performance then depends on how meetings are chaired and closed.

Almost all meetings had clear objectives, agendas and relevant, useful presentations. Efficiency dropped when online or hybrid platforms experienced technical challenges, or when items ran over time. Breaks were often compressed. Late agenda changes and under-papered AOB items reduced decision quality and increased fatigue. As mentioned in decision-making section, closure was inconsistent, with some meetings ended without a clear summary of decisions, owners, and deadlines. Half of the observed working group meetings had agenda items that were left hanging with outcomes were less clear, and no end statement on the agreed way forward in terms of times, responsibilities and next steps.

Focus groups have provided a useful low-friction space for candid exchange and several have sustained activity over multiple years (online survey rated focus groups highly, 91%, Table 4.1). The overall focus group portfolio has been opportunistic, with groups starting, pausing, and closing without a consistent link to an agreed multi-year strategy or explicit work plan (Annex 1). This creates a risk of diluted effort, variable participation and commitment by members, overlapping mandates, and uneven follow-through, even where individual groups perform well. It also creates an external transparency gap, since an outside user cannot easily see the purpose of each focus group, who participates, what it has produced, and whether it is still active. A simple improvement would be to publish a short focus group register with remit, membership, outputs, and status, alongside a standard internal mandate that includes an intended product, user, and review date.

When the system works best, focus groups provide a low-friction space for candid exchanges and practical problem solving. They help convert expert inputs into draft wording that working groups can test and refine. Working groups were probably the least effective of the group meetings observed. Several meetings

were dominated by a few voices. Chairs did not encourage input from silent voices, especially during hybrid and online meetings. This narrows plurality even when attendance is high. Equitable participation is therefore a live operational issue for the NSAC. It affects which evidence is heard and which options are developed. It also affects whether under-represented interests see a route to influence (see representation section above). The use of ridicule by some vocal members also discourages constructive dissent. Behavioural meeting norms set the effective boundary of participation. A light behavioural standard that is adhered to, and consistent chair interventions could help maintain a respectful and inclusive meeting environment. This supports constructive dissent and improved outcomes.

There were good examples of effective functioning of groups. The main problems in the minority of groups observed were workload, and time discipline. The extraordinary ExCom meeting illustrated a different risk. Procedural ambiguity and contested interpretations dominated the agenda. This eroded trust and displaced policy substance. GA discussions raised SSF representation, minority statements, and the division of responsibilities between GA and ExCom. ExCom and GA discussions need a reliable way to 'park' procedural disputes. A short protocol could help. It could separate rule interpretation from policy substance. It should include an escalation route and a clear record of decisions when necessary.

The Brussels relocation acted as a stress test for NSAC decision making. In November 2024, members identified an inconsistency in draft statutes on seat allocations, and the legal submission was paused to protect procedural confidence. The Council then used a repeated written procedure to re-confirm clarified text and considered additional safeguards to reduce recurrence. The episode showed that NSAC can correct course, and that early verification, clear roles, and recorded closure steps are essential when decisions carry high organisational consequences. It also showed that, without stronger routine controls, governance issues can quickly absorb attention, crowd out policy delivery, and damage trust between colleagues.

OIG participation is a key legitimacy control for the whole NSAC structure, because it is the main route to balanced advice and credible consensus across interests. When OIG numbers are low, workload and influence concentrate in a smaller core, minority concerns are easier to sideline, and the Executive, WGs and GA become more vulnerable to disputes over process rather than substance.

These patterns make chair neutrality, time discipline, and clear role division central to how NSAC structures perform.

Table 4.1. Status of NSAC Focus Groups over the evaluation period.

Focus Group	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
NSAC/NWWAC Social Aspects Focus Group	active	active	active	active
NWWAC/NSAC Skates and Rays Focus Group	active	active	active	active
Landing Obligation Focus Group	active	active	active	active
Marine Strategy Frame Directive Focus Group				active
Simplification of rules Focus Group				active
Climate Change Focus Group	active	active	dormant	dormant
NWWAC/MAC/NSAC Brown Crab Focus Group	active	active	active	dormant
Mapping of Important Fishing Grounds Focus Group	NA	NA	active	dormant
Technical Measures Focus Group	dormant	dormant	active	dormant
Control Regulation Focus Group	dormant	dormant	dormant	active (joint AC advice)
NSAC/NWWAC Marine Strategy Framework Directive Focus Group	active	not active	not active	not active
NWWAC/NSAC Seabass Focus Group	active	not active	not active	not active
CFP Report Focus Group	active	not active	not active	not active
NSAC/WMR Plaice Box Evaluation Focus Group	active	not active	not active	not active

4.2 Performance of NSAC Chair, Vice-Chairs, Working Group and Focus Groups Chairs and Secretariat

Chairs and Vice-Chairs set the tone, protect procedure, and close decisions. WG and FG Chairs explore the issues and translate technical exchange into draft text. The Chairs role is also to build consensus by keeping discussion evidence-led and orderly, drawing in quieter voices, and closing the debate with clear wording that reflects the shared ground while recording any remaining dissent in a structured way. They also work with members to demark next steps and actions. The Secretariat facilitates the process and also currently plays a strong role drafting advice. It also strengthens the evidence trail by suggesting speakers and experts. Senior officers and the secretariat also represent the NSAC at external meetings (Annex 2). Illustrations of internal governance friction are sharper in interviews than in the online survey.

The evaluation evidence focuses on chairing practice in meetings, not on the full strategic role of the NSAC Chair, nor the vice-chairs. Online survey results report high confidence in chair impartiality (95%). The survey reports that chairs and facilitators strongly affect conflict management, participation, and outcomes (91%). Meeting observations and interviews show that outcomes depend on the style of the chairing, understanding of the boundaries of the roles, and a drafting workflow that spreads ownership beyond a small core. Many groups are described as well chaired. Effective chairing behaviours are consistently identified as chairs who restate purpose, manage time, control interruptions, and close items with clear action points improve outputs. Chairs who shield external presenters from undue cynicism, improve the discussion quality and reduce adversarial exchanges.

Despite the recommendations from the 2021 review, there appears to be limited progress on chair independency checks, term limits/rotation, and the option of an independent chair for divisive topics. It was reported that there was overall resistance to training in building consensus. Interviews report that attempts to introduce consensus-building training were dismissed. This limits improvement options for chairs and coordinators. The role of the Chair was challenged most during online meetings, and the NSAC doesn't have a single unified virtual meeting protocol. Observations report that action tracking exists, but closure varies, and weak closure drives repetition.

Observations describe the blurring of boundaries and roles. Some chairs sometimes speak as stakeholders resulting in the weakening of their neutrality and operational effectiveness as Chairs. Occasionally other members of the group would step into the chairing role to fill the gap in facilitation and leadership. Meeting observations saw some circular debates, where the discourse was not being managed. One or two experienced members were observed stepping in to summarise positions, propose wording, or steer the group back toward a decision where chair-led closure was not emerging. When tensions were high, the division of roles between Chair and Secretariat was not always clear in practice. This blurring of roles risks that these informal norms substitute for the agreed procedures.

Members report high satisfaction with Secretariat performance. The online survey showed satisfaction with the Secretariat was high, with 95–100% of respondents agreeing it meets or exceeds standards, provides timely information and follow-up, and operates transparently and impartially. Interviewees and observations noted that, on occasion, the Secretariat is drawn into substantive discussion and choices around drafting to maintain momentum, which can blur roles and reinforces the value of clear, agreed boundaries for facilitation and text ownership. Interviewees describe a “secretariat paradox”. When the Secretariat fills the drafting vacuum, member ownership weakens and influence can feel

concentrated in a non-member actor, which some members find uncomfortable. The interviews also note the Secretariat being pulled into late drafting, evidence chasing, agenda overload, and conflict containment. Concerns raised about morale and sustainability in the secretariat, and with practical frictions such as fragility of version-control and the secretariat role in ad-hoc collaboration. The issue is not the level of effort. It is that delivery risk remains concentrated in the Secretariat.

The secretariat also carries the majority of the representation at external meetings. The annual reports show the following attendance at meetings: 2021/22: 47; 2022/23: 16; 2023/24: 21; 2024/25: 60 (Annex 2). The rationale for this activity is not well described in the annual work plans. The work plans describe the intent and main channels for external engagement, but they don't link participation to the relative contribution to the NSAC activities. The annual reports provide more rationale with many external-meeting entries include a short purpose or "why it matters" statement but this is not consistently addressed. There appears to be a variable approach to the internal report of meetings too (comments in annual report for 2023).

There is no clear, written rule on who speaks for NSAC externally in high-level meetings, and how NSAC ensures that different interests are fairly represented when it engages with the Commission, Member States, or other bodies. Without that agreement, external messages can depend on who is available or most vocal. That creates a governance risk, because it can look like NSAC positions are being set informally, or that some interests are being represented more than others, even when internal discussions were more balanced.

As mentioned above, there were tensions at the senior board level during the evaluation period. The survey did not measure statute compliance, escalation routes, or contested authority. It therefore under-detects and offers few insights on high-pressure internal disputes. Interviews described opaque governance frictions and concentrated drafting power. Board-level differences can be managed within confidential processes if they are resolved promptly and decisions are clearly recorded, but when disagreements spill into wider forums without a transparent explanation of the outcome, they become harder to manage and can weaken confidence in the system.

5. Institutional influence and leadership

The NSAC is recognised as a voice of fisheries interests in the North Sea. Interviews described the NSAC as a pragmatic forum that stabilises regional dialogue and builds working relationships. Its failure to adhere to the 60:40 makeup of fisheries verses OIG undermines its legitimacy. It is not seen currently seen as a consensus-based stakeholder advisory group.

The NSAC advice and technical output is legally non-binding. The current system creates a paper mill effect, where councils are pressured to produce large volumes of written reports rather than focusing on high-quality dialogue. This environment is made more difficult by the requirement for consensus, which can reduce the impact or headlines of the advice. There is an element of reactivity in the current system, and the NSAC is now regularly collaborating with other ACs to be more proactive. There is a difference between the regular advice to DGMARE and the Article 11 advice as joint recommendations. There are different timelines and different responsibilities.

5.1 Relationship with the institutions (European Commission and Member States)

The online survey found 79% of respondents felt their organisation's investment of time and resources is proportionate to the policy impact of the NSAC, and yet 57% did not think NSAC advice is highly valued by the Commission and Member States. DG MARE, many of the members interviewed, and the Secretariat converged on the idea that NSAC advice "infuses" policy rather than advice being copied into legal text or direct co-management. NSAC members contribute a large amount of effort and technical work into the advice. A sizable minority of members interviewed expect this effort to bring about co-management. There were some interviewees that expressed significant frustration at the lack of direct, substantive input into the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and broader management decisions. Also, the inability to track directly NSAC advice in the CFP, was expressed as a signal of low impact. DG MARE emphasised that impact is diffuse and rarely attributable "line-by-line" or through verbatim adoption.

The evidence shows NSAC maintains regular institutional contact, but with an uneven fit to decision timelines. Interviewees describe a system where Member States rarely request advice formally, and where regional groups such as Scheveningen operate their own advisory routes, so NSAC input can often be indirect. DG MARE is seen as accessible but time-constrained, and the Commission is described as relying heavily on written consultations and Inter-AC formats, which can compress debate and reduce the visibility of NSAC's distinct regional perspective. Many stressed the value of being more anticipatory, to reduce reliance on fast-track procedures and to create space for resolving contested issues before deadlines harden.

It is clear that the ACs key role is to influence through soft power, serving as a network that enriches the policy-making process through long-term engagement (described as a "long-game institution"). Rather than a simple transfer of text into law, this model values the Council's real-world expertise as an "infusion" allowing its practical insights to subtly impact the Commission's

thinking over time. The concept of a learning network was used, when members can learn about different gears, experiences, sectors, and policy tools, even when the resulting advice has little visible impact on management decisions. By providing informed, timely advice, the NSAC helps nudge policy frames and fosters a collective understanding that leads to more nuanced and durable management outcomes.

Commission attendance in NSAC meetings is valued. The Commission attended three observed meetings. It presented only at the ExCom. This suggests a shift to more targeted, outcome-driven engagement design from the commission. With limited capacity in the Commission, attendance is easier to justify when meetings are designed with tangible contributions required. One-way briefings on public material are seen as a weaker use of limited time. There appeared to be a misunderstanding as to the best or most appropriate mechanism to invite DGAMRE representative to the NSAC meetings. DG MARE encouraged bilateral dialogue and targeted invitations with clear purpose. It would be helpful to track the Commission and Member State participation by theme and season in the NSAC meetings.

The annual workplans were valued by the commission. Document analysis suggests a high degree of alignment between advice outputs and workplan themes. The Commission suggests NSAC to be more anticipatory, rather than mainly reacting through annual cycles and consultations to ensure sufficient time for required processes needed to build consensus. For DGMARE participation is easier when NSAC meetings are planned well in advance, focused on priority files, and designed for two-way dialogue rather than one-way presentations of public material. It also encouraged early signalling of upcoming science and advice needs, so stakeholders can shape priorities before timelines become tight. A multi-year strategy for recurring or complex priorities that span multiple years, such as the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) evaluations, bycatch or climate would be of value. This long-term approach would enhance strategic focus and facilitate joint collaboration between different Advisory Councils on topics of mutual interest.

Member States rarely request advice formally. Pathways to engage with Member States were described as thin, although many interviewees highlighted the growing importance of Article 11 joint recommendations, often developed through regional cooperation groups such as Scheveningen. Advice into regular CFP processes provides stakeholder input to DG MARE on the development or implementation of fisheries policy and management measures under the CFP. In these regular processes, timelines and consultation formats are often more flexible, and some advice needs can be anticipated. DG MARE indicated that the NSAC could be more anticipatory in preparing such advice. By contrast, advice linked to an Article 11 process feeds into a specific regionalised CFP procedure in

which the relevant Member States, where they share a direct management interest, prepare a joint recommendation for fisheries conservation measures needed to support compliance with EU environmental legislation. In practice, this route is used for fisheries measures linked to obligations under the Habitats Directive, Birds Directive and the MSFD. Here the process is more legally structured, the timetable is tighter, and requests for advice may be less predictable.

It would be an understatement to say that Brexit changed the operating context of the NSAC. The NSAC now covers a reduced geographic area (~21% of the North Sea in EU EEZ now). Brexit reduced perceived regional leverage, the NSACs formal scope and changed who sits around the table. However, the NSAC BREXIT focus group was cited as highly valued by the European Commission in the interview. UK membership ended at the close of the transition period on 31 December 2020, and UK organisations then continued mainly as invited observers. There was little engagement with UK representatives during the meetings observed, other than the workshops. Brexit also created a new set of shared stocks. NSAC increased coordination through the Inter-AC Brexit Forum, linked to the Specialised Committee on Fisheries and its working groups. Work programmes explicitly position this as an ongoing priority, including exploring post-2026 Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) realities and more formal exchange routes.

5.2 Contribution to the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy

The document analysis shows a credible and broad contribution to the CFP, with sustained attention to fisheries management, long-term environmental sustainability and practical implementability. The advice and work programme delivery align strongly with core resource management and innovation themes of the CFP, including fully documented fisheries, REM, selectivity trials, and Landing Obligation implementation. There is routine engagement with environmental files through an active ecosystem working group and external interactions with OSPAR and MSFD processes. The socio-economic dimension is present, but it is often handled through specific files rather than a single integrated narrative. There is focused work on social aspects, and engagement with STECF processes on socio-economic impact assessment in sensitive areas.

The range of topics covered by the NSAC is broad and recognisably CFP and MSFD relevant. Recurring subjects include fishing opportunities, technical measures, the landing obligation, and control-related files (Box 5.1). Emerging pressures include offshore wind, MSP, climate impacts, marine plastics, and predator management. There are specific contributions that can be tracked as helping operationalise policy, these include advice on squid mesh size, rays and skates management, cod and climate discussions, discard plans, and securing a dedicated recreational fisheries chapter in the CFP evaluation. As mentioned

above, the soft-policy influencing role of the NSAC is highly valued and the NSAC is contributing to CFP processes.

Food supply has been covered through supply chain and processing resilience discussions, including an AIPCE-CEP¹ webinar on processing resilience and EU food security. "Level playing field" themes appear through work on third-country interactions and post-Brexit implementation risks, including discussion in Inter-AC Brexit formats on avoiding diverging control approaches.

Another mechanism is the increasing use of Joint AC correspondence when issues cut across sea basins, or when memberships overlap and a single AC view would be partial. It helps NSAC amplify messages, share workload, and show that recommendations have been tested beyond one forum. There was a consistent pattern of joint outputs with NWWAC on shared-stock and technical files, including joint advice on seabass and MSFD, and joint letters on urgent policy issues. There were also joint AC correspondence on system-wide governance questions, such as the weight of AC advice in consultations and stakeholder engagement in the Specialised Committee on Fisheries, and later a multi-AC advice on stakeholder engagement in ICES advice request formulation. NSAC also led or contributed to wider joint advice beyond the North Sea pairings, including joint work on valorisation of fisheries and aquaculture byproducts and waste with other ACs.

This was welcomed by many. However, there were a few issues of concern raised in the interviews. Joint correspondence needs more predictable coordination and complete buy in from members. The increasing trends for advice and correspondence to come from a core group led to some challenges of the legitimacy and process from drafting Joint AC correspondence. Joint positions add credibility with external agencies, but they should be agreed without squeezing out minority views or overloading Secretariats or the ExCom.

¹ (Association des Industries de Pêche Congelée et des Produits de l'Aquaculture, or EU Fish Processors and Traders Association) and CEP (Comité des Organisations Nationales d'Importateurs et Exportateurs de Poissons, or European Federation of National Organizations of Importers and Exporters of Fish)

Box 5.1 – Topics listed in the annual workplans.

Landing Obligation and discards: choke mitigation tools, selectivity, discard plans, exemptions, survivability, and methods for disposal/valorisation of undersized or excess catches; linked monitoring, control and enforcement.

Control, monitoring and compliance: Control Regulation revision and enforceability; fully documented fisheries; REM/CCTV and related tools; implementation follow-up.

Technical measures and regional Joint Recommendations: Technical Measures Regulation implementation and evaluation; directed fisheries definitions; harmonisation across the area; Scheveningen JR processes.

Fishing opportunities and stock management: TACs and quotas, ICES advice, North Sea demersal stocks, and TAC-setting arrangements under the North Sea MAP; multi-annual plans and cod recovery/management.

Post-Brexit cooperation and shared stocks: engagement with UK and Norway, EU-NO-UK negotiations, joint stocks management, and Inter-AC Brexit Forum work.

Species and fishery-specific files: skates and rays; brown crab; seabass (earlier); small pelagic stocks (planned in 2022/23); prohibited species list and management.

Climate and energy transition: decarbonisation and energy transition of fleets; climate impacts on stocks and management reference points; climate-neutral vessels; broader ocean-climate policy links; CO₂ storage as a focus group topic.

Offshore wind, MSP and coexistence: fisheries–windfarm coexistence; Marine Spatial Planning; stakeholder engagement in ABM/MSP; multi-use considerations.

Marine environment policy and conservation measures: MSFD; MPAs and management; Natura 2000; Birds and Habitats Directives; EU Biodiversity Strategy; OECMs; vulnerable benthic communities and scientific underpinning of conservation measures.

Marine pollution: plastics and marine litter; circular design of fishing gear; wider marine pollution concerns.

Science and data interfaces: ICES engagement (including responses to advice and bridging science–management); data collection framework references; stock survey updates; scientific underpinning of measures.

Socio-economic and social policy: social aspects of the CFP; generational renewal (in later joint work); recreational fisheries (in later joint work); stakeholder engagement and participation.

Governance and CFP reform files: CFP evaluation / “Fisheries Package” items (CFP report, action plan elements, evaluation processes) and associated advice planning.

Funding and programmes: EMFF/EMFAF use for sustainability, data, and implementation support.

Other human pressures in the marine environment: marine noise, sand extraction, and related cumulative pressures

6. Progress since the last performance review (2020-2021)

In 2020 –2021 the NSAC carried out an internal review of its performance and effectiveness. The review contained a number of recommendations which aimed to improve the performance of the advisory council (Table 10.3.1). The recommendations aimed to improve NSAC functionality and prepare it for the post-COVID and post-Brexit landscape. It addressed issues from internal

governance and stakeholder relations to external engagement and the quality of advice. The review was carried out by the NSAC secretariat and was endorsed by the Executive Committee.

The review emphasized the need for structural and procedural clarity, alongside a collective commitment from all members to respectful and effective collaboration. Key themes mentioned by the review were fostering trust and cooperation among diverse stakeholder groups, ensuring balanced representation, improving the impact and scientific underpinning of advice. Also enhancing internal procedures and leadership impartiality, as well as strengthening engagement with external bodies like the European Commission, regional groups, and the scientific community.

Comparing the findings of the 2025 performance evaluation with the 2021 review, it appears that implementation of the recommendations has been uneven. While real progress has been made, most of the recommendations have seen limited progress or no progress, while a smaller number show clear improvement. The strongest progress appears in more procedural and external-facing areas, such as retaining online meetings, strengthening the evidence base for advice, providing clearer end-user summaries. Also, through improved planning and document-sharing with the Commission, engaging with the European Parliament, and embedding periodic performance review processes.

By contrast, the least progress is concentrated in the more difficult internal issues. Namely management team conflict remains unresolved, there is no clear evidence of formal agreements on external representation, the OIG vice-chair vacancy persists, virtual meeting protocols and observer feedback mechanisms have not been properly established, and several recommendations aimed at improving trust, atmosphere, stakeholder balance, and internal discussion are still marked as no progress. Overall, a comparison of progress points to an organisation that has been more successful at improving systems, process, and technical output. This contrasts to less successfully resolving the deeper issues of governance, representation, and internal relationships.

The Secretariat was asked to self-assess implementation of the 2021 review recommendations. That self-assessment presented a picture of incremental progress across several recommendations, particularly in areas within the secretariat's direct operational control. However, when the self-assessments was compared with the external evaluators' findings, a more complex and nuanced reality emerged. It was difficult to find evidence on improving collective ownership, behavioural change, or cross-stakeholder cooperation. The analysis suggests that progress has been constrained by some continuing resistance to procedural, representational and cultural change across the membership, with reform efforts not yet consistently securing broad buy-in. Overall, the picture is

not one of simple capacity constraints, but of a deeper organisational pattern in which procedural modernisation has advanced further than cultural or relational reform. The core obstacles to progress are relational and structural, not procedural. The divergence between internal and external perceptions itself is an important diagnostic signal, as it highlights a lack of shared understanding of the organisation's challenges, which in turn reduces NSAC's capacity to self-correct and adapt.

7. Performance highlights and development needs

NSAC has impact and delivers valuable outputs. However, it does so with weakened balance, fragile consensus, concentrated ownership, and an external impact that is harder to see than to assert. It has a functioning delivery system that can turn discussion into advice. It has strong core structures with clearly demarked roles and responsibilities. The ExCom, Working Groups, Focus Groups and General Assembly each play a distinct role, and together they create a repeatable pathway from technical discussion to agreed advice. It utilises a strong and diverse evidence base and pool of experts. It has a capable Secretariat and a proven capacity to keep output moving. Agendas were usually clear, meetings were generally well supported, and the NSAC showed a proven ability to produce advice across a demanding policy portfolio. The NSAC offers useful fora for practical exchange and problem-solving. The Focus Groups are flexible, low-friction spaces for candid exchange, external expertise and practical problem solving. More broadly, members valued the Working Groups. The NSAC creates the space where issues can be explored and advice can be developed.

However, some shortcomings in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, legitimacy and impact of the NSAC were identified by the review.

NSAC has lost representational balance, and with that some of its legitimacy.

This is the clearest organisational weakness. The NSAC does not reflect its required 60:40 structure. OIG membership continued to fall over the 2020–2025 evaluation period, and OIG presence on the Executive Committee was only 7% at the start of 2026. This is despite the issue of OIG underrepresentation being acknowledged in the 2021 review as a structural problem. This weakens plurality, discourages dissent, and makes "consensus" look closer to majority control than balanced agreement. That directly affects both effectiveness and external legitimacy and credibility.

Decision-making processes perform in low-stress conditions but weakens under pressure.

Procedural strain rises when disagreement, time pressure, or governance issues enter the room. The result is weakened closure of decisions, with only a few voices dominating, and procedural disputes crowding out substantive decisions. The rules of procedure are not consistently used by members as a common framework for getting work done. At times they are used to block action. This is an efficiency problem because meetings and drafting cycles become circular. It is also an effectiveness problem because disagreement is not reliably converted into decisions, owners and timelines.

Delivery responsibilities are overly concentrated within the Secretariat, ExCom, and a small group of core members.

The system keeps producing but does so through concentrated effort. That gives short-term efficiency, but at a cost. Wider member ownership is hollowed out, newer and smaller organisations have less room to shape outcomes, and delivery risk becomes concentrated in a few people. The “secretariat paradox” is important here. When the Secretariat fills the drafting gap, output continues, but member ownership weakens and influence can appear captured. That reduces resilience as an organisation.

Impact is real but diffuse, reactive, and hard to demonstrate.

It is clear that the NSAC has impact and influence on the governance system of the North Sea. Influence is mostly indirect, through soft power and long-term policy “infusion”. That creates frustration because members invest heavily, yet the effect on Commission and Member State decisions is rarely visible or traceable. There is a tendency to operate reactively, over-use fast track procedures, and inefficient meeting time spent on one-way communication and commentary rather than credible dialogue. This limits strategic impact and makes the organisation look busier than it is influential.

Caveats

The evaluation did not include direct observation of Board meetings, and evidence on Board functioning relies on interviews and documentary records. This limits the extent to which the analysis can assess how Board decisions are reached in practice. The terms of reference also include evaluating optimisation of budgetary resources. These were not assessed. Thus financial planning, expenditure patterns, and budget performance were not considered during the compilation of evidence and were not treated as primary lines of enquiry. As a result, conclusions on efficiency and resourcing relate mainly to operational processes and perceived capacity constraints, rather than to a systematic review of budgets and financial management.

8. Recommendations

In summary, the NSAC has well defined procedures, but currently operates on a weak foundation of trust. Disagreement is not consistently or systematically worked through which is a fundamental flaw in an organisation that's main method is consensus. Consensus can mask majority control, and under pressure a few voices dominate, so conflict is contained rather than used to build commitment. This was acknowledged internally in 2021, but the situation has remained largely unchanged. Commitment and accountability weaken because decisions are not always converted into clear owners, timelines and follow-up. The loss of balance and plurality reduces confidence that results are genuinely collective rather than delivered by an inner core. The NSAC shows signs of being resistant to change. It can see the problems, but protects itself through behaviours that preserve short-term stability, such as reliance on process, ExCom and the Secretariat, while avoiding the more difficult work of rebuilding plurality, handling conflict openly, and distributing ownership across the stakeholder community of the North Sea region. The priority is not simply to resolve present tensions, but to build a more adaptive, balanced and durable organisation that is better equipped to represent the North Sea stakeholder community over time.

The main message is not that the NSAC lacks capacity or delivery. It is that it now needs to prepare itself for the future by extending its proven operational strengths into the more challenging areas of representational balance, consensus under pressure, wider ownership, and governance resilience. The NSAC can adapt, especially where change is procedural and within clear lines of responsibility, but that change has been slower where it touches culture, representation, or established ways of working.

8.1 Strengthening internal functioning and decision-making

The NSAC must rebuild plurality and legitimacy. The loss of representational balance is the clearest weakness of the organisation. It has been recognised for some time, but change has been negative, and the longer the imbalance continues the more it weakens both internal confidence and external credibility. The NSAC should move beyond general outreach to OIG and take practical steps that make participation easier for OIGs and smaller organisations. Attempts to recruit new OIGs will likely fail if the underlying structural and cultural issues are not addressed. The NSAC should set up a focus group with NSAC members and OIGs that have left to develop a road map for their return. While representation remains unbalanced, the NSAC should create simple safeguards, including clearer routes for OIGs to reach chair and ExCom roles, improved meeting behaviour culture and transparent reporting and monitoring of progress of representation in participation.

The NSAC should make decision-making work better in practice. Decision-making works reasonably well in calm conditions but becomes fragile under pressure. Rules are not always used in a consistent way when disagreement rises, time is short, and established habits take over. The NSAC should use the Rules of Procedure as a shared framework for getting work done. They should be seen as an enabling tool, not a blocking tool. NSAC should also use more disciplined closure steps and action points in meetings, so decisions end with agreed wording, named owners, timelines, and next steps.

NSAC would benefit from improved transparency in ways that support trust and participation. NSAC makes documents available, but not always the full process, evidence, and decision steps behind them. A structured document space would reduce reliance on email, improve version control, and make participation in drafting easier to follow. The same principle applies to focus groups, where a simple register of remit, membership, outputs, and status would improve clarity inside and outside the organisation.

The NSAC should use a clearer decision pathway for contentious items. Members will often disagree at first, so the task is to turn disagreement into a usable outcome. Chairs should frame the issue neutrally, separate interests from positions, and test what is already agreed before moving to what remains disputed. Discussion should be time-limited, repeated interventions curtailed, and quieter or less represented members invited in before closure. Where views still differ, the group should work with a small number of evidence-linked options, note any information gaps, and test member support. Any remaining dissent should be recorded briefly and factually, without reopening the full text or allowing derision. Each item should close with a clear statement of what was agreed, what was 'parked,' who owns the next step, and by when. If consensus still cannot be reached, there should be a simple and commonly agreed standard procedure to follow.

8.2 Stabilising performance structures and leadership

The NSAC needs to strengthen governance resilience. The core structures are sound, but recent governance pressures exposed weaknesses in how decisions are handled when confidence is low and timelines are tight. A short independent governance review would therefore be a sensible next step. It should focus on roles, procedures, escalation routes, and decision recording, with the aim of making decisions more robust under pressure and less dependent on individuals. This should be seen as a stabilising step after a period of senior-level tension and reduced leadership continuity, not as a complete redesign of the organisation.

The NSAC would benefit from broader ownership of both process and content. Delivery is kept moving by a capable Secretariat, the ExCom, and a small core of

members, but this concentration reduces resilience and weakens wider commitment. Relying on a strong inner core to keep things moving, helps in the short term but is less suitable as a longer-term model for renewal. The NSAC should therefore spread ownership more deliberately. It needs to formally include the diversity of interests (such as recreational and small-scale fisheries, as well as environmental conservation). Earlier member evidence inputs, clearer chaired closure, and more structured space for minority views would help more voices shape outcomes without slowing delivery. Clearer boundaries are also needed where chairs move into stakeholder positions, or where Chair and Secretariat roles become blurred.

Meeting practices need improvement. Performance often depends less on formal structure than on how meetings are chaired, paced, and closed. A culture change in interaction style is required. Chairs should draw in quieter voices more actively, especially in hybrid and online settings, and avoid leaving agenda items without a clear statement of what has been agreed and what happens next. Chairs should control excessive speaking interventions, point out any flippancy or dismissive language. Focus groups should remain flexible, but be linked more clearly to purpose, expected output, and review point. An internal guide to online and hybrid meeting behaviour should be developed.

8.3 Making institutional influence more strategic and visible

Internal reform and external credibility are linked. Rebuilding plurality is not only a matter of internal governance. It is also a condition for more credible external leadership. It will also increase the legitimacy of the voice of the NSAC.

The NSAC should focus on making its influence more strategic, visible, and representative. Fisheries in the North Sea operate in one of the most anthropogenically impacted marine ecosystems in the world, and the management and policy space is becoming ever more complex and potentially integrated. NSAC influence is often indirect, reactive, and hard to demonstrate. Influence should be more deliberate, better evidenced, and easier to see. This means focusing effort on the files where the NSAC can add value, reducing over-reliance on reactive fast-track work, and using meetings more for dialogue than one-way communication. This outward-facing agenda builds on areas where the NSAC has continued to perform, but it will carry more weight if it is supported by stronger internal balance and clearer ownership. NSAC should develop a 3-year plan for multi-year advisory issues. The plan should guide the NSAC engagement in inter-AC initiatives, participation in external meetings, and the management of workshops and focus groups.

External representation should also be made more coherent and aligned. The NSAC should agree an internal approach on who speaks externally, how different interests are represented, and how external engagement links back to agreed

priorities and reported outcomes. Participation in external meetings should be supported by clear rationale, balanced representation, or consistent follow-up.

8.4 Making the recommendations actionable

The following actionable recommendations have been compiled. They aim at strengthening internal functioning; stabilising performance; and making institutional influence more strategic (Table 8.1)

Table 8.1. Synthesis of actionable recommendations.

No.	Recommendation	For who
1.1	Rebuild OIG participation and safeguards: set up a focused process with former OIGs to develop a return road map, while putting in place practical safeguards on representation, behaviour, and routes into Chair and ExCom roles.	ExCom / Secretariat
1.2	Strengthen chairing and meeting conduct: train Chairs to use a clearer decision pathway, neutral facilitation, disciplined closure, better pacing, more active inclusion of quieter voices, and clearer standards for online and hybrid meetings.	Chairs / Secretariat
1.3	Develop decision pathway to embed consensus in advice production. This should be in the form of a concise document to be added to the rules of procedure.	Chairs / ExCom / Members
1.4	Create a structured online document space to reduce reliance on email, improve transparency and improve version control.	Secretariat / ExCom
1.5	Create a public register for focus groups showing remit, membership, outputs, and status.	Secretariat
2.1	Review governance: carry out an independent review of high-level governance, and management tensions.	Board / ExCom
2.2	Change interaction style in meetings by controlling excessive interventions, acknowledging plurality of views and challenging flippant or dismissive language.	Chairs / Members
2.3	Develop an internal guide to online and hybrid meeting behaviour.	Secretariat / ExCom
3.1	Establish a proactive 3-year planning framework for emerging and multi-year advisory issues, helping the NSAC anticipate upcoming requests and minimise the use of fast-track procedures. This framework should guide inter-AC collaboration, prioritisation of external representation, and structure workshops and focus groups around early consensus building.	Board / ExCom / Secretariat
3.2.	Plan and manage external engagement more strategically: a clearer internal approach on who attends, who speaks, how interests are represented, and are followed up.	Board / Chair / Secretariat

9. Conclusions

Overall, this evaluation found that the NSAC remains a relevant and productive advisory body over 2020–2025. It continued to generate evidence-informed advice across a wide and increasingly complex policy portfolio, supported by functioning internal structures, a capable Secretariat, active Working Groups and Focus Groups, and sustained engagement with the European Commission and wider advisory processes. At the same time, the evaluation showed that performance has become uneven under pressure. Representational balance has weakened considerably, consensus has become more fragile in contested settings, and delivery has become concentrated in a small core. The question for the NSAC is now not only one of performance, but of whether its current model can remain credible and effective as it navigates a narrower geographic mandate, increasingly wide-ranging policy requirements, and the challenge of maintaining broad and inclusive stakeholder participation.

The NSAC should be recognised for maintaining continuity, visibility and output during a demanding period. It has worked through Brexit, relocation, governance strain, and an expanding policy agenda. Yet it has continued to provide a practical forum for exchange, problem-solving and advice development. The evidence points to real strengths with clear underlying structures, a strong evidence base, and supportive operational structures. These are significant assets, and they provide a solid foundation for the next phase of development.

The message from inside is that NSAC is at a crossroads. The key challenges are now less about whether the NSAC can deliver, and more about how it can adapt. The clearest issue is the loss of representational balance, which affects plurality, confidence, and external credibility. If NSAC continues to act mainly as an industry-dominated network, it may remain valuable to those inside but struggle to justify itself in the EU marine governance system. Within the AC, decision-making is less robust when disagreement rises, responsibilities are concentrated in a small group, and the value of the NSAC's influence is not always visible to members or external partners. These are important challenges, but they are also identifiable and manageable. They point to the need for renewal in participation, clearer handling of disagreement, broader ownership of process and content, and a more strategic approach to demonstrating impact.

Looking ahead, the NSAC has a credible basis on which to strengthen its role. The main message from this evaluation is not that the organisation lacks capacity or value. It is that it needs to extend its proven operational strengths into the more challenging areas of representational balance, consensus under pressure, wider ownership, and governance resilience. If it can do this, the NSAC is well placed to remain an important forum for regional dialogue and to become a stronger,

more visible and more durable platform for North Sea fisheries governance in a changing policy environment.

10. Methods

This section outlines the methods used to conduct the performance evaluation, based on the performance assessment framework, data sources, outputs, and data collection instruments.

10.1 Performance assessment framework

The performance review framework was tailored to the features of the North Sea Advisory Council and the specifications of the Terms of Reference (ToRs). The framework includes a set of criteria and measurable indicators, making the evidence base of the assessment visible and engaging with the results constructively. The framework combines the evidence gathered through document analysis, desk research, meetings observation, survey, and interviews.

This report was internally reviewed by NIVA, as a form of quality assurance.

Table 10.1 Performance assessment framework

Criteria	Description	Assessment	Metrics	ToR
Effectiveness What is done	Supports maintenance of NSAC integrity and functioning	Fulfilment of objectives (art. 2 Statutes and 44 CFP) Members' perception Members' retention Transparency	Members perception of NSAC Members plurality (nr. and profile of organizations) Members entry and exit Members rationale to join NSAC, sense of belonging Access to documents Process traceability	a, c, f, d
Efficiency How it is done	Achieves the desired results optimizing time and resources	Delivery: implementation of working principles (art. 11 statutes). Addressing critical issues in a timely and effective manner (meetings and special procedures) Decisions (people involved participate and commit to the decision) Steering (people involved facilitate timely decisions aligned with goals) Work plans performance Balance in representativeness (measures adopted and mechanisms to facilitate consensus)	Alignment of Advice documents with workplan themes Workplan implementation Use of evidence in advice Existence of dispute resolution mechanisms (formal or informal). Members perception on the clarity of the process Members satisfaction with the mechanisms for decision-making Professional interactions Members assessment	b, e
Coherence	Ensuring correspondence of objectives with the CFP	Alignment of objectives (art. 44 CFP and art. 2 Statutes) Contribution to the CFP (policy impact, to the extent possible)	Alignment score (formal): objectives set in the statutes Alignment score (implemented): objectives pursued in the actual work. Evidence of implemented recommendations based on the 2021 review	g

10.2 Document analysis

As outlined in the agreed workplan, the consultants employed AI assisted analysis methods to review NSAC documents produced between 2020 and 2025, with the aim of assessing operational performance, efficiency, and coherence.

The AI tool NotebookLM was selected for this task due to its functionality and privacy preserving design. In particular, NotebookLM ensures that uploaded materials remain private and are not used to train Google's general AI models. NotebookLM is also suitable in this research context as it strictly grounds all responses in uploaded documents, sources grounded answers with exact passages from sources, does not fabricate responses, while handling volume well.

NSAC Advice documents and formal meeting reports from the North Sea Advisory Council (NSAC) Board, covering the period from 2020 to 2025, were extracted from the NSAC website and uploaded to NotebookLM for structured analysis.

A series of targeted prompts were used to:

- Assess overall alignment between the NSAC Work Programme and the body of advice produced during the period.
- Summarise document content and extract key themes relevant to NSAC's performance, efficiency, and coherence.
- Identify patterns, gaps, and inconsistencies in the documentation.

Prompts were applied iteratively, allowing the consultants to cross verify findings and ensure consistency across data types and sources.

Data selection, scope, and preparation

Based on the agreed performance review workplan, the following documents were included in the document analysis: Statutes, rules of procedure, work plan, adopted advice, replies to advice, and minutes of meetings.

The legal statutes, rules of procedures and advice were manually downloaded from the NSAC website.

Workplans and board meeting minutes were provided by the NSAC Secretariat.

In advance of the AI assisted analysis of alignment of the advice and the workplans, a manual review of advice was conducted using the qualitative software Nvivo 15. Thematic codes were extracted from the workplans and modified to capture the thematic areas. Process codes were developed by the consultants related to specific areas of enquiry for the performance evaluation related to audience and procedure. This additional manual review helped to

ensure researcher familiarity with the content of the documents and supports confidence in the AI assisted analysis.

Prompts

Perplexity.AI was used to develop specific prompts for NotebookLM to conduct an analysis of how the NSAC advice aligns with the themes of the NSAC workplan overtime.

Using the combined sources of documents within NotebookLM allowed the consultants to make requests of the documents to respond to specific queries and identify specific examples of evidence based on the NSAC documentation.

Limitations

AI tools must be used cautiously for text interpretation. There are potential risks related to omission or misclassification related to AI generated summaries. However, these risks were mitigated by selecting the appropriate AI tool where sources could be specifically limited and verified by checking the sources manually. These risks were further reduced by cross checking through manual review, triangulation of evidence with other sources of data, including interviews, and the survey.

Document analysis: Advice

All documents listed under 'latest advice' were downloaded from the NSAC website for the years 2020–2021 until 2024–2025. 'Responses' were excluded from the analysis of advice. Some documents were labelled 'advice' others were 'letters' or other types of contributions. In total, 74 documents were analysed.

Table 10.2.1 NSAC Advice number by year

Year	2020–2021	2021–2022	2022–2023	2023–2024	2024–2025
Number of 'Advice' documents	15	14	15	15	15

Document analysis: Workplans

AI was used to extract the headings from the workplans in the period 2020–2021 until 2024–2025. Comparing across years reveals an increasing thematic scope and areas of work.

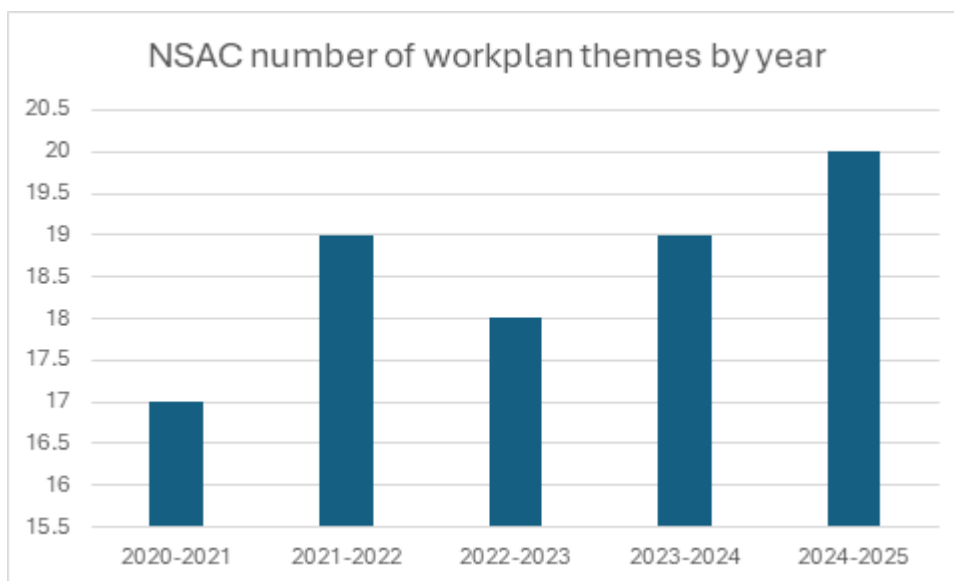


Figure 10.2.1 NSAC workplan themes by year

Table 10.2.2 NSAC Workplan Themes by year

2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Landing obligation	Landing Obligation	Landing Obligation	Landing Obligation	Landing Obligation
Fully Documented Fisheries & Control Regulation	Revision of the Control Regulation	Revision of the Control Regulation	Revision of the Control Regulation	Fisheries technology and innovation
European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) 2021-2027	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) 2021-2027	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) 2021-2027	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) 2021-2027	Evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy
ICES Advice	ICES Advice	ICES Advice	ICES Advice and stakeholder engagement	Revision of the Control Regulation
Technical Measures	Technical Measures	Technical Measures	Technical Measures	ICES Advice and stakeholder engagement
Multi-annual Management Plans / Recovery Plans	Multi-annual Management Plans / Recovery Plans	Multi-annual Management Plans / Recovery Plans	Evaluation of the Multi-annual Management Plans	Technical Measures for Conservation of Fisheries Resources and safeguarding marine ecosystems
TAC Setting Arrangements in the North Sea	TAC Setting Arrangements in the North Sea	TAC Setting Arrangements in the North Sea	TAC Setting Arrangements in the North Sea	Evaluation of the Multi-annual Management Plans
Brexit and its implications for the NSAC	Brexit and its implications for the NSAC	Brexit and its implications for the NSAC	Brexit and its implications for the NSAC	TAC Setting Arrangements in the North Sea
Environmental Issues	Environmental sustainability	Environmental sustainability	Environmental sustainability	Brexit and its implications for the NSAC
Other areas of interest	Social sustainability	Social sustainability	Social sustainability	Environmental sustainability
Continue to develop closer links with the Scheveningen Group	Gender equality	Gender equality	Gender equality	Social sustainability

Working closely with scientists	Other areas of interest	Continue to develop closer links with the Scheveningen Group	Continue to develop closer links with the Scheveningen Group	Gender equality
Develop closer links with Member States	Continue to develop closer links with the Scheveningen Group	Working closely with scientists	Working closely with scientists	Continue to develop closer links with the Scheveningen Group
Developing closer links with the European Parliament	Working closely with scientists	Develop closer links with Member States	Develop closer links with Member States	Working closely with other Advisory Councils
Relationships with Norway, UK and other third countries	Develop closer links with Member States	Developing closer links with the European Parliament Fisheries Committee	Developing closer links with the European Parliament Fisheries Committee	Working closely with ICES and STECF, including national scientists
Links to the European Commission	Developing closer links with the European Parliament Fisheries Committee	Relationships with Norway, UK and other third countries	Relationships with Norway, UK and other third countries	Developing closer links with the European Parliament Fisheries Committee
Provisional planning	Relationships with Norway, UK and other third countries	Relationships with AC Stakeholders	Developing closer links with other actors such as OSPAR, ICES	Relationships with Norway, UK and other third countries
	Links to the European Commission	Links to the European Commission	Relationships with AC Stakeholders	Developing closer links with other (environmental) actors such as OSPAR, ICES
	Provisional planning		Links to the European Commission	Relationships with Stakeholders
				Links to the European Commission

Based on a thematic analysis of the provided Advisory Council (AC) advice documents, table 10.2.3 summarizes how the six workplan goals are represented and operationalized.

Table 10.2.3 Overview: Goal Representation in Advice Documents

Goal ID	Goal Label	Total Docs	Primary Focus	Secondary / Indirect	Qualitative Note on Treatment
1	Resource Management	8	6	2	Substantive technical detail on TAC setting, MSY ranges, and Landing Obligation hurdles.
2	Nature Conservation	9	7	2	Substantive detail on scientific criteria for species protection and MPA management.
3	Marine Spatial Planning	6	5	1	Substantive technical detail regarding spatial mapping and cross-sectoral coexistence.
4	Social Dimension	6	5	1	Substantive detail on workforce safety, demographics, and community identity.
5	Innovation & Technology	7	5	2	Highly technical detail on gear selectivity, decarbonization, and REM/AI applications.
6	Governance	15+	6	9+	Mainly procedural ; frequently appears as a secondary focus on stakeholder roles and "level playing fields".

Document analysis: Minutes

Board meeting reports (21 documents) were uploaded to NotebookLM and the documents were used to generate a comprehensive briefing document

synthesizing main themes and key takeaways. The output focused on: Strategic relocation and internal conflict; post-Brexit realities; Governance and Member Engagement; Core policy and Management focus; Relationships with EU institutions. This resource of documents was also used iteratively based on specific requests to identify evidence of implementation of the 2021 NSAC performance evaluation review recommendations.

Document analysis: Advice responses

Responses to NSAC Advice were downloaded from the website and uploaded to NotebookLM (46 documents). Specific requests related to the relationship between NSAC and the European Commission and Member States, as well as Satisfaction with the official replies and reaction to advice; Cooperation, including attendance in meetings; and influence of advice on EU policy making resulted in output that summarized Satisfaction with official replies and reaction to advice, cooperation and meeting attendance, as well as influence of Advice on EU policy-making.

Document Analysis: CFP Alignment and NSAC statutes

Table 10.2.3 CFP and NSAC statutes and RoPs compared.

CFP (art. 44 R. 1380/2013)	NSAC foundational documents
<p>2. Advisory Councils may:</p> <p>(a) submit recommendations and suggestions on matters relating to the management of fisheries and the socio-economic and conservation aspects of fisheries and aquaculture to the Commission and to the Member State concerned, and, in particular, recommendations on how to simplify rules on fisheries management;</p> <p>(b) inform the Commission and Member States of problems relating to the management and the socio-economic and conservation aspects of fisheries and, where appropriate, of aquaculture in their geographical area or field of competence and propose solutions to overcome those problems;</p> <p>(c) contribute, in close cooperation with scientists, to the collection, supply and analysis of data necessary for the development of conservation measures.</p>	<p>NSAC NL Statutes 2019</p> <p>PURPOSE</p> <p>Article 2.</p> <p>The objects for which the association is established are to prepare and provide advice on the management of the fisheries of the North Sea on behalf of stakeholders in order to achieve the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (this policy is in these articles referred to as the Common Fisheries Policy.</p> <p>The actions of the Advisory Council must always be compliant with the applicable European Regulations.</p> <p>NSAC RoPs Objectives:</p> <p>The objective of NSAC is to prepare and provide advice on the management of the fisheries of the North Sea on behalf of stakeholders in order to achieve the objectives of the CFP. That advice shall be provided to the Fisheries Council of the European Community, the European Commission, individual Member States of the European Community, the European Parliament, the International Council for Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and other bodies as decided by the NSAC.</p> <p>The NSAC shall fulfil the role of an Advisory Council (AC) as described in</p>

	<p>European Regulation (EU) No. 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1954/2003 and (EC) No 1224/2009 and repealing Council regulations (EC) No 2371/2002 and (EC) No 639/2004 and Council Decision 2004/585/EC.</p> <p>Observers</p> <p>34. Representatives of the fisheries sector and other interest groups from third countries, including representatives from Regional Fisheries organisations that have a fishing interest in the area or fisheries covered by NSAC as well as scientists may be invited to participate in NSAC as active observers when issues which affect them are discussed, at the discretion of the Executive Committee.</p>
<p>If an issue is of common interest to two or more Advisory Councils, they shall coordinate their positions with a view to adopting joint recommendations on that issue.</p>	
<p>3. Advisory Councils shall be consulted on joint recommendations pursuant to Article 18. They may also be consulted by the Commission and by Member States in respect of other measures. Their advice shall be taken into account. Those consultations shall be without prejudice to the consultation of STECF or other scientific bodies. The opinions of the Advisory Councils may be submitted to all Member States concerned and to the Commission.</p>	
<p>4. The Commission and, where relevant, the Member State concerned shall reply within two months to any recommendation, suggestion or information received pursuant to paragraph 1. Where the final measures that are adopted diverge from the Advisory Councils' opinions, recommendations and suggestions received pursuant to paragraph 1, the Commission or the Member State concerned shall state detailed reasons for the divergence.</p>	

10.3 Evaluating implementation of the 2021 NSAC performance review.

The recommendations from the 2021 review were not specifically listed but placed throughout the text of that report. The evaluators of the current review interpreted and extracted potential recommendations from the 2021 performance review to construct a list of inferred recommendations (Table 10.3.1). This list was scanned by the NSAC secretariat. Progress on implementation between 2021 and 2025 of these extracted recommendations was assessed in two ways:

- i. The external evaluators assessment of implementation

- ii. A self-assessment carried out in December 2025 by the NSAC secretariat of implementation.

These two methods of assessment provide different perspectives, experiences, and knowledge of the operational realities of the NSAC. This is a form of perception-gap analysis. It is used to compare internal self-assessment with external judgements. Colour coding was used by the evaluators in Table 10.3.1. The colour coding was done by the external evaluators. Red = No progress or regression; Orange = Limited progress or no evidence could be identified; Yellow = some progress; Green = good progress. Grey = Change not possible or context has changed. The text in the last two columns represent the evidence used by the evaluators and the self-assessment by the secretariat of implementation.

Table 10.3.1 The extracted recommendations from the 2021 NSAC performance evaluation review ²

The text Red = No progress or regression; Orange = Limited progress or no evidence could be identified; Yellow = some progress; Green = good progress. Grey = Change not possible or context has changed.

R1. Internal governance & functioning

	Membership & representation	External evaluator assessment evidence	NSAC Secretariat self-assessment
R1.01	Encourage active engagement and a positive attitude from all stakeholders.	Code of conduct developed and implemented 2022/2023 – though effectiveness unclear	Did encourage, limited change
R1.02	The Commission should develop clear guidelines for the classification of member organisations (fisheries or Other Interest Groups - OIGs). New organisations should be properly assigned to the appropriate category when applying to the AC.	Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2022/204 amends Delegated Regulation (EU) 2015/242 and, among others, explicitly empowers Advisory Councils to decide on the classification of member organisations.	Legal change; limited practical implementation
R1.03	Attract new members, particularly from the small-scale sector and OIGs, and address high membership fees that may deter smaller NGOs.	Departure of the majority of eNGOs	Limited progress
R1.04	Launch a publicity campaign for public relations and direct contact with potential members.	Some external engagement evident on LinkedIn – and a detailed newsletter published at a range of intervals.	Limited progress
R1.05	All members, alongside Chairs and Secretariat, should strive for balanced representation across stakeholder groups and gender.	NSAC currently lacks diversity in stakeholder group representation overall.	Limited progress
R1.06	Encourage organisations to put forward both male and female candidates for positions.	Unclear if a specific strategy has been put in place or if self-identified gender disaggregated data is collected to allow for progress monitoring.	Some progress
R1.07	Contribute to gender equality advocacy, potentially by teaming up with organizations like the International Organisation for Women in the Seafood Industry.	Women in Seafood presented at NSAC GA 2021. Several advice documents specifically address gender equality, primarily as a core component of the Social Dimension and generational renewal	Some progress – now stalled
	Working Groups		
R1.08	Rethink and redesign the scope and names of existing Working Groups, possibly by integrating the Skagerrak & Kattegat WG's	Instead of renaming, refinement of group terms of reference being used in a gradual iterative process.	This has been attempted by former Chair

² <https://www.nsrac.org/projects/nsac-performance-review-2021/>

	agenda into the Demersal WG and Ecosystem WG, or mainstreaming its work.		
	Management Team		
R1.09	Maintain a balanced representation between fisheries and OIGs within the Management Team, seeking a replacement for the OIG Vice-Chair if vacant.	OIG Vice-Chair position remains vacant	Short term progress
R1.10	Resolve internal issues with the Management Team before escalating them externally, such as to the Commission.	Internal conflict continues	No progress
R1.11	Establish clear agreements on external representation, ensuring balanced industry and OIG participation in strategic discussions.	No evidence of formal agreements identified	No progress
R1.12	Appoint an interim OIG member to represent if the OIG Vice-Chair position is not officially filled.	Only two instances of use of this adaptive procedure identified (in 2021 & 2022)	No progress
	Meetings		
R1.13	Retain online meetings to a greater degree than before the pandemic due to their efficiency and inclusivity.	All meetings observed during the evaluation process were available online.	Yes
R1.14	Establish a protocol for virtual meetings.	No single unified protocol identified. However, operational guidelines have been discussed in Board meetings & evident in operations.	No progress
R1.15	Utilize observers to enhance transparency, bring additional viewpoints, allow for independent feedback, and promote higher conduct.	Unclear how widely this has been used.	Some progress
R1.16	Implement observer reports and/or surveys after meetings to gather feedback for the Secretariat and Chairs.	No surveys circulated after meetings observed by evaluators.	No progress
	Rules of Procedure		
R1.17	Review existing Rules of Procedure and protocols to ensure they are relevant, provide clarity, and align with external changes like Brexit and COVID-19 developments.	Rules of procedure being updated (2026 Newsletter)	In progress
R1.18	Follow procedures duly but with enough flexibility.	Observed meetings followed procedures	In progress
R1.19	Include a mechanism for the resolution of grievances.	In progress – but unclear if proposed mechanisms are adequate	In progress

Chairpersons			
R1.20	Limit the duration and number of terms a Chairperson can serve, and ensure rotation.	Unclear if this is being advanced. No agreed changes in RoP as yet.	In progress
R1.21	Propose a qualified majority rule for elections instead of unanimity to prevent individual vetoes.	Unclear if this is being advanced.	No progress
R1.22	Implement checks and balances to secure Chair independency.	Unclear if/how this is being advanced.	There were attempts.
R1.23	Chairs have a responsibility to improve the atmosphere and trust within the membership by ensuring space for internal discussions.	Lack of OIGs/some interviews & survey evidence suggests there is room for improvement.	No progress
R1.24	Members are also responsible for raising and discussing issues internally before they worsen.	Lack of OIGs/some interviews & survey evidence suggests there is room for improvement.	No progress
R1.25	Explore the option of an independent Chair for divisive and controversial topics.	This has been explored, and is being considered for formal inclusion to ongoing rules of procedure revision process.	No progress
Stakeholder relations			
R1.26	Give greater attention to the selection of appropriate stakeholders in diverse forums.	Lack of OIGs/some interviews & survey evidence suggests there is room for improvement.	No progress
R1.27	Highlight shared challenges among stakeholders to overcome differences and foster synergies.	Lack of OIGs/some interviews & survey evidence suggests there is room for improvement.	No progress
Secretariat			
R1.28	Provide the Secretariat with support, such as administrative assistance, to allow more time for content creation, strategic matters, and additional operations like social media and press releases.	Additional staff has been hired.	Limited progress
R1.29	The Executive Secretary should look into conflict resolution theory and other soft skills for future needs.	Secretariat has been proactive in proposing structural conflict resolution mechanisms.	In progress
R1.30	Extend information about the executive aspects of the NSAC to the entire membership to create synergies.	Progress evident in formalising ToRs; Finance and work plan regularly reported to GA and ExCom; Formalised internal communication procedures; new procedures to promote synergies e.g. preparatory meetings.	Progress

R1.31	Strengthen the Secretariat to be better prepared for advice drafting.	Additional resources are now present in the Secretariat. However, institutionalizing balanced stakeholder involvement in Advice production has been a focus evident in the minutes of the Board meetings.	Currently often secretariat driven, rather than cocreation.
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R2. Advice quality & impact

	Drafting process	External evaluator assessment	NSAC Secr. Self-assessment
R2.01	Ensure advice drafting follows well-defined Terms of Reference, agreed upon by members beforehand, to provide direction and negotiate disagreements early.	While NSAC has made administrative steps to formalise the process of agreeing ToRs in advance, the need to resolve conflicts within the meeting (not by correspondence) has been highlighted.	Limited progress
R2.02	Involve two representatives from both the industry and OIG sectors in drafting the initial advice to increase the chances of successful adoption and reduce backlash.	Unable to assess	Limited progress
R2.03	Focus on seeking consensus where possible and avoid contentious topics when consensus is not achievable.	The Advice demonstrates that the NSAC operates under a strong mandate to seek consensus and has developed protocols to handle contentious topics that threaten its collaborative functioning.	No progress
R2.04	Conduct proper and honest discussions in early meetings to agree on clear key points before advice drafting begins, to mitigate conflict.	Unable to assess	Limited progress
R2.05	Advice should be based on facts, scientific underpinning, and evidence-backed at-sea experience, rather than just opinions.	NSAC advice is extensively supported by a combination of formal scientific reports, technical research trials, and at-sea observations, while also highlighting critical gaps and methodological disagreements in the evidence base used for policy-making.	Notable progress
R2.06	Provide a short summary of the advice for end users.	Unable to assess	Notable progress
	Evaluation & Feedback		
R2.08	An external evaluation of how much NSAC advice has been adopted by the Commission is crucial for maintaining credibility.	Unable to assess/No evidence to suggest this has been advanced identified.	No progress
R2.09	Seek detailed and concrete feedback from advice recipients (Commission and Member States) on specific parts of the advice to improve its usability and demonstrate its value.	No evidence to suggest this has been advanced identified.	No progress

R3. External relations – note some of these are beyond the control of the NSAC and reliant on others to deliver

	The Commission	External evaluator assessment	NSAC Secr. Self-assessment
R3.01	The Commission should give more weight to AC inputs and encourage cooperation at this level.	Interview highlighted that DGMARE highly value NSAC Advice, and that outputs help shape direction, while acknowledging visible tracking in legislation is not possible.	Some progress
R3.02	Improve communication by proactively sharing meeting schedules and working documents with the Commission.	NSAC has consistent progress in proactively sharing meeting schedules and working documents with the European Commission. This effort has evolved from basic calendar sharing to a systematic annual and semi-annual planning process.	Notable progress
R3.03	Regular meetings with the Commission (Inter-AC or bilateral) are important for fostering trust and acknowledging the value of the NSAC's work.	In September 2023, the Commission decided to hold meetings with AC Secretariats every three months to improve interaction and provide a direct channel for administrative updates.	Some progress
R3.04	Active involvement of Commission representatives in the NSAC's main meetings is crucial for informed and adaptive work.	Based on the interview with DGMARE: DG MARE attends NSAC meetings regularly but with variable frequency: C5 attends most often (working groups, focus groups, ExCom). C1 attends occasionally, focused on Article 11 issues. Attendance increases during key policy moments (pre-advice periods, TAC season). DG MARE's participation is lower than in other ACs, partly because NSAC invites them less often. DGMARE's participation is consistent but not continuous, and more seasonal and topic-driven than in some other Advisory Councils.	Regression
R3.05	The Commission could provide a skilled diplomatic helpdesk to assist in breaking discussion deadlocks.	No evidence identified this has been taken up.	No progress
	Regional Group (Scheveningen Group)		
R3.06	Ensure effective planning on both sides to meet deadlines for advice, especially on complex issues like the Landing Obligation.	Based on the minutes of the Board meetings, there is evidence of progress in formalizing the planning relationship between the NSAC and the Scheveningen Group (the regional Member State group) to	Limited progress

		meet advice deadlines, particularly regarding the Landing Obligation. This was also highlighted during the interviews.	
R3.07	The Presidency and individual Member State representatives should attend NSAC meetings regularly.	The NSAC systematically invites the Presidency of the Scheveningen Group to its Executive Committee meetings to provide direct updates on their work program.	Regression
R3.08	Brief the NSAC thoroughly and timely on relevant matters.	Based on the board meeting minutes, the Scheveningen Group has presented its work program to NSAC.	Limited progress
	The European Parliament		
R3.09	Promote and present the collective work of the NSAC membership to all interested parties in the European Parliament to share knowledge and facts.	NSAC engages with the European Parliament's Committee on Fisheries (PECH) through direct technical input on reports, responses to legislative questionnaires, and strategic diplomatic outreach.	Progress
	Science		
R3.10	Strengthen links between the NSAC and the scientific community by more directly involving scientists in the ACs' work, addressing funding limitations, and improving information transfer.	Based on the Board meeting minutes, there is evidence of progress in strengthening links between the NSAC and the scientific community through direct collaboration, institutional knowledge transfer, and active engagement with research bodies like ICES.	Some progress
	Other Advisory Councils		
R3.11	Institutionalize and regularly conduct performance reviews on a periodic basis.	Stipulated in the Delegated Act. External Performance evaluation in progress.	Progress
R3.12	Monitor follow-up actions and appraise the effects of performance review findings and recommendations.	External performance evaluation process has requested Secretariat reflection on proves of earlier internal evaluation (i.e. this table)	Some progress
R3.15	Organize an annual seminar among ACs for sharing views on functioning.	AC's meet annually.	In progress
R3.16	Ensure review results and conclusions are adequately communicated and followed up.	Internal performance evaluation publicly available on thr web.	In progress
R3.17	Dedicate time in meetings or a task force for reflection on outcomes and learning from other ACs' good practices.	The NSAC often benchmarks its procedures against other ACs and participates in joint forums to share best practices:	In progress

R4. Post-Brexit adaptation

		External evaluator assessment	NSAC Secr. Self-assessment
R4.01	Structure agendas to group UK/Norway related topics and invite their representatives to observe dedicated parts of relevant meetings.	NSAC has formalized the observer status of UK and Norwegian representatives and adjusted meeting structures to balance transparency with the need for internal EU deliberation.	In progress
R4.02	Engage more with other Directorates, such as DG ENV (through coordination with DG MARE), given the increasing focus on ecosystem issues and non-fisheries uses of the North Sea.	NSAC has progressed in engaging with other Directorates, most notably DG ENV, while addressing the shift toward broader ecosystem management and non-fisheries uses of the marine environment.	In progress
R4.03	Adopt adaptive management to incorporate the latest developments from EU-UK-Norway negotiations and beyond.	Unable to assess	Limited options at AC level

10.4 Observing meetings

The reviewers observed 11 meetings. While the performance review period covers the years 2020–2024, the reviewers observed meetings held in the second half of 2025 with the opportunity to assesses different bodies (GA, WG, FGs). The range of meetings were chosen to reduce the impact of contextual factors in the observations and provide a balanced view of typical behaviours, dynamics and decision-making patterns over time (Table 10.4.1).

Reviewers and used the following tools:

- a standardized template to assess chairing and interactions (Table 10.4.2).
- a participation tracker to record number, duration and type of interventions by NSAC Members.
- an agenda tracker to record the topics addressed and their alignment with the work programme and MEDAC goals
- observation notes to document informal interactions and group dynamics, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the meeting environment
- Open AI to synthesise the observations using anonymised versions of the sheets.

The evaluators were noting the following elements:

Efficiency (how it is done)

- Agenda discipline and timekeeping
- Role clarity (chair/secretariat/members)
- Preparation quality (papers sent on time, readable, proportionate)
- Participation and inclusion (who speaks, who is sidelined)
- Transaction costs (repetition, circular debate, late papers)
- Decision mechanics (consensus rules, voting, handling of dissent)
- Record and follow-up (minutes, action tracker, closure)

Effectiveness (what is done)

- Clear objectives/priorities
- Decisions align with mandat
- Robust and relevant presentations
- Outputs delivered (advice, recommendations, plans)
- Quality of decisions (fit to evidence, risk considered)
- Accountability for delivery (actions actually progress)

Check and relate back to the overall framework document

Table 10.4.1. List of NSAC meetings observed for the performance review.

Format	Date	Type	Topics	Participants	Interveners	*Participation rate
Online	01/07/2025	Webinar	MSP	41	10	0.81
Online	10/07/2025	WG	Joint Demersal and Skagerrak & Kattegat	19	14	0.83
Online	02/09/2025	FG	Joint NSAC/NWWAC Social Aspects	12	7	0.52
Hybrid	23/09/2025	Executive Committee	-	21	15	0.56
Hybrid	23/09/2025	Informal dialogue	Future of Bottom trawl fisheries	48	9	0.89
Hybrid	24/09/2025	General Assembly	-	25	13	0.58
Online	02/10/2025	WG	Skagerrak & Kattegat	20	14	0.63
Online	08/10/2025	WG	Ecosystem	15	9	0.63
Online	10/10/2025	FG	Simplification	5	5	0.51
Online	22/10/2025	WG	Demersal	17	12	0.62
Online	16/12/2025	Executive Committee	Extra-ordinary	17	9	0.71

*Participation rate is based on the Gini coefficient which is a way to describe how unevenly something is shared across a group. 0 means everyone has intervened the same share, 1 means one person has intervened and everyone else has not. It takes into account numbers of speakers and the interventions that they make. Chairs were excluded from the analysis.

Table 10.4.2. Template for meetings observation

	Acceptable	Needs improvement	Comments	Improvement ideas
CHAIRING				
1. Ensuring a common aim is achieved				
2. Maintaining a good work environment				
3. Arousing interest in participants and keeping it up				
4. Promoting the participation of everyone				
5. Managing contrasting views				
6. Preventing and managing complicated situations				
7. Willingly and constructively engages difficult matters when necessary				
8. Ensuring independence and impartiality				
FACILITATION				
9. Facilitating interaction / giving the floor				

10. Reorienting discussions				
11. Summarising what has been said				
12. Supporting of and flexibility in accommodating committee members' needs/interests				
REGULATION				
13. Development of work				
14. Encouragement				
15. Accepting proposals				
16. Moderating heated discussions				
17. Sticking to the agenda				
18. Time management				
INTERACTION				
19. Participants address each other with respect and frankness				
20. Quality of participation/discussion				
21. Plurality of the participants profiles providing input				
22. Plurality of the participants providing input				
TOPICS				
23. Quality of the presentations				
24. Availability of support material				
25. Explanations and additional clarifications				

10.5 Survey

An online survey was designed by the consultants (drawing on previous surveys conducted NSAC internal evaluation and MEDAC performance evaluation). Microsoft forms was used to collect responses. Responses were collected anonymously. Questions related to the professional role of the respondent, gender, organisation type, and geographic focus. It also asked respondents to respond to a set of statements about the functioning of NSAC based on a forced-point scale, aligned with the aims of the survey to understand perceptions of the organisation, and to reduce central tendency bias. The survey was distributed by email to NSAC members (Box 10.5.1 lists survey questions). The link was also provided directly to one organisation previously, but not currently an NSAC members (this organisation representative also contributed with an interview).

The survey was sent to members 8 October, with reminders sent to encourage additional responses 22 October. In total, 24 responses were submitted. It took respondents on average 15 minutes to complete the survey. Note that the survey

was carried out before the resignations of senior leadership and the extraordinary general assembly.

Respondents

Respondents identified as representatives of the fisheries sector (67%) and other interest groups (33%). A majority of respondents were from organisations represented both on the General Assembly and well as the Executive Committee (63%). While 38% were members of the General Assembly only.

Responses were received from Belgium (1), France (3), Denmark (6), Germany (3), Netherlands (3), Sweden (4), Transnational (1), European (1).

The majority of responses came from organizational representatives whose organisations have been part of NSAC for more than 10 years (75%), with between 5–10 years, and less than 5 years both equal to 13% respectively.

The majority of respondents identified as 'fishers organisation representative' (50%), with 'Environmental NGO' (17%), 'other' (17%), 'Manager of fisheries organisations' (8%), Fisher representing a fishers' organisation (4%), and 'Intergovernmental organisation representative' (4%).

Respondents were also male (63%), female (33%), prefer not say (4%). The most frequently chosen response related to motivation to participate in NSAC was 'influence and/or shape management policies' (38%). The majority of respondents indicated they felt their organisation's investment of time and resources is proportionate to the policy impact of the NSAC (79%).

Box 10.5.1 Questions from the online survey.

North Sea Advisory Council - 2025 Performance Evaluation Survey

This survey is designed to understand what NSAC means to you and how you perceive its functioning and operation. We've kept the questions to a minimum, so it should take about 10 minutes to complete. Your feedback will inform the NSAC performance evaluation and help develop recommendations to improve its performance. We are aware of the many surveys you receive and the limited time available, so please note that this information has direct practical application from which you will benefit as a NSAC member.

We will process the results, and the answers according to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (EU) 2016/679 ensuring the privacy and security of your data. For additional information on the NSAC performance review, please contact us any time at ellen.johannesen@niva-dk.dk and mark.dickeycollas@gmail.com

Organisation & personal profile

1. What sector does your organisation represent in the NSAC?

- Fisheries sector
 Other interest group

2. Which NSAC member group does your organisation belong to? *

- General Assembly (only)
 General Assembly & Executive Committee

3. In which countries does your organisation operate?

- Belgium France Denmark Germany Netherlands Sweden
 UK Norway Transnational (various countries)

European

- International

4. For how long has your organisation been a member of the NSAC?

- Less than 5 years
 Between 5 and 10 years
More than 10 years

5. Do you consider yourself mainly as a:

- Fisher
 Fisher representing a fishers' organisation
Fishers organisation representative
 Manager of fisheries organisations
Environmental NGO representative
 Intergovernmental organisation representative
Member State representative
 Scientist
Other

6. To which gender identity do you most identify? * Why we ask about gender:

Understanding gender-related response patterns helps understanding if certain groups are underrepresented or have different experiences, preferences, or concerns.

- Female Male Prefer to self describe Prefer not to say

Motivation and Value

7. What motivated your organisation to join and contribute to the NSAC? (Select up to 2) *

Please select at most 2 options.

- To increase opportunities to access evidence and management practices
- To influence and/or shape management policies
- To network with other NSAC members
- To give a voice to my organisation
- To increase the impact of my own organisation
- To join forces with other organisations
- To defend my organization's interest
- To increase environmental protection
- Other

8. Please indicate to which extent you agree with the statement below

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree
My organisation's investment of time and resources is proportionate to the policy impact of the NSAC	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Meetings and Participation

9. What is your preferred way of participating in NSAC meetings?

- Attend the meetings in person when possible Attend the meetings online
- Attend the meetings only when the items in the agenda are relevant Not attend the meetings and read the minutes and documentation

10. With regard to NSAC meetings, please indicate how easy it is for you to:

	Very easy	Easy	Difficult
Intervene in meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Present alternative viewpoints	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Debate difficult issues in NSAC meetings when in person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Debate difficult issues in NSAC meetings online	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provide feedback to an external consultation into the NSAC	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Find and access documentation on the website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understand topics on the agenda	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Please indicate to which extent you agree with the statement below

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree
Speaking time during discussions reflects a balanced representation of all relevant interests.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. With regard to written consultations, please indicate how much you agree with the following statements

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree
Written consultations allow sufficient time for stakeholders to respond	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preparing NSAC replies to written consultations is straightforward and manageable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Issues arising during consultations can be effectively resolved via email communication	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Issues arising during consultations can be effectively resolved through online meetings or phone calls
 Written consultation replies provide opportunities to include minority or divergent stakeholder views

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Decision-Making and Advice

13. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the statements below

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree
The decision-making process in the NSAC is clear and transparent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am satisfied with how decisions are made within the NSAC	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The current procedure for drafting advice is effective	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
NSAC advice reflects stakeholder views in a balanced and fair manner	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
NSAC advice is highly valued by the European Commission and Member States	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Trust, Collaboration, and Inclusivity

14. How would you assess the level of collaborative spirit amongst the NSAC members?

Excellent
 Good
 Fair
 Poor
 Very poor

15. Please indicate how often you have experienced participants:

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
Using words that can be considered offensive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Behaving in a manner that can be considered offensive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Acting in a way that excludes others from the debate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Acting in a way that takes most of the time available for debate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Commenting about feeling excluded	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Governance and Roles

16. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree
Chairs and moderators apply impartiality rules fairly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Chairs and facilitators have a significant influence on conflict management, participation, and outcomes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The roles of the General Assembly, Working Groups, Executive Committee, Focus Groups, and Secretariat are clearly defined	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The General Assembly, has the capacity to set how the NSAC operates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Executive Committee is able to determine the important issues for NSAC to work on	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The working groups help the NSAC work more efficiently	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The focus groups help the NSAC work more efficiently	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Secretariat

17 Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements:

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree
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The Secretariat's overall performance meets or exceeds expected standard
I receive relevant information from the Secretariat in a timely manner
The Secretariat provides adequate support and follow-up to initiatives
The Secretariat operates in a transparent, inclusive, and impartial manner

Additional feedback

Please share any additional thoughts, ideas, or comments you may have regarding the NSAC's performance, governance, or future strategy.

The specific results of the survey are given below (see section 10.5 for demographic profile information of survey respondents from the NSAC).

10. With regard to NSAC meetings, please indicate how easy it is for you to:

[More](#)

● Very easy ● Easy ● Difficult ● Very difficult

Intervene in meetings

Present alternative viewpoints

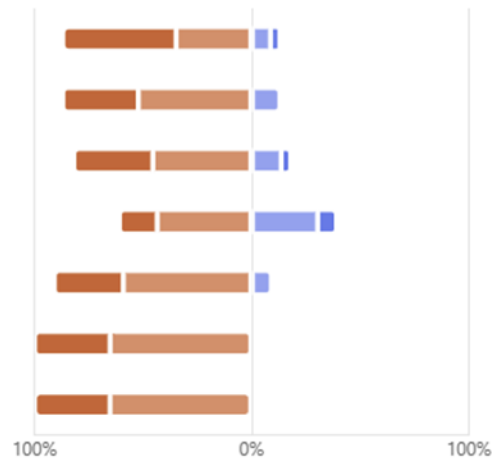
Debate difficult issues in NSAC meetings when in person

Debate difficult issues in NSAC meetings online

Provide feedback to an external consultation into the NSAC

Find and access documentation on the website

Understand topics on the agenda

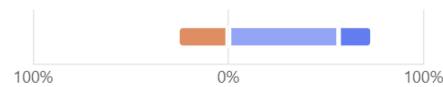


11. Please indicate to which extent you agree with the statement below

[More details](#)

● Strongly disagree ● Disagree ● Agree ● Strongly Agree

Speaking time during discussions reflects a balanced representation of all relevant interests.



12. With regard to written consultations, please indicate how much you agree with the following statements

[More det](#)

● Strongly disagree ● Disagree ● Agree ● Strongly agree

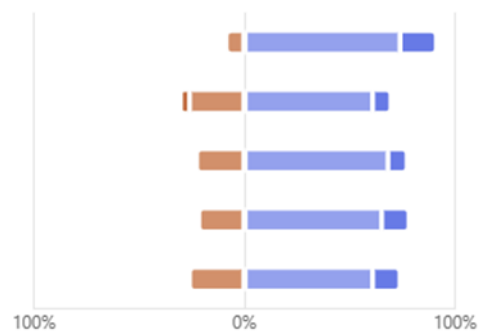
Written consultations allow sufficient time for stakeholders to respond

Preparing NSAC replies to written consultations is straightforward and manageable

Issues arising during consultations can be effectively resolved via email communication

Issues arising during consultations can be effectively resolved through online meetings or phone calls

Written consultation replies provide opportunities to include minority or divergent stakeholder views



13. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the statements below

[More details](#)

● Strongly disagree ● Disagree ● Agree ● Strongly Agree

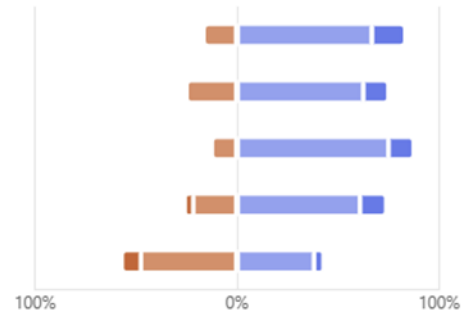
The decision-making process in the NSAC is clear and transparent

I am satisfied with how decisions are made within the NSAC

The current procedure for drafting advice is effective

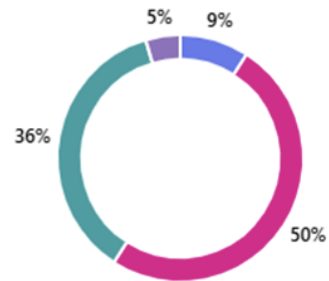
NSAC advice reflects stakeholder views in a balanced and fair manner

NSAC advice is highly valued by the European Commission and Member States



14. How would you assess the level of collaborative spirit amongst the NSAC members?

- Excellent 2
- Good 11
- Fair 8
- Poor 1
- Very poor 0



15. Please indicate how often you have experienced participants:

[More details](#)

● Often ● Sometimes ● Rarely ● Never

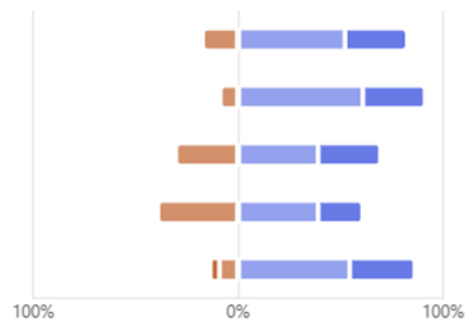
Using words that can be considered offensive

Behaving in a manner that can be considered offensive

Acting in a way that excludes others from the debate

Acting in a way that takes most of the time available for debate

Commenting about feeling excluded

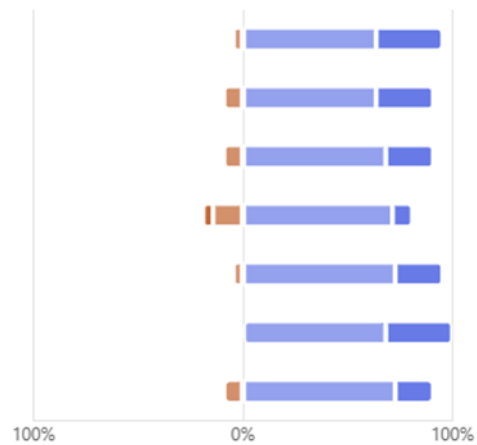


16. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements:

[More det:](#)

● Strongly disagree ● Disagree ● Agree ● Strongly Agree

- Chairs and moderators apply impartiality rules fairly
- Chairs and facilitators have a significant influence on conflict management, participation, and outcomes
- The roles of the General Assembly, Working Groups, Executive Committee, Focus Groups, and Secretariat are clearly defined
- The General Assembly, has the capacity to set how the NSAC operates
- The Executive Committee is able to determine the important issues for NSAC to work on
- The working groups help the NSAC work more efficiently
- The focus groups help the NSAC work more efficiently

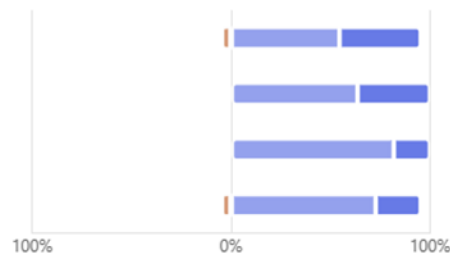


17. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements:

[More details](#)

● Strongly disagree ● Disagree ● Agree ● Strongly agree

- The Secretariat's overall performance meets or exceeds expected standard
- I receive relevant information from the Secretariat in a timely manner
- The Secretariat provides adequate support and follow-up to initiatives
- The Secretariat operates in a transparent, inclusive, and impartial manner



10.6 Interviews

The review used semi-structured interviews to gather deeper insights on members' perceptions about NSAC's functioning and role.

The interviews were conducted online, except for two held in-person, and lasted an average of 60 minutes. They were all conducted in English.

They were performed ensuring anonymity, with all information treated confidentially and presented in aggregated form to prevent it from being traced back to individuals or organizations. The interview with DGMARE was attributable. Interviewees (11 in total) were selected based on a combination of nine criteria to ensure diversity, relevance, and balanced representation across roles, organizations, and geographic areas. Each interviewee met one or several of the criteria.

Note that all of the interviews, other than with the secretariat and the European Commission, were carried out before the resignations of the Chairs of the General Assembly, and the Executive Committee, and some Vice Chairs in the

autumn of 2025, and prior to the extra-ordinary General Assembly in December 2025.

Table 13. Selection criteria for the performance review interviews.

Criteria
Representation of different types of organizations (60/40)
Geographical representation, ensuring representation from across NL, DE, DK, FR, SW, BE
Member Organizations
Withdrawn member
Chair
Chairs of different group types (Working Group, focus group, and workshop)
NSAC Secretariat
Exploratory interviews: profiles with long-term understanding of the ACs functioning and of the advisory process

General interview questions

The interview questionnaire included 7 questions. However, as the interviews were semi-structured, the specific questions varied slightly across interviews to allow flexibility in exploring relevant topics based on each participant’s experience and perspective. Interviewees did not see the questions in advance.

Standard introductory text

“Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the performance evaluation of the North Sea Advisory Council. I am Mark Dickey-Collas and I am working with Ellen Johannesen to carry out the performance evaluation of the North Sea Advisory Council.

This is a semi-structured interview and it is being used to supplement the survey and it will provide deeper insights on members’ perceptions about NSAC’s functioning and role. The interviews are all being carried out online and are confidential, and findings will be aggregated. Quotes may be used but will not be attributed to individuals or organisations. The interview will be carried out in English.

The interview questionnaire includes 7 questions. However, as the interview is semi-structured, the specific questions may vary slightly across interview to allow flexibility in exploring relevant topics based on your experience and perspective.

The interviewees have been were selected based a combination of nine criteria to ensure diversity, relevance, and balanced representation across roles, organizations, and geographic areas. Each interviewee met one or several criteria.

The interviewer will take notes (or transcribe the meeting), this will be the formal recording of the interview. The data will be maintained for up to a year and then deleted.

If it is OK with you, let’s begin...”

Framework of initial questions

1. What is your background, and how long have you engaged with NSAC?

2. This review is designed to assess the functioning of the internal bodies of NSAC, which focuses on NSAC's operational effectiveness (what is done), and efficiency (how is it done).
 - Ignoring the obligation from DGMARE for the evaluation, in terms of effectiveness and efficiency, do you think that it is time for an assessment of the functioning of NSAC, and can you explain your answer?
 - Are there examples being able to change and solve issues?
3. What are the strengths and weakness of NSAC's:
 - decision-making?
 - consensus building of advice?
 - of those you have listed, what would be your key strength or weakness?
Has the work of NSAC (through advice and responding to consultations) made a difference to the management of fisheries and to the lives of those fishing and the state of the North Sea?
 - If it has, how has it made a difference, if not, why not?
5. What in your mind, is the purpose of the 60:40% ratio between fisheries organisations and other societal organisations?
6. What is your view of the regular narrative that NSAC is the voice of the fishing/ fisheries in the North Sea? What have you gained, benefited from engagement with NSAC?
 - Relationship between NSAC and MSs.
7. Is there anything else that you would like to share with us?

DGMARE interview questions

Framework of questions for DGMARE interviews. The questions were made available 2 weeks before the interviews and DGMARE units D3, C1 and C5 provided answers that were shared by the interviewee.

Questions:

"Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the performance evaluation of the North Sea Advisory Council .

You received the questions in advance, but this is approached as a semi-structured interview so we may explore additional topics based on your experience and perspectives. We are conducting interviews in order to collect perceptions about NSAC's functioning and role. The interviews are all being carried out online and are confidential, and findings will be aggregated. Quotes may be used but will not be attributed to individuals or organisations. The interview will be carried out in English. We will record and transcribe this interview, this will be the formal recording. The data will be maintained for up to a year and then deleted. If it is OK with you, let's begin..."

European Commission

1. Your role and interactions

Please describe your role and how you interact with Advisory Councils, including how often you engage with the NSAC, and at which points in the annual policy cycle?

2. Managing consultation workload

Consultation timelines are short and consultations are increasing. From DG MARE's perspective, which two or three changes would most improve the usefulness and efficiency of NSAC inputs?

3. Multi-year strategy

Would DG MARE find it useful for NSAC to adopt a multi-year strategy? If yes, what specific elements would you expect to see (e.g., priority themes, engagement approach, evidence standards, delivery calendar, link to CFP objectives, skill development)?

4. Representation and credibility (60:40 and OIG participation)

NSAC has not maintained the required balance of interests and has lost most OIG participation. In DG MARE's view, what are the potential causes of the failure to maintain plural representation, and what practical measures could DG MARE support to help ACs meet the intent of balanced representation?

5. Brexit Focus Group

NSAC established a Brexit Focus Group. Has it improved the quality or timeliness of North Sea advice post-Brexit (e.g., coherence across EU–UK–Norway realities, clearer options, fewer “late surprises”). Please use an example of where it helped, or explain why it has not?

6. Fast-track procedures and advice quality under time pressure

NSAC has used fast-track/written procedures, especially in 2023–2024. What is the trade-off you see between speed and quality (clarity, specificity, feasibility)? What is the single most helpful change NSAC could make to improve decision-usefulness under short deadlines?

7. Consensus vs minority statements

Where NSAC advice includes minority statements, does DG MARE interpret that as (e.g.):

- a useful signal of implementation risk, or
- a sign the advice is not mature enough for decision use?
- Something else?

And does that judgement change when the 40% OIG representation is structurally under-filled?

8. Demonstrating value and improving the feedback loop

NSAC members report uncertainty about whether their advice is valued. What feedback mechanisms would DG MARE consider proportionate and feasible to better signal how AC advice is used (or why it is not used)?

NSAC secretariat interview questions

These interviews were carried out in person at NSAC HQ in Brussels.

Interview 1

Advice development workflow

1. Role and evolution
Can you describe your role and responsibilities as Assistant Secretary in drafting/processing advice, and how the role has evolved over time?
2. How advice is drafted and agreed
How is NSAC advice drafted and negotiated in practice (steps, roles, tools, meetings vs email)?
3. Fast-track and written procedures
What drives the use of written/fast-track procedures, and what does this change in terms of ownership, quality, and legitimacy?
4. Recurrent bottlenecks
Where are the recurrent bottlenecks in producing advice, and what tends to resolve them?

5. Evidence standards
How is evidence handled in advice drafting (what counts as evidence, how references/claims are checked, and how contested evidence is treated)?

Transparency and information management

6. Website and outward transparency
How can the website be improved to better inform non-insiders about planning, meeting outcomes, and focus group work?
7. Document control and version tracking
What document-sharing and tracking mechanisms are currently used, what are the main pain points, and what workable solution would improve transparency and efficiency?

Interview 2

A. Role, interface, and operating context

1. Role and evolution
Can you describe your role and responsibilities as Executive Secretary, and how the role has evolved over time?
2. What shapes your performance
What internal and external factors most affect your ability to deliver the role effectively?
3. Working with the Presidency
How do you work with the Chair and Vice-Chairs in practice (division of labour, coordination, decision support)?
4. Added value and boundaries
Where do you add the most value beyond administration, and where do sensitivities arise around role boundaries? Can you give an example?
5. Balancing institutions and regionalisation
What are the positive and negative aspects of balancing DG MARE expectations with regionalisation through Member States (e.g., Scheveningen)? Please give one example?

B. Governance, rules, and learning

6. Self-reflection and improvement
How does NSAC reflect on its performance and learn from mistakes? What tends to translate into change, and what does not?
7. Governance stress-test
What aspects of NSAC leadership and governance have been most tested recently? Looking back, what were the root causes of the dispute, and what clear process now exists to resolve similar conflicts if they escalate again (roles, escalation route, and decision authority in practice)?
8. Rules of Procedure in practice
Where do the Rules of Procedure create ambiguity or inconsistent interpretation, and what clarification would strengthen decision legitimacy? Can you give an example?
9. Any Other Business (AoB)
How is AoB used in practice, and what effect does it have on ownership, follow-up, and transparency?

C. Working environment and internal processes

10. Code of conduct impacts
What changes in behaviour or meeting dynamics have you observed since the 2023 code of conduct was introduced?

11. Cross-AC secretariat initiatives and ownership
Much work is increasingly operationalised across multiple ACs. How can these initiatives be integrated while maintaining NSAC member ownership and understanding?
12. Managing disagreement
What mechanisms does NSAC use to manage disagreement and still reach workable outcomes and consensus advice? Where do these mechanisms succeed, and where do they break down? Please give an example?
13. Training and support for Chairs
Why has chair training not taken place so far, and what would a minimal, realistic training package look like?

D. Representation, culture, and participation

14. Meeting culture and inclusion
How would you describe NSAC's meeting culture (formal and informal), including the shift toward online working? What supports participation and what unintentionally excludes people?
15. Withdrawal of OIG members
From your perspective, what factors contributed most to the loss of OIG participation? What actions has NSAC taken, and what has been the outcome?
16. Speaking time and collaborative spirit
Survey results indicate concerns about speaking time and collaboration. How has ExCom discussed this, and what measures have been tried? What worked, and what did not?
17. Coverage of membership types
How does NSAC ensure sufficient workplan time and attention across smaller and larger organisations, and across member types?
18. Role in supporting balanced representation
What is the Executive Secretary's role in supporting balanced representation in practice, and where are the limits of that role?

E. Priorities, workload, and delivery

19. Setting priorities and reactivating focus groups
How are priorities for work made and communicated, including decisions to reactivate dormant focus groups?
20. Breadth of topics vs reduced resources
As topics broaden and resources reduce, what approaches help NSAC maintain delivery and avoid overload?

F. Impact, visibility, and continuity

21. Soft impact and measurable impact
How does NSAC reflect "soft/gradual" impact versus more direct influence in its advice processes, Rules of Procedure, or public reporting?
22. Tracking of impact
How does NSAC track what happens to its advice after submission (uptake, feedback, and learning)?
23. Brexit Focus Group
What has the Brexit Focus Group achieved, and what criteria should determine whether it is still needed?

G. Closing question

24. One operational change to AC regulation

If you could advocate for one operational change to the AC regulation, what would it be, and why?

10.7 Background and positionality of reviewers

Mark Dickey-Collas is an independent marine natural scientist with expertise in fisheries science, science informed advice and ecosystem-based fisheries management and 30 years of experience in scientific and advisory roles. Mark has engaged professionally with many the of NSAC members over his career. He has had personal individual discussions with members of the executive board and secretariat during the performance review. Ellen Johannesen (PhD) is an interdisciplinary marine social science researcher at the Norwegian Institute for Water Research Denmark (NIVA DK), whose perspective is informed by extensive work at the science-policy interface on ecosystem-based management and ocean governance, including 14 years of experience at the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), where she contributed to international processes related to marine governance. Their familiarity with the ACs and the EU advisory and policy system provided valuable context.

Explicitly acknowledging the influence of their own positions on the interpretation and analysis of findings, the reviewers implemented measures to remain reflective and neutral throughout the process. Triangulation of sources and adherence to evidence-based methods were employed to mitigate potential biases and ensure the credibility of the conclusions drawn. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, the risk of error or misinterpretation cannot be entirely eliminated.

11. List of acronyms

AC / ACs	Advisory Council / Advisory Councils.
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy.
DA	Delegated Act.
DG ENV	Directorate-General for Environment.
DG MARE	Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries.
EP	European Parliament.
EU	European Union.
ExCom	Executive Committee.
FG / FGs	Focus Group(s).
GES	Good Environmental Status.
ICES	International Council for the Exploration of the Sea.
MAC	Market Advisory Council.
MS / MSs	Member State(s).

MSFD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive.
NGO / NGOs	Non-governmental organisation(s).
NSAC	North Sea Advisory Council.
NSCFP	North Sea Commission Fisheries Partnership.
NWWAC	North Western Waters Advisory Council.
OIG / OIGs	Other Interest Group(s).
OSPAR	OSPAR Commission / OSPAR process for the North-East Atlantic marine environment.
PELAC / PelAC	Pelagic Advisory Council.
PR	Performance review.
RoPs	Rules of Procedure.
STECF	Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries.
TAC / TACs	Total allowable catch(es).
ToR	Terms of Reference.
UK	United Kingdom.

Acronyms used mainly in Annex 2 and related meeting lists

CMO	Common Market Organisation.
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
EBCD	European Bureau for Conservation and Development.
EBFM	Ecosystem-based fisheries management.
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee.
EFARO	European Fisheries and Aquaculture Research Organisations.
EFCA	European Fisheries Control Agency.
EIFAAC	European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission.
EMFAF	European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund.
ETP	Energy Transition Partnership.
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization.
FMP / FMPs	Fisheries Management Plan(s).
LSF	Large Scale Fisheries.
MAP	Marine Action Plan.
MIACO/MIAC	ICES annual meeting with observers and Acs
MSCG	Marine Strategy Coordination Group.
MSE	Management Strategy Evaluation.
MSP	Maritime spatial planning.
NIVA DK	Norwegian Institute for Water Research Denmark.
PECH	European Parliament Committee on Fisheries.
UNOC3	Third United Nations Ocean Conference.

Terms of Reference NSAC Performance Review 2025

Background:

In June 2020, the NSAC Executive Committee resolved to conduct an internal performance review with a view to take stock of membership sentiment and provide recommendations for improved functioning. The internal performance review was launched at the end of 2020 and finalised in 2021. Please read the 2021 NSAC Performance Review Report [here](#).

In the 2022 Delegated Act, the Commission formalized the requirement for an independent performance review with the same aim. In accordance with the DA, the NSAC aims to conduct such a review in operational year 2024/2025.

Performance Review 2025

Objectives:

The aim of an external PR is to perform an external and objective assessment of the functioning of the internal bodies and procedures of the NSAC, focusing on the NSAC's

- **operational effectiveness** (what is done?),
- **efficiency** (how is it done?) and
- **coherence** (does it align with the EU provisions?).

The aim is also to identify challenges, issues to improve (or change), examples of good practices and finally, to receive possible recommendations and identify action points by the appointed Auditor.

TOPICS:

a) Functioning of the Executive Committee, Working Groups, General Assembly, Focus Groups, and Management Team meetings

- Relevance and coverage of the addressed topics
- Organisation of the meetings
- Participation and evidence-based input from members (both orally at the meetings and in writing through consultations)

b) Decision-making process

- Openness of the process to members
- Adequate time for discussion, consultation and adoption of drafts
- Reflection of the consensus views of the members in advice
- Reflection of minority and diverging views in advice
- Underpinning of advice with factual evidence, policy and/or science
- Use of written consultations and of urgent consultations
- Working environment (e.g., respect and professional behaviour)

c) Representation of different interests

- Balance between sector organisations and other interest groups (professionals fishers, trade unions, NGOs, recreational fisheries etc.)
- Balance between small and large organisations
- Geographical representation
- Common identity and sense of ownership
- Added value of membership and participation

d) Performance of the Chair, Vice-Chairs, Working Group and Focus Groups Chairs and the Secretariat

- Fulfilment of roles, duties and responsibilities
- Leadership/initiative, impartiality, and work environment
- Deliverance of work programme, optimisation of budgetary resources, timely transmission of documents and information,
- Compliance with rules of procedure

e) Relationship with the Institutions (European Commission and Member States)

- Satisfaction with the official replies and reaction to advice,
- Cooperation, including attendance in meetings,
- Influence of advice on EU policy-making

f) Transparency

- Publication and accessibility (to the members and to the general public) of documents on the website
- Information on membership composition

g) Contribution to the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy

- Long-term environmental sustainability, socio-economic benefits, availability of food supplies
- Efficient and transparent internal market & level-playing-field

Working Methodology & Schedule

- External consultant to attend the following meetings: TBD
- Analysis of applicable legislation, including the Common Fisheries Policy and the Commission Delegated Regulation on the functioning of the Advisory Councils.
- Analysis of existing documentation, including statutes, rules of procedure, guidelines, work programmes, adopted advice, replies to advice, and minutes of meetings.
- Inclusion on the mailing list, in order to consider official communications from the

- Secretariat to members and observers.
- Structured interviews with NSAC Chair, Vice-Chairs, Executive Secretary, members, European Commission representatives that coordinate or participate in NSAC work, active observers and Member States representatives.

Annex 1. List of all Focus groups during the evaluation period (2020–2024)

Date	Focus group	Place	Subject / key findings (brief)
12 Nov 2020	Windfarms	Online	Reviewed member comments and finalised advice on offshore windfarms; advice then passed through Ecosystem WG and ExCom and fed into PECH Committee deliberations.
1 Dec 2020	Control	Online	Discussed first draft of control/CCTV advice; agreed CCTV useful for Landing Obligation control, ETP bycatch monitoring and data collection; endorsed risk-based non-compliance assessment; Belgian fleet concerns noted; further meeting planned.
10 Dec 2020	Skates & Rays (NSAC/NWWAC)	Online	ICES WGEF presentation on skates and rays advice; Commission view on TAC methodology; debate focused on how discards are accounted for in advice.
17 Dec 2020	Control	Online	Resolved Belgian fleet objections; agreed CCTV is one tool (not essential) for monitoring the Landing Obligation; finalised advice and sent to ExCom for adoption; draft advice serves as record.
13 Jan 2021	Biodiversity (inaugural)	Online	Agreed Terms of Reference and forward plan for Biodiversity Strategy advice; Secretariat and Chair tasked with preparing framework text for next meeting.
19 Jan 2021	Skates & Rays (NSAC/NWWAC)	Online	Discussed Thornback Ray FIP, ICES WKSURVIVE and WKSHARKS5; reviewed wider elasmobranch projects (Raywatch, survivability, genetics, etc.); Commission updated group on new EU–UK/NO unit.
19 Jan 2021	Control	Online	Ironed out contentious parts of control/CCTV advice; finalised text for ExCom approval; draft advice treated as record of discussions.
20 Jan 2021	Technical Measures	Online	Agreed Terms of Reference; drafted responses to Commission questionnaire on evaluation of Technical Measures; Secretariat to convert responses into NSAC advice for ExCom written procedure.
21 Jan 2021	Brown Crab	Online	Collected national information on brown crab (legislation, vessels, capacity, gear); discussed exports to China and cadmium limits; considered trade trends and Brexit implications.
10 Feb 2021	Biodiversity	Online	Coordinated Biodiversity Strategy advice; agreed final Terms of Reference and extra inputs on sustainable marine environment, social benefits of MPAs, and positive fisheries–MPA interactions.
16 Feb 2021	Technical Measures	Online	Launched work on advice on directed fisheries; noted possible Scheveningen JR on directed plaice fishery as a key driver for further discussion.
24 Feb 2021	Biodiversity	Online	Reviewed latest draft of Biodiversity Strategy advice; agreed to continue collaborative drafting (Google Docs) and submit final advice to ExCom on 27 May.
2 Mar 2021	Landing Obligation	Online	Agreed Terms of Reference with three aims: prepare advice on 2022 Discard Plan, identify choke risks in North Sea demersal fisheries, and identify mitigation measures; longer-term work on CFP Article 15 noted; awaited guidance from Scheveningen Group.
4 Mar 2021	Skates & Rays (NSAC/NWWAC)	Online	Heard Raywatch and RayScan presentations, Irish survivability trials, and WMR work on sharks/rays; discussed Commission replies to undulate ray advice and prohibited list; considered ICES request on cat-3 methods, Thornback Ray FIP and use of discard survival data.

19 Mar 2021	Brown Crab	Online	Followed up questionnaire on national brown crab fisheries; exchanged information on science, animal welfare and supply chain issues; discussed latest data and potential management implications.
12 Apr 2021	Landing Obligation	Online	Discussed NSAC advice on Discard Plan: COVID impact on data, existing de minimis exemptions, potential new exemptions, and conditions for Nephrops/plaice derogations in Kattegat; stressed need for EU/UK regulatory conformity.
20 Apr 2021	Landing Obligation	Online	Reviewed and amended draft Discard Plan advice; agreed to submit to Scheveningen Group ahead of High-Level meeting; planned to resume work after TAC/quota and ICES 2022 advice.
28 Apr 2021	Biodiversity	Online	Considered further insertions to draft Biodiversity Strategy advice; concluded another FG meeting was needed before Ecosystem WG adoption.
6 May 2021	Biodiversity	Online	Coordinated additional input to Biodiversity Strategy advice; anticipated approval in June so advice could inform Commission Biodiversity Roadmap consultation.
12 May 2021	Brexit (PELAC Brexit)	Online	Discussed EU–UK negotiations and Specialized Committee on Fisheries; reviewed joint AC letter seeking AC inclusion; considered scenarios for PELAC forum and transfer of four quotas from NSAC; planned further meeting on Specialized Committee constitution.
17 May 2021	Biodiversity	Online	Continued coordination on Biodiversity Strategy advice, refining additional input with view to final approval and use in Commission Biodiversity Roadmap consultation.
7 Jun 2021	MSFD	Online	Heard DG ENV overview of MSFD and upcoming review/impact assessment; discussed policy scenarios; agreed to draft Terms of Reference and noted need for permanent Chair to steer MSFD advice.
8 Jun 2021	Biodiversity	Online	Further coordinated input to Biodiversity Strategy advice; agreed next meeting on 8 July to review latest draft in light of ICES advice on bottom-contacting gears.
14 Jun 2021	Brown Crab (MAC/NSAC)	Online	Exchanged information on brown crab landings, effort, recruitment, pathogens and ocean acidification; discussed possible protection measures.
8 Jul 2021	Biodiversity	Online	Agreed to acknowledge ICES advice on bottom-contacting gears in the Biodiversity Strategy advice; decided to move advice into Ecosystem WG and ExCom approval process.
8 Sep 2021	Landing Obligation	Online	Discussed scientific advice, potential choke situations and experience with CFP Article 15; agreed two-track work: choke-mitigation advice based on NWWAC tool, and separate advice collating members' landing obligation experience.
5 Oct 2021	MSFD	Online	Elected Sofie Smedegaard Mathiesen as permanent Chair; progressed Terms of Reference; agreed joint MSFD work with NWWAC; MSFD structure and GES descriptors explained by expert; recognised need for more expert input.
5 Oct 2021	Landing Obligation	Online	Developed NSAC Choke Identification Tool based on members' experience; prioritised choke work over Article 15 due to time; tool later considered by FG and approved by ExCom in November.
18 Oct 2021	MSFD	Online	Continued ToR finalisation and joint NSAC/NWWAC approach; heard further presentation on MSFD/OSPAR linkages and GES descriptors; reiterated need for ongoing expert engagement to support meaningful advice.

2 Dec 2021	Skates & Rays	Online	Considered Commission response to joint NWWAC/NSAC request; recalled 2017 STECF advice; discussed management options including seasonal closures, sub-TACs and technical measures.
8 Dec 2021	MSFD	Online	Reviewed and revised the first draft of advice on the MSFD; informed about the upcoming MSFD stakeholder conference and asked Secretariat to prepare a new draft.
5 Jan 2022	MSFD	Online	Received a summary of outcomes from the MSFD conference; incorporated key insights into the draft advice adjusted to North Sea specificities.
11 Jan 2022	Social Aspects	Online	Discussed new inclusions in the draft terms of reference; heard a presentation on careers in the seafood industry by Mary Campbell (BIM).
17 Jan 2022	MSFD	Online	Scrutinised the draft MSFD advice before consultation in the Ecosystem Working Group and Executive Committee.
15 Feb 2022	Social Aspects	Online	Dr Iliana Christodoulou-Varotsi presented on safety and social aspects of commercial fishing; group discussed the draft terms of reference and response to a questionnaire.
21 Feb 2022	Skates & Rays	Online	DG MARE updated on setting up a STECF expert working group; BIM survivability trial and several national projects presented; focus on filling knowledge gaps.
21 Feb 2022	CFP Report	Online	Approved Kenn Skau Fischer as Chair; agreed to contribute to the Commission's CFP functioning report using Commission and EP questionnaires.
4 Mar 2022	CFP Report	Online	Continued work on responses to Commission and EP questionnaires which formed the backbone of subsequent NSAC advice.
8 Mar 2022	Joint NSAC/PELAC small industrial species (preparatory)	Online	Agreed scope of a joint on small pelagic and industrial species, including species list, timelines, recipients of advice and chairing arrangements; NSAC to host meetings.
9 Mar 2022	Social Aspects	Online	AZTI presented the CABFishMAN project on small-scale fisheries and ecosystem-sensitive management; discussed and amended a draft submission on the fuel crisis.
14 Mar 2022	Climate Change	Online	Approved Alexandra Philippe as Chair; discussed framework and draft terms of reference; mapped climate change issues for NSAC advice with priority on decarbonisation of the fleet.
22 Mar 2022	Landing Obligation	Online	Finalised NSAC advice on the 2023 Discard Plan under Article 15 of the CFP; advice later submitted to the Scheveningen Group.
11 Jul 2022	Climate Change	Online	DG MARE presented EU funding possibilities for vessel retrofitting and climate adaptation/decarbonisation; members briefed on NSAC participation in the UN Ocean Conference.
1 Sep 2022	Skates & Rays	Online	Updated on STECF expert group; reviewed BIM trial and Dutch shark and ray research; approved letter requesting harmonised identification guides and discussed workshop terms of reference.
5 Sep 2022	Social Aspects	Online	Discussed draft advice and terms of reference; requested explicit mention of fuel crisis impacts on fleets; members invited to send written comments.

8 Sep 2022	Seabass	Online	Re-elected Chair; agreed terms of reference; discussed measures for 2023 and a seabass allocation tool.
15 Sep 2022	Climate Change	Online	Heard presentations on the REPowerEU strategy, wind propulsion options and energy efficiency measures; discussed implications for fishing fleets.
3 Oct 2022	Climate Change	Online	Finalised NSAC advice on decarbonisation of the fishing fleet and agreed to proceed via Executive Committee consultation procedure.
3 Nov 2022	NSAC Landing Obligation	Online	Addressed 2023 exemptions under the Scheveningen Discard Plan and preparations for the January 2023 Landing Obligation workshop; agreed to review current plan and future exemptions.
16 Nov 2022	NSAC/NWWAC Social Aspects	Online	Reviewed draft joint advice on social aspects of the CFP; discussed new terms of reference under NSAC chairmanship and identified further work steps.
30 Nov 2022	NWWAC/MAC/NSAC Brown Crab	Online	Presented status of the brown crab stock in Ireland; provided the basis for ongoing joint work on brown crab management.
8 Dec 2022	NWWAC/NSAC Skates and Rays	Online	Prepared the 2023 workshop; heard presentation on electromagnetic fields from offshore export cables and benthic elasmobranchs; noted Commission's response on harmonising ID guides.
13 Dec 2022	NSAC Landing Obligation	Brussels	Low attendance meeting used to finalise programme and logistics for the January 2023 Landing Obligation workshop.
20 Feb 2023	NSAC/NWWAC Social Aspects	Online	Focused on the harmonised safety regime for vessels ≥ 24 m (Directive 97/70/EC); exchanged views feeding into joint advice.
3 Mar 2023	NSAC/NWWAC Social Aspects	Online	Continued discussions on Directive 97/70/EC, highlighting the role of human error and use of AIS in accidents; these points were incorporated in the final advice.
23 Mar 2023	NSAC Landing Obligation	Online	Chair presented a list of post-2023 Landing Obligation exemptions; group debated evaluation of the North Sea Multiannual Plan; inputs fed into NSAC advice on the MAP and the LO.
27 Mar 2023	NSAC/NWWAC Social Aspects	Online	Considered Danish Occupational Health Services as a best practice case for vessel safety; example included in the joint advice on Directive 97/70/EC.
29 Mar 2023	NSAC Landing Obligation	Online	Elected Jakob Handrup as new Chair; discussed a possible future Landing Obligation workshop; series of meetings culminated in advice on the functioning of the Landing Obligation.
6 Nov 2023	NSAC/NWWAC Social Aspects	Online	Reviewed near-final draft advice on generational renewal and recreational fisheries; heard presentations from French organisations on marine safety, prevention and digital transition; refined texts accordingly.
7 Nov 2023	NSAC Technical Measures	Online	Addressed DG MARE questionnaire on evaluation of the Technical Measures Regulation; identified relevant national and EU projects on selectivity, ecosystem protection, capacity and fisher collaboration.
15 Dec 2023	NSAC/NWWAC Skates and Rays	Online	Joanne Morgan (ICES) presented latest ICES advice on selected elasmobranch stocks; meeting focused on drafting advice and planning next steps.

23 Jan 2024	NWWAC/MAC/NSAC Brown Crab	Online	Discussed Commission's response to earlier joint advice on brown crab and considered options for follow-up actions and further advice.
16 Apr 2024	NSAC Mapping of Fishing Grounds	Online	Discussed draft terms of reference; received a demonstration of the DTU Aqua online mapping tool; agreed to bring in further national presentations and EU MSP platform inputs to support advice.
11 Oct 2024	NSAC Mapping of Fishing Grounds	Online	Heino Fock presented the CRANIMPACT study on brown shrimp fisheries and habitats; Falke de Sager presented on the use of VISTools from a PO and fishers' perspective; discussed process for drafting the upcoming advice on Mapping of Fishing Grounds.
18 Oct 2024	NWWAC/NSAC Skates and Rays	Online	Joanne Morgan presented recently published ICES advice on skates and rays; DG MARE updated on TAC-splitting simulations, roadmap and timeline; group agreed to plan a workshop in Brussels for 2025.

Annex 2. List of external meetings during the evaluation period.

4 November 2021	Inter-AC Secretariats meeting	Online
11 November 2021	Meeting with Saudi Arabian delegation	Zoetermeer (NL)
17 November 2021	NSAC Executive Secretary lunch meeting with Europêche	Brussels (BE)
17 November 2021	NSAC Executive Secretary met with European Workers Transport Federation	Brussels (BE)
22 November 2021	Scheveningen Technical Group	Online
26 November 2021	Inter-AC Secretariats meeting	Online
29 November 2021	DG MARE Regionalisation study – focus group with AC Chairs and Secretariats	Online
2 December 2021	Blockchain webinar	Online
17 December 2021	MSFD Conference "Future of our Seas"	Online
18 January 2022	Inter-AC Chairs and Secretariats meeting	Online
19 January 2022	Inter-AC meeting	Online
10 February 2022	Inter-AC Brexit Forum	Online
15 February 2022	Scheveningen Technical Group	Online
16 February 2022	EcoScope (stakeholder workshop)	Brussels (BE)
25 February 2022	Inter-AC Secretariats meeting	Online
7 March 2022	SEAwisE/NSAC workshop on ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management in the North Sea	Online
8 March 2022	Preparatory meeting with PELAC on small industrial species FG	Online
10 March 2022	Meeting with Saudi Arabian delegation	Online
10 March 2022	Scheveningen Technical Group	Online
21-25 March 2022	OSPAR EIHA	Edinburgh (UK)
24 March 2022	Scheveningen High-level Group	Online

4 April 2022	EFCA Advisory Board	Vigo (ES)
4 April 2022	Scheveningen Technical Group	Online
14 April 2022	Webinar on CCTV in fisheries	Online
22 April 2022	Scheveningen High-level Group	Online
26 April 2022	WWF and S&D Webinar on offshore renewable energy	Online
29 April 2022	Inter-AC meeting	Online
5 May 2022	Inter-AC Brexit Forum	Online
10 May 2022	Virtual Workshop: impacts of seismic and offshore wind energy developments on fisheries (organised by NWWAC and PelAC)	Online
12 May 2022	Inter-AC Secretariats meeting	Online
20 May 2022	Scheveningen Technical Group	Online
30 May – 1 June 2022	Blue Bioeconomy Foresight workshop organised by EFARO	IJmuiden (NL)
31 May 2022	OECD Foresight Workshop on "The key shaping forces impacting the future ocean economy"	Online
2 June 2022	Inter-AC Brexit Forum	Online
3 June 2022	STECF EWG LO observers meeting	Online
10 June 2022	Stakeholders workshop "Functioning of CFP"	Brussels (BE)
22 – 23 June 2022	MIAC/O	Copenhagen (DK)
24 June 2022	Fisheries Science seminar	Brussels (BE) /hybrid
27 June -1 July 2022	UN Ocean Conference	Lisbon (PT)
30 June 2022	Inter-AC Brexit Forum	Online
4 July 2022	Scheveningen Technical Group	Online
12 July 2022	Presentation on Virtual Reality Simulator for Maritime Emergencies for fishing vessels	Brussels (BE)
26 July 2022	Meeting on the implementation of the Deep-Sea Access Regulation	Online
4 August 2022	Highly Protected Marine Areas in English Waters Meeting with European Stakeholders	Online
15 September 2022	Scheveningen Technical Group	Online
26-30 September 2022	STECF EWG 22-08: Skates and rays management	Brussels (BE)
13 October 2022	Scheveningen Technical Group	Online
20 October 2022	Inter-AC Brexit Forum	Online
24 October 2022	EFCA Advisory Board	Online
24-27 October 2022	OSPAR ICG-POSH	Leiden (NL)
15 November 2022	Stakeholder Workshop on MSFD review	Brussels, BE
17 November 2022	Inter-AC meeting: ACs and Commission	Online
22 November 2022	SmartFish H2020 mini-exhibition by SINTEF	Brussels, BE
24 November 2022	Scheveningen Technical Group	Online

5 December 2022	Roundtable discussion on fishing opportunities with Commissioner Sinkevicius	Brussels, BE
20 December 2022	Inter-AC Brexit Forum	Online
11 January 2023	Inter-AC Chairs and Secretariats meeting	Online
12 and 13 January 2023	MIAC/O	Copenhagen, DK and online
24 January 2023	Scheveningen Technical Group	Copenhagen, DK and online
20 February 2023	Scheveningen High-level Group	Copenhagen, DK and online
24 February 2023	Inter-AC Brexit Forum	Online
9 March 2023	Inter-AC meeting	Brussels, BE and online
20 to 24 March 2023	OSPAR EIHA	Trondheim, NO and online
23 March 2023	Scheveningen Technical Group	Copenhagen, DK and online
28 March 2023	European Parliament event on Pulse Fishing by MEP Peter van Dalen	Brussels, BE
31 March 2023	EFARO webinar on the future of bottom trawling	Copenhagen, DK and online
19 April 2023	EFCA Advisory Board	Vigo, SP
20 April 2023	Scheveningen High-level Group	Copenhagen, DK and online
11 May 2023	Marine Strategy Coordination Group (MSCG)	Brussels, BE
16 to 18 May 2023	ICES Workshop on Stakeholder Engagement Strategy	Copenhagen, DK and online
24 to 26 May 2023	European Maritime Day	Brest, FR
14 June 2023	Scheveningen Technical Group	Copenhagen, DK and online
16 June 2023	Joining Forces for the Energy Transition in EU Fisheries and Aquaculture conference	Brussels, BE
26 June 2023	AIPCE CEP webinar on the resilience of the fish processing industry and the EU food security	Online
19 July 2023	Inter-AC / Commission meeting: 2024 ICES advice	Online
19 July 2023	Scheveningen Technical Group	Copenhagen, DK and online
27 July 2023	NSAC/NWWAC Social Aspects FG	Online
6 September 2023	Commission meeting with DEFRA	Brussels, BE
7 and 8 September 2023	CIBBRiNA kick-off meeting	Amsterdam, NL
21 September 2023	'From Waves to Wisdom: Empowering Fishers through Sustainable Fisheries Training'	Brussels, BE
27 September 2023	Fish-X conference on digital transition in support of small-scale fisheries	Brussels, BE
29 September 2023	Understanding OECMs to achieve the 30 by 30 target	Brussels, BE
6 October 2023	Joint Special Group on the Marine Action Plan (MAP)	Brussels, BE and online
9 October 2023	Inter-AC Brexit Forum	Online
10 to 11 October 2023	EurOcean conference 2023	Vigo, SP
10 October 2023	Inter-AC meeting: ACs and Commission	Online
11 October 2023	Rethinking the allocation of fisheries catches for fairer and more sustainable decisions	Brussels, BE and online

19 October 2023	EFCA Advisory Board	Online
23 October 2023	Marine Strategy Coordination Group (MSCG)	Brussels, BE
2 November 2023	Interview on the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI)	online
14-16 November 2023	OSPAR ICG-POSH	Trondheim (NO) and online
21 November 2023	Interview on meta-organisations in marine governance by a PhD student from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) and visiting student at Stanford University	online
28 November 2023	DG MARE Workshop on Financing the Energy Transition for Fisheries and Aquaculture	Brussels (BE) and online
28 November 2023	European Parliament event “Is bottom fishing in the EU sustainable? A new perspective under the European Commission’s Action Plan”	Brussels, BE
7 December 2023	Roundtable with Commissioner Sinkevičius on 2024 Fishing Opportunities	Brussels, BE
8 December 2023	EFARO webinar on the need for and use of socio-data for fisheries management	Online
18 January 2024	MIAC	Copenhagen, DK
18-19 January 2024	MIACO	Copenhagen, DK
18 January 2024	Scheveningen Technical Group	Online
22-26 January 2024	STECF expert working group on technical measures (EWG 23-15)	Online
30 January 2024	EP Policy event “Connecting the dots for a circulate blue bioeconomy: from science to policy and regulatory solutions”	Brussels, BE
5 February 2024	Inter-AC Brexit Forum	Brussels, BE
6 February 2024	Inter-AC meeting: Commission	Brussels, BE and online
15 February 2024	AIPCE-CEP Webinar on Driving Sustainability across Seafood Supply Chains	Online
20 February 2024	STECF Scoping meeting on the socio-economic impacts of the Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems	Online
21 February 2024	Inter-AC meeting: Commission and DEFRA	Brussels, BE and online
21 February 2024	Scheveningen Technical Group	Gothenburg, SE and online
28 February 2024	Energy Transition Partnership’s workshop on Innovation and Research	Brussels, BE and online
29 February 2024	Inter-AC meeting on stakeholder engagement in ICES and STECF advice request formulation	Brussels, BE and online
19 March 2024	Fishers for the Future participatory event	Brussels, BE and online
20 March 2024	Scheveningen Technical Group	Gothenburg, SE and online
26 March 2024	CIBBRiNA Stakeholder Advisory Board meeting	Online
3 April 2024	DEMASK kick-off meeting	Zandvoort, NL
11 April 2024	Secretariats meeting on format of Inter-AC meetings and SE in ICES/STECF Advice request formulation	Online
12 April 2024	DG MARE workshop on financing the Marine Action Plan	Brussels, BE and online
15 April 2024	Inter-AC Secretariats meeting on EMD workshop organisation	Online
16 April 2024	Scheveningen Technical Group and High-level Group	Gothenburg, SE and online
19 April 2024	Energy Transition Partnership workshop on skills	Brussels, BE and online

23 April 2024	EFCA Advisory Board	Vigo, SP
24 April 2024	DG MARE workshop on rebuilding the European eel stock and sustainability of sectors	Brussels, BE and online
7 May 2024	Inter-AC meeting: CFP evaluation	Online
17 May 2024	Inter-AC Brexit Forum facilitated by NSAC	Online
30-31 May 2024	European Maritime Day	Svendborg, DK
11 June 2024	JPI Ocean Strategic Navigation Forum	Brussels, BE
12 June 2024	Scheveningen Technical Group	Gothenburg, SE and online
17 June 2024	DG MARE validation Workshop as part of the mid-term EMFAF evaluation study	Online
18 June 2024	Joint Special Group on the Marine Action Plan (MAP)	Online
5 July 2024	Inter-AC meeting: ICES advice	Online
16 July 2024	Scheveningen Technical Group	Gothenburg, SE and online
17 September 2024	UK-EU workshop on shared Channel king scallop stocks	Brussels, BE
18 September 2024	Inter-AC meeting: DEFRA on national Fisheries Management Plans	Online
19 September 2024	Inter-AC Brexit Forum	Online
20 September 2024	Fishers of the Future Workshop	Online
23 September 2024	Presentation of PECH Committee research on the EU Oceans and Fisheries Policy	Brussels, BE
25 September 2024	2024 Fisheries Science Seminar on Artificial Intelligence	Brussels, BE and online
25 September 2024	Scheveningen Technical Group	Lysekil, SE and online
1 October 2024	Coordination meeting Inter-AC workshop on Control with DG MARE	Online
4 October 2024	Inter-AC meeting	Online
10 October 2024	CIBBRiNA Stakeholder Advisory Board meeting	Online
15 October 2024	EFCA Advisory Board	Online
16-22 October 2024	Sciaena EBFM webinars "From Paradigm to Practice"	Online
21-25 October 2024	STECF Expert Working Group on the implementation of technical measures	Online
22-24 October	European Maritime Spatial Planning week	Marseille, FR
6 November	Confirmation hearing of Commissioner-Designate for Fisheries & Oceans	Brussels, BE
8 November	CIBBRiNA third joint webinar on fisheries bycatch	Online
12-14 November	OSPAR ICG MPA	Galway (IE) and online
14 November	EBCD Event "The Contribution of Fisheries and Aquaculture to Food Security"	Brussels (BE)
14 November	Marine Strategy Coordination Group (MSCG)	Online
26-27 November	Blue Mission Banos – Arena 3	Amsterdam (NL)
28 November	Secretariat visit to Wageningen University & Research to discuss advice on pulse with students	Wageningen (NL)
2 December	DG MARE debrief from EU-UK negotiations	Brussels (BE) and online

3 December	Roundtable meeting with ExCom Chair and Oceans Commissioner Costas Kadis	Brussels (BE)
5 December	EP hearing on “How scientific advice is developed for EU Fisheries Policy decisions”	Brussels (BE)
9 December	Webinar on “Capacity ceilings in EU fisheries – Barrier or opportunity for decarbonisation?”	Online
10-12 December	ICES workshop on Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for North Sea Herring	Copenhagen (DK)
11 December	ETP Workshop: strategic goals for a sustainable Large Scale Fisheries (LSF)	Brussels (BE)
16 December	DEFRA Update on UK Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs)	Online
9 January	DG MARE - ACs Coordination ahead of Control workshop	Online
13 January	Meeting with Commission ahead of MIRIA	Online
14 January	Fishers of the Future closing event	Brussels (BE) and online
22 January	MIRIA Debrief	Copenhagen (DK) and online
22 January	Scheveningen Technical Group	Online
23 January	MIAC meeting	Copenhagen (DK) and online
23-24 January	MIACO meeting	Copenhagen (DK) and online
28 January	MAC-SWWAC Workshop on Producer Organisations under the CMO	Brussels (BE)
4 February	Inter-AC Brexit Forum	Brussels (BE)
11 February	SURIMI workshop	Online
21 February 2025	High-level roundtable with Commissioner Kadis on the EU Ocean Pact	Brussels (BE)
21 February 2025	Scheveningen Technical Group	online
3-7 March	European Ocean Days	Brussels (BE)
3 March	POLITICO Event: Walking the Talk on the European Ocean Pact	Online
19 March	DG MARE Marine Expert Group	Brussels (BE) and online
20 March	Scheveningen Technical Group	Brugge (BE) and online
24 March	SEAwise Regional Review Workshop	Copenhagen (DK) and online
25-27 March	ICES Working Group on Stakeholder Engagement (WGENGAGE)	Copenhagen (DK)
25 March	SEADITO workshop	Online
31 March – 4 April	STECF Expert Working Group on Social Data in EU Fisheries	Online
7 April	Energy Transition Partnership: Segment Workshop on Large Scale and Distant Water Fleets	Brussels (BE)
7 April	Technical Group on Seabed	Brussels (BE)
8-9 April	Inter-AC meeting	Brussels (BE)
23-24 April	EFCA Advisory, 20th Anniversary, and Administrative Board	Vigo (ES)

23 April	Scheveningen Technical Group	Online
25 April	EIFAAC Stakeholder consultation on the draft European Cormorant Management Plan	Online
5 May	EESC/EBCD event 'On the road to UNOC3: How can the upcoming European Ocean pact advance ocean sustainability?'	Brussels (BE)
7 May	EFARO webinar on European eel management	Online
8 May	Marine Strategy Coordination Group (MSCG)	Brussels (BE)
12 May	Belgian and Dutch Permanent Representations event on the Future of Beam Trawling	Brussels (BE)
14 May	OR Else Midterm event	Zandvoort (NL)
21-23 May	European Maritime Day	Cork (IE)
27-28 May	EcoScope EBFM decision-support & MSP Challenge workshops	Brussels (BE)
3 June	Conference on Management Advice to Reduce Cormorant Predation Impacts hosted by Polish EU Council presidency	Brussels (BE)
16 June	ICES Next Generation Ecosystem Overviews (WKEO4)	Online
23 June	Workshop 'From the Green Deal to the Ocean Pact: Strengthening Policy Coherence for Our Most Ambitious Marine Goals'	Brussels (BE)
24-27 June	2025 People & the Sea Conference (MARE)	Amsterdam (NL)
24 June	ECO-CATCH	Hirtshals (DK)
30 June	Joint Special Group on the Marine Action Plan (MAP)	Online
30 June – 3 July	Seawise Symposium on Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management	Brussels (BE)
7 July	DG MARE-AC meeting on ICES Advice	Online
7 July	Inter-AC Brexit Forum	Online
8 July	DG MARE presentation on the evaluation of the landing obligation	Online
14 July	ETP Webinar – state of play and ACs input	Online
18 July	Scheveningen Technical Group	Online
9 September	FAO webinar: From science to solutions - The state of world's marine fishery resources	Online