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Meeting Report
European Maritime Day - 21-22 May 2026, Limassol, Cyprus
Workshop Title: Advisory Councils' Knowledge on Small-Scale Coastal Fisheries (SSCF), Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) and Co-management
Date: 22 May, 11:25 – 12:40
Location: Richard Hall, Carob Mill, Limassol, Cyprus

Opening Remarks:

Ms Rosa Caggiano (MEDAC) welcomed all participants and thanked the organisers for the opportunity to host the workshop within the framework of the European Maritime Day 2026 in Limassol. She then gave the floor to Commissioner Costas Kadis.

Commissioner Costas Kadis (European Commission) thanked the 11 Advisory Councils (ACs), describing them as the European Commission's closest collaborators and key partners in EU fisheries policymaking. He underlined the essential role of the ACs in providing sound, stakeholder-based advice to the European Commission and Member States.

The Commissioner stressed that the effectiveness of the Advisory Council system depends on two fundamental elements: the active engagement of all stakeholders and a shared commitment to mutual respect.

He noted that many ACs had contributed to the ongoing development of a Code of Conduct, which forms part of the broader work on guidelines for the functioning of the Advisory Councils. The contributions received are currently under review, and a draft Code of Conduct is expected to be presented at the next Inter-AC meeting on 15 July.

Commissioner Kadis reaffirmed that supporting small-scale fisheries remains a priority for the European Commission. He highlighted the tools already available to Member States, including: securing preferential access to territorial waters through Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP); allocating fishing opportunities under Article 17 of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) Regulation; simplifying access to funding; and reducing administrative burdens.

The Commissioner also emphasised the importance of preserving and integrating the knowledge of small-scale fishers. Referring to the Implementation Dialogue on Small-Scale and Coastal Fisheries held in November 2025, he recalled that participants had highlighted the value of projects involving fishers and community-led cooperation. Exchanges between fishers, public authorities, scientists and civil society were recognised as essential for addressing challenges such as competition for maritime space, geopolitical tensions, stock recovery and generational renewal.

Referring to the recently published evaluation of the CFP Regulation, Commissioner Kadis noted that while progress has been made in reducing fishing pressure, further efforts are still required to rebuild fish stocks. He called for a holistic approach to ocean governance that fully integrates fishers' expertise into ecosystem-based management.

Finally, he highlighted the importance of regionalisation within the CFP, noting that Joint Recommendations submitted by Member States with shared interests demonstrate how stakeholder involvement can successfully address regional and local challenges. He concluded by encouraging further collaborative initiatives and wished participants a productive workshop.

Ms Caggiano (MEDAC) thanked Commissioner Kadis for his encouraging remarks and for recognising the significant work carried out by the Advisory Councils over recent years. She noted that this recognition provides renewed motivation for the ACs to continue strengthening their cooperation. She then introduced the workshop agenda and speakers. A brief overview of the Advisory Councils was provided, together with a QR code giving participants access to further information on the role, structure and composition of the European Advisory Councils.

Presentations

Simone Niedermueller (WWF) a marine biologist and regional manager presented "Co-management and the RPOA SSF as an opportunity for embedding Local Ecological Knowledge in MSP"

Nicolas Blanc (Sciaena) fisheries and biodiversity Coordinator presented "Three examples from CCRUP ocean basins - west Atlantic, east Atlantic and Indian Ocean" and then for CCSUD "Co-management as a tool to sustainable octopus fisheries in the Algarve"

Christian Tsangarides (BSAC) Baltic sea AC Vice-Chair "Securing space for SSCF within a MSP context - a Baltic Sea case study"

Antonis Petrou (APMARINE) Marine Biologist / Scientific Advisor Pancyprian Association of Professional Small-Scale Fishers and member of MEDAC presented a "Case Study of Zygi Cyprus"

Q&A Session

Cable routes and offshore developments: participants asked whether submarine cable routes represent a significant concern for the small-scale fisheries sector.

Mr. Petrou explained that cable routes are generally not considered a major issue, as fishers have extensive knowledge of their fishing grounds and are well aware of the location of underwater infrastructure. According to his experience, cable routes have not generated significant concerns among small-scale fishers.

Mr. Tsangarides noted that offshore wind farms present a more complex challenge. In the Baltic Sea, co-management becomes particularly difficult where several Member States—and Russia—share fish stocks, making coordination across multiple governance systems highly complex.

Integrating local ecological knowledge and science: participants discussed how to achieve an appropriate balance between scientific knowledge and the practical experience of fishers.

Ms. Niedermueller stressed that Advisory Councils are not themselves co-management bodies but play an important consultative role. She emphasised that Local Ecological Knowledge should complement, rather than replace, scientific evidence. She also observed that local knowledge extends beyond fisheries management and Maritime Spatial Planning, encompassing cultural heritage, community identity and local traditions, all of which should be considered in decision-making.

Mr. Blanc added that while scientific research often originates in universities, fishers possess valuable observational knowledge gained through daily experience at sea. For example, fishers may immediately recognise the effects of unusual rainfall patterns on fish stocks even before these changes are scientifically documented. He also acknowledged that implementing co-management is challenging, particularly over large geographical areas.

He concluded by stressing that NGOs are not seeking to stop fishing activities, just as fishers are not seeking to deplete fish stocks. Instead, all stakeholders must work together to identify common solutions.

Mr. Petrou underlined that although fishers are not scientists, their observations should be recognised and valued. Mutual trust, he argued, is the foundation of successful co-management. He stressed the importance of genuine stakeholder engagement, noting that fisheries operate differently across regions and that local circumstances require tailored approaches.
He further observed that while stock recovery remains important, fisheries management must also address emerging challenges such as invasive species and climate change, which are profoundly affecting marine ecosystems. Fishers collect valuable observations every day, and these data should be better integrated into management processes.
Future of the fisheries sector: a participant raised concerns that Europe risks losing fishers rather than fish stocks.

Closing Remarks
Ms. Pocheau (CCSUD) highlighted that the case studies presented during the workshop clearly demonstrated the increasing complexity of spatial conflicts and competing maritime uses. At the same time, they showed that practical and inclusive solutions already exist.
She emphasised that early stakeholder involvement, the integration of Local Ecological Knowledge and long-term dialogue among fishers, scientists, public authorities and civil society are fundamental elements of effective and balanced marine governance.
She stressed that small-scale fisheries should be recognised not merely as stakeholders but as active partners in the implementation of Maritime Spatial Planning.
She thanked all speakers, participants, organisers and stakeholders for their valuable contributions and active participation throughout the workshop. She noted that the discussions would provide a strong basis for continued cooperation among the Advisory Councils and for future initiatives aimed at promoting more inclusive and sustainable marine governance.
She concluded by inviting participants wishing to learn more about the Advisory Councils—described by Commissioner Kadis as the European Commission's "closest collaborators"— to continue the discussion after the workshop and explore opportunities for future engagement