

MEETING REPORT

Meeting between ICES and Advisory Councils (MIAC) 2026

Date : 22 January 2026
Time : 09:00 – 12:00 hrs CET
Type meeting : Hybrid
Location : ICES, H. C. Andersens Blvd. 46, 1553 Copenhagen, Denmark
Chair : Merel den Held (PelAC) and Colm Lordan (ICES ACOM)

1. Welcome and introduction

Merel den Held and Colm Lordan welcomed the participants to the meeting.

2. BSAC: Ecosystem considerations - The BSAC would like to ask ICES for some insight into how ecosystem considerations are considered in the stock advice

Jarek Zieliński raised a question about the general changes in productivity in the Baltic and how it is this reflected in the models and ICES output. He inquired about how changes within the ecosystem (productivity, natural mortality, predators' abundance) are considered in the ICES advice. The BSAC was also curious on how Baltic Sea stock advice account for natural mortality including predators and to what extent is this predator-prey relationship reflected in ICES advice on fisheries management. He noted that this question was repeated from the previous year, as BSAC members requested a more detailed answer.

Dorleta Garcia took the floor to respond. She noted that ecosystem considerations could be integrated into assessments in two main ways:

1. Through biological parameters directly linked to stock productivity, such as natural mortality, weight, and maturity.
2. Through the Conservation Considerations sections, which contextualize ecosystem level pressures and constraints.

Variable natural mortality for herring, sprat, and eastern Baltic cod stocks is estimated using multispecies models that incorporate predator, prey dynamics, based on stomach content data.

She noted that the models did not represent the full food web, and that limited predation mortality was captured. Density dependence and competition are known to occur in some species and are typically reflected in changes in biological parameters or reduced recruitment.

For some stocks, such as cod, substantial changes in stock condition have been observed in recent years. These have been incorporated into the assessment through annual observations of weight, maturity, and length-at-age. Evidence has indicated that these changes were directly linked to the degraded state of the Baltic Sea ecosystem, and this was reflected in the Conservation Considerations sections. She concluded that the recovery of Baltic stocks would require an ecosystem-based approach.

Similar changes in productivity have been observed in other stocks and regions. ICES has started discussing how to improve the reference point framework so that it becomes more adaptive and responsive to productivity shifts.

Zieliński raised a question on mixed fisheries advice in the Baltic Sea. He noted that ICES had formerly informed the BSAC that a lack of experts prevented the advice from being developed. He wished to know if new experts had joined and requested an update on the state of play. The BSAC has set up a science focus group and invited ICES representatives to join.

Wolfgang Albrecht repeated the BSAC question to assess the impact of predation on the stock biomass.

The ACOM Chair responded that more time was needed to include predation in the stock assessment model. He added that once this is the case it would be included. He noted the great impact of predators on fish biomass in the Baltic. He added that the Our Baltic Conference had suggested developing rebuilding plans and that ICES was working with the Commission on this matter.

3. CCRUP: Would it be feasible to request an ICES data workshop or benchmark for *Beryx spp.* in ICES Subarea 10, and what would be the necessary steps to initiate such a process?

Jorge Goncalves highlighted the economic importance of *Beryx spp.* (alfonsinos) in the Azores. He inquired about requesting a dedicated data workshop on alfonsinos to ICES. His suggestion was that the workshop would allow for a review of the available scientific information, would explore the feasibility of conducting separate stock assessments, and would identify appropriate methodologies. He aimed at moving the stock's data category from category 5 to a higher category, enabling better-informed management decisions through more robust scientific advice.

Sarah Gaichas responded that the alfonsinos stock was currently assessed as a Northeast Atlantic stock (alf.27.nea) and noted the inconsistency of developing a benchmark focusing exclusively on Subarea 10. They reminded participants that the first step to carry out a benchmark was to clearly define its purpose: stock identification revision, reference point establishment or stock status assessment improvement.

The ICES Working Group on the Biology and Assessment of Deep-sea Fisheries Resources noted that the primary limitation for *Beryx spp.* was a lack of robust information on stock identification. The stock was currently classified as a category 5 stock and assesses jointly *Beryx splendens* and *Beryx decadactylus* in a single advice. Existing knowledge suggests that *Beryx spp.* form a Northeast Atlantic stock, migrating throughout their life cycle and occurring in Subarea 10 for part of that cycle. However, an alternative hypothesis suggests that while *Beryx decadactylus* may undertake large-scale movements, *Beryx splendens* could represent a potential fisheries management unit in the Azores, as all life stages are observed in the area.

Another key recommendation emerging from WGDEEP was the need to develop a reliable abundance index capable of representing exploitable biomass. The Azorean scientific survey time series contains gaps that currently prevent the application of the RFB rule. Exploratory CPUE analyses based on DCF data exist, but these indices are not yet considered sufficiently robust for use in advice.

Given these limitations, a data workshop appears to be the most appropriate and feasible initial step, rather than a full benchmark. Such a workshop could focus on:

- Clarifying stock identification hypotheses and data needs;

- Compiling, harmonising, and reconstructing historical catch and effort data, including information from countries that previously exploited *Beryx spp.* in the Northeast Atlantic;
- Evaluating the feasibility of developing standardized CPUE-based abundance indices using DCF and logbook data;
- Assessing whether Subarea 10 data could meaningfully contribute to the understanding of the wider Northeast Atlantic stock.

It was also noted that current fisheries for *Beryx spp.* appear to be largely restricted to the Azores, conducted by a small-scale fleet using hook-and-line gear. Under these circumstances, an abundance index derived from a well-defined reference fleet could potentially provide a reliable indicator of exploitable biomass. Stronger engagement with local fishers and improved access to detailed logbook information would be required to enhance data quality and to avoid continued penalization through highly precautionary catch advice.

She concluded that initiating an ICES data workshop focused on stock identification, historical data reconstruction, and abundance index development would be a logical and necessary precursor to any future benchmark process.

4. LDAC: Could ICES explain its advice on definition of ecosystem and biodiversity objectives for NEAFC to develop an EAFM?

Alexandre Rodriguez mentioned that the LDAC noted in its advice that NEAFC had made important progress at the last two Annual Meetings (2023 and 2024) towards an Ecosystem based Approach to Fisheries Management. NEAFC has requested ICES to provide advice on different approaches regarding the definition of ecosystem and biodiversity objectives. The LDAC wishes to understand better the pros/cons of the five scenarios proposed by ICES and have a more detailed focus on its implementation and next steps, if a scenario has already been decided upon by NEAFC by the time of MIAC. The LDAC would also be interested in getting more information on the ongoing collaboration of ICES with NEAFC and OSPAR on implementing a cross-sectoral ecosystem-based approach to NEAFC fisheries.

Simon Jennings responded that the advice had been adopted in 2024 and discussed by some NEAFC contracting parties on October 7th, 2025. No further requests or formal discussions have taken place in NEAFC since then. No formal preference for a way forward has been expressed by NEAFC at the present time but the pros/cons of each of the five scenarios are summarised in the report. ICES was unable to provide advice on operational objectives as it is beyond its competence and subject to NEAFC decision.

Alexandre Rodriguez thanked Mr. Jennings for his reply but showed concern on the lack of progress from NEAFC resulting in a non-decision at the last Annual Meeting 2025 on implementing EBAFM. He noted that RFMOs' work on EBAM is becoming increasingly important and more intertwined with fisheries management and highlighted that the recent update on ICES Ecosystem Overview on Northeast Oceanic Atlantic could be a good basis for information and guidance in this ecoregion. He concluded saying that the LDAC will continue monitoring the evolution of this work and table again this topic in future MIAC meetings if relevant.

5. NSAC – Climate and ecosystem informed advice for North Sea cod

Tamara Talevska referred to the NSAC January advice on climate-informed management of North Sea cod. It highlights that rising sea temperatures, shifting plankton dynamics, and habitat changes have resulted in a decline in cod survival within the southern North Sea and eastern Channel, as temperatures now frequently exceed the species' physiological tolerance range. The NSAC noted that current stock

assessments and management models did not incorporate these climate-driven effects. The NSAC wished to know how ICES could develop climate and ecosystem informed advice for North Sea cod.

Dorleta Garcia responded that to compute reference points (RPs), time series are truncated to account for regime shifts. They noted that recent research had provided evidence that environmental variables related to climate change (salinity and sea surface temperature) affected recruitment and could explain a substantial part of its variability. However, these factors were not yet incorporated into the current assessment or short-term forecast. Environmental drivers have been considered in long-term projections, but their integration into short-term forecasts (STF) remained uncertain, partly due to the challenges associated with predicting environmental variables, among other factors.

ICES concluded that it aims to further develop this area, particularly regarding time, varying reference points, not only for North Sea cod but more generally across stocks. Developments are expected in the coming years.

Michael Andersen raised a question on how the impact of current environmental conditions in the North Sea on cod spawning could be included in the stock assessment.

Garcia agreed that a change in reference point calculation would be needed. She noted that the short-term forecast for the southern substock had been changed to include productivity. She agreed that the reference points had not been changed.

Andersen regretted that the ICES advice aimed at rebuilding a stock for which the environmental conditions needed to rebuild it were not met.

Garcia responded that the stock's capacity to rebuild raised the question of who would decide whether a stock can or cannot be rebuilt. She agreed that the current productivity of the stock should be included in the advice.

Lordan concluded that implementing EBFM would be needed to discuss and address these issues.

6. NWWAC: Update on ICES work regarding data limited stocks

Following from the previous year's discussions, the NWWAC still views category 5 and 6 assessments as not fit for purpose. They question their use as a basis for setting fishing opportunities. Alexandra Philippe inquired about the progress made by ICES's Workshop on the Development of Quantitative Assessment Methodologies based on Life-history traits, exploitation characteristics, and other relevant parameters for data-limited stocks and on early stakeholder involvement in the ICES process.

Lordan responded that substantial work had been completed on data limited approached for category 4-6 stocks. Two promising approaches for stock status estimation and catch advice for category 4-6 stocks were further refined during the latest WKLIFE XIV workshop. Further work will be required before real life application. They concluded by highlighting the importance of stakeholder information when application to specific stocks was being considered.

Anne Cooper added that ACOM had asked the group to focus on categories 4, 5 and 6. In some cases, the advice could lead to being too precautionary or not precautionary enough. ICES had worked on developing empirical rules to provide precautionary advice on data limited stocks. External funding has been secured on data limited stocks, ICES hopes to be able to use these rules by the autumn.

John Lynch welcomed the work from ICES on category 4, 5, and 6 stock, he added that analytical assessments may not be achievable for these stocks. He regretted the continued application of the precautionary buffer leading to zero-TAC advice. He suggested finding an alternative to avoid these stocks becoming choke species.

Lordan replied that the impacts of the precautionary buffer on the landing obligation and on choke species was well understood. He regretted that many stocks were category 5 or 6 stocks, which led WKLIFE to work on developing empirical rules to be used. He noted that discussions should happen with management authorities to prioritise stocks that need an analytical assessment.

Cooper added that managers oversaw setting management objectives that were to be used in the Harvest Control Rules. She added that the models would only come to ensure that the HCR can be considered as precautionary. She invited fishers to provide data to support the development of the models.

Philippe sought clarification on the precautionary buffer, wishing to know if ICES or managers suggested the approach.

Lordan responded that the application of the precautionary buffer was part of the ICES advisory framework for data limited stocks. He added that ACOM was responsible for providing precautionary advice in a context where data was limited, the buffer is the application of the precautionary approach to data limited stocks.

Andersen supported the comments provided by Lynch.

Zieliński requested ICES to keep the AC Secretariats updated.

7. PelAC: Can ICES provide more insight on the scientific data that led to consider the 2017-2024 recruitment assumptions as the most plausible low productivity scenario for mackerel? Can ICES provide more information on the decision process around the approval of ICES advice?

Merel den Held mentioned that the PelAC attended the Advice Drafting Group for widely distributed stocks and was made aware of the use of ICES guidelines to set fishing opportunities for 2026. The lowest productivity scenario was selected for the Short-Term Forecast, and the ADG selected to use the average recruitment over 2017-2024 instead of over 2014-2024. The PelAC inquired about the reasoning behind such decision.

Dorleta Garcia responded that the recruitment estimated using the WG proposed time window led to a forecasted recruitment that was considerably higher than the levels observed in the most recent three years. This time window followed the method defined at the benchmark for use under normal circumstances. However, the stock is currently below Blim, and the reduced productivity must be reflected in the forecast, as agreed by ACOM during the March meeting.

She recalled that during the March ICES ACOM, it was emphasised that when a stock falls below Blim, the assumptions selected for the STF must reflect the current productivity of the stock. This approach aims to avoid producing a zero-catch advice whenever stocks are below Blim.

After the WG meeting, a more detailed evaluation of the implications was conducted, and it was found that an alternative time window (since 2017) produced a recruitment estimate consistent with recent observations.

Garcia stressed that when a stock is below Blim, special ACOM approved rules apply that led to the choice of the 2017-2024 assumptions.

Dominic Rihan thanked Garcia for her response. He stressed that the science of the advice was not being criticised, but that however, the process surrounding the advice and the lack of transparency was pointed out as a concern by stakeholders. He noted that the WGWIDE report highlighted that no scientific justification could be found to change the recruitment assumptions. He added that the benchmark report, the stock assessment report recommendations were overturned by ADG and ACOM. He raised a question on decision making process between the Expert Working Group, the Advice Drafting Group and the Advisory Committee.

Garcia responded that the guidelines had not been made publicly available before the meeting. The process was described as transparent as it was recorded in the ADG minutes, she added that decisions similar to the one taken on mackerel had been taken on other stocks by the ADG. She highlighted that the role of the ADG is to apply the guidelines from ACOM. She referred to a study from ACOM that noted a tendency from ICES advice to overestimate SSB when the stock was below Blim. To avoid setting a zero-TAC advice, ICES suggested the use of the guidelines.

Paul Thomas noted that the process was confusing from a stakeholder perspective. He noted that ICES process and ICES advice were based on best available science. Reading through the benchmark report on mackerel, the rationale behind choosing the 2014-2024 period is due to a change of productivity observed around the stock in 2014 with stable lower recruitment and recruits per spawner observed. He added that the WGWISE report noted that no scientific justification could be found to change the starting year of the recruitment assumptions. During the ADG meeting, it was suggested that recruitment assumptions could be changed, and this approach was approved by ACOM. Mackerel was highlighted to be a key stock for all Coastal States fishers. Thomas raised a question on the hierarchy between the benchmark report, the working group, ADG and ACOM in the science behind the advice.

Lordan clarified the ACOM procedures for developing advice, explaining that working groups first conduct assessments, compile evidence, and generate forecasts. An independent Advice Drafting Group (ADG) then reviews this output to ensure alignment with ACOM procedures. In this case, the initial advice did not comply with the ACOM decision from March 2025, partly due to delays in publishing the ACOM report and guidelines, though both the Working Group and ADG members were aware of the decision.

Lordan addressed concerns about transparency, noting that while working groups are not directly transparent to PelAC, the ADG (where observers are present) serves as the first point of transparency. The discussion on recruitment assumptions took place in the ADG, where it was determined that the previous ACOM guidelines (which would have resulted in zero advice due to sensitivity to recruitment assumptions) had been updated. The new guidance allowed for the most plausible recruitment assumption to be used, provided there was a 50% probability of staying above Blim, leading to catch advice based on that assumption.

The recruit-per-spawner analysis from the benchmark suggested an even lower recruitment assumption, but the ADG adopted a middle-ground scenario between the working group's proposal and the stricter alternatives (zero advice or a significantly lower recruitment assumption). Lordan emphasized that ACOM ultimately approved the ADG's decision, with full confidence that it aligned with guidelines and was the most appropriate approach given the mackerel stock's challenging situation.

Lordan also noted that ADG adjustments to recruitment assumptions or forecast settings are not unusual, this is a standard part of the ADG's role. He acknowledged that while procedures are well-documented, they may not be fully understood by all stakeholders. He concluded by expressing hope for improvement in the mackerel stock and reaffirmed that the advice provided was the most suitable under the circumstances.

8. **SWWAC: How should we improve scientific knowledge, both environmental and socio-economic, so that there is complete and sufficient information for each type of fishing gear, so that the regulations are as fair and appropriate as possible when implementing fishing closures in VMES?**

Sergio López inquired about the ICES advice supporting Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1614 on protecting Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems.

Simon Jennings responded that the advice is being continuously improved in line with the benchmark process. A benchmark is being planned for late 2027 to carry out the following actions:

- Reviewing quality of historic data
- Impacts of static gear (WGDEC ToR and dedicated WK in 2026)
- Reviewing VME index and use of predictive habitat modelling to determine where VME are likely to occur (WK in 2025 and 2026)
- Increasing transparency of analysis
- Assessing consequences of spatial scales of analysis

Jennings noted that a workshop dedicated to static gear impacts will feed into the process.

Sergio López expressed concern that by 2027, when all relevant data becomes available, the longline fleet may no longer exist due to economic unviability and lack of interest from vessel owners and fishers. He noted that three years after the regulation's approval, a significant shift had already occurred, with many longline vessels transitioning to more efficient trawl fleets, which have greater fishing capacity. This shift risks leading to overfishing in fishing grounds, requiring future corrective measures.

López regretted the slow pace of decision-making, which he feared would come too late for the longline fishery, a sector he described as the most selective. Despite these challenges, he reaffirmed his willingness to collaborate and participate in workshops to provide the essential information needed for informed decision-making.

Jennings responded that drafting advice required inputs from experts and the involvement of a large community of experts requiring time to draft the advice.

9. [SWWAC – How effective are the measures to restock the European eel \(*Anguilla anguilla*\) implemented by Member States as part of their national management plans, as provided for in Regulation \(EC\) No 1100/2007?](#)

Marie-Julie Roux responded that the net benefit of restocking to the reproductive potential of the eel stock remains unknown and unquantifiable. Previous evidence showed that restocking could increase local abundance and silver eel escapement, however no firm scientific evidence shows that restocking provides a net benefit to the overall spawning stock. ICES pointed out that restocking conflicted with stock conservation goals due to its reliance on catches of silver eel, further increasing the fishing mortality of eel. On this basis, ICES reiterated its advice that, based on the precautionary approach, fishing for the purpose of restocking should not be allowed. In cases where restocking still occurs, ICES advises that MS need to quantify and report the mortalities affecting the stocked eels, as well as the escapement generated by those eels. The 2025 ICES advice on European eel throughout its natural range, again stated there should be zero catches of glass eels for restocking purposes in 2026.

10. [PelAC - Can the raw survey data inputted in the boarfish be re-examined and lead to an in-year update?](#)

Lordan responded that requirements for a reissue of advice were linked to the discovery of an error in the data and/or assessment, which has yet to be the case. The survey's time series was fully reviewed and revised for the benchmark in 2024, and no errors were found with the data from surveys conducted since this time. ICES noted the reduction of the 2025 acoustic survey compared to the previous year and the possible contradiction with the IBTS index. However, the model uses the groundfish index for length composition and the acoustic survey to assess increases in biomass. ICES remained open to rectifying the data error if detected.

Rihan thanked Lordan for his responses, he added that the survey and the assessment did not match what fishers saw on the ground. The concerns about the survey were expressed by both fishers targeting boarfish and by fishers trying to avoid catches of boarfish.

11. NWWAC- How does ICES assess if the advice is sufficiently precautionary in the framework of the advice requesters policies?

Lordan responded that their aim was to provide advice that is sufficiently precautionary based on the different requesters' legal and policy framework. The precaution in advice is implemented through the ICES framework: the F_{MSY} reference points are defined using long-term simulations such that the probability of SSB being below B_{lim} is less than 5% i.e. $p(SSB < B_{lim}) < 5\%$ when applying the ICES Advice Rule. Reference points and frameworks are constantly evolving and improving to provide best available science that remains precautionary according to updated standards.

Philippe raised a question on ICES's assessment of requester's regulatory framework. She wished to know if ICES assessed whether the framework was aligned with the precautionary approach.

Lordan responded that ICES only provides advice that is aligned with the precautionary approach.

12. LDAC - Could ICES provide an update on their 5-year review work on Spatial measures for conservation of habitats and species in NEAFC RA?

Simon Jennings responded that they would be conducting a 5-year review (2019-2024) of VMEs in NEAFC RA. ICES will provide advice on whether significant adverse impacts on VMEs are still considered likely in all the closed areas under Article 5.2 of NEAFC Recommendation 19:2014; and whether extension of prohibition to fish shall be required in all the areas beyond 31 December 2027. New information on vulnerable habitats and fisheries activities in the NEAFC regulatory áreas is available here: <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27043537>

Alexandre Rodriguez noted that ICES advised maintaining closures to bottom contacting gears to protect VMEs. He wished to have additional information on the ICES comment that evidence is lacking to ensure effective protection of VMEs. ICES also added that more accurate data on gear types used in NEAFC regulated areas to complement VMS data. He wished to know the improvements that could be expected with additional data.

Simon Jennings responded that due to the lack of gear type data, the risk of significant adverse impacts cannot be assessed. Regarding additional gear type data, Jennings noted that NEAFC data does not include gear type, meaning ICES cannot carry out the same analysis as for the European Commission on VMEs. However, ICES expect to have such access to gear type information in the future subject to mandate from NEAFC.

13. CCRUP - How can empirical data from small-scale local fisheries be better integrated into ICES stock assessment models?

Sarah Gaichas responded that data collection is being carried out by local experts/institutions, they however remained available to provide advice on how to carry out data collection programmes.

Rui Catarino added that for some stocks fishing organisations worked in coordination with scientific institutes to develop data collection plans. He suggested reaching out to the national institute in charge of the stock to develop a data collection scheme

Goncalves thanked Gaichas and Catarino for their input.



Wendell Medeiros noted that for small scale fishers may face issues in providing data. In this case, he added that using the logbooks and engaging with the Data Collection Framework would work towards improving data availability for catch advice.

Neil Campbell added that ICES was involved in a project on spatial data for small-scale fishers: EM4SSF. Moreover, ICES has its own spatial fisheries data working group that aims to develop tools to handle logbooks and spatial data for SSCF.

14. BSAC - Update on the work on mixed fisheries advice in the Baltic Sea for pelagic and demersal fisheries

Lordan responded that a lack of request from advice requesters and a lack of experts sent by the scientific institutes meant that they no longer worked on this matter.

Zieliński noted with no request from the Baltic Member States, ICES would not develop a mixed species fisheries advice for the Baltic Sea. He added that the BSAC had requested from ICES the inclusion of the socio-economic impact of each catch advice options.

Waniewski posed a question regarding ICES data on whether temporary restrictions or closures of fishing opportunities in the Baltic Sea have led to improvements in the quality and condition of Baltic cod stocks. The speaker sought clarification on whether these management measures have had a positive impact on the health and recovery of the species.

Christian Tsangarides raised a question on the use of eDNA, he wished to know if ICES had published a recommendation on its use within the ICES framework.

Lordan outlined ongoing efforts in the Baltic Sea, highlighting the extensive research conducted by institutes in the region. However, the key challenge remains integrating this research into operational advice for fisheries management. The focus of current projects is to leverage existing knowledge, such as multi-species and ecosystem models, which have primarily been used in project-based contexts and scientific publications, and apply it to guide management decisions more effectively. Both ACOM and SCICOM are working to align experts and foster collaboration to address this challenge.

Lordan acknowledged resource constraints, including funding limitations for research and monitoring, which are expected to worsen in the future. He emphasized the need to rationalize efforts and focus on the most critical questions. Collaboration with BSAC was proposed to align scientific priorities with those of advice requesters and the broader ICES community to tackle the significant challenges in the Baltic Sea.

Regarding Baltic cod stock improvements, Lordan noted a gradual increase in the Eastern Baltic cod population based on assessments. However, ICES has not specifically evaluated the effectiveness of spatial and temporal management measures, as this is a complex scientific question. The reduction in commercial fisheries has also led to a decline in data availability, making it harder to assess stock responses to management measures accurately.

On eDNA, Lordan mentioned ongoing research into its use for bycatch monitoring and stock identification, though it remains at a proof-of-concept stage rather than operational. Non-eDNA genetic sampling programs are already in place for several Baltic stocks, such as Western and Eastern Baltic cod and herring, and genetics and genomics are increasingly being used as operational tools to better understand stock dynamics. Lordan expressed openness to leveraging these technologies as they mature.

15. Close of meeting and next meeting

The PelAC Executive Secretary announced that the next Advisory Council in line to organise the 2027 MIAC meeting is the Long Distance Fleet Advisory Council (LDAC).

Lordan mentioned that ICES will come back in writing to the additional questions.

Merel den Held thanked ICES for hosting the MIAC meeting and all participants for their participation.

