MIAC 2026

Coordination meeting between ICES and the Advisory Councils

Date : 22 January 2026

Time : 09:00 – 12:00 hrs CET

Type meeting : Hybrid

Location : ICES, H. C. Andersens Blvd. 46, 1553 Copenhagen, Denmark

Connection : ZOOM link

Chair : Merel den Held (PelAC) and Colm Lordan (ICES ACOM)

Interpretation : This meeting will have interpretation in DE/EN/ES/FR/PL/PT
In order to work you will need to bring your own headset and laptop

All times are local Copenhagen time (CET)

09:00		Welcome and introduction
09:10	BSAC	Ecosystem considerations - The BSAC would like to ask ICES for some insight into how ecosystem considerations are considered in the stock advice.
09:25	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 ?
09:40	LDAC	Could ICES explain its advice on definition of ecosystem and biodiversity objectives for NEAFC to develop an EAFM?
09:55	NSAC	Climate and ecosystem-informed advice for North Sea cod
10:05	NWWAC	Update on ICES work regarding data limited stocks
10:20		*Break*
10:40	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?
10:55	SSWAC	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?

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Additional in session questions if time allows

11:10	SSWAC	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?
11:15	PelAC	Can the raw survey data inputted in the boarfish be re-examined and lead to an in-year update?
11:20	NWWAC	How does ICES assess if the advice is sufficiently precautionary in the framework of the advice requesters policies?
11:25	LDAC	Could ICES provide an update on their 5-year review work on Spatial measures for conservation of habitats and species in NEAFC RA?
11:30	CCRUP	How can empirical data from small-scale local fisheries be better integrated into ICES stock assessment models?
11:35	BSAC	Update on the work on mixed fisheries advice in the Baltic Sea for pelagic and demersal fisheries
11:40		Conclusion & 2027 MIAC Coordination
12:00		End of meeting

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Annexes

1. Short explanation on the first agenda items
2. Short explanation on the agenda items if time allows
3. Questions for ICES for written answers

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Annex 1

Short explanation on the first agenda items

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

In particular, the BSAC would like to raise the question of the general changes in productivity in the Baltic and how is this reflected in the models and ICES output. How changes within the ecosystem (productivity, natural mortality, predators' abundance) are considered in the ICES advice (reply during the meeting); The BSAC is also again curious on how Baltic Sea stock advice account for natural mortality including predators. To what extent is this predator-prey relationship reflected in ICES advice on fisheries management? This question is repeated from last year, as the BSAC members would request a more detailed answer.

2 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 ?**

Given the economic importance of *Beryx spp*. (alfonsinos) in the Azores, we believe it is necessary to consider a dedicated data workshop. Such a workshop would allow for a review of the available scientific information, explore the feasibility of conducting separate stock assessments, and identify appropriate methodologies. This could improve the knowledge base for *Beryx spp.* and potentially allow the stock to move from category 5 to a higher category, thereby enabling more robust scientific advice and better-informed management decisions.

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

If already agreed by NEAFC, could you elaborate on the methodology, content and next steps of the specific approach/scenario chosen for achieving the operational ecosystem objectives?

The LDAC notes in its advice that NEAFC has made important progress at the last two Annual Meetings (2023 and 2024) towards an EAFM, by requesting ICES to provide advice on different approaches regarding the definition of ecosystem and biodiversity objectives. The LDAC supports this pathway as a way to implement EAFM. While NEAFC has not yet developed a comprehensive ecosystem approach framework like its neighboring RFMO the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO), it is taking steps by requesting scientific advice from ICES and exploring operational biodiversity and ecosystem objectives.

Regarding ICES advice on approaches to operational ecosystem objectives assessing five approaches to indicate which should be prioritized, the LDAC recommends that NEAFC assess these scenarios and choose one that achieves the appropriate balance between feasibility and ambition in whatever approach its parties select from those suggested by ICES, showing consistency with existing frameworks such as OSPAR.

The LDAC wishes to understand better the pros/cons of the five scenarios proposed by ICES and, if decided already a favoured one by NEAFC by the time of MIAC, have a more detailed focus on its implementation and next steps.

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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.

4 NSAC **Climate and ecosystem-informed advice for North Sea cod**

In January, the NSAC issued advice on climate-informed management of North Sea cod, highlighting 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. Current stock assessments and management models do not incorporate these climate-driven effects. The NSAC therefore recommends integrating climate and ecosystem factors into fisheries advice, enhancing real-time environmental monitoring, and promoting cross-disciplinary scientific collaboration to move beyond a solely model-based approach. Given ongoing ocean warming, the recovery of the southern cod sub-stock to historical levels appears unlikely. Focus should be instead on realistic recovery objectives, the sustainable use of healthier northern stocks, and advancing scientific research to better understand stock mixing (e.g., via tagging/genetic studies) and assess the effectiveness of current spatial measures. Without such evidence-based adaptation, there is a risk of implementing management actions driven more by political considerations than by scientific evidence.

5 NWWAC **Update on ICES work regarding data limited stocks**

Following from last year's discussions, NWWAC still feels that category 5 and 6 assessments are not fit for purpose and should not be considered as a basis for setting fishing opportunities. What progress has been made in WKLIFE? Is early stakeholder involvement being considered to reflect the realities on the ground?

6 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?**

In the dramatic context surrounding the 2026 advice for mackerel, the PelAC, by attending the Advice Drafting Group was made aware of the use of ICES guidelines to set fishing opportunities for 2025. These guidelines suggest that when the stock is below Blim, fishing opportunities should be set in order to ensure that the SSB can recover above Blim in the year following the assumption year with more than 50 % probability. This should be done using the most plausible low productivity scenario. 2 recruitment assumptions were presented to the ADG participants to meet the low productivity scenario requirement, either using 2014-2024 time period or 2017-2024 time period to compute the average recruitment. The ADG decided to use the 2017-2024 time period. The PelAC would like to better understand the decision process leading to the final decision.

7 SSWAC **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?**

The Implementing Regulation 2022/1614 (EU) approved fishing closures in 87 areas of European waters for all fishing gear known as 'bottom gear', despite the fact that there was

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no differentiated impact data for each type of fishing gear. The impact of these measures has been considered by some fleets, such as the longline fleet, very disproportionate, since with the methodology used, of the 16,500 km2 closed, only 32% (5,200 km²) was an area with potential VME to be protected and 68% (11,300 km²) was an area subject to the trawling buffer, which has had a major socio-economic impact on some fleets and ports. In view of the possible revision of this Regulation by the European Commission, it is essential to have the best scientific information available on fishing methods and their real impact.

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Annex 2

Short explanation on the agenda items if time allows

8 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?**

The EC Regulation No 1100/2007 establishing measures for the recovery of European eel stocks at the Union level requires each Member State involved to draw up and implement a national management plan aimed at addressing all causes of eel mortality. It also stipulates that EU Member States authorising the fishing of eels less than 12 cm in length must reserve 60% of their production for restocking European waters since 2013. Member States that have chosen to develop a national European eel restocking programme as part of their management plan are required to produce and provide reports on the implementation and effectiveness of their programmes. Supported by some, backed by scientific studies, or criticised by others, opinions differ on the effectiveness of restocking, leaving room for doubt. While Regulation No. 1100/2007 will soon have been in force for 20 years and an ICES stock assessment benchmark is on the horizon for 2026-2027, the issue has still not been the subject of an in-depth, wide-ranging scientific study on this 'emergency measure' aimed at accelerating the recovery of the European eel population. The implementation procedures to make these measures effective are still not the subject of clear and shared guidelines. Is ICES capable of conducting such an analysis?

9 PelAC **Can the raw survey data inputted in the boarfish be re-examined and lead to an in-year update?**

The PelAC notes that the ICES advice for 2026 appears to be driven by the single 2025 acoustic survey data point, which was 36% (158 000 tonnes) lower than the 2024 estimate. Furthermore, the PelAC notes this level of reduction is not supported by the recent catches of the stock and contradicts the other indices including those from the IBTS survey in the assessment, which indicated an increase in biomass. The PelAC has requested that the raw survey data be re-examined to ensure that no errors have been made. Additionally, the PelAC urges the Commission and ICES to allow for an in-year update to the advice and TAC if the 2026 acoustic survey aligns with historical norms—confirming the 2025 data as an outlier. This may permit expanded fishing opportunities in Q4 2026.

10 NWWAC **How does ICES assess if the advice is sufficiently precautionary in the framework of the advice requesters policies?**

ICES advice is based on clients' requests and must be consistent with their policy objectives and frameworks, e.g. EU MAP. How are assessments in relation to the precautionary approach carried out?

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

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In particular, does ICES intend to fully incorporate the new scientific tools species (i.e. species distribution modelling - SDM and habitat suitability modelling - HSM into their VME advice production process?

The definition and need for protection of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) from bottom fishing was established in UN General Assembly Resolution 61/05 in 2006. The identification and protection of VMEs through VME Closed Areas (VME-CAs) has become a well-developed policy in NEAFC, with monitoring, control and surveillance mechanisms to ensure compliance and a robust scientific peer review process carried out by ICES.

The role of ICES is to provide scientific and technical advice underpinning VME candidate areas and to regularly monitor the biological effectiveness of these areas. As a result, ICES has produced advice on areas where VMEs are known to occur or are likely to occur in EU waters and also provides recurring annual advice on the presence of VMEs in NEAFC waters and as described above, NEAFC has protected multiple VME areas since 2008.

The NEAFC VME-CAs were brought under a single management instrument in 2014 (Rec 19: 2014) and this instrument also commits the parties to review its implementation on a five-year basis. The last iteration of this review was in 2024.

The LDAC is interested to know what the state of play of the VMEs in light of the last review released by ICES in 2024 is, in particular on implementation of new scientific tools species into their VME advice production process.

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

In the Azores, despite the efforts of the fisheries sector and voluntary management measures in some islands, it has been difficult to manage the current quota of red seabream (*Pagellus bogaraveo*). This species is highly valued commercially, yet has faced repeated quota reductions, affecting the local fisheries sector. Similarly, *Beryx spp*. remain in category 5, leading to precautionary approaches and continuous cuts that are increasingly unsustainable for local fishing communities. Improved integration of empirical data from small-scale fisheries into ICES stock assessments could help strengthen the knowledge base and provide more realistic and regionally adapted management advice.

13 BSAC **Update on the work on mixed fisheries advice in the Baltic Sea for pelagic and demersal fisheries**

Last year ICES explained that there was a lack of appropriate data and of expertise to prepare Baltic mixed fisheries advice. In 2023, the experts in the Baltic mixed fisheries have participated in the ICES work.

Were there any results from this? Was it possible to find new experts to work on the matter? When could we expect the ICES advice to take account of species interactions?

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Annex 3

Questions for ICES for written answers

1 BSAC **The BSAC agrees that the current system of scientific advice should include more options and include an explanation of the consequences of each option. Requests to ICES should also better cater for ecosystem-based fisheries management. The advice should also reflect the changes in the ecosystem. There is an obvious need for better understanding of relevant processes, including predation, consequences of climate change, regime shift etc. and their impact on productivity of the ecosystem. Is ICES able to provide such advice?**

2 CCRUP **How does ICES currently integrate or take into account the socioeconomic dimensions in the assessment of fisheries and of the restrictions on local communities?**

In the Azores, due to the implementation of the Azores Marine Protected Areas Network (RAMPA) and the reduction of TACs, it was necessary to assess the socioeconomic impact of these measures on local fishing communities.

3 NWWAC **On what basis is the distribution of catches between commercial and recreational fishing, as presented in ICES opinions 6-7 2025 on sea bass and pollock, assessed? And what would be the uncertainty surrounding the results obtained from the seabass tool?**

4 NWWAC **Does ICES agree that the ICES MSY Approach and related assessments do not provide the fisheries managers with the information they need to deliver their legal obligations?**

Fishery Managers are required to restore and maintain fish stocks "above levels which can produce the maximum sustainable yield". This is an explicit biomass target, yet the ICES advice does not tell us what tonnage this biomass target is. So fisheries managers have no way of telling the level of progress towards meeting the biomass target.

Where a stock is below MSY Btrigger, fishery managers are required to ensure a "rapid return" of the stock to "above levels which can produce the maximum sustainable yield". Yet the ICES advice is aimed at achieving the maximum sustainable yield only in the "long term". The ICES advice does not say what the "long term" means for each stock.

"Fishing opportunities shall in any event be fixed in such a way as to ensure that there is less than a 5 % probability of the spawning stock biomass falling below the limit spawning stock biomass reference point (Blim)." FMSY is calculated such that the probability of a long-term equilibrium being above Blim is 95% or more. But it does not ensure that each year there is at most a 5% probability of the stock being below Blim.

5 NWWAC **Adjustments of advice due to retrospective bias**

Advice with retrospective bias uses hindsight to change previous advice that in the majority leads to a reduction in TACs. What measures have ICES evaluated to address such fluctuations in the advice which makes planning of fishing operations by operators almost impossible beyond a few months annually. Why is hindsight retrospective bias not used to change previous negative advice on recruitment when a stock shows a huge increase in biomass contrary to the recruitment indicators.

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6 **NWWAC** **Does ICES analyse causes for poor recruitment, e.g. inter-species predation?**

NWWAC members are concerned about declining SSBs while stocks are fished at MSY. What are the cases for this decline and specifically for poor recruitment? Is ICES investigating for example inter-species predation (boarfish, bluefin tuna, hake), intra-species mechanisms (cannibalism)? Should data collection in a central deposit include analysis of stomach contents?

7 **NWWAC** **Can ICES indicate what benchmarks are planned and if the identified stocks can be prioritised?**

In December 2024, the NWWAC submitted advice to the European Commission on prioritising certain stocks for benchmarking by ICES. These included:

- Sole 7 h-k
- Whiting 7 b-c, e-k
- Plaice 7fg
- Lemon Sole 3a, 4, 7d

The full background for these requests can be found in the advice document here: https://www.nwwac.org/publications/nwwac-advice-on-stocks-to-prioritise-for-benchmark-workshops-by-ices.5187.html

8 **PelAC** **Has the effect of weather conditions on blue whiting dispersion been accounted for in the stock assessment, particularly in relation to its potential influence on the results of the international blue whiting spawning stock survey?**

The International Blue Whiting spawning stock survey is the only survey used as input to the assessment model. WGWIDE notes that the survey in 2025 was impacted by bad weather. Fishing vessels having also experienced trouble finding blue whiting on the acoustic equipment and found blue whiting to be much more scattered throughout the water layer over large distances compared to years before. The PelAC would like to know how the impact of the scattered distribution of blue whiting due to the weather conditions has been included in the assessment.

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