



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE/C.1/CA/ms

Dear Mr Brouckaert,

I thank you for your letter dated 16 November 2023 in which you raised a number of points in relation to the ICES advice on Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) and to the revision of the list of areas where VMEs occur or are likely to occur.

Firstly, you mention issues relating to ICES advice on VMEs from both 2021 and 2023, as raised in the report of the Killybegs fishermen's organisation (KFO), and you ask how the Commission will address those.

I would like to inform you that at the last MIACO meeting of 19 January 2024, ICES announced the launch of a specific process to address and correct methods of data collection for VMEs and analyses in 2024. In this context, ICES invited Advisory Councils and stakeholders to share their views on the current ICES evidence and advice related to VMEs, and on the actions to be taken in 2024 and beyond.

I am hopeful that the North-Western Waters Advisory Council will take an active role in this new process within the framework and under the steer of ICES.

Secondly, on the revision of the list of VMEs areas ⁽¹⁾ and building on the conclusions of the 2023 STECF opinion ⁽²⁾, I would like to inform you that a wider socio-economic assessment of the VMEs closures will be undertaken by STECF in the course of 2024.

The NWWAC is in copy of an invitation addressed to Member States to take part in a meeting in February under the STECF guidance to undertake such an assessment. The STECF and the European Commission expect an important engagement and evidence-

⁽¹⁾ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1614 of 15 September 2022 determining the existing deep-sea fishing areas and establishing a list of areas where vulnerable marine ecosystems are known to occur or are likely to occur.

⁽²⁾ STECF PLEN 23-02 and STECF PLEN 23-03 "Assessment of a socio-economic analysis of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems".

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based inputs to gather information at an individual fishing unit or fishery level, which will complete the 2023 analysis by STECF done at fleet level.

I hope that this letter answers your questions and addresses your points regarding the continuous stakeholders' engagement process on the VMEs file.

I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Ms Caroline Alibert-Deprez (Caroline.ALIBERT-DEPREZ@ec.europa.eu) or Ms Julia Rubeck, our Advisory Councils coordinator, via the functional mailbox MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu.

Yours sincerely,

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