



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE/C1/CA/ms

to Member States
Advisory Councils
EUROPECHE, EAPO, ETF, DSCC

Subject: Update on next steps - Socio-economic analysis of the Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems' closures performed by the STECF

Dear Madam, dear Sir

In the context of the review of the established list of areas where VMEs are known to occur or are likely to occur⁽¹⁾, building on the opinion of the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee on Fisheries in 2023⁽²⁾, the European Commission has requested the STECF to carry out a refined analysis of the socio-economic impacts of the VMEs closures according to scenarios presented in the ICES advices⁽³⁾. Launched early 2024 with the creation of an STECF Expert Working Group (EWG 24-09) and a first scoping meeting on 20 February to which Member States and Advisory Councils took part, this exercise is expected to unroll until **the STECF Plenary of March 2025**.

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of the next steps that are foreseen, in order to establish a common planning for Advisory Councils' and stakeholders' engagement and inputs.

Two streams of expertise will feed into the STECF analysis⁽⁴⁾, namely:

- **Scientific expertise** by STECF members including
 - a) literature review of existing socio-economic analysis prepared by Member States, regional/local authorities and stakeholders,
 - b) compilation and analysis of ACs/stakeholders feedback,
 - c) running the DISPLACE⁽⁵⁾ model based on ICES Regional Database & Estimation System, ICES VMS data and other sources such as [national reporting](#).

⁽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*”.

⁽³⁾ ICES (2021). [EU Request to advise on the list of areas where VMEs are known](#) to occur or are likely to occur and on the existing deep-sea fishing areas (ref. (EU)2016/2336).

ICES (2023). [Advice on areas where Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems \(VMEs\)](#) are known to occur or are likely to occur in EU waters.

⁽⁴⁾ As described in the STECF Plenary report 24-02: “7.1 EWG follow up on the assessment of socio-economic impact of VMEs in Member States” (p.139-140)

⁽⁵⁾ The [DISPLACE model](#) is a spatial model applied to fisheries management. DISPLACE aims to transform the fishermen's detailed knowledge into models, evaluation tools, and methods that can

- **Stakeholders' expertise** by members of the Advisory Councils with a series of consultations
 - a) first round with the Inter-AC (4 October), the North-Western Waters AC (9 October) and the South-Western Waters AC (23 October) ⁽⁶⁾
 - b) second round through targeted discussions with ACs members and written contributions (dates tbc - end of year)

It is expected that the results of both streams of expertise will feed into the STECF Expert Working Group meeting of **17-21 February 2025**, which will prepare a report for the STECF Plenary of March 2025.

In **Annex I**, you will find a draft list of available references prepared nationally or regionally on the socio-economic impacts that have been brought to the attention of the Commission.

ACTION: the Commission would appreciate suggestions for additional or updated scientific material on the evaluation of the socio-economic impact of the VMEs closures at local/regional level. This material will be included in the literature review and be analysed as part of the evidence base. It will be stored on the JRC website and publicly available. **You are welcome to send your suggestions and the relevant files to MARE-C1@ec.europa.eu no later than 16 September.**

In **Annex II**, you will find a description of the stakeholders' feedback collection and use provided by the STECF EWG Chair, M. Ralf Döring. You are welcome to send comments or questions to MARE-C1@ec.europa.eu on this.

I thank you very much for your continuous engagement on this file. My services stay at your disposal for any further guidance.

Yours sincerely,

(e-Signed)
Charlina VITCHEVA

Annex I – draft list of references

Annex II – Description of next steps by STECF EWG chair

provide the fisheries with research and advice. The model intends to serve as a basis for decision support tools for (fishery) managers. (*extract of overview description on DISPLACE webpage*).

⁽⁶⁾ Should other ACs be willing to engage during that timeframe, please contact MARE-C1@ec.europa.eu

Annex I – draft list of references

INDUROT-Universidad de Oviedo (2023) Socioeconomic and operational analysis of the Asturian fishing fleet. Report prepared for the D.G. of Maritime Fisheries of the Principality of Asturias. Cartography Annexes I and II.

INDUROT-Universidad de Oviedo (2024) Anàlisis de la afección de la flota pesquera asturiana por la propuesta de actualización future de los ecosistemas marinos vulnerables en la UE

Universidad de Santiago de Compostella (2022) Estudio del impacto socioeconomico de las propuestas de limitacion de las artes de fondo de la pesca costera artesanal de Galicia

Ifremer. Biseau Alain, Begot Eric (2023) Evaluation de l’impact de deux scénarios de fermeture aux engins de fond des zones susceptibles d’abriter des écosystèmes marins vulnérables (EMV). DGAMPA - Direction Générale des Affaires Maritimes, de la Pêche et de l’Aquaculture.

Ifremer. Begot Eric, Biseau Alain, Le Blond Samuel (2022) Evaluation des impacts économiques des fermetures des EMV dans la strate bathymétrique des 400-800m . DGAMPA - Direction Générale des Affaires Maritimes, de la Pêche et de l’Aquaculture, La Défense.

Ifremer. Begot Eric, Biseau Alain, Leblond Samuel (2021) Evaluation de l’impact des scénarios de fermeture aux engins de fond des zones susceptibles d’abriter des EMV. DPMA - Direction des Pêches Maritimes et de l’Aquaculture, La Défense.

Annex II – Description of next steps by STECF EWG chair

STECF EXPERT WORKING GROUP (EWG) 24-09

FOLLOW-UP ASSESSMENT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF THE VMEs CLOSURES

Author: Ralf Doering (Thuenen-Institute of Sea Fisheries, Bremerhaven, Germany), Chair of the Expert Working Group (EWG 24-09) on the assessment of socio-economic impacts of the VMEs closures

Subject: Explanation of the feedback-loop with Advisory Councils

Background

On 15 September 2022, the Commission adopted Implementing Act (EU) 2022/1614 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. The Deep-sea Access Regulation (EU) 2016/2336 provides that fishing with all bottom gears shall be prohibited in all listed areas (87 at the moment) below a depth of 400 meters.

On 28 July 2023, STECF Plenary issued its report including a preliminary advice⁷ on the socio-economic impacts of the VMEs closed areas, whereby the creation of dedicated Expert Working Group was recommended. STECF presented its July advice to a meeting with Stakeholders and Member States organised by DG Mare on 26 September 2023.

Together with the conclusions of the preliminary advice of STECF, the meeting with the Advisory Councils helped identify two areas where further research is required:

- 1) The assumption regarding the displacement of fishing effort following the VMEs areas closures.
- 2) The impacts on the small-scale fishing fleets, notably in Spain and Portugal, as segments data for the small-scale fleets were only partly available.

Following suit, DG Mare requested STECF to pursue this refined research and carry out analyses with a specific focus on the displacement of the fishing effort and on getting a more comprehensive picture of the impacts on the small-scale fleets. For that purpose, STECF proposed and a STECF member chaired a scoping meeting on 20 February 2024 with Member States representatives, scientists, and observers to exchange views on available data sets. Later on it was decided to use ICES datasets rather than launching additional data calls due to time and capacity constraints.

Way forward

- To get a better overview of the reaction of the fleets facing the closures, STECF proposed to run the DISPLACE model⁸, a spatial model of fisheries developed by a consortium of EU scientific research centres that facilitates sustainable fishing and maritime spatial planning. The model will be run, with ICES Spatial Fisheries Data, to assess possible reactions of the fleets regarding the closures. In the Expert Working Group meeting of 17-21 February 2025, experts will then try to compare the situation of 2022 with 2023, which is the first year of the closures.
- For the impacts on the small-scale fleets, STECF has entered a process of listing and summarizing all new and available publications and reports from national or local entities, may they be from scientific institutes, public or private bodies. Together with

⁷ Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries , [73rd plenary report \(STECF-PLN-23-02\)](#), point 6.1 „Assessment of a socio-economic analysis of vulnerable marine ecosystems“

⁸ DISPLACE model: <https://displace-project.org/blog/overview/>

this additional material, STECF would like to invite stakeholders and experts on small-scale fleets to take part in its meeting planned for 17-21 February 2025.

With this, STECF expects to be able to give a more detailed overview on the socio-economic impacts of the VMEs closures, specifically on the small-scale fleets.

In addition to the collection of additional data and the running of the DISPLACE model, STECF proposed to hold an interaction with representatives of Advisory Councils to discuss the preliminary results of the DISPLACE model.

If agreed by the ACs, STECF considers that the interactions could take the form of a specific meeting with AC representatives during a regular AC meeting or a specific meeting organised by the ACs with a focus on the socio-economic impacts of the VMEs closures

STECF planning for 2024/2025

For the feedback-loop with the ACs, STECF proposes the following approach:

- 1) Attendance of the EWG Chair (Ralf Doering) at meetings of the ACs in October 2024 (Inter-AC, NWWAC, SWWAC) for an exchange on the state of play, the expected results from the additional analyses and how the process of collecting responses from the ACs will be organised.
- 2) STECF Plenary meeting of 11-15 November will draft the Terms of References of the EWG 24-09 meeting planned for 17-21 Feb. 2025 and will provide DG Mare with a first progress report.
In addition, some preliminary results from the running of the DISPLACE model will be available for the plenary meeting.
- 3) If agreed by the ACs, organisation of specific meetings with the Advisory Councils with a discussion of the results of the DISPLACE model and the impacts on the small-scale fleets. For that, the results of the modelling and a literature review will be made available to the ACs. AC representatives can also provide written comments after the meeting as input to the EWG meeting in February 2025.
- 4) In February 2025, the EWG meeting will be held to prepare a report for DG Mare on the impacts of the displacement of fishing effort and the impacts on the small-scale fisheries in addition to the available data analyses from STECF PLEN 23-02. During that meeting, AC representatives can participate as observers and specific time slots will be reserved for the exchange with the stakeholders and their comments on the socio-economic impacts of the closures of the VMEs.
- 5) During the STECF Plenary of March 2025 (PLEN 25-01), STECF will prepare the final advice and the report of the EWG with the presentation of the results will be published at the end of March 2025.

This is the first time STECF plans such an exchange with stakeholders regarding feedback to analyses provided to STECF. In the past, stakeholders were invited to EWG meetings but outside of those meetings there was limited exchange. Therefore, any information you can provide regarding possible socio-economic impacts, any data which could give us insights in possible impacts would help us in the attempt for a better understanding of the socio-economic impacts of the closures of the VMEs.