

REPORT

Meeting: **NSAC/NWWAC Social Aspects FG**
Parties: **NSAC/NWWAC FG members, DG MARE, STECF chairs**
Date and time: **17 January 2025**
Location: **Zoom**
Chair: **Kenn Skau Fischer**
Rapporteur: **NSAC Secretariat**

1 Welcome and introduction [Chair]

The meeting's Chair, **Kenn Skau Fischer**, welcomed the participants and presented the day's agenda.

Apologies were conveyed for Peter Breckling (Deutscher Fischerei Verband) and Marloes Kraan of Wageningen University & Research.

2 Report from the previous meeting [NSAC Secretariat]

Paper 2.1 Report of meeting of 5 September 2024

As no comments were raised regarding the report of the previous meeting of 5 September 2024, it was approved and can be found published on the [website](#).

2.2 Actions from previous meeting

Tamara Talevska of NSAC Secretariat read through previously agreed actions and informed on their status as follows:

Action	Responsible	Status
Joan Roussoulière-Azzam to circulate the template used for developing the National Fisheries Profiles and the draft of the vademecum on fishing allocations to the FG once available.	Joan Roussoulière-Azzam	Complete, template included in STECF 24-05 report (table 2.3 p 35-36-37);

		<i>vademecum ongoing</i>
Joan Roussoulière-Azzam to inform the Commission on the mention of the inclusion of state aid in the vademecum on fishing allocations.	Joan Roussoulière-Azzam	<i>Ongoing</i>
Members to inform the Secretariat of their availability to attend the Fishers of the Future workshop on future fishers profiles, scheduled for September 16, 17, or 20.	FG Members	<i>Complete, workshop attended on 20 September</i>
Members to complete the e-survey related to the baseline study on training and certification requirements for fishers in EU Member States before the deadline.	FG Members	<i>Complete</i>
Next Social Aspects FG meeting to focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Next steps following the Commission's response to the NSAC/NWWAC Recreational Fishing advice (if needed). Trends in fuel costs and their impact on fish prices.	Social Aspects FG	<i>Complete</i>

3 STECF-24-05 report on social data in fisheries [Marta Ballesteros, STECF meeting chair]

Marta Ballesteros, chair of the STECF expert group on social data in fisheries, presented the [**STECF-24-05 report**](#).

While robust scientific and advisory systems exist for assessing environmental (i.e., ICES stock assessments) and economic performance (i.e., STECF annual economic reports), the social dimension lacks systematic data gathering, analysis, and regular advisory processes. There is a lack of a structured approach to evaluating the social dimension of EU fisheries. Moreover, addressing the social dimension often raises concerns about politicization, potentially undermining the integrity of advice.

To tackle this, a group of expert marine social scientists has spent the last five years developing a credible and independent system for delivering advice on the social aspects of the CFP. Contrary to the belief that social impacts cannot be measured, they have demonstrated that these aspects are quantifiable through developed methodologies.

The result of their work is the **Toolbox for the Social Dimension of the CFP**, comprising four key tools:

- **National Fisheries Profiles (NFPs)**
- **Community Fisheries Profiles (CFPs)**
- **Social Indicators**
- **Data Calls**

The purpose of the toolbox is to address the complexity of the social dimension and allow for the delivery of effective, evidence-based advice.

National Fisheries Profiles provide comprehensive insights into the social dimensions of fisheries in EU member states. 15 reports were developed to date. Each report examines the role of fisheries in society, the current status of the sector and underlying factors explaining that status, critical social and institutional features, and the well-being and living conditions of fisheries communities. NFPs also reveal both Europe-wide trends and country-specific situations. They allow comparisons across member states in three areas:

- Predicting the likely impacts of measures;
- Measuring the effects of implemented measures;
- Evaluating the effectiveness of these measures.

While NFPs are powerful tools, they lack the granularity to reflect the diversity of fisheries communities within a country. Recognizing this, social scientists have developed a definition of **fisheries communities** based on following attributes:

- It is place-based, usually around harbors but potentially incorporating wider areas;
- Economic and social benefits are generated by fisheries;
- It enables generations of fisheries, with shared norms and interlinks;
- It's likely to include fisheries-based organizations and ancillary industries in aquatic food value chains.

Using the above definition of fisheries communities, profiling efforts were launched, identifying around 300 communities across the EU. The STECF expert group recommended starting with 30 communities, selected based on criteria:

- Contrast communities: thriving or declining/dying communities
- Plural communities representing diverse fisheries sectors
- Communities offering insights into impacts of policy measures (i.e., offshore wind farms, marine closures, etc.).

Community profiles, together with NFPs, provide a deeper understanding of the social landscape at both country and community levels. Additionally, they enable **social impact assessments**, moving beyond simplified assumptions such as “less quota equals fewer jobs.” For instance, reduced quotas may force fishers to travel farther, raising safety concerns.

Additionally, **community profiles** enable cumulative policy impact assessments and better understanding of responses to crises. Fieldwork is encouraged to ensure profiles are grounded in first-hand observations rather than desk research.

To measure these dynamics, **social indicators** are critical. In 2022, DG MARE requested social indicators for the CFP, prompting experts to respond with 1,500 possibilities and a need for clarity on policy priorities. The Commission then prepared a scoping paper identifying 7 key policy questions, later expanded to 19. Based on input to public consultation, 38 social indicators were developed.

From the 38 developed indicators, 12 are ready for use, and several member states are running pilot tests to gather information. These indicators relate to:

- **Current conditions:** Work safety (e.g., minimum crew per vessel, mandatory training, technological improvements), well-being (e.g., time away from home, financial security), and trade union membership.
- **Generational renewal:** Data on new entries, training enrolment, and vessel registry additions.
- **Dependency:** Financial metrics, such as fishers' average net income compared to national averages.
- **Impact of policy measures:** Metrics like the percentage of marine space allocated to other uses and priority areas for fishing, derived from marine spatial plans analysis submitted by member states.

All the described tools are interlinked to address the previous lack of structured evidence on the social dimension, enabling stakeholders to generate data for informed decision-making and advocacy. For example, a National Fisheries Profile may highlight the social importance of fisheries, while simultaneously a marine spatial plan reveals insufficient space allocated to fishing. If such contradiction occurs, it underscores the need for better evidence to inform decision-making.

The **Chair** thanked Ballesteros for her presentation. He asked whether the FG could provide comments on the **STECF report** on the social dimension. He also inquired about the **community profiles**, pointing out that two major Danish fishery harbors in the North Sea were missing from the presented list, and questioned the criteria for inclusion of certain ports rather than others.

Ballesteros responded that feedback to STECF report can be considered in two contexts:

- STECF's formal process, where feedback cannot alter the published report due to its strict formalities.
- The expert working group's ongoing work on the social dimension, where stakeholders' input is very valued, as it ensures the relevance of outputs. In this case, feedback would be treated as raw material for the group to consider, not formal comments for the STECF report.

Regarding community profiles, the report presents three lists of 15, 30, and 60 communities across Europe, with 30 recommended as the starting point. The omission of certain ports, like those in Denmark, could be due to the absence of Danish representatives at the expert meeting or other logistical factors. Ballesteros emphasized that the list is a starting point, not fixed; further communities may be added. However, DG MARE's budget constraints may limit the initial number of community profiles analysed. Social scientists aim to cover a broader range of communities beyond the STECF list, and additional profiles could be created independently if funding allows. **Ballesteros** also reminded the three selection criteria for communities, which guide the selection of the communities list. It might be the mentioned ports do not possess those criteria. However, the ultimate goal is covering a broader range of communities, not just those initially selected.

Jan Kappel (European Anglers Alliance) inquired whether recreational fisheries are also being considered within developments of the fisheries' social dimension.

Ballesteros explained that recreational fisheries were not part of the first NFP template but were later recognized as essential. It is now mandatory to include information on recreational fisheries in all profiles, covering their interaction with commercial fisheries, available data, and implemented measures.

Kappel highlighted data gaps in recreational fisheries. He also flagged that in the Baltic, the decline in charter boating is significantly impacting dependent businesses. There is need for more socio-economic data on recreational fisheries, as the allocation of access to fish stocks affects both recreational and commercial sectors.

Ballesteros pointed to ongoing work by ICES, STECF, and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean to improve data gathering on recreational fisheries. However, to the best of her knowledge, those groups have not yet addressed the specific impacts of declining resources on recreational fisheries, which may need to be considered for further development.

Dominic Rihan (KFO) commended progress on social data collection since its introduction in the STECF but emphasized the importance of keeping datasets updated. Outdated data risks being misinterpreted as definitive in policy debates and impact assessments. He asked about the frequency of updates and collaboration with the ICES working group on social aspects to avoid duplication of efforts.

Ballesteros clarified that ongoing data collection pilots on social indicators will determine the potential expansion of the current indicator list by assessing the availability, quality, and cost of gathering new data, as well as identifying where fieldwork is necessary. Current systematic data collection includes fishers' nationality, education level, age, and gender. Pilots aim to expand this list and refine updates, which may occur annually, biennially, or triennially based on findings. Regarding collaboration with ICES, **Ballesteros** noted while ICES focuses on long-term scientific exploration, STECF applies measurable, actionable methodologies for quicker development.

Talevska also queried whether the Commission receives information from both organizations (STECF, ICES) separately or if they collaborate to produce integrated products for policymaking. She also asked about the next steps and how quickly the findings from the STECF report would influence policy.

Ballesteros clarified that ICES recurrent advisory products do not yet address the social dimension directly. In contrast, STECF provides recurrent advice through its annual social group meetings. Last year, the group proposed meeting twice annually: one meeting would focus on methodology and data gathering & exploration, while the second could potentially deliver an annual social report, complementing the economic annual report by adding social context to the data and guiding policy. A decision on this second meeting for 2025 is pending, but the hope is to produce a draft social report for the CFP. STECF also aligns its social analysis with economic and biological dimensions by maintaining common points of analysis.

Jonny Woodlock (Independent observer) noted the need to consider ecotourism alongside commercial and recreational fishing, particularly in Ireland, where retired mariners and charter skippers are driving its growth. He emphasized the sector's relevance to local fishing communities.

Ballesteros acknowledged ecotourism as an emerging activity within fisheries communities. While some NFPs highlight ecotourism as a well-integrated opportunity, others identify it as a potential source of conflict. Profiles aim to capture such trends, challenges, and opportunities to inform policies that support growth or mitigate conflict in these contexts.

Llibori Martínez from Ipsua noted the diversity in recreational fishing practices and regulations across countries and regions, referring to examples such as France's lack of a fishing register versus Spain's licensing requirements. He stressed the need for coherence in the data provided by actors and inquired into how can associations assist the expert groups with available information.

Ballesters highlighted two ways provided information could be applied:

- Sharing data with ICES and the GFCM, which are leading efforts on recreational fishing.
- Noting the input for deeper exploration of recreational fisheries in future expert group work.

Kappel inquired about focus on diversification opportunities, such as in the case of small-scale commercial fishers, who often face low profitability and rely on other incomes for financial support.

Ballesteros responded that diversification outcomes depend on local contexts and fishers' preferences. Some fishers prioritize continuing their traditional practices over looking for more profitable alternatives.

Bruno Dachicourt (Syndicat National des Marins Pêcheurs CFTC) queried whether any of the social indicators account for the diverse activities across EU member states and their respective policies. He specifically highlighted the impact of UK decisions on coastal communities throughout Europe.

Ballesteros responded that the NFPs include information on trade relationships and the short- and long-term impacts of Brexit. While these aspects are covered in descriptive terms, no specific indicators address them yet. For countries affected by UK legislation, the community profiles template could emphasize policy frameworks.

Patrick Murphy (IS&WFPO) added that since Brexit, there has been little follow-up on its impacts in different countries. He emphasized the need to revisit Article 1380 (2013) requiring fleet sustainability reporting. Opportunities for fishers are closely tied to data on available fish stocks per country or individual. He questioned how to sustain meaningful dialogue on these issues. Additionally, Murphy criticized the Commission's limited questionnaires, which restrict the ability to address specific challenges like relative stability, training, and other factors affecting coastal states and stakeholders. He also flagged current competition for skilled

labour in the marine sector, determined by a lack of new entries and the rise of novel industries.

Ballesteros acknowledged these concerns, noting that labour competition and training are critical issues. Regulations often prevent the new generation from gaining practical experience, hindering recruitment. While STECF focuses on actionable areas, broader issues like relative stability require input through ICES. To sustain meaningful dialogue, it is crucial to have ongoing exchange with the NSAC/NWWAC FG.

Talevska informed of the NWWAC's initiative to improve stakeholder engagement in STECF, and invited Ballesteros to collaborate on structuring future stakeholder engagement effectively.

Gerard Hussenot (Bluefish) asked if the work on social indicators includes demographic data like fisher age distributions across Europe and whether such documents are publicly available.

Ballesteros informed that fisher age demographics are included in annual economic reports, showing an aging industry and the challenge of generational renewal. This information is regularly [published](#) on the STECF website. Additionally, all NFPs provide detailed analyses of age demographics, broken down by gender, age, and region.

The **Chair** thanked Ballesteros for her presentation and proposed the FG draft a paper on the STECF report to reflect the discussion's key considerations. **(Action)**

4 Update on Commission's work on social dimension

4.1 Vademecum on fishing rights allocations

Talevska updated members on the status of the vademecum on fishing rights allocations, noting that delays in finalization are due to the focus on closing the Fishers of the Future (FoF) project and ongoing adaptations of the MARE Team to the work with the new Commissioner.

Talevska asked if there was any input from national authorities on the vademecum.

The **Chair** clarified that while the Commission had requested information from member states to inform the paper, no further updates were shared.

4.2 Fishers of the Future: closing event

On January 14th, the closing event of the Fishers of the Future foresight project took place in Brussels and online. A [report](#) was produced and circulated to members.

Talevska informed that the closing event generated strong reactions, particularly from marine social scientists, who submitted written feedback to the Commission, criticizing the study's lack of representation, questionable methodology, and the final event's format and the lack of audience interaction.

Ballesteros emphasized the importance of robust evidence to inform discussions and acknowledged serious methodological flaws in the FoF study. She highlighted the need to base social criteria on rigorous evidence rather than perceptions or opinions. Ballesteros suggested that while the FoF study has issues, some elements might still be useful for future discussions.

Murphy raised concerns about how the results may be interpreted, noting that political bodies often focus on the positive without addressing real impacts. He criticized the study for failing to consider the fishing industry's historical trends, its evolution, and the technological and structural changes that have shaped its current state.

5 Outstanding FG topics & next steps for 2025

The **Chair** highlighted mental health, the sector's attractiveness, and negative public perceptions of fisheries as interconnected issues that could be addressed by future meetings.

Regarding fuel prices and rising costs in fisheries, the **Chair** queried whether the FG should revisit this topic, given that a paper had already been produced previously, or keep it on the list for future discussions.

Murphy informed on new regulations in Ireland that are expected to further burden the fishers. Based on a recent report, profitability for the Irish fleet has already dropped by 82% in 2023. He suggested drafting simple points on the major impacts of these challenges, noting the risks they pose to the industry. **(Action)**

Woodlock pointed out that the industry has little control over international fuel prices but noted that national bodies could mitigate rising costs of living, including increased employment costs which are affecting the industry.

The **Chair** observed that recent STECF economic report paints a generalized positive picture of the industry. However, the report does not take into account last year's data. He proposed drafting a paper on the general economic conditions of the North Sea and North Western Waters fishing sectors, focusing on income and costs. **(Action)**

The **Chair** highlighted the need to prioritize topics and arrange presentations on key issues. He also suggested inviting FEGAPESCA to present on health and safety in the fishing sector at a future meeting. **(Action)**

Kappel noted that discussions on fuel prices and costs should also consider decarbonization, which incurs short-term expenses but can be cost-effective in the long term. He proposed exploring market impacts and innovative ways to lower consumer costs. **(Action)**

The **Chair** concluded by suggesting that the STECF annual economic report, commissioned by the European Commission, could be used as a starting point for discussions on this topic within the FG. **(Action)**

7 Closing: Date and time of next meeting

The group agreed to hold the next FG meeting on **28 March**, from **10:00 to 12:00 CET**.
(Action)

The agenda to include:

- Exchange on draft paper on the STECF report concerning the social dimension.
- Presentations on the following topics:
 - Mental health, the attractiveness of the fishing sector and negative publicity.
 - FEGAPESCA's work on health and safety in the industry.
 - STECF economic report.

8 Agreed actions

Action	Responsible
<i>Carried forward:</i> Joan Roussoulière-Azzam to inform the Commission on the mention of the inclusion of state aid in the vademecum on fishing allocations.	Joan Roussoulière-Azzam
Secretariat to invite Marta Ballesteros as observer to future joint Social Aspects FG meetings.	Secretariat
Secretariat to draft a paper reflecting member's considerations - from this report - on the STECF report on the social dimension..	Secretariat
Secretariat to draft a paper highlighting the impact of new national regulations on rising costs and decreasing profitability, including general economic conditions of fisheries. The advice could also consider discussions on fuel prices and costs in terms of decarbonization, incurring short-term expenses but long term cost-effectiveness. Exploration of market impacts and innovative ways to lower consumer costs could be added.	Secretariat
Next FG meeting to table: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mental health, the attractiveness of the fishing sector, and negative publicity - FEGAPESCA presentation on health and safety in the fishing sector - STECF economic annual report 	Secretariat

Next meeting of the FG to take place on 28 March, from 10:00 CET.

FG Members

9 Participants

First Name	Last Name	Organisation
Alexandra	Philippe	EBCD
Bruno	Dachicourt	Syndicat National des Marins Pêcheurs CFTC
Dominic	Rihan	KFO
Falke	Falke de Sager	Rederscentrale
Flemming	Christensen	Danish Fishermen's Occupation Health Services
Gerard	Hussenot	Blue Fish
Jan	Kappel	European Anglers Alliance
Jenny, Idoya, Odille, Heidi		Interpreters
Johnny	Woodlock	Independent observer
Kateryna	Urbanovych	NSAC Secretariat
Kenn Skau	Fischer	Chair of FG
Llibori	Martinez	IFSUA
Marta	Ballesteros	Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO). STECF social group co-chair
Michael	Andersen	DFPO
Mo	Mathies	NWWAC Secretariat
Patrick	Murphy	IS&WFPO
Tamara	Talevska	NSAC Secretariat