

REPORT

Meeting: **NSAC/NWWAC Social Aspects FG**
Parties: **NSAC/NWWAC FG members, stakeholders**
Date and time: **4 April 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 Dominic Rihan (KFO), Alexandra Philippe (EBCD), Marta Ballesteros (Spanish Institute of Oceanography), and Patrick Murphy (IS&WFPO) who was replaced by colleague Gregory Casey of the same organization.

2 Report from the previous meeting [NSAC Secretariat]

Paper 2.1 Report of meeting of 17 January 2025

As no comments were raised regarding the report of the previous meeting of 17 January 2025, 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	Status
<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.	<i>Update shared via email on 31/03; further information will be sought ahead of future FGs</i>

Secretariat to invite Marta Ballesteros as observer to future joint Social Aspects FG meetings.	Complete
Secretariat to draft a paper reflecting member's considerations on the STECF report on social dimension.	Complete, draft shared and for discussion at day's meeting
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.	Ongoing
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 	2/3 Complete; STECF 2024 AER to be presented at upcoming FG
Next meeting of the FG to take place on 28 March, from 10:00 CET.	Complete

Regarding the drafting of a joint paper on the impact of new national regulations on rising costs and suboptimal economic conditions of the fishing sector, the **Chair** expressed that, due to ongoing uncertainties, especially regarding interest rates and fuel costs, it is not an ideal time to assess the profitability of the fishing industry. While current catches and prices are strong, the broader economic outlook remains unclear (mainly due to the recent US policies). A cautious approach is needed, with close monitoring of earnings and income trends in the sector.

3 Mental health & attractiveness of the fishing sector [Sisse Grøn, Det Nationale Forskningscenter for Arbejdsmiljø]

Sisse Grøn (Det Nationale Forskningscenter for Arbejdsmiljø) presented recent findings on mental health challenges in the Danish fisheries workplaces. The project, initiated by the Fishers' Health Service, aimed to explore stress and mental strain among fishers caused by external pressures such as the green transition, ocean health, Brexit, quota systems, and increasing regulation.

Traditional research were deemed ineffective due to the structure of the sector and limited survey participation. Instead, the team conducted *chronicle workshops*. These structured sessions, conducted with four diverse groups of fishers across Denmark, involved three phases: identifying key events over the past decade, mapping key actors, and discussing the

consequences of both events and actors. Despite differences in geography and fishing methods, the reported impacts were similar: stress, poor health, frustration, demotivation, and a sense of powerlessness.

The qualitative data were aggregated and analysed by considering psychosocial work environment theory, which identifies six key factors influencing workplace health. The findings aligned with four of these, particularly highlighting imbalances in predictability and influence—both strongly linked to deteriorating mental health.

To connect these insights with potential action, a stakeholder group was formed. This included representatives from the Fishers' Health Service and safety organization, maritime authorities, producer organizations (POs), an ocean-focused NGO, and the Danish ministry (which followed the project). The research team presented their findings to the stakeholder group and tasked them with addressing a core issue: fishers' lack of control over their work. In the first co-creation workshop, stakeholders explored root causes, many of which mirrored the fishers' accounts. These included economic instability, environmental regulations, quotas, Brexit, Norway's role, shifting consumer trends, media narratives, and the influence of NGOs.

A few weeks later, a second workshop was held. Stakeholders shared their insights on how their institutions interacted with fishers' mental health and brainstormed constructive solutions. A key realization emerged: the problem of limited influence extended beyond fishers to the political level, with fishers lacking sufficient representation in national policymaking. Participants proposed several solutions, including ongoing collaboration with policymakers, establishing a knowledge center to support information-sharing, and building relationships with NGOs and green politicians. From this process, six recommendations were developed, based on stakeholder and fisher input, and refined by the research team:

- Strengthen dialogue and collaboration at all levels.
- Create recognition and trust between stakeholders and fishers.
- Improve planning and early warning systems, e.g. about regulatory changes.
- Pair regulatory control with guidance and dialogue.
- Adapt policies to different fishing segments.
- Promote knowledge exchange, ensuring relevant stakeholders have the right information.

These recommendations were directly linked to **psychosocial health factors**, especially the lack of influence, known to contribute to mental health problems such as stress, burnout, and even loss of workability or depression. The aim was to strengthen agency among fishers and mitigate the damaging health effects of powerlessness and unpredictability.

In the final co-creation meeting, stakeholders expressed interest in continuing collaboration and even proposed formalizing the group, although this remains a plan for future development. Grøn noted that the project has been published in the Journal of Agromedicine, with hopes for further international collaboration, emphasizing that these challenges are too complex to be addressed by individual countries alone.

Grøn concluded by offering to share her presentation slides. **(Action)**

Jan Kappel (EAA) asked which categories of fishers were included in the study. **Grøn** responded that while the majority were vessel owners, the workshops also included crew members. To broaden representation, the research team conducted additional interviews with underrepresented groups, especially younger fishers and crew, aiming for a diverse perspective beyond the typically older vessel-owner demographic.

Talevska inquired whether the study covered demersal or pelagic fisheries. **Grøn** clarified that of the four workshop groups, one focused on pelagic fishers and another on small-scale inshore (in-water) fishers. Overall, the team made efforts to ensure a varied and representative sample of the Danish fishing sector.

The **Chair** noted the lack of similar research in other countries and asked whether Grøn was aware of comparable international studies. **Grøn** mentioned a similar initiative in New Zealand, and noted that some related work appears in the latest issue of the Journal of Agromedicine (based on the IFI 6 conference), but no other study used the same participatory method or offered comparable deepness within the EU context.

Gregory Casey (...) asked whether there were any notable psychosocial differences between people in the fishing industry and the general working population. **Grøn** replied that no such comparative analysis was possible due to limited data. Around 90 fishers participated in the workshops, but no broad survey was distributed. From her personal view, mental health burden appeared to be worse among fishers.

Casey then reflected on the challenge of influencing policymakers, asking how the fishing sector compares in this regard to other sectors like agriculture or IT. **Grøn** acknowledged that such comparisons are extremely difficult. The fishing sector is uniquely hard to analyse and benchmark due to its structure and data limitations, making direct comparisons to other industries unreliable.

Peter Breckling (German Fisheries PO) shared an example from Germany illustrating the importance of creative engagement strategies when conducting research with fishers. In the conducted experiment, fishers' results were particularly honest, closely aligning with expected statistical outcomes. This shows that with the right approach, fishers can be highly reliable respondents. He also raised concern about the recommendation to "cooperate with NGOs and green politicians," arguing that such relationships are often unrealistic or even harmful for fishers' livelihoods. **Sisse Grøn** clarified that this recommendation **did not come from the research team**, but rather emerged from ideas generated by the stakeholder group during workshops.

Talevska asked whether there were differences across fishing segments in how mental health issues were perceived or reported. **Grøn** replied that surprisingly few differences were observed.

Talevska also highlighted the importance of including such mental health research in broader EU efforts, referencing the upcoming first EU Social Report (being developed by STECF), which will address topics such as sector attractiveness. She emphasized the need to promote this research, suggesting it could feed into qualitative indicators used in policy development. She added that bridging gaps between the industry and NGOs is crucial, acknowledging that

while fishers may not have time to engage, industry representatives and supporting organizations should actively restore broken relationships, given the current polarized climate.

Casey shared his double perspective as both a fisheries representative and an eNGO director, encouraging fishing organizations to engage more actively with eNGOs. Fishing organizations bring crucial knowledge about marine operations that could strengthen NGO perspectives and foster mutual understanding.

Ilaria Bellomo (NWWAC Secretariat) emphasized the need to better understand the perspectives of young fishers, particularly regarding the attractiveness of the sector and the link between mental health and onboard safety. She shared a personal experience of a 20-year-old Italian fisher who witnessed a colleague die from a heart attack during a fishing trip. The fisher had no psychological support and was expected to return to sea the next day. Bellomo stressed that psychological support for fishers facing traumatic events is lacking and must be addressed.

The **Chair** responded that in Denmark, such support is already integrated into the occupational health services for fishers. If a serious incident occurs onboard, mental health support is provided, and funding for this is widely supported. He highlighted the importance of addressing both the physical and psychological well-being of fishers.

4 Good practices in health and safety & maritime emergencies in the fishing sector [Jesús Clemente Expósito, ARVI]

Jesús Clemente Expósito (ARVI) presented on safety, health, and maritime emergencies, highlighting ARVI's preventive service and its related initiatives.

In 2005, ARVI promoted the creation of a joint prevention service for shipowners in the marine and fishing sector. The goal was to provide a non-profit, specialized, and sector-specific service to strengthen a culture of prevention. The service offers integrated prevention management and coordination with lower costs, ensuring collective benefits and sector advocacy through a cooperative model.

The preventive service operates across **four main areas**:

1. **Prevention Management:** Focus on occupational risk assessments, prevention plans, accident investigations, improving living and working procedures and conditions on board, and worker training.
2. **Coordination of Business Activities:** Ensuring technical and chronological coordination during vessel repairs, structured in four phases: preliminary actions, start of work, ongoing supervision, and end of work (final reporting).
3. **Consulting and Projects:** Preparation of technical studies and collaboration with public and private companies on security and prevention projects.
4. **Training:** Delivered both onboard and in classrooms, aimed at integrating prevention knowledge among crew.

Exposito highlighted key projects:

- **SAFEFISHING:** Led by ARVI, this project created a standardized EU-level training program (through audiovisual support) for occupational risk prevention in the trawling sector, structuring the content in each of the phases of work carried out on board.
- **Virtual Reality for Maritime Emergencies:** Developed VR training tools for maritime emergencies such as ship abandonment, seafarer overboard, and engine room fires. The VR tool is publicly accessible with standard VR equipment.
- **Predictive Security** (Improvement of Conditions for the Prevention of Occupational Risks and Maritime Safety on Board): Focuses on training audiovisuals that simulate critical safety scenarios during key trawler operations help prevent accidents. The simulations incorporate factors like bad weather, fatigue, poor lighting, and inadequate training.

ARVI also produces additional audiovisual materials covering the correct use of firefighting and rescue equipment, including survival suits, life rafts, rescue boats, life vests, pyrotechnics, CO₂ extinguishing systems, hoses, and fire extinguishers.

A major training initiative is the **FORMAR package**, developed by **FEGAPESCA**. Currently, the initiative includes **five phases** of audiovisual materials focused on maritime prevention and safety. These videos are designed for **easy access and use on any device**, offering a flexible way to promote safety awareness.

- **Phase 1** includes 20 3D audiovisuals covering general risks and preventive measures that affect all crew members across different fishing vessels. Topics include personal protective equipment (PPE), emergency stops, safety signage, and procedures to minimize injury risks.
- **Phase 2** presents another 20 3D audiovisuals detailing specific onboard tasks on coastal and deep-sea trawlers, highlighting the main risks and corresponding preventive actions for each task.
- **Phase 3** includes 20 3D audiovisuals detailing tasks on longline fishing vessels, both coastal and deep-sea. The videos identify the key risks and preventive measures for each task.
- **Phase 4** consists of five training audiovisuals covering emergency situations on fishing vessels: engine room fire, accommodation fire, flooding (above and below deck), and ship abandonment. These videos are longer, providing a step-by-step guide from the onset to the resolution of each emergency.
- **Phase 5**, the final completed phase, features a single 3D audiovisual demonstrating the procedure for coordinating fishing vessel repair activities. It outlines the coordination process between vessel owners, self-employed individuals, contractors, and shore personnel to ensure safe repair and maintenance practices.

- **Phase 6** is currently in progress and will focus on **first aid onboard**. This audiovisual will include real-life demonstrations for treating common injuries and illnesses on fishing vessels, complementing mandatory medical training for bridge and engineering officials.

All projects aim to reduce occupational accidents, improve onboard living and working conditions, and provide accessible, practical training. Resources can be viewed or downloaded from arvi.org.

5 ACs Contribution to STECF Expert WG on social data

Following up on an action from the last FG meeting, the Secretariat has developed advice on the STECF report regarding the social dimension of fisheries. **Kateryna Urbanovych** (NSAC Secretariat) outlined the structure of the advice, including a background section, general comments on the report, and three sections on tools developed by the STECF expert group: national fisheries profiles, community fisheries profiles, and social indicators.

Additionally, she informed that the STECF Expert WG is meeting this week to discuss the structure of the Social Report. Currently, input from stakeholders is needed, specifically on data sources and important indicators. Urbanovych suggested consulting with the EWG chairs at the next FG meeting to clarify the needed contributions for the advice to effectively support their work.

Talevska added that while it's unlikely that current input will influence the first annual social report (to be produced in October), recommendations such as collecting and including mental health data from the fisheries sector could be valuable. This would tie into the sector's attractiveness and other relevant indicators.

Falke de Sager (Rederscentrale) asked whether the paper should clarify what socio-economic data should be produced, noting that more specificity might be needed.

Talevska agreed, highlighting the need for clearer requests and specific indicators or variables to help guide the STECF in its reporting.

Michael Andersen (DFPO) noted that ACs are not data providers and should not be expected to collect or provide data. He emphasized that models should be adapted to fit the available data, rather than rejecting data that doesn't fit their current models.

Talevska emphasized that while ACs won't collect data, they should flag to the Commission what data should be collected in the future to ensure the annual social report reflects the necessary information to influence policy.

Kappel suggested revising the current wording to recognize the socioeconomic value of recreational fishing independently, rather than only in relation to its impact on commercial fisheries.

The **Chair** encouraged members to provide written feedback to the advice by **April 22nd**.
(Action)

6 Correcting tax discrimination: Irish example of ensuring fair tax credits for fishers [Gregory Casey, Irish South & West Fish Producer's Organisation]

On behalf of Patrick Murphy, **Casey** shared that in Ireland, there are three separate tax credits for seafarers:

- The **Seagoing Naval Personnel** credit applies to Irish Navy personnel spending time at sea, offering about €1,500 annually.
- The **Seafarers Allowance** is for individuals who spend at least 161 days at sea on international voyages, with a tax credit of €6,350 per year.
- The **Fisher Tax Credit** is available to those who spend at least 80 days at sea, actively engaged in sea fishing, and are residents in Ireland. This tax credit is the lowest, at €1,270 annually.

The Irish South and West Fish PO made a submission to the Minister for the Marine and the Department of Finance, highlighting the discrimination between sea workers. No response was received to the submission and the issue was not addressed in the budget. The PO is now working to engage the new minister to propose an increase in the Fisher Tax Credit.

Casey emphasized that many Irish fishers spend 150-200 days at sea, working in various international waters, yet their allowance is significantly lower than that of merchant seamen, who receive about five times more. This disparity, Casey argued, affects the recruitment of young people into the sector, and increasing the Fisher Tax Credit could incentivize more young recruits by tying the credit to training or qualification requirements.

The **Chair** highlighted that companies in Denmark providing services to offshore platforms, such as oil rigs and wind farms in the North Sea, benefit from helpful taxation, making these sectors more attractive compared to fishing. These workers enjoy lower taxes due to international tax rules. In addition, their work hours are often more regular compared to the unpredictable and long hours in fishing. This discrepancy makes it harder for the fishing industry to compete in terms of recruitment. The **Chair** questioned whether similar issues exist in other countries like France, Belgium, the Netherlands, or Germany, and proposed raising this with the Commission as a broader issue of competitiveness between the fishing and offshore sectors.

Casey agreed, noting that Ireland also faces a similar issue, where Northern Irish boats can work on Irish offshore rigs without needing to deregister, while Irish boats must fully deregister and re-register as merchant vessels to work in the offshore sector. This creates a disincentive for potential fishermen, as the offshore wind industry offers better pay and hours. Casey emphasized that the rules set by the Irish Revenue for fishing, such as eight-hour days and 40-hour weeks, bear no resemblance to the reality of the fishing industry. He suggested that

this issue should be addressed with the Commission as an anti-competitive practice affecting recruitment.

Breckling added that this issue should be framed within the context of food sovereignty, a priority for the Commission. If such issues are not addressed, it will be difficult to reverse the decline in self-supply of fish products, which undermines political credibility. This, he argued, is not just about discrimination but about maintaining competitive conditions for the fishing industry.

The **Chair** invited Casey and Patrick Murphy to draft a short text on the issue, noting that having a written proposal would make it easier to consult the group on whether to develop an advice to the Commission. Input from other countries on similar tax or competitiveness issues would also be valuable to determine whether this is a broader EU-wide concern. The Chair also supported Breckling's suggestion to frame the issue within the context of food security. **(Action)**

Casey confirmed that the PO's submission to the government could be adapted to the Commission.

7 Date and Time of the next meeting

The next meeting of the FG is to take place on Tuesday 3 June, 10:30, CEST. **(Action)**

8 Agreed actions

Action	Responsible
Sisse Grøn to distribute the slides and corresponding paper from presented research on fisher's mental health.	Sisse Grøn
FG Members to provide written input to the NSAC/NWWAC Advice on STECF social dimension report by 22 nd of April.	FG Members
Gregory Casey and Patrick Murphy to draft a text on the need to correct tax discrimination ensuring fair tax credits for fishers, improving recruitment and feeding into EU food sovereignty targets.	Gregory Casey and Patrick Murphy
Next Social Aspects FG to convene on 3 June, 10:30 CEST.	FG Members

9 Participants

First Name	Last Name	Organisation
Bruno	Dachicourt	Syndicat National des Marins Pêcheurs CFTC
Falke	Falke de Sager	Rederscentrale
Gerard	Hussenot	Blue Fish
Gregory	Casey	IS&WFPO
Ilaria	Bellomo	NWWAC Secretariat
Irene	Prieto	ARVI
Jan	Kappel	European Anglers Alliance
Johnny	Woodlock	Independent observer
Kateryna	Urbanovych	NSAC Secretariat
Kenn Skau	Fischer	Chair of FG
Michael	Andersen	DFPO
Peter	Breckling	German Fisheries PO
Jesus	Clemente	ARVI
Sisse	Gron	Det Nationale Forskningscenter for Arbejdsmiljø
Tamara	Talevska	NSAC Secretariat