

## REPORT

Meeting: **NSAC/NWWAC Social Aspects FG**  
Parties: **NSAC/NWWAC FG members, stakeholders**  
Date and time: **3 June 2025**  
Location: **Zoom**  
Chair: **Kenn Skau Fischer**  
Rapporteur: **NSAC Secretariat**

### 1 Welcome and introduction [Chair]

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

Apologies were conveyed for Tamara Talevska (NSAC), Michael Andersen (DFPO), and Jan Kappel (EEA).

### 2 Report from the previous meeting [NSAC Secretariat]

#### Paper 2.1 Report of meeting of 4 April 2025

As no comments were raised regarding the report of the previous meeting of 4 April 2025, it was approved and can be found published on the [website](#).

#### 2.2 Actions from previous meeting

**Kateryna Urbanovych** of NSAC Secretariat read through previously agreed actions and informed on their status as follows:

Action	Status
Sisse Grøn to distribute the slides and corresponding paper from presented research on fisher's mental health.	<b>Complete.</b>
FG Members to provide written input to the NSAC/NWWAC Advice on STECF social dimension report by 22 <sup>nd</sup> of April.	<b>Complete, to be discussed at day's meeting.</b>

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.	<b>Complete.</b>
Next Social Aspects FG to convene on 3 June, 10:30 CEST.	<b>Complete.</b>

Regarding the agenda item on fair tax credits for fishers, the **Chair** emphasized the need for a proper discussion and proposed tabling the issue for an upcoming meeting. This is a relevant concern in Denmark and likely other countries.

**Patrick Murphy** (IS&WFPO) highlighted the clear discrimination in the tax credits system, which contributes to difficulties attracting young people to the industry.

**Rihan** explained that the circulated document is a recent submission to the Irish government, aimed at revising the existing tax credit ahead of the October/November budget. The goal is to align fisher tax credits with those for other seafarers. Simultaneously, the state agency is conducting a comprehensive review of marine and other sectors taxation systems.

The **Chair** suggested members review the circulated document. The topic will be placed on the agenda for the next meeting to exchange views on the matter, as well as whether to issue formal advice. This issue may not be well known across the EU and could be important for discussions in the Commission and Parliament. **(Action)**

**Murphy** added that the Fisher's Tax Credit was introduced some years ago, but the marine equivalent, the Seafarers' Allowance, differs in application, particularly regarding days spent away from home. He recommended members also examine the Seafarers' Allowance in their countries as it may offer useful comparisons.

**Peter Breckling** (German Fisheries PO) pointed out that fishers tax discussions must also consider fishermen's overall tax burden, consumer prices, and EU product competitiveness versus imports.

**Johnny Woodlock** (Independent Observer) praised the clarity of the industry's paper on tax issues and noted widespread support for adjusting the Seafarers' or Seagoing Allowance, expressing surprise at the discrepancy between naval officers' allowances and those of fishers, who also spend several days at sea.

**Rihan** suggested that, depending on the timing and progress of the next meeting, he could approach the group reviewing taxation to possibly give a brief presentation. **(Action)**

**Murphy** highlighted Breckling's point: increasing the number of fishers leads to a larger supply, which lowers prices. Reducing the financial burden on fishers means they keep more income, which in turn reduces costs for boats and further lowers prices.

### 3 Understanding fishers' wellbeing through participatory processes in fisheries management [*Evgenia Micha, University of Gloucestershire and Ingrid Kelling, Lyell Centre*]

**Evgenia Micha** (University of Gloucestershire) presented the recent [paper](#) on understanding fishers' wellbeing through participatory processes in fisheries management, published in *Ocean Sustainability* (Nature portfolio).

The foundation behind the research was that common misconception that fishers' wellbeing is static and linear. However, based on literature and experience it is clear that it is a complex, dynamic system involving economic, environmental, social, sustainability, governance, and human factors, all interconnected and constantly evolving.

The study highlights that research and policy often overlook this complexity. Stakeholders involved in wellbeing discussions have diverse interests, definitions, and unequal access and influence, causing imbalances. The goal was to create a comprehensive wellbeing system map by integrating knowledge from all stakeholders and examining how system elements interact when everyone's voice is included.

The team used fuzzy cognitive mapping, which visualizes the system as a network of elements connected by arrows indicating the nature and strength of relationships. Individual maps were created through interviews and then combined into a combined map.

Starting with 35 wellbeing indicators drawn from literature and expert input, the paper authors engaged stakeholders including five fishers, three researchers, three association representatives, four civil society members, and three government officials. In total, 70 participants built the community map.

If using the example of "mental health", in the fishers' maps, it was peripheral, influenced only by access to healthcare and not impacting other factors. This showed that from fishers' perspective alone, mental health is isolated in the wellbeing system. In the researchers' map, mental health is seen very differently: it is influenced by access to healthcare and science and, in turn, impacts many factors such as economic security, investments, revenue, community inclusivity, and quality of life. For researchers, mental health is a key element with broad influence. Among representatives from associations and unions, mental health appears peripheral, influenced mainly by their sense of identity and affecting safety. While safety is important, mental health itself is not central to their system. For civil society stakeholders, mental health plays a major role. It both affects and is affected by economic security, fishers' autonomy from restrictive legislation, healthcare access, and community inclusiveness. Good mental health fosters inclusion, and a supportive community enhances mental health. Safety is strongly linked here as well. Government representatives see mental health mainly as influencing quality of life, which they consider important but abstract, something they feel has limited direct policy influence.

By aggregating all maps, a community map was created with 37 indicators (35+2 added by participants) and 301 connections. Mental health emerges as highly connected, influencing

revenue, investment, safety, and inclusivity in the local community core factors shaping fishers' wellbeing beyond traditional views focused on counselling.

An interesting observation: in the researchers' map, economic security affects mental health, while in civil society's map, mental health affects economic security. Since these influences were equally strong but opposite, they cancel out in the combined map, highlighting the complexity of system interactions. Safety and investment remain central, with investment shown as the most important factor, itself influenced by mental health.

**Micha** emphasized that to truly understand wellbeing—especially mental health—it's crucial to include all stakeholders, not just fishers. Different groups have varied perceptions, and mental health is often misunderstood or stigmatized, tied to pride and masculinity. It is a core element intertwined with freedom of choice, identity, and profitability. A holistic system map enables identifying and examining these interconnected elements.

**Woodlock** noted that communication was only mentioned in relation to communication to shore and questioned whether language barriers between fishers, especially with increasing foreign crews, were considered, highlighting the potential for isolation if common language is lacking.

**Micha** explained that there is an additional indicator called isolation included in the framework. For this research, the Scottish nephrops fishery as a case study was used, with most research conducted in Scotland. There, isolation appears to be a significant issue, especially since much of the crew is foreign and non-English-speaking. These crew members often stick to their own nationality groups, reducing interaction. However, isolation usually affects the skipper rather than the crew, since, for example, if a boat employs Filipino workers from the same agency, they tend to know each other, leaving the Scottish skipper isolated without anyone to talk to.

**Breckling** thanked the team for addressing this issue and raised a question about measuring these indicators quantitatively. As a natural scientist, he pointed out that fishers' subjective answers about their lives vary widely and are difficult to quantify. For example, one fisher may say, "Happy wife, happy life," while another may say, "I'm a fisher to be at sea, not at home." He asked how these qualitative insights could be integrated into measurable indicators, especially when politicians expect concrete results, such as demonstrating a 10% improvement after investing millions in fishers' well-being.

**Micha** responded that some indicators do have measurable data, particularly environmental ones. In the UK, for example, data on boat movements and stock levels can be incorporated into models. However, social data is less developed. The UK is currently designing surveys to better capture social sustainability, but there's still a long way to go. For subjective measures like quality of life or community inclusion, the best approach so far is gathering ratings from many stakeholders on a 1–10 scale, which helps approximate real conditions.

If investing considerable amounts in improving fishers' well-being, Micha noted that the first step would be identifying actionable indicators. Action should be put not into improve quality of life, since that's not directly controllable by government. Instead, they focus should be on

tangible changes, like improving quota access, easing immigration regulations, or facilitating credit access, that can be measured and influence outcomes indirectly.

**Urbanovych** asked about the framework's future as a policy tool, wondering if there have been contacts with policymakers and how they envision it being applied in other cases.

**Micha** shared that the Scottish Marine Directorate showed strong interest in the qualitative approach of the framework. Unlike traditional surveys requiring thousands of responses, this method works with smaller samples and yields meaningful insights. A focus group is scheduled with the Directorate at the end of the month to explore how to adapt this research, originally a lengthy academic project, into a faster, policy-ready tool. This will involve input from high-level fishers, such as those operating pelagic boats. Additionally, there has been interest from a Washington-based human rights organization focused on maritime issues, appreciating the method's blend of qualitative and quantitative elements.

**Gerard Hussenot** (Blue Fish) asked about the representativeness of the sample and specifically whether only five fishers were involved or if a broader group was considered.

**Micha** clarified that five fishers were involved in map creation. Nephrop fishers are hard to locate as they're dispersed; efforts at a fishers expo yielded five participants who made the map. Many more agreed to interviews, but only the five maps were included in the publication. While five is a small number, literature supports it as valid for qualitative research, though it remains limited.

The **Chair** noted that this sample size question is important for the Focus Group's work, particularly when aggregating data and conclusions across different studies in fisheries. Despite differences between larger and smaller vessels, many issues overlap. Drawing from Danish and Swedish fisheries experience, the Chair asked Micha how the Focus Group could build on the article's findings to develop advice.

**Micha** highlighted that it is crucial to gather perspectives from all sides to avoid isolated views. For example, Scottish fishers initially resist discussing mental health as it conflicts with their identity, but when shown maps linking freedom of decision-making to happiness, they agreed with the insight, despite not volunteering it themselves. This method allows knowledge sharing without requiring stakeholders to confront each other directly. Presenting others' views encourages agreement and inclusion.

**Marta Ballesteros** (Spanish Institute of Oceanography) highlighted that some topics, such as mental health, can be difficult to address directly. She suggested that bringing fishers' lived experiences back into the organizations, and linking these to the draft advice on mental health, could help broaden the conversation. Framing mental health in more accessible terms, and emphasizing its real-life impacts without necessarily using the term itself, could be particularly helpful for organizations and advisory groups. She noted that mental health also affects the functioning of advisory councils, where members spend considerable time resolving conflicts and crafting advice, making it a topic worth further discussion.

**Micha** added that when mental health is mentioned, especially among fishers, it often conjures images of therapy or talking about personal trauma, which can feel off-putting. However, as

the presentation showed, mental health is really about being able to live your life without suffering: maintaining well-being, staying included in your community, and being able to work and earn a living.

**Ballesteros** emphasized that for fishers, the decision to start or continue in the profession is closely tied to happiness.

**Micha** concluded that mental health is ultimately about happiness. If generational renewal is a key concern, mental well-being offers a valuable lens: becoming a fisher is a life choice, unlike other professions where emotional fulfilment may not be as essential. You don't need to love being an accountant to stay in the job, but you do need to enjoy being a fisher to keep going.

The **Chair** closed by noting that the group would work on formal advice on this issue in the future.

#### 4 STECF EWG 25-02 Social Data in EU Fisheries: paving the way for the Annual Social Report on EU Fisheries [*Marta Ballesteros, EWG Chair*]

**Marta Ballesteros** (STECF Social Data EWG Chair) presented the latest outcomes of the STECF expert working group on social data ([EWG 25-02](#))

She emphasized that the social dimension is not just symbolic, but it can be fully operational, on par with the biological and economic dimensions. A major step forward is the upcoming first-ever annual social report, which will contextualize elements of the STECF's annual economic report.

She reminded participants of the key tools in the social data "toolbox": National Fisheries Profiles, Fisheries Community Profiles, Social Indicators, and Data Collection.

National Fisheries Profiles are nearly complete and now undergoing external peer review to ensure they meet quality standards for use in Commission's assessments.

The Fisheries Community Profiles have evolved. Last year's concept was updated to reflect the importance of intergenerational continuity in fishing, not just preserving the past, but ensuring communities have a future. A new element – fisheries and maritime cultural heritage – has also been integrated into their core definition. Three pilot tests (in the Netherlands, France, and Spain) are underway to evaluate the usefulness of the tool. Key insights so far include:

- While harmonizing profiles is important, local priorities may differ from those identified at the EU level. These must be recognized, whether highlighted in the National Profiles or identified through fieldwork.
- Fieldwork should go beyond traditional stakeholders. In addition to fishers, researchers are encouraged to speak with young people and others outside the sector to understand diverse community perceptions.



- If possible, researchers should join a fishing trip or, alternatively, do an early-morning harbour walkthrough to gain real-world insights, especially if they lack hands-on fisheries experience.
- Lastly, it is recommended to conduct fieldwork during local fisheries festivals or cultural events to better capture community dynamics that a standard interview might miss.

Regarding social indicators, the Commission states that the current data collection across Europe includes social data. However, experts have consistently told the Commission that this data is largely demographic and descriptive, it shows what's happening but doesn't allow for meaningful analysis or assessment. Last year, the STECF experts convinced the Commission to run a pilot test of 12 proposed social indicators. Before making it mandatory for member states to collect this data, the Commission wants to ensure the methodology is robust and that the indicators provide valuable insights.

These indicators focus on key issues such as generational renewal (who is entering fisheries, who completes mandatory or voluntary training), financial status (comparing fishers' income to other professions), and affiliation to trade unions. It was observed that in some countries, training opens opportunities outside fisheries. Indicators related to marine spatial planning are also included, specifically how much area under a country's MSP is allocated to fisheries compared to other uses. Since fisheries often lack designated priority areas, this metric will help measure spatial competition. Well-being indicators are part of the pilot too, despite their limitations. As said, time away from home can have both positive and negative effects, so the aim is to gather quantitative data first and complement it with qualitative insights later. Work safety is another focus, such as minimum crew size per vessel.

Seven countries have agreed to test these indicators. Some will test all 12, others only a selection. These tests will be reviewed by the Commission's advisory bodies. If successful, the indicators will be integrated into the official data collection framework.

Building on what was started last year, the EWG focused on three main actions:

1. Annual Social Report (ASOR): the report will be compiled as per usual Commission's guidelines. Therefore, expectations should be managed as the first ASOR probably won't answer all questions, especially given data limitations. The Commission seeks harmonized, cross-country data, which remains a challenge. For the first time, the ASOR will include both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The report's structure cannot be shared yet, as it's under review by the STECF plenary, but it should be available in July. **(Action)**
2. Complementary Data Sources: Since the 12 social indicators won't be ready this year, the STECF is considering existing EU datasets (such as the Labour Force Survey, Income and Living Conditions statistics, and the Working Conditions Survey) to extract relevant social data.
3. Assessments of the NFPs and FCPs have been also performed and relevant feedback from the ACs has been incorporated into the report.

Due to current data constraints and limited human resources, not all areas requiring advice can be fully addressed. Prioritization is therefore necessary. Feedback from the ACs is being

considered and is instrumental in the development of the advice. For instance, the suggestion to update National Fisheries Profiles annually was carefully considered. However, social and structural changes typically occur gradually, making a three-year update cycle more appropriate. Exceptions may apply in cases of significant change, such as the current fleet restructuring in the Netherlands. In such instances, ongoing engagement with stakeholders can serve as an early warning mechanism, prompting ad hoc updates outside the regular cycle.

Additionally, concerns were raised regarding the omission of key Danish harbours from the fisheries community profiles, as well as the absence of Danish experts in the STECF process. While one Danish expert was initially involved, the feedback received from the FG has helped identify gaps. The additional communities will be added to the list for consideration. It should be noted, however, that the development of community profiles is largely voluntary at this stage. A standardized template ensures comparability, but unless funding is provided by the Commission, profiles will rely on contributions from researchers, including those undertaking theses, PhDs, or master's projects. If funding becomes available, the communities already identified will be prioritized. Nonetheless, the long-term objective is to cover all fisheries communities across Europe through collaborative academic and institutional efforts.

Regarding the issue of mental health, the topic has been incorporated into ongoing work on well-being indicators. The findings and recommendations shared are highly relevant, both for setting immediate priorities and for planning medium-term actions.

On the inclusion of recreational fisheries, it must be acknowledged that current capacity does not allow for its full integration into the existing work. Attempting to cover both commercial and recreational fisheries would risk producing superficial results. Consequently, it has been recommended that the STECF consider forming a dedicated group to address recreational fisheries in depth. Existing expertise could then be made available to support that work. It is not intended to downplay the importance of recreational fisheries, but rather to ensure each area receives the attention and resources it requires.

The **Chair** acknowledged the remark on recreational fisheries. In relation to data collection within fisheries communities, he noted that many communities possess important local expertise. With the right mechanisms in place, experts could be actively engaged in gathering relevant information. This would not only improve data quality but also foster a sense of ownership and potentially contribute to well-being outcomes.

**Ballesteros** responded that regarding the inclusion of recreational fisheries, these are considered only to the extent of their interactions with or impact on commercial fisheries, such as through competition for space or other shared uses. Broader aspects of recreational fisheries remain outside the current scope of the EWG work.

In response to the suggestion of involving fisheries organizations in the development of fisheries community profiles, it was proposed to initiate a pilot project in one community. This would explore how such organizations might contribute meaningfully to the profile development process. As data quality is a frequent concern in social science research, strict protocols for data collection and validation would be co-created and applied. The proposed



approach would involve identifying which elements can be directly contributed by fisheries organizations, which require dialogue-based collaboration, and which would remain part of the final analytical process. If agreed, **Ballesteros** can bring this back to the EWG, with the next steps involving a preparatory online meetings. The broader aim would be to promote local ownership of the profiles and ensure their relevance in decision-making processes at various levels – national, regional, or municipal.

**Breckling** noted that he is happy to see that German scientist, Tobias Lassner, who has direct ties to the fishing community, is participating in the EWG. An example was shared from a television program in which a chef, after spending a week at sea with a fishing crew, expressed disbelief at the hardships of the profession. The crew, in contrast, showed deep pride in their work, exemplifying the disconnect between public perception and the lived experience of fishers. Capturing and understanding this disconnect scientifically remains a challenge. He also asked whether the EWG reports can be made available to the group. **(Action)**

**Urbanovych** asked about the expected publication date of the Annual Social Report and thanked Ballesteros for her input on the NSAC/NWWAC draft paper concerning the STECF's work. She noted that the paper aims to highlight relevant aspects for consideration by the STECF EWG, and asked for guidelines for a more systematic contribution of FG members to their ongoing work.

**Ballesteros** responded that the report is expected to be published in November or December, depending on the timeline of the STECF plenary meetings. The EWG will convene again from 13-17 October to draft the report, which will include both EU-wide trend chapters and Member State-specific sections. Although the primary focus will be on fisheries, the report will also include descriptive demographic and employment data for aquaculture and processing, following a specific request to the Commission.

Two key contributions from ACs could be:

1. Just as fishers detect ecological shifts at sea, stakeholders often observe early signs of social or economic changes within communities (such as changes in crew composition or social dynamics). AC members could share brief bullet points based on their long-term experience, identifying noticeable changes in social or economic conditions. These inputs could help signal emerging issues before they are captured in official data. **(Action)**
2. AC members could also report on unintended and local impacts of specific regulations that may not be apparent at the EU level. For example, while the effects of area closures for vulnerable marine ecosystems are broadly understood, region-specific issues (such as quota allocation mechanisms that fail to incentivize small-scale fisheries due to unique local circumstances) are less visible and require local insight.

**Urbanovych** relayed a suggestion from Talevska to designate one representative from the FG to consistently attend the STECF Social Data in Fisheries meetings and report back in a systematic manner. Ideally, the same individual would serve in this role for a fixed period (e.g. three years) to ensure continuity. **(Action)**

**Ballesteros** welcomed the proposal and expressed appreciation for the focus group's interest, noting that such engagement helps connect experts and stakeholders, which is especially valuable.

The **Chair** asked whether ongoing or upcoming changes within the STECF might affect the EWG on Social Data.

**Ballesteros** responded that socio-economic expertise has been given higher priority in the selection criteria for new STECF members. However, the broader implications remain unclear. For the time being, the ASOR will proceed as planned. The working group is already established, and the ToR has been finalized. Beyond that, future developments are uncertain, and updates will be shared when available.

The **Chair** further commented on the national fisheries profiles, highlighting the importance of allowing stakeholders to review and comment on the content before publication. It was noted that fishers are often sensitive to how they and their communities are portrayed.

**Ballesteros** acknowledged the concern, stressing the importance of careful communication when presenting fisheries to the wider public. While pre-publication review is not likely due to Commission procedures, post-publication feedback will be welcomed.

#### 4.1 ACs Contribution to STECF Expert WG on social data

**Urbanovych** briefly introduced the draft NSAC/NWWAC advice on the STECF report on social data. Following the latest meeting, new sections were added. She proposed broadening the scope of the advice to provide general recommendations on the STECF EWG's work on social data in fisheries, rather than referring solely to the specific [report](#). In light of Ballesteros' presentation, she also suggested adding a new section with comments on the Annual Social Report.

The **Chair** supported this approach.

**Urbanovych** further asked members to clarify which specific socio-economic data would be most useful, as the current wording remains too general. She suggested that the advice explicitly reference the data types to be considered. **(Action)**

The Chair encouraged members to provide feedback to the draft. Upon integrating comments, the revised draft will be circulated and members will have one week to respond. If no further comments are received, the advice will be considered endorsed by the focus group and submitted to the AC ExComs for formal adoption, following the respective AC procedures. A second review round might be added if substantial input is provided. **(Action)**

**Hussenot** expressed support for the conclusions of the draft, stating that the issues addressed are highly relevant to Bluefish, which is committed to defending the social pillar of sustainable development.

## 5 Date and Time of the next meeting

The next meeting of the FG is to take place on 2 September, 13:00 CEST. **(Action)**

## 6 Agreed actions

Action	Responsible
Members to review the circulated document on fair tax credits for fishers. The topic to be tabled at the next FG meeting.	FG Members
Dominic Rihan to reach out to the Irish state agency for a presentation of the developed review of taxation systems across sectors.	Dominic Rihan
Marta Ballesteros to circulate the report of the recent STECF EWG on Social Data meeting to the Secretariat upon publication. NSAC Secretariat to circulate the recent and past EWG reports to the FG members.	Marta Ballesteros, Secretariat
FG Members to submit feedback to the draft NSAC/NWWAC paper on STECF work (i.e., on noticeable changes in social or economic conditions and which socio-economic data are essential to consider by the EWG). Upon integration of comments, the draft is to be circulated to FG for one week and subsequently to the ExComs.	FG Members, Secretariat
Social Aspects FG to consider designating one representative to attend and report back from the STECF Social Data EWG meetings.	FG Members
The next meeting of the FG to take place on 2 September, 13:00 CEST.	FG Members

## 7 Participants

First Name	Last Name	Organisation
Bruno	Dachicourt	Syndicat National des Marins Pêcheurs CFTC
Dominc	Rihan	KFO



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR  
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES  
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN  
WATERS  
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Flemming	Christensen	
Gerard	Hussenot	Blue Fish
Ilaria	Bellomo	NWWAC Secretariat
Isabelle & Kieran		Interpreters
Johnny	Woodlock	Independent observer
Kateryna	Urbanovych	NSAC Secretariat
Kenn Skau	Fischer	Chair of FG
Marta	Ballesteros	Spanish Institute of Oceanography
Patrick	Murphy	IS&WFPO
Peter	Breckling	German Fisheries PO