

REPORT

Meeting: **NSAC/NWWAC Social Aspects FG**
Parties: **NSAC/NWWAC FG members, stakeholders**
Date and time: **2 September 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), Falke De Sager (Rederscentrale), Patrick Murphy (Irish South & West Fish Producer's Organisation), as well as Mo Mathies and Ilaria Bellomo (NWWAC).

2 Report from the previous meeting [NSAC Secretariat]

Paper 2.1 Report of meeting of 3 June 2025

As no comments were raised regarding the report of the previous meeting of 3 June 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
Members to review the circulated document on fair tax credits for fishers. The topic to be tabled at the next FG meeting.	<i>Complete, to be discussed at day's meeting</i>

Dominic Rihan to reach out to the Irish state agency for a presentation of the developed review of taxation systems across sectors.	<i>Complete, to be tabled at next meeting of the FG</i>
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.	<i>Ongoing</i>
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.	<i>Complete, advice approved on 21 August</i>
Social Aspects FG to consider designating one representative to add and report back from the STECF Social Data EWG meetings.	<i>Ongoing</i>
The next meeting of the FG to take place on 2 September, 13:00 CEST.	<i>Complete</i>

On the agenda item concerning the STECF EWG report, **Marta Ballesteros** (STECF) explained that it will be published together with the annual social report in October, effectively as a combined report. As soon as it is ready, members will receive it.

3 Baseline study on the training and certification requirements of fishers in the EU [Tim Haasnoot, ProSea]

Tim Haasnoot (ProSea) presented the baseline study on training and certification requirements for EU fishers. The study was carried out by a consortium consisting of Deloitte, Wageningen University and ProSea. Its objective was to provide the European Commission with an overview of the current state of training and certification across the EU and to assess the potential advantages and disadvantages of introducing a common standard based on the revised STCW-F Convention.

The study, conducted in mid-2024, focused exclusively on professional sea fisheries. Five landlocked Member States without a fishing fleet were excluded, leaving 22 Member States under review. Data were collected through a literature review, an e-survey distributed via sectoral networks, and stakeholder interviews. Gaps in information were addressed through targeted follow-up with relevant actors.

For each Member State, the current training requirements, certification processes, and responsible authorities were described, followed by a comparison with the revised STCW-F Convention. An assessment of the potential implications of adopting the Convention into EU law was also carried out.

Limitations were encountered due to uneven Member State input, difficulties in identifying and contacting key informants, and limited or outdated publicly available information. Additional complexity arose from the fact that not all Member States have ratified the STCW-F Convention, complicating comparability.

The findings were structured in a set format, covering: (chapter 1) the relevance of the fishing sector in terms of employment and economic weight, and (chapter 2) the national legal framework, authorities involved, and requirements in place for training and certification of fishers. Chapter 3 addresses training content and structure. Training pathways were examined, including entry routes for new and adult entrants, as well as the availability of part-time programs. Vocational training provided by nautical colleges was distinguished from courses offered by commercial institutes, such as basic safety training covered under the STCW or STCW-F Conventions. The content and financing of training programmes as well as the demographic profiles (age, gender) of training participants were also reviewed. Chapter 4 focuses on certification requirements, the extent of international recognition of certificates, and the number of certified fishers. Chapter 5 provides summaries and references for each Member State. This standardized structure facilitated comparisons, although diversity across Member States made such analysis complex.

Significant variation was observed in training and certification systems. Some Member States lacked any legal framework, and responsibility was often fragmented across multiple ministries, complicating data collection. At the EU level, overlapping responsibilities between DG MARE, DG MOVE, and DG EMPL created similar challenges. A high degree of diversity was observed in the definition of functions. Functions described were difficult to interpret and to compare with those in other EU countries. Training pathways were found to differ considerably. In some countries, vocational training programs exist; in others, fishers follow seafarer training with additional modules on fisheries. In several cases, no formal training pathway was identified. Program duration varied from multi-year vocational courses to short, one-day safety trainings. Data on the number of trained fishers proved difficult to obtain, as distinctions between fishers and seafarers were not always clear.

Certification data also proved unreliable. Issued certificates did not necessarily reflect the number of active fishers, and recognition procedures varied widely: some Member States applied rigorous checks, others relied on mutual trust, while some did not recognize certificates from abroad at all. Most recognition requests originated from neighbouring countries, but the data available may not accurately reflect actual mobility within the EU.

In practice, Member States often referred to the Directive on the Minimum Level of Training for Seafarers (EU Directive 2022/993 linked to the STCW Convention) with fisheries being explicitly excluded from the STCW or the Professional Qualifications Directive (EU Directive 2005/36/EC). However, both Directives were also seen as inadequate by some EU Member States to use for fishers.

Finally, a gap analysis was conducted by comparing national frameworks with the revised STCW-F Convention. Member States were categorized as:

- 5 countries: largely compliant, requiring only limited re- or upskilling;
- 9 countries: requiring moderate upskilling or reskilling;
- 8 countries: requiring substantial reskilling and upskilling.

However, comparability was hindered by incomplete information, non-ratification of the STCW-F Convention by many countries, and translation issues. The results therefore provide only an indicative picture of the current state of play.

The advantages and disadvantages of implementing a common training and certification standard were assessed through the e-survey, expert interviews, desk research, and participation in the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for Sea Fisheries. Respondents' arguments were grouped into eight categories. Reported advantages included improved safety and resilience of fishers, a more level playing field, facilitation of free labour mobility, and support for sustainable fishing practices. Reported disadvantages included a lack of fit with local contexts, increased administrative and financial burdens, limited resources and facilities, insufficient entrants, and the potential weakening of existing national standards. The absence of a harmonized approach was identified as a key challenge. Current recognition procedures for certificates are complex and handled on a case-by-case basis, requiring Member States to conduct extensive checks due to wide national variations. This fragmentation creates barriers to labour mobility and poses risks to fisher safety, other actors at sea, and the marine environment.

Concerns were also raised about compliance with existing EU directives. For instance, although the directive transposing the Working Fishing Convention (EU Directive 2017/159) requires training, in some Member States no such requirements could be identified. This results in unequal training opportunities across the EU, contradicting the social dimension of the Common Fisheries Policy and hindering free movement of labour. Even in cases where the STCW or STCW-F Conventions have been ratified, interpretation varies, leading to uncertainty over skills and competences. Mutual recognition of certificates is therefore often denied due to insufficient clarity on national standards.

By contrast, in merchant shipping, the STCW Convention has been transposed into EU law, with the European Maritime Safety Agency ensuring compliance across Member States.

Haasnoot suggested that a similar mechanism could be considered for the revised STCW-F Convention, which is increasingly aligned with the STCW Convention.

Peter Breckling (German Industry) asked whether a level playing field exists in Europe regarding education and training of fishers, particularly in shared fishing grounds such as the Baltic Sea, North Sea, or Mediterranean. He questioned whether training systems could be considered common at the European level with regional differences, or whether they remain entirely national, and further asked which countries could serve as best-practice examples.

Haasnoot responded that significant variation exists across Member States in terms of fishing grounds, vessels, and techniques, making full harmonization challenging. Establishing a shared baseline would be a practical first step and the revised STCW-F Convention could provide such a minimum, applicable to all fishing vessel personnel, with stricter requirements

for vessels over 24 meters. In the end, the STCW-F Convention aims to provide a minimum level of training and certification for fishing vessel personnel at the international level. Adoption of this baseline at EU level is a way to promote labour mobility, establish common terminology, and avoid undue burdens on small-scale fishers. Member States such as Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Spain, which have ratified the STCW-F Convention are examples where training and certification frameworks appear well-organized.

Johnny Woodlock (independent observer) emphasized the importance of a harmonized approach to training and certification, noting that currently in some cases fishers can start work without formal training. He underlined the greater risks on larger vessels and highlighted the situation in Ireland, where enforcement of basic training requirements is inconsistent and non-EU crews are often accepted without certification. He expressed strong support for a harmonized approach.

The **Chair** observed that while harmonization would facilitate labour mobility and other objectives, the question remains whether such an approach is necessary or merely desirable.

In reply, **Haasnoot** argued that harmonization aligns with the ambitions of the Common Fisheries Policy, the need for generational renewal, and the increasing mobility of both EU and non-EU fishers. He reiterated that a shared minimum standard, in line with international conventions, would provide fairness, professional recognition, and equal opportunities for fishers, comparable to those enjoyed in the merchant shipping sector.

Urbanovych asked how the Commission intends to use the study and what the next steps will be. She also inquired whether the findings had been presented to Member States or regional groups and highlighted a question raised by Marta Ballesteros in the chat regarding whether young family members are permitted to go on board vessels for fishing trips or recreational outings.

Haasnoot replied that DG MARE is considering an impact assessment to evaluate costs and consequences for Member States as a possible follow-up. The findings have been presented to policymakers from DG MARE, CINEA, DG MOVE, and DG EMPL, as well as at the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for Sea Fisheries in Brussels.

On the issue of children on board vessels, the **Chair** noted that this does not appear to be an issue in Denmark but suggested further clarification could be sought.

Haasnoot added that child labor and safety regulations must be considered under international conventions and national laws. Where the STCW-F Convention has been ratified, all persons on board are required to have basic safety training. He stressed that fishing vessels are not playgrounds and that guests must also be properly equipped with safety gear.

The **Chair** added that insurance issues would also arise in such cases.

Flemming Christensen observed that in Denmark family members may go on board if listed on the crew list but are not permitted to carry out fishing-related work. He also asked whether comments made during meetings are incorporated into the report, noting shortcomings in the Danish section.

Haasnoot clarified that the published material consists of an overall report and separate detailed Member State case studies. The overall report includes only main findings to avoid excessive length, while detailed case studies contain the full information. Publication of the overall report was delayed until the case studies were available to avoid misinterpretation.

Christensen noted that factual errors had been identified.

Haasnoot observed that some findings originated from e-survey responses. While these were not considered the most important source, they were validated, cross-checked, and supplemented with additional information. However, the original survey input could not be altered.

The **Chair** noted that extensive information is available in the report and highlighted the importance of harmonisation of training, certification, and labour mobility practices as a central interest of the focus group. He emphasized the need to ensure that the report is not disregarded but instead followed up through an impact assessment and possible steps toward more harmonised implementation across Member States. Broader links to national education systems and fleet organisation were also noted.

He suggested the FG to prepare a draft advice on harmonisation of training. Members were invited to provide written contributions, after which a draft would be prepared for discussion at the next meeting. **(Action)**

The **Chair** further underlined that training should not be viewed as an end in itself, but as a means of ensuring high standards in fisheries, improving product quality, and enhancing working conditions

4 EU Blue Generational Renewal Strategy (Ocean Pact)

The **Chair** noted that the recently published Ocean Pact text addresses not only environmental but also social aspects, including generational renewal, women's participation, upskilling, and working conditions. In 2027, the Commission plans to introduce a Blue Generational Renewal Strategy to foster a skilled workforce in marine research, ocean technology, and sustainable fisheries. Education, both initial and lifelong, is essential, particularly in the context of new technologies affecting the fisheries sector. The Chair suggested that the focus group reflect on how to contribute to this discussion and remain engaged with the process.

Woodlock observed that generational renewal is closely linked to training and shared his personal experience of joining a trawler to better understand the challenges of fishing. He noted that while such experiences provide valuable insights, they raise questions about harmonised training approaches. He stressed that opportunities should exist for people interested in fisheries careers to experience the realities of working at sea without having to undergo full certification, given that many might discover they are unsuited to the work.

Urbanovych proposed establishing contact with DG MARE officials working on the social dimension of the strategy and highlighted the Young Fishermen Network in Cornwall as an

example of good practice. She suggested inviting representatives from this or similar initiatives to present their work to the group.

The **Chair** reiterated that the Blue Generational Renewal Strategy will extend beyond fisheries to include fleet modernisation, digitalisation, improved safety, and support for upskilling and reskilling. He stressed the importance of the focus group's involvement and underlined the need to maintain close engagement with the Commission as the strategy develops. **(Action)**

Breckling reflected on the Commission's approaches to generational renewal, noting that they often appear overly academic and detached from the realities of the fishing profession. He emphasized the need to focus on the target group actually entering the sector. Drawing on personal experience in Germany, he observed that the profession's image strongly influences career choice, with social and community factors playing a key role. He highlighted that promoting the real-life experiences of modern European fishers, through media, local examples, and community engagement, could improve understanding and attract new entrants.

The **Chair** likened the situation in fisheries to football, where many people theorize but few have direct experience. He stressed the importance of maintaining close engagement with the Commission to ensure that fisheries receive sufficient attention within the Blue Generational Renewal Strategy, rather than being treated as just one chapter among many.

5 Taxation of fisheries incomes compared to other sectors

The item was raised based on contributions from Irish members, who noted that offshore industry workers benefit from specific tax credits that are not available to fishers, creating a potential disincentive to work in the fisheries sector. For example, if salaries were comparable but taxes were higher in fisheries, employment in offshore industries would be financially more attractive.

The **Chair** confirmed that a similar situation exists in Denmark, where workers in the offshore industry or commercial fleet activities supporting wind farms may receive tax benefits, potentially affecting fisheries recruitment. He suggested that members investigate whether this issue occurs in other Member States and report back, noting that if the concern is limited to Ireland and Denmark, further action from the FG may not be necessary.

Breckling added that in Germany, tax discussions have focused on reinvestment of proceeds from the sale of vessels, a benefit granted to inland shipping but not to fisheries, which is relevant in the context of fleet renewal and investment in new vessels.

Jan Kappel (EAA) noted that taxation falls under national sovereignty and should be considered within national frameworks, warning that harmonization of such taxes across the EU could be problematic.

The **Chair** acknowledged the national dimension but highlighted that taxation practices in one sector may create unintended disadvantages for others, such as fisheries, particularly in relation to recruitment. He emphasized that the focus should be on whether tax treatment impacts fisheries recruitment and labor fairness rather than attempting general harmonization. Consideration of other issues was noted as outside the scope of the current discussion.

Finally, it was noted that Irish colleagues were absent from the meeting and may need to provide further input, thus this discussion will be reprised at subsequent FGs . **(Action)**

6 AOB

6.1 NSAC/NWWAC Advice on well-being of fishers (for discussion)

Urbanovych inquired whether members wished to prepare advice on the well-being of fishers, noting that the group had already tabled several presentations on the topic. She highlighted a presentation she attended at the MARE Conference in June, which compared mental health in the fishing sector in England with the general population, suggesting that the researcher could be invited to present her findings.

The **Chair** emphasized the need to decide whether the focus group should elaborate on these findings to produce recommendations, or simply take note of the information presented. He encouraged members to consider practical actions that could be taken. He asked for comments to be submitted in writing to the Secretariat by a deadline to be communicated. **(Action)**

6.2 Compensation of fishers for their knowledge

Urbanovych noted a presentation at the MARE Conference on collaborative research with fishers, raising the question of how fishers should be compensated for providing knowledge. She explained that compensation may be monetary or in-kind (e.g., gifts), but that national regulations, including tax implications, vary across countries. She informed about Ballesteros' suggestion regarding a possible focus group discussion on the approaches taken in different Member States with the goal to provide an opinion on appropriate practices.

The **Chair** reflected that this topic encompasses multiple situations: (1) fishers participating directly in projects, possibly with vessel rental or project-related work, and (2) fishers providing experiential or historical knowledge for scientific or policy development. He noted that while increased compensation may encourage cooperation, the group should consider what practical recommendations could be made. Ballesteros' previous comments on the matter were acknowledged, and she may be invited to provide further clarification. **(Action)**

6.3 Social impacts of proposed MPAs [Johnny Woodlock]

Woodlock noted that the map of proposed MPAs by the Fair Seas coalition in Ireland. He highlighted that while improvements in biodiversity had been observed in areas such as Lyme Bay following restrictions on bottom-impacting gear, the social impacts and benefits had not yet been considered. In the northwest Irish Sea, fishing had shifted from small-scale net fishing to large multi-rig vessels focusing on razor clam dredging, which is particularly damaging to the seabed. He warned that if the area were declared an MPA, local fishers and coastal communities could be severely impacted, especially as the area is also earmarked for wind farm development. He emphasized that the social consequences of MPAs must be closely monitored.

The **Chair** agreed that the issue is important, noting that discussions on MPAs often focus on environmental benefits while overlooking implications for fisheries and coastal communities.

He proposed that experts be invited to contribute to a future focus group meeting to discuss potential impacts and explore whether advice could be developed. **(Action)**

Urbanovych added that several fisheries organizations, including Rederscentrale and From NORD, had released statements on the social impacts of the 42 MPAs plan, which could be considered for presentation to the group.

Breckling described experiences in Germany, where attempts to establish a national park in the Baltic coastal area failed due to opposition from stakeholders. Instead, additional MPAs with fishing bans were introduced, with financial compensation offered to fishers. He highlighted that German fishers advocated for monitoring biodiversity and species populations to assess whether closures positively affected the environment, with fishing resuming if no improvement was observed. He noted that this approach contrasts with positions that maintain permanent closures without data-based evaluation.

Woodlock highlighted that fleet displacement is often overlooked by proponents of MPAs. He noted that many small vessels operating from traditional piers along the Irish coastline use low-impact gears and fish in nearby waters. If large stretches of coastline were closed to fishing under MPA rules, these vessels would not be able to relocate due to depth restrictions and limited range. This could force boats to move into areas that had previously been lightly fished, undermining the purpose of MPAs. He stressed that displacement must be considered as a significant consequence of MPA designation.

In the chat, **Mark Dickey-Collas (Dickey-Collas Marine, evaluator)** observed that once MPAs are established, their legal basis often makes them permanent.

The **Chair** added that while national legislation could allow for monitoring and review, MPAs are typically located in coastal areas, which disproportionately affects small-scale vessels. Larger vessels with greater capacity can relocate, but smaller single-handed boats cannot. He noted that the issue is particularly critical for coastal fleets and should be explored further in upcoming discussions.

6.4 STECF EWG on Social Data

Urbanovych invited members to join the upcoming STECF Expert Working Group on Social Data (13–17 October, online). Registration closes on 19 September. **(Action)**

7 Closing & next meeting date

The Secretariat will circulate a Doodle to set the date of the next FG meeting (to take place in December or January). **(Action)**

8 Agreed actions

Action	Responsible
(Carried-forward) 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
Members to forward input to potential NSAC/NWWAC advice on harmonisation of training and certification for EU fisheries.	FG Members
Secretariat to contact Commission representatives to inquire into Blue Generational Renewal Strategy developments.	NSAC Secretariat
Next meeting of the FG to include discussions on taxation of fisheries income compared to other maritime sectors.	FG Members
Members to forward written contribution to potential NSAC/NWWAC advice on the well-being of fishers.	FG Members
Marta Ballesteros to be invited to the next meeting of the FG to present on compensations of fishers for their knowledge.	Marta Ballesteros
The Secretariat to invite experts on potential fisheries impacts of MPAs to present at a future FG meeting.	NSAC Secretariat
Members to inform about their interest to join the STECF Expert Working Group on Social Data (13–17 October, online).	FG Members
Secretariat to circulate a doodle to establish the date for the next meeting of the FG.	NSAC Secretariat

9 Participants

First Name	Last Name	Organisation
Bruno	Dachicourt	Syndicat National des Marins Pêcheurs CFTC
Ellen	Johannesen	NIVA
Flemming	Christensen	
Gerard	Hussenot	Blue Fish
Jan	Kappel	EAA



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Jasmine	Vlietinck	Rederscentrale
Johnny	Woodlock	Independent observer
Kateryna	Urbanovych	NSAC Secretariat
Kenn Skau	Fischer	Chair of FG
Llibori Martínez	Latorre	IFSUA
Maria & Paula		Interpreters
Mark	Dickey-Collas	Dickey-Collas Marine
Marta	Ballesteros	Spanish Institute of Oceanography
Peter	Breckling	German Fisheries PO
Tim	Haasnoot	ProSea