



Mrs. Sabela García
RAC Liaison Officer
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For the attention of:

Mrs. Lowri Evans
Director General
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Contact details
for correspondence:

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Date: 16 February 2012
Subject: Inter-RAC perspectives on the functioning of the RACs

Dear Mrs. Evans,

On behalf of the Secretariats of the seven RACs, we would like to raise and draw your attention to and initiate discussion with you upon, a number of common issues related to the functioning of the RACs.

1. Background: Achievements to date and purpose

We would like to start by thanking you and your colleagues within DG MARE for all the positive steps that the European Commission has already taken to improve our functioning.

We can refer in particular to:

- The access to scientific expertise through the Memorandum of Understanding with ICES,
- The change in the time schedule for the release of the scientific advice,
- The involvement of the RACs within STECF work and participation in the review and preparation of long-term management plans,
- The recognition of the RACs as bodies pursuing an aim of general European interest and the granting of permanent and stable funding, and
- The possibility of receiving our prefunding without a guarantee.

It is fair to recognize that the current functioning is quite different from that of 5 years ago.



We would like to build on these achievements and present some specific suggestions for further improvements to the functioning of the RACs.

2. Strategic issues for discussion at forthcoming coordination meetings

Firstly, we would like to have an open and detailed discussion with your services about some relevant issues we have identified of strategic importance to the functioning of the RACs (Annex 1). Although some of the items have not been formally discussed in each of the RACs, we consider them to be of common interest. Many have already been raised at previous coordination meetings and require further clarification or update.

Secondly, we would like to be informed of the Commission's position regarding each of the recommendations made in the POSEIDON/MRAG interim evaluation report released in 2010. This is in addition to the response from the Commission to a letter on the same subject submitted for your attention by the North Western Waters RAC on 19th April 2011.

There are two main points we would like to draw particular attention to:

- Multi-annual planning in the funding and budget flexibility would certainly underpin a more strategic and long-term approach for the RACs;
- The alignment of the financial years of the RACs would also facilitate the administrative work and enable us to hold common meetings between the Commission and the RACs at strategic points in the planning cycle. Since this could lead to a peak in the workload for DG MARE services at the end of the year we suggest staggering the cycle between two financial years e.g:
 - January to December for some of the RACs (i.e. Year N);
 - July to June for the remaining RACs (i.e. Year N+1).

3. Financial issues requiring update and clarification

We were recently informed that not all the budget allocated to the RACs for the period 2004 to 2011, as stated in Council Decision 2004/585/EC, has been spent.

With this in mind, we seek clarification of the reasons for the Commission's decision not to raise the maximum annual EU grant from €250,000 to €300,000 as recommended (POSEIDON/MRAG interim evaluation report).

Any immediate increase in the operational budget would allow for additional meetings or the employment of a secondee within the Secretariat, which would strengthen the effective functioning of the RACs.

With regard to the Commission's response to the NWWRAC on 31st May 2011 on this issue, the Commission confirmed that considering the ongoing reform process, it is likely that no increase in funding will occur before 2014. We request a re-consideration of this argument, given that an interim, short-term increase in funding could be objectively disconnected from



the CFP reform process and go a long way towards achieving the more challenging tasks within RAC work plans (e.g. long-term management plans).

We look forward to discussing these different topics with you and your services and remain at your disposal for any further information.

Kind regards,

Benoît Guerin
SWWRAC
Secretary to the Inter-RAC Group

and on behalf of:

Sally Clink
Executive Secretary
BSRAC

Carlos Aldereguia
Executive Secretary
LDRAC

Rosa Caggiano
Executive Secretary
MEDRAC

Martin Brebner
Executive Secretary
NSRAC

Conor Nolan
Executive Secretary
NWWRAC

Aukje Coers
Executive Secretary
PELRAC



Annex 1 – Issues for discussion on the functioning of the RACs

- Possibility to have a multi-annual work programme in order to have long-term planning;
- EU funding programmes and projects available for the RACs outside the operational budget;
- “Spin off” initiatives and projects building on RAC work priorities (e.g. MAMPs, data deficiencies, discards);
- Improved access to scientific resources for evidence-based advice;
- Possibility for the RACs *“to be involved” in the identification of research priorities*, as stated by the Commission since the third coordination meeting (2006);
- Co-operation in hiring temporary or permanent staff to increase the work capacity of the Secretariats to facilitate engagement in EU and DCR projects (e.g. EU stagiaire programmes, national secondees);
- Education and training provided to the Secretariats:
 - Participation of RAC staff in DG MARE training programmes (e.g. occasional ICES courses on stocks assessment);
 - Commission open sessions on EU grants management;
 - Explanation of legislative framework and decision-making process which have an impact on the work of the RACs;
 - Clarification of the role and input of the RACs in different types of consultations launched by the Commission and/or Member States (e.g. EU public consultations, non-papers, white and green papers, emergency measures, commitology).
- Framework for formal co-operation with ICES and STECF (e.g. data poor stocks, review of LTMPs);
- Definition of criteria for RAC advice and Commission responses;
- Develop new tools to facilitate improved communication and dissemination to grass roots (e.g. legislative initiatives or basic concepts of fisheries management such as MSY, ecosystem approach)