

20 YEARS



**North Western Waters  
Advisory Council –  
Pelagic Advisory Council  
20-year Anniversary Event**

**14 March 2024  
Dublin Castle, Ireland**

**REPORT**



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR  
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES  
SEPTENTRIONALES

**NORTH WESTERN  
WATERS**  
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA  
LAS AGUAS  
NOROCCIDENTALES



Co-funded by  
the European Union

**Pelagic**  
ADVISORY  
COUNCIL 



A large school of fish, likely salmon, swimming in clear blue water. The fish are densely packed and moving in a coordinated pattern, creating a sense of movement and depth. Sunlight rays are visible filtering through the water from the top left, adding to the serene and natural atmosphere of the scene.

# INTRODUCTION

# WELCOME FROM THE AC CHAIRS EMIEL BROUCKAERT AND SEAN O'DONOGHUE

The Chair of the Pelagic Advisory Council (PelAC), Sean O'Donoghue, joined on stage by the Chair of the North Western Waters Advisory Council (NWWAC), Emiel Brouckaert, welcomed the ACs' members, distinguished guests and speakers gathered in the room to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the creation of the two Advisory Councils. He felt that this jointly organised event was timely to take stock after the seismic effects Brexit has had on fisheries. Moreover, the event aimed at trying to develop a roadmap for enhancing the role of ACs and strengthening regionalisation, to meet the significant challenges for the future of the European fisheries sector, such as climate change and the energy transition.

O'Donoghue pointed out that since their inception, the two ACs have been recognised as key stakeholders in the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The Councils have brought together and aligned the views of the fishing industry, environmental NGOs and other civil society organisations, fostering dialogue, building trust and integrating stakeholder knowledge in the decision-making process ensuring sustainable management of marine resources in the North East Atlantic.

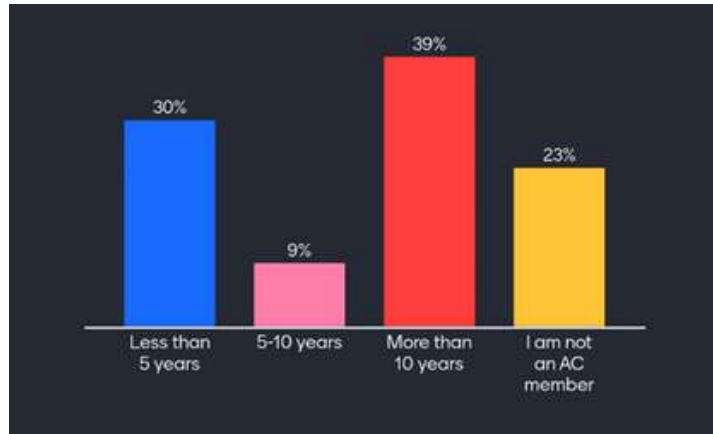
*"This anniversary celebration not only marks a milestone reflecting the Councils' achievements over the past two decades, but looks forward to the role of ACs and regionalisation while forging a path towards a more resilient and prosperous future for European fisheries and coastal communities".*

O'Donoghue concluded his welcome speech by stating that, while looking ahead to the future of European fisheries, both ACs remain fully committed to fostering dialogue, collaboration, consensus-building and sustainable practices for the benefit of present and future generations. He felt hopeful that the event would result in elaborating a roadmap for an enhanced role of the ACs.

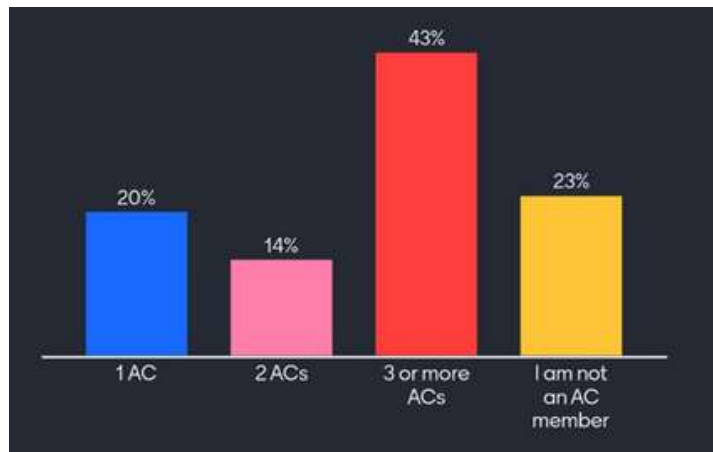
# WARM-UP QUESTIONS

To kick-start the event and engage the audience, Moderator Karen Coleman invited all participants to respond to the following questions on menti.com.

## How long have you been active in the AC?



## How many ACs are you involved in?



## What in your view were the most succesful policy changes that ACs contributed to?





# VIDEO ADDRESS BY THE COMMISSIONER FOR ENVIRONMENT, OCEANS AND FISHERIES VIRGINIJUS SINKEVIČIUS

*"Dear colleagues, dear friends, happy anniversary. I wish I could have joined to celebrate this wonderful occasion at Dublin Castle, the centre of power and tradition in Ireland.*

*Over two decades, Advisory Councils have had a pivotal role in the way fisheries policy has evolved. They are a source of useful advice to the Commission and to the Member States, serving as platforms for open discussion and contributing to regionalised approaches. In many ways, fisheries management under the EU Common Fisheries Policy has become the gold standard around the world. Advisory Councils play an important role in this process, delivering on sustainability in the policy and the stability for the fisheries sector. This is a true testament to all the collaborative work that has been done over the last 20 years, working on management objectives, tools and implementation.*

*The last five years have not been easy. The war in Ukraine, Brexit, Covid, climate change and the energy crisis have all had an impact on the sector. It was necessary to adapt and move forward. And now we need to prepare for life after 2026 in our relations with the UK. We also need to resolve pressing issues with Norway and in setting off coastal states. We fully understand many of your concerns here and we will maintain our unified EU position and conviction in jointly finding the right solutions. Finally, soon we will have a new Commission and a new European Parliament. Inevitably, this means resetting the EU ambitions and objectives. But it will be up to you, together with our successors, to look for compatibility with the goals of our common fisheries policy, to identify synergies and win-wins wherever possible.*



*I know that this is not an easy task. Therefore, your continued involvement is essential to help us find the right way forward. The work of the North Western Waters and Pelagic Advisory Councils has made a huge difference over the last 20 years. I have no doubt that this will continue and that you will take our evolving challenges in your stride. Colleagues, today is a special occasion, a moment to celebrate all your contributions, all your efforts, your successes, your drive and convictions. Your dedication to making our fisheries even more sustainable and profitable for generations to come. Thank you for everything that you do and have a wonderful event."*

# KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY DIRECTOR-GENERAL CHARLINA VITCHEVA

Vitcheva greeted all participants in the room and expressed her pleasure for the celebration of such a special occasion.

She stated that the stakeholder input provided to the decision-making process through ACs over the past two decades is a genuinely valuable asset. Today the role of ACs is even more important than ever: *“the more difficult the setting is and the more challenging the context is, the more valuable it is to have brains around the table working together to find effective solutions”*. Challenges such as Brexit, the energy crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic required flexible and innovative approaches. *“I applaud you for all the work carried out to ensure continuity of our working together”*.

Vitcheva commended the ACs for the significant progress achieved in terms of representation, transparency and building bridges and trust with the stakeholders. *“We have learned a lot collectively, including to adjust better, perceive challenges quicker and address and find solutions in a more effective manner”*. She also praised the ACs for both the number and the quality of recommendations produced over the last decades, mentioning the wide range of topics addressed and the comprehensiveness of their advice. She felt that the regionalisation process is key to ensuring adaptable and resilient policy-making and fisheries management. In this regard, the Commission has been proactively promoting further interaction and cooperation between ACs and Regional Member States Groups. Indeed, AC’s advice contains very valuable information for Regional Groups to propose management measures through the submission of joint recommendations.

Vitcheva stressed the need to ensure that European decision-making remains agile, timely and relevant, building on grassroots initiatives to deliver policy needs, both within the EU and with neighbouring countries in the North East Atlantic.

2024 is an important watershed, as there will be a new Commission with new priorities. *“I would like to reassure you that our colleagues are engaged in analysing challenges and changes that are potentially sought, and will propose priorities for the future. Your input in these coming months is extremely important. If you want to factor yourself into the future priorities of the Commission, it is now the time”*, said Vitcheva.

In this context, she mentioned the fisheries package adopted just one year ago, which focuses on the quality of implementation but also raises the ambition with regards for example the energy transition and the sustainability of fisheries through the Marine Action Plan. It links with elements to better integrate socio-economic aspects into policy making, and the Commission counts on AC’s input for a meaningful, in-depth contribution to policy.

She also referred to the recently adopted control regulation and the EMFAF, which is being used to address persistent challenges experienced by the sector. *“All of this shapes the priorities we have for 2024. We are using this period to prepare the knowledge base necessary to support the various policy options that our new political hierarchy will examine for the next mandate”*.

Vitcheva also commented on other important themes high on the European agenda, such as food security, climate change and a number of political instability cases. In all this context, DG MARE is working hard to keep fisheries and their policies to the fore of the political agenda of the Commission. The next couple of years are pivotal in shaping the future vision of fisheries, paving the path of how the implementation of the CFP will evolve and how the three pillars of sustainability can be delivered on.

Brexit is one of the shaping elements for the landscape in which both the NWWAC and the PelAC are working. *“It is not an easy transition, but my humble opinion is that we have coped admirably with the challenge that was there in 2020 and all those that came since then, for example via the four rounds of consultation with the third parties – Norway, the UK and Coastal States”*.





Vitcheva felt that despite the political sensitivity, the EU managed to have a balanced deal ensuring stability for the fisheries sector, with stable access to each other waters and a strong basis for EU-UK relationships after the transition period ending in 2026. With around 100 TACs now negotiated externally, there has been a major shift in focus into this type of consultations compared to the EU Council in Decembers past. *“Our first round of negotiations with the UK was quite rough, but throughout the years we have achieved good collaboration with our partners across the Channel”.*

Another important set of work is the one carried out through the Specialised Committee on Fisheries (SCF), where there is a very constructive working dialogue with the UK counterparts. The SCF has been a forum of great importance, especially for avoiding unnecessary policy divergence, which is a very sensitive topic for the EU fishing sector. Vitcheva emphasised the importance for the Commission to continue the flow of information regarding EU-UK relationships and SCF work and especially appreciated the joint ACs’ initiative of the Inter-AC Brexit Forum. Joint endeavour with the ACs is crucial to sustain the process in a fluent and effective manner.

Before concluding her speech, Vitcheva made a special reference to O’Donoghue on the occasion of his upcoming retirement, thanking him profusely for his work over the past 40 years supporting both the Irish sector and European fisheries overall. She concluded by highlighting the commitment of ACs to a meaningful decision-making process in a very difficult policy and sensitive area for the sectors involved.

*“I am sure that we will have future decades of very fruitful work. In the Commission we will continue to be very open to unhindered grassroot discussion on issues of relevance, to the benefit of our sector and of our citizens”.*

# VIDEO ADDRESS BY MINISTER CHARLIE MCCONALOGUE T.D.

*“Congratulations to the North Western Waters and Pelagic Advisory Councils on this celebration of your 20th anniversary of your establishment. I would like to thank the Advisory Councils for inviting me to your anniversary event. Unfortunately, I cannot attend in person, but I do want to take this opportunity to convey my appreciation for the contribution the Advisory Councils have made to the sustainable management of our fishery resources over this last 20 years. The establishment of the Advisory Councils, one of the key pillars of the 2002 reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, provided a framework for stakeholders to contribute to the Common Fisheries Policy decision-making process. This framework was further strengthened by the 2013 reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, providing the Advisory Councils with a crucial role in the newly established regional decision-making process.*

*Another major outcome of the 2013 CFP reform was the landing obligation, which the Advisory Councils played a vital role in implementing through your cooperation with the regional Member States groups. This will stand as one of the major achievements of the Advisory Councils. The EU seafood sector has undergone tremendous changes in the period since the North Western Waters and Pelagic Advisory Councils were first established. The last four years in particular have been a time of unprecedented change. Your discussions today on the future of EU fisheries and regionalisation in the North East Atlantic are therefore particularly timely. This provides a perfect opportunity to reflect on the changes that have taken place and the progress that has been made as the Advisory Councils face into the next decade.*

*Twenty years ago, only a handful of stocks were fished at maximum sustainable yield levels. Thankfully, we have seen this number grow over time thanks to the efforts of all stakeholders. However, there is still much room for improvement. We also need to consider other pressures, of course, on the marine environment, such as the impacts of climate change, competing demands for marine space, and navigating the energy transition for the seafood sector.*



*In addition, we also have to consider the post-Brexit complexities. However, while there are challenges, there are also opportunities. We have a chance to learn from our experiences, to build on our progress and find new and better ways to keep our fish stocks and marine environment healthy for future generations. The ocean's complex systems show us that nothing exists in isolation, nor can decisions be made in isolation.*

*In order to solve the complex issues facing us, we all, fishers, scientists, environmental NGOs, policymakers and politicians, need to work together. The sea as a source of some of the greenest renewable protein will be key to feeding the Earth's growing population, and if properly managed, this vital resource will be an important contributor to food security in the coming years. Our aim therefore must be to sustainably manage our marine resources, including our fish stocks, so they can continue to support our fishers, coastal communities and citizens long into the future. The Advisory Councils have a crucial role to play in building this future. I wish you continued success and look forward to facing our shared challenges together. Thank you so much for your ongoing work and I wish you very well for this conference."*





# ABOUT THE NWWAC AND THE PELAC

NWWAC/PelAC 20th Anniversary Event  
The future of regionalisation in the Northeast Atlantic



# THE BEGINNINGS

## **NWWAC: The beginnings by Michael Keatinge**

20 years ago, when the ACs were established, Michael Keatinge was Director of the Fisheries Division of Bord Iascaigh Mhara, the Irish Seafood Development Agency. Through his work and involvement, the NWWAC was established in 2005 with Ireland as the hosting Member State. Keatinge was closely involved with the AC's work until his retirement in 2020 and has kept a connection until this day as Director and Company Secretary as well as through expert work on the NWWAC choke tool and participation in meetings.

The presentation by Keatinge is [available here](#).

## **PelAC: The beginnings by Gerard van Balsfoort**

Gerard van Balsfoort became involved in the PelAC in 2006, one year after its establishment. Van Balsfoort played an active role at the PelAC in his capacity as President of the Pelagic-Freezer Trawler Association and has held the function as the PelAC Head of Secretariat until his retirement at the end of 2021. Over his many years of active engagement within the PelAC, he contributed significantly to the PelAC's work and direction through the recruitment and guidance of various members of staff of the Secretariat, as well as through his active participation in the PelAC Management Team and meetings.

His presentation is [available here](#).



# GREATEST ACHIEVEMENTS

## **NWWAC: Greatest achievements by NWWAC OIG Vice-Chair Alexandra Philippe**

Coleman introduced Alexandra Philippe, who has been the NWWAC Vice-Chair representing the Other Interest Group members since 2021. She is currently a Policy Officer for the European Bureau for Conservation and Development.

The presentation by Philippe is [available here](#).

## **PelAC: Greatest achievements by PelAC OIG Vice-Chair Gonçalo Carvalho**

Finally, Coleman invited Gonçalo Carvalho to take the floor. Carvalho is an oceans and fisheries activist with Sciaena, a non-profit marine sciences and cooperation association. He is also the OIG Vice-Chair of the PelAC's Executive Committee, as well as Chair of the PelAC Ecosystem Working Group.

His presentation is [available here](#).





# PODIUM DISCUSSION: THE FUTURE OF EU FISHERIES AND REGIONALISATION IN THE NORTHEAST ATLANTIC

NWWAC/PelAC 20th Anniversary Event  
The future of regionalisation in the Northeast Atlantic



Moderator Karen Coleman invited Vitcheva, O'Donoghue and Brouckaert to join her back on stage for a podium discussion, which also saw the participation of: Patricia de Clercq, representing the Belgian Presidency of the Fisheries Ministries Council; Donné Slangen, from the Dutch representation of the Scheveningen Group; and Aurélie Darpeix, representing the French Presidency of the North Western Waters Member States Group.

The aim of the discussion was to identify aspects that would enhance the role of the ACs and develop a positive roadmap for the future within the scope of regionalisation. *"Today is a celebration of the work of the ACs over the past 20 years and we would like to arrive at a positive roadmap for the next 20"*, commented Coleman.

She explained that regionalisation is anchored in the Common Fisheries Policy (Art. 18) and was established to enable a bottom-up approach to fisheries governance by allowing lower-level authorities and stakeholders to step into the fisheries management process and design tailor-made management on a regional scale. In 2021, the Commission undertook a review[1] to provide improved understanding on how regionalisation has worked until now. It was found that *"while regionalisation is seen as an improvement to the system that was there before 2004, stakeholders agree that more work is needed to apply regionalisation in practice. There is need for more transparency and more meaningful engagement and collaboration between ACs and Member States Groups."*

Following its own-initiative review[2], the European Parliament's Committee on Fisheries came out in strong support for the Advisory Councils calling *"on the Commission and Member States to systematically and actively participate in the AC's meetings and to better communicate on the value of their advice"* and considered *"that co-management with the ACs must be developed to foster a bottom-up approach."*

[1] <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e86c2f43-e6d1-11ec-a534-01aa75ed71a1>

[2] [https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=2021/2169\(INI\)&l=en](https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=2021/2169(INI)&l=en)



Before opening the floor for questions from all participants, Coleman asked the panel members to briefly share their views by replying to the following opening question:

Has the process of stakeholder involvement through the ACs and their delivery of consensus advice resulted in the development of effective management measures? What can be said in terms of improvements in regulatory compliance and the state of the fish stocks since the Advisory Councils came into effect?

In O'Donoghue's opinion, there is no doubt that stakeholder involvement through the ACs has delivered significant development on management measures. He proudly mentioned the management strategies currently in place for virtually all of the stocks under the PelAC's remit and the groundbreaking work on genetics initiated by the PelAC, as reflected in Carvalho's presentation. Also, in terms of regulatory compliance and state of the stocks, he felt that the PelAC has made a huge difference from very small beginnings 20 years ago and continues to address very important issues for the pelagic sector, such as the developing management strategies for stocks of herring and horse mackerel where there is zero catch advice.

Vitcheva felt that the previous presentations gave extremely good examples of the positive contributions of the ACs. The Commission is very consistent in recognising such contributions as it also was the initiator of the CFP reform that brought regionalization into place. Without stakeholder engagement and expertise, the Commission would not be able to design relevant policies and could not expect much achievement on their implementation. From these two points of view, the ACs have contributed enormously.

*"Throughout these 20 years, one of the elements which I appreciate the most is the fact is that through the ACs, the decision-making process is brought back to its origin, to where it has to pertain, outside of the so-called Brussels bubble".*





In her opinion, there are specifically three areas where enormous advancement is evident thanks to the Advisory Councils – fisheries management, data collection and embedding science into policy decisions. While ICES is the Commission’s scientific advice generator, Vitcheva pointed out that a lot of knowledge, including scientific knowledge, comes through the ACs as well.

Brouckaert agreed with previous speakers on the importance and input of ACs in fisheries management. He particularly highlighted the long-lasting cooperation between the NWWAC and the NWW Regional Group, which for example led to the development of important management plans for sole and cod. He also referred to more recent work on skates & rays, brown crab and post-Brexit fisheries management as relevant topics where the AC is having an impact through consensus advice. In his opinion, NWWAC advice undoubtedly produced positive evolution of the stock status overall, even if unfortunately, not for all stocks in the remit area. However, an item that has not reached conclusion yet is achieving more stability in NWW fishing opportunities, which will continue to be an important aspect in future NWWAC advice. He felt that regulatory compliance is still partially a challenge and mentioned the AC work on control and enforcement, for which advice has generally been to take a bottom-up approach to achieve acceptance and compliance by fishers and to avoid legislation that is unworkable and too detailed. The AC will continue collaborating with the Commission, EFCA and the Member States on this matter through its dedicated Focus Group in order to bring about a workable implementation of the new control regulation.

Patricia de Clercq stated that stakeholder involvement is one of the biggest accomplishments of the ACs, especially because there are different perspectives that are put on the table which ultimately results in a deep understanding of each other's different interests and concerns. This enlightens discussions, but also makes it more challenging to find consensus.



*“This open dialogue is something I think we should keep in future as it is extremely important not just for stakeholders but especially for us policymakers”.* In terms of improvement of regularity compliance, in her view the role of ACs is pivotal, because when stakeholders are actively involved in developing management measures, they are more likely to comply with resulting regulations. She agreed with Brouckaert that implementing regulations can be quite complex and specifically mentioned the landing obligation as a key example in this regard. *“We have to look for workable solutions and therefore we need stakeholders’ input, but we also need to focus on the end goal of improving selectivity even further”.* She highlighted the importance of taking into account the technological innovations available and the efforts taken in monitoring and data collection which will improve the quality of advice and policy-making.

Darpeix felt that ACs succeeded to link stakeholders with decision-makers such as the Member States and the Commission. *“I think that the EU project reflects itself entirely in this relationship that boosts dialogue and knowledge sharing”.* Another important aspect is the policy elaboration process, which thanks to ACs has a bottom-up approach and at the same time ensures accountability by stakeholders on the policies elaborated at EU level. Professionals can get directly involved in policy development and thus feel empowered to ensure a sustainable and effective implementation of such policies. The regionalisation process has resulted in a great number of Delegated Acts adopted by the Commission in this framework. It is undoubtedly a process that requires a lot of effort, both in terms of reaching consensus, which needs great amount of negotiation, but also in terms of scientific validation of proposals. *“Despite this being a very demanding process, we still managed to reach concrete and effective measures, as testified by the number of Delegated Act produced thanks to regionalisation”.*



Finally, Donn  Slangen took the floor and underlined what Vitcheva and De Clercq had already said on the importance of ACs in terms of gathering knowledge from different stakeholders who work and have interest in the waters of the North East Atlantic. He also agreed that ACs play a crucial role in ensuring that the whole policy chain, from drafting to implementation and enforcement, is working effectively. Overall, he felt extremely positive that the ACs will continue to deliver important work in the years to come.

ACs are indeed essential in stakeholder participation, but after 20 years what could be changed to increase their effectiveness?

As somebody who has been involved with the ACs since the beginning, O'Donoghue pointed out that the current context is completely different from the one where the ACs started 20 years ago, as already mentioned, with the impacts of Brexit, COVID-19 and the energy crisis. However, going forward there is a huge climate and environmental issue and the energy transition challenge to address. In his opinion, there needs to be much greater cooperation between the Member States, the Commission, the Council and the Parliament, as ACs have a narrow remit at the moment. The ACs report to the Member States and the Commission. *"We need real collaboration and meaningful engagement, with proper dedicated structures for that".*

Vitcheva also reacted to the question, stating how she has been convinced of the value of ACs since the very start of her role as DG MARE Director-General. She referred to the situation in 2020, when NGOs were leaving ACs' membership and when a process of self-reflection was started between the Commission and the ACs to understand how to improve their work. This resulted in a change of ACs' rules of procedure which was embedded into a Delegated Act to support an increase in representation and representativeness.



This also led to the implementation of the performance review, which will be the recurrent assessment rule of how the Advisory Councils are working. Vitcheva felt that this evolutionary process will continue in an iterative way, and the Commission is committed to improvement.

Do you think it would be appropriate for ACs to provide political advice to the Commission, for example in relation to arrangement with the Coastal States that could jeopardise stocks' sustainability? How would the Commission deal with such advice?

In O'Donoghue's view, while there was indeed a decision made at the very beginning of the ACs to stay out of political discussions, for example regarding sharing arrangements or relative stability, however when somebody or something is threatening the sustainability of a stock, ACs are duty bound to make that recommendation to the Commission. This has happened in the PelAC with specific recommendations on the reckless and irresponsible actions of Norway and Faroe Islands in terms of mackerel.

Despite the considerable work carried out by the ACs, it is difficult to see how it is taken on board by the Commission and how it impacts decision-making. In your opinion, why is the EU fleet constantly decreasing in number of vessels? And how can European food security be ensured?

Vitcheva replied that cooperation and collaboration among stakeholders is clearly not the only element that is necessary in order to have a thriving seafood sector. She also pointed out that the sector is doing well according to the available average figures. The only year when it really was below the breakeven was 2022, when the energy prices increased and there was loss in profitability. Other elements that have impacted the sector include Brexit and COVID-19, as already mentioned.





*“We are absolutely conscious of these challenges and that is why we launched the communication on an energy transition. This is a process that we would like to accompany and support in the most helpful way.”*

Regarding the question on the fleet, Vitcheva commented that it is really a matter of balance between the fishing capacity and the fishing opportunities that makes the sector profitable or not. In her view, with the burden of climate change and many other external factors adding pressure on the fishing sector, profitability can be achieved systematically and in a long-term perspective only through restructuring measures that are relevant. She remained available to continue discussions on the matter at a later stage.

Darpeix believed that it is quite a broad discussion, with items possibly outside of the scope of regionalisation and of the CFP. She felt that there is definitely the need to ensure fleet profitability, the long-term sustainability of the sector and environmental protection. This can be done by guaranteeing a level playing field, considering other tools than the CFP. Regarding the major challenges for the future of regionalisation, she noted the increasing need for technical and scientific knowledge both in ACs and in Regional Groups, as the range of topics to address becomes wider and more and more specific. In her opinion, there is an important matter of optimisation of resources and prioritisation of topics in need of addressing in order to guarantee proper consideration by both Member States and ACs. Last but not least, it is clear that Brexit poses a major challenge as the British are establishing measures unilaterally in their own waters which have great impact on EU fishers. In this context, the EU needs to reaffirm its authority through regionalisation.



Should the ACs have an enhanced advisory role in a future revised reformed CFP, for example, in terms of recognition granted vis à vis individual citizens/organisations through targeted consultations?

Brouckaert replied that this question centred exactly on the aim of the event, which is to look at the future and at the enhancement of the role of ACs. He mentioned the advice produced by the NWWAC following the publication of the CFP report, which is surely an appropriate basis to further reflect and develop advice on this aspect. In his opinion, it is important to consider how the ACs' advisory role can be enhanced not only when the Commission launches consultations or requests advice, but also when they propose recommendations on their own initiative, taking action on topics brought forward by their members

Can the ACs provide balanced advice if the balance between industry and NGO participation is lost?

Vitcheva responded that no balanced advice can be provided in that case. *"Representativeness is the only way we can have a balanced advice"*, she commented.

Slangen added that initiatives such as the energy transition or the nature restoration law need to go more hand in hand with fisheries. *"Fishers have to be in the picture and claim their space in the discussions, otherwise the balance in transition is lost"*.





It is important to acknowledge that fisheries resources have improved over the past 10 years. However, how are we going to manage the future based on drastic quota changes which are indeed based on scientific opinions, but which does not take into account important variables such as climate change or water pollution? We have to remember that small-scale fishers are the first to be impacted by these factors.

Vitcheva replied that there have been no reforms of the CFP since 2013. The CFP package that was issued last year aimed at opening the dialogue and starting an evaluation of the policy that might lead to a reform. *“I hope that if there is a reform as a result of this process, it will be considered relevant by all stakeholders”*, said Vitcheva. She agreed that the fishery sector is indeed a victim of climate change, a statement that DG MARE is always bringing forward. *“Climate change and the risks brought by climate change are at the top of our agenda”*. In her opinion, making claims with regards to the failure of a policy is a very strong statement. She disagreed that arguments placed by the farmers’ protests can be equally relevant to the fisheries sector and felt it was important to underline the difference.

What do you think is the one key challenge within the scope of regionalization that the Commission or the Member States should address in order to ensure the continued viability of the fisheries sector?

Darpeix replied that, as already mentioned in her previous intervention, the greatest challenges are the lack of capacity and human resources to deal with a multiple array of topics and the changed landscape brought by Brexit, the latter especially true for regionalisation actors that share their remit waters with the UK. Therefore, it is important that the EU maintains its sovereignty as well as a dialogue with the UK, which could also be done through the ACs, to ensure management measures that are shared and co-developed.



IO'Donoghue repeated that, with the changed landscape and dynamics brought about there needs to be real collaboration between ACs, Member States, Commission, Parliament and Council. *"We should really sit down together to come up with a formula where there is real meaningful engagement between the parties. To do that, we will have to build trust between the parties"*. Moreover, he pointed out that the PelAC has to deal with three different Regional Groups, which can be quite complex in terms of work organisation and coordination. In his view, the setup of a Regional Group dedicated to pelagic stocks would better fit the specific remit of the PelAC.

In de Clercq's opinion, the key action to ensure the continued viability of the fisheries sector is to build on perspective for the fishers. There are many important challenges ahead as already mentioned – climate change, energy transition, attractiveness of the sector – and decision makers should work on having that put in perspective and have a long-term vision for the fisheries sector. Another important element to consider with the aim to offer perspective for the sector is that the geopolitical layer has changed since the last reform of the CFP, and negotiation elements should be revised.

Slangen felt that the main challenge for the Member States is to work with all those transitions in terms of energy production and nature restoration which may mean multiple use of marine space. *"We need innovation and more flexibility, and that is something we have to work on together in an international collaboration between Member States"*. In his opinion, the different Member States' agendas need to be properly aligned to really get a good future perspective for the fishers, and that is the main challenge.





Brouckaert commented that from a NWWAC point of view the regionalisation approach remains very relevant. However, in their current role, ACs are providing advice to the Commission and to the regional Member States only when joint recommendations are coming up on implementation of regulations. If ACs could get more involved at the specific moment when legislative proposals are being prepared, advice from stakeholders could be better taken into account and effectively help in drafting these proposals. He clarified that there is no intention to propose any changes in how the Council and the Parliament are involved. *“However, it is important to note that the regionalisation approach also includes waters shared with third countries, and as ACs we should be able to give advice on their management as well”.*

Do you think ACs will be around in 20years time?

*“Absolutely yes”*, said O’Donoghue and Brouckaert.

Vitcheva added that she could not see any other alternative to ACs for having an inclusive approach to the decision-making process. “The outcome of the dialogue with ACs has only been positive. I trust that the ACs format will still be there in 20 years”. In terms of challenges for both ACs and policymakers, it is vital to ensure that there is business continuity and attractiveness of the sector. There should be a good business case for the young generation to come and ensure generational renewal. Probably the profession will change due to the technological innovation bringing modifications in how vessels operate, in fishing practices and in fishers’ mindset. Fishers for example could also perform public service related to data collection or sustainability services. In this regard, Vitcheva announced the launch of a project by the Commission, Fishers of the Future, which will discuss these issues. *“We will rely heavily on your input to deliberate how this traditional and noble profession can continue and how we can project future to this business”.*

A large school of fish, likely salmon, swimming in clear blue water. The fish are densely packed and moving in a coordinated pattern. Sunlight rays penetrate the water from the top left, creating a shimmering effect. The overall color palette is dominated by various shades of blue.

**CLOSING**



# CLOSING REMARKS BY THE AC CHAIRS EMIEL BROUCKAERT AND SEAN O'DONOGHUE

Brouckaert addressed the audience with closing remarks joined on stage by O'Donoghue.

He started off by thanking all speakers and panellists for their contribution to the celebratory event, including Commissioner Sinkevičius and Minister McConalogue for making the effort of addressing the ACs via video. He extended his thanks to Sinead McSherry for her speech. He particularly thanked DG MARE Director-General Vitcheva for her keynote address and for her presence on the panel. He also took the opportunity to wish O'Donoghue well in his retirement.

He referred to Keatinge and Van Balsfoort's presentation, looking back at the beginnings of the ACs but also reflecting on their future needs. He expressed his gratitude to Philippe and Carvalho for providing very good overviews of the achievements of both ACs. Finally, he recalled elements from the panel discussion with interesting questions from the floor.

*"Many aspects that we heard in both the presentations and in the panel discussion have already been taken on board in our respective work programmes, but I am sure you agree that there are also more items to consider as raised in the panel session".*

The outcomes of the panel discussion will be addressed by the NWWAC in its future work. He anticipated that one conclusion to appear in advice from both ACs is that a new CFP is needed, taking into account the evolution of the fisheries landscape in the North East Atlantic. This was mentioned several times during the panel discussions: the UK leaving the EU, the readiness to address crisis situations and the assurance of a sustainable EU food system, all in the context of climate change and of the energy transition. The NWWAC will follow-up on the items identified in the podium discussion and consider them for future work.

Before closing his speech, Brouckaert thanked the NWWAC and PelAC Secretariats for their high-quality work in organising this event.

# 20 YEARS



[info@nwwac.ie](mailto:info@nwwac.ie)  
[info@pelagic-ac.org](mailto:info@pelagic-ac.org)



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR  
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES  
SEPTENTRIONALES

**NORTH WESTERN  
WATERS**  
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA  
LAS AGUAS  
NOROCCIDENTALES



Co-funded by  
the European Union

