



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

REPORT

NWWAC GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Virtual, 25 September 2025

1. Welcome and introductions by the NWWAC Chair (Chair)

The Chair Alexandra Philippe welcomed all participants and members and presented the agenda, which was adopted. As this was her first meeting as Chair, she took the opportunity to thank the previous NWWAC Chair, Emiel Brouckaert, for his work, as well as the current Vice-Chair and the Secretariat for their support.

Apologies were received from Manu Kelberine (CRPM de Bretagne), Kenatea Chavez-Hey (ANOP), Emiel Brouckaert and Sander Meyns (Rederscentrale), and Corentine Piton (France Peche Durable et Responsable).

Action points from the previous meeting (19 September 2024, virtual): No action points were recorded.

2. Update DG MARE D3 – Dovile Vaigauskaite, Head of Unit MARE D3, and Julia Rubeck, Policy Coordinator – CFP and stakeholders at DG MARE

The Chair welcomed and introduced Dovile Vaigauskaite. Ms. Vaigauskaite is the new Head of Unit MARE D.3 following the departure of Valerie Tankink. She joined the unit in July but is familiar with the Advisory Councils through her previous work as Team Leader for the CFP back in 2018-2020 as well as covering international files. Some members may remember that she presented the EC policy statement at the NWWAC HWG meeting in July 2019.

Ms. Vaigauskaite briefly introduced herself again and her role in the unit, explaining that she had rejoined MARE D.3 on 01 July after previously serving as CFP team leader. She mentioned that many files in the unit were familiar to her, though some aspects had changed over the past five years. She expressed enthusiasm for returning, highlighting her longstanding commitment to fisheries and the opportunity to work at a critical juncture for policy with the CFP evaluation and the upcoming financial framework.

She described MARE D.3 as a pivotal unit within DG Mare, with responsibilities divided between policy implementation and development, and funding coordination, supporting geographical units to ensure coherent and coordinated action. She emphasised that the unit is responsible for several key initiatives, beginning with the CFP evaluation. She thanked members for their contributions through the call for evidence and advice and encouraged them to participate in a survey conducted by FAMENET to collect information on the functioning of advisory councils, which are an important element of CFP governance. She explained that the evaluation process is ongoing, with outcomes expected in spring 2026 and to be published as a Commission-endorsed staff working document. The team is currently mapping assessments and drawing conclusions, supported by an external study collecting data on over 200 indicators to ensure the evaluation is evidence-based.



Ms. Vaigauskaite then addressed the future multi-annual financial framework (MFF) for 2028–2034. She explained that the Commission package, published on 16 July, represents a significant change from the current framework and that the EMFAF, as a standalone fund, no longer exists, but this restructuring aims to simplify and streamline programs to enhance impact and efficiency. She noted that the overall funding available for fisheries, maritime, and the blue economy has actually increased compared to the current EMFAF. She outlined the structure of the new proposal, highlighting the National and Regional Partnership Plans, which include a minimum of €2 billion ring-fenced for core CFP activities, a separate sub-fund of €72 billion, and additional strands such as Competitive Europe and Global Europe, which can also support fisheries.

She advised participants to review the EU website's recently published fact sheets and Q&A documents for detailed information. She also described the early stages of exchanges with Member States in the Council, noting that discussions with the European Parliament are slower, and highlighted the Danish Presidency's ambition to narrow positions by the end of their term. She emphasised the importance of starting national dialogue to ensure fisheries are adequately funded within Member States, encouraging participants to begin reflecting on funding priorities even though national plans will be discussed over the next one to two years.

Finally, she concluded her intervention by inviting participants to follow up on detailed questions.

Julia Rubeck intervened and introduced the points she was asked to cover, including the Ocean Pact, the evaluation of the MSP directive, and the organogram of DG MARE. She briefly outlined the Ocean Pact as an overarching strategy aimed at achieving a healthier, more resilient ocean to benefit both people and the planet. She noted that the Commission is proposing a strengthened governance framework, including a legislative proposal for a European Ocean Act expected in 2027, which will build on the Ocean Pact. She mentioned that the evaluation of the MSP directive has just started, with consultations scheduled to begin in the autumn, and reassured participants that the Secretariat will be notified as soon as details on the consultation process and timeframe are available. She emphasised that public consultations have structured timeframes but encouraged participants not to worry if internal working group schedules do not align, as there will always be opportunities to provide input, coordinated with Units A2 and A3 handling the Ocean Pact.

Ms. Rubeck then shared the DG MARE Organisational chart¹, explaining the structure and responsibilities of each directorate.

Finally, she explained DG MARE's internal coordination efforts, emphasising that the topics handled by NWWAC members are cross-cutting and often involve multiple units. She highlighted the role of MARE D3 in supporting colleagues with CFP implementation, evaluation, MFF, fleet issues, and other horizontal topics, and confirmed that they relay NWWAC questions to the relevant units. She concluded by inviting any specific questions from participants.

¹ [Maritime Affairs and Fisheries - European Commission](#)



The Chair thanked Julia Rubeck and Dovile Vaigauskaite for their presentations. She framed the discussion by returning briefly to points made on the future MFF, emphasising that the topic is complex and very new. She encouraged members to engage with the topic early to understand the architecture, structure, and philosophy of the MFF, highlighting that administrative contact will be important due to the decentralised nature of the funding. She noted that the MFF presents opportunities for the fisheries sector to modernise, innovate, become more competitive, and decarbonise. She also confirmed the group's readiness to work on the Ocean Pact and the upcoming European Ocean Act, stressing the importance of timely engagement with consultations for both the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive.

The Chair then opened the floor for questions. Jan Kappel raised two main points in relation to concerns about funding and resources for NGOs participating in the ACs, highlighting the potential difficulty of attracting NGOs under the new MFF, and questions about the proposed creation of a Small-Scale Fisheries Advisory Council, noting that the consultation procedure had not allowed minority viewpoints to be expressed.

The Chair explained that the issue regarding NGO letters would be discussed under "Any Other Business" and clarified that the NWWAC had chosen not to formally support the letter to allow more internal debate.

Responding to the queries raised, D. Vaigauskaite explained that regarding the MFF, each Member State will submit a single national plan following a Commission template, including a dedicated chapter on fisheries and oceans. She outlined the new logic of funding, which shifts from prescriptive allocations under the current framework to a system where Member States decide how to meet general and specific CFP objectives. Funding will be linked to milestones and targets, including reforms, ensuring payments are made only when objectives are achieved. She highlighted that DG MARE will work with Member States to identify priority areas and ensure important sectors like data collection and control receive funding.

On NGO participation, D. Vaigauskaite noted that then ACs remain a key element of stakeholder consultation under the CFP, and while funding challenges exist, information collected through tools like the FAMENET survey will help assess and address participation issues.

J. Rubeck addressed the question on small-scale fisheries, explaining that creating a new AC would require modifying the CFP, which lists the existing 11 ACs. She highlighted that existing rules already provide avenues for small-scale fisheries to participate in current ACs, although these may not be fully utilised across all ACs.

The Chair closed the discussion by expressing appreciation for the dialogue, noting the value of continued engagement and thanking Ms. Rubeck and Ms. Vaigauskaite for attending and explaining the future framework and processes.



3. Annual report from the NWWAC Chair (Chair)

Slides can be found [here](#).

The Chair provided an update on work completed in Year 20 as well as the Work Programme and proposed submissions for Year 21 including the proposed calendar of meetings for Year 21

Jean-Marie Robert and Patrick Murphy supported the proposal to move the NWWAC March 2026 Meeting in Brussels.

4. Report on the budget (Secretariat)

Slides can be found [here](#).

Mo Mathies provided an overview of the income and expenditure for Year 20 as well as an outlook at the income and expenditure Year 21.

Following a request made by an AC member, the Secretariat made several changes to the NWWAC reimbursement rules which were put forward to the General Assembly for review and approval.

J-M. Robert requested clarification on the proposed measures, noting that, for example, if only a half day is reimbursed but travel occurs in the morning, the full day is not covered. P. Murphy asked clarification on the exceptional circumstances regarding the travel expenses.

Llibori Martinez expressed confusion and concern over reimbursement rules, noting differences between this and other advisory councils. He highlighted that small organisations with limited resources face challenges attending meetings, particularly half-day sessions, and felt it was unfair that virtual participation is not reimbursed. Martinez clarified he was not proposing changes but sharing his perspective on the impact for small organisations.

M. Mathies explained that reimbursement currently applies only to in-person attendance for groups in which members are officially enrolled. The Chair acknowledged concerns, noting that travel allowances and daily rates had been increased to better reflect current costs, including breakfast deductions. She emphasised that online participation remains a management team discussion point but is not currently reimbursed. She stressed ongoing dialogue with members to monitor and adjust support where feasible.

Actions:

- Proposal from GA to ExCom that the NWWAC March 2026 meeting will be held in Brussels, in order to facilitate the participation of Commissioner Kadis on 05 March.
- Members approved presentation of updated reimbursement rules to the ExCom for approval (16 October).



5. Report on membership (Secretariat)

Slides can be found [here](#).

M. Mathies provided an update on AC membership in Year 20.

6. NWWAC Company update (Secretariat)

Slides can be found [here](#).

M. Mathies provided a company update for Year 20.

7. NWWAC Communication

Ilaria Bellomo introduced the NWWAC communication programme, noting that the current communication strategy, last updated in 2020, is being revised and finalised. She highlighted recent initiatives, including the launch of the NWWAC LinkedIn page in March 2025 to showcase members' contributions, and a forthcoming "NWWAC Member Spotlight" on LinkedIn, which will feature members' organisations and work. Members will be asked to complete a short Google Form to provide information for these posts.

I. Bellomo then discussed proposals to improve internal communication, including creating either a WhatsApp community or a WhatsApp group. The goal is to provide faster, more accessible communication for reminders, deadlines, news, and social media updates, reducing the volume of emails members receive. She explained that a WhatsApp community could include subgroups for working or focus groups, while a WhatsApp group would be simpler, with all members receiving the same information. In both cases, the Secretariat would remain the sole sender of messages, ensuring formal communications continue via email.

The Chair supported a simpler WhatsApp group as a practical step, suggesting it would be trialled for six months to a year to assess its usefulness and impact. M. Mathies added that members willing to participate would be invited to provide mobile numbers, and the initiative's success would depend on the response rate. The Chair concluded by inviting comments from members and, seeing none, proposed moving forward with the initiative.

Action: Secretariat to invite members to join the NWWAC WhatsApp group and assess the level of interest and responses received.

8. AOB

- Procedure for publication of NWWAC minutes

M. Mathies outlined a proposed new procedure for meeting minutes. Currently, draft minutes are reviewed and adopted in the next meeting, but this step is often overlooked. The Secretariat proposes to circulate draft minutes to participants for comments within a set period (initially one week, later agreed as two weeks). If no comments are received, the minutes would be considered

adopted and published online as the official report, removing the “draft” watermark and improving readability.

John Lynch agreed with the approach but suggested extending the comment period to two weeks. He also asked about the expected turnaround time for draft minutes, noting the difficulty of reviewing them long after a meeting. M. Mathies explained that drafts are usually prepared within a week but must first be sent to relevant speakers for review, which can extend the process depending on the number of contributors.

- **NGOs letter to the Commissioner Kadis**

The Chair addressed a letter which had been sent to Commissioner Kadis by some e-NGOs. For transparency, the Secretariat shared the letter with the General Assembly. The Chair noted that the letter did not target the NWWAC specifically, as the signatory organisations are not members of the NWWAC. She highlighted the importance of receiving feedback directly to facilitate open discussion and constructive dialogue and opened the floor for comments from members.

Bruno Dachicourt expressed appreciation for the Secretariat circulating the letter and emphasised that while improvements are always possible, his organisation was satisfied with the functioning of the AC and had also contributed to the consultation requested by the Commission. In response to the e-NGO letter, Dachicourt informed that ETF sent a letter to the Commission to support the work of the Advisory Councils.

P. Murphy noted the long-standing debate over NGO engagement and suggested documenting the membership history and outreach efforts, reaffirming that the AC remains open and welcoming to more organisations.

M. Mathies added that multiple membership drives had been conducted since 2019, but feedback from potential new NGO members indicated a lack of capacity to join. She clarified that none of the organisations that sent the letter are current members of the AC and that updates to statutes and rules of procedure had already addressed many previous complaints. She stressed that improvements could only be implemented if organisations were actively participating in the AC. The Chair suggested preparing a concise summary to demonstrate the AC’s openness to dialogue and the actions already taken, to be presented at the upcoming meeting of the Executive Committee.

Gérald Hussenot was not a signatory of the letter and expressed satisfaction with the AC’s functioning, while also commending Alexandra for her work.

The Chair concluded by reaffirming the AC’s commitment to fairness and democratic debate, emphasising that discussions and differing opinions are an important part of the process. She proposed moving the matter to ExCom for further clarification and potential follow-up, and thanked members for their feedback before transitioning to the final agenda item summarising agreed actions and decisions.

Actions:

- Secretariat to provide an update on the membership drive at the next General Assembly to



review progress and outcomes.

- Secretariat to provide an update on the membership drive at the next General Assembly to review progress and outcomes.

9. Summary of actions agreed and decisions adopted (Chair)

1	Proposal from GA to ExCom that the NWWAC March 2026 meeting will be held in Brussels, in order to facilitate the participation of Commissioner Kadis on 05 March.
2	Members approved presentation of updated reimbursement rules to the ExCom for approval (16 October).
3	Secretariat to invite members to join the NWWAC WhatsApp group and assess the level of interest and responses received.
4	Secretariat to provide an update on the membership drive, including engagement with NGOs and the accompanying letter, during the next ExCom on 16 October.
5	Secretariat to provide an update on the membership drive at the next General Assembly to review progress and outcomes.

The Chair closed the meeting, thanking members, participants, the Secretariat and interpreters.



Participants

NWWAC members	
José Beltran	OPP-7 BURELA
Bruno Dachicourt	ETF/CFTC
Gérald Hussenot Desenonges	BLUE FISH
Jan Kappel	European Anglers Alliance (EAA)
Franck Le Barzic	OP COBRENORD
Suso Lourido	Puerto de Celeiro SA OPP77
John Lynch	Irish South & East Fish Producers Organisation Ltd
Llibori Martinez Latorre	IFSUA
Patrick Murphy	Irish South & West Fish Producers Organisation
Aodh O'Donnell	Irish Fish Producers Organisation Limited
Mikel Ortiz	OPPAO
Alexandra Philippe	EBCD
Irene Prieto	OPPF4
Dominic Rihan	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation
Pauline Stephan	CNPMEM
Dominique Thomas	OP CME MMN
Durk van Tuinen	Nederlandse Vissersbond
Arthur Yon	FROM Nord
Experts & observers	
Julia Rubeck	DG MARE
Dovile Vaigauskaite	DG MARE
NWWAC Secretariat	
Ilaria Bellomo	Fisheries Strategy & Administration Officer
Mo Mathies	Executive Secretary