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HORIZONTAL WORKING GROUP

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Vigo and online

1 Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed all participants to the meeting. Apologies were received from Suso Lourido (Puerto de Celeiro) ahead of the meeting. The agenda was adopted.

Action points the last meeting (11 March 2025, Paris)

1	NWWAC to develop advice on the “Vision for Agriculture and Food” roadmap. Advice submitted on 30 June, awaiting reply
2	Secretariat to circulate draft CFP response and ask for additional input on strategic topics. Next meeting of FG CFP to be organised for end of March to continue advice drafting. Advice submitted on 17 April, awaiting response
3	Secretariat to circulate invitation for ICES WGENGAGE. Circulated, waiting for publication of ICES report
4	Secretariat to share ICES documentation from MIAC/MIACO in NWWAC Members Area. AC to keep pressure on addressing categories 5 & 6 stocks and follow up in HWG topics from MIAC and MIACO possibly for July meetings. Done
5	Secretariat to contact LDAC regarding next meeting of Inter-AC Brexit Forum and emphasise the importance of including detailed update on TCA review 2026. Possibility to formulate request to Commission regarding increased AC involvement on this topic. Next meeting 07 July
6	FG Climate & Environment to meet and prepare advice on Energy Transition Partnership. Advice submitted on 19 June, awaiting reply
7	Secretariat to contact UK Seabass group again for AC inclusion in work. Secretariat to organise next meeting once benchmark results are available. Response received from Defra that ACs cannot join WG. Benchmark results presented in yesterday’s WG 3 meeting.
8	Proposal to the joint FG Social Aspects to include in ToR a case study of area 7d. Proposal put forward to FG Chair who felt that the ACs do not have the means to conduct such a study and that the request is area specific so within the sole NWWAC remit.



2 ICES Advisory Process & MIAC/MIACO follow up – Joanne Morgan, ICES ACOM Vice-Chair

The presentation can be found [here](#).

The Chair introduced ICES ACOM-Vice Chair Joanne Morgan who joined members for her fourth Working Group meeting having provided detailed information on the ICES advice in WG1-3 yesterday and earlier this morning.

Morgan recalled the ICES advice process and recent changes and presented an overview of the 10 principles governing the production of advice, including the use of peer-reviewed science and consistency with client policies. She explained that ICES revised the mixed stock guidelines. In some cases, ICES advice is for reproductively isolated populations that mix spatially for part of the year and are caught in the same fisheries during that time. Hence, these fisheries impact multiple stocks of the same species at the same time. Advice should be precautionary for all stocks in the fishery; that is, advice for a stock below Blim should be for zero catch where there is no F that will recover the stock to above Blim with > 50% probability in the year after the year for which the advice applies. Morgan then clarified advice rules for category 1 and 3 stocks and referenced the ICES [Advice Explorer](#) tool which allows stakeholders to access advice in an easy way.

The Chair thanked Morgan for this overview and opened the floor to questions.

Dominic **Rihan** expressed his frustration regarding Cat 6 stocks referring specifically to northern shrimp and Rockall cod. He agreed with the precautionary approach being applied as not enough data is available on these stocks but felt that as soon as ICES advises a specific number for total allowable catch for example for Rockall cod, then managers are tied to this despite not enough information being available. He added that the approach used by ICES for northern shrimp would be preferable where ICES does not give catch advice as not enough information is available. In his opinion this showed a lack of consistency.

Morgan explained that ICES strives for consistency and therefore develops rules and guidelines, for example those on mixed fisheries. She added that WKLife has started addressing Cat 4, 5, and 6 stocks over the past two years in order to improve assessments.

The Chair wondered if advice is deemed in need of being precautionary or not, who would be taking this decision.

Morgan explained that theoretically ICES makes this decision based on evaluations of available management plans to ensure that in the long-term any measures taken have less than 5% chance of driving the stock below Blim. But it also depends on the advice requester who can decide they want to fish lower than maximum sustainable yield.

3 CFP evaluation update – Herman Bos, Julia Rubeck, DG MARE D3

The Chair recalled that members of this Working group joint by DG MARE in October last year who provided insight into the Commission's approach to evaluating the CFP and its alignment



with EU goals over the past decade. This was followed by a public consultation to which the NWWAC submitted detailed advice in April of this year with a brief response received from DG MARE in the previous week. She welcomed Herman Bos and Julia Rubeck, MARE D.3 and invited them to present an overview of the state of play of the Commission's work.

Bos presented an update on the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) evaluation, explaining that the evaluation is being conducted to assess the effectiveness of the CFP reform implemented over the past 10 years. The evaluation, which is based on the 2011 impact assessment, will address three main questions: what has happened, why has it happened, and how much of this is linked to EU intervention. The evaluation will be completed with a staff working document that will feed into potential next steps, including an impact assessment and possible revision of the CFP.

The Chair thanked Bos for the presentation and asked for clarification regarding AC involvement going forward.

Rubeck explained that the Commission is considering a second round of direct AC consultation similar to the one carried out in 2024. This will be confirmed with the AC Secretariats as soon as possible.

Pauline **Stephan** asked how the different positions of stakeholders are considered and if they are weighted differently, for example individual stakeholder vs organisation representing a group of fishermen.

Bos explained that the Commission analyses the summaries and includes both the responses to the questionnaires as well as opinions submitted separately. He added that interviews based on the questionnaire will also be carried out over the next weeks.

Rubeck clarified that there is no weighing system as such in the public consultation, because the public consultation used right now is the single system that is used for any consultation across the Commission. She added that the team for the CFP evaluation is working on balancing the advice, and that the Commission is aware that the questionnaire format is not suitable for ACs. She expressed her understanding for the frustration regarding the brief response received by the AC from DG MARE on its detailed advice, and explained that the team is not able to provide a detailed response, as the team is concentrating on including the advice in the evaluation.

Following a question from the Secretariat on the weighting of the advice, Rubeck repeated that the Advisory Councils are primary stakeholders created for the purpose of listening to stakeholders.

Patrick **Murphy** asked for clarification regarding the objective of the CFP evaluation.

Bos explained that the Commission is evaluating how the CFP regulation has performed over the past 10 years based on the questions what has happened, why has it happened, and how much of this is linked to EU intervention to arrive at a conclusion if the CFP is still fit for purpose.

Murphy felt that the CFP was not achieving its objectives and failing to keep coastal



communities alive with a vibrant fishing industry. He wondered how this evaluation would contribute to any improvement.

Rubeck responded that the results of the evaluation will lead to a decision on the carrying out of an impact assessment. She explained that the outcome of the evaluation could not be prejudged but that the next steps would include changes.

Rihan wondered what would happen if the evaluation showed that the CFP was working well and no change was needed. The current regulation calls for a report to Council and Parliament, which this evaluation could fulfil.

Rubeck referred to the Commissioner's statement as part of the Ocean Pact where he mentioned a possible reform of the CFP. She added that available data provides ground for change, and the Commission has collected a wide range of input including concrete proposals from various stakeholders on factual elements on the functioning of the CFP. She added that the ACs still have room for additional submissions until early autumn.

Rihan felt that when looking at the timeline for changing the regulation, the current college would be coming to the end of its mandate just about when arriving at a concrete proposal. He felt that at that time the Commissioner may not wish to put forward a new proposal as he would no longer be responsible for it.

The Chair added that concurrently the Marine Strategy Framework Directive is being reviewed, and any decision will have consequences for the CFP.

Rubeck explained that things would be clearer once the evaluation report is published. She referred back to the mission letter and added that while time constraints exist, solutions exist too. If the evaluation points in the direction of a reform, then the Commission proposal has to echo this result. However, in the end it is the legislator who decides the way forward.

4 EU Ocean Pact – Felix Leinemann, Head of Unit MARE.A.2

The Chair outlined that the European Ocean Pact was launched on 05 June and was formally presented at the United Nations Ocean Conference in Nice by President von der Leyen on 09 June, recalling the AC's contributions to the preparations for the Pact, for example by participating in the High-Level Roundtable in February and submitting advice in March. She welcomed Felix Leinemann, Head of Unit MARE A.2, who joined online to provide insight into this new strategy.

Leinemann opened by referring to Commissioner Kadis' [mission letter](#) which includes the development of "a new European Ocean Pact, ensuring coherence across all policy areas linked to the oceans," the idea for which developed from a fragmented situation. He outlined that the EU is an Ocean Union with the world's largest collective marine area. In the face of a triple planetary crisis impact on the ocean, stronger governance is needed at sea basin level, national and local level.



Strengthened governance framework

1. **Ocean Act:** by 2027 that will build on a revision of the MSPD
Ocean Board: stakeholders supporting the Commission in implementation
Ocean Pact dashboard: to monitor and report progress
2. Working together at regional level: **sea basin approach/** Black, Baltic, Mediterranean, Arctic seas
3. **Financial** support – integrated approach to funding from private and public sources, incl. to enhance coastal communities' resilience through EU financing and EIB loans.

Six priorities

1. Protecting and restoring ocean health (30% protected area by 2030)
2. Boosting the competitiveness of the sustainable blue economy (with possible revision of the CFP)
3. Supporting coastal, island communities and outermost regions (dedicated strategy, just launched a study on coastal community)
4. Advancing ocean research, knowledge, skills and innovation (ocean observation initiative which has been launched).
5. Enhancing maritime security and defence as a prerequisite
6. Strengthening EU ocean diplomacy and international rules-based governance (international treaty, SFPA)

Guiding principles

- Source-to-sea approach
- Ecosystem based approach
- Precautionary principle
- Best available scientific advice

Leinemann concluded that the Ocean Pact aims at a holistic approach and collaboration across Member States, regions, and with stakeholders: fishers, blue economy professionals, innovators, investors, scientists, and civil society.

The Chair thanked Leinemann for his presentation and opened the floor for questions.

Referring to Leinemann's mention that the Ocean Act will build on the a revision of the MSP Directive and that the GNSBI (Greater North Sea Basin Initiative) is an example of an initiative based on the MSP approach, **Brouckaert** pointed out that part of the Atlantic NWW is covered in the GNSBI and wondered if his statement above meant that the North Sea will not be included in the Ocean Act. He added that in line with previous conversations, would it not be beneficial instead of referring to small-scale fisheries, to substitute this with "small and medium enterprises" (SMEs) instead.

The **Chair** added a query on how the MSFD and MSP Directive will connect with the process of Ocean Pact as well as the CFP. She recalled that the Ocean Pact currently contains aspirational targets in the annex and she wondered if these would become binding targets under the Ocean Act. She added that the NWWAC would discuss internally the proposal in the Ocean Pact of setting up an AC dedicated to small-scale fisheries.



Leinemann responded that the GNSBI is not mentioned in the Ocean Pact and that he was unsure about NWWAC involvement. Regarding the question on SSF vs. SME he commented that mainly SME in coastal communities are reflected. He explained that the Ocean Pact should bring together all the existing targets and objectives under one roof and not establish new targets, and therefore, not changing whether a target is aspirational or binding. He added that there will be a process of evaluating the MSP Directive including an impact assessment of the public consultation. He felt that this would bring ample opportunity for discussion. From his point of view the link to the MSFD needs to be there, including to the evaluation of the MSFD. There are opportunities that maritime spatial planning could bring in better implementing the MSFD, which DG MARE has already discussed with colleagues in DG ENV and will continue to do so.

ACTION: FG Climate & Environment to review and potentially address the aspirational and binding targets included in the Ocean Pact.

5 EFCA update – Cristina Morgado, Deputy Head of Unit EU waters and North Atlantic; Killian Chute, Administrator Planning and Assessment, EFCA

The Chair welcomed Cristina Morgado, Deputy Head of Unit EU waters and North Atlantic, and Killian Chute, Administrator Planning and Assessment, EFCA, who will provide an update on the REM technical guidelines published by EFCA and the EFCA Risk Assessment methodology as applied to the planning of JDPs, including the results of the RRA of 2024.

Killian **Chute** provided updates relevant to the Northwestern Waters region covering EFCA's operational highlights for 2024, inspection results, risk assessment activities, interagency collaboration, and regulatory focus areas. He explained that the Joint Deployment Plan (JDP) remains EFCA's key framework for cooperation with Member States on fisheries control, with the Western Waters JDP continuing to be the relevant plan for the Northwestern Waters Advisory Council.

Within the Western Waters JDP, 2024, EFCA and Member States conducted 4,187 land inspections and 808 sea inspections were carried out. There was a slight increase in both total inspections and the number of suspected infringements compared to 2023. Chute pointed out that it is important to note that a higher number of suspected infringements does not necessarily indicate lower compliance; it may instead reflect more accurate targeting through improved risk assessments.

EFCA's enforcement priorities for the Western Waters region remain focused on compliance with the Landing Obligation and the associated reporting requirements, including the documentation of de minimis catches and legal discards. There is also a continued emphasis on respecting spatial management measures such as area closures, particularly vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs), compliance with gear regulations, and addressing misreporting of both fishing areas and catches. Additional oversight is being applied to UK vessels operating in EU waters and vice versa. Post-landing controls, including inspections of fish transports, are also part of the enforcement effort.

Chute outlined that EFCA conducts an annual Strategic Risk Assessment in cooperation with Member States. This assessment, based on fleet segment data (including gear type, mesh size, and fishing area), guides the planning of JDPs. The highest risks identified for 2024 include non-



compliance with the Landing Obligation, misreporting, the use of illegal gear, and fishing in closed areas. High-risk fleet segments identified include otter trawlers and beam trawlers operating in specific areas.

Chute recalled that EFCA has highlighted the importance of safety during inspections, particularly the safe installation and use of boarding ladders on vessels. This ensures the well-being of both inspectors and crew.

In 2023, EFCA completed a three-year Weighing Project, which evaluated current practices for weighing fishery products across sea basins. The project resulted in a set of best practices and guidelines, now published on the EFCA website.

Chute concluded that comprehensive data and further details on methodologies can be found in the EFCA Annual Report and its annexes. The risk assessment methodology is also publicly available on EFCA's website.

Cristina **Morgado** continued with an overview of EFCA's work on REM. The REM Technical Working Group was established in 2018 by EFCA's Administrative Board. It brings together control experts from all EU Member States, under EFCA and the European Commission's coordination. The group's main purpose is to develop and update technical specifications for REM systems used in EU fisheries control. It supports Member States in implementing REM systems, encourages the exchange of best practices, and aims to ensure a level playing field in enforcing the landing obligation. The first technical guidelines were published in 2019, but due to rapid technological progress and the results from various national pilot projects, these guidelines have been updated in 2025 and are now available on EFCA's website.

Morgado outlined that REM involves a combination of onboard technologies—cameras, sensors, GPS—and a control centre that manages data collection, transfer, and analysis. The system helps monitor compliance with the landing obligation, which remains one of the most challenging aspects of fisheries control. Key contents of the updated guidelines include definitions, system specifications for standard vessels, parameters for different vessel types, and the Vessel Monitoring Plan. The monitoring plan outlines where equipment will be placed onboard and how it will function, and it must be approved before fishing activities begin as part of vessel authorisation.

Guidance is also given on operational procedures for vessel masters, including pre-departure requirements, data storage and handling (which varies by trip duration), and how artificial intelligence and machine learning can assist in data analysis—such as identifying species, detecting protected species, and estimating catch weights. The guidelines address complex issues such as system ownership, data rights, and privacy protections. For example, masking or blurring technologies may be used to protect individual privacy. The guidelines also discuss the costs of REM systems, including who is responsible for them—Member States or fishers—as well as pre-installation requirements.

The REM system is focused strictly on monitoring fishing activities, not individuals. Cameras and sensors are typically activated based on triggers, such as the start of fishing operations, and are strategically positioned to monitor key areas like pump systems and sorting decks.

While the guidelines offer detailed recommendations for REM standards, including camera clarity and data transfer rates, they do not set binding minimum technical specifications. The group acknowledges that standardisation is still evolving.

The challenges identified include varying levels of experience among Member States, limited



pilot project data, and the need to assess whether REM is changing fisher behaviour or improving compliance. Another challenge is developing effective and efficient data analysis, which is still at an early stage—whether through manual review or artificial intelligence.

Mandatory implementation of REM is scheduled for 2028, applying initially to vessels over 18 metres on a risk-based approach. However, some Member States may choose to include smaller vessels. Notably, Scotland plans to introduce REM for pelagic vessels in March 2026.

Morgado concluded that while significant progress has been made, several technical, legal, and operational challenges remain. The updated guidelines serve as an important resource to harmonise REM implementation and prepare for its broader rollout across the EU fleet.

The Chair thanked Chute and Morgado for the detailed presentations and opened the floor to questions.

Rihan queried the classification of nearly every trawler in the EU as high risk as there are very few trawlers fishing with a mesh size larger than 120mm. This would mean that every trawler would need to install REM leading to an unmanageable amount of data. He asked for clarification regarding EFAC inspections of Norwegian vessels in EU waters.

Chute clarified that inspections of Norwegian vessels in EU waters are included. He added that he presented the risk assessment for the JDPs, on how EFCA conducts its control activities which is unrelated to REM installation and any decision regarding this would fall under the remit of the Commission.

Murphy asked for a clarification regarding significance of infringements and potential loss of fishermen from the work force. He wondered if an analysis had been carried out on vessels currently using REM regarding detection of infringements. He felt that the regulation had become so complex that even national control and enforcement agencies sometimes were not clear on what rules applied. He also wondered how vessels are classed as high risk and if there was a possibility to move from high risk to low risk.

Chute responded that when REM has been used in pilot projects, people learn there is a better way to follow the regulation and avoid the discards. To analyse the data, specialists are employed with typically 10% of any fishing operations reviewed. Morgado commented that cameras are usually sensor activated, so it is only a subset of data that is being analysed. Chute added that EFCA is not involved in the determination of which vessels are high risk but for its own JDPs looks at fleet segments, and for example changes in behaviour, choke situations etc. If available data shows large quota for a fleet and few infringements, the fleet segment would drop out of the high-risk category.

Manu **Kelberine** commented that the delegated act has not yet been published and added that Member States would need to develop a derogation regarding a storage plan for multiple species in mixed fisheries. These need to be separately stored, however, this is difficult to implement on vessels under current provisions.

Chute explained that this relates to policy-making which is under the remit of the Commission and not EFCA who only looks after the implementation of agreed legislation and ensuring that Member States also implement it in the same way.

John **Lynch** wondered if the risk assessment for REM would be carried out by fleet segment or by individual vessels.



Morgado replied that this is being conducted by the Commission, however, the current understanding is that it would be by fleet segment and not by individual vessel.

Referring to the CFP evaluation, **Brouckaert** commented that a lot of stakeholders are hoping it will be revised once it is recognised that the Landing Obligation is not a good solution for minimising or avoiding discards or unwanted catches. If this came true, would that not mean that EFCA's work until now might become superfluous? Referring to the European project [OPTIFISH](#), he wondered if there is a connection between EFCA's work and what the project is addressing.

Morgado explained that EFCA had been in touch with Member States, technology providers as well as some scientific projects, but not Optifish.

Commenting on EFCA's report regarding weighing, Dominique **Thomas** stated that it was impossible to follow the rules as they are. She asked if there were any plans for follow-up from EFCA on this.

Morgado clarified that the report would form the basis for the implementing act and that there are no plans for further follow up.

6 Update on the MSFD – Alice Belin, DG ENV

The Chair welcomed Alice Belin who joined members of this HWG previously in 2023. Belin is a policy officer in DG ENV working on marine policy. Her engagement with the NWWAC in 2023 on the Nature Restoration Law was followed last year with a presentation by her colleague Laurent Markovic on the work of the Technical Group Seabed under the framework of the MSFD. While this work is ongoing, the revision of the MSFD was just announced a few weeks ago.

Belin thanked the Chair for the invitation and recalled that the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) was adopted in 2008, aiming to protect EU marine waters. An evaluation of the directive, published in March of this year, highlights key messages regarding its implementation and effectiveness.

Despite plans for revision, the current MSFD is still being implemented and improved. A major ongoing task is the determination and definition of "good environmental status" (GES), which involves 11 descriptors and various pressures beyond just fisheries. While progress has been made, gaps remain in these definitions, which are crucial for effective implementation and enforcement. Member States reported updates to their programs of measures in 2021, and an assessment published in February showed progress in some areas but stagnation in others. Currently, Member States are reporting their updates on the assessment of marine waters, a comprehensive exercise conducted every six years to evaluate the state of their waters against GES criteria and various pressures. This information, expected to be assessed by the EU in the coming year, builds upon assessments made by Regional Sea Conventions (e.g., Ospar) published in 2023.

The evaluation, which began in 2021, is a backward-looking exercise assessing the directive's implementation since 2008. It follows five criteria under the European Commission's "better regulation framework":

1. Effectiveness:



The directive has established a comprehensive framework for marine protection, but GES has not been achieved, and progress on the ground has been limited, with some areas even experiencing degradation. Legislative complexity, unclear concepts (like GES and the ecosystem-based approach), and unclear procedures for setting binding threshold values have hindered implementation. The 2020 deadline for achieving GES proved unrealistic, and a lack of concrete operational targets makes monitoring progress difficult. The MSFD has facilitated broad data collection and knowledge building on the marine environment, though issues with data harmonization, quality, and gaps persist. Improved data management, including harmonized monitoring standards, could lead to better assessments and more effective measures. There is scope to reduce reporting requirements that do not directly serve policy needs. Regional differences in implementation remain significant, and there's a need for more formalized procedures governing interactions between the directive's implementation and the work of regional sea conventions. Legal ambiguities regarding regional coordination also make enforcement difficult.

2. **Efficiency:**

The directive has been cost-effective, with estimated incremental benefits exceeding implementation costs (primarily administrative costs). However, inefficiencies exist due to the directive's complex implementation cycle and numerous reporting obligations, leading to a high perceived administrative burden for Member States.

3. **Coherence:**

There is a generally high level of coherence with other EU environmental policies, particularly in shared objectives. However, inconsistencies with directives like the Water Framework Directive and Birds and Habitats Directive create implementation challenges. Integration of MSFD principles into other relevant sectoral policies, particularly those related to the blue economy, is insufficient. Greater cross-sectoral cooperation is needed to ensure these policies mutually enhance sustainability objectives. The directive's coherence with regional and international marine protection initiatives and its support for fulfilling related commitments were also examined.

4&5 **EU Added Value & Relevance**

The MSFD demonstrates clear EU added value and remains highly relevant today, providing a solid framework for ecosystem-based management and promoting sustainable use of marine resources. However, the directive is not entirely "future-proof"; it lacks full capability for monitoring and reporting progress through operational targets and needs clearer procedures for harmonized monitoring and reporting. Links with the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive need strengthening. A significant gap is the insufficient integration of climate change impacts, which were barely referenced in the 2008 directive.

The evaluation identified five **key problem areas** that will form the basis for future revisions of the MSFD:

1. **Legal Framework:** Lack of clear objectives, definitions, and procedures.
2. **Implementation and Enforcement:** Burdensome implementation cycle and disparities in regional coordination.



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3. **Policy Coherence:** Misalignment with other environmental and sectoral frameworks, and the MSFD's reliance on progress made under these other frameworks.
4. **Data Management:** Issues with data collection, sharing, use, and the reporting burden for Member States.
5. **Climate Change Integration:** Insufficient consideration of climate change impacts.

The decision to revise the MSFD, announced in the Water Resilience Strategy and Ocean Pact, directly stems from these evaluation outcomes. The revision has two equally important objectives:

1. Better protection of the marine environment.
2. Reducing administrative burden, simplifying processes, and improving policy coherence.

To achieve these, three specific objectives have been defined for the revision:

1. Strengthening the regulatory framework for better enforcement.
2. Improving the operational effectiveness of the framework, focusing on policy coherence and regional coordination.
3. Enhancing data management, reporting, and data use.

The Chair thanked Belin for her presentation and mentioned that the NWWAC acts as observer in the Marine Strategy Coordination Group (MSCG). She felt that this helped the process to a certain extent and recalled the statement on stakeholder involvement which the NWWAC made at the last MSCG meeting in which DG ENV was encouraged to cooperate more closely with DG MARE, but also to have this connection between the Environmental Administration and the Fisheries Administration in the implementation of the current MSFD. She expressed the AC's concern regarding the lack of consultation of mainly fisheries stakeholders in relation to the development of certain threshold values, namely, on the seabed. She felt that the AC had expertise to contribute to these aspects and wondered if the threshold values would still be established under the current framework and without any impact assessment. Would these then be used as binding targets under the new MSFD. She encouraged all members to engage with their administrations to provide guidance to the MSCG as well as TG Seabed.

Belin commented that the contents of the NWWAC statement at MSCG had been well noted. She added that the lack of clearer procedures on how to determine good environmental status is problematic and will be addressed. This may involve and impact assessment, however, currently there is no impact assessment involved in the setting of threshold values. She outlined the current process in which threshold values are being developed and adopted as set out in the secondary legislation to the MSFD, called the decision on good environmental status that was adopted by the Member States in 2017. She added that the lack of consultation mainly with fisheries stakeholders was noted but highlighted that several working groups are open to observers and that the AC is welcome to participate. Having previously chaired TG Seabed she felt that observers and Member States could communicate freely as they are all experts providing expertise. However, when decisions need to be made this is in the remit of the Member States only. Stakeholders are also consulted as part of public consultations. She finished by mentioning discussions at regional sea convention level, e.g. OSPAR, where observers can also participate in this work.



7 UN Ocean Conference update – Chair

The Chair encouraged participants to have a look at the UN Ocean Conference outcomes — the documentation is really extensive and covers a wide range of important issues. She provided a brief overview of key issues.

Fisheries Representation

One point worth noting is that fisheries were somewhat underrepresented in the official dialogue sessions. Topics like Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) attracted far more attention, with strong involvement from NGOs and foundations running high-profile campaigns. Unfortunately, fisheries often featured in these debates in a negative light. In France, for instance, there were very visible campaigns in the streets of Nice against bottom trawling and for bans of bottom-trawling in MPAs. Despite this, there were some events focusing on fisheries management and also on "blue food" — where fisheries and aquaculture were brought into discussions around sustainable food systems. However, the narrative of blue food as a climate solution has yet to gain real traction.

Blue Technology

Another emerging area was blue technology, which is seen as a link between ocean conservation and sustainable use.

Fisheries Management

The updated [FAO global fisheries status report](#) was presented, which acknowledged where fisheries management is working and producing positive results. This is an important reminder that effective fisheries management contributes positively to ocean sustainability.

However, work still needs to be done on changing the narrative — showing that fisheries, when managed well, can contribute to ecosystem services like food provision and biodiversity. This remains a real challenge in conferences like this, where the public, who mostly learn about these issues through the media, often hear only one side of the story. In France and Belgium, this was very apparent.

BBNJ Agreement and Biodiversity Framework

Another major topic was the BBNJ Agreement (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction), the High Seas Treaty. There was a big push to get 60 ratifications by the conference, which wasn't quite achieved, but significant progress was made — 19 countries ratified it during the week, so entry into force seems near. This treaty will enable the designation of MPAs in the high seas, which is a big step forward. Similarly, the Global Biodiversity Framework was a key focus, particularly the "30 by 30" target (protecting 30% of the ocean by 2030). But it is important to remember this framework contains 26 targets, covering not just protection and restoration but also sustainable use, indigenous knowledge, and fair benefit-sharing. Focusing only on the 30% target risks missing the broader picture. The CBD Secretariat itself is raising awareness about this.

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

Public campaigns such as the recent David Attenborough documentaries have raised awareness about Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), but they have also deepened polarisation. Litigation is now emerging, with some Member States being challenged by NGOs on the legality of allowing bottom trawling in MPAs. New commitments and announcements of exclusion



zones were made at the conference while other Member States reiterated their willingness to pursue a case-by-case approach to gear restrictions and MPAs. However, the debate remains politically charged, and bridging the gap between science and policy continues to be a significant challenge.

Blue Food and Food Security

On a more positive note, blue food — including fisheries and aquaculture — was increasingly recognised as part of the solution. It featured prominently in the Ocean Action Panel's contributions. However, there is still a need to address issues like unsustainable aquaculture expansion, food loss, and waste. Food security is becoming a stronger narrative, particularly for countries in the Global South. Aquaculture is seen as part of the solution to increase food security.

Deep-Sea Mining

On deep-sea mining, there were still calls for a precautionary approach until more scientific data is available on its impacts — something we've discussed before.

Research and Finance

There was also a significant focus on ocean research and knowledge-sharing, and a range of funding commitments from both public and private actors. Altogether, pledges amounted to around €1 billion for ocean initiatives.

Looking Ahead

Of course, this conference is only one step in a much longer process. Upcoming key meetings include the UN Climate COP 30, the Biodiversity COP 17, the next BBNJ meeting, and the IUCN World Congress. These events build on one another, creating a domino effect. Missing one can make it harder to influence the next.

In the context of the Climate COP and others, we should think about how aquatic food fits into climate resilience and food security narratives — and ensure these perspectives are reflected in national climate plans. This will likely feature in several of our future NWWAC advices.

Final Thoughts

In summary, this is an evolving conversation, and we will see further developments throughout the year. The media cycles will keep these issues in the public eye.

6. UK MPA consultation

The Chair introduced the current consultation on Management of English offshore marine protected areas (deadline 01 September). A non-UK stakeholder meeting is scheduled for 15 July. She added that the proposed measures will have an impact on EU fishermen if implemented and handed over to Pauline Stephan.

Stephan explained that these measures would have the worst socio-economic impact on France since Brexit and that the topic had been discussed in the North Sea AC with a proposal made to develop two pieces of advice:



- Letter to send the Commission requesting political intervention and extension of the deadline
- Joint response to the consultation process

Rihan felt that the UK has no intention to change its mind and will follow the provisions of the TCA. He added it would be useful to speak with the Scottish industry about this.

The NWWAC Secretariat briefly outlined the current discussions with the Commission regarding UK observers at AC meetings. The issue arose as part of the arrangements for the NWWAC meetings in Vigo as apparently separate rules are in place in the TCA for UK observers at EU meetings. The ACs have not been made aware of these and are awaiting clarification.

Lynch expressed his support for the submission of a letter to the European Commission though he felt that the outcome was predetermined. He added it would be important to put the AC's opinion on record, and that in stages 1 and 2 of the consultation stakeholders were given the impression that any restrictions on fishing would be imposed in only a small area where the main features are directly present, plus a buffer zone. Now in stage 3 a blanket ban is being proposed which seems to affect mainly EU fisheries and could set a precedent regarding bottom trawling in MPAs though the UK is a third country.

The Chair felt that there was agreement in the room for CNPMM to take the lead on drafting submissions. She added that it would be useful to review Annex 38 of the TCA regarding access to UK waters which has now been extended to 2038. With shared stocks subject to the annual consultation, access must also be given to these stocks, so objections might be possible regarding the proportionality.

Kelberine acknowledged that certain areas of the sea floor have to be protected. However, he felt that there would not be a lot of space left for fisheries if future offshore energy zones were overlaid with MPAs.

Murphy wondered if the AC should request the Commission to carry out an evaluation of the socioeconomic impact of these measures on the EU fleet in the absence of any information from the UK. This should also take into account the issue of displacement.

Arthur **Yon** agreed with the proposal put forward by CNPEM and the comments of previous speakers.

Thomas commented that it was important to highlight the cost issue as well as the socioeconomic consequences. She added that the measures would likely lead to many enterprises closing which would have a huge socio-economic impact.

Geert **Meun** informed participants that in personal communications with UK industry representatives it has become clear that they are very concerned about the developments and considering lodging complaints with their own government.

Kelberine felt that it might be impossible to address all the challenges identified in one letter and that it might be better to focus on the most important ones.

Irene **Prieto** added that Spanish organisations are also impacted by this and wondered if it



would be beneficial to contact the various Member States to ask them to assert their influence as well.

Mathies recalled that a UK fishing industry representative had provided some insight into the UK process during the meeting of Working Group 1. It had been outlined that Defra had managed to evaluate the non-monetised benefits of the measures, but not the socio-economic impacts citing lack of available data. She added that as the deadline of the consultation is 01 September, it would be easier for individual organisations to respond, which might also be more powerful than a single piece of advice as the AC is not recognised as a primary stakeholder organisation at UK level.

Stephan agreed with the views shared by other members and pointed out that during the ExCom meeting the following day a Director from DG MARE would be present with whom this could be discussed as well. In addition, she asked if the Inter-AC Brexit Forum was going to address this issue.

Kelberine reiterated that information regarding overlap of offshore renewable energy developments and MPAs is already available for analysis.

The **Chair** summarised that first an extension to the consultation deadline should be sought. Secondly, the consultation response should be drafted. And thirdly, once additional data is available from the Commission, the AC could develop more detailed advice regarding the impact of cumulative measures from fishing restrictions in MPAs and offshore renewable energy developments. The aim would be to ask for an impact assessment in relation to the consequences for the EU fleet, as well as for plans regarding displacement of effort.

ACTION: Secretariat to contact LDAC and request issue of UK MPAs to be added to the Inter-AC Brexit Forum agenda. (carried out by the NWWAC Secretariat during the meeting – completed.)

ACTION: Proposal for CNPMM to develop a letter to the Commission requesting a political intervention regarding the UK MPA consultation and to contact the UK for an extension of the deadline, request from the Commission the carrying out of a study of the socio-economic consequences as well as potential impact of displacement of vessels, to be submitted if possible jointly with the North Sea AC.

ACTION: CNPMM to develop advice to the UK in response to the MPA consultation.

Murphy reiterated the need for the Commission to carry out an evaluation of the socio-economic costs associated with the proposed measures as well as potential effects from displacement.

1. Focus Groups update

The following updates were provided:

- Inter-AC Brexit Forum (Chair)
- CFP (Chair)
- Landing Obligation (Emiel Brouckaert)
- Climate & Environment (Chair)



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- Joint NWWAC/NSAC Skates & Rays (John Lynch)
- Control and Compliance (Patrick Murphy)
- Social Aspects (Kenn Skau Fischer)
- Spatial Dimension (Secretariat)

All details can be found on the slides [here](#).

2. AOB

- NWWAC Communication Strategy – Secretariat

3. Summary of actions agreed and decisions adopted by the Chair

1	Members to send feedback on the fishing opportunities advice to the Secretariat.
2	Members to send written queries for Joanne Morgan following her presentation to the Secretariat.
3	Members to send written queries for Julia Rubeck and Herman Bos following the presentation on the CFP evaluation to the Secretariat.
4	FG Climate & Environment to review and potentially address the aspirational and binding targets included in the Ocean Pact
5	Members to send written queries for Cristina Morgado and Killian Chute (EFCA) following their update on JDPs and REM to the Secretariat.
6	Proposal for CNPMEM to develop a letter to the Commission requesting a political intervention regarding the UK MPA consultation and to contact the UK for an extension of the deadline, request from the Commission the carrying out of a study of the socio-economic consequences as well as potential impact of displacement of vessels, to be submitted if possible jointly with the North Sea AC.
7	CNPMEM to develop advice to the UK in response to the MPA consultation.
8	Management team to reflect on how advice is presented to the Commission and how to achieve the best responses
9	NWWAC Secretariat to circulate the form for the NWWAC members' spotlight as well as set up WhatsApp Community as a trial and engage with FG Control.



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Participants

NWWAC members		
José	Beltran	OPP-7 BURELA
Emiel	Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
Manu	Kelberine	CRPMEM de Bretagne
Franck	Le Barzic	OP COBRENORD
John	Lynch	Irish South & East Fish Producers Organisation Ltd
Llibori	Martinez Latorre	International Forum for Sustainable Underwater Act
Geert	Meun	VisNed
Patrick	Murphy	Irish South & West Fish Producers Organisation
Aodh	O'Donnell	Irish Fish Producers Organisation (IFPO)
Alexandra	Philippe	EBCD
Corentine	Piton	France Pêche Durable et Responsable
Irene	Prieto	OPPF4
Erwan	Quemeneur	CDPMEM-29
Dominic	Rihan	KFO
Pauline	Stephan	CNPMEM
Dominique	Thomas	OP CME MMN
Arthur	Yon	FROM Nord
Experts & Observers		
Alice	Belin	Policy Officer DG ENV
Herman	Bos	DG MARE D3
Guillermo	Bravo Téllez	NWW MS TG - Spanish Representative
Killian	Chute	Administrator Planning and Assessment, EFCA
Enda	Conneely	IIMRO
Noelia	Cuervo Álvarez	NWW MS TG - Spanish Representative
David	Curtis	EAA
Felix	Leinemann	Head of Unit MARE.A.2
Cristina	Morgado	Deputy Head of Unit EU waters and North Atlantic
Joanne	Morgan	ACOM Vice-Chair -ICES
Jean-Marie	Robert	Pêcheurs de Bretagne
Alexandre	Rodriguez	LDAC Secretariat
Julia	Rubeck	DG MARE D3
Kenn	Skau Fischer	NSAC Chair
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Ilaria	Bellomo	
Mo	Mathies	