



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE.C5/JB/vr

Subject: Reply to the North Western Waters Advisory Council Advice on new approaches to fisheries management principles

Dear Ms Philippe,

This letter is in response to the advice of the North Western Waters Advisory Council (NWWAC) on new approaches to fisheries management, which we received in January 2025 (Ares(2025)619336).

The issues underlined in the letter are indeed core elements that will feed into the evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) regulation. As you know, we launched the detailed public consultation on 29 January as part of this evaluation, which ran for 12 weeks. I would like to thank the NWWAC for its active engagement in this process and for submitting a formal contribution to the consultation. Any decision on refining or strengthening the CFP regulation must be based on sound evidence and shaped through an inclusive dialogue with all relevant stakeholders. In this context, I also want to acknowledge the valuable input provided by the NWWAC during our recent bilateral meetings with each advisory council, as well as earlier contributions such as your submission of 24 October 2022 (Ares(2022)7365065) in preparation for the 2023 CFP report. Your continued involvement is greatly appreciated and remains highly relevant to the ongoing evaluation.

The CFP requires fisheries management to achieve Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) for all stocks, ensuring long-term environmental, economic, and social sustainability. The MSY objective has proven that sustainability pays off, with most stocks recovering and fleets fishing sustainably seeing strong results. However, the multiple and pressing changes you highlight may prompt a reassessment of our stock management approach.

The reopening of the spurdog fishery highlights the need to refine management approaches for species-specific challenges. Concerns about the maximum size limit and survival rates of released fish are being carefully examined. Discussions within the Specialised Committee on Fisheries (SCF) and a special request to ICES to explore alternative

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management options are key steps. The results are expected in September 2025, and industry input remains essential to ensure effective and practical measures.

Climate change, ecosystem shifts, and stock distribution changes must be carefully assessed. Fisheries management must consider ecosystem interactions and socio-economic contexts, especially in a rapidly changing ocean. ICES already incorporates ecosystem factors in advice for most data-rich stocks. We remain committed to supporting science and improving our understanding to inform better decisions.

We plan to evaluate the Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) Directive under the Commission's Better Regulation guidelines. In this regard, and while not pre-empting the outcome of this future evaluation, we take note of your recommendation to better balance biodiversity goals with the vital role of fisheries in food security, particularly for coastal communities. Effective MSP must align ecological sustainability with socio-economic needs to ensure both healthy marine ecosystems and resilient fisheries.

Socio-economic aspects are crucial to support management decisions, and we recognise the progress made at regional level in improving data availability. We are also working with STECF to further develop social indicators. However, changes in data collection and analysis will be gradual, making early input from you and fishers — flagging behavioural changes or anomalies as they arise — is essential to propose timely and appropriate measures.

Furthermore, it is indeed important to assess how Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) developments impact fishing communities. The MSP Directive provides a framework for Member States to coordinate maritime activities, balancing ecological and socio-economic considerations. The Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI) also provides a forum for Member States, Norway and the UK to exchange on these challenges, promoting informed and balanced policy decisions.

I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Jurgen Batsleer (Jurgen.Batsleer@ec.europa.eu) or Ms Julia Rubeck, our Advisory Councils coordinator, via the functional mailbox MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu.

Yours sincerely,

Charlina VITCHEVA