MIAC 2025

Coordination meeting between ICES and the Advisory Councils

January 23rd, 2025 : Copenhagen / hybrid setting

ICES, H. C. Andersens Blvd. 46, 1553 København, Atlantic Room, 4th floor

This meeting will have interpretation
for it to work you will need to bring your own Headset + laptop

All time stamps indicated are at local Copenhagen time **(UTC+1)**

Connection link: https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84022136190

9 : 00		**Welcome and introduction by the chair** **Sergio Lopez (SWWAC) and Colm Lordan (ICES ACOM)**
9 : 10	**LDAC**	Update on ICES advice on an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management (EBFM) to NEAFC and advisory products (including ecosystem services) to OSPAR
9 : 30	**PELAC**	Lack of comprehensive long-term sharing arrangements for blue whiting, atlanto-scandian herring and mackerel
9: 50	**NWWAC** NSAC	ICES views on how to improve advice interannual stability and consistency depending on the stock category
10 : 10	**SWWAC**	Common dolphin bycatch in the Western Waters
10 : 30		**Coffee break**
10: 50	**BSAC**	How changes within the ecosystem (productivity, natural mortality, predators' abundance…) are considered in the ICES advices
11 : 10	**NSAC**	Implementation of the ICES Stakeholder Engagement Strategy, the WKSTIMP-inspired NSAC and inter-AC initiatives
11 : 30	**CCRUP**	Possibility to separate the ICES advice on fishing opportunities for *Beryx splendes* (BYS) and *Beryx decadactylus* (BXD) in area 10 (Azores)
11 : 50		**Conclusion - 2026 MIAC coordination**
12 : 00		**End of the meeting**

ANNEXES

I. Short explanations on each agenda item

A. Update on ICES advice on an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management (EBFM) to NEAFC and advisory products (including ecosystem services) to OSPAR – LDAC.

The LDAC regularly follows the negotiations on NEAFC and often provides informal or formal advice on management arrangements for shared stocks under the remit of Coastal States and NEAFC; governance framework; spatial measures for conservation of habitats and species (i.e. VMEs and OECMs); and climate change. As an example, you can read here the LDAC advice in preparation of NEAFC Annual Meeting in November 2024: https://ldac.eu/images/LDAC_Advice_NEAFC_2024_20Sept.pdf

At NEAFC, a broader approach is privileged because of the need to collaborate with OSPAR. OSPAR has a broad mandate to assess and manage all the other pressures on the ecosystems and one of its objectives is to have a regional ecosystem-based approach that covers all the sectors. In this respect, we note that ICES has issued in late September a response to NEAFC request on Ecosystem Approaches to Fisheries Management: https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27052372 ;

The LDAC would be interested in getting more information on the above referred topics, in particular ongoing collaboration with OSPAR on implementing a cross-sectoral ecosystem-based approach to NEAFC fisheries. We are also looking from the LDAC to contribute to the performance review exercise as stakeholders and wonder if ICES has the same intention or rather would act more like an external scientific advisor.

B. Lack of comprehensive long-term sharing arrangements for blue whiting, atlanto-scandian herring and mackerel – PELAC.

Can ICES assess the impact on the stocks of the lack of comprehensive long-term sharing arrangements for these species? How is the evaluation of long-term management plans affected by the lack of comprehensive long-term sharing arrangements? ICES advice for blue whiting, atlanto-scandian herring and mackerel underline that consistent deviations from advice are not included in the evaluation of the management plan and that for these stocks, there is a long-term risk of SSB falling below Blim. Considering that the advice for mackerel for 2025 is 22% lower than in 2024, that blue whiting catch opportunities are decreasing by 5% and that for ASH, SSB is below MSYBtrigger, there is a need to understand the consequences of to the lack of long-term sharing arrangement between Coastal States for these species.

C. ICES views on how to improve advice stability and consistency – NWWAC.

The ICES advices for NWW stocks have recently been characterized by significant year-on-year fluctuations in stock assessments. The relevance and reliability of ICES advice in such cases are critical, as more stable advice could help mitigate the impacts of these fluctuations on fisheries management decisions. The NWWAC has already raised with ICES and with DG MARE that some of the advice provided remains out of line on what fishers see on the fishing grounds. In its advice on 2024 fishing opportunities, the NWWAC proposed that the stability clause used for category 3 stock is applied to other categories as well to mitigate fluctuations in the advice over the years. We appreciate that ICES is instituting an early warning system starting this year with benchmark stocks. Moreover, the use of a stability clause for category 1 stocks was discussed at meetings between ICES and advice requesters. It was thought that because of the larger amount and robustness of information available for category 1 stocks, the stability clause would not be needed. However, large changes in the advice can happen for those stocks too and that can cause difficulties for both the industry and management. It is our understanding that ICES has started discussing on a broader use of the clause and we would appreciate hearing about ICES efforts and next steps in that regard. Furthermore, the fact remains that a substantial part of the ICES advice is based on limited data. The NWWAC believes that category 5 and 6 assessments are not fit for purpose and should not be considered as a basis for setting fishing opportunities. What steps is ICES taking to move stock assessments from categories 5 and 6 to categories 3, and ultimately categories 1 and 2, to improve the reliability of its advice? This shift could be facilitated by integrating more genetic research, which would enhance the understanding of stock structures and dynamics. Are there other methods that ICES envisages for enhancing the transparency and predictability of stock assessments, beyond the application of the stability clause?

D. Common dolphin bycatch in the Western Waters – SWWAC.

Is there a danger of extinction in the short term for the common dolphin population in the north-east Atlantic, and is there therefore an urgent need to implement large-scale closures for gear defined as being at risk, without waiting for the results of tests of large-scale mitigation measures carried out in France, Spain and Portugal? Have the results of all the measures implemented in recent years been evaluated?

Current knowledge of the North-East Atlantic common dolphin population indicates that this population is abundant and stable (SCAN IV: https: //tinyurl.com/3ynt6swa). The latest ICES opinions on the subject (opinions linked to the WKEMBYC of 26 May 2020, 24 January 2023 and 29 June 2023, and the opinion of 1 December 2023 linked to the work of the WGBYC in particular) and on anthropogenic mortality, in particular that associated with accidental catches by fishing gear, do not seem to indicate that the population is in danger of extinction in the short term. The closures were implemented without analysing the results of the use of pingers to prevent cetaceans being caught, electronic surveillance and surveillance by on-board observers to improve the data.

E. How ecosystem considerations are considered in the stock advice – BSAC.

The BSAC would like to raise the question of the general changes in productivity in the Baltic and how is this reflected in the models and ICES output : How the Baltic Sea stock advices account for natural

mortality including predators (seals and cormorants)1. Is this clearly conveyed to advice recipients and what actions are taken to make sure we can better estimate natural mortality and account for it in the advice? Building on the findings from the European seal project by Matis in Iceland2, can ICES provide insights into the current understanding of seals, whales, and their ecosystem impacts, particularly in relation to fishing activity? How well do we understand the fish consumption required to sustain these populations, and how does this compare to human fishing removals? To what extent is this predator-prey relationship reflected in ICES advice on fisheries management?

F. State of play and next steps of the implementation of the ICES Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and the WKSTIMP-inspired NSAC and inter-AC initiatives aimed at improving the involvement of stakeholders in scientific request formulation– NSAC.

ICES WKSTIMP - Workshop on Implementation of ICES Stakeholder Engagement Strategy took place in May 2023. A report was produced formulating over 20 recommendations. We would like to receive feedback on which recommendations have been taken up by ICES ACOM, and what are the next steps and timelines.

In addition, we would like to take the opportunity to provide an update on the work of Advisory Councils in developing a joint proposal on improving stakeholder engagement with DG MARE in the formulation of the request for advice from the EU to ICES. We would also like to hear about how ICES would like to be positioned and how it sees its role in this strengthened interface.

G. Possibility to separate the ICES advice on fishing possibilities for *Beryx splendes* (BYS) and *Beryx decadactylus* (BXD) in area 10 (Azores) – CCRUP.

Representatives from the Azorean Fishermen consider that the situation of the stocks of *Beryx sp.* makes the application of the precautionary approach unnecessary and propose to provide direct data for these stocks.
Considering the advice of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), they note that the predicted landings correspondi«g to advice for *Beryx sp*. are very low since 2023, due to a lack of data, which is beyond the control of our fishermen.
Whereas Azorean fishermen note that the stocks of *Beryx sp*, especially Splendid Alfonsino (*Beryx splendens*), have been increasing as a result of successive biannual precautionary cuts, and are now in a good state of conservation.
Considering that Azorean fishermen for many years, have made themselves available to collect and provide information on this stock, for later analysis by the regional government.
Considering the selectivity of the fishing gear used to capture these species and the fact that fishermen are easily able to direct their fishing towards catching Splendid Alfonsino or Alfonsino (*Beryx decadactylus*), depending on the different depths at which these species live, they would like to know if it is possible for ICES to deliver separete advices on fishing opportunities for Splendid Alfonsino and Alfonsino, using if needed the data of the Azorean fishermen.

[1] *Carefully calculations about the necessary fish removal as a livelihood for the seal and cormorant population amounts to 20,000 tons every year. Even if this is not all cod and herring, this extraction cannot be seriously ignored as having a significant impact on the cod and herring population.*
[2] Viðarsson, J. R., Baldursson, J., Traustason, E., Laksá, U., Burke, H., Hinchcliffe, J., & Pálsson, J. (2024). Nordic Seals: Seal populations in the North-Atlantic, Arctic Ocean and adjacent waters. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12545042

II. Questions to ICES for written answers

NWWAC NSAC

1. **Update on how ICES is working to build/maintain partnerships between scientists and stakeholders (especially fishers) as one of the main tools to boost data availability and quality**. The lack of data for certain stocks is negatively impacting stock assessments and management, with potential impacts on the catch advice and the resulting fishing opportunities. The ICES Advisory Plan also recognizes this as a quality assurance issue. In this regard, it is essential to consider partnerships between scientists and fishers as one of the main tools to boost data availability. Industry surveys and non-quantifiable information such as fishers' perceptions are an important part of this process. We would appreciate an update on how ICES is following up on the implementation of WKSTIMP outcomes. How does ICES plan to encourage closer collaboration between scientists and fishermen to improve data collection, and what specific initiatives are already underway in this regard? How does ICES collect feedback on its advice from fishers and how does this influence the assessment processes?

NWWAC NSAC

2. **Update on ICES work on climate change implications and overall ecosystem-based approach in stock assessments**. As mentioned in the 2024 ICES Celtic Seas ecoregion – Ecosystem Overview, climate change is causing changes in water masses. Freshening of western subpolar north Atlantic waters is observed in deeper areas of the ecoregion. In addition, the warming of surface water temperature in shallow shelf regions has become increasingly seasonally stratified and nutrient-limited in some areas. This has already changed the spatial distribution of several plankton and fish species within the ecoregion and is likely to continue to do so. The preservation of several stocks in the Celtic Seas is threatened by this, especially cod as the species' temperature optimum is outside of the range of temperature values occurring in the Celtic Seas ecosystem. ICES has already partly integrated the lower productivity of these stocks into its evaluation method (for example with recruitment hypothesis). However, the reference points used in the assessment do not take into account the effects of climate change on environmental conditions. We appreciate that the information needed to adjust reference points is missing for a great number of stocks, which makes it difficult to quantify the impacts of climate change. However, their consideration in the ICES assessment is vital to understand the future viability of fisheries in the Celtic Seas and allow for the suitable and adaptive alignment of fisheries management measures. In light of this, we would appreciate hearing about the next steps and objectives ICES may have to operationalize the inclusion of climate change impacts in stock assessment.

NWWAC

3. **The need for multiple stock assessors from different institutes for each stock.** It may be beneficial for ICES to consider assigning multiple stock assessors from different institutes to each stock. Currently, most stocks have a data coordinator responsible for compiling the data and a stock assessor who runs the assessment model. These roles are sometimes housed within the same institute and sometimes

across different ones. However, given that each institute operates under different policies, resource allocations, and national priorities, some stocks may not receive the necessary attention if they are not a high priority for the institute responsible for their assessment. This has led to delays and insufficient preparation for certain benchmarks, as seen in recent cases. While institutes are understandably hesitant to relinquish assessment duties, which are often tied to their budgets, a more collaborative approach involving assessors from multiple institutes could enhance the quality and timeliness of stock assessments. Such an approach would promote ongoing development of assessments rather than reactive measures taken only during benchmarks. It would also encourage a more thorough examination of the data and models, helping to prevent undetected issues, such as those recently identified with the Irish Sea herring. By assigning multiple assessors to each stock, ICES could ensure more robust and continuous oversight, ultimately improving the reliability and accuracy of assessments.

NWWAC

4. **The need to formally identify data deficiencies.** It may be valuable for ICES to consider formally identifying and addressing data deficiencies in stock assessments. In many cases, significant data quality issues exist, but these are often noted only briefly in reports without being clearly highlighted. This can result in suboptimal stock assessments based on unreliable data. For example, even for major stocks like western horse mackerel, data quality remains a concern, and this issue is even more pronounced in some demersal species. While it is understandable that institutes may be reluctant to acknowledge data quality issues, particularly when they are tied to established data collection frameworks, a more transparent approach could help improve the situation. ICES plays a critical role in specifying the data requirements for stock assessments, and by clearly highlighting deficiencies in its advice, it may prompt data collection funders to take necessary action. Although ICES may indicate that such issues are communicated to the fisheries RCGs, a more direct and transparent communication of these problems within the advice itself could foster quicker reactions and drive improvements. Given ICES's central role in stock assessments, its involvement in rethinking and refining data collection processes would be invaluable in ensuring that data quality supports accurate and reliable assessments.

BSAC

5. **Update on the work on mixed fisheries advice in the Baltic Sea for pelagic and demersal fisheries.** Last year ICES explained that there was a lack of appropriate data and of expertise to prepare Baltic mixed fisheries advice. In 2023, the experts in the Baltic mixed fisheries have participated in the ICES work. Were there any results from this? Was it possible to find new experts to work on the matter? When could we expect the ICES advice to take account of species interactions?

LDAC

6. **Update on NAFO/ICES Pandalus Working Group work in terms of release of scientific advice and review of scientific assessment model on 3M Shrimp for 2025?** This is a follow up of the request made in previous MIAC meetings. On release of scientific advice, the LDAC requests that ICES-NAFO Pandalus WG continues releasing its advice for 3M Shrimp in September, ensuring that stock assessment is

handed over in time for decision at the NAFO Annual Meeting. ICES has noted progress on ecosystem modelling for the Flemish Cap and the inter-relationships between redfish, cod and shrimp, including on multi-species MSE. It was also noted that a 'number of pandalus benchmarks' took place in 2022 with some interesting results but still there is work to do in terms of data quality and ecosystem modelling for Flemish Cap. However, ICES stressed that despite the benchmarks of the other shrimp stocks of the Joint Group ICES-NAFO are finished, this is not the case for the 3M stock. The main reason is that this is a data limited stock with lack of robust data available which has deteriorated over time. Moreover, there were no more benchmark meetings in 2023 for this stock. On scientific assessment models, the LDAC recognizes the need to restart the work to explore an SS3 model given the partial and patchy nature of the available data. On data review and benchmark exercise, the LDAC would like to ask that a follow up ICES benchmark on Pandalus (WKPRAWN) is convened and that its outcomes and advice are incorporated in the work of the NAFO Scientific Committee with the view of improving assessment and management recommendations in coming years.

CCRUP 7. **What is the most appropriate methodology for fishermen to create a database which can be taken into account in ICES studies?** Considering the systematic lack of data received by ICES and the consequent precautionary measures suggested to the most valuable species in the Azores, the Azorean fishermen are proposing to the Local, National Governments and EC the financing of the assembling of a database, with data recalled directly by them (and not through fish auction data) to provide ICES with data that can support its stock assessments for the area 10. Therefore, they would like to know what parameters/data should be requested from fishermen, as well as what analysis is necessary, for subsequent sending to ICES of these data which would allow this data to be properly considered by ICES.

SWWAC 8. **VMEs in SWW and NWW: What measures do you consider necessary to improve the actual scientific knowledge according to the differentiated impact of each fishing gear (mobile/fixed or bottom/demersal) in order to take the most appropriate and fair measures so that the application of bans is adequate and proportional to the impact of each fishing gear?** The approval of Regulation 2022/1614 on VMEs which approved closures in 87 areas of European waters proved to lack sufficient scientific data differentiated by fishing gear, taking decisions only on the basis of trawl footprint data, but which has been applied to all fishing gears, which some organizations and modalities have considered to be very disproportionate and unfair. As an example of the disproportionality of this closure for some fishing gears, the 87 closed areas account for some 16,544 km2 in EU waters, of which VME areas account for 32% (5,200 km2) and trawl footprint buffer zones for 68% (11,300 km2). It is essential that the best available scientific information is used and that it is differentiated according to the different fishing gears so that measures are agreed according to the real impact of each fishing gear, knowing what corresponds to mobile and fixed gears, and above all the different impact of each one on VMEs.

NSAC 9. **Discussion on possible improvements or alternatives to headline advice.** NSAC would like to point out the issue with headline advice prompting the managers to take the highlighted option, limiting managers' ability/willingness to explore alternative options. We would like to explore possibilities in adopting alternative ways of presenting advice, one that invites managers to look beyond what is proposed in the headline advice. This would particularly be useful when the headline advice is zero.

NSAC 10. **Inclusion of socio-economic considerations in ICES Advice in addition to environmental ones. NSAC** would like to query whether ICES is considering including socio-economic considerations in its advice as it does with conservation aspects. This would be in line with the CFP's three pillars of sustainability.

PELAC 11. **Can ICES provide more detail on the science that is used to draft the non-fisheries conservation considerations ?** During our October meetings, Dorleta Garcia, ICES ACOM vice-chair provided the PelAC with an update on the non-fisheries conservation considerations, stating that this is the case if the stock is more affected by other anthropogenic pressures than by fishing. She underlined that this was to be given when clear demonstrable management actions can be recommended for any non-catch anthropogenic pressure, or clear demonstrable sensitivity to climate change. The PelAC would like to have more information on how this is dealt with within ICES, how the assessment of the pressure is done and how demonstrable management actions are defined.

PELAC 12. **Will ICES review its quality control and approval process in the light of the lack of uptake of the issues found in the configuration of the Irish Sea herring stock assessment ? While ICES plan a benchmark to address the mixing of Celtic Sea and Irish Sea herring mixing ?** The errors found in the configuration of the Irish Sea assessment model also raise serious questions about ICES quality control procedures and the slow reaction time to significant assessment issues. The existing assessment model has been in place since the 2017 benchmark (ICES, 2017a; 2017b) and the outputs of the model, particularly in relation to the unusually flat F pattern, have been questioned multiple times but until recently have not been thoroughly investigated by ICES. It now appears that the SSB and resulting advice have been overestimated for the past seven years, with an unknown impact on both the Irish Sea and Celtic Sea stocks. Mechanisms need to be put in place to address issues such as this as they arise and to prevent update assessments being conducted with assessment models that are known to have significant issues.

Serious questions were also raised at the 2017 benchmark about the appropriateness of the Irish Sea model, and in particular the catchability assigned to the acoustic SSB index, due to the then known but unquantified mixing of Celtic Sea herring into the survey area. It appears now that these concerns were well founded, and the acoustic survey indices are confounded by the presence of herring from adjacent stocks, which should have been accounted for in the model configuration. It should be noted that the WKIRISH benchmark reviewers were not in agreement with the use of the index and requested that HAWG draft the ToRs for

an inter-benchmark to decide on the issue. However ICES ACOM leadership decided to leave the decision to HAWG, who regardless of lack of agreement within, decided to retain the inappropriate catchability in the assessment (ICES, 20178b). The impact of this also needs to be assessed as part of the benchmark.

PELAC

13. **Considering the impacts of environmental factors on blue whiting, can ICES include in the stock model the impact of the subpolar gyre and wind?** During a presentation made by Hjálmar Hátún and Costanza Cappelli at a WGI PelAC meeting, we were made aware of the impact of the subpolar gyre and on the wind stress curl on blue whiting recruitment. During this presentation, Hátún presented the characteristics of the subpolar gyre in the North Atlantic, which influences sea water temperature and therefore affects blue whiting spawning-feeding distributions and their migrations. Increased temperatures caused by the sub-polar gyre in the late 1990s, led to a three-fold increase in blue whiting stock size, and caused a spatial shift in catches. Moreover, he noted that wind stress curl (a factor of wind stress and rotational wind direction) appears to be an important factor for blue whiting recruitment. Research has found a correlation between high wind stress curl and recruitment – as wind stress curl increases, generally so does recruitment. In addition, when northward transport takes place, recruitment appears to increase, suggesting that sea surface temperature and sea surface height also have a role to play in influencing recruitment.

    Reference: Hátún, Hjálmar & Payne, Mark & Jacobsen, Jan. (2009). The North Atlantic subpolar gyre regulates the spawning distribution of blue whiting (Micromesistius poutassou). Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences. 66. 759-770. 10.1139/F09-037.

PELAC

14. **To what extent is ICES including ecosystem considerations and the effects of climate change in MSE processes?** To implement the Ecosystem Based approach to fisheries management, there is a need to incorporate ecosystem and climate change in Management Strategy Evaluations. Most MSEs to date have focused on individual species in line with single stock advice ICES is providing. Fully implementing EBFM will require applying the framework to multiple species or broader ecosystem-level relations to improve the quality of the advice in line with our understanding of ecosystems. The PelAC would like to better understand how this is done within ICES.

NWWAC

15. **Seabass catches allocation tool.** We would be grateful if ICES could update us on the development of the tool. It would be desirable for the tool to be delivered in time for its use in the 2026 Fishing Opportunities negotiations. Is there sufficient time available to achieve this goal? What key milestones would need to be met along the way? It would be useful if ICES could prepare a draft timetable outlining the steps required for the tool's completion, which would also facilitate ACs contribution where needed.