



DRAFT MINUTES

HORIZONTAL WORKING GROUP

Zoom

10 October 2024

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair Emiel Brouckaert welcomed all participants to the meeting. No apologies were received in advance of the meeting. The agenda was adopted as drafted. The agenda was adopted as drafted.

Action points from the last meeting (Ghent, 02 July 2024):

1	FG Climate & Environment to evaluate TG Seabed work and determine if any advice is needed. To be addressed under item 5 of the agenda.
2	Members to send queries on the NRL to Secretariat for resolution by DG ENV, specifically on definitions within the NRL. Awaiting response from DG ENV.
3	Secretariat to liaise with SEAwisE project on the organisation of a workshop in early spring and specifically on how to arrive at EBM using the work carried out within the AC. Workshop scheduled in connection with NWWAC Spring meetings in Paris.
4	Secretariat to circulate list of horizontal topics for Inter-AC Brexit Forum for feedback to see if the topics are still relevant. This action point was completed, an updated list was sent to the Market Advisory Council before the last meeting of the Forum on 18 September.
5	Secretariat to follow up on organisation of control workshop as proposed by DG MARE. To be addressed under item 5 of the agenda.
6	Secretariat to circulate request for expressions of interest for participation at Phase 3 workshop of Fishers of the Future study. 5 members attended the Fishers of the future meeting on 17 September. A report from the meeting has been shared and advice on fishers profiles was submitted on 27 September
7	Proposal to organise joint webinar with PelAC on impact of ORE on fisheries. To be addressed under item 5 of the agenda.
8	Support MAC FG PEFCR and potentially advice “as is”. Advice submitted by MAC and support by NWWAC on 06 August.
9	Secretariat to follow up if there is any volunteer for this observer ship for the EU Agri Food Chain Observatory, check with MAC. Patrick Murphy expressed his availability to represent the AC in this Forum. The Secretariat will go ahead with the application.



10	Secretariat to contact members re. establishing the FG Seabass following discussions in the FG Landing Obligation.
	The Focus Group was re-established and met on 6 September for the first time.
11	Election of WG Chair at next meeting.
	To be postponed as this position is normally linked to the election of the AC Chair.

2. CFP evaluation – Joan Roussouliere-Azzam, DG MARE D.3

Joan Roussouliere-Azzam is a policy officer in DG MARE Unit D.3 working specifically on the social dimension of fisheries and part of the core team responsible for coordinating the CFP evaluation. She provided a comprehensive presentation outlining the Commission's structured approach to evaluating the CFP and its alignment with EU goals over the past decade. Roussouliere-Azzam's presentation can be found [here](#).

Roussouliere-Azzam began by highlighting the evaluation first principle used by the Commission. This principle ensures that before any new decisions or actions are taken, the Commission takes stock of past initiatives and assesses their performance against initial expectations. In this case, the baseline for evaluating the CFP regulation is the 2000-2001 impact assessment, which led to the 2013 CFP reform. She stressed that no assumptions are made about future steps until a thorough evaluation of past performance is completed.

The Commission has already received 87 responses to the call for evidence launched in June. Responses came from a broad range of stakeholders, including the fishing sector, NGOs, public authorities, trade unions, and academics. These inputs are crucial for shaping the ongoing evaluation and understanding the sector's views on the CFP's impact and future direction.

Roussouliere-Azzam outlined the five evaluation criteria used by the Commission to assess the CFP:

- Effectiveness: How well the CFP has met its objectives.
- Efficiency: Whether the resources used (including financial and regulatory) were cost-effective.
- Relevance: The CFP's ability to address emerging needs such as climate change and geopolitical shifts like Brexit.
- Coherence: Both internal coherence (within CFP regulations) and external coherence (alignment with environmental legislation and international obligations).
- EU Added Value: The additional benefits brought by EU-level action compared to what individual Member States could have achieved alone.

The CFP evaluation is complex due to its framework regulation structure, covering various aspects of fisheries management. Roussouliere-Azzam presented six thematic areas where the evaluation criteria would be applied: fisheries management, governance, aquaculture, control and enforcement and Common Market Organization. These areas reflect the multidimensional nature of fisheries management in the EU and the need to assess each category's performance.

There have been questions about the need for a full evaluation, especially since a report on the CFP was delivered in February 2023. Roussouliere-Azzam clarified that while the Commission had a legal obligation to report on the CFP's functioning in 2023, the current evaluation goes beyond that. The decision to conduct a full evaluation followed extensive stakeholder feedback and dialogue with EU institutions, including the European Parliament and the Council. This evaluation will build on past work and other ongoing evaluations, such as the evaluation of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and the landing obligation.

The political landscape is also shaping the CFP's future. Roussouliere-Azzam mentioned that Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, has committed to appointing a Fisheries and Oceans Commissioner in her political guidelines for the next Commission. The designated commissioner, Kostas Cadis, will play a pivotal role in ensuring the CFP remains sustainable, competitive, and resilient. His mission letter explicitly mentions the need to complete and follow up on the CFP evaluation, with attention to the three pillars of the CFP: environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Additionally, the Commission is focusing on the European Oceans Pact, which aims for policy coherence across all ocean-related areas, supporting blue economy growth and ocean resilience.

Roussouliere-Azzam provided details on the next steps in the evaluation process:

- A supporting study will be launched in October 2024 to aid in the evaluation. This will include a public stakeholder consultation that will ask more specific and detailed questions than the initial call for evidence.
- The evaluation will also involve targeted consultations with experts, including those in Advisory Councils and other key stakeholders. These sessions will provide a deeper dive into the issues raised and allow for more detailed feedback.
- The study will take 12 months to complete, with a finalisation expected by October 2025.
- The Commission will then compile the results into a staff working document, the official product of the evaluation, which will help guide future decisions on the CFP.

Roussouliere-Azzam emphasised the connection between the CFP evaluation and broader EU initiatives like the European Oceans Pact and the Commission's mission to ensure coherence in all marine and ocean-related policies. The aim is to support resilient and healthy oceans, promote the blue economy, and enhance marine knowledge and innovation. This aligns with stakeholders' calls for more coherent marine spatial planning and improvements in fisheries management selectivity.

She closed her intervention by acknowledging the ongoing input from stakeholders, particularly from the NWWAC, which has provided detailed feedback on various aspects of the CFP. She invited further discussion, emphasising the Commission's openness to stakeholder reflections, whether they relate to the identified themes or new areas of concern.

The Chair thanked Roussouliere-Azzam for the useful information and the overview she gave of the NWWAC input provided through the response to the call for evidence but also over the past years. He felt more time was needed for the NWWAC analysis to confirm the Commission's priority identification of the AC main recommendations.

Patrick Murphy raised concerns about how to effectively evaluate the CFP in light of upcoming changes that have not yet occurred but will significantly impact the fishing industry. Murphy acknowledged that the CFP is evaluated based on the state of the industry, seas, and fish stocks. However, he pointed out that many of the upcoming challenges, like the introduction of marine protected areas (MPAs) and offshore renewable energy projects (ORE), were not part of the previous CFP. These new elements make it difficult to evaluate the policy's effectiveness when the impacts of these changes, such as vessel displacement and effects on spawning grounds, have not fully materialised yet. He also referenced the decline of the Irish fishing fleet, noting that his own organisation's fleet has shrunk drastically, from 400 vessels to just 140 over the past 20 years due to factors like Brexit and COVID-19. He is concerned that despite efforts to implement technical measures and improve practices, the industry is still being blamed for damaging the oceans. He asked how the CFP evaluation process will account for these uncertainties and ensure the policy's objectives can still be met in such a changing environment.

Pauline Stephan asked about the timing of the next public consultation as announced during the presentation, pointing out that it will be a busy period for the industry until the end of the year, due to consultations on fishing opportunities.

Dominic Rihan was worried that the entire process—from the current evaluation to any potential reforms—will take an excessively long time. He noted that the evaluation process itself is projected to end in October 2025, after which discussions will follow between the European Parliament, Member States, and the Council. This back-and-forth could delay any meaningful action. If a decision is made to amend or reform the CFP, the next steps involve lengthy bureaucratic processes, including the Commission's impact assessment, which he estimates could take nearly two years. Rihan agreed with Murphy that the fishing industry is facing significant challenges. He feared that by the time the evaluation and reform process concludes, the fishing industry may have shrunk so drastically that the CFP may no longer be relevant.

Roussouliere-Azzam replied by acknowledging the concerns raised about the challenges facing the fishing industry and the lengthy nature of the evaluation and reform process. She clarified that she could not provide solutions on policy issues right now, as that is the purpose of the evaluation. However, she acknowledged the radical changes in need of examination during the evaluation process. She highlighted the issue of flexibility to be considered in the evaluation, suggesting that the policy might need to adapt to changing circumstances. She agreed with Rihan's concerns about the lengthy timeline for potential CFP amendments, noting that even the decision to amend the CFP has not been made yet. However, she emphasised that there is ongoing work in DG MARE to improve current implementations, even if it is not perfect. Roussouliere-Azzam noted that part of the evaluation process will be to explore whether improvements can be made through amendments to the regulation or by other means. The goal is to ensure the sustainability of the fishing sector, the availability of fish in the market, and the health of the oceans. She reassured participants that the Commission's aim is to ensure that the fishing sector remains viable, with sustainable fish stocks and healthy oceans. The evaluation will help in deciding the best course of action, whether through regulation or other methods. Regarding the timing of the consultation, Roussouliere-Azzam replied



that the study might extend into the next year, depending on when it starts, and reiterated that participants will be informed in advance about the next steps.

Alexandra Philippe highlighted her confusion and frustration regarding the lengthy process, noting that discussions around reviewing and evaluating the CFP have been ongoing for the past five years. She questioned what had been accomplished during this period, as it seems that despite earlier evaluations, the structured process is only now gaining momentum with the current refit and regulatory reviews. She pointed out that the current CFP regulation does not mention climate change and does not fully incorporate recent scientific advancements or socioeconomic impacts. Philippe underscored that this is problematic, particularly given how long it might take to see actual reforms (potentially 5–7 years). She emphasised the need for a more comprehensive approach. While she acknowledged that including socioeconomic indicators is a positive step, she also stressed the importance of considering all environmental pressures, including marine protection, spatial competition, and climate change adaptation. She reiterated support for the regionalisation process within the CFP, which allows for more tailored and localised policy-making, as it has been successful and should be maintained. Philippe also emphasised the need for legal certainty, which would provide predictability for the sector. She explained that having clarity in the legal process is essential to encourage investment, particularly in areas like energy efficiency.

Franck Le Barzic agreed with the items brought forward by previous speakers. He noted that the first objective is to ensure full coherence of CFP and wondered if the evaluation considers the option of simplifying the CFP, given the complexity of its application. He felt a pragmatic approach is essential to understand what is applicable in reality on the ground to ensure level playing field. Le Barzic then asked which methodological elements DG MARE is taking into account to evaluate the socio-economic impact of the CFP, as in his view socio-economic assessments need to be more detailed in order to properly reflect the specificities of EU fleets.

Referring to the five evaluation criteria, the Chair wondered how aspects such as relevance and other criteria would be assessed, who would be involved in the evaluations, and what the methodology would look like. He echoed a concern raised by Le Barzic about needing more details on this process. He pointed out that the political context slide presented during the meeting missed an important element: the issue of food security and EU food sovereignty, which has significant political impact and should be considered in any review of the CFP. Supporting Rihan's earlier comments, the Chair highlighted the urgent need for a review of the CFP but acknowledged the long process currently in place. He asked if there was a way to accelerate the process, suggesting that the hierarchy could be approached to find a faster way to incorporate changes and address the evolving needs of the fishing industry.

Roussouliere-Azzam explained that policymaking is an iterative process, acknowledging that it might seem like the same things are being done repeatedly, but each step builds on the previous one to improve the policy. She emphasised that the evaluation is necessary for any amendments, and the data from previous reports will serve as a foundation for future work. She reassured participants that food security, along with the balance between large-scale and small-scale fisheries, is crucial in the context of the CFP. She clarified that DG MARE is currently in the process of selecting a contractor to assist with the evaluation. The contractor will help assess both quantitative and qualitative impacts on

the sector, especially in areas where data is lacking. This will include calculating costs and burdens using established regulatory methods and refining them for the specific needs of the fisheries sector. While agreeing that speeding up the review process would be ideal, she cautioned that moving too quickly could lead to incomplete evaluations or insufficient stakeholder input. It is important to ensure balance between speed and thoroughness, ensuring that conclusions are solid and well-informed. She reassured participants that discussions on how to expedite the process while maintaining quality are ongoing within the management teams.

The Chair highlighted the importance of utilising existing expertise from the fisheries sector, including that of ACs, during the evaluation process. He stressed that although an external contractor will be involved, there is already significant knowledge and data available within the industry, which should not be overlooked. He pointed out that organisations have limited time and resources but can contribute valuable insights, which should be considered in the contractor's work. He noted that the Common Agriculture Policy review cycle seems to be more frequent and agile than the CFP, despite agriculture being potentially more complex. He questioned why the fisheries sector could not achieve similar efficiency in reviewing its policy, suggesting that lessons could be learned from the CAP process to speed up the CFP review.

Murphy agreed with the Chair and expressed frustration that regulations are often introduced without sufficient input from the industry, resulting in rules that do not work well in practice. He urged for engagement with industry experts before new regulations are finalised, stressing the importance of understanding how the industry is coping with current regulations. He pointed out that without practical and immediate changes, the fishing industry may not survive in the coming years. Ultimately, Murphy urged for deeper collaboration, similar to what is seen in agriculture.

Rihan enquired about the role of the Scientific, Technical, and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) in the evaluation process, highlighting his belief that there is significant expertise within the committee that could contribute valuable insights.

Following on from Murphy, and in the same vein, Gérald Hussenot enquired about the Commission's position on the future United Nations Conference on the Oceans in June 2025 and fisheries being excluded from the conference programme.

Roussouliere-Azzam agreed on the importance of utilizing expert knowledge in the evaluation process. She assured that the Commission would make every effort to incorporate expert insights, acknowledging that qualitative data derived from experts is crucial for a robust evaluation. She explained that the evaluation goes through a formal process involving the Regulatory Scrutiny Board. This board requires that any claims made in the evaluation are supported by factual evidence, which can include both quantitative and qualitative data. She confirmed that reports provided by the STECF would be taken into account during the evaluation. She also encouraged participants to contribute ideas for ways of gathering qualitative data once the process is underway. In addressing the comparison with the CAP, she acknowledged the differences in scale and resources between CAP and the CFP.



Manu Kelberine enquired whether the CFP evaluation is going to assess the cumulative impacts on fisheries of different pieces of legislation on environmental and spatial issues.

Roussouliere-Azzam confirmed that the Directive on Maritime Spatial Planning is already part of the CFP evaluation and acknowledged the request for an evaluation of cumulative impacts on the fishing sector. She agreed that the sector is under pressure by many different activities taking place in the maritime space and that this element must be considered in the analysis.

The Chair asked if and how feedback from individual citizens would be valued compared to responses from organised bodies, such as ACs. This question is significant because it addresses the potential disparity in influence between formal organisations and individual respondents.

Roussouliere-Azzam replied that ACs hold significantly more weight in the consultation process compared to individual citizens, indicating that their input is deemed more valuable due to their expertise and organised structure. She mentioned that alongside public consultations, there would also be targeted consultations specifically for experts and ACs. This approach aims to gather in-depth insights and knowledge that a general public consultation might not capture effectively.

Referring to public consultations, Jose Beltrán noted that citizen opinions far outnumber those of stakeholders and fisheries professionals. While the public may lack in-depth knowledge of the sector, their perspectives are significant due to their volume. He also highlighted the issue of complexity and pointed out that despite repeated calls to simplify the CFP, it has only grown more complex over time. This is a key factor in the challenge of generational renewal. The excessive regulation not only makes the CFP difficult to navigate but also discourages new talent from entering the industry.

Patrick Murphy expressed his concerns about the challenges facing the fishing industry in Europe, particularly in relation to competition from products imported from other countries. These imports often come from regions with less stringent regulations, which allows them to be sold at lower costs. He acknowledged the importance of having regulatory standards and fair wages in the European industry, but noted that these standards put European fishers at a disadvantage when competing with imported products that do not have to meet the same level of regulation. Murphy questioned whether these competitive disadvantages and the broader implications of import policies are being considered in the ongoing review.

Roussouliere-Azzam acknowledged the importance of addressing the level playing field and mentioned that her colleagues working on international trade issues are also looking into how to ensure a level playing field beyond the CFP. She assured Murphy that this concern is taken seriously and will be included in the evaluation process. While acknowledging that citizens may not have the same level of expertise as industry professionals, she pointed out that they are also consumers whose perspectives and needs must be considered. The Commission is aware of the high demand for simplification in regulations. However, she explained that creating simpler policies is often challenging due to the need to fine-tune regulations for different fleet segments and address various aspects, such as safety and training. She concluded by reaffirming the Commission's commitment to finding a balance between the diverse demands on the EU and the complexities of the regulatory landscape. She indicated that they are working towards achieving a feasible and effective solution.

Murphy expanded on his earlier points by addressing the socio-economic implications of lower consumer prices for seafood. He acknowledged the importance of maintaining affordable prices for consumers but questioned how this would affect those working in the industry. He highlighted the astronomical costs associated with meeting regulatory requirements and maintaining production standards. While consumer prices are a consideration, the economic viability of the fishing industry should also be prioritised. The CFP evaluation might benefit from gathering detailed economic data on the costs that fishermen face today, including the expenses related to keeping boats operational and complying with regulations.

Roussouliere-Azzam expressed interest in the types of data available, noting that they already have several sources, including the STECF data and the annual economic report on the fleet. She mentioned that they also EUMOFA data, which provide detailed insights. However, there may be important elements that may have been overlooked in the current data or evaluation processes. She encouraged Murphy and others to share any specific aspects they feel need attention.

ACTION: The NWWAC will continue following the developments of the CFP evaluation project, waiting for DG MARE to provide more information on future consultations and on the contractor.

3. Topics to be discussed at MIAC 2025

Matilde Vallerani shared a slide on screen with the list of topics put forward by the NWWAC to discuss with ICES at MIAC meeting in January 2025. She explained the rationale behind the first three items and then invited Edward Farrell to do the same for the remaining two points.

The Chair opened the floor for members' feedback.

Pauline Stephan proposed to add a reference on multi-annual plans to the first item and ask if new methods are being developed and could be used to improve the assessment.

Murphy highlighted issues with data-deficient fish stocks, categorized as levels 3 to 5, which are based on catch records. He explains that existing restrictions make it hard to improve data quality for these stocks. In his view, fishery allocations can limit data collection efforts because fishers risk exceeding quotas if they catch too many fish, even if the intention is to lend or provide the fish for data purposes. He pointed out a systemic issue where ICES only includes data if it's available for five years and meets specific quality standards. This delay complicates the integration of real-time data.

In his remarks, Rihan argued that categories 5 and 6 are simply mathematical calculations, not genuine "advice," as they lack substantive analysis. He finds it problematic that ICES is presenting these as advisory recommendations. Rihan also questioned the reliability of category 3 assessments, suggesting that decisions seem arbitrary, such as reductions of 20% without sufficient rationale. These issues are urgent, but current timelines for adjustments are too slow, taking up to five years. What should fishers do in the meantime if the advice doesn't match real fish stock conditions? According to Rihan, ICES and potentially the European Commission should reconsider how they request and provide advice to better reflect actual fishery conditions. He warns that the longer the

landing obligation is enforced with unfit advice, the more serious the choke issues will become, not due to fish stock health, but because of the advice structure itself.

Le Barzic agreed with Rihan and argued that ICES should make it clear when they are not in a position to provide sound advice. The ICES advice is the basis for setting quotas and it has a significant impact on the industry, especially if the assessment has a high level of uncertainty. He proposed that ICES should review genetic data collection methods and identify new ones that could be applied to improve the quality of the assessment.

Lynch brought attention to the cumulative impacts of current fishing regulations, including those discussed in the morning with the Commission. These have been significant, especially regarding stocks classified as category 5 and 6 because of data deficiencies. He noted that the landing obligation has increased focus on data-deficient stocks, where minimal data exists to make informed assessments. The repeated application of a “precautionary buffer” in these cases adds challenges, as it restricts fishing activity to protect stocks with insufficient data, causing operational difficulties for fishers. In his view, aligning regulatory measures with realistic advice, even for data-deficient stocks, is critical.

ACTION: The Secretariat will share the list of points to be raised with ICES at MIAC and update explanatory paragraphs following comments from members.

4. Commission update on UK communications – Norman Graham, DG MARE C.5

The Chair introduced Norman Graham from DG MARE C.5, who gave an overview of the key points on the ongoing dialogue and updates related to UK-EU fisheries management.

Graham highlighted that the work of the Specialized Committee on Fisheries (SCF) is winding down as focus shifts to the annual consultations on TAC & quotas. The recent committee meeting (Sept. 24) was a year-end review of accomplishments, ongoing efforts, and areas for future focus, such as potential new work streams and ongoing projects. The UK is moving forward with Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs), which are essential for both the UK and the EU. Engagement and contributions to public consultations on the FMPs, as well as on Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Highly Protected Marine Areas, are encouraged.

The collaboration on king scallops, which Graham sees as a beneficial engagement, could potentially be applied to multi-year strategies for other fisheries. The joint work on pollock with the UK is also significant, especially in understanding recreational catches and possibly shaping new management strategies.

Regarding annual consultations, challenges are anticipated in areas like the Celtic Sea, where stocks like cod and haddock are in decline. The UK’s broad scope on the Celtic Sea’s FMP, including commercial and deepwater species, suggests that rebuilding efforts will be crucial. Skates, rays, and spurdog stocks are also undergoing special attention for management. The TCA (Trade and

Cooperation Agreement) commitment to create fallback guidelines for stocks without agreed quotas is being developed, especially given upcoming negotiation seasons.

Graham noted the importance of preparing for post-2026 UK-EU fisheries relations, though UK officials, pending further government organization, have not provided positions.

He finally reported that annual consultations are expected to begin in November with goals to wrap by the Fisheries Council on December 9. Graham encourages all stakeholders to stay informed and engaged, especially on public consultations regarding FMPs and MPAs.

Rihan asked about the progress on the UK side regarding technical measures in the Celtic Sea. This suggests a focus on how the UK is aligning or advancing in this area. He then inquired whether, regarding legal cases, the UK is under the similar pressures that the Commission is facing. He asked if the UK has any advantages, though he acknowledges the complexities and uncertainties around legal issues. Rihan then commended the consultation process with the Scottish fishing industry concerning MPAs, noting it as positive and constructive. He appreciated the clarity the Scottish side provided on the process, expressing that the industry's feedback was beneficial and helped align understanding on MPA-related decisions.

Le Barzic asked for clarification regarding the Commission's position on the UK initiatives setting up unilateral management measures and not necessarily preceded by any consultation or exchange with the EU, referring specifically to the recent setting of a new closure and maximum landing size for undulate ray in the Channel. This change has been introduced without consultation of EU counterparts nor is justified with scientific information. He found this to be in contradiction with the positive work happening on the FMPs or through STECF. Le Barzic then asked whether the SCF is also discussing ORE developments. He pointed out that a consultation has recently been launched by the Crown Estate for the development of new windfarms in the Celtic Sea and in the Channel, which are likely to have a tremendous impact on fisheries.

Geert Meun commented that the UK's intent to unilaterally make decisions about management plans for non-quota species has a significant impact on EU fishers. UK policies in this area could disadvantage EU fishermen, highlighting the need for careful consideration of these management approaches. He specifically mentioned a proposal to increase the minimum mesh size for fly-seining from 80 mm to 100 mm. He argued that this proposal disproportionately affects certain fishing methods. Only 20% of non-quota landings are from fly-seining, with the remaining 80% from other commercial fishing gears, suggesting that the change would unfairly impact a small group of fishers. He pointed out that the UK's fly-seining fleet largely consists of foreign-flagged vessels (Dutch and Belgian), which operate in the southern North Sea and the Channel. This raises questions about the UK's management approach and its effects on EU-owned vessels flying foreign flags.

Replying to Meun, Graham emphasised that Brexit has allowed the UK to implement measures in its waters under national legislation, as long as these measures are non-discriminatory. The EU can only challenge UK actions if they breach the TCA. He acknowledged the frustrations EU stakeholders face but regulatory autonomy is a reality post-Brexit. Regarding the proposed changes in the minimum mesh size for fly-seining, he noted that the consultation process is open and encouraged stakeholders

to submit their views. Graham acknowledged the positive feedback from the Scottish industry on the MPA process and emphasizes that the Scottish government has been transparent. He also notes that the impacts of MPA designations affect UK fleets as well, making discrimination harder to argue. He reported on two ongoing legal cases:

- European Court of Justice case, focusing on the EU's application of precautionary measures in fisheries, with a decision expected post-Christmas.
- UK case by Blue Marine Foundation, challenging the UK's setting of TACs above zero, similar to an Irish case. This may evolve with the UK's new government.

Graham then replied to the point on technical measures in the Celtic Sea, indicating they will likely require further consultation, especially on species like cod and whiting. The UK is developing its own management plan for the Celtic Sea and reviewing its catch policy, both of which will involve close communication with EU stakeholders.

He will go back to his DG MARE colleague Jurgen Batsleer for the question on undulate ray. Normally a change in technical measures should be notified to the Council who would transmit it to the MS to share it with professionals. He was surprised this happened without notification.

Regarding offshore renewables and spatial squeeze, Graham clarified that this is outside the TCA's scope, falling under national competencies for both the UK and Member States. However, he recognized the significant spatial impact of such developments.

Le Barzic came back on the new measures on undulate ray introduced by the UK and remarked his disappointment, since initiatives like this go in complete contradiction with the harmonisation efforts carried out in the Channel and in the Celtic Sea. Regarding ORE, while he understood the topic is not part of the TCA, he highlighted the impacts windfarms developments would have on EU vessels' accessibility to UK waters, which would justify addressing such issues in the SCF.

Rihan recalled that the UK had proposed eliminating the landing obligation and asked if there had been any progress on this initiative, which he believed would be a positive development in fisheries management.

The Chair mentioned that the NWWAC recently attended a meeting where the UK's FMPs and related ideas were presented. He recalled asking whether the ACs would be directly contacted for consultations on these plans but was uncertain about the answer. However, information from the UK should soon be circulated by the Commission. He then brought up the upcoming trilateral negotiations, specifically asking if there's an opportunity for the AC to offer input. He also inquired if there will be regular stakeholder meetings scheduled in advance of the formal November negotiations.

Graham mentioned that there was previous interest from the UK in reconsidering the landing obligation, but this topic has since gone quiet. He noted that any significant changes would likely be presented as part of the FMP consultations, which he expects to have advanced notice of, given the transparency of the UK's approach. Graham confirmed that the latest information on the FMPs had just been received and would be circulated to stakeholders, emphasizing the importance of reviewing these details closely. He explained that the Council mandate, now approved under the Hungarian

Presidency, outlines using all available legal flexibilities to address negotiation challenges. The team is also working on the logistical arrangements, with ongoing debriefs for stakeholders during the trilateral and other related negotiations. He acknowledged the concerns about offshore wind farms, highlighting that accessibility issues are a shared challenge across both sides of the Channel. While not formally covered by the TCA, Graham agreed to raise these issues whenever possible, noting that offshore renewable developments are an increasingly significant issue for both UK and EU fishers.

5. Ecological Sensitivity Analysis Celtic Sea – Damien Haberlin, MaREI, University College Cork

The Chair invited Damien Haberlin to take the floor and present on the report. His slides are available [here](#).

Haberlin was a member of the Advisory Group who produced the ecological sensitivity analysis of the Celtic Sea. The purpose was to assess areas for potential MPAs to guide Ireland's Department of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage. This work builds upon an earlier study on the Western Irish Sea. Led by the University of Galway and chaired by Professor Louise Alcock, the Advisory Group collaborated with stakeholders, government staff, and the Marine Institute for data access.

The team's goals included comprehensive data gathering on species and habitats in need of protection, focusing particularly on areas affected by offshore wind projects, trawling, and shipping. They excluded already protected species and aimed to map areas of high ecological sensitivity using tools like Zonation and Prioritizer. The Zonation tool identified ecologically important areas, while Prioritizer allowed spatial optimization for MPA proposals to minimize conflicts with human activities, like fishing and ore extraction, while meeting ecological protection targets.

Methodologically, they reviewed species listed as endangered or vulnerable by international organizations, compiled data on these, and assessed their resilience and resistance to various impacts, such as seabed abrasion, noise, and pollution. Data availability varied, with some species well-documented and others based on citizen science data. The analysis produced around 40 species and habitat types as priorities, including benthic habitats and shark species. The team then mapped these priority areas, applying cost layers in Prioritizer to avoid high-conflict zones, balancing ecological sensitivity and human activity constraints.

Haberlin moved to a visual of the resulting areas, emphasizing that these were foundational recommendations to inform formal MPA designations, providing an ecologically informed basis while considering practical limitations.

Plot A showcases areas of interest that include four polygons located in the northeastern corner, all of which fall within a broader DMAP area. This area is designated for offshore energy wind farms to be established in the Irish Sea, based on results from a recent ORE auction in Ireland. Haberlin noted that the highest priority is given to the site nearest to the coastline, which is the most northerly. As one moves outward and eastward, the priority decreases, and ideally, the first site selected will be closer to the coastline.

In developing these solutions, Haberlin explained that various scenarios focusing on fishing efforts were considered. These included fishing weighted by effort, gear type, value, and the number of vessels. He emphasized the flexibility of the software used, which allows for different criteria to yield diverse MPA solutions. While there are many ways to instruct the software, the results are not dramatically different; broadly speaking, the same areas are being protected.

One significant advantage of the tool used is the ability to stack solutions on top of each other. By doing this, it becomes easier to identify areas of high importance that also avoid sectoral activities. When the previous four plots are stacked, the areas highlighted in the darkest colors represent the best solutions for avoiding sectoral conflict while maximizing the target of 30% protection.

As he delves into various scenarios, the first one presented is an initial solution that had very little imposed on it, aside from a sectoral cost layer. This combined layer incorporates ore fishing and maritime traffic, resulting in 15 reserve areas; however, some of these areas are quite small and may not be viable as proper MPAs.

Next, he discussed a solution that heavily weighted threatened species, focusing on vulnerable or endangered species. Haberlin then outlined a pragmatic solution that focused on broad-scale benthic habitat types, noting that this method included many species, particularly benthic sharks and fish, due to their significant overlap with broad habitat types. He also highlighted a solution that incorporates existing protected areas along the coast. This approach aims to maximize coherence with existing policies under the Birds and Habitats Directive, ensuring that solutions build upon already protected areas.

The focus then shifted to the stakeholder engagement process, which Haberlin described as vital throughout this initiative. Engagement began in January of this year by compiling a list of features and sending it out for stakeholder review. Stakeholders were invited to consider these features and provide feedback, and many contributed data that enriched the understanding of the project. Several online meetings and in-person stakeholder discussions were held in February 2024. The feedback received was invaluable, shaping the overall thinking and significantly contributing to the eventual report. Some recurring concerns were raised by stakeholders, particularly regarding the exclusion of Natura 2000 areas and the need to address other environmental impacts beyond ORE, fishing and maritime traffic. Although the terms of reference limited the ability to fully incorporate these aspects, Haberlin assured that these concerns have been documented in the report for consideration in the MPA designation process. Additionally, many stakeholders expressed dissatisfaction with the apparent lack of enforcement in Ireland, pointing out that while legislation is created effectively, enforcement has been lacking. Concerns about policy coherence also emerged, indicating this is an area needing improvement.

The report culminated in several key recommendations based on stakeholder input. Participants expressed a desire for the public consultation process to be expanded to cover the entire Irish EEZ, rather than being confined to a narrow geographic area. They also highlighted significant gaps in data, particularly regarding inshore fisheries and habitat distribution, as well as the need for more comprehensive survey data. Importantly, stakeholders want increased engagement, advocating for more extensive participation at earlier stages and sufficient time for reflection and feedback. They

also call for increased opportunities for citizen science, stressing that MPA designations must be coherent and ecologically relevant, avoiding disparate areas on a map that lack ecological justification.

The Chair suggested that the topic presented seemed particularly relevant for the Focus Group on the Spatial Dimension. In this regard, he recommended that further discussions take place within that specific Focus Group, which would then bring any recommendations or action suggestions back to the Working Group for consideration.

ACTION: The Focus Group Spatial Dimension will follow up on the presentation by Damien Haberlin and consider the drafting of advice on the Celtic Sea Ecological Sensitivity Analysis.

To adhere to the meeting's schedule, the Chair decided not to open the floor for questions at that time but expressed hope that Haberlin would be available for any future inquiries related to his presentation and the overall process.

6. Focus Groups update

Inter-AC Brexit Forum (Chair)

The Chair highlighted that the Inter-AC Brexit Forum was established to facilitate information exchange among stakeholders regarding Brexit's impact on fisheries, particularly to provide updates from the European Commission. However, he noted that much of this information is confidential, so detailed updates aren't always shared with stakeholders on both sides until after discussions. He provided an overview of the recent meetings, mentioning that they had four meetings in the previous working year and that plans for the next meeting are still being finalized, potentially scheduled for late this year or early next. Among the topics discussed during the last meeting on 18 September there were:

- The multi-year strategy for King Scallops
- The UK Fisheries Management Plans
- UK MPAs
- Seabass Management and Technical Measures

CFP (Alexandra Philippe)

Philippe mentioned that the FG provided feedback to the European Commission's call for evidence for the CFP evaluation, submitted in early September. The work on supporting the CFP evaluation will continue as a public consultation on the CFP is scheduled to be launched by the end of 2024, marking the next major phase in this process.

Landing Obligation (Chair)

The Chair began by noting their last meeting on 24 July, during which they finalized advice on fishing opportunities for 2025. This advice also incorporated relevant topics from recent discussions,

including the ICES advice published on June 28th. The group will meet again soon, though a date has not yet been set. The focus for the next meeting will be the drafting of advice on choke risk in the NWW, incorporating the input from the regional Working Groups. Other topics include following up on DG MARE's evaluation of the landing obligation, reviewing the UK's approach to discards, and responding to the European Fisheries Control Agency report on the landing obligation. The group also recently responded to a questionnaire from MRAG Deloitte and sent a letter to DG MARE, addressing the landing obligation process. This will require additional follow-up in the upcoming meetings.

Climate & Environment (Alexandra Philippe)

Philippe referred to the outcomes of the last meeting on 26 September, which featured input from Irish expert Richard Cronin. The group focused on the Natural Restoration Law and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), noting the strong interconnection between the two. Although there is currently some ambiguity in implementing the Natural Restoration Law, Philippe emphasized that national plans will be developed over the next two years, creating an opportunity for members to have a say in their formation. Regarding the MSFD, the FG discussed threshold values set for the seabed and other environmental indicators, which are determined administratively rather than politically. Recognizing the importance of stakeholder engagement, the FG has decided to draft advice on the matter. Philippe also noted the need for a more proactive approach within the Marine Strategy Coordination Group, where the AC role is typically limited to observation. In terms of energy transition, Philippe reported that they applied to join the Energy Transition Partnership support group. While acknowledging the time and resource demands of this commitment, she mentioned that the Commission has offered to tailor participation requirements to better accommodate their limited resources. Finally, she touched on the importance of keeping abreast of funding programs for energy technology and alternative fuels, given their relevance to discussions around the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund. With the next funding cycle spanning seven years, the FG is preparing to ensure that their input is effectively integrated into this programming period.

Skates & Rays (John Lynch)

Lynch reported that the joint NWWAC/NSAC FG on Skates & Rays had not met since 12 February. However, work has been ongoing, including drafting a letter to the European Commission following interactions stemming from a 2023 workshop. This letter addressed the Commission's intention to shift towards setting individual TACs for skates and rays and included several key recommendations. The FG requested that STECF hold an expert working group to simulate the effects of changes in TAC setting and management, considering the implications of using the relative stability allocation key. They also emphasized improving discard data for the relevant stocks, conducting trials to support survivability exemptions for main commercial species, and exploring management options outside the TAC system, including alternative strategies. Additionally, they recommended more funding for research on these complex issues. On 7 August, they received a response from the Commission, which largely aligned with their recommendations, suggesting next steps that corresponded to their requests. In light of this, the FG scheduled a timely follow-up meeting on 18 October, where Joanne Morgan from ICES would present the latest ICES advice on individual TACs for skates and rays. This meeting will also address updates on the EU-UK roadmap for potentially splitting these TACs.

Le Barzic noted that although new ICES advice has been released for most skate and ray species, a critical stock—cuckoo ray in the Celtic Sea and the Bay of Biscay—is still missing. He suggested that the Focus Group reach out to Morgan to request a publication timeline for this specific advice.

Control and Compliance (Patrick Murphy)

Murphy and Matilde Vallerani provided updates on the recent work of the Focus Group on Control, despite the group not having met since January. Murphy explained that since their last meeting, they have been working on correspondence, including a letter dated 24 May requesting a workshop with DG MARE on the revised control regulation.

Vallerani added that the NWWAC has been collaborating with other ACs to organize this workshop which is tentatively scheduled for February 2025 and is planned to coincide with the Inter-AC Brexit Forum to streamline travel for participants. The workshop will start with a general session followed by breakout discussions, with each AC currently identifying its priority topics to guide the organization of these breakout rooms. Vallerani mentioned that the NWWAC already has a list of priority topics, thanks to an earlier exercise conducted at the Horizontal Working Group meeting in Dublin in March. Vallerani also suggested that it would be beneficial for the Focus Group on Control to reconvene soon to review the topics identified in Dublin. The Commission is informed of the planning stages, which they acknowledged at the recent Inter-AC meeting, indicating support for the workshop's development.

Murphy added that a correlation table had been created to highlight changes from previous control regulations. He suggested circulating this table again so members could review it, identify specific areas of impact, and consider drafting advice in response to these changes. He proposed an online meeting to discuss these points further.

Rihan expressed cautious support for the planned joint workshop, acknowledging its value but highlighting potential challenges due to the involvement of multiple ACs and diverse stakeholder questions. With numerous ACs in attendance, each bringing different concerns related to various fisheries and circumstances, the workshop could risk becoming overwhelming, which might allow DG MARE to avoid addressing specific issues effectively. Rihan emphasized the need for meticulous planning to ensure that each AC derives meaningful benefit from the session. He suggested a structured approach to maximize the opportunity.

Mo Mathies responded by acknowledging the potential issues of overcrowding and information overload in the joint workshop. She assured Rihan that the Secretariat is fully aware of these risks and is taking steps to prevent the workshop from becoming too large or unfocused. To address this, several breakout rooms are being organised to split the different ACs into smaller, more manageable groups. Additionally, there will be prioritisation of key topics for the joint session to ensure a focused start. She emphasized the importance of balancing these elements carefully so that each AC and in-person attendee has a chance to be heard, reassuring Rihan that these considerations are integral to their planning approach.

ACTION: The Focus Group Control, Enforcement and Compliance will review the control regulation correlation table in view of the organisation of a multi-ACs workshop on the topic.

Social aspects (Tamara Talevska)

Tamara Talevska began by noting that they had only conducted three meetings since the start of the financial year last November. Despite the limited number of meetings, they had managed to produce two advisory papers in recent months, along with the corresponding responses, which are available on their website. Currently, the Focus Group is concentrating on several DG MARE priorities related to social aspects, but they are waiting for the outputs from previously presented projects before deciding to provide comments. In their most recent meeting, they hosted Joan Roussouliere-Azzam from the DG MARE policy coordination unit, who briefed the members on ongoing work related to national fisheries profiles, community profiles, and social indicators. Within the framework of social indicators, priority areas for future consultations were also identified. Talevska continued by discussing the group's deliberations on the allocation of fishing opportunities and the "Fishers of the Future" project, which is currently in progress. They shared updates on the next steps for these initiatives. Another key topic covered was the ProSea baseline study on training and certification requirements for officials in the European Union, which examines the differences in certification and training across member states. This study is seen as a step toward sharing best practices and eventually harmonizing training and certification schemes. The report detailing these discussions is also available on their website. The date for the next meeting has not yet been determined, as it is contingent on updates from the previously mentioned projects and topics. However, the group agreed to follow up on ongoing files and to discuss trends in fuel costs and their impact on fish prices. Additionally, any topics proposed by members will be welcomed.

Spatial Dimension (Secretariat)

Matilde Vallerani reported that the joint Focus Group, shared with the Pelagic AC, is implementing a rotational leadership model to improve administrative efficiency. This year, the NWWAC will take the lead. The last meeting of the FG was held on 5 September, where preliminary discussions were held about ecological sensitivity analysis in the Celtic Sea, a topic further elaborated in a recent presentation from Haberlin, which will be integrated into the group's upcoming meeting on 7 November. She also mentioned progress on an important action item approved in July: organizing a joint webinar on the impacts of renewable energy on fisheries. The planning for the webinar is advancing, with early discussions covering the terms of reference, a draft agenda, potential speakers, and key participants such as MS and National Institutes. The next meeting of the FG will focus on finalizing the terms of reference for the webinar, which is scheduled to take place online in the spring of 2025.

7. AOB

No AOB were raised during the meeting.



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

1	The NWWAC will continue following the developments of the CFP evaluation project, waiting for DG MARE to provide more information on future consultations and on the contractor.
2	The Secretariat will share the list of points to be raised with ICES at MIAC and update explanatory paragraphs following comments from members.
3	The Focus Group Spatial Dimension will follow up on the presentation by Damien Haberlin and consider the drafting of advice on the Celtic Sea Ecological Sensitivity Analysis.
4	The Focus Group Control, Enforcement and Compliance will review the control regulation correlation table in view of the organisation of a multi-ACs workshop on the topic.

Participants

NWWAC members		
Jose	Beltran	OPP-7 BURELA
Emiel	Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
Enda	Connelly	IIMRO
Falke	De Sager	Rederscentrale
Edward	Farrell	KFO
Gerald	Hussenot	Blue Fish
Louis	Gustin	CRPM Hauts de France
Manu	Kelberine	CRPM de Bretagne
Franck	Le Barzic	OP COBRENORD
Olivier	Lepretre	CRPM Hauts de France
Suso	Lourido	Puerto de Celeiro SA OPP77
John	Lynch	Irish South & East Fish Producers Organisation Ltd
Llibori	Martinez Latorre	IFSUA
Geert	Meun	VisNed
PATRICK	MURPHY	Irish South & West Fish Producers Organisation
Aodh	O Domhnaill	Irish Fish Producers Organisation
Alexandra	Philippe	EBCD
Corentine	Piton	France Pêche Durable et Responsable
Irene	Prieto	OPPF4
Dominic	Rihan	KFO
Jean-Marie	Robert	Pêcheurs de Bretagne
Pauline	Stephan	CNPMEM
Dominique	Thomas	OPCMEMMN
Arthur	Yon	FROM Nord
Experts & Observers		
Soumaya	Bouker	DG MARE
Guillermo	Bravo Téllez	Ministerio de Agricultura Pesca y Alimentación
Damien	Haberlin	MaREI, University College Cork
Norman	Graham	DG MARE
Joan	Roussouliere-Azzam	DG MARE
Julia	Rubek	DG MARE



Tamara	Talevska	NSAC Secretariat
NWWAC Secretariat		
Mo Mathies		Executive Secretary
Matilde Vallerani		Deputy Executive Secretary

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