

Evolution and benchmarking of ICES VME advice

MIACO 2026 Item 12

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ICES Advisory Committee, vice-chair



ICES
CIEM

International Council for
the Exploration of the Sea
Conseil International pour
l'Exploration de la Mer



Evolution and benchmarking of VME advice

To update MIACO on the evolution of ICES Vulnerable Marine Ecosystem (VME) recurrent advice and planning for benchmarking of the methods to provide this advice in 2027.

MIACO are invited to provide feedback on the completeness of the approach and to highlight any additional issues for ICES to consider while preparing for the benchmark.

Evolution and benchmarking of VME advice

ICES last benchmarked the methods for providing VME advice in 2022.

The benchmarked methods are used to advise the EC but not NEAFC.

Advice at any point in time is provided based on available evidence and methods at that time.

But the evidence base and methods are continually evolving.

Evolution and benchmarking of VME advice

Since 2022, there have been several science and policy developments of relevance to the ICES advice.

And ICES received wide-ranging feedback on the methods and advice from expert groups, requesters of advice and stakeholders.

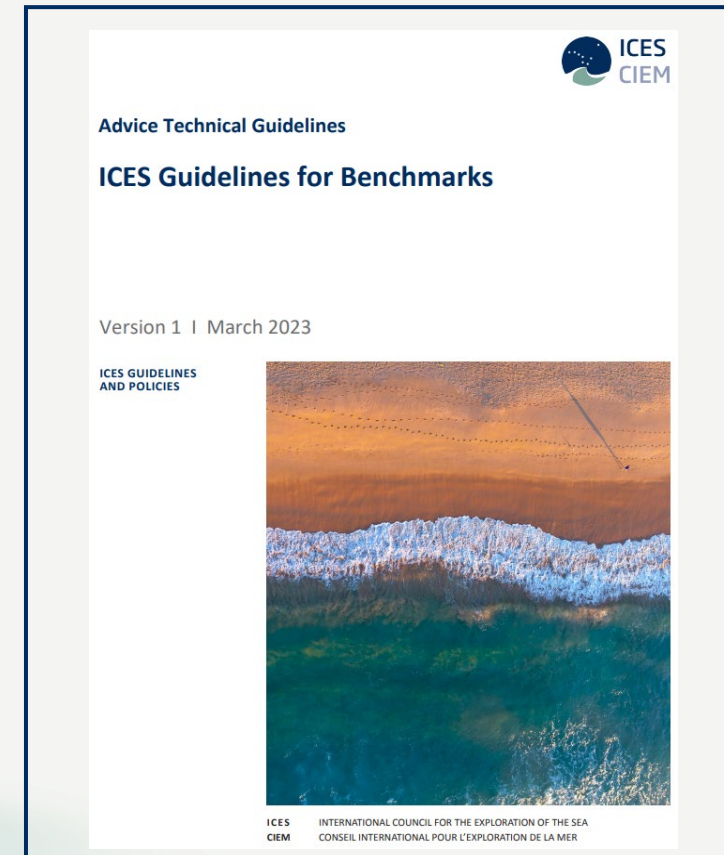
So, we need benchmarking to ensure our advice is still based on the best available science.

ICES has scheduled benchmarking of methods for providing VME advice in 2027. The benchmark is preceded by many preparatory actions.

Benchmarking

ICES uses the 'benchmark process' to peer-review and incorporate new science for use in the provision of all types of recurrent advice.

Guidelines formalise prioritisation of benchmarks, their scope and planning. Full benchmarks review methods, assumptions and data.



Towards benchmarking

Preparatory actions take account of new research/ science, including new analytical methods, and issues raised by advice requesters, scientists and stakeholders.

Towards benchmarking

Completed actions

Topic	Action	Timescale
Quality of historic VME data in ICES VME Database	Reviewed and as necessary corrected historical records included in ICES VME Database (WG Deep-water Ecology).	2024-25
Predictive habitat modelling of areas where VME are likely to occur	Workshop on the Use of Predictive Habitat Models in ICES Advice and chaired by Kerry Howell, UK and Chris Rooper, Canada.	2025
Transparency of analytical process	Increased documentation of process and including relevant code in ICES Transparent Assessment Framework.	2024-25

Towards benchmarking

Completed actions

Topic	Action	Timescale
Impacts of static gear	Workshop on static gear impacts, planned for 2026, preceded by preparatory analysis.	2026
Review of, and options to improve, VME index	Workshop on the VME index, planned for 2026, preceded by preparatory analysis.	2026
Spatial scales of analysis	Testing consequences of grid systems used for VME and VMS analyses.	2025-26

Evolution and benchmarking of VME advice

Please provide feedback on the completeness of the approach and highlight any additional issues for ICES to consider while preparing for the benchmark.

Thank you

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