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NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
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COMMISSIONER KADIS MEETING WITH THE ADVISORY COUNCILS

Subject: Negotiations on fishing opportunities 2025

02 December 2024

On 02 December, Commissioner Kadis and DG MARE Director-General Vitcheva met with the Chairs and OIG Vice-Chairs of the Advisory Councils (ACs) ahead of the annual negotiations on fishing opportunities. This marked the commissioner's first formal meeting with stakeholders and provided an important platform for dialogue. The North Western Waters Advisory Council (NWWAC), represented by Emiel Brouckaert (Chair) and Alexandra Philippe (OIG Vice-Chair), presented the key recommendations from the AC's advice on fishing opportunities and outlined their broader work, particularly focusing on the evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

Disclaimer: the report only focuses on the Commissioner's introductory remarks and his comments regarding the geographical remit of the NWWAC as well as on the interventions of the NWWAC Chair and Vice-Chair.

Commissioner Kadis' intervention

As an introduction, the Commissioner stressed the importance of scientific advice taking into consideration stakeholder inputs within the rule of the law when making decisions on fishing opportunities. He recognised the critical role of the ACs in his portfolio and in the implementation of the CFP, committing to regular meetings to strengthen exchanges between the Commission and the ACs. He also announced that a public consultation on the evaluation of the CFP will begin early next year, with results expected by year-end. The aim of this process is to build on the policy's strengths while addressing its weaknesses. The Commissioner highlighted the need to elevate the ocean as a strategic priority, linking it to competitiveness, climate change, and biodiversity. He introduced the concept of an Ocean Pact, a comprehensive framework designed to integrate all ocean-related policies in a coherent manner. This initiative will involve extensive consultation with stakeholders, including the fisheries and aquaculture sectors – AC input will be welcome – and form part of a broader reflection on the ocean's role in food sovereignty.

The Commissioner confirmed that the Commission's TAC proposal will be based on sustainability and precaution. He noted that the overall number of agreed TACs will be lower than last year's, as several multi-annual TACs were already agreed in 2023. He explained that collaboration with Norway remains a priority and that an agreement was reached for the trilateral negotiations between Norway, UK and EU. Also, the EU-UK bilateral reached agreement on 81 TACs. Particular attention was given to the North-East Atlantic negotiations with Coastal States. Whilst agreement was reached on mackerel, Atlanto-Scandian herring and

blue whiting, the EU is working on bringing the parties together for further discussions. Relations with the UK, especially in light of the post-2026 transition period, were also emphasised as a key area for continued cooperation and management.

Chair Emiel Brouckaert's intervention

Emiel Brouckaert, Chair of the NWWAC, introduced both himself and Alexandra Philippe, NWWAC Other Interest Group Vice-Chair. He expressed gratitude to Director-General Vitcheva for the invitation to the pre-December Council meeting and congratulated Commissioner Kadis on his recent appointment, appreciating his prompt engagement just three days into his mandate. Brouckaert explained that he would first focus on the primary topic of the day, followed by Alexandra Philippe addressing other NWWAC priorities.

He highlighted the NWWAC's dedicated efforts over the summer to produce advice on the Commission's June communication on fishing opportunities and the ICES advice released at the end of June. He noted that most of the North Western Waters stocks are part of EU-UK bilateral negotiations, where the first step involves the Council providing a mandate for these discussions. Brouckaert focussed on four main points in the NWWAC advice ([link](#)), submitted on 21 August:

1. **Assessment Quality Issues:** The NWWAC advice states that there are data deficiencies leading to reliance on Precautionary Approaches, which may not always be necessary. In the NWWAC advice solutions are proposed, including fisheries-science partnerships and genetic analysis. Unofficial feedback on the AC advice states that limited resources—both human and financial—are obstacles to faster resolution.
2. **Stability Clause Expansion:** The NWWAC advice emphasises the need to expand the stability clause to prevent excessive annual fluctuations TACs.
3. **Adaptation of Reference Points:** The advice contains the importance of adjusting Fishing Mortality and Biomass reference points to account for the impacts of climate change on fish stocks.
4. **Look beyond ICES headline advice:** The NWWAC advice highlights the value of looking at all catch options in the ICES advice, taking into consideration input from stakeholders and the practical experiences of fishers. Brouckaert noted that there are detailed examples of this in the stock-by-stock analysis in the NWWAC advice, where using other catch options is sometimes even supported by scientists. Unofficial feedback on this refers to the different EU legal services only accepting the use of headline advice. This can only change when the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) undergoes a review.

Brouckaert then acknowledged the Commissioner's statement that in preparation of the December Council, the completion of the EU-UK bilateral agreement is near. This leaves Ministers with limited opportunity to integrate valid comments on the bilateral outcome into decisions.

He added that also for this issue, there was an unofficial response that the only possibility to take the socio-economic pillar of sustainability into consideration, is a review of the CFP. This is

in itself is a topic on which the NWWAC has produced advice, and this is one of the topics Alexandra Philippe would elaborate on further.

OIG Vice-Chair Alexandra Philippe's intervention

In her opening remarks, Alexandra Philippe highlighted the significance of re-establishing dialogue in the format previously held annually with Commissioner Sinkevicius. She noted that this meeting offered an opportunity to provide a comprehensive overview of NWWAC's current priorities beyond fishing opportunities.

Philippe explained that the NWWAC is actively addressing several pressing issues, including climate change, the social dimensions of fisheries (in collaboration with the North Sea AC), Maritime Spatial Planning (in partnership with the Pelagic AC), the energy transition of the fisheries sector as well as on the control regulation.

A key focus for the coming years, she said, will be the evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Philippe emphasised that the NWWAC has issued several advices on this matter and outlined the AC's key recommendations:

1. **Adapting the CFP to Modern Challenges:** She stressed the importance of addressing new realities, including climate change, Brexit, competition for marine space, and global crises, to ensure the CFP remains effective.
2. **Reassessing Key Policy Components:** Philippe highlighted the need to reconfigure elements such as the landing obligation to improve implementation, control, and alignment with practical realities.
3. **Implementing Holistic Ecosystem-Based Management:** She explained that policies and management tools must account for all pressures on the marine environment to support sustainable fisheries.
4. **Strengthening Regionalisation:** Philippe underlined that regionalisation should remain central to the CFP, as it allows for tailored policies informed by stakeholder input, particularly from Advisory Councils.
5. **Enhancing Stakeholder Engagement:** She commented that the AC advocates for broader multi-stakeholder involvement and targeted consultations with Advisory Councils to ensure the CFP's continued relevance and effectiveness.
6. **Ensuring Legal Certainty:** Philippe noted the importance of providing the sector with clear legal frameworks to encourage investments necessary for innovation.

Both the Commissioner and DG MARE Director-General took note of the information provided by the NWWAC.