

REPORT

Meeting: **NSAC/NWWAC Social Aspects FG**
 Parties: **NSAC/NWWAC FG members, stakeholders**
 Date and time: **15 April 2026**
 Location: **MS Teams**
 Chair: **Tamara Talevska**
 Rapporteur: **NSAC Secretariat**

1 Welcome and introduction

Tamara Talevska welcomed participants in the absence of a chair of the meeting. She then informed attendees of the norms & principles within the NSAC Code of Conduct.

Apologies were conveyed for Patrick Murphy (Irish South & West Fish Producer's Organisation), Mo Mathies (NWWAC) and Dominic Rihan (Killybegs Fishers Organization).

Agenda was adopted without comments.

2 Report from the previous meeting [*NSAC Secretariat*]

Paper 2.1 Report of meeting of 2 September 2025

As no comments were raised regarding the report of the previous meeting of 2 September 2025, it was approved and can be found published on the [website](#).

2.2 Actions from previous meeting

Kateryna Urbanovych of NSAC Secretariat read through previously agreed actions and informed on their status as follows:

Action	Status
(<i>Carried-forward</i>) Marta Ballesteros to circulate the report of the recent STECF EWG on Social Data meeting to the Secretariat upon publication. NSAC Secretariat to circulate the recent and past EWG reports to the FG members.	<i>Tabled for next meeting</i>
Members to forward input to potential NSAC/NWWAC advice on harmonisation of training and certification for EU fisheries.	<i>Ongoing</i>
Secretariat to contact Commission representatives to inquire into Blue Generational Renewal Strategy developments.	<i>Considered for later</i>

Next meeting of the FG to include discussions on taxation of fisheries income compared to other maritime sectors.	<i>Postponed to next meeting</i>
Members to forward written contribution to potential NSAC/NWWAC advice on the well-being of fishers.	<i>Ongoing</i>
Marta Ballesteros to be invited to the next meeting of the FG to present on compensations of fishers for their knowledge.	<i>Postponed to next meeting</i>
The Secretariat to invite experts on potential fisheries impacts of MPAs to present at a future FG meeting.	<i>Ongoing</i>
Members to inform about their interest to join the STECF Expert Working Group on Social Data (13–17 October, online). <i>Next one in 15 June – AC representatives may follow.</i>	<i>Complete</i>
Secretariat to circulate a doodle to establish the date for the next meeting of the FG.	<i>Complete</i>

Falke de Sager (BFPO) asked whether the next STECF Expert Working Group on Social Data meeting would be held online.

Marta Ballesteros (Spanish Institute of Oceanography) responded that the meeting will be hybrid, with some discussions possibly taking place in person and others in hybrid format.

Johnny Woodlock (observer) asked for fuel prices be added under AOB.

Talevska noted that the imminent fuel crisis has been discussed in the General Assembly, and joint-AC letter is currently under consultation with other ACs, aiming to activate state aid mechanisms and increase the ceiling for state aid in the event of a crisis.

3 FG Chair Election [*members*]

Following the resignation of the previous Chair, **Alfred Fisker Hansen**, the current NSAC ExCom industry Vice-Chair volunteered as a candidate for the FG's chairmanship.

Alfred Fisker Hansen noted that he has worked in fisheries for many years, including 20 years on the board of TFA. He is currently a Vice-Chair in the Danish Fishermen's Organization and was recently elected as Vice-Chair of the NSAC ExCom. He is also involved in Danish work on safety on board and the working environment. Many changes are currently taking place in the sector, with increasingly strict regulations for fishers, rising fuel prices, and concerns related to the "license to operate" as well as marine protected areas. These developments create significant concerns for fishers determining a need to help build confidence in the future of the sector. While in Denmark the number of accidents at sea has decreased, fisheries remain a dangerous working environment requiring constant attention to safety. He concluded that this is why continued work in fisheries social aspects is important, including maintaining belief in the future of the sector.

Members appointed **Hansen** to Chair of the Focus Group with consensus.

4 ETF-Europeche upcoming project on occupational health, safety on board and attractiveness of fisheries sector [*Andrea Albertazzi, European Transport Workers' Federation*]

Andrea Albertazzi (ETF) presented the project **Pillars of the Sea 4**.

He explained that ETF is a European trade union federation bringing together national unions across all transport modes, including civil aviation, road, rail, maritime transport, and fisheries. ETF is part of the EU Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for Sea Fisheries representing the workers side, alongside Europeche and Copa-Cogeca that represent the employers. Within this framework, the social partners meet three times per year and implement a joint work programme, also thanks to EU-funded projects. *Pillars of the Sea 4* is the latest in a series of such joint projects. It supports the implementation of the work programme by enabling additional dedicated meetings on specific issues. The project is funded under the European Commission's Social Dialogue budget line, will run for 24 months (1 February 2026-31 January 2028), and is structured on three pillars. Project management rotates between social partners; this edition is led by ETF. A final dissemination conference will be organized in Brussels in the last quarter of 2027 to present the project results and deliverables.

Pillar 1 focuses on developing occupational health and safety guidelines to be submitted to the ILO. Albertazzi recalled the importance of the ILO *Work in Fishing* Convention (C188), adopted in 2007, which sets global minimum standards for working and living conditions on fishing vessels. The fishing sector remains one of the most dangerous globally, with persistent safety risks, accidents, and cases of labour abuse or exploitation. The ratification of C188 remains limited, including among key fishing nations, and implementation is often uneven. In comparison to the Maritime Labour Convention, ratification levels are significantly lower.

In the EU, C188 has been partially transposed into Directive 2017/159 following an agreement between the EU Social Partners. However, the directive excludes self-employed fishers due to competence limitations, unlike the ILO Convention, which covers all fishers.

Unfortunately, Some Member States see no need to ratify C188. However, this creates challenges internationally, as the EU encourages third countries to ratify the Convention in trade negotiations and fisheries agreements. These partners often respond that not all EU coastal states have ratified it, weakening the EU's position. Therefore, it is crucial to achieve broader EU ratification to strengthen credibility, improve global standards, and enhance the visibility and impact of the Convention. In view of this, pillar 1 aims to develop occupational health and safety guidelines. An ILO resolution adopted in 2017 called on the organization and its Member States to develop such guidelines, leaving a gap that still needs to be addressed. European social partners decided to take the initiative at EU level due to their strong and established cooperation with the ILO. Albertazzi referred to two recent examples of this fruitful cooperation: the guidelines on medical examinations for fishers and the guidelines on fair recruitment and employment services for migrant fishers, where work carried out under EU-funded social dialogue projects formed the basis for guidelines later adopted by the ILO in its tripartite framework involving governments, employers, and workers.

The objective is therefore to prepare a document at European level that can be submitted to the ILO for consideration, discussion, and potential adoption at global level. The ILO has limited resources to develop all necessary instruments and such initiatives can help accelerate progress and bring the fisheries sector closer to the level of regulatory development seen in other sectors.

Albertazzi acknowledged the differences between the maritime and fisheries sectors but noted that they also share certain similarities. For this reason, the starting point for the work will be the existing occupational safety and health guidelines developed under the Maritime Labour Convention. These will be adapted and tailored to address the specific risks of the fisheries sector. An external expert will support the work and the final document will be drafted using terminology and references compatible with ILO standards in order to facilitate potential global adoption.

The **second Pillar** will focus on the issue of attractiveness of the fisheries sector. A decline in the number of vessels and jobs in the EU fisheries sector, alongside low interest from younger generations, an ageing workforce, and increasing reliance on migrant fishers has been observed in the EU fleet. Such trends pose a risk to the future of the sector. The social partners consider low attractiveness to be driven by multiple factors that vary across regions, fleet segments, and coastal communities. To better understand these dynamics, the project will conduct qualitative research aimed at identifying barriers to entering the profession, potential incentives, good practices, and required skills.

In addition to desk research on existing initiatives at national and EU level, the project will include interviews with a wide range of stakeholders, including active and retired fishers, young workers who have chosen to enter or avoid the sector, public authorities, training institutions, and other relevant actors. The aim is not only to diagnose the problem but also to identify policy areas where action could improve the situation. The research will follow a structured and scientifically sound methodology developed with the support of an external expert, including standardized interview frameworks adaptable to different national contexts and fleet segments.

Project activities will include meetings of the steering committee in selected countries (likely Italy, France, the Netherlands, and Spain) where interviews and stakeholder engagement can take place. However, the research will not be limited to these countries, as interviews may also be conducted remotely. The work will result in a final report summarizing the findings of the research and, through collaboration between the steering committee and the external expert, will identify potential policy measures aimed at reversing the current negative trends in sector attractiveness.

Finally, **Pillar 3** is closely linked to Pillar 1 and focuses on developing a proposal for a new legal instrument. The ILO Convention C188 was partially transposed into EU legislation through Directive 2017/159. Under EU Treaty provisions, such agreements can be implemented through EU legislation when requested by the social partners. While the adoption of the directive represented a significant achievement, challenges remain regarding its practical implementation at national level. Member States are required to transpose directives into national law, but there is limited information on how the C188 standards are enforced in practice. Questions remain about the frequency and coordination of inspections, the training

of inspectors, and the monitoring of compliance with minimum standards on working time, contracts, and living and working conditions on board.

The social partners have therefore long advocated for a new directive specifically addressing control and enforcement of C188 standards, including greater harmonization of inspection and monitoring systems across the EU. Therefore, the objective of pillar 3 is to work with an external expert to draft a proposal for a new directive that would strengthen enforcement mechanisms and ensure that minimum standards are effectively applied.

A Pillars of the Sea 4 kick-off meeting with selected external expert will be organized shortly, after which detailed planning of activities will begin.

Woodlock raised concerns expressed by inshore fishers operating in the Irish Sea on the east coast of Ireland. In recent years, fishers requested stronger enforcement of minimum standards due to concerns about safety in emergency situations. He referred to cases where migrant fishers purchased vessels and entered the fishery without sufficient English language skills, creating safety concerns due to difficulties communicating by radio.

Albertazzi responded that the situation of migrant fishers in Ireland has been a long-standing concern for the ETF and has been repeatedly raised within the Social Dialogue Committee. Particular attention was given to the regulatory framework that allowed migrant fishers to work in the Irish fleet and to potential gaps that could enable abuse or exploitation. He referred to advocacy efforts led by ETF and partner organizations at international level addressing these issues.

Flemming Nygaard Christensen (Danish Fishermen Occupational Health Service) offered to arrange a presentation at a future meeting of the FG on how Danish maritime authorities have implemented ILO Convention C188. The Convention entered into force in Denmark on 3 February 2021 and is now integrated into routine vessel inspections, with certification requirements applying to vessels over 24 meters. **(Action)**

Ballesteros noted that the upcoming STECF Annual Social Report includes both quantitative and qualitative analyses based on data from all Member States, examining age structures and trends since 2017. The report identifies both cross-sectoral and fisheries-specific challenges affecting workforce renewal and its findings could support the work under Pillar 2 of the project. Further analysis is being conducted to compare EU trends with countries where fisher numbers are increasing, such as Norway, in order to better understand the drivers behind both decline and growth in the sector. She offered to share the findings and support the project's expert work and suggested organizing a broad presentation once the report is released, complemented by smaller, more focused discussions as needed.

Hansen emphasized that recruitment of young people into fisheries remains a significant challenge. Labour shortages affect many sectors in Europe, including in Denmark, but the fisheries sector faces additional difficulties due to uncertainty about its future and declining morale among fishers. It is challenging to attract young people to a profession when many current workers are expressing a desire to leave the sector. Improving the sector's image, ensuring safe and stable working conditions, and maintaining economic viability are essential to making fisheries a more attractive career choice. Ongoing public debates, particularly

around bottom trawling, are contributing to negative perceptions of the sector, further complicating recruitment efforts.

Woodlock noted that, in Ireland, some tax measures and quota changes are being introduced, but the central question remains whether a sustainable and profitable livelihood can still be achieved in the sector. Rising fuel costs are a major factor reducing profitability and continued financial pressure could lead some fishers to leave the industry. Given the hazardous and demanding nature of the work, declining profits make it harder to retain existing fishers and attract younger generations. He also emphasized the importance of ensuring that ILO Convention C188 applies not only to larger vessels but also to smaller boats. Small-scale operators, particularly in the North Irish Sea, sometimes feel overlooked, as regulatory support measures and financial incentives often appear to favour larger vessels.

Iliaria Bellomo (NWWAC) asked whether the survey on generational renewal would focus solely on fishers in the catching sector or also include other segments of the value chain, such as processing. She also asked how the survey would address the role of women in the fisheries sector, particularly young women, noting that their contribution often remains under-recognized, especially in administrative and support roles.

Albertazzi responded that the survey will focus specifically on the catching sector. Regarding gender participation, fisheries remain a highly male-dominated sector and that increasing the presence of women is widely recognized as an important objective. However, structural barriers must first be addressed. Working and living conditions on board are a key factor, with the average age of fishing vessels in the EU being relatively high, often resulting in limited comfort and inadequate facilities. Additionally, regulatory constraints related to gross tonnage limits under the Common Fisheries Policy discourage vessel owners from expanding crew accommodation or improving living conditions, as additional space counts toward capacity limits. Excluding “social tonnage”, space dedicated to crew welfare, from capacity calculations could incentivize better onboard conditions, though such proposals have so far not been accepted due to concerns about potential misuse.

Work-life balance, long periods at sea, and uncertainty about the future of the sector also affect recruitment and retention, particularly among younger people. Many potential entrants perceive fisheries as offering limited long-term prospects, making it difficult to commit to a career that requires significant training and lifestyle adjustments. These issues will be examined in detail under the project’s work on sector attractiveness, including through interviews with stakeholders. Additionally, the main provisions of Convention C188 are applicable to small-scale fisheries and this is particularly important given the significant role of small-scale operators and the fact that safety and labour challenges also occur within that segment.

Talevska noted that the project aligns closely with upcoming European Commission initiatives, such as the Blue Generational Renewal and EU Coastal Community strategies. She asked how the project team plans to feed its results into these policy processes and how coordination with the Commission’s ongoing initiatives will be ensured. She also asked for clarification on the project management structure, asking whether ETF and Europeche are leading the project while external experts are being engaged to support methodology and implementation, whether scientific institutes are involved in the consortium and if stakeholder

engagement would extend beyond the organizations' existing networks to include non-governmental organizations, particularly social NGOs working on labour and social issues.

Albertazzi responded that the attractiveness pillar was positively received by DG MARE during the project design phase. Although the project operates on a separate timeline determined by funding and approval procedures, regular updates will be provided to the Social Dialogue Committee, where discussions with the European Commission routinely take place. Regarding stakeholder engagement, participation beyond the core partner organizations will be considered in consultation with the steering committee and external experts. Meetings organized in Member States could provide opportunities to involve additional stakeholders, including NGOs. A key objective is to mobilize national members not only as individuals but also as facilitators who can engage the broader fisheries sector at national level. On project management, external experts are being recruited through formal tender procedures to support specific project components. Experts for the pillars on sector attractiveness and on drafting a proposal for a new enforcement directive have already been selected, and contracts are in the process of being finalized. The selection process for the expert supporting the occupational health and safety guidelines pillar is nearing completion, after which project activities will formally commence.

Talevska asked if further updates be provided once the project is officially launched.

5 NSAC/NWWAC Advice on Social Aspects

Talevska invited members to discuss and agree on priorities for the agenda of the next meeting, including identifying any topics on which advice papers should be drafted. She recalled several issues previously discussed:

- Well-being of fishers, for which scientific presentations had already been delivered and background material is available;
- Training and certification standards for which a presentation had been provided by ProSea

She added that fisheries taxation was postponed to a future meeting to allow for fuller participation by members. The upcoming STECF Social Report should be a first priority, alongside a presentation from the European Commission on the Coastal Community Strategy. She asked members to indicate the preferred order of topics and whether any additional items should be included.

Talevska asked Ballesteros to provide an indication of the expected timing for the presentation of the STECF Social Report.

Ballesteros responded that late June would be the most appropriate timing for the presentation.

Talevska proposed waiting until June for the STECF Social Report presentation, while holding the next meeting in May to address other topics, including the Coastal Community Strategy, taxation, and the presentation on the implementation of ILO Convention C188 in Denmark.
(Action)

6 AOB

Woodlock raised concerns about fuel prices and their impact on fishing companies and operations. There is high level of uncertainty in the sector, with fuel prices changing significantly within a short period.

Hansen added that Europeche is preparing to send a letter to the European Commission regarding fuel costs. Several Member States have introduced support measures for fuel. However, many of these measures fall under the *de minimis* framework, which requires national co-financing and may create unequal conditions across Member States. The sector is facing severe financial pressure, with fuel costs having increased significantly, placing particular strain on small businesses. Continued losses could reduce fishing activity and affect related industries dependent on landings.

Falke de Sager (BFPO) added that the situation should be considered not only as an energy issue but also as a broader food security concern. Rising costs are affecting multiple sectors, including agriculture through higher fertilizer prices, and prolonged disruption could have implications for food supply and food sovereignty across the EU. There is need for a proactive policy response from the Commission that addresses both the immediate crisis and longer-term structural challenges.

7 Closing & next meeting date

The Secretariat will inform members regarding the date & time of the next FG's meeting (either 19 May or 8 June morning). (**Action**)

8 Agreed actions

Action	Responsible
(<i>Carried forward</i>) Marta Ballesteros to be invited to the next meeting of the FG to present on compensations of fishers for their knowledge.	Marta Ballesteros, Secretariat
Next FG meeting to table a presentation on the Coastal Community Strategy, taxation, and the implementation of ILO Convention C188 in Denmark.	Social Aspects FG
Secretariat to inform members regarding the date & time of the next FG's meeting.	NSAC Secretariat

9 Participants

First Name	Last Name	Organisation
Alfred	Fisker Hansen	Chair of FG
Andrea	Albertazzi	ETF
Bruno	Dachicourt	ETF



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Claus		German Fisheries PO
Falke	De Sager	BFPO
Flemming	Christensen	Danish Fishermen Occupational Health Service
Ilaria	Bellomo	NWWAC Secretariat
Jan	Kappel	EAA
Johnny	Woodlock	Independent observer
Kateryna	Urbanovych	NSAC Secretariat
Marta	Ballesteros	Spanish Institute of Oceanography
Tamara	Talevska	NSAC Secretariat