

Minutes

NWWAC Focus Group Landing Obligation

24 July 2026, Virtual

1. Welcome and introductions

The NWWAC FG Chair, Emiel Brouckaert, welcomed participants and Norman Graham from DG MARE C5. The agenda was adopted.

Action points from the last NWWAC FG Meeting (18 May 2026)

1	Follow-up on UK landing obligation issue: Patrick Murphy and Dominic Rihan to discuss the matter directly with N. Graham and report back to the focus group with updates
	Update provided during FG meeting:
2	Follow-up the discussion on “rebuilding plans and on the importance to include the effects of climate change as a factor in stock assessments as well as for rebuilding plans” during the NWWAC July meetings in Dublin.
	Completed.
3	NWWAC Advice on Choke Risk: Members to submit comments on the choke risk assessment by noon the following day, 19 May. Secretariat to continue drafting advice based on contributions.
	Completed.
4	Preparation of annual NWWAC advice related to Fishing Opportunities
	Agenda item 2.
5	Secretariat to circulate to members the Guidance Note presentation
	Completed.

Regarding the first action point, **Dominic Rihan** explained that a fishing vessel had been detained by the Scottish Navy for discarding mackerel. The detention was based on the Scottish Navy’s assertion that the de minimis exemption for mackerel in Area 6 was no longer in force. However, this interpretation was incorrect, as the exemption had been agreed as part of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) arrangements that governed the transition from the pre-Brexit to the post-Brexit fisheries management framework.

Following the detention, the matter was raised through the relevant administrative and control authorities. The issue was subsequently escalated to the European Commission, which engaged with the UK authorities to seek clarification and resolution. After discussions, the UK authorities acknowledged that their original position had been incorrect and accepted that the exemption remained applicable. Although the matter was ultimately resolved, it was noted that the acceptance of the error appeared reluctant.

D. Rihan highlighted that this was not an isolated incident and stated that a number of similar issues had arisen, particularly involving the Scottish Navy. In these cases, concerns centred on

the enforcement of legislation that pre-dated Brexit and had since been superseded by new arrangements. According to Dominic, there appeared to be a recurring tendency to apply outdated rules rather than the legislative framework that was agreed and implemented following Brexit.

While the specific case concerning the mackerel exemption was successfully resolved, D. Rihan emphasised that the experience illustrated a broader challenge. He noted that repeatedly having to pursue lengthy administrative processes to correct the interpretation and application of fisheries legislation was both undesirable and resource-intensive. He indicated that the industry would prefer greater consistency and accuracy in enforcement to avoid similar disputes arising in the future.

2. NWWAC draft advice on Fishing Opportunities for 2027

Members discussed the draft advice on fishing opportunities for 2027. The document was displayed, and notes were recorded directly in the text.

3. AOB

Next steps

The group agreed a timeline for finalising the advice. An updated draft will be prepared incorporating the discussions from the meeting and circulated by the following Monday. Members of the focus group will then have until the 30 July to review the document and provide additional comments. Following receipt of these comments, a revised version will be prepared and submitted to the Horizontal Working Group.

The discussion also addressed concerns regarding the timing of the advice in relation to the European Commission's ongoing work on fishing opportunities. As the Commission had indicated that discussions were already progressing, it was considered beneficial to share a more advanced draft before the formal adoption process is completed. It was therefore agreed that the version circulated to the Horizontal Working Group for consultation would also be shared with the European Commission in draft form. This would allow Commission officials to review the substance of the advice at an earlier stage, while making clear that the document remained under development and was still subject to further consultation and refinement.

There was broad support for this approach, which had already been discussed with and endorsed by the relevant chair. It was considered a practical way to ensure that the Commission had early visibility of the AC's emerging recommendations and could take these into account while continuing its preparatory work. Commission representatives acknowledged the proposal and confirmed that the points raised during the meeting had been noted.

EC Update on the Involvement of NWWAC Members:

Norman Graham provided an update on upcoming European Commission engagement activities involving NWWAC members, focusing on rebuilding plans and non-quota species.

- **8 September: Hybrid meeting on rebuilding plans:**

Regarding the rebuilding plans, he explained that the Commission had requested ICES to undertake work on potential rebuilding scenarios building on previously presented alternative harvest control rules. The expectation had been that this technical advice would be available by 1 September; however, ICES had since informed the Commission that no results would be delivered before 30 September. Despite this delay, it was considered beneficial to proceed with a meeting on 8 September, coinciding with the presence of several NWWAC members in Brussels for other discussions. A short hybrid meeting of approximately one and a half hours was therefore proposed to provide an update on ongoing discussions with the United Kingdom and to present the next steps being considered for the rebuilding process.

N. Graham noted that the meeting would focus on the technical and scientific workstreams that the Commission intends to establish to support future rebuilding discussions. He also highlighted the importance of incorporating fishers' knowledge into the process. Given the significant changes that have been observed within the fishery in recent years, there is a strong interest in gathering practical insights from those directly involved in fishing activities. Such information was seen as valuable for understanding developments within the fishery, including changes in stock distribution and fishing patterns, and for complementing the scientific evidence base. The meeting was therefore intended to provide an overview of the proposed roadmap and create an opportunity to discuss these developments with stakeholders.

- **Last week of September: Stocktake meeting on non-quota species:**

On non-quota species, N. Graham explained that a separate stocktake online meeting was planned for the last week of September, although the date had not yet been formally confirmed. The intention was to organise the event during that period to ensure discussions could take place before commercial activity intensified for certain fisheries, particularly the king scallop season. The meeting would serve primarily as an information-sharing exercise, bringing together updates on the wide range of initiatives currently underway concerning non-quota stocks.

He noted that considerable work is currently being undertaken on species such as octopus, including several recent seminars and further events planned by the UK later in the year. In addition, a number of research projects focusing on cephalopods have been established. The objective of the stocktake meeting would be to provide stakeholders with a consolidated overview of these various activities and ensure that participants are fully informed of developments across different workstreams. Updates would also be provided on other non-quota species issues, including work relating to brown crab, scallops and matters previously discussed with the UK concerning fisheries in the Channel. Overall, the meeting was intended to improve awareness of ongoing initiatives and provide stakeholders with a comprehensive overview of current developments in the management and research of non-quota species.

The meeting is expected to be held fully online and will include interpretation services to facilitate participation.

[Discussion on a possible revision of the current Discard Plan by the Focus Group and the development of proposals for the next Discard Plan](#)

An update was provided by **Ilaria Bellomo** on the development of the next NWW discard plan being prepared by the NWW Member State Group. The Member States are currently considering how best to involve the AC in the process. Unlike previous exercises, where ACs were often consulted only after a largely complete draft had been prepared, consideration is now being given to a more staged approach. Under this model, sections of the draft discard plan would be shared at an earlier stage, allowing for consultation and feedback throughout the drafting process rather than only at the end. This approach was presented as a means of improving stakeholder engagement, providing AC with more time to review proposals and contribute meaningfully to the development of the plan.

The Chair highlighted the importance of this process, as the current discard plan, which was agreed for a three-year period, is due to be revised and renewed. Attention was drawn to the requirement for the Member State Group to submit a Joint Recommendation to the European Commission by 1 May. Participants stressed the value of receiving draft material as early as possible in order to facilitate timely analysis and the preparation of advice. It was suggested that, once any draft sections become available, the focus group should be convened to review the proposals and begin developing recommendations.

At the same time, concerns were raised about the risk of relying entirely on the Member States' timetable. Previous experiences had shown that AC had sometimes been asked to review extensive and complex documentation at very short notice, which was widely considered unsatisfactory and detrimental to meaningful consultation. It was therefore noted that the AC may need to consider developing its own advice independently if sufficient information is not made available at an early stage.

Questions were also raised by **D. Rihan** regarding the policy direction that the Member States intend to pursue. In particular, participants expressed interest in understanding whether the objective would simply be to roll over the existing provisions or whether there was an ambition to adapt the discard plan to reflect current fisheries realities. It was observed that the existing discard plan had been developed under different circumstances and may no longer fully address the challenges and operational conditions faced by the sector today. For this reason, early clarification of the Member States' intentions was considered important.

It was agreed that further information should be sought from the Member State Group during forthcoming discussions, particularly regarding both the content and timetable for the development of the new discard plan.

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

The Chair summarised the key action points arising from the meeting.

Action Points

1	On the Fishing Opportunities advice: - Update version to be circulated to FG on 27 July; - FG members will have time to submit additional comments until 30 July. - On 31 July, the Secretariat will send the updated version to HWG for two-week consultation. This draft will also be shared with Norman Graham.
2	Meeting invitations will be circulated to FG members for the meeting scheduled on 8 September on the Rebuilding Plans.
3	Secretariat to inform FG members on date for the stocktake meeting on non-quota species, with the intention of holding the meeting during the last week of September.
4	Further engagement with the Member State Group will take place to obtain additional information on the content, timetable and objectives of the future discard plan process.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked all participants, the Commission, the Secretariat and formally closed the meeting.

Participants:

NWWAC Members	
Maelys Bernard	FROM Nord
Emiel Brouckaert	BFPO
John Lynch	ISEFPO
Franck Le Barzic	Cobrenord
Titouan Lecompte	CNPMEM
Patrick Murphy	ISWFPO
Aodh O'Donnel	IFPO
Alexandra Philippe	EBCD
Irene Prieto	OPPF4
Dominic Rihan	KFO
Observers	
Norman Graham	DG MARE C5
Pauline Stephan	EAPO
NWWAC Secretariat	
Ilaria Bellomo	NWWAC Secretariat