



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

MINUTES

FOCUS GROUP CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENT

Virtual meeting via Teams

Monday 11 May 2026

Participants

Ilaria Bellomo	NWWAC
Falke de Sager	BFPO
Ed Farrell	KFO
Jérôme Jourdain	UAPF
Mo Mathies	NWWAC
Patrick Murphy	ISWFPO
Aodh O'Donnell	IFPO
Alexandra Philippe (Chair)	EBCD
Irene Prieto	OPPF4

1 Welcome and introductions

The Chair Alexandra Philippe welcomed all participants. Apologies were received from John Lynch (ISEFPO) and Arthur Yon (FROM Nord) in advance of the meeting. The agenda was adopted with one AOB to be raised regarding the Atkantic Strategy survey.

Action points from last meeting (virtual, 15 December 2025)

1	Secretariat to send email request to members to forward information on practical implementation of MSFD by their respective administrations Included in draft advice document
2	FG members to follow the NSAC FG MSFD meeting on Friday 19 December Done
3	Secretariat to prepare first draft advice document based on discussions Draft document shared with FG members 09 January
4	References to previous AC advice to be included in draft advice document where appropriate References included



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

2 NWWAC Draft advice on the Ocean Act public consultation- discussion

The Chair outlined that the Ocean Act is expected to stem from the Ocean Pact and will be developed alongside the revision of the Marine Spatial Planning framework. Its aim is to consolidate all targets related to maritime space and ocean governance into a single piece of legislation. It remains unclear whether this will include only binding targets or also currently aspirational targets that may later become binding, but the overall intention is to create one coherent framework covering all maritime activities.

There are still a number of uncertainties surrounding this initiative. A presentation delivered by Felix Leineman at the Horizontal Working Group in March provided some additional insight, but several questions remain unanswered. A public consultation is currently open until 16 July, and it appears to be framed as a directive, although it is not entirely certain whether this designation is definitive or simply standard wording used on the consultation platform. That said, given that Marine Spatial Planning is already governed by a directive, it would be logical for this to follow a similar approach.

At the same time, the revision of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive is also progressing, meaning that several interconnected processes are taking place simultaneously. This creates challenges in terms of maintaining focus, as efforts must be spread across multiple workstreams, which can lead to some details being overlooked. As a result, it is important to continue engaging carefully with each consultation, despite the time this requires.

She explained that to support this work, the consultation questionnaire has been reviewed and reorganised into thematic headings that could serve as the basis for structured advice. This working document is intended purely as a support tool for discussions and should not be seen as final. There is flexibility in how to proceed, either by responding directly to the questionnaire or by developing separate advice. However, it may be preferable to structure any advice in line with the consultation itself to ensure consistency and clarity. Participants are encouraged to share any initial observations or ideas they may already have from reviewing the consultation before moving into more detailed discussion.

Mo Mathies explained that public consultation questionnaires are designed for individual organisations or respondents and are not well suited to being completed collectively by an Advisory Council, as reaching consensus on each question is very difficult. Instead, it is more effective for the AC to produce its own structured advice document addressing the key issues raised, while members may complete the questionnaire individually on behalf of their organisations.

Ed Farrell and **Falke de Sager** agreed with this evaluation and for the AC to go ahead with a stand-alone advice document.



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

The Chair agreed to proceed by using the consultation questions as a guide for drafting the advice, helping both to structure the discussion and to better understand the direction of the Commission, while not being constrained by the consultation format and allowing for broader or more general comments where relevant. The discussion began with questions assessing the current performance of Marine Spatial Planning, including whether it is fit for purpose, meets its objectives and supports the achievement of Good Environmental Status, highlighting clear links with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and noting the recent publication of the second implementation report, which could provide useful context although further input on its conclusions would be welcome. Overall, the aim is to gather views across these areas in a structured way, while also allowing space for overarching comments that could inform the introduction to the advice.

M. Mathies pointed out that the AC had not yet directly worked on the MSP but that multiple related advice submissions had been made over the past years that could inform the advice drafting.

The Chair agreed that existing advice on ORE, MSFD, the Ocean Pact etc. should be reviewed.

A discussion followed responding to the topics identified in the questionnaire for inclusion in the AC response highlighting differing experiences across Member States regarding how marine spatial planning (MSP) treats fisheries and aquaculture, with concerns raised that these sectors are often not explicitly recognised or allocated dedicated space. In Ireland, for example, fisheries and aquaculture are not directly covered within MSP legislation, leaving them without clear legal status, while in other countries such as Belgium they are generally permitted but not given specific zones. This has led to a perception that traditional maritime activities are in a weaker position compared to newer sectors, such as offshore renewable energy, which benefit from clearer site allocation and legal certainty. Participants also noted the lack of harmonisation across Member States and limited effectiveness or visibility of sea basin initiatives, alongside uncertainties around the ongoing evaluation and potential revision of the MSP Directive as a basis for the future Ocean Act.

A central concern was the **absence of legal protection and recognition for fishing activities**, particularly given their long-standing role and contribution to food production, in contrast to other sectors that are supported by explicit targets or spatial allocations. Several participants suggested that defining core fishing grounds at national or EU level could help safeguard key areas, reduce conflicts with other uses, and ensure better integration into marine spatial planning, while also calling for more detailed socio-economic impact assessments on displacement and cumulative effects on coastal communities. More broadly, there was concern that increasing reliance on Member States could lead to uneven implementation and reduced level playing field across Europe, alongside questions about whether the Ocean Act should more clearly address fisheries as a strategic sector within the overall framework.



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

It was suggested that gathering input on how marine spatial planning is functioning across different Member States would be valuable, particularly to highlight the importance of regionalisation and the role of Advisory Councils operating at sea basin level. This would help demonstrate why a regional perspective is relevant and necessary in shaping effective policy. It was also noted that draft text could be prepared to reflect these points.

The discussion also focused on the **relationship between the Marine Spatial Planning Directive and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive**, both of which are expected to be revised around the same time. While there have been indications at Commission level that stronger synergies between the two could be pursued, Member States and stakeholders have expressed concerns about this, citing the risk of increased complexity due to responsibilities being split across different departments, and fears that one directive could be weakened or absorbed by the other. While there is some support for a more integrated approach, the general view was that, at a minimum, coherence and alignment between the two frameworks should be ensured, while recognising the need to keep the discussion manageable given the already complex scope of both directives.

The discussion emphasised the importance of **improving policy coherence** and strengthening the ecosystem-based approach within marine spatial planning, with a particular focus on ensuring that food security is properly recognised. It was noted that current interpretations of the ecosystem-based approach tend to focus primarily on environmental protection and multi-species management, often overlooking the role of people and the provision of food. There was a shared view that food production and food security should be explicitly integrated into MSP, alongside broader policy considerations. In addition, the lack of climate change integration in the existing framework was highlighted as a significant gap, given its growing impacts on marine ecosystems, fish stocks and spatial distribution, suggesting the need for more adaptive and dynamic planning approaches rather than static ones.

The conversation also addressed **cooperation with third countries**, particularly the UK, where existing advice on offshore developments and cumulative impacts could be drawn upon. Participants stressed the importance of **flexibility in spatial designations**, such as marine protected areas and fishing grounds, to account for shifting environmental conditions and stock movements due to climate change. Concerns were also raised around the concept of **multi-use**, with recognition that in some cases different activities, such as offshore renewables and certain fishing methods, are not compatible and this needs to be realistically reflected in planning decisions. Finally, it was suggested that fishermen could play a greater role in monitoring and data collection, though this should be properly recognised and remunerated within the system.

A recent study by Bord Iascaigh Mhara on **coexistence** was referenced, which could be useful in supporting the discussion, noting that early findings suggest that true coexistence between activities is limited in practice despite frequent references to it in policy debates. While there was



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

some uncertainty about whether the report has been finalised or published, it was understood that it examined multiple international examples and questioned the practical reality of coexistence, reinforcing concerns already raised by participants.

Examples from Belgium further illustrated these challenges, with only limited and largely experimental cases of multi-use being tested, such as combining aquaculture or pot fisheries with restoration projects or offshore wind farms. However, these initiatives remain constrained, and in practice developers are often not required or incentivised to enable fisheries access, with barriers such as insurance frequently cited. It was therefore suggested that a stronger framework may be needed to ensure that multi-use is genuinely implemented, rather than remaining a theoretical concept, as current experience shows that practical integration of fisheries into shared maritime space remains very limited.

It was suggested to address the challenges of multi-use, particularly for demersal fisheries, highlighting that without viable solutions these activities may simply be excluded from certain areas, while also emphasising the cumulative impacts of multiple maritime uses such as offshore energy, MPAs and shipping on fishing, reinforcing the need to consider spatial pressures and the potential value of defining dedicated fishing areas.

In relation to **stakeholder engagement and participation**, the discussion highlighted the need to assess the current level of stakeholder engagement across Member States, with a view to determining whether it is sufficient and how it could be improved, while emphasising the importance of the ACs in providing a valuable multi-country perspective. It was suggested that clearer guidance and a more harmonised approach to stakeholder engagement should be developed to ensure a level playing field across Member States, as practices currently vary significantly and may disadvantage certain stakeholders.

There was also recognition of the importance of early and consistent stakeholder involvement in marine spatial planning processes, particularly in the context of sea basin approaches and multi-country interactions. In relation to cooperation with third countries such as the UK and Norway, it was noted that while alignment on consultation standards would be desirable, it may not be enforceable, though it remains important to highlight differences in engagement and the challenges they create for stakeholders operating across shared maritime areas.

The discussion noted that while improving **data collection and ocean observation** is clearly important, there remains some uncertainty about how best to address this in practice, beyond recognising the value of expanded mapping and ensuring that policymaking is firmly grounded in science. It was emphasised that the use of fishers' empirical knowledge should be strengthened, as has been called for in previous advice, and that stakeholder-generated data, including from vessels equipped with seabed mapping technology, is currently underutilised and not sufficiently integrated into decision-making processes.



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

Participants highlighted the need for a more inclusive and balanced approach to data sharing across sectors, particularly given concerns about declining research funding, suggesting that data collection efforts should be broadened creatively to ensure continuity. It was also proposed that data gathered through commercial activities, such as offshore wind developments, could be made more widely available to support scientific research and marine planning, potentially through anonymisation where necessary, while ensuring a level playing field so that all sectors contribute data in a comparable manner, similar to existing practices in fisheries. It was agreed that **cables** should also be explicitly addressed in the advice as an additional and emerging pressure on maritime space.

More broadly, significant uncertainty remains around the **proposed Ocean Act**, particularly regarding how binding and aspirational targets will be brought together within a single framework and whether aspirational targets could effectively become binding, which would represent a substantial shift from policy to legislation and require strong stakeholder and Member State support.

There was also concern about the overall clarity, purpose and added value of the Ocean Act, with questions raised as to whether it risks becoming a largely political or communication-driven initiative rather than a practical tool. The process was described as challenging for stakeholders due to the lack of clear direction, the number of parallel policy developments, and difficulties in understanding how different elements, including the CFP and longer-term strategies such as Vision 2040, will fit together. It was therefore suggested that further reflection time be allowed, while also noting the importance of ensuring careful interpretation of evaluation findings, particularly avoiding overly simplistic conclusions that attribute challenges solely to poor implementation rather than potential shortcomings in the framework itself.

3. Next steps

The Secretariat will draft the minutes from the meeting and use the discussion to develop a first draft advice document. FG members are invited to send additional comments and suggestions based on the working document to the Secretariat by the specified deadline.

4. AOB

The Secretariat highlighted the survey supporting the review the results of the atlantic strategy since the last revision of its action plan which was circulated to members with the invitation for individual responses. It was agreed that a short AC response could be prepared, reflecting the limited involvement of the NWWAC to date and advocating for stronger engagement of the fisheries sector. A draft response would be circulated for comments, with a quick turnaround



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

required due to the upcoming deadline, and while formal consensus would not be necessary given the minimal level of current involvement, members would still have the opportunity to review and contribute before submission.

5 Summary of actions agreed

1	Members to send comments and suggestion on the working paper to the Secretariat.
2	Secretarita to draft advice document based on discussions and comments received.
3	Secretariat to circualte completed Atlantic Strategy consultation document to FG members for approval by reply.