



## REPORT

Meeting: **EMD Workshop - Celebrating Advisory Councils' success in view of the Ocean Pact**

Parties: **Advisory Councils (Secretariats, Chairs, Vice-Chairs, Members), DG MARE, stakeholders**

Date: **22 May, 2025**

Location: **Cork, Ireland**

Moderators: **Rosa Caggiano (MEDAC), Paul Thomas (PelAC), Mo Mathies (NWWAC)**

Rapporteur: **NSAC Secretariat**

### 1. Welcome and Introduction

**Rosa Caggiano** (MEDAC), on behalf of 11 ACs, welcomed participants to the day's workshop, celebrating the ACs success in view of the EU Ocean Pact. She informed participants that a [video](#) explaining the role and functioning of Advisory Councils for the public has been recently developed. Additionally, [brochures](#) outlining ACs' key activities can also be accessed. The video was then shown.

### 2. ACs Success stories

Workshop moderators took the floor to present the Advisory Councils' success stories as follows:

#### **AAC**

In March 2022, an Aquaculture Advisory Council's recommendation called for the establishment of an EU Reference Centre for Animal Welfare for aquaculture species. The AAC welcomed the creation of the EU Reference Centre for Animal Welfare for aquatic animals (EURCAW-Aqua) in early 2024. In August 2024, and in close cooperation with DG MARE, DG SANTE, the Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism (AAM) and the team in charge of the EURCAW-Aqua, the AAC published a Recommendation on the working priorities for the EU Reference Centre for Animal Welfare on Aquatic Animals.

It includes recommendations on knowledge transfer, supporting good policy, priority topics and stakeholder engagement.

**BSAC**

In 2023 and 2024, the Baltic Sea Advisory Council organised two workshops dedicated to seals and cormorants. The first workshop dealt with the applicable legislation and research on these two groups of predators in the Baltic Sea. The second one focused on discussions around conservation and management. The workshops constituted an important step forward towards creating a common understanding of how to better balance conservation and management of seals and cormorants. Following the two workshops, in November 2024, the BSAC issued two sets of consensus-based recommendations, one on cormorants and one on seals. The recommendations were addressed to the European Commission, Baltic Sea Member States, HELCOM and ICES. These recommendations set the scene for the discussions during the Joint NSAC-BSAC workshop on predators held in March 2025.

**BISAC**

The Black Sea Advisory Council played a key role in correcting the omission of the fisheries sector from Romania's National Maritime Spatial Plan, which initially erroneously stated that no fishing activities took place in the Black Sea. The BISAC issued recommendations on genuine involvement of fishers, the organization of information sessions, cooperation with other sectors, and the assessment of the impact of offshore wind farms, highlighting the risks associated with placing them in fishing areas. As a result, the chapter dedicated to fisheries was updated with relevant data and maps, and fishing was officially recognized as an essential activity through Government Emergency Ordinance no. 97/2023, an example of participatory governance.

**CCRUP**

Taking into account their various recommendations n°. 37 and n°44, on the Review of Criteria relating to the Fleet's State and the Fleet Renewal in the Outermost Regions, the European Union exceptionally authorised the renewal of several vessels in the Outermost Regions (ORs), namely: 6 in La Réunion, 22 in Martinique and 23 in Guadeloupe, including a one-off scheme for the renewal of 25 vessels in French Guyane. For the Portuguese ORs (Azores and Madeira) and the Spanish OR (Canary Islands), funding access programmes are also open and in the communication COM(2024) 223, on "Guidelines for the analysis of the balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities for fleet segments consisting of vessels of less than 12 metres in length in the outermost regions (...)", the European Commission acknowledged that the special characteristics and limitations of the ORs, often make it impossible to carry out an assessment according to the criteria established for the annual report, thus determining alternative methods for interested Member States to apply, in order to prepare balance indicators for fleets under 12 metres.

**LDAC**

Since its creation, one of the main topics of work for the LDAC has been the fight against illegal, unregulated and undeclared (IUU) fishing to support the "zero tolerance approach" adopted by the European Commission. Over the years, significant trust has been built between members both from fishing

sector and environmental NGOs grouped around the IUU Fishing Coalition (EJF, OCEANA, Pew and WWF). As a result, the LDAC has issued in the last 10 years more than 15 pieces of advice on this topic covering different topics such as recommendations for enhancing the implementation of the IUU Regulation in relation to Catch Documentation Scheme and the carding system; request for harmonised control of imports from third countries into the EU market across EU MS; or Monitoring Control Surveillance (MCS) considerations to be included in the EU mandate for negotiations at SFPAs and RFMO Annual Meetings (e.g. high seas board inspection scheme, regional observer programmes, prohibition for driftnets...) such as NAFO, ICCAT or IOTC. In terms of data gathering, the LDAC has used evidence and reports from a wide range of sources such as European institutions and bodies (EC, EP, ECA), international control and police authorities (EFCA, Interpol), investigative journalists (Urbina et al.), researchers (PlanetTracker), or national administrations ("Sparrow" macro-operation in Spain).

#### **MAC**

Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, there was a very high degree of uncertainty concerning the impact on the fisheries and aquaculture supply chain. To address the uncertainty, weekly informal online meetings were established between the Management Team of the MAC (Chair, Vice-Chairs, Chairs of Working Groups) and the Markets Unit of DG MARE, allowing for the transmission of information from the stakeholders, for example on price increases, decrease in production activities, restrictions in outlets, changes in consumer behaviour, and lack of public support. The information was collected by the Secretariat from all the members of the Advisory Council. The Commission officials would share data from the official observatory as well as information on planned emergency measures. Eventually, the MAC adopted formal advice to the European Commission and to the Member States summarising the problems faced by the supply chain and recommending several market, funding, and environmental and social initiatives. The measures informally and formally suggested to the European Commission were generally implemented, including the possibility of financial support for the entire supply chain in crises situations.

#### **MEDAC**

The MEDAC adopted advice on invasive species and algae (Ref.:238/2020) already called for an Alien Species Observatory "1. Constituting and developing an international coordination centre and a Mediterranean warning network to detect, monitor and manage invasions. The centre should be based or have monitoring centres close to the entry points of invasive species, such as Strait of Gibraltar or the Suez Canal" and it has been included in the GFCM Scientific Advisory Committee Report 2022 "Monitoring programmes [...] - Continue supporting key regional activities including: [...]; monitoring NIS across the Mediterranean, including through the establishment of the Observatory". In the 47th Session of the GFCM (2024) "The Commission endorsed the final version of the concept note for the pilot study on non-indigenous species (NIS) in the eastern Mediterranean, [...]. The Commission also endorsed the guiding document for the establishment of a Mediterranean observatory on non-indigenous species, including insights for its operationalization. The

Commission noted the importance of these activities in supporting NIS management and an assessment of potential related opportunities.”

#### **NSAC**

In 2023, the NSAC issued advice on the need to involve stakeholders in the formulation of ICES advice requests - the only remaining stage in advice production, where systematic stakeholder engagement has not yet been formalized. This led to a joint-AC motion to involve stakeholders in this critical stage of advice request formulation, where the Commission poses questions to be answered by ICES in the form of a scientific advice. The Commission's response was extremely positive, with the first coordination meeting between DG MARE and ACs held in 2024 followed by the first formal stakeholder meeting in December last year and a debrief from a meeting with ICES advice requesters (MIRIA) in January 2025. The aim of these meetings was to exchange with DG MARE on research topics identified by the Advisory Councils and discuss avenues for stakeholder input to non-recurrent advice, as a starting point. This is seen as a critical step in introduction of ecosystem variables in the framework of ecosystem-based fisheries management, the operationalisation of which has been slow in the EU context.

#### **NWWAC**

One example of how the work of the NWWAC has influenced relevant fisheries and environmental policies is the recent mention in the Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the Communication “Towards more sustainable fishing in the EU: state of play and orientations for 2023”. The NWWAC developed advice on energy-efficient technologies used by new engines for fishing vessels, which led to modification of the final Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/46 of 13 January 2022 implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 as regards the identification of energy-efficient technologies and the specification of methodology elements to determine the normal fishing effort of fishing vessels, and the addition of a reference to internal combustion and fuel cell hybrid in the final text of the implementing act. This advice was also supported by CC SUD, MEDAC, NSAC and CCRUP.

#### **PelAC**

In 2011, the PelAC, following the development of targeted boarfish fisheries, the start of scientific data collection and work from the EU pelagic industry, requested that Boarfish be included in the PelAC remit. The first PelAC LTMS was drafted in 2012 and sent to ICES. It was considered precautionary and was used by ICES to provide advice on the stock. Boarfish was officially included in the PelAC remit in the 2013 reform of the CFP.

Over the past 10 years the PelAC has updated its management plan, suggested closures to avoid bycatches in boarfish fisheries, provided recommendations on ICES advice. The PelAC's work on boarfish was rewarded in 2024 with a benchmark and the stock moving from a category 3 stock to a category 1 stock. The PelAC will be working on drafting a long-term management strategy for boarfish.

### 3. Panel discussion on AC's Success Stories & the Role of ACs in Supporting the Implementation of the Ocean Pact

A panel of speakers explored the success stories achieved over 20 years of ACs work. The panel featured **Alexandra Philippe** (NWWAC Chair), **Merel den Held** (PelAC Vice Chair), **Yobana Bermúdez** (MAC Chair), **Antonis Petrou** (MEDAC Coordinator FG East Med), and **Stylianos Mitolidis** (DG MARE).

The panel was asked: “After hearing these inspiring stories, what do you believe is the key to the success of the Advisory Councils?”

**Alexandra Philippe** highlighted the importance of gradual, collaborative progress which may not always be immediately visible or easy to understand from the outside. The AC Secretariats themselves represent a key part of these successes. She emphasized that one of the main achievements of the ACs is their ability to foster compromise among stakeholders from diverse backgrounds and nationalities, a reflection of the EU's principle of “unity in diversity” at a more local and sector-specific level. Another accomplishment is the integration of broader issues, such as climate change, biodiversity, and ecosystem-based management, into fisheries governance, which were traditionally treated separately.

**Merel den Held** emphasised the importance of consensus-building, noting that while industry and OIG representatives advocate for their respective positions, the PelAC seeks to provide a forum for finding common ground. She referred to recent discussions on a zero-TAC stock, where members ultimately agreed to request that the Commission ensure continued data collection for scientific purposes, maintaining a category 1 assessment for the stock while balancing conservation concerns with the need for informed advice. She also highlighted the value of informal interactions outside formal meetings, such as coffee breaks, dinners, or fish auction visits, as key opportunities to build trust and foster collaboration among members who might not otherwise engage directly. Finally, she noted that being able to build on science is also another key aspect making the ACs successful, as it increases their credibility.

**Yobana Bermúdez** thanked the organisers, the European Commission, and the ACs for enabling this networking opportunity, which is vital for the future of ocean governance. She highlighted that the success of ACs lies in their inclusive and transparent structure, allowing active participation from a broad range of stakeholders. In the case of the MAC, its membership spans the entire fisheries and aquaculture supply chain, from primary producers to retailers, processors, unions, other interest groups, and consumers across the EU. She stressed the importance of experienced Chairs and the crucial role of Secretariats in setting relevant priorities and building consensus. Strong cooperation with the European Commission is also a key success factor and particularly the value added when Commission representatives actively engage in AC meetings and discussions.

**Antonis Petrou** underlined that behind every policy, directive, or piece of advice from the ACs there are real people whose lives are directly impacted. One of the core strengths of the ACs, he noted, is that all fisheries organisations, regardless of size, have a voice and can influence advice by consensus. This inclusivity fosters dialogue between diverse groups, such as producer organisations and NGOs, helping to narrow gaps and reduce conflict. He stressed

the importance of small-scale fishers being able to engage with peers from other Member States, including larger fishing nations. Despite differences in scale, the concerns are often shared. Knowing that these concerns are being heard at higher levels brings confidence and reduces uncertainty for smaller operators. Petrou concluded by underlining the value of the ACs in connecting grassroots realities to EU-level decision-making. He praised the EU for enabling this genuine bottom-up approach, which ensures that even the smallest fishers have a seat at the table and their voices are considered in shaping fisheries policy.

Following, a question was addressed to the Commission: *“Over the past 20 years, Advisory Councils have played a role in shaping EU fisheries, aquaculture, and supply chain policy. From the Commission’s perspective, how have the ACs fulfilled the aims and objectives set out in the CFP Regulation, and what are the key expectations and challenges for the future?”*

**Stylianos Mitolidis** thanked the organisers and emphasised the value of the European Maritime Day (EMD) as a platform for bringing together the diverse actors of the blue economy. He welcomed the recent inclusion of dedicated AC workshops in the EMD, calling it an important step toward greater stakeholder engagement. He stressed that policymaking is inherently complex and cannot succeed without stakeholder input. The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) was never intended as a top-down approach; rather, it aimed to ensure broad participation. This is why the Advisory Councils were established in the 2003 reform and later formalised in the 2013 CFP regulation: to provide structured and representative advice to both the Commission and Member States. Mitolidis highlighted the importance of the ACs' 60/40 balanced structure, which ensures that both industry and other groups of interest are heard. He noted that the ACs have produced valuable input over the years. There are clear success stories demonstrating the importance of involving both civil society and sectoral actors in policy development. He also acknowledged the ongoing evaluation of the CFP Regulation and expressed appreciation for the contributions submitted by the ACs.

Looking forward, he underlined the need to strengthen dialogue within the ACs, fostering a culture of constructive debate and mutual respect, even when views differ, including with the Commission. Finally, he stressed that ACs should continue to play a key role in providing evidence-based advice to support EU policy amidst growing geopolitical, environmental, and socioeconomic challenges. Their continued motivation and engagement are essential for shaping future fisheries governance.

Following, the panellists were invited to reflect on the role of Advisory Councils in implementing the upcoming EU Ocean Pact. As outlined by President von der Leyen and reiterated in the mission letter of Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans Costas Kadić, the EU Ocean Pact is a key Commission priority. Highlighted during the opening of the European Maritime Day, the Pact aims to deliver a coherent and holistic approach across all maritime policy areas, guided by a set of strategic objectives.

Question to the panellists: *In your view, what is the top priority that should be addressed in the EU Ocean Pact?*

**Alexandra Philippe** noted that one of the key priorities should be ensuring inclusive and integrated governance, where all ecosystem services, such as energy and food, are fully considered. It is essential that the Ocean Pact acknowledges the social dimension and

includes fisheries as part of the solution. Fisheries are crucial for European food security, coastal resilience, and the production of low-carbon protein. Therefore, the Pact should explicitly recognise the cultural, economic, social, and nutritional value of aquatic food production and fisheries more broadly. Another priority is to use the Ocean Pact as an opportunity to bridge the gap between conservation and sustainable use, particularly in fisheries management. Competitiveness and ecosystem conservation should not be seen as opposing goals, but rather as complementary ones. She concluded that all ACs are all looking forward to seeing how the Ocean Pact will be implemented and are ready to actively contribute to its success.

**Merel den Held** stressed that oceans are under increasing pressure from climate change, pollution, overfishing, IUU fishing, biodiversity loss, habitat degradation, and growing competition for marine space and resources. She emphasised that the European Ocean Pact must serve as a single, coherent framework for all EU ocean-related policies and act as a catalyst to unite all blue economy sectors. The overarching goal should be to collectively advance marine conservation, ecosystem resilience, sustainable resource management, and food security. She highlighted the importance of breaking down silos between sectors. Establishing a collaborative decision-making platform under the umbrella of maritime spatial planning would facilitate cross-sector dialogue and coordination. Den Held pointed to ACs as a strong model of inclusive, evidence-based stakeholder engagement, an approach that should also be applied to Commission expert groups. She concluded that the top priority of the Ocean Pact must be to establish robust, inclusive coordination mechanisms across all ocean sectors to ensure that conservation, resilience, and sustainability are achieved in a balanced and enduring way.

**Yobana Bermúdez** emphasised that the Ocean Pact should take a global and market-oriented perspective, incorporating all relevant actors, from fishers, aquaculture farmers, producers, and processors to traders, retailers, consumers, and other interest groups. She stressed that the Pact must aim for an ideal balance among the three pillars of sustainability while ensuring the sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources and the continued growth of sustainable aquaculture. She underlined the importance of addressing the FAO's concerns about rising hunger and malnutrition at the global level. Biodiversity conservation must be paired with sustainable utilisation, and the Pact must also ensure a level playing field across markets to support fair and responsible competition.

**Antonis Petrou** highlighted that, beyond theoretical considerations, several key elements are still missing from current marine policies. First, he stressed the need for a genuinely holistic approach, one that accounts for all economic activities linked to the sea, the use of marine resources and spaces, the impacts and interactions between sectors, and the ecological restoration and conservation measures necessary to support them. Second, he echoed previous speakers in emphasising the importance of fully integrating the three pillars of sustainability without forcing a hierarchy among them. Supporting coastal communities must involve not only ecosystem health but also local economic growth and access to essential services that make life in these regions viable. Third, Petrou underscored the need for an ecosystem-based scientific approach. This includes the capacity to assess environmental transformations, identify their causes and project future developments, factoring in changes to physical and chemical parameters and their ecological consequences at multiple levels.

He also called for the development of multiannual fisheries management plans tailored to each Mediterranean GSA. These plans should include specific measures that guarantee both environmental and socioeconomic sustainability, ensuring food production, business viability, employment, stock renewability, and biodiversity protection. Co-management practices could play a central role in this framework.

**Petrou** concluded by noting that, to date, marine policy continues to focus narrowly on a few sectors (such as fisheries) and relies on scientific assessments that remain overly limited, often focused on individual stocks without accounting for broader environmental changes.

#### 4. Q&A with the audience & Slido exercise

The floor was then opened to questions from the audience, with moderation by Paul Thomas (PelAC).

**Nathalie Steins** (Wageningen Marine Research) raised a question on the 40/60% stakeholder balance in the Advisory Councils, noting that many ACs struggle particularly with ensuring adequate representation of the Other Interest Groups. She asked what the best way forward would be in addressing this challenge, especially given the shared ambition for balanced representation and collaborative work.

**Philippe** welcomed the question, noting that it touches on a widely shared concern. She acknowledged that achieving the 60/40 balance remains a challenge, especially in an increasingly polarised context. However, she emphasised that the value of the ACs lies in producing compromise-based advice, which the Commission is more likely to consider seriously. While some stakeholders may find more appeal in campaigning, the ACs offer a unique platform for collective decision-making, even if it's not always the most high-profile route. As the first AC Chair appointed from the OIG college, Philippe underlined the importance of broadening participation. She noted that topics beyond traditional fisheries management, such as marine spatial planning or ecosystem-based approaches, might attract wider interest and help diversify representation. She encouraged others to promote the ACs' work and bring in new voices.

**Bermúdez** added that, in her view, the quality of stakeholder engagement matters more than quantity. Mobilising and supporting diverse groups requires significant resources, and the interest in participating in ACs is growing, thanks in part to the collaborative efforts with the Commission and the tangible results being delivered.

**Petrou** acknowledged the difficulty in achieving perfect balance but pointed out that certain cross-cutting issues, such as invasive species, are able to unite stakeholders across sectors. Using the example of non-indigenous species in the Eastern Mediterranean, he noted that both conservationists and fishers recognise the threat and often align on solutions, such as encouraging targeted fishing to control populations. This kind of issue-based collaboration, driven by shared challenges, will only grow in relevance, especially with the increasing impacts of climate change.



A member of the CCSUD raised a question regarding coordination across Advisory Councils, noting that there are recurring topics common to all ACs (i.e. Fishers of the Future), and asked whether an interactive structure could be established to manage such cross-cutting issues more effectively.

**Mitolidis** responded by cautioning against creating yet another formal structure, suggesting it would likely add complexity without offering real added value. Instead, he pointed to the existing Inter-AC meetings, held every six months, as a valuable and evolving platform for cooperation. He noted that these meetings have grown in importance over the past five years, with strong Commission support. He referred to the past April Inter-AC meeting, where new formats for discussion were piloted, and suggested further exploration of informal cooperation mechanisms. Additionally, topic-specific events involving all ACs and the Commission, such as the recent joint session on the Control Regulation, could be replicated when there is shared interest. This flexible, ad hoc approach, he argued, is more effective than building new bureaucratic layers that would require additional funding.

**Mo Mathies** (NWWAC) added that collaboration already happens regularly when ACs share interest in a topic. She recalled examples such as:

- The joint workshop on Control, which included all ACs
- A [joint advice on the Blue Economy](#) produced by all 11 ACs in 2020/2021

She reminded participants that the CFP mandates joint work between ACs on shared issues, and upcoming examples include a meeting on the Energy Transition Partnership. However, she stressed that such collaboration is member-driven: “If you want this to happen, you have to ask us, and we will make it happen.”

**Petrou** added that one of the topics warranting coordinated work across ACs is the rejuvenation of the fishing fleet, highlighting it as a priority that would benefit from joint efforts.

In addition to the Q&A, audience engagement was further encouraged through a **live Slido survey**. First, participants were asked to describe in one word the contributions made by the Advisory Councils to the implementation of the CFP over the past 20 years. The most recurring responses highlighted “vital consensus,” “engagement,” “collaboration,” and “dialogue”, with “collaboration” also standing out.

Next, the audience was asked to vote on what they saw as the key priority to be achieved under the Ocean Pact, choosing from three options:

1. Pursue a healthy and productive ocean by implementing relevant EU legislation and championing the EU’s international ocean governance agenda;
2. Boost a competitive, resilient, and sustainable EU blue economy, including fisheries;
3. Consolidate, simplify, and extend the EU’s marine knowledge framework.

The second option, focusing on strengthening the blue economy, received the highest support, followed by the third option.

Figures 1 and 2 show the result of the two exercises more in details.

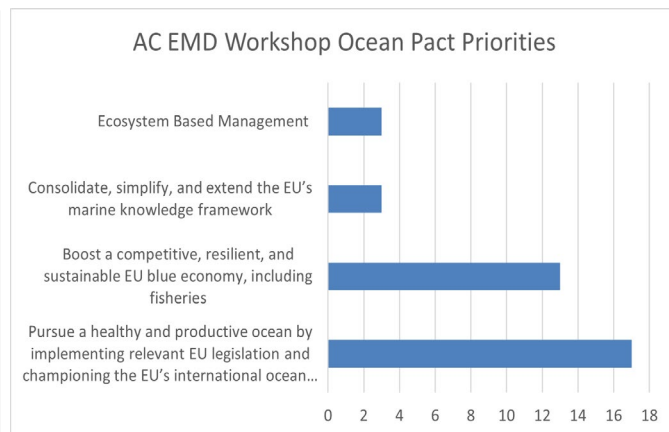


Figure 1: Word cloud of participants one word description of AC's contribution to the implementation of the CFP over the past 20 years. Figure 2: Participants preferences on priorities to be achieved over the past 20 years.

## 5. Conclusion

To conclude the workshop, **Mathies** took the floor to share final reflections. She began by acknowledging that, due to time constraints, the interactive breakout sessions had to be omitted from the programme.

She highlighted the breadth and diversity of topics addressed by the ACs, noting that their work extends well beyond TACs and quotas or fisheries management measures. Increasingly, environmental aspects have become central to the ACs' agendas, with issues such as climate change, pollution, and non-indigenous species taking priority. She emphasised that while some topics are region-specific, many are cross-cutting and relevant across basins. Mathies encouraged participants to explore the various Advisory Councils' websites, noting that many operate in multiple languages (i.e., NWWAC in English, French, and Spanish, and MEDAC offering at least six languages) demonstrating their commitment to inclusivity and transparency. All advice produced by the ACs, along with the Commission's responses, is publicly available online

She called on civil society organisations and individuals interested in fisheries management to engage with their relevant Advisory Council and consider becoming a member. Mathies underlined the ACs' role as EU-wide, legally established entities that play a significant role in informing policy, acting as knowledge brokers and trusted contributors in shaping the future of European fisheries and aquaculture policy.

In closing, she thanked all participants for their engagement and patience, reiterating the importance of the discussions held and expressing hope for even more interactive collaboration in future sessions.