



MINUTES

37th Meeting of LDAC Working Group 2 Atlantic and Pacific RFMOs and Access Arrangements

Wednesday, 11 March 2026 – 09:00-13:00h CET / GMT+1
Venue: Hotel Martin's EU Brussels, Bvd. Charlemagne 80, 1000 Brussels

Chair: Emil Remisz / Vice Chair: Tim Heddema

1. Welcome by the Chair.

The WG2 Chair, Emil Remisz, welcomed members, observers and representatives of DG MARE to the meeting.

2. Adoption of the Minutes from previous Meeting (Brussels, 15 October 2025).

DECISION: The minutes of the previous WG2 meeting were adopted without comments or amendments.

3. Adoption of the Agenda.

The agenda was adopted with the following change: to move agenda item 9 on Greenland halibut and discuss it together with item 6 on bilateral and trilateral dialogues with North East Atlantic third countries.

4. North West Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (NAFO).

4.1. NAFO Ecosystem Working Group: protection of deep-sea ecosystems and designation of VMEs

Mar Sacau and Pablo Durán (IEO-CSIC) presented NAFO work on the ecosystem approach, focusing on the NAFO Roadmap and Ecosystem Summary Sheets (ESS), the designation of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs), impacts from bottom fishing and interactions with human economic activities other than fishing.

The NAFO ecosystem framework combines a three-tier approach: Tier 1 on productivity-state assessment, including the Total Catch Index (2TCI) as an ecosystem reference point; Tier 2 on a multispecies assessment; Tier 3 on stock assessment. The ESS are updated periodically, with interim monitoring intended to identify significant ecological changes. A visualization beta web app is expected to be finalized and available to managers for testing and feedback at the 2026 NAFO Annual Meeting.

On VMEs, the presenters recalled the framework stemming from UN General Assembly Resolution 61/105 and the use of scientific seabed mapping and indicator taxa such as corals, gorgonians and sponges. They reminded in this sense that the EU scientific and research surveys constitute an important source of VME data in the NAFO Regulatory Area. With relation to Significant Adverse Impact assessments following the FAO Deep-sea Fisheries Guidelines, they clarified that are carried out on a five-year cycle and that work towards the next assessment is expected for 2027. The current VME closures remain in force until the end of 2026, while the Scientific Council/WGESA is reviewing VME distribution models and the system of closures and indicator elements for the consideration of the Commission at the Annual Meeting.

Mr. Durán also described some IEO-CSIC led work under projects including ATLAS, NEREIDA and BATISCAFO to map interactions between fisheries, offshore oil and gas, submarine cables, shipping, research activity, seabed litter and protected areas. The Northwest Atlantic was presented as a useful case study of overlapping human pressures and different regulatory jurisdictions.

Questions and comments from the floor

WG2 members noted that ecosystem-based management should consider non-fishing pressures alongside fisheries impacts and raised questions on climate change, links with ICES Ecosystem Overviews, the relationship between 2TCI and MSY, the move-on rule when encountering corals or sponges, the possible revision of VME closures and the effects of other marine infrastructures such as oil and gas platforms in the marine environment.

In response, Ms. Sacau clarified that 2TCI is the Total Catch Index adopted by NAFO as a reference point to assess ecosystem overfishing. She reiterated the importance of EU scientific surveys for VME information and noted that the review scheduled for completion in 2027 would cover closures and VME indicator elements, including seamounts.

Mr. Durán explained that work on other pressures is constrained by available data and funding, although monitoring of contaminants in fish is continuing where possible.

WG2 members welcomed the presentation as highly relevant for preparation of LDAC advice for the 48th NAFO Annual Meeting and highlighted the potential relevance of BBNJ environmental impact assessment provisions to intersectoral pressures in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

ACTION: Use the IEO-CSIC presentation and discussion as background information and valuable input to inform the drafting of LDAC advice in preparation for the 48th NAFO Annual Meeting (Vilnius, September 2026).

5. North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC).

5.1–5.3. Debriefing of the 44th Annual Meeting, EC feedback to LDAC advice and forthcoming work

Xosé Tubío (DG MARE) reported on the outcomes of the 44th NEAFC Annual Meeting. He also informed members that the Commission reply to the LDAC advice for the 2025 Annual Meeting had been transmitted to the Secretariat that day, apologising for the delay.

Among positive developments, the 2023 compliance report was finally adopted. NEAFC also requested the Russian Federation to provide fisheries data that had not been transmitted to ICES since 2022; the data were subsequently sent to the Secretariat and forwarded to PECMAS representatives for examination. The Commission also highlighted the adoption of a timetable and Terms of Reference for the NEAFC Performance Review to be conducted during 2026.

On pelagic redfish, DG MARE referred to measures addressing fishing levels considered unsustainable, including port-related restrictions introduced by Iceland and the United Kingdom. On mackerel, the EU recommendation based on ICES advice was not endorsed and subsequent arrangements among other parties complicated the management situation. For blue whiting, neither of the proposals tabled obtained agreement.

Monitoring, control and surveillance remained a major concern. The EU had sought stronger control of transshipments at sea, in particular in light of transshipment patterns by large-scale Russian fleet, including operations in Moroccan waters. The proposal did not obtain sufficient support beyond the United Kingdom. Members were also informed of changes to procedures concerning provisional IUU listing; the EU had argued for retaining the existing route in parallel with the new PECMAS procedure in order to avoid weakening the system.

Looking ahead, DG MARE intends to continue close coordination with EU Member States and stakeholders before PECMAS and other NEAFC meetings. Expected topics include the delayed five-year review of the VME recommendation, ecosystem-based fisheries management, management strategy evaluations, future development of NEAFC/PECMAS, the role of NEAFC in the BBNJ framework, observer participation, transshipment controls and the recruitment of a new NEAFC Secretary.

In the discussion, members asked about the scale of Russian transshipments in Moroccan waters, possible use of the EU framework addressing unsustainable fishing, and reports concerning EU nationals linked to transshipment activity. DG MARE indicated that these matters involved distinct legal dimensions—fight against illegal fishing, unsustainable fishing and enforcement of EU sanctions—and were being examined by the relevant Commission services. The Commission estimated that, under the new pattern observed in 2025, a significant part of Russian blue whiting catches taken west of Ireland had been transhipped in Moroccan waters or ports.

Members also called for closer integration between Coastal States consultations and NEAFC as RFMO, particularly for small pelagic stocks, noting the limited transparency of the former process and the difficulty of incorporating ecosystem considerations.

6. Bilateral and trilateral dialogues between the EU and North East Atlantic third countries.

6.1. Norway and access to the Svalbard Fisheries Protection Zone; Greenland halibut

DG MARE provided an update on Arctic cod in the Svalbard Fisheries Protection Zone (FPZ), including the 2026 TAC and the ongoing discussion on EU fishing opportunities. The Commission distinguished the setting of the 2026 TAC from the separate issue of quantities withdrawn from the EU since 2021 and indicated that work was continuing on the appropriate way forward.

As agreed under item 3, the WG2 Chair presented under this point the issue originally listed as agenda item 9: the lack of EU fishing rights for Greenland halibut in ICES areas I and II despite the EU fleet's historical track record. Mr Remisz outlined his view of how the quota allocation should be calculated in the Svalbard FPZ and compared the methodology with that used for cod. DG MARE confirmed awareness of the calculations but noted that the terms and management context were different. At present, discussions with Norway were focused on Arctic cod rather than Greenland halibut.

ACTION: Share the Chair's presentation on Greenland halibut with DG MARE for further consideration and consider using it as a basis to develop a dedicated LDAC advice on this subject.

6.2. United Kingdom, Faroe Islands and Iceland

For the Faroe Islands, DG MARE reported that no bilateral fisheries-agreement discussions were ongoing; relations were mainly taking place in the context of NEAFC Coastal States consultations.

With Iceland, engagement on a possible bilateral fisheries arrangement had not yet resulted in agreement, but high level dialogue continued. The broader relationship is also being developed under the Memorandum of Understanding signed in July 2025, with a stock-taking exercise on its implementation planned for April 2026.

Regarding the United Kingdom, DG MARE referred to intensive work on rebuilding depleted stocks in the Celtic Sea and Channel and to technical measures agreed during consultations concluded in December 2025.

6.3. Greenland

Sara Perucho (DG MARE) updated members on the EU–Greenland Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement. The current protocol covers 2025–2030 and is implemented through two Joint Committee meetings each year: one in November, notably to adjust fishing opportunities to scientific advice, and another in May/June dealing inter alia with sectoral support. Twelve stocks are covered by the protocol, with four EU Member States and ten vessels active in Greenlandic waters.

In response to a question on quota exchanges, DG MARE explained that some fishing opportunities obtained under the Greenland agreement, including cod, Greenland halibut and grenadier, may be transferred in exchanges with Norway. The agreement also permits exchanges with Iceland, although no such arrangement was in place at the time of the meeting.

7. Update on Pacific RFMOs.

7.1. South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO) – COMM14

Ms Fiona Hartford (DG MARE) debriefed members on the 14th SPRFMO Commission meeting held in Panama on 2–6 March 2026, which she characterised as productive overall for the EU.

For jack mackerel, the conservation measure was renewed by consensus. A TAC of 1,531,000 tonnes was agreed following difficult discussions. The increase was above the level indicated by the harvest control rule/scientific advice but below the increase advocated by Chile. The measure also introduced the possibility for each member to carry forward up to 15,000 tonnes of unused quota; the EU quota for 2026 was reported as 100,000 tonnes. Work on the management strategy evaluation continued, although further technical and procedural discussions remained necessary.

For jumbo flying squid, several proposals were discussed, including capacity limits and proposals for buffer zones close to the EEZs of Ecuador, Peru and Chile. The EU also tabled an information paper aimed at developing links between SPRFMO and the BBNJ process.

Members questioned new SPRFMO observer guidelines, particularly their confidentiality requirements. DG MARE explained that the guidelines had been developed by the SPRFMO Secretariat and that, at the EU's request, they were placed before the Commission for open discussion. The Commission considered that guidance for observers could be useful but that an appropriate balance was needed between confidentiality and transparency. Members were also informed that two proposals on bottom fishing had not been adopted, leaving the status quo in place, while a proposal concerning crew data standards was adopted.

7.2. North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC)

The agenda foresaw a briefing on DG MARE priorities for the NPFC annual meeting but MARE replied that they were not available to provide an update at this stage.

ACTION: The LDAC will invite MARE to provide a summary at next WG2 meeting in October 2026.

8. Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) between the EU and UK.

The Executive Secretary provided an oral report on the Inter-AC Brexit Forum of 21 October 2025, reminding the members the confidential nature of the deliberations and views exchanged at these meetings. He encourage those interested members to inform the Secretary of their willingness to attend future meetings.

9. Greenland Halibut (areas I and II).

This item was moved and discussed under item 6.1 together with the bilateral dialogue with Norway and access to the Svalbard FPZ.

10. Update on NEAFC Coastal States negotiations.

10.1. Briefing by DG MARE

Pawel Swiderek (DG MARE) presented the state of play of Coastal States consultations, describing an increasingly complex setting for the management of shared pelagic stocks.

For mackerel, the EU chaired intensive consultations but major differences remained unresolved, including the 2025 TAC overshoot and quota-sharing arrangements. DG MARE reiterated the EU objective of a comprehensive six-party arrangement and expressed concern that existing partial arrangements between some Coastal States did not provide adequate space for the EU's established share. The scale of Russian fishing levels was also identified as a major factor affecting rebuilding prospects.

For blue whiting, consultations were also chaired by the EU but remained blocked. DG MARE referred to the position of the Faroe Islands and the difficulty of reaching fishing levels consistent with scientific advice while a substantial reserve/allocation for the Russian Federation remained in the system.

For Atlanto-Scandian herring, DG MARE expressed concern that the EU was able to intervene in consultations but was not treated as a full participant in the same way as other parties. Particular concern was raised about a request to ICES for an MSE submitted by five parties without incorporating the EU contribution prepared with Member State scientists and including ecosystem-based fisheries management considerations.

WG2 members questioned whether stronger measures were being considered and highlighted the EU market's importance for mackerel. DG MARE did not speculate on future measures but acknowledged the structural difficulty created by the absence of agreed sharing rules and by fishing levels above scientific advice. Members also asked how socio-economic considerations are taken into account when applying ICES headline advice and whether unilateral EU TAC-setting could be contemplated in the absence of a comprehensive sharing arrangement.

10.2. Assessment of the current situation in the EU pelagic sector

Tim Heddema presented the industry assessment. He welcomed the existence of new access arrangements for Atlanto-Scandian herring and blue whiting under EU–Norway bilateral dialogue but considered the level of access insufficient compared with previous years. Industry called either for full access or for restoration of quota shares to levels reflecting the historical arrangements.



On mackerel, Mr. Heddema stressed the need to combine stock rebuilding with a level playing field among EU and non-EU fleets to ensure socio-economic sustainability. He questioned aspects of the scientific scenarios underpinning the ICES headline advice and argued that alternative rebuilding pathways should be examined where they produce similar biomass outcomes over a longer period. He also referred to efforts outside the formal negotiations, including the Ocean Stewardship Initiative, to bring together science, diplomacy, international ocean governance and stakeholder perspectives.

Several WG2 members stressed the need to protect and rebuild the stock while defending the EU fleet's track record and expressed concern about Russian fishing and transshipment activity and the EU's relationship with Norway. The Chair proposed that WG2 follow up these concerns directly with DG MARE.

ACTION: Prepare a letter to DG MARE on the situation of North-East Atlantic pelagic stocks and consider establishing a Focus Group to develop an LDAC position on this subject.

Closure of the Meeting

The Chair thanked participants for their contributions and closed the meeting at the end of the scheduled session.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

- **NAFO** – Use the IEO-CSIC presentation and discussion as input to LDAC advice for the 48th NAFO Annual Meeting in Vilnius in September 2026.
- **NPFC**: Invite MARE to provide a summary on state of play at next LDAC WG2 meeting in October 2026.
- **Greenland halibut / Svalbard FPZ** – Share the Chair's presentation on Greenland halibut with DG MARE and consider the possibility to use it as basis for developing a LDAC advice on this subject.
- **NEAFC Coastal States / management of pelagic stocks** – Prepare a letter to DG MARE and consider establishing a Focus Group to develop the LDAC position and follow-up on this topic.

END



ANNEX I. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

WORKING GROUP 2 MEMBERS

1. Emil Remisz. High Seas Fish Producers Organization – WG2 Chair
2. Tim Heddema. Dutch Fish Trawler Pelagic Association – WG2 Vice Chair.
3. Iván López. AGARBA/CEPESCA – LDAC Chair
4. Vanya Vulperhorst. OCEANA – LDAC First Vice Chair
5. Julien Daudu. EJF – LDAC WG5 Chair
6. Daniel Voces. EUROPÊCHE – LDAC WG5 Vice Chair
7. Ángela Cortina. Opana / OPP3/Agarba – LDAC WG4 Vice Chair
8. Aivaras Labanauskas. Lithuanian Long Distance Fisheries Association
9. Sergio López. OPP-BURELA
10. Juan Manuel Trujillo. European Transport Federation
11. Janne Posti. CONXEMAR
12. Francisco Fernández. OPROMAR/ANACEF
13. Hector Fernández. Bolton Food
14. Margot Angibaud. EUROPECHE
15. Iris Ziegler. Seas at Risk
16. Jean-Christophe Vandeveld. The Pew Charitable Trusts
17. Josephine Woronoff. The Pew Charitable Trusts
18. Despina Symons. European Bureau for Conservation and Development
19. Renee Heal. Deep Sea Conservation Coalition

REGISTERED OBSERVERS

20. Juan Acacio. Secretaría General de Pesca Marítima. Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries Spain.
21. Xose TUBIO. C1 Unit DG MARE
22. Fiona HARFORD. DG MARE
23. Thomas BREGEON. C5 Unit DG MARE.
24. Sara PERUCHO MARTINEZ. B3 Unit DG MARE
25. Pawel Swiderek. DG MARE
26. Camille Gallouze. DG MARE
27. Stephanie Czudaj. GIZ Germany
28. Yago Rosado. OCEANA
29. Mar Sacau. IEO-CSIC (Zoom)
30. Pablo Durán. IEO-CSIC (Zoom)
31. Isadora Moniz. Marine Stewardship Council.
32. Margarita Mancebo. SGP (Zoom)
33. Luis Belmonte. SGP (Zoom)

LDAC SECRETARIAT

34. Alexandre Rodríguez. Executive Secretary.
35. Manuela Iglesias. Policy and Communications.
36. Marta de Lucas. Administration and Finances.