



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels
MARE.C.3/AS

**Subject: Reply to the Joint NSAC-LDAC-PelAC-NWWC-SWWAC-BSAC
Advice on stakeholder engagement in ICES advice request formulation**

Dear Chairs and Members of the Advisory Councils,

Thank you for your letter of 30 October 2024 concerning the joint NSAC-LDAC-PelAC-NWWAC-SWWAC-BSAC advice on stakeholder engagement in ICES advice request formulation.

I particularly welcome your initiative, which aligns with DG MARE's objectives to strengthen stakeholders' engagement in implementing the Common Fisheries Policy, particularly in preparing scientific advice. As highlighted in the recent studies¹, effective stakeholders' participation is central to successfully implementing an ecosystem-based approach in fisheries management. You may recall that in 2022, DG MARE's annual scientific seminar focused on the ecosystem-based approach, concluding that active stakeholders' participation is crucial.

To strengthen this engagement, DG MARE has, since early 2024, consulted with Member States, Advisory Councils (ACs), and scientific institute heads to explore viable approaches. During these discussions, it was recognized that the process of requesting scientific advice from ICES and STECF is often time-sensitive, which may not allow for systematic consultation. Instead, it was suggested that stakeholders could be consulted early each year to provide input and feedback on the main scientific priorities, a concept reflected in your suggestions.

¹ "The implementation of ecosystem-based approaches applied to fisheries management under the CFP"; Contracts: 1) EASME/EMFF/2018/011 Specific Contract Lot 1 No.1; 2) 2ASME/EMFF/2018/011 Specific Contract Lot 2 No.3. and 3) EASME/2020/OP/0012.

Mr Ken Skau Fisher- Chairman North Sea AC, Mr Ivan López- Chairman Long Distance AC, Mr Esben Sverdrup-Jensen - Chairman Pelagic AC, Mr Emiel Brouckaert- Chairman North Western Waters AC ,Mr Sergio Lopez- Président du CC SUD,Mr Jarek Zieliński- Chair BSAC Executive Committee

I am pleased to confirm that DG MARE plans to organize a dedicated meeting between DG MARE and ACs early next year for this purpose. In preparation, we can share a list of recurrent and anticipated non-recurrent requests with ACs, as part of an “early signalling” advice requests process. This meeting should also provide an opportunity to discuss your draft principles for stakeholder engagement in advice request formulation, as you outlined in Annex I of your letter.

To streamline communication, we would kindly ask you to collectively designate a contact person for coordinating this exchange with DG MARE.

In response to your request for observer status for the ACs at the annual meeting between ICES and Requesters of ICES Advice (MIRIA) or a MIRIA debrief, I am pleased to confirm that DG MARE will organize a MIRIA debrief for stakeholders attending the annual meeting between ICES, Advisory Councils and other Observers (MIACO) in Copenhagen. We will send an invitation once the timing and venue are confirmed.

As for your proposal to have a joint (half-day) meeting between MIRIA and MIACO members in Copenhagen to present and discuss research priorities and get a common understanding of the timeline of request priorities for the year ahead, I would like to emphasise that this request would need to be decided at ICES level. As you know, MIACO is an inclusive annual meeting involving observers from third countries, and any changes to the structure would require consensus among all MIRIA and MIACO participants.

Regarding your request to consider and discuss the potential necessity for amending the Commission’s Terms of Reference for scientific requests to ICES, it is unclear which specific document you are referring to. DG MARE uses an internal manual for requesting scientific advice, aimed at informing policy units of the options available for soliciting advice. While we agree that stakeholder consultation could be included in this manual, it will need to be flexible enough to manage the timing demands of these requests efficiently. We believe that the suggested annual early-year consultation meeting would be a more practical approach to achieving this goal.

I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Ms Agnieszka Sadowska, Policy Officer in the scientific advice unit at: agnieszka.sadowska@ec.europa.eu or Ms Julia Rubeck, our ACs coordinator, via the functional mailbox MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu.

Yours sincerely,

Charlina VITCHEVA