



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,  
MARE/C1/

Dear Mr López,

Thank you for your letter of 16 October <sup>(1)</sup> containing the Long-Distance Advisory Council's (LDAC) advice in view of the 44<sup>th</sup> NEAFC Annual Meeting which took place on 11-14 November. I would like to summarise the most relevant developments related to your recommendations. As usual, the Annual Meeting report and related documents are published on the NEAFC website <sup>(2)</sup>.

We share LDAC's concerns about the management of the three large pelagic stocks in the North East Atlantic (mackerel, blue whiting and Atlanto-Scandian herring) and particularly regret that at the Annual Meeting other Parties refused to recommend setting the total allowable catch (TAC) for mackerel at the level advised by ICES. The disagreement between Parties in respect of the reserve for Russia in international waters prevented the adoption of a recommendation on blue whiting. The EU will, however, follow the TAC as endorsed by coastal States for this stock. Only the TAC for Atlanto-Scandian herring was endorsed by all Contracting Parties.

Discussions are ongoing at coastal States level on mackerel and blue whiting management with a formal round of consultations to reconvene in March. It is necessary to explore all options and willingness of other coastal States to achieve a comprehensive sharing arrangement. We take note of your strong recommendation on measures addressing non-sustainable fishing practices by non-EU countries. An amendment to the NEAFC Convention to provide for establishing procedures for the settlement of disputes was adopted in 2004. However, this amendment has not yet come into force as it has not been ratified by the Russian Federation.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Ares(2025)8874803

<sup>(2)</sup> [NEAFC Meetings | North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission](#)

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We appreciate your views on the added value of long-term management strategies (LTMS) and the need to take steps to implement Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM), also linked to your recommendations on climate change considerations for fisheries management. The EU has made extensive proposals for draft Management Strategy Evaluations for mackerel and Atlanto-Scandian herring, a first step to consider an LTMS for these stocks. These proposals included, among others, EAFM elements. We expect that these contributions will eventually be included in the final evaluation requests. Moreover, the EU continues to promote the implementation of EAFM, including in NEAFC, where it hosted a workshop on the matter on 7 October 2025. The progress on this topic for pelagic stocks is, however, very much dependent on other NEAFC Parties' work and efforts to accompany that of the EU. We also took note of the need to consider all human activities when implementing EAFM and not fishing in isolation, an aspect also linked to your remarks on deep-sea mining.

While our ambition for the performance review was higher, we can nevertheless inform you that the timeline proposed by the EU for the performance review was endorsed at the Annual Meeting. My services will establish a process to ensure that within the EU delegation there is consultation with stakeholders, and their input is considered for the performance review. On substance, we agree that the performance review must address the issue of the separate management of the pelagic species by an informal inter-Party forum (i.e. coastal States consultations), given that, as your letter rightly points out, the last NEAFC performance review already identified it as an issue and concluded that the management of the pelagic stocks should be integrated into a single forum.

In preparation of the 2025 Annual Meeting, my services met with stakeholders, both with industry and registered NEAFC observers (including NGOs). There have also been meetings in relation to other meetings over the course of the year such as PECMAS, Collective Arrangement and the Working Group on the Future Development of NEAFC as well as coastal States consultations. We nevertheless take note of LDAC's suggestion both for a separate technical meeting in preparation for the Annual Meeting and ahead of the relevant intersessional meetings such as PECMAS or Working Groups.

Regarding observer participation in NEAFC meetings, the LDAC recommendation included granting a longer NEAFC observer status rather than one year at a time; that more than two observers can participate in PECMAS meetings and that observer participation is also extended to the Permanent Committee on Monitoring and Compliance (PECMAC). The EU has been, and continues to be, a committed supporter of increased observer participation in NEAFC meetings (including in coastal States meetings). It has consistently taken the lead in this regard as it welcomes transparency as well as the additional input and viewpoints the increased observer participation entails. At the Annual Meeting, the EU tabled a proposal containing LDAC's recommendations which was endorsed and is now part of the NEAFC Rules of Procedures. We appreciate the acknowledgment of our efforts, including in the Chair's capacity, to promote transparency and participation of observers in Coastal States consultations.

We take note of LDAC's suggestion to request ICES to improve VME identification at NEAFC level and for this organisation to update the list of VME indicators based on the

ICES advice released in September 2024 as well as other recommendations in respect of spatial measures for conservation of habitats and species, including on MPAs and OECMs, the joint work by NEAFC-OSPAR and, further to its entry into force, the BBNJ Treaty. We will seek to progress several of those recommendations within NEAFC, although I am sure that LDAC is aware of the challenges and of the need to undertake some prior steps in certain cases. The review of Recommendation 19:2014 is overdue and should be finalised in 2026, including compliance, data indicating bottom fishing in restricted areas in the Barents Sea NEAFC Regulatory Area. Furthermore, ICES will conduct a benchmark on the VME advice process in 2027 (preceded by an ICES workshop in 2026 on VME index), which will influence the future NEAFC work on measures for the conservation of habitats and biodiversity.

I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Ms Julia Rubeck, our Advisory Councils coordinator, via the functional mailbox [MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu](mailto:MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu) or Mr Xosé Tubio, the EU Head of Delegation to NEAFC's Permanent Committee on Management and Science.

Yours sincerely,

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