

## **LDAC ADVICE TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

### **Recommendations for NAFO 48th Annual Meeting Vilnius (Lithuania), 21-25 September 2026**

**Date of adoption: 4 September 2026**

**R-04-Ej.20 (2026-2027)/WG2**

#### **BACKGROUND**

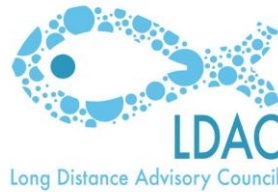
The meeting of the NAFO Scientific Council (SC) and its Standing Committees, held from the 29<sup>th</sup> of May to the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 2026, assessed the state of main commercial stocks in NAFO and, as a result, a table with recommendations for fishing opportunities for 2026 was presented (see table 1).

A delegation composed by the Long Distance Advisory Council (LDAC) Chair, several members of the LDAC WG2 representing both the concerned EU MS fleets with commercial interest in the fishery and environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the LDAC Executive Secretary all participated at a coordination meeting with the DG MARE lead negotiator and his team held virtually on 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 2026. A summary overview was given on the report of the Scientific Council and its advice for 2027 and beyond in relation to the main stocks for decision, as well as other conservation issues including ecosystem considerations.

At the meeting there was also a short reference made to the work of several NAFO Working Groups, including the ones on Ecosystem Science and Assessment (WG ESA), Ecosystem Approach Framework to Fisheries Management (WG EAFMM) and on Risk Based Management Strategies (WG RBMS) as well as a presentation on the work of the Working Group on Control and Compliance (STACTIC).

#### **AIM OF THE ADVICE**

Through the present advice, the LDAC would like to make several recommendations addressed to the negotiating team of DG MARE on behalf of the European Commission and the Fisheries Administrations of the Member States of the EU, based on the outcomes of the Scientific Council and relevant NAFO WGs. One of the key recommendations would be on the fishing opportunities for 2027 that will be decided at that meeting, together with other management and conservation measures which are of relevance of the commercial fisheries for the LDAC members (both EU fleet and other interest groups including environmental NGOs) in NAFO Regulatory Area (RA).



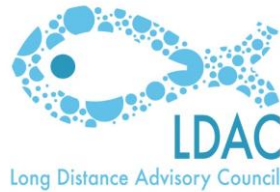
For comparative analysis purposes, below is a summary table containing TACs approved for 2025 and 2026, as well as the level of estimated catch in terms of quota consumption in the last full year closed, i.e. 2025. The catch values are the ones agreed at the Joint Commission-Scientific Council “Catch Estimation Strategy Advisory Group” (CESAG).

The catch estimates made by the CESAG combine catch from all species by DCR (daily catch reports transmitted by fishing vessels to NAFO) and port inspection reports for all stocks and countries, completing it with Canada’s catch data within its EEZ. Finally, this table also contains the recommended TAC made by the Scientific Council for 2027.

*Table 1. Estimated catch(t) for 2025 (CESAG), TACs adopted (t) for 2025 and 2026 and management recommendations for TAC for 2027 for main commercial stocks of NAFO Regulatory Area.*

| <b>Stock</b>                      | <b>Estimated Catch 2025 (t)</b> | <b>TAC 2025 (t)</b> | <b>TAC 2026 (t)</b> | <b>Recommended TAC for 2027 (t)</b> |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Greenland Halibut (GHL) 2+3JKLMNO | 14 513                          | 14 791              | 14 729              | 14 351                              |
| Cod 3M                            | 12 485                          | 12 613              | 15 360              | 10 086 - 12 452                     |
| Cod 3NO*                          | 354                             | ndf                 | ndf                 | ndf                                 |
| American Plaice 3LNO              | 574                             | ndf                 | ndf                 | ndf                                 |
| American Plaice 3M                | 371                             | ndf                 | ndf                 | ndf                                 |
| Witch Flounder 3NO                | 250                             | 1 395               | 1 461               | 131 – 647                           |
| Redfish 3M                        | 10 410                          | 17 503              | 15 636              | SC September (tbd)                  |
| Redfish 3LN                       | 4 804                           | 6 000               | 6 000               | 4802 – 9 957                        |
| Redfish 3O*                       | 4 194                           | 20 000              | 8 000               | ndf                                 |
| White Hake 3NO*                   | 686                             | 1 000               | 1 000               | 500?                                |
| Capelin 3NO*                      | 8                               | ndf                 | ndf                 | ndf                                 |
| Thorny Skate/Rays 3LNO            | 2 945                           | 7 000               | 7 000               | -                                   |
| Yellowtail Flounder 3LNO*         | 3 646                           | 15 810              | 24 290              | 22 000                              |
| Squid 3+4 (3LMNO)*                | 59                              | 34 000              | 34 000              | -                                   |
| Shrimp 3M*                        | 0                               | ndf                 | ndf                 | ndf                                 |
| Alfonsinos 6G*                    | 0                               | ndf                 | ndf                 | ndf                                 |

*ndf = no directed fishery (moratorium); \* Stocks assessed in previous years.*



## **REQUESTS FOR ADVICE MADE TO SC BY NAFO COMMISSION FOR 2027**

The LDAC notes that the stocks for which SC has run new assessments with its respective levels of TACs determined for this year are:

### **Stocks assessed in June 2026**

- Cod Div. 3M (TAC 2027)
- American Plaice Div. 3M (TACs 2027, 2028 and 2029)
- Redfish Divs. 3LN (TACs 2027 and 2028)
- American Plaice Divs. 3LNO (TACs 2027 and 2028)
- Witch Flounder Divs. 3NO (TACs 2027 and 2028)
- Thorny Skate/Rays 3LNOPs (TACs 2027 and 2028)
- Greenland Halibut 2 + 3KLMNO (TAC 2027 via the MP)
- American Plaice Div. 3M

### **Updated assessment to be issued in September 2026**

- Redfish 3M (TACs 2027 and 2028)
- Shrimp Div. 3M (TACs 2027 and 2028)

Interim monitoring of assessments made in previous years with TAC for 2027 for several stocks. The review of the available data for these stocks confirms the advice issued in previous years for the following stocks:

- Yellowtail Flounder Divs. 3LNO (TACs 2026 and 2027)
- Cod Divs. 3NO (TACs 2022 and further)
- Redfish Div. 3<sup>º</sup> (TACs 2026, 2027 and 2028)
- Capelin Divs. 3NO (TACs 2022 and further)
- White Hake Divs. 3NO and Sub. 3Ps (TACs 2027 and further)
- Alfonsinos Div 6G (TACs 2022 and further)
- Grenadier berglax Sub. 2+3 (TACs 2020 and further)

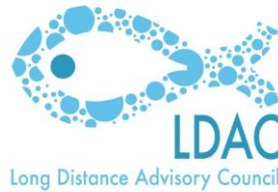
### **Gaps in assessment due to lack of Designated Expert:**

No assessment was made, nor interim monitoring report run nor advice provided for:

- Rays Divs. 3LNO and Subdiv. 3Ps
- White Hake Divs. 3NO and Subdiv. 3Ps.

### **Gaps in assessment due to lack of Designated Expert but IMR provided:**

- Redfish Div. 3M
- Golden redfish Div. 3M



## **SECTION I.**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS OF SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL (SC) ADVICE ON SETTING OF TAC AND OTHER MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR COMMERCIAL STOCKS OF INTEREST**

#### **1. Cod on NAFO Div. 3M - Flemish Cap**

##### **1.1. Summary of scientific advice: stock status**

At the SC meeting in June 2026, the results of the Bayesian SCAA model introduced at the 2018 benchmark were updated and used as the basis for the assessment of this stock with data from 1988 to 2025.

The current model shows the following results:

- The spawning stock biomass (SSB) has declined rapidly since 2017 but has remained stable during the last 5 years and is estimated to be above  $B_{lim}$  but below  $B_{trigger}$  (Cautious Zone) in 2025.
- The recruitment (R) has varied since 2013 at intermediate levels but much lower than those observed in 2011-2012. In 2021 and 2022, a good recruitment was observed, but since 2023 and 2024 has kept at very low levels.
- Fishing mortality (F) has remained below  $F_{lim}$  and  $F_{target}$  for all this period except 2011.

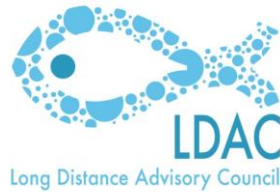
The SC projected the F scenarios defined for placing the stock in the Cautious Zone in accordance with the Precautionary Approach Framework (PAF) for 2027. Four different scenarios of F were selected:  $F_{bar} = 0$  and the three levels defined for the stock in the Cautious Zone (F on the lower, middle and upper fringe of the leave).

For all scenarios forecasted, the stock is placed on the Cautious Zone (below  $B_{trigger}$ ) with a probability of at least 60%. The median biomass in 2028 is expected to be lower than in 2026.

**The SC advice a level of catch for 2027 between 10 086 t and 12 452 t coherent with the PAF. However, the SC observes that there is a higher uncertainty in the stock assessment and in the projections than in previous years due to the lack of data on age and maturity size since 2023. However, this additional uncertainty is neither quantified nor reflected in the risk table.**

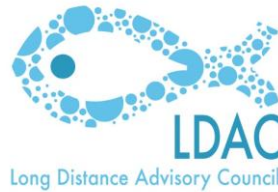
##### **1.2. LDAC technical considerations**

- The LDAC is deeply concerned with the comments made by the SC in relation to the situation existing with the lack of age reading and maturity ogives of EU-Spain cod surveys for third consecutive year (2023, 2024 and 2025). This omission has contributed to undermine the quality and robustness of the assessment, having to use the median of 2022 and apply it for those missing years. The LDAC appreciates that the SC decided to carry out an assessment despite the uncertainty.



Should this problem persist and continues in further years, the LDAC is worried that there is a clear risk to have no assessment. This situation is applicable to Redfish 3M.

- The LDAC takes note of the moving of the Cod 3M from the “Healthy Zone” to the “Cautious Zone” (albeit in the limit line) for first time this year in accordance with PAF approach. We fear that this could bring negative implications in terms of catch advice.
- Notwithstanding the above, the LDAC notes that the biomass is stable since 2021 above  $B_{lim}$  although below  $B_{trigger}$ .
- The LDAC notes with concern that recruitment remains very low which does not align with perception from fishing operators in the ground. The LDAC hopes that it will increase in the coming years as a result of the combination of low fishing pressure in line with the precautionary TAC and technical flanking measures, including the mandatory use of the “Norwegian” grid to avoid catch of small individuals and the continuation of the seasonal time area closure in the first quarter of the year (January-March 2027) to protect spawning aggregations.
- The LDAC notes that the effects of the technical flanking measures for 3M cod adopted in 2021 are only partially considered by the SC to see changes in recruitment and fishing mortality per age. The operators have witnessed greater dispersion of this stock, with higher variability and unpredictability in the volume of catch in the area as a result of different factors including effects of warming of waters and changing of fishing season from beginning to later in the year due to the application of the technical measures.
- In line with the precautionary approach and to achieve a proper balance between biological, social, and economic sustainability, the LDAC would like to avoid high fluctuations on TAC between years and reiterate its proposal in adopting a robust medium-long term approach which can take into consideration the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) process for this stock to allow to set a correct baseline and flexibility mechanisms in the forthcoming years.
- The LDAC reminds that environmental factors are playing a key role in the recruitment levels observed in the last decade in the Flemish Cap. Therefore, the LDAC supports further work of the NAFO Scientific Council Working Group on Ecosystem Science and Assessment (WG-ESA) on species interactions and ecosystem productivity between cod, shrimp, and redfish stocks.



### **1.3. LDAC Recommendations to the EU for Cod NAFO Div. 3M:**

**R1. The LDAC acknowledges the SC recommendation of a range which would mean in absolute terms a decrease of TAC between almost 19% (highest value of 12 452t) and circa 34% (lowest value of 10 086t) with respect of that of 2026. In view of this and given that all ranges are coherent with the PAF and have very similar predicted results for 2028, the LDAC would support the EU to defend the minimum possible decrease and highest value of the recommended range, i.e. 12 452t, to allow similar levels of catch than those agreed in 2024 for 2025.**

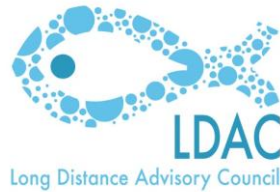
**R2. The LDAC continues supporting the continuation of the technical (flanking) measures adopted at the Annual Meeting in September 2020 aimed to rebuild the stock and protect spawning aggregations of 3M Cod, namely:**

- **Improving gear selectivity through the mandatory use of the sorting (“Norwegian”) grid and analogue devices for all demersal trawlers targeting cod operating in NAFO RA.**
- **The time area closure for Division 3M (Flemish Cap) from January to March 2027 to protect spawning aggregations of Cod, with fishing activity on cod allowed from April to December despite the significant impact on the fishing companies operations.**

**R3. The LDAC appreciates the work carried out this year by the SC in assessing the effectiveness of the technical measures and its impact on both changes in fishing exploitation patterns and the observed recovery of the stock. The LDAC would ask the EU to request from SC a detailed report on stock distribution in order to find out what conclusions have been reached and advance in knowledge of stock behaviour regarding potential changes in distribution and migratory patterns.**

**R4. The LDAC is pleased to see that the SC has developed guidelines for a sampling plan and design to bring statistically results that can be validated scientifically. However, it is still concerned of the slow progress in the implementation side and encourages the EU to give priority to its implementation.**

**The EU trawl fleet targeting cod active in the area reiterates its willingness to collaborate and volunteers to explore possibilities to conduct this exercise with scientists including the use of fishing units with twin trawl which might be of interest for gathering data and comparing results in a sampling plan.**



**R5. The LDAC supports the EU to address the topic of availability and analysis of data collected from EU-Spain and Portugal scientific surveys analysed in order to solve it for next year.**

**R6. The LDAC asks the EU to support the SC proposal of conducting a full assessment of Atlantic cod in Division 3M every two years, starting in June 2027, since biological parameters and the stock status have remained relatively stable in the last years. As a safeguard, the LDAC agrees with the caveat that the stock will be monitored via IMR in interim years (e.g. 2028) and an assessment can be triggered by Scientific Council if changes are observed. This two-year window should be also an opportunity to smoothly integrate the evaluation of the impact and efficiency of the flanking measures on the recovery of this stock into the assessment.**

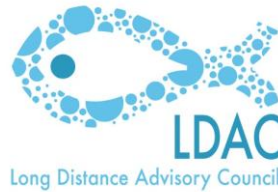
## **2. Redfish 3M**

- Similar to the situation for Cod 3M, the LDAC is deeply concerned with the comments made by the SC in relation to the lack of available data on age reading and maturity ogives missing from EU-Spain cod surveys for third consecutive year (2023, 2024 and 2025). This omission has contributed to undermine the quality and robustness of the assessment. Should this problem persist and continues in further years, the LDAC is worried that there is a clear risk to have no assessment.
- **Given that the assessment will be carried out in September before the start of the Annual Meeting, the LDAC urges the Commission to discuss the results of the SC on this stock in the Annual meeting and keep a flexible mandate to include considerations coming from scientists and EU registered MS and stakeholders at said meeting.**

## **3. American Plaice 3M**

### **3.1. Summary of scientific advice: stock status**

- The SC is not ready to apply the new PAF due to the inability to estimate the PA Reference Points (RPs) for the time being. The population biomass has increased above the average of the historical series, but this increase has been slow and dependent on good levels of recruitment in the past and low catch levels.
- An increase has been observed in the population growth in relation to the average of the historical series with the current level of catch (200-400 t) although it has been slow and reliant on good levels of recruitment and low level of catch in the past.



- The recruitment has been scarce since 2018.
- The SC concludes that there is not enough evidence to support a higher level of catch.
- This stock is caught as by-catch in trawl fisheries, with cod as redfish as main target species. Between 1979 and 1993 a TAC of 2000t was in force for this stock. In 1994 and 1995, a reduction was agreed to 1 000 t for 1994 and 1995 and since then it is under moratorium for fishing.
- **A qualitative assessment was approved based on survey indexes and catch data in commercial fisheries. The biomass of the survey increase from 2007, mainly due to two recruitment spikes (2008-2012 y 2015-2018), positioning above the average of the historical time series.**

### 3.2. LDAC technical considerations

- The LDAC notes that the advice from SC is very similar that of previous years.
- The LDAC warns that an early reopening of the fishery could have a counterproductive effect given the small quota share for certain EU MS and the still relatively low levels of biomass and recruitment for these stocks.
- As the trend seems to be positive, the LDAC will monitor the situation in future years.

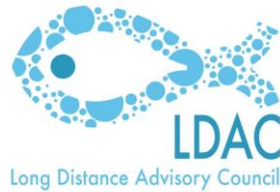
### 3.3. LDAC recommendations to the EU for American Plaice 3M

**R1. In order to be precautionary and giving the situation of the stock, the LDAC supports to maintain the current moratoria (ndf) while allowing a level of by-catch for this fishery that do not hamper the recovery of the stock, i.e. between 200 and 400 t.**

## 4. Redfish 3LN (TACs for 2027 and 2028)

### 4.1. Summary of scientific work / advice

- There are two species of the genus *Sebastes* with distribution overlapping in several areas of Northwest Atlantic, namely on the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Laurentian Channel, off Newfoundland and south of Labrador Sea: the deep-sea redfish (*Sebastes mentella*), with a maximum abundance at depths greater than 350 m, and Acadian redfish (*Sebastes fasciatus*), preferring shallower waters of less than 300 m.



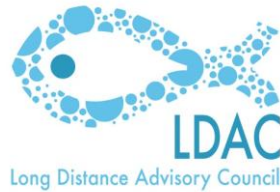
- A new stock assessment was made this year using a mixed approach that combines the survey indexes result of the standardised average of the Spanish surveys in 3L y 3N and the spring and autumn Canadian surveys in 3LN.
- Biomass has increased since 2023. The stock is above the historical series average and there is a 19 % risk to be under  $B_{lim}$  in 2025. Therefore, the stock is not under the “Critical Zone” of the PAF.
- Recruitment (measured as individuals between 15 and 20 cm) has remained below the long-term average since mid-2010s in all the four surveys analysed (Canadian spring and autumn and EU-Spain surveys in 3NO y 3L) with exception of Spanish survey I 3L in 2023.
- The fishing mortality is low and has decreased in the last years, maintaining very far from the maximum of historical series of catch registered in the early 90s.
- Work is ongoing to develop an MSE for this stock. In absence of reference points as a result of the flawed model, until the MSE is completed, a provisional  $B_{lim}$  has been adopted using an average of the period 1991-2005 with a combined survey index.
- Regarding MSE (CR3), at the SC meeting in January 2025, it was agreed to stop the MSE process given the results of the Operating Models (OMs) analysed. Subsequently, at the next WG RBMS meeting, additional information was tabled in a preliminary document on development of a simple production model for possible use as OM for the MSE for this stock. It was agreed that more details on this model would be given at the forthcoming SC meetings. In June 2025, the SC examined the latest work and, although useful to explore future progress, the model was not considered fit for purpose.

#### **SC Advice:**

**Given that the level of catch in the last five years has allowed an increase of the population stock, the SC recommends set catch coherent with those levels, giving a range between 4 802 t and 10 172 t, with the average set in 8 314 t.**

#### **4.2. LDAC technical considerations**

- The LDAC notes the positive change in the biomass of this stock, reducing considerably its risk of being below  $B_{lim}$  and reverting the trend observed since 2015. This results in that, according to the PAF, the stock is now out of the “Critical Zone” and has moved to the “Cautious Zone”.
- The LDAC reiterates its concern on the stagnation in the process of developing an MSE which should be the basis for future advice on this stock.



- The SC acknowledges that redfish are known to have variable and episodic recruitment, with potentially large periods of time between recruitment pulses and poorly understood relationships between stock size and recruitment. Impacts of delineations of stock boundaries and synchronicity between adjacent stocks are also unknown.
- There is partial overlapping fishery of cod Divs. 2J3KL which has now reopened since 2025. If European vessels are prevented from conducting directed fisheries towards redfish Div. 3L just as they become theoretically able to catch cod in the same area, then it becomes much harder to make proper use of the reopened cod quota.

#### **4.3. LDAC Recommendations for Redfish 3LN**

**R1. The LDAC welcomes the advice of the SC as it moves away from the “non-directed fishery” approach used for previous years with the old PAF. The LDAC supports the SC advice considering the constraints of the stock assessment flawed reflecting a proposal for TAC consistent with the improvement of the stock in accordance with the new PAF, placing the stock above  $B_{lim}$  and in the Cautious Zone and not the Critical Zone. On the range provided between 4 802 t and 10 172 t, the LDAC would ask the EU to defend the setting of the TAC around the average (8 314 t) moving towards the upper range, which would be above current levels in previous years (6000 t).**

**R2. If a higher value is agreed, the LDAC would like the EC to propose maintaining catch limits within current levels as in previous years, with a footnote to revise this figure should catches exceed 8 500 t. This approach is fully consistent with that asked for other stocks such as redfish Div. 30, thorny skate, or white hake.**

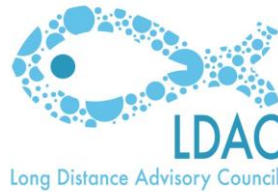
**R3. The LDAC notes that there is still limited knowledge of the state of the stock and uncertainties associated to the change of model.**

**R4. The LDAC considers the ongoing work very important to develop an MSE for this stock and believes that no drastic decisions should be taken until this work is completed.**

#### **5. American Plaice Divs. 3LNO (TACs for 2027 and beyond)**

##### **5.1. Summary of scientific advice: stock status**

- The SC has not carried out a full evaluation for this stock. The advice is based on an IMR which indicates that there have been no changes in the stock status. The SC reiterates its advice that, in accordance with the recovery plan, no directed fishery should take place for this stock until an assessment indicates a very low probability to be below  $B_{lim}$ .



The by-catch must also be maintained at the lowest possible level and limited to interactions with fisheries linked to other target species.

- The SC has reiterated that they will not run a full assessment of this stock until the IMR indicates that conditions have changed or a benchmark workshop is held.
- The SC has identified this stock as a “priority one” for a benchmark and, in their reply to Question 12 of the Commission, a proposal for a work plan to ease this task is described. It is foreseen that this work plan is completed by early 2028, with a full assessment of this stock in June 2028

## 5.2. LDAC Recommendations for American Plaice 3LNO

- **The LDAC regrets that the outcome of the uncertainty in the assessment is no directed fisheries. However, LDAC is in conformity with the scientific advice.**
- **The LDAC supports the proposal from SC and asks EU to suggest adoption by the Commission of the work plan with the timeline indicated above.**

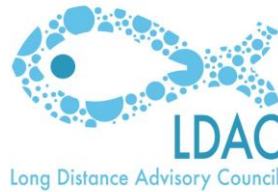
## 6. **Witch flounder Divs. 3NO (TACs for 2027 and 2028)**

### 6.1. Summary of scientific advice

- The management unit for this stock is NAFO Division 3NO. It is mainly distributed in Division 3O along the south-western edge of the Grand Banks. In most years, the distribution is concentrated towards the slope, but in other years a higher proportion may be concentrated in shallower waters.
- A Bayesian production model was used for the assessment. The results show a trajectory similar to that of the last assessment. The data used come from survey campaigns and the commercial fishery.
- The stock is in the Cautious Zone. It has increased slightly since 2015 and is estimated at 37 per cent of  $B_{msy}$ .

There is a very high risk (>99%) that the stock will fall below  $B_{trigger}$  and a very low risk (<1%) that  $F$  will exceed  $F_{lim}$  or  $F_{trigger}$ . There is a 28% risk for the stock to fall below  $B_{lim}$ .

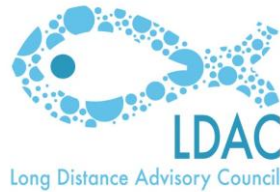
- Recent recruitment appears to be at average levels.



- The SC projected fishing mortality scenarios for the period 2027–2028, in accordance with the definitions for stocks located in the PAF’s Cautious Zone. The stock is forecast to remain below  $B_{\text{trigger}}$  with an annual probability of between 94% and 97%, and there remains an annual risk of between 14% and 20% that the stock will fall below  $B_{\text{lim}}$ .
- Catches of between 131 t and 647 t in 2027, and between 205 t and 801 t in 2028, are consistent with the PAF.
- **The LDAC is concerned with this stock’s deterioration despite the low level of catch in the last years, even though the biomass has increased slightly in recent year and the trajectory is similar than the last assessment.**

#### **6.2. LDAC Recommendations for Witch flounder Divs. 3NO**

- **The LDAC notes that witch flounder is a by-catch fishery for EU fleet targeting Redfish 3O.**
- **The LDAC is deeply concerned with the scientific recommendation of TAC ranges for 2027 and 2028. If adopted, this would result in a quota for the entire EU fleets concerned of between 20 t and 50 t becoming de facto a “choke species” for other targeted fisheries and creating significantly adverse economic consequences.**
- **In view of the above, and with the aim of avoiding a “choke species” situation, the LDAC asks the EU to defend one of the two following options as strategy for negotiation:**
  - **Option 1. To ask for the status of “*non-directed fisheries*” (ndf) in order to use a by-catch system and allow the other target fisheries to continue.**
  - **Option 2. In view of the evidence that stock trends that have not changed in relation to previous years, to maintain a TAC similar to that adopted for 2025 and 2026, i.e. around 1 400 t.**



## **6. Greenland Halibut (GHL) in Sub. 2 and Div. 3KLMNO (TAC for 2027 via the MP)**

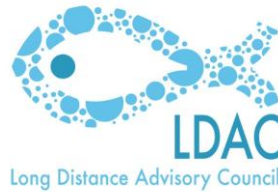
### **6.1. Summary of scientific advice**

- The present HCR is now called Management Procedure (MP) following the review of the MSE process in 2024. The new HCR was adopted by the NAFO Commission at the Annual Meeting in 2024 to calculate TACs for GHL in the Subarea 2 + Div. 3KLMNO. The HCR is based on the biomass indexes from scientific surveys and has two components of the biomass used to calculate the TAC: one based on the biomass to be achieved ("*target*") and the other on the trends shown by the surveys ("*slope*"). The final annual TAC is the result of the combination of the estimation of TAC from both "*target*" and "*slope*," with the restriction of not allowing a TAC variation of  $\pm 10\%$  between consecutive years.
- The survey indexed upon which the HCR for the calculation of the TAC for 2027 is applied are based on four surveys: Canadian autumn survey in Divs. 2J3K; Canadian autumn survey in Divs. 3LNO; European survey in Div. 3M; and Spanish survey in Div. 3NO.
- Exceptional circumstances have not occurred this year.

**In view of the above, the SC advice derived from the application of the MP adopted in 2024 for Greenland Halibut is a TAC of 14 351t for 2027, in comparison to 14 729t for 2026 and 14 827t for 2025.**

### **6.2. LDAC technical considerations**

- The LDAC notes the considerable reduction in fishing effort made by the fishing fleets (mainly EU) before the HCR entered into force in 2010, with a decrease in catches from a peak TAC of approximately 40,000 t in 2000-2002 followed by a big reduction effort during the period where the recovery plan was implemented between 2004 and 2010. The current ceiling is now established close to 14 000 t.
- Notwithstanding the above, and despite the starting point being set at low levels, the LDAC considers that the HCR/MP is proving effective in providing stability and long-term planning to the management of this fishery.
- However, it notes that the application of the MP as currently designed has implied a 15% decrease of the TAC since 2020, and the present advice of 14 351 t constitutes the lowest quantity in the history of management of this stock, as it has been the case of the previous years.



- The Spanish and Portuguese trawl fleet industry note that it seems not to reflect the real situation in the fishing grounds, where they find all group ages of GHL in abundance in their trawls, showing a disparity between catch reports from fleets and scientific survey. One possible explanation could be attributable to the size and wide distribution of the stock. The scientific surveys only cover some sample areas and are an average of four different surveys with different weights.

### **6.3. LDAC Recommendations for Greenland Halibut 2+3KLMNO**

**R1. The LDAC asks the EU to ask for setting a TAC at around 14 876 t (i.e. 10% increase on the TAC of 2026 in compliance with the MP rule) given the following reasons:**

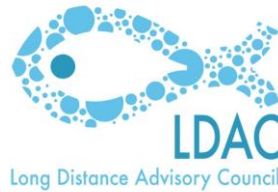
- Subject to updated assessment, the stock status seems stable.
- The TAC provided is lower than the average value expected according to the projections a result of the correction factor which sets a value of  $\mu = 0.963$  to reach  $B_{msy}$  in 2047 as management target.
- The management objectives have effectively changed in terms of reaching  $B_{msy}$  by a deadline (from 2027 to 2037 and 2047 in recent years).
- Next revision and uptake of assessment will take place in 2027 with an in-depth review in 2030.

Even if this TAC is slightly higher (700 t more) than that recommended by the SC as a consequence of the automatic application of the management procedure, it will unlikely have an impact on the biological recovery of the stock given the projections shown in the MP. However, this slight increase will contribute to significant beneficial economic effect on the fleets concerned after many years of reduction.

It is advised that the EU contacts with other potential “like-minded” contracting parties (such as Japan) on this argument prior to the Annual Meeting.

**R2. The LDAC asks the EU to propose NAFO Commission to launch a study in 2027 to assess the effectiveness and adequacy of the management procedure for GHL, including management objectives so it is in time for the review of the stock assessment in 2027 or 2030. If not possible, the LDAC asks the EU to consider funding their own study and look for adequate capacity and expertise so they can inform the discussions for the Annual Meeting in 2027.**

**R3. The LDAC requests the EU to submit a question to the SC in the following line: what would happen if the “management adjustment factor”  $\mu = 0.963$  was not applied? Would the omission of the adjustment have any influence on the biological recovery of the stock and risk the sustainability in the short, medium or long term?**



## **7. Northern Shortfin Squid in Subareas 3+4 (TACs for 2025, 2026 and 2027)**

### **7.1. Summary of scientific advice**

The assessment for this stock has been deferred again until the Annual Meeting in September 2026. The SCS made a recommendation in 2019 which was then maintained for the period 2020–2023: *The primary biomass index (Div. 4VWX) and mean body size value for 2018 were not available for use in the assessment. The 2019 values indicated that the stock may be moving towards a high productivity period. SC advice is a TAC of no more than 34 000 metric tonnes/year.* The management decision was to set up a TAC in line with the SC recommendation (i.e., 34 000 t/year) with a roll over in the following years.

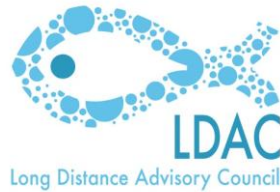
### **7.2. LDAC technical considerations**

- The LDAC notes that, in terms of fishing dynamics, since the nineties, the squid fishery has been mainly a seasonal one with low level of catches (currently around 60 t).
- However, there are Spanish vessels represented in the LDAC which have become more active in the area targeting squid during the last years and are interested to keep this fishery open.
- The LDAC looks forward to having the interim monitoring for this stock prior to the Annual Meeting so a sound management decision can be made.

### **7.3. LDAC Recommendations for Squid in Subareas 3+4 (*Illex illecebrosus*):**

**R1. Pending of the outcome of the SC and the scientific recommendation in September (if a Designated Expert is appointed) and should no significant changes occur in the state of the stock, the LDAC advises that the European Commission should consider requesting a rollover of 34 000 t for this stock considering the socio-economic importance of this fishery for the Spanish cephalopod freezer fleet.**

**R2. The LDAC suggests bringing forward the beginning of the fishing season for squid from the 1<sup>st</sup> of July to the 1<sup>st</sup> of June to benefit from fish aggregations, spotted during that period, and be allowed to fish it without having to submit a preliminary request within the three first hours of the haul, as it is the case now, and minimize the risk of being subject to regulatory sanctions related to catch composition or use of smaller mesh size.**



## **8. Northern cod 2J3KL**

### **8.1. Background**

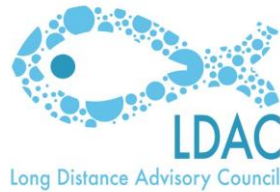
- In 2024, Canada re-opened a commercial fishery for Northern cod in NAFO Divisions 2J3KL, effectively ending the 32-year moratorium. This decision also resulted in the de facto reopening of the fishery in international waters subject to NAFO's Regulatory Area (RA). However, the LDAC notes that, in practice, this stock had remained closed only for non-Canadian vessels in international waters. Within the Canadian EEZ, the fishery had been accessible to Canadian vessels since at least 1998 under so-called "stewardship" quotas, individual licences, or other schemes. This meant that the fishery was re-opened to Canadian vessels just six years after the moratorium was imposed.
- From 1998 to 2023 (except for a short closure between 2003 and 2005), Canada's "stewardship" quotas for Canadian vessels alone amounted to almost 160,000 t<sup>1</sup>. This level of harvesting raises serious concerns regarding its contribution to the delayed recovery of the stock.
- On 12 June 2026, Canada adopted a catch limit of 59,000 t for its vessels for the period 1 July 2026 – 30 June 2027. Subsequently, on 15 June 2026, NAFO adopted a TAC for this stock for the same period, including an allocation of 5% of the TAC to other NAFO Contracting Parties (CPs), such as the European Union, to be fished in the NAFO Regulatory Area. NAFO also maintained the existing recovery measures for the stock for that period.

### **8.2. LDAC technical considerations**

- The LDAC considers it critical that any directed fishing activities for this stock by CPs in the NAFO Regulatory Area are conducted within a robust management framework and under a level playing field that ensures both the long-term conservation of this important resource and respect for the historical fishing rights of all CPs in the area.
- For 22 years, Canada not only disregarded the moratorium on Northern cod but also increased catches year after year. For example, the TAC rose by 25% from 9,500 t in 2018 to 12,350 t during the 2019–2021 period. In 2022 and 2023, Canada further raised its "experimental" TAC to nearly 13,000 t.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://fisheryprogress.org/sites/default/files/indicators-documents/2J%203KL%20Northern%20Cod%20Rebuilding%20Plan%20Dec%2021%2020\\_0.pdf](https://fisheryprogress.org/sites/default/files/indicators-documents/2J%203KL%20Northern%20Cod%20Rebuilding%20Plan%20Dec%2021%2020_0.pdf)



- Moreover, it seems that there was also a significant level of unreported catches and discards that should be considered when assessing Canada's overall removals of cod 2J3KL during the moratorium<sup>2</sup>.
- These actions may have slowed the recovery of the stock, thereby postponing the reopening of the fishery for other CPs.

### **8.3. LDAC recommendations for Northern cod Divs. 2J3KL**

**R1. This fishery is of high importance to EU cod trawl fleets. The overall TAC for this area now exceeds that of 3M cod, and its significance is increasing given the EU's small quota in the Barents Sea.**

**R2. Canada should be reminded that, irrespective of the terminology used ("stewardship fishery" or otherwise), the reality is that it set unilateral TACs amounting to almost 160,000 t over a 22-year period, conducting targeted fishing in an area under moratorium. In this regard, the EU should not exclude the option of asking Canada to provide compensation to all CPs that refrained from this fishery during the moratorium. The level of such compensation should be calculated based not only on the TACs unilaterally set by Canada but also on unreported catches and discards within the Canadian EEZ.**

## **9. Thorny skate in Divisions 3LNO and Subdiv. 3Ps (TACs for 2027 and 2028)**

### **9.1. Summary of scientific advice**

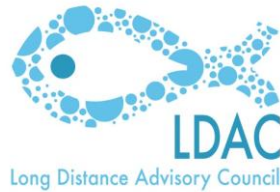
- No new survey information is available to determine stock status.
- It is not possible to do a full evaluation nor an IMR of this stock due to the lack of a designated expert (DE) in the Scientific Council.
- In this moment, it is not possible to provide an updated advice, so the SC recommends being cautious in the management for this stock.

### **9.2. LDAC technical considerations**

- The LDAC regrets the lack of a designated expert happening with this stock and others (such as white hake) not allowing to have a full scientific assessment as planned.

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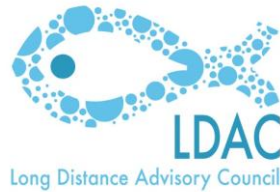
<sup>2</sup> See pages 6 and 7 of the Report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans (March 2017): <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/FOPO/Reports/RP8826804/foporp10/foporp10-e.pdf>



- Given the low level of thorny skate catch in recent years (3 500 t in average), it is unlikely that there have been major changes to the state of the stock.
- The TAC adopted by NAFO for 2025-2026 for thorny skate in 3LNO Division has been of 7 000 t, and the distribution of the quota for this stock is as follows: European Union has 4 408 t (63%); Canada 1 167 t (17%); Russia 1 167 t (17%); and others, 3%.
- Regarding the internal allocation within the EU, Spain has a quota of 3 403 t (77% of the total), with a declared consumption of quota close to 90%. Portugal has assigned 660 t (15%), and Estonia 345 t (8%).
- The SC has traditionally recommended “*keeping the quotas close to the catches*” and two important countries with quota do not use it: Canada has an independent skate fishery in 3PS within its EEZ and adjacent to 3LNO, over the same stock, but that is managed as a separate unit, and there Canada maintains unchanged since 1997 an independent quota of 1 050 t. There is also a small share for San Pierre et Miquelon, and Russia is not interested in the fishery.

### 9.3. LDAC Recommendations to the EU for thorny skate in Divs. 3LNO

- The SC acknowledges that the thorny skate stock has had a stable low level of overall catch levels (3500 t in average for the period 2019-2025). The SC also predicts that it is unlikely that there have been major changes to the state of the stock. As in previous years, the LDAC reiterates its proposal to “*no increase in catches*” for 2027 and 2028 which are stable in the region of 3 500 t in average.
- However, the LDAC has diverging views on the specific translation into figures of the advice for the 3LNO portion. The views are as follows:
  - The fishing sector of the LDAC agrees with the catch limitation advice but not with the link between catch and TAC for this stock. They remind that the SC does not propose a TAC but “*no increase in catches*”. This has been the case since 2013 with a TAC fixed at 7 000 t for division 3LNO, considering that the catch levels are stable around 3 500 t and that the EU is the only CPCs having a directed fishing in the zone. Other CPCs (Russia and Canada) are not participating in this fishery and therefore do not have a real impact in the conservation of the stock. They remind the importance of the Thorny Skate 3LNO stock for some EU MS, in particular Spain, which do fully utilise its allotted quota since 2013. As a safeguard measure, the fishing sector of the LDAC is in favour of maintaining in the quota table the reference to Note 12 updated to 2025 as follows: “Should catches exceed 5,000 t, additional measures would be adopted to further restrain catches in 2025”.



- **The NGO group requests, in view of the inability to produce advice this year, to follow the Scientific Committee advice from 2025 that catches should not be allowed to exceed 3 500 t and supports setting the TAC accordingly.**
- **The LDAC urges the EU to invite NAFO Commission to look for a solution to the institutional and systemic problem existing within the Scientific Council of lack of designated experts for certain stocks such as this and white hake. This compromises the production of advice as the current status of the stock is unknown despite catches remaining stable.**
- **The LDAC pleads the EU to ask for a full scientific assessment for 2027 without further delays.**

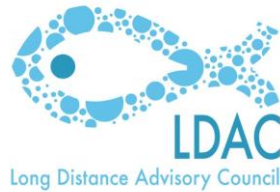
## **10. NAFO Northern shrimp in Divisions 2J3KLNO**

### **10.1. Summary of scientific advice:**

During the 2025 annual meeting, the Scientific Council was tasked with reviewing and provide an assessment regarding the Canadian management approach for Northern shrimp in Division 2J3KLNO.

### **10.2. LDAC technical recommendations**

- The LDAC notes that if Canada proceeds with reopening the fishery within its jurisdiction, Article VI (11)(a) of the NAFO convention requires consistency between measures applied in the NAFO Regulatory Area and measures applied by the coastal State to the same straddling stock.
- The LDAC warns that any decision made by Canada must be consistent and aligned with NAFO rules in order to avoid unilateral decisions being extended to the international waters as a “rubber stamp” exercise by NAFO Commission.
- The LDAC requests that any decision made must ensure level playing field between Canada and other CPCs in terms of equitable allocation of fishing opportunities within Canadian waters and international waters managed by NAFO RA.



### **10.3. LDAC Recommendations on Northern Shrimp Divs. 2J3KLNO**

**R1. The LDAC would appreciate an update on the status of the work by the SC on the assessment on Canadian management approach for this stock.**

**R2. In line with reopening of the fishery by Canada within its waters and in light of art VI (11)(A) of the NAFO convention, the LDAC asks the EU to request that the corresponding fishing opportunities should be adopted in the NAFO regulatory area for all Contracting Parties with historical track records.**

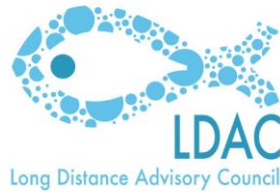
**R3. Should this be adopted, the EU would hold a share of 6,6% of the stock for NAFO 3L which is currently under moratorium. The EU should be prepared and have an internal calculation ready for historical catch data and internal allocation issues to counteract any requests by the UK for a share in the EU quota.**

## **SECTION II. ECOSYSTEM CONSIDERATIONS**

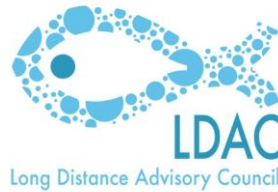
### **1. Ecosystem approach (CR1): Monitoring ecosystem conditions in EPU's from Grand Banks (3LNO) and Flemish Cap (3M) and report on catch information for sustainability in the ecosystem in relation to 2TCI.**

#### **1.1. Summary of scientific advice**

- The SC developed in 2023 a template on how to include Total Catch Index (TCI) information in the stock summary sheets (SSSs). The TCI is an indicator of whether each level of catch at functional group level or ecosystem production unit (EPU) is coherent with the productivity (understood as sustainability) of the ecosystem. The comparison of each aggregated level of catch within each group with the TCI informs on the risk of ecosystem overfishing (EO).
- NAFO has adopted 2TCI as reference point of the ecosystem to inform on risk of ecosystem overfishing.
- The recent monitoring of conditions on Ecosystem Production Units (EPU's) of the Grand Banks (3LNO) and Flemish Cap (3M) in 2024-2025 indicates that changes observed are in line with the trends already observed for these ecosystems, and therefore, do not comply with the criteria of "significant ecological changes" to activate an update on the Ecosystem Summary Sheets (ESS) out of deadline.



- For the Grand Banks EPU, the level of catch of piscivores foreseen for 2026-2027 are kept below the reference point of 2TCI ecosystem for 2026, while it is expected that catch increases to reach the 2TCI limit in 2027.
- For Flemish Cap EPU, the catch levels of piscivores for 2026-2027 would exceed 2TCI in 2026 but decrease below this level in 2027.
- To support WG-EAFFM discussions on possible management measures in the event that the 2TCI level is exceeded, and to regularly report TCI-related information to the Commission, the SC developed a report on the sustainability of catches at the ecosystem level to summarize information on the Catch/TCI relationship. The structure and content of these reports are expected to evolve based on discussions and comments from managers in the WG-EAFFM and the Commission.
- Work is currently being carried out on tiers 1 and 2 of the Ecosystem Roadmap and that the next scheduled update of the Ecosystem Summary Sheets (ESSs) for these EPUs will be in 2028.
- A vacancy in the Designated Expert for 3LNO EPU remains. If not fulfilled in time, it will not be possible to carry out such update work in time for 2028.
- As part of implementation of Tier 1, SC has developed an app prototype for TCI to allow a quick and interactive assessment of effects of candidate values of TAC and its risk to exceed the 2TCI.
- This app aims to serve as decision-support tool for managers by visualising in real time the impact of each option analysed in the ratio Catch/TCI foreseen. This prototype will be presented at WG-EAFMM meeting. The aim would be to present this also at the Annual Meeting in 2026 to gather feedback coupled with a questionnaire to progress on the design and interface. If the Commission approves the usefulness of this app, once finalised its development process, it could become a complementary tool to the standard assessment of the SC, being periodically updated and making it available for use at the NAFO Annual Meeting.



## **1.2. LDAC recommendations on work on catch information related to 2TCI**

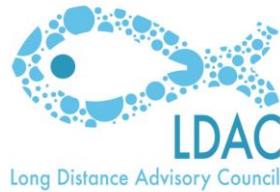
- **The LDAC wishes to request to the EU to reinforce the scientific capacity of the SC in this area and sponsor at least one European fisheries scientist to carry out the work of estimation of the 2TCI and the future update of the EESs.**

### **The EU fleet fishing in NAFO represented in the LDAC:**

- **Supports the expansion of scientific capacity but not at the expense of fisheries single-stock assessment and management. If new scientific approaches are to be examined in the SC annual workplan, it cannot be at the expense of existing needs regarding traditional stock assessments. Prioritisation should be towards fisheries assessments ensuring adequate funding and expertise.**
- **Notes that NAFO does not have competence over activities other than fishing that influence the ecosystems within its geographic area.**
- **Further notes that entities that have both the competence and the responsibility to assume ecosystem responsibilities in their areas of sovereignty, like coastal states parties of NAFO, are not developing such tools.**
- **Proposes the EU to suggest outsourcing or “spin off” this work into external scientific organisations (such as oceanographic institutes and/or universities) to undertake this work, freeing up resources to NAFO SC and allowing other bodies to apply for dedicated scientific funding, including EU funding.**

### **The EU NGOs represented in the LDAC:**

- **Note that any decision regarding changes in the allocation of resources in the SC should be conditioned to the outcome of the ongoing discussions regarding NAFO’s ecosystem operational objectives. It is these agreed objectives that should drive the work of the SC as well as the decisions regarding its funding.**
- **Also note that the work of the WG EAFMM is grounded in a roadmap. The current work of the SC on a single document describing and clarifying the roadmap, and the feedback from the managers, should be another step before taking any decisions regarding potential changes in the work of the SC.**

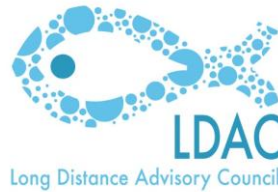


- **Would like to recall that implementing an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management is a core objective of the CFP. In that regard, the pioneer work of NAFO with its ecosystem roadmap is an example of such an implementation and should be considered by the EU as an example for other RFMOs.**
- **Would also like to highlight that a series of tools are available to progress towards an EAFM. From ambitious ecosystem modelling to single-stock assessments that incorporate ecosystem considerations (e.g. predator-prey relations, climate impacts) via multispecies assessments. Management strategy evaluations are also a unique opportunity to test the robustness of the HCRs against various ecosystem parameters. In brief, EAFM should urgently be progressed in several ways, and priorities should stem from the ecosystem operational objectives agreed by the managers.**

## **2. Development of a document detailing a NAFO Roadmap for EAF for next 1-3 years (CR5)**

### **2.1. Summary of scientific process:**

- The NAFO Roadmap for an EAF allows NAFO to fulfil with its commitment of an Agreement to implement an ecosystem approach to manage the fishing resources.
- Even though this framework has been already described and recognized in several NAFO documents, there is not a single document formally adopted by the Commission providing a detailed description of the NAFO Roadmap on this field.
- This lack of formal recognition is creating difficulties to communicate this work, both internally and externally.
- Given the present difficulties, the SC has fast tracked the issuing of a detailed draft of this Roadmap requested by the Commission. The revised version incorporates the comments and feedback received by managers over the preliminary draft circulated at WG-EAFMM in 2025. This includes the elimination of the section “current implementation” (as being too dynamic hampering stability in the long term); the emphasis on the adaptive nature of the roadmap; more explicit references to climate change; and coherence with NAFO CEM.
- The roadmap document will be presented at the WG-EAFMM of 2026 for its discussion and is expected to be the basis for a presentation to the Commission at the Annual Meeting in 2026 aimed at its possible adoption.



## **2.2. LDAC recommendations on an Ecosystem Roadmap for EAF in NAFO:**

- The LDAC supports the work carried out this year by the SC and welcomes the progress made towards a single document that includes a set of operational objectives and a time plan with clear targets and deliverables. With this in view, the LDAC would like to ask the EU to look in detail at this revised draft, contribute actively at WG-EAFFM, consult internally with stakeholders and MS, provide comments as necessary and discuss it at the Annual Meeting aiming at its possible adoption.

## **3. Work towards the reassessment of VMEs and the impact of bottom fisheries on VMEs for 2027, including possible management options (CR6 b)**

### **3.1. Summary of scientific advice**

- NAFO has closed **12 seamount areas** in the northwest Atlantic in areas beyond national jurisdiction in the NAFO Regulatory Area (NRA) for bottom fishing activities (see figure 1): New England, Corner Rise, Fogo and Newfoundland Seamount Chains, the Orphan Knoll and a cluster of 7 individual seamounts in the northern part of the NRA. Different fisheries measures have been put in place by NAFO to protect these seamounts and associated species since 2007.
- Some of these seamounts have been described as **ecologically or biologically significant areas (EBSA)** under two decisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD 2012<sup>3</sup>, 2014a<sup>4</sup>), and all have been identified by NAFO Contracting Parties as vulnerable marine ecosystems (VME) (NAFO 2021)<sup>5</sup>. In addition, WG-EAFFM (NAFO, 2023)<sup>6</sup> recommends that the Commission requests the Secretariat, in consultation with the Scientific Council as required, to submit the seamount closure areas to the CBD Secretariat and to the UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP WCMC) for inclusion in the World Database on Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs). Draft OECM nomination template has been already developed, and the submission process is still ongoing.

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<sup>3</sup> CBD. 2012. "Decision Adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at Its Eleventh Meeting Xi/17. Marine and Coastal Biodiversity: Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas."

<sup>4</sup> CBD. 2014a. "Decision Adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity Xii/22. Marine and Coastal Biodiversity: Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs)."

<sup>5</sup> NAFO (2021). *Report of the Scientific Council, 27 May -11 June 2021*. NAFO SCS Doc. 21/14REV. NAFO.

<sup>6</sup> NAFO (2023). Report of the NAFO Joint Commission-Scientific Council Working Group on Ecosystem Approach Framework to Fisheries Management (WG-EAFFM) Meeting, 20 - 22 July 2023, Edinburgh. United Kingdom. NAFO COM-SC Doc. 23/04, Serial No. N7441, 19 pp. <https://www.nafo.int/Portals/0/PDFs/COM-SC/2023/com-scdoc23-04.pdf>

- NAFO closed the Newfoundland Seamounts, the New England Seamounts, the Corner Rise Seamounts and the Orphan Knoll for bottom fishing effective 2007. The Fogo Seamounts were closed for bottom fishing effective 2009. The boundaries of the New England Seamount Chain were extended, and seamount closure boundaries amended in 2022.
- In 2016, NAFO requirements for mid-water trawl gear modification were introduced to avoid bottom contact when fishing in seamount areas.
- There was a small mid-water trawl fishery targeting splendid alfonsino (*Beryx splendens*) on parts of the Corner Rise seamounts, however, in 2019, the NAFO Scientific Council concluded the stock to be depleted and recommended imposing a moratorium. This moratorium has been in place since 2020.
- In 2022, NAFO expanded the boundaries of its existing seamount area closures, added six (6) new seamount closures, and extended the effectivity of the whole seamount closures for another five (5) years. **As a result, all seamount areas in the NAFO Regulatory Area at fishable depth (i.e. shallower than 4000 metres) are now closed to bottom contacting fishing gears until December 2026.** Also in 2022, NAFO reviewed the boundaries of its VME closures based on new analysis by the Scientific Council. As a result, all of the existing closures were extended for another five years, and five (5) of these closed areas were increased in size. A further four (4) new VME closures were established for an interim period of two years pending further analysis by the scientific Council. In all, the areas closed to bottom fishing total 372,201 km<sup>2</sup>, representing 14% of the NAFO Regulatory Area. The expansion and extension of the area closures on seamounts and VMEs were based on the SAI analysis.

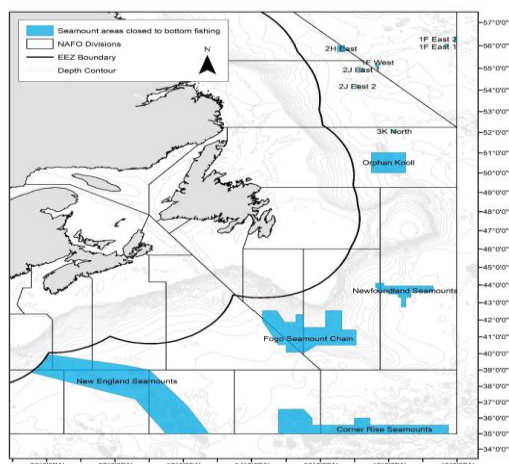
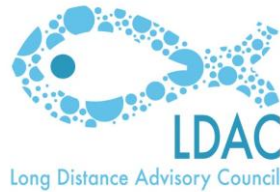


Figure 1. Map showing the location of the current areas closed by NAFO to protect Seamounts. Until 31 December 2026, no vessel shall engage in bottom fishing activities in any of the areas.



In summary:

- Bottom fishing closures to protect seamount VME were first established in NAFO in 2007. Management measures are included in Article 17.3 of the NAFO Conservation and Enforcement Measures. In 2012, 2014, 2015 and 2021 following advice from NAFO Scientific Council, revisions to the seamount VME closure boundaries were introduced increasing the overall area and biomass of VMEs protected in the NRA.
- Current closures to bottom fishing activities are subject to review every 5 years. Previous reviews conducted in 2014 and 2021 verified the continued presence of VME and their continued protection through bottom fishery closure measures. The next full review of the NAFO VME bottom fishing closures (including the seamounts closures) is expected in 2027.

### 3.2. LDAC technical considerations:

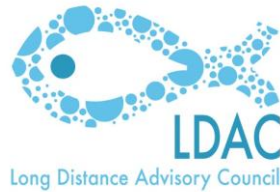
- The LDAC welcomes the full review of the VMEs and supports the WG-EAFFM recommendation that the Commission request the SC to provide management options as part of the reassessment of bottom fishing to be discussed in 2027.
- The LDAC notes that in March 2027, a WGESA meeting with managers is foreseen to make this process more transparent. Due to the complexity of this work, the LDAC wishes that this meeting is in person only (with hybrid option only for justified cases) and working documents are circulated in due advance.
- The SC recommended that every effort to be made to minimize sampling impacts and maximize data collection on catches made in vulnerable areas.

### 3.3. **LDAC recommendations on impact of bottom fishing in VMEs:**

**R1. The LDAC concurs with the WG-EAFFM recommendation for the SC to provide management options as part of the reassessment of bottom fishing to be discussed in 2026 already.**

**R2. The LDAC requests to look at fishing footprint when analysing the KDE in polygons of high density and consider them as main factor before issuing management recommendations from ESA.**

**R3. The LDAC supports the work plan of the SC but show its concern on the possibility that next WGESA meeting in November will be online as this could affect significantly to the quality of deliberations and work at a crucial stage.**

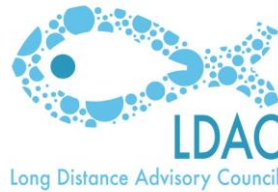


**R4. The LDAC supports the WGESA meeting with policy makers in spring 2027, but requests that sufficient preparation is given in terms of availability of summary reports and clarity on the VMEs identification and implementation.**

**R5. Regarding the proposal of VMEs for area 10, it is noted that there are oil and gas exploitation activities there despite OECM measures aimed to protect sea pens and sponges.**

### **3.4. Diverging positions on impact of bottom fishing in VMEs**

- The **LDAC fishing industry** reiterates that impacts from bottom trawl scientific research surveys are not considered to cause long-term damage to VMEs due to their small area of influence and long recurrence interval. Evaluation of the exclusion of closed areas from research surveys indicated that indices of some stocks would be affected, making them unreliable for conducting scientific advice in future. In addition, these research surveys also play a key role in monitoring conservation objectives of protected area valuable and necessary for accurate and reliable scientific data collection.
- The **LDAC NGO Group** emphasises that any bottom trawling in closed VMEs should be avoided including for bottom trawl research surveys as these areas have been closed to bottom trawling for the reason of protecting them against the impacts from this fishing gear and reiterate that scientists continue to warn that the first trawl causes the biggest damage. Therefore, even limited experimental trawls could cause long lasting damage and once again destroy any recovery achieved from closing these areas. Furthermore, the NGOs highlight that the overall low percentage of sea bottom closed to bottom trawling as VMEs should not be considered to be elementary for stock indices and stock assessments and that monitoring of conservation objectives might be better done by monitoring abundance and data from adjacent fishing areas instead, improving sampling quality and reporting of discards from these. The NGOs therefore request that the EU does not support reopening VMEs to any bottom trawling activities including for experimental surveys.



**4. Monitoring and update on relevant research related to the potential impacts of activities other than fishing in the Convention Area, subject to the capacity of the Scientific Council.**

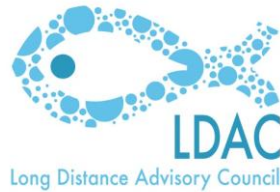
The LDAC notes that the number of areas closed to fishing increases steadily but at the same time, Canada is making oil and gas exploration drills in closed areas.

**LDAC Recommendations on impact of activities other than fishing in NAFO CA**

- The LDAC recommends that the protection of VMEs should expand to all human extractive activities, despite NAFO being a fisheries organisation. NAFO is one of the RFMOs leading the way in the implementation of an ecosystem approach so this cannot be ignored.
- The LDAC recommends that the work conducted by IEO-CSIC (EU-Spain) in previous years developing charts with all available information on existing human activities and pressures in NAFO CA, and which was presented at discussed at previous WG-EAFFM, continues with adequate funding. This work should be considered for inclusion in the NAFO Ecosystem Summary Sheets.
- In this respect, the LDAC would light to highlight the new IEO-led research project called BATISCAFO, aimed to set baseline levels and measure impacts of marine pollution in the NAFO RA and identify, if possible, the economic activities causing them. The LDAC requests both Spain and the EU to support this work and provide adequate funding to gain a better understanding of both the overall (cumulative) effects and the individual (relative) impacts that these human extractive activities have on the seafloor and the ecosystem in general.

**5. Approaches to integrate questions related to climate change in the activities of the Scientific Council (CR10)**

The LDAC notes that the SC has followed the mandate of the Commission from 2025 and drafted a working document describing objectives, structure and desired outcomes of a possible in person meeting to explore approaches to integrate information related to climate changes in their activities. This document is expected to be presented at the WG-EAFMM in 2026 for discussion and subsequently to the Commission for NAFO Annual Meeting.



The LDAC supports this work and trusts that progress is made this year towards a work plan in this subject for the coming years.

### **SECTION III. MONITORING, CONTROL AND SURVEILLANCE CONSIDERATIONS**

#### **LDAC Recommendations on Monitoring, Control and Compliance (STACTIC):**

##### **General Recommendations on MCS:**

- The LDAC advises the DG MARE negotiation team to regularly inform on the state of play of the above referred discussions that will likely continue at the next STACTIC to be held during the NAFO Annual Meeting.
- The LDAC also request that the above-mentioned items are included for discussion at the coordination meeting between the EU and the stakeholders held mid-week, as any potential measure adopted could have an impact for the fishing vessels' operations.

**-END-**