

Ms Charlina Vitcheva
Director-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
European Commission
Jozef II-straat 99
1000 Brussels
Belgium

07 February 2025

Dear Ms Vitcheva,

Subject: Joint-ACs advice on stakeholder engagement in Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) processes

Following the STECF Expert Working Group (EWG) 24-16 on the implementation of the Technical Measures Regulation, the Long Distance Advisory Council (LDAC), Mediterranean AC (MEDAC), Outermost Regions AC (CCRUP), North Sea AC (NSAC), North Western Waters AC (NWWAC), Pelagic AC (PelAC) and South Western Waters AC (SWWAC) would like to highlight some considerations regarding stakeholder involvement in STECF processes as observers and suggest ways to enhance the valuable contributions ACs can make to these processes.

ACs are uniquely positioned to provide technical expertise in fisheries management, as they represent a wide range of stakeholders, including fishers, environmental NGOs, and other relevant parties. AC members have firsthand experience and ground-level insights that can enrich the scientific deliberations of STECF, and we strongly believe that they should have the opportunity to participate more extensively in EWGs. Therefore, the LDAC, MEDAC, CCRUP, NSAC, NWWAC, PelAC and SWWAC would like to put forward the following recommendations:

- Currently, the number of representatives from ACs who can participate in EWGs is usually limited to 1 or 2. Given the depth and breadth of expertise within the ACs, we suggest that DG MARE asks the Chairs of EWGs to expand the number of AC participants where necessary or relevant. This would support a more comprehensive representation of stakeholder perspectives and ensure that a wider array of practical, real-world insights is brought into the discussions.
- We appreciate that Terms of Reference (ToRs) for EWGs are generally available on the STECF website, but we also suggest that STECF informs the ACs in a timely manner if their contribution will be required or useful for a specific EWG. This is critical because AC members require sufficient time for internal consultations and preparation. Additionally,



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since STECF EWGs are conducted in English, early notice is essential to ensure that representatives can contribute effectively.

- To enhance collaboration, we propose organising targeted meetings between STECF and the ACs on specific topics prior to an EWG. These meetings would provide an opportunity to discuss key issues in depth, identify relevant data and expertise, and align expectations. Such preparatory discussions could significantly enhance the relevance and quality of the input provided by ACs to the STECF process.
- In addition to targeted meetings, the ACs suggest exploring the possibility of organising specific sessions with STECF during AC working group meetings. These sessions could serve as a platform for open dialogue, where STECF members can present their work, seek input from AC members, and discuss upcoming priorities, for example as it happens with ICES at MIACO meetings. This approach would strengthen the integration of stakeholder expertise into scientific assessments and policy advice. Increased dialogue could also help improve understanding work in specific waters on improving selectivity and the functioning of the landing obligation.
- The usability of the [STECF website](#) should be improved. While it is an important resource for accessing reports and ToRs, the new version of the website lacks many of the previous reports, which undermines transparency and accessibility. We recommend ensuring that all previous reports are restored and that the site is made more user-friendly.
- Finally, we propose the implementation of a notification system for meetings. Many stakeholders find it difficult to regularly browse through various websites for updates, and a system that sends email notifications would ensure timely awareness of upcoming meetings. This would be especially helpful for meetings where stakeholder engagement is particularly valuable.

The ACs would like to underline the importance of allocating sufficient resources to STECF and the chairs of EWG to ensure the previous recommendations can be met. Including additional working days for STECF and EWG chairs to plan for EWG meetings (where relevant) and to present their findings to ACs can be a way to ensure effective collaboration between the ACs and STECF. Several examples highlighted below of where this has happened, illustrate the importance of such dialogue.



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In this context we would like to highlight the excellent collaboration experienced currently in the preparation for EWG 24-09 on Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems. Both the NWWAC and the SWWAC have had regular communication with DG MARE and the Chair of this WG who also attended the meeting of the NWWAC's Working Group 2 Celtic Sea & West of Scotland on 09 October 2024 ([link](#)) and the SWWAC's ICES Area VIII and IX working group on October 23rd ([link](#)). Both these meetings served as an information point to members as well as an opportunity to ask in-depth questions regarding the process of the STECF's work and stakeholder engagement. In order to facilitate the latter at an even deeper level, STECF is holding a limited number of one-to-one interviews with select AC representatives in preparation for the March meeting.

We would also like to commend the direct collaboration effort that started last year with the STECF EWG 23-11 on Fishing effort regime for demersal fisheries in the West Mediterranean. The aim of this first meeting was to explain the work of the EWG experts to MEDAC members, present results of previous meetings and receive feedback from stakeholders on questions from previous EWG meetings on the socioeconomic impact of implementing the West Mediterranean Multiannual Plan on demersal species. The MEDAC hopes that this meeting will be the first of a long series.

LDAC members are pleased with the level of involvement of the LDAC in the EWG on the Annual Economic Report for the EU fishing fleet in the last years, including the participation of the EWG Chair in several LDAC plenary meetings to present the outcomes of the AER and the direct invitation and appointment of the LDAC Secretary as coordinator of the regional chapters on performance of the EU distant water fleets at regional/RFMO level (NAFO, ICCAT, IOTC, NEAFC and CECAF).

While the CCRUP is aware that the Outermost Regions are mentioned in the reports and of the existence of the [EWG 24-06 Outermost Regions](#), its members would greatly appreciate if they could be involved in this work if possible, or be informed directly of the outcomes. The CCRUP membership comprises of multiple nationalities and therefore languages. It is greatly appreciated that documents are currently already available in French and Portuguese. However, members would also welcome the translation of the reports into Spanish, as the Canary Islands are also European territories, in order to ensure access to this information for as many stakeholders as possible.

The NWWAC, LDAC, MEDAC, NSAC and SWWAC would like to express their sincere appreciation for these close engagements and are available to provide any further useful information to facilitate similar efforts in the future.



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The ACs firmly believe that measures such as those proposed above will foster a more collaborative and productive relationship between STECF and the ACs, ultimately enhancing the scientific and stakeholder foundation of fisheries management in the EU.

The ACs remain committed to supporting the work of STECF and DG MARE, and we are eager to contribute in a manner that maximises the impact of stakeholder knowledge and experience.

Thank you for considering our suggestions. We would be delighted to discuss these ideas further and explore practical steps for their implementation.

Yours sincerely,

Emiel Brouckaert, Chair NWWAC

Antonio Marzoa Notlevsen, Chair MEDAC

Kenn Skau Fischer, Chair NSAC

Iván Lopez, Chair LDAC

Sergio López, Chair SWWAC

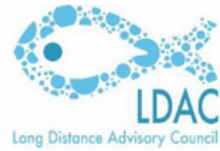
Ruben Farias, Chair CCRUP



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