Report MIAC 2025

Coordination meeting between ICES and the Advisory Councils

23 January 2025 : Copenhagen / hybrid format

Introduction

Sergio Lopez (SWWAC), chairman of the meeting, and Colm Lordan (ICES ACOM) thanked the members of the Advisory Councils for their participation and emphasised the importance of dialogue between stakeholders and scientists. Colm Lordan (ICES ACOM) stressed that important and interesting questions had been raised and that ICES would try to respond to them in a useful way. He also reiterated ICES' continued commitment to productive dialogue with the Advisory Councils.

1. Update on ICES advice on an ecosystem approach to fisheries management (EBFM) in the North East Atlantic international fisheries - LDAC

Jean Christophe Vandevelde (LDAC) pointed out that the LDAC is monitoring negotiations with the NEAFC and provided a detailed advice ahead of the last Annual Meeting held in November on issues such as conservation and management measures for shared stocks, improving regional governance and transparency in decision making, proposing new and reviewing existing marine protected areas (including OECMs) and looking at impacts of climate change for highly migratory and straddling stocks including small pelagic, demersal and deep-sea ones. He welcomed the increased collaboration of ICES with OSPAR, in particular to achieve a cross-sectoral ecosystem approach and impact assessment of different activities for areas such as VMEs. ICES has recently published advice on these topics. The LDAC would like more details on ICES collaboration with NEAFC and OSPAR under the Collective Arrangement as well as what will the ICES role will be in the forthcoming performance review to be carried out in 2025-2026.

Question to ICES: What are the details of ICES' commitments in the collaboration with OSPAR and in the NEAFC performance review?

Simon Jennings explained that ICES had provided NEAFC with advice in 2024 to support the definition of operational objectives relating to biodiversity and ecosystems. He said that this collaboration was rooted in ICES' role as scientific advisor to NEAFC. Simon Jennings announced that, as part of the collective arrangement with OSPAR, ICES would be attending a meeting in Brussels the following week to discuss the next steps in the implementation of the EBM. He added that one of the objectives of the OSPAR 2030 strategy was to examine how OSPAR and other international organizations could work together to implement the EBM more effectively. He recalled that ICES' 2024 advice to NEAFC was based on five alternative approaches that had been applied in practice, the most demanding (in terms of data and resources) was the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. ICES advice to NEAFC explained that a gradual implementation of the EBM was feasible, with a limited initial scope that could be extended over time,

depending on the resources available and the priorities of the stakeholders involved. Simon Jennings concluded by saying that the discussions in Brussels at the Collective Arrangement Meeting would provide further clarity on the next steps and he will be glad to report back on this.

Jean-Christophe Vandevelde intervened again to ask a question about the NEAFC performance review whether ICES plans to take part in the discussions on this review as contributors and also whether scientific contributions would be made to inform future decisions.

Simon Jennings responded by saying that, at this stage, ICES' involvement in the NEAFC performance review remained uncertain

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2. Lack of long-term sharing agreements for certain species - PELAC

Merel den Held (PELAC) indicated that the long-term management of blue whiting, herring and mackerel stocks is affected by the absence of sharing agreements. This poses risks for the spawning stock biomass (SSB) and the stability of the scientific councils. The impacts of this absence are worrying, particularly with significant reductions in catch opportunities forecast for 2025.

Question to ICES: In the absence of sharing agreements, how does ICES assess the impact of these situations on the sustainability of the stocks concerned?

Dorleta Garcia explained that current stock assessments already reflect the impact of exceedances of ICES recommendations, which highlights the risks for these stocks. Dorleta Garcia added that ICES has not been mandated to analyse "what-if" scenarios of what the current situation would be if there were no overshoots. However, she indicated that a retrospective analysis could be carried out looking at the historical development of the stock and comparing it to the equilibrium targets:

- For mackerel, the biomass is decreasing after having reached high levels. On average, catches were 35% higher than recommended. Without these overruns, the current biomass could be around BMSY, with catches of 950,000 tons (10% below current catches).
- For blue whiting, the catch advice has been exceeded a 33% in average. However, the biomass, even fluctuating, remains high thanks to higher recruitment than initially forecasted, offsetting the overruns.
- For Atlanto-Scandinavian herring, the situation is similar to that for mackerel, but with an even more serious impact. The biomass is now below the MSYBtrigger, showing a marked decline over the last 10 years. Without the overruns, the biomass could have remained around the level seen in 2009, with catches of around 850,000 tons.

Merelden Held thanked Dorleta Garcia for her answers and asked for details of the concrete steps to be taken to include these analyses in future discussions between coastal states. In particular, she asked about the possibility of submitting a formal request to ICES for non-recurring advice. Dorleta Garcia recommended two approaches:

1. Carry out a quantitative retrospective analysis to understand the impact of past overruns on current stock levels.
2. Incorporate implementation errors into future evaluations of long-term management plans in order to measure risks.

Jean-Christophe Vandevelde (PEW) reacted to the possibility of including implementation errors in evaluations of management strategies. He agreed with this approach, but stressed that the problem lies with the decision-makers. According to him, managers refuse to include these considerations in long-term management strategies, because recognising unilateral quotas could be perceived as tacit political acceptance.

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3. Stability and consistency of advice - NWWAC

Emiel Brouckaert (NWWAC) commented that major fluctuations in ICES advice from one year to the next have an impact on fisheries management. NWWAC proposes a wider application of stability clauses to mitigate these variations. It also calls for improved assessments for less documented stock categories (5 and 6).

Question to ICES: What efforts is ICES currently making to improve the stability of scientific advice and incorporate innovative methodologies (such as genetics) to strengthen data on poorly documented stocks?

Colm Lordan (ICES) responded by saying that ICES is well aware of the fluctuations in advice and the difficulties this can cause. An early warning system and regular dialogue with managers have been put in place to better explain these changes. Mechanisms to get in touch with stakeholders sooner were discussed at MIRIA. ICES already applies stability clauses for category 3 stocks (stocks with little data available). For category 1 and 2 stocks, ICES believes that adopting a stability clause (limiting advice to past levels) would be inconsistent with the best available advice obtained after benchmarks.

Emiel Brouckaert (NWWAC) added the questions if other aspects than management can be considered to obtain more stability. Also, if managers would consider all options in an advice sheet instead of only headline advice, wouldn't that enable more stability? Finaly another management principle affecting stability is the Top-Down application for stocks with a Landing Obligation exemption. Does ICES think this the necessary?

Colm Lordan (ICES) replied that multi-annual advice would result in a better use of available resources and contribute to better quality, more benchmarks and climate impact assessment. Therefore, a MIRIA subgroup is scheduled after the March ACOM meeting and DG MARE said that afterwards this will be discussed with stakeholders. For the use of advice options and the Top-Down approach, he points out that consideration of stability is the responsibility of managers, as they involve socio-economic choices that go beyond scientific advice.

During this discussion, Dominic Rihan (PELAC) raised a problem concerning the assessment of category 3 stocks, taking the example of herring in 6a South. He explained that, despite a healthy biomass and fishing mortality well below MSY thresholds, current advice, limited by a stability clause, only allows for a 20% increase in catches, thus blocking the ability of fisheries to benefit from the favourable state of stocks. He asked whether a fast-track mechanism could be put in place to move these stocks to category 1. Colm Lordan responded by explaining that the current rules for category 3 stocks are designed to be precautionary and lead to MSY in the long term, but recognises the challenges in the short term. He mentioned that a move towards a category 1 assessment would require benchmarks, which is difficult given limited resources. Michael Andersen (NSAC) added that assessments should be more responsive to management needs, calling on scientists to develop more practical approaches for data-limited stocks. Colm Lordan supported this idea and referred to ongoing dialogues with DG MARE and successful examples, such as the case of the Zone 7 pollack, where collaborative initiatives have led to concrete progress.

Joanne Morgan (ICES) referred to the work in WKLIFE which is working to constantly improve data limited methods, including trying to develop methods for category 4, 5 and 6 stocks.

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4. Common dolphin by-catch - SWWAC

Serge Larzabal (SWWAC) pointed out that since 2020, the SWWAC has devoted particular attention to the issue of cetacean bycatch, a complex and sensitive subject. While all the members agree on the need to take action to reduce these catches, the way in which and the urgency of taking action remain major points of debate. These measures have a major socio-economic impact on certain stakeholders. The lack of consensus between the players involved makes managing this issue particularly difficult. This is why the SWWAC is seeking the expertise of ICES, based on the best scientific data available.

Question to ICES: On the basis of the scientific data available, is there a risk of extinction in the short term for the common dolphin population in the North-East Atlantic?

Marie-Julie Roux (ICES) explained that there is no short-term risk of extinction for the common dolphin population in the north-east Atlantic. The available data suggests that the common dolphin population is abundant and stable. However, bycatch of common dolphins has been identified by ICES as being above the level of potential biological removal, indicating a risk of population depletion due to fisheries. She also pointed out that there is widespread uncertainty about the spatial distribution and population dynamics of common dolphins in the North-East Atlantic, combined with a lack of reliable by-catch estimates for all relevant fishing methods over its entire range. She added that this uncertainty remains a cause for concern.

Marie-Julie Roux (ICES) added that the management objective is to minimise and reduce bycatch. ICES has indicated in the past that temporary closures for high-risk métiers are probably the most effective short-term management measures for reducing bycatch of common dolphins. Such closures are currently applied in the Bay of Biscay during the winter months, when by-catch mortality appears to be highest. However, by-catches of common dolphins have also been observed elsewhere in the Celtic Seas, the North Sea and on the Iberian

coast. She pointed out that ICES has not yet assessed the results of all the measures recently put in place, but that ongoing bycatch projects, involving ICES experts, are testing mitigation measures.

Aurélien Henneveux (SWWAC) provided a number of details on the programs underway and the experiments being carried out as part of bycatch mitigation measures. He pointed out that some programs involve very broad approaches, which can pose challenges in terms of practical implementation. In his opinion, it is essential to ensure that experiments are not only relevant but also applicable in specific contexts, in order to obtain directly exploitable operational results. Aurélien Henneveux emphasised the need to convey understandable and well-structured messages to ensure that those involved, particularly fishermen, are able to understand and apply the measures effectively. In his view, collaboration between stakeholders is a crucial lever for the success of mitigation projects. Finally, he mentioned the difficulty of evaluating the results of projects over short periods. He recommended better coordination between the various stakeholders to optimise experimentation efforts, stressing that this could improve data collection and analysis, while promoting solutions adapted to the realities on the ground.

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5. Ecosystem considerations in stock advice - BSAC

Jarek Zielinski (BSAC), supported by Merek Waniewski (BSAC), questioned the ICES on the inclusion of natural mortality in management models, in particular the impact of predators (seals and cormorants) in the Baltic. He asked for clarification on the way in which these predator-prey interactions are integrated into the advice and their impact compared to human catches.

Question 1 to ICES: How does ICES incorporate interactions with natural predators into its stock management models, and what are their impacts compared with human catches?

Marie-Julie Roux (CIEM) pointed out that:

- ICES advice implicitly includes assumptions about environmental influences on stock productivity and dynamics.
- The poor condition of stocks in the Baltic is primarily linked to environmental stressors (warming, eutrophication, hypoxia) directly/indirectly linked to human activities. Predation pressure from abundant predators like seals and cormorants may play a role, but their effects have yet to be quantified.
- Predator–prey interactions in Baltic stock advice are mainly handled through quantitative and often time-varying mortality estimation within the stock assessment model.
- Natural mortality can be estimated using multi-species models or based on biological parameters.
- Data on consumption rates needed to parameterize multi-species models are often scarce or not available.
- A number of projects are studying the impact of cormorants, but the data is still insufficient for robust integration into the models.

- Grey seals may consume significant quantities of herring, sprat, cod, flounder and salmonids. Their effects on Baltic fish stocks are likely to have increased, although no quantitative estimations are available.
- Predation by seals is considered in the mortality of Baltic salmon (subdivisions 22-31) and attempts were made to include it in the assessment for western Baltic cod in the last inter-benchmark for the stock (WKIBPWEB, 2021)
- Increasing populations of grey seals since 2000 coincide with an increase in nematode (C. osculatum) parasitic infections, which are a contributing factor to the poor condition of Baltic cod.
- ICES is pursuing methodological developments to incorporate these interactions into future advice.
- This requires long-term monitoring of predators and fish stocks.

BSAC has also requested an update on the development of advice on mixed fisheries in the Baltic Sea, for pelagic and demersal fisheries. Last year, ICES reported a lack of appropriate data and expertise to develop this advice. In 2023, experts in Baltic mixed fisheries took part in the ICES work.

Question 2 to ICES: What results have been obtained, have new experts been mobilised and when can we expect ICES advice to include interactions between species?

Colm Lordan (ICES) replied that a group of ICES experts had drawn up 9 recommendations for research priorities in the Baltic. Changes in selectivity had not been prioritized by the experts, but ICES would take account of new research findings. This work requires resources and ongoing support to be implemented. Elements on mixed fisheries have been included in the overview, but this is a difficult exercise due to a lack of resources.

Dave Reid (ICES SCICOM) presented the work of the WGECOBAL workshop, aimed at adapting academic research to operational management in order to assess the impact of the ecosystem on fisheries and predators such as seals and cormorants. Colm Lordan pointed out that ICES' strategy for integrating the knowledge of stakeholders can be applied via a pilot project in the Baltic. Jarek Zielinski (BSAC) stressed the need to refocus science on specific gaps (selectivity, impact of predators). Alexander Ben Embarek (BSAC) announced that he would be sending out an invitation to a scientific think tank to examine these issues in greater depth.

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6. ICES Stakeholder Engagement Strategy - NSAC

Tamara Talevska (NSAC) requested an update on the progress of stakeholder engagement in ICES. She highlighted the 35 actions identified in the WKSTIMP report issued in 2023 and asked for updates on the state of play of their implementation. The NSAC advocated for stakeholder involvement in the formulation of requests for scientific advice to the European Commission, leading to a stakeholder meeting with the Commission in February 2024 and a joint advice from the ACs adopted in October 2024 on different modalities of engagement ahead of MIRIA meeting. It also highlighted the importance of prioritising topics for effective coordination and proposed to integrate scientists dedicated to the ACs as well as ICES training for ACs to strengthen their contributions.

Question to ICES: What concrete actions have already been implemented by ICES following the WKSTIMP workshop, and what prospects for collaboration are planned to strengthen the commitment of stakeholders?

Colm Lordan (ICES) emphasised the importance of the stakeholder engagement strategy and said that the long-term aim is to open up the processes to make them more transparent, inclusive and to incorporate more diverse sources of knowledge. He mentioned that ICES is committed to taking forward the actions in the WKSTIMP report, noting that 35 actions have been reviewed and prioritised, and some have already been addressed. Colm Lordan also announced the WGENGAGE working group, which will meet at the end of March, and said that ICES is working with the chairs of this working group to incorporate expertise from potential candidates for members into future discussions. Colm Lordan expressed his support for the joint letter sent to DG Mare on stakeholder engagement and welcomed the actions put in place by DG Mare to discuss special requests. He added that separate and joint engagements with requesters and stakeholders could be valuable and that ICES is exploring ways to facilitate such engagements. Colm Lordan noted the issue of training on ICES scientific advice, many training courses are organised by ICES, but they are aimed more at scientists, although training for stakeholders should be considered as it was the case in the past there was a special request by DGMARE on training for recipients of advice which often was open to other stakeholders.

Alexandre Rodriguez (LDAC) spoke on his capacity as WKSTIMP Co-Chair and congratulated ICES for taking up an important number of recommendations arising from the Report. Regarding the composition of the WGENGAGE, he suggested to "get it right from the outset" by promoting greater transparency on the call for applicants and suggested that the working group composition could be flexible and evolve in terms of names of participants and members according to the subjects dealt with and insisting on the multiple attributes or roles identified under ICES Stakeholder Engagement Strategy to contribute to the discussions. He also suggested improving the feedback and take-up of stakeholders' advice, in particular by organising dedicated preparatory meetings on sensitive subjects such as "TAC 0 stocks", MSE or designation and review of vulnerable marine ecosystems, amongst others. These meetings could take diverse formats and happen either before or after expert group meetings or benchmark workshops, to allow time for integrating their knowledge. He also mentioned the ongoing ICES work on integrated environmental assessments as an opportunity to further involve stakeholders.

In response, Colm Lordan acknowledged the slow but firm progress of actions adopted by WKSTIMP and the importance of flexibility in terms of WGENGAGE composition and roles and attributes of stakeholders. He expressed optimism that the WGENGAGE would be launched soon, stressing their task to prioritise actions and ensure a realistic and balanced approach so resources are available to guarantee their success.

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7. Separating advices for *Beryx splendens* and *Beryx decadactylus* - CCRUP

Ruben Farias (CC RUP) commented that fishermen in the Azores can provide data to enable differentiated management of the two species of *Beryx*. Their conservation efforts have

improved the state of the stocks and they are requesting separate advice for each species, using their local data if necessary to adjust fishing opportunities.

Question to ICES: Can ICES provide separate advice for *Beryx splendens* (Speldid Alfonsino) and *Beryx decadactylus* (Alfonsino), incorporating local data from the Azores for differentiated and appropriate management of the two species?

Joanne Morgan (ICES) replied that ICES preferred to provide separate advice for each species or stock, but that insufficient data made this approach difficult to implement at this time for these stocks.
She pointed out that progress had been made in assessing stocks of *Beryx splendens* (category 3), but that uncertainties remained, notably due to the absence of certain years in the survey series, such as 2020 and 2022, even though catch data were available. She pointed out that the assessment methodology was still being developed.

In conclusion, she mentioned that advice on this stock is more complex because of the uncertainties associated with the data

Emiel Brouckaert (NWWAC) stressed that the integration of fishermen's data is a key issue. He explained that efforts have been made to integrate this information into scientific assessments, but that this largely depends on the quality and methodology of the data collected. He mentioned that ICES has worked to improve the quality of the data available, but that the full scientific evaluation of these data is a lengthy process.

Colm Lordan (ICES) commented that ICES is not a data collector, so it is better to discuss this with national institutions. However, there are several Working Groups addressing this issue and an example of ICES following up is the result of WKIRISH, working on F_{ECO}. Also, as pointed out in WKAFPA, there is the possibility to contribute via the Data Compilation Workshops for benchmarks.

Rui Catarino (ICES) gave concrete examples of programs where fishermen's data is already being used to improve scientific assessments (in Scotland, Norway and the Netherlands). He stressed that similar programs could be implemented elsewhere, with collaboration between fishermen and national institutes to guarantee data quality. He also stressed that the successful integration of fishermen's data required efforts to standardize and validate the data.

Ruben Farias (CC RUP) came back on the beryx and said that all species landing on the Azores information is available, but Joanne Morgan (ICES) stated that the missing information is at survey level.

When Dominic Rihan (PelAC) asked if there are other possibilities than benchmarks to include new data, Colm Lordan (ICES) referred to the missing data overview on the ICES website. Rui Catarino (ICES) added that an 'Issue List' is available and stakeholders have the possibility to add comments which are only seen by the Stock Assessor. Emiel Brouckaert (NWWAC) in this respect referred to a NWWAC written question about additional Assessors by stock.

Conclusion - 2026 MIAC coordination

Sergio Lopez (SWWAC) concluded the meeting by thanking all the participants and in particular the ICES representatives. Merel den Held (PELAC) indicated that the organisation of MIAC 2026 would be carried out by PELAC, a rotation system having been agreed by the Advisory Councils:

2026 - PELAC
2027 - LDAC
2028 - NSAC
2029 - NWWAC
2030 - CC RUP
2031 - BSAC
2032 - SWWAC

Advisory Councils Participants

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AC	Surname	Name
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	Tsangarides	Christian
	Ben Embarek	Alexander
CC RUP	Farias	Ruben
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	Carvalho	Goncalo
LDAC	Rodriguez	Alexandre
	Vandevelde	Jean-Cristophe
NSAC	Talevska	Tamara
	Skau Fischer	Kenn
	Urbanovych	Kateryna
	Andersen	Michael
NWWAC	Brouckaert	Emiel
	Philippe	Alexandra
PELAC	Sverdrup-Jensen	Esben
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	Jourdain	Jérôme
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	Lourido García	Jesús
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	Pereira	Raquel
	Henneveux	Aurélien
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	Melo	Pedro
	Gutiérrez Pedrajo	Carlos
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	Milewska	Ewa
	Ovaska	Matti
	Oberg	Amanda
MEDAC	Caggiano	Rosa
	Piron	Marzia
NWWAC	Mathies	Mo