



## **DRAFT MINUTES**

### **INTER-ADVISORY COUNCILS (INTER-ACs) MEETING 4 October 2024 – 10:00-17:00**

**Participants:** all Advisory Councils (ACs) were represented at Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretariat levels.

**From DG MARE:** Director General Charlina Vitcheva, Director Stylianos Mitolidis (Dir. D), Valérie Tankink (Head of Unit D.3), Eoin Mac Aoidh (Deputy Head of Unit D.3), Julia Rubeck and Soumaya Bouker (MARE AC Team), Caroline Alibert-Deprez (Unit C.1), .

#### **1. Welcome and adoption of the agenda**

The Commission convened this second inter-AC hybrid meeting of 2024, which gathered all Advisory Councils (ACs). Inter-ACs meetings are the occasion to exchange with DG MARE's Director General and DG MARE colleagues on matters which are of broad interest to all advisory bodies. The transition period of the Commission was explained to the participants, as well as an update on Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems' (VMEs) socio-economic analysis was presented. The meeting also focused on the functioning of the Advisory Councils and detailed the Energy Transition Initiative and related Partnership.

#### **2. Opening and exchange of views with Director General Vitcheva**

Director General Vitcheva welcomed the AC and thanked them for connecting remotely, allowing for a broader representation. She recalled the current context of transition, with the nomination of Commissioner-Designate Costas Kadis, former Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and the Environment of Cyprus and Professor of Biodiversity. He will now undergo a hearing in front of the European Parliament early November.

Director General Vitcheva confirmed that the Ocean is much higher on the political agenda, including for the President who mentioned the Ocean Pact. A lot of focus on stakeholders' engagement has been added in the Mission Letters and is reflected as well in the political guidelines. One can also note in these letters a specific focus on the younger generations. COM always remains open for such dialogues and motivated to take it up at a higher scale.

Ms Vitcheva further focused on the Evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) Regulation, which is clearly mentioned in Commissioner-designate's Mission Letter as well as a task of projection on fisheries in 2040. Ms Vitcheva thanked the ACs for their contributions within the Call for Evidence and underlined that 87 recommendations and opinions have been gathered and are being analysed. She further noted how much DG MARE values the constellation of communities of ACs, representing broad interests on the topics.

The second stage will consist in the publication of a wider public consultation. Director General Vitcheva encouraged the ACs to actively take part in the public consultation, as a complement to all advice, recommendations, letters, and various inputs provided over the

years on the CFP. The idea is that COM has a good basis of informed data and information for any decision taken afterwards. The first step however remains the start of next College of Commissioners.

#### Questions and Answers (by alphabetical order)

The AAC recalled all steps bringing the aquaculture policy forward since the last reform of the CFP in 2014 but highlighted that the current policy measures are not being successful as the stagnation of the sector shows. The root cause is, according to the AAC, the lack of political commitment in Member States (MS) to develop sustainable aquaculture. Therefore, the AAC invites COM and MS to bring forward a reform of Aquaculture policy. The AAC further mentioned that they expect COM to undertake an assessment of the strategic guidelines on aquaculture not later than May 2025.

**Director General Vitcheva** noted that there is an issue of competence with aquaculture, and that the specificity of this sector does not give more possibilities for binding decisions. She reiterated that aquaculture is also part of the CFP Evaluation. Regarding stagnation, Ms Vitcheva highlighted that COM focused on the most important barriers and published 2 guidance documents to overcome these bottlenecks. She further asked the AAC to send their impressions on the guidance document and thus help in seeing how COM can extend the work on good practices. The good thing is that the aquatic food gains more and more ground among the consumers and this is probably the best push also to the development of the aquaculture sector. The question is how we can be part of this trend on aquatic food in the EU. Director General announced that the Aquaculture Mechanism is likely to foresee a campaign which will address some of the misunderstandings regarding the quality of aquaculture products and its impact on environment.

**BSAC** recalled that the Baltic Sea frequently acts as a test for the implementation of the CFP regulation. BSAC Chair further welcomed the CFP Evaluation and praised the useful and transparent initiative of meeting the Commissioner prior to the October Council and asked whether this tradition could be maintained with VP Šefčovič. BSAC Chair further noted that the Baltic fleet project can be a useful example in looking at the realities of energy transition and related projects.

**Ms Vitcheva** thanked the BSAC for its contribution for the TACs and quotas inputs. She noted that COM is convinced that these meetings with Commissioner ahead of the Council are the way forward and are part of COM's transparency claims. She will talk to VP Šefčovič, but without trying to back-track, VP Šefčovič is Trade and Customs' Commissioner-designate and it is very demanding for him to prepare for his hearing.

On the Baltic MAP and Article 4.6, Ms Vitcheva confirmed that there are diverging views between the EP and COM. The idea was to bring coherence: MAPs are there to give flexibility and not rigidity.

The state of the Baltic Sea is not encouraging, and prudence remains. The Director General underlined the need to be transparent and noted that in the Baltic Sea the fisheries are the victims of the non-full implementation of the environmental regulations. There are some gaps in the control of the reporting of observing the quotas, and the first outcomes on audits on control are not positive.

**BISAC** presented the work achieved over the past months together with the Bulgarian and Romanian and confirmed that the war in Ukraine and in the Middle East impacting the fishing sector. A recent focus has been put on offshore wind generation power stations and

their interaction with aquaculture in the Black Sea. In parallel, decarbonisation is another important topic for the sea basin as it is very difficult to modernize while keeping the GT power of the ships currently used and still difficult to absorb the funding and make use of all programmes available.

**Director General Vitcheva** thanked the BISAC for the positive feedback on role of ACs to support the sector. She further welcomed the fact that EMFAF is well serving the progresses but also noted the absorption issues. Ms Vitcheva also highlighted that it is a very good initiative that ACs invest time on offshore wind energy and very important to be around the table.

**CC-RUP** thanked the Commission for the efforts in responding to advice or meetings and welcomed EFCA's engagement in their last meeting in Guyana. 3 Recommendations are on their way on the Marine Action Plan, on Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) and on ICCAT.

**Director General Vitcheva** confirmed that attending meetings in Guyana was impossible in this transition and preparatory period. She further thanked the CC-RUP on their involvement to extend to the outermost regions the ICES task on VMEs as taking care of the VMEs brings back pays-off, ensuring that stocks are healthier.

**LDAC** welcomed the steps of the CFP Evaluation and the opportunities for ACs to contribute via the public consultation and the dedicated sessions. LDAC further emphasize the importance of the external dimension of the CFP and recalled both its position on level playing field and its work on joint ventures. It further asked the Commission to dedicate more resources and capacity to increase scientific and technical input in RFMOs. LDAC further advocated for a regional network of SFPAs to ensure coherence and cooperation. Furthermore, on IUU, LDAC reiterated its implication and work together with the COM and EFCA, as well as its "zero-tolerance" approach on the matter. LDAC also expressed their support to Fishers for the Future but voiced concerns over the methodology and the fishers profiles and scenarios projected. On Energy Transition initiative, LDAC requested further information on the Support Groups and clarifications about the timing of the roadmap. Lastly, LDAC proposed the setting-up of an inter-AC/COM forum on governance in the Northeast Atlantic, mirroring the inter-AC Brexit forum.

**Director General Vitcheva** confirmed the importance of the distance fleet as well as the specific focus in the overall Evaluation on the external fleet and external dimension of the CFP. On RFMOs, Director General acknowledge the pledge on non-discrimination and transparency but reiterated the most important is to implement it. Ms Vitcheva further commented on the value of AC work and the need to work hand in hand within international fora. On level-playing field, we are glad it is included in the Mission Letter of Commissioner-designate Kadis as it is important to have a more empowered EU to defend its interest internationally. About ETP, the Director General recalled it is financed with very limited money from the EMFAF and that COM experienced cuts in direct management.

**MAC** thanked the Director General for the efforts to continuously improve the functioning of the inter-AC meeting, especially the continuous availability to exchange with stakeholders. On the Fisheries Control Regulation, MAC mentioned the Article 58 on traceability the related feasibility study for prepared and preserved products, for which MAC has provided advice on the Terms of Reference. It further recommended that the external consultant should be required to visit processing plants and gather knowledge on the practical implications. MAC also drew attention to various ongoing challenges in the

trade relationship between the EU and Norway, including on the delay in the entrance into force of the recently celebrated agreements (EEA Financial Mechanism, Norwegian Financial Mechanism, temporary liberalisation of market access), the increase in the access for smoked Norwegian smoked salmon into the EU market, the export ban on “production grade” Norwegian Atlantic farmed salmon, and the cartel case registered against six Norwegian salmon producers. Additionally, the MAC drew attention to the ongoing initiative on protecting sharks through sustainable fishing and trade, including the need to prioritise a proper implementation of the EU’s “Shark Fins Naturally Attached” policy, instead of a ban on the trade of loose fins.

**Director General Vitcheva** confirmed that DG MARE’s voice is better heard in discussions on trade and market access and that COM is very happy that MS and ACs are passing the same message: talking with one voice is our strength, as the link between fisheries management and market access should be maintained. On the feasibility study, all contributions on the ToRs have been considered. The feasibility study will be launched in early 2025, allowing for a transition period. The transition should be smooth and fair. Traceability is desired by consumers, and it is positive for processors. On the initiative for sharks, the pressure should not be relocated.

**MEDAC** commented on the West Med MAP and asked for greater flexibility on the MAPs. Moreover, MEDAC reiterated that it is necessary to wait for the evaluation of the bioecological and socioeconomic results before making new management decisions, considering also that the socio-economic impact of the 5 years of entry into force of the West Med MAP is not yet known. MEDAC further regretted that the AC has not been consulted in the decision-making processes of national MSP initiatives or EU-funded MSP projects. MEDAC confirmed the alignment with other ACs (joint letter) on the request to the ETP send candidates as potential coordinators to the various WGs does not include any budget and that to the coordinator is required to be fluent in English would lead to discrimination in participation. MEDAC also noted that it is not realistic to think about a full picture of the profession related to fisheries today and hence, wondered how a foresight exercise for 2050 like Fishers of the Future is possible. MEDAC is very grateful for the organisation of the seminar on the role of the ACs during this year's EMD, and thanked the EC for giving MEDAC this opportunity, which reinforced teamwork between the ACs.

**Ms Vitcheva** thanked the MEDAC for their insights and noted that indeed the WestMed MAP is the main topic right now. It is too early to engage on content on the implementation of the West Med MAP measures and 2025 will be the important step, with the entry into force of the permanent phase of the MAP.

**NSAC** appreciated the new format of the meeting. It thanked Director-General for her appearance at the NSAC’s 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary and noted that the outcomes of NSAC’s Conference on the future of the CFP will feed into the CFP Evaluation. Food security and seafood contribution to climate objectives will be on the agenda as well. The NSAC supports the LDAC letter on Energy Transition initiative and confirmed that there is ambiguity even in larger sectors such as shipping as to what path of transition to take. In parallel, the NSAC is reinstating a dormant focus group on control-related matters, as well as climate change and the funding of energy transition. NSAC is currently working on advice on mapping of important fishing grounds as part of MSP efforts. Stakeholder engagement in scientific advice is also a topic currently of interest and the NSAC thanked the Head of Scientific Unit Ms Ivanescu for the dedicated Inter-AC meeting in spring. Finally, NSAC relayed sector’s concerns about several streams of ongoing transitions and the related costs.

**Ms Vitcheva** thanked the NSAC for the invitation to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Edinburgh and confirmed she will attend the upcoming meeting of Fisheries Director Generals of the North Sea to discuss MSP, which is of great interest for the NSAC too.

**NWWAC** announced that the 20<sup>th</sup> year of functioning of the NWWAC has just started and that the annual Work Programme contains many topics relevant for the inter-AC. The NWWAC has contributed also to Fishers of the Future sessions with the ACs and indicated gaps in the creation of the profiles. The NWWAC Chair also thanked COM for accepting to take part in the multi-AC control regulation workshop, supported as well by the PELAC.

**Director General** welcomed the dedicated sessions on the Control Regulation as it will give clarity and transparency. The idea is that the revised Control Regulation reduces the burden by using digitalised technologies.

**PELAC** thanked COM for the continued dialogue and underlined the need of a rapid action on the ICES advice regarding the Northeast mackerel stock. PELAC further welcomed the dialogue with Norway and urged COM to intensify the discussion as a firm and coordinated stance would be welcome. PELAC also informed the COM that the Working Groups have been increased, including on ecosystem-based approach and on fish welfare in pelagic fisheries.

**Director General Vitcheva** insisted that COM disagrees with the approach regarding mackerel stocks and unilateral decisions and that it has been clear in communicating about it with the respective countries.

**CC-SUD** enhanced that the AC is focusing on the historical TAC and quota proposals and that more data on the socio-economic impacts of such decisions are needed. CC-SUD further commented on the need to allow more time to react to COM proposal.

Lunch Break

### **3. Update on Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems socio-economic analysis**

COM invited Professor Ralf Döring, Chair of the STECF Working Group on VMEs to present the upcoming processes of additional analyses of socio-economic impacts of closures of the VMEs.

**Ralf Döring** explained that the STECF has received a request from DG MARE for an additional analysis. Two different focuses will be studied: the possible displacement effects of the closures and the impacts on the small-scale fisheries. STECF proposes in this framework to have specific stakeholders' interactions to collect extra information and to receive feedback on some of the modelling results. This kind of set-up will be used for the first time, the novelty lies within a more longer-term feedback process.

The current state of play is that STECF has analysed available data in 2023 and presented in September 2023 the results (results on STECF website). DG MARE requested additional information to be provided on specific issues. Hence, any additional data, qualitative data or statements are still helpful. STECF is now working on the modelling results which will be available, but no confirmed date yet.

Professor Döring further presented how the ACs could be involved via the planned feedback loop: any additional information detained by the ACs can be sent out, and they can answer a list of questions which will be circulated later this month. These documents will be used as background documents for the EWG, which will take place from 17<sup>th</sup> February to 21<sup>st</sup> February 2025. ACs are welcome to register as observers.

Responding to questions, COM highlighted that STECF is limited to the 87 closures and will analyse the future impact and will include outermost regions, contrary to ICES working on deep-sea VMEs. COM also responded to worries about the small-scale fleet being out of the scope and confirmed that STECF had looked into fleet segments in 2023 and that additional data are requested, including on small scale fleet.

#### **4. Functioning of the ACs - taking stock of the implementation of Delegated Regulation 2022/204**

COM presented an overview and stock taking of the implementation of the delegated regulation 2022/204 on the functioning of the Advisory Councils, with a focus on the balance between the sector organisations and the other-interest groups, the working methods including transparency and respect of all opinions as well as the performance review exercise.

**MEDAC** detailed the situation and underlined that the balance is not an issue as the 60-40 ratio is respected across the AC. The MEDAC presidency is composed of a non-voting president and five vice-presidents, three 60% and two 40%, with the presence of two women in the presidency. MEDAC also welcomed the clarifications on classifications as it brought more active members, moreover Oceana and LIFE have re-joined. Most of the advice in the MEDAC are subject to consensus and minority statements have been included when necessary. The MEDAC uses more hybrid and online meetings since the Covid, and this has led a broad range of participants to attend. MEDAC works in 6 languages. The Performance Review has been launched in October with a team of two new external experts and the Secretariat is hopeful that this will bring a constructive approach to the exercise. No particular comments were brought on the lump-sum.

**CC-RUP** complemented by underlying the important amount of workload needed, as a lot of regions, of members, of lot of cultures, a lot of topics coexist within the CC-RUP and the absolute need to work in 3 languages makes all the processes lengthier. The first performance review will be launched soon as the 6<sup>th</sup> year of exercise of the CC-RUP just started. On the lump-sum approach, the Secretariat conveyed the message that it is challenging to plan the recommendations so long in advance to complete the work programme.

**LDAC** confirmed that they work in 3 languages which is also time-consuming. The Secretariat further explained the fast-track preparation system they have put in place for working group meetings and ExCom meetings. This new system allowed the LDAC to send 3 opinions just in September and the efforts to try to frontload the work have been fruitful. On transparency, all documents are sent out and everyone has the right to comment the documents to ensure there are no bias and no different treatment given. The aim of these opinions is to achieve consensus: if opinions differ and no consensus on a paragraph, then they are mentioned in the footnotes of the advice. LDAC has conducted several performance reviews already and can share with other ACs the methodology that has been used. LDAC also underlined being satisfied with the lump-sum now that improvements have been seen. To conclude, LDAC also thanked COM for the new format of discussion

in the morning and for the emphasis of the Director General put on the external dimension of the CFP.

**NSAC** thanked specifically Ms Valérie Tankink for holding a very open meeting with the Secretariats and welcomed the regular update emails. NSAC further requested more detailed agenda for the meetings, in order to be better prepared for the interventions. After 3 years, the NSAC just elected an OIG Vice-Chair. No issues over classification are to be reported but one comment on the criteria related to assets and funding: there are no means for the Secretariats to check all assets of all the structures when they apply. There is an obvious lack of resources of OIG which makes AC involvement more complicated. On minority opinions, NSAC Secretariat mentioned they were quite rare but were always mentioned in the advice. NSAC has specifically suffered from Brexit and experienced a big loss in membership and hence in capacity. About the Performance Review, the upcoming one should be in 2025 and will be conducted independently after an internal review 5 years ago. The secretariat further noted again the positioning of ACs vis-à-vis other stakeholders (i.e. within Joint Special Group on the Marine Action Plan) and asked whether COM was considering elevating the status of ACs.

**AAC** referred to an issue in classification and the unfortunate recent experience with the ASC who did apply for membership in the AC but since ASC receives funding from license holders and from consumer products bearing ASC label, the classification was put into question and orientated towards sector. The ASC then withdrew their application, and the Chair mentioned it was a pity: categorisation should not be an obstacle. The upcoming ExCom on 29<sup>th</sup> October will look into this question again to find internal consensus on classification.

**MAC** Secretariat mentioned that there were no issues in terms of balance of the chairmanship positions, as the practice is to have a Chair from the supply chain, one Vice-Chair from the primary sector and another Vice-Chair from the OIGs. Classification of members under the Annex of the Delegated Regulation can be complex in practice, so further clarity on the meaning of “funding originating from undertakings” would be useful. On the balance and wider composition of the membership, the entire supply chain as well as NGOs are represented. The Secretariat has undertaken efforts to ensure wider geographical representation and a wider representation of interests, particularly of aquaculture associations and NGOs, although it remains challenging to attract NGOs due to lack of focus on fisheries market topic and a general lack of resources. On working practices, the number of meetings per year increased, the Secretariat has taken a more active role in the work, and the aim continues to be to achieve consensus. As required, the MAC undertook an independent performance review, which showed positive results. As for the change to a lump sum approach, the MAC welcomed the new approach and welcomed the swift approval of the latest sum.

**BSAC** underlined the AC had undergone a revision of rules of procedures last year and are in line with the delegated regulation. The balance is swiftly implemented at ExCom level. Furthermore, classification has never been an issue for BSAC as such, but periodic discussions occur on BSAC statements to be more encompassing. Like in other ACs, the range of topics covered has been broadened in the past years (including ETP, MSP, NRL, social dimension etc.) and a response has been to ensure online meetings to multiply them more easily. As a complement to the Secretariat intervention, BSAC Vice-Chair intervened on the imbalances in all the ACs creating problems as OIG are always in minority. She further noted that OIG seats are not all filled, namely because of limited resources.

**NWWAC** recalled that their latest performance review was conducted last year and that overall the NWWAC functions well. Delays in the grant process have been reduced and the improvements welcomed.

**PELAC** confirmed new elections just happened and new working groups are being created too to adapt to the broadening of topics to be covered. Minority opinions are not an issue in the work of PELAC. The 2021 Performance Review put forward the need to renew the ExCom generations to ensure knowledge is passed on.

**BISAC** announced that there will be new elections at the next GA end of November. BISAC faces a systematic non-participation or non-payment of membership fees but that the set of rules of procedures clarifies this point. BISAC is still working on shortcomings identified by the previous performance review. In order to save time and money, it has been decided to use hybrid meeting options more automatically.

**CC-SUD** sent contribution in writing after the meeting. The latest Performance Review was conducted in July 2024 and identified as shortcoming the need to improve external communication. The creation of a LinkedIn page will follow as a first action. As other ACs, CC SUD underlined the difficulty to plan so much in advance the work programme for coming months and the difficulty to maintain the planning during the year. Also, the first lump-sum grant attribution has suffered from important delays for the CC-SUD.

## 5. **AOB**

- Energy Transition Partnership (ETP)

COM briefly presented the state of play of the Energy Transition initiative launched in February 2023 as well as the four main areas to accelerate the transition:

- Improve the governance framework (through the Energy Transition Partnership)
- Close the gaps through research & innovation
- Develop people skills ready for the energy transition
- Improve the business and financing opportunities

The most interesting area for ACs is the energy transition partnership and the Assistance Mechanism that is created to support this action. The ETP AM will organise a workshop per year dedicated to each segment, but also a general workshop. The first workshop is planned on Ports and infrastructures in Q4 of 2024. The ETP Support Group is there to support the Assistance Mechanism and is composed of 4 Experts and a secretariat, to work on 5 thematic areas via 10 working groups. The ACs can provide the ETP Support Group with inputs and a proposal is to envisage ACs inputs also in Spring 2025 on the final recommendations.

The ACs are important stakeholders for the ETP and all input provided in various formats will be welcomed. COM welcomes the announcement today that several ACs are creating focus groups on energy transition and will contribute to the energy transition initiative.

- Article 17

COM briefly presented the state of play of the work on Article 17. The *vademecum* on the allocation of quota by Member States under Article 17 of the CFP is one of the deliverables of the fisheries and oceans package of 2023.



COM thanked the ACs for their input to the consultations carried out earlier in 2024. These inputs complemented that of the Member States and STECF to provide a rich basis for the work to follow.

The analysis is on-going and will focus on the transparency of allocation, which is a legal obligation and where COM sees clear room to improve, and on how the allocations work in Member States. COM highlighted being particularly looking for good examples of dealing with change and on the role producer organisations play in allocations. COM is also keen to explore tradeable quota systems. COM further invited ACs to still send further input on any of these issues, should they have such information, to help with the ongoing work.

The next College of European Commissioners will decide on the timing and precise focus of the *vademecum*, and, in the meantime, COM is continuing the necessary technical work in the background.