

InterAC meeting

9th March 2023

Hybrid

Report

The BSAC was represented by Jarek Zieliński (ExCom Chair), Glenn Douglas (BSAC Vice-Chair), Nils Höglund (EBM WG Chair) and Guillaume Carruel (BSAC Executive Secretary)¹. The BSAC rapporteur followed the meeting online and drafted the minutes.

1. Welcome and adoption of the agenda Lena Andersson Pench, Director MARE.D 9:30 – 9:45

Lena Andersson Pench, Director DG Mare D opened the meeting and welcomed the representatives of all Advisory Councils to the first in-person (hybrid) meeting since 2019. She thanked those who made an effort to be present in the room. She introduced the main points of the agenda: the presentation of DG Mare work and the policy package published in the end of February 2023. She underlined that the Advisory Councils play an important role for DG Mare and they are doing their best to be present at ACs meetings. Forward planning is absolutely vital to secure the presence of Commission's representatives at meetings.

2. Introduction and presentation of MARE A work Delilah AL KHUDHAIRY, Director MARE A Maritime Policy and Blue Economy

Delilah AL KHUDHAIRY, Director MARE A, introduced herself and gave an overview on the main policy lines of the Directorate. MARE A takes care of all economic activities that concern the seas (sustainable blue economy, energy, aquaculture, algae, security, blue invest, regions, knowledge, skills and many more) as well as some elements linked to the CFP package (CMO and energy transition) and the mission ocean. She sketched key milestones and deliverables for 2023. She underlined that all sectors that rely on and make use of marine resources should take account of environmental, economic and social dimensions. She mentioned the Green Deal as the guiding principle and the goals to reduce emissions by 2030. The sectors need to reduce their footprint and to accommodate sustainable business models to reduce cumulative effects on the environment.. She indicated that offshore renewable energy can help reach targets. She referred to the European Maritime Days in Brest on 24th – 25th May 2023. This important event will bring together all sea users to discuss sustainable use of the seas. She also referred to the implementation of the Re-powerEU plan. The Commission has initiated the dialogue on how to transform the sector. She mentioned the Commission's target on marine litter,

¹ *To promote the transparency of the meetings, the Commission invited all AC members as online observers. This was as a way to address the ACs concerns and the reality that, given the high workload, the Commission is not able to participate at the wide variety of separate AC meetings, especially where it concerns horizontal topics of relevance for all ACs.*

referring to the actions with respect to derelict fishing gears. Design standard for re-use and re-cycle gear will be presented. Biodiversity requirements for protection of at least 30% of the seas are part of the recently published Action Plan. Climate aspects have to be taken into account in implementing sustainable Blue Economy. Seafood plays key role in food system and food security. The Commission is working on food standards and sustainability labels. DG Mare works closely with other DGs to ensure a coherent approach to all maritime aspects. Four enablers have been identified: ocean-related knowledge, up-to-date research, financing using all tools (EU and private financing) and skills. The Commission also needs data collected by different authorities. She referred to the data sharing network EMODNET². She also referred to the annual Blue Economy report, containing a snapshot on activities. It aims to continuously improve the measuring and monitoring of the socio-economic performance of the Blue Economy, while taking its environmental impacts into account. It encompasses all sectoral and cross-sectoral economic activities based on or related to the oceans, seas and coasts. The Blue Economy Observatory is a platform complementing the Blue Economy report, it is to bridge the knowledge gaps in socio-economic data. It aims to address various challenges such as pollution and decarbonisation across various sea basins. Under funding possibilities, she mentioned the Blue Invest³ initiative that aims to boost innovation and investment in sustainable technologies for the blue economy, by supporting readiness and access to finance for early-stage businesses, SMEs and scale-ups. It is enabled by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. Among new initiatives undertaken by the Commission, Ocean Literacy will continue understanding the oceans, coalition that raises awareness about importance of oceans among citizens. Different users of sea basins need to be taken into account. Making space for all is a challenge. She referred to the Baltic Conference in Palanga in September 2023 to evaluate progress in implementing the Ministerial Declaration of 2020. Director MARE A concluded by underlying the important role of the ACs. In the course of discussion, LDAC asked about the relation between the Blue Economy report and STECF ANNUAL Economic Report. DG Mare representative answered that both reports are complementary.

3. Opening address and presentation of the CFP package Charlina Vitcheva, Director General MARE

Charlina Vitcheva informed that the treaty on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) was adopted on 8th March 2023 at the Intergovernmental Conference on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction held at UN Headquarters, after six years of negotiations. This is a new legally binding instrument addressing marine biodiversity in the deep seabed and high seas.

The Director General referred to the policy package, composed of 4 files. The ACs were one of the first audiences to which the package was presented. The package was also presented to the European Parliament in a full day meeting of the PECH committee. She

² [European Marine Observation and Data Network \(EMODnet\) \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/european-council/en/european-marine-observation-and-data-network-emodnet)

³ [| Maritime Forum \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/european-council/en/blue-invest)

underlined that the consultation process with the ACs is extremely important because the ACs represent stakeholders of different interest and take part in the regionalisation process. She stated that the Commissioner had appreciated open dialogue with the AC chairs and vice-chairs during the roundtable meeting held before the Council of Ministers in December 2022. Such meetings will be held at regular basis. She thanked the ACs for the joint letter addressed to the Commission regarding support for the ACs and underlined that any opportunity to increase the visibility and raising the profile of the ACs will be taken onboard. DG Mare will continue to organise meetings with the ACs to present the recommendations of the ACs and further improve the cooperation.

She presented the policy package. It consists of 4 files:

1. Communication on the common fisheries policy today and tomorrow⁴

As set out in the CFP Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013⁵, the aim of this staff working document and the Communication it accompanies is to report on the functioning of the CFP. It assesses the state of play and implementation of the different provisions, mindful of the new challenges and opportunities since the 2013 reform, and the political orientations set out in the European Green Deal and the related Biodiversity and Farm to Fork strategies.

The Director General underlined that the progress made in achieving sustainable fisheries is tangible. Some crucial fish stocks have been rebuilt. A decade after the last reform, we see tangible progress towards more sustainable fisheries on the ground. For example, in 2009, in the EU, only five (5) fish stocks were harvested sustainably. In 2022, that number was 60. The EU fishing fleets increased resilience and profitability. There is a clear direct link between sustainability of stocks and profitability. The Commission managed to react quickly to deal with the crisis situation caused by the increase in energy prices, as a result of the war in Ukraine. She underlined that the CFP regulation provides a fit for purpose framework. The CFP continues to be the adequate legal framework to address the challenges that EU fisheries and seas face. It provides the necessary stability to the fisheries. Although some elements of the CFP need to be implemented further, the Commission sees no need for immediate reform of the CFP.. The Commission has launched the debate on the future of the sector (Fishers of the Future) as generation renewal is identified as a challenge.

The Director General stated that the report had been upgraded into a Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council because of the future orientation of this document. The Communication calls on Member States to use the bottom-up approach enabling local fishing communities to address social challenges and needs through community-led local development under the 2021-2027 EMFAF programmes. This Communication points to a number of specific elements of the CFP, where implementation needs to be strengthened and/or further assessments and reflections are necessary to ensure that the sector, society at large and nature can fully benefit from the enormous potential of this policy. These elements include social indicators,

⁴ [COM-2023-103 en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁵ Article 49 of the Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy

to be used in the analysis of socio-economic reports to increase the robustness of socio-economic reports that are used in the preparation of fisheries management and conservation measures. The Director General underlined that the input from ACs will be needed in this regard. She asked the ACs to take part in the upcoming evaluation of the landing obligation, to ensure a regional approach. She also referred to the implementation of Article 17 of the CFP clearly requiring Member States, when allocating fishing opportunities, to use transparent and objective criteria, including those of an environmental, social and economic nature. The Commission will work to encourage the use of criteria that can foster sustainable fishing practices and support small-scale and coastal fishers.

There is clearly a need for sustainable innovation and structural investment across the value chain, especially with regard to the improvement of energy efficiency, move towards more sustainable fishing gear, the reduction of the environmental and climate footprint, the improvement of safety and the promotion of well-being at work. The ACs are invited to propose award criteria for innovation. The Commission calls on Member States, fisheries stakeholders and the scientific community to join the Commission in a 'Fisheries and Oceans Pact', reconfirming the joint commitment to fully implement the current policy and contributing to necessary reflections and assessments of certain elements of the CFP⁶.

Action Plan⁷ (AP): Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries. The Director General stated that this is the environmental pillar of the package, addressing the need to make fisheries more sustainable. She explained that, in line with the objectives of the new global biodiversity framework and the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy to protect 30% of Europe's sea area, the EU can reduce a significant share of this pressure by creating new MPAs and effectively managing existing ones as well as by making fishing practices more sustainable, including through the use of low-impact fishing gears. Effectively managed protected areas minimise incidental catches of sensitive species, protect fish spawning and nursery areas and juveniles, and reduce impacts on sensitive habitats, in particular the seabed. Bridge between the CFP and environmental legislation needs to be established. The Commission calls on the Member States to make full use of the CFP tools available and to phase out mobile bottom fishing in all MPAs by 2030 at the latest. To start with, Member States should, by the end of March 2024, adopt national measures or, where appropriate, propose joint recommendations to the regional groups to prohibit mobile bottom fishing in the MPAs that are Natura 2000 sites and newly established MPAs. Input from the ACs is needed on various knowledge gaps.

Communication on energy transition⁸

This Communication presents an enabling framework for the energy transition in the EU fisheries and aquaculture sector by identifying and addressing barriers and setting up the structures for long-term cooperation in this area. As a result of this fuel dependency, a significant part of the EU fisheries fleet was not able to cover their operational costs in 2022, leading many vessels to stay in port. The increased energy prices are a threat to

⁶ [COM-2023-103_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁷ [COM-2023-102_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁸ [Communication from the Commission: On the Energy Transition of the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture sector \(europa.eu\)](#)

profitability and viability – both directly through increased energy costs and indirectly through higher feed prices and other input costs. As a result, much of the fisheries and aquaculture sector had to rely on the financial support provided by EU Member States and the financial tools made available at EU level to continue operations. There is therefore a need to accelerate the energy transition through a more coordinated EU approach. The Commission will launch a virtual knowledge-sharing platform under the ETP, starting with the publication of a compendium of case studies and best practices on energy-transition innovations in the EU fisheries and aquaculture sector and synergies by design across sectors. The Commission will conduct an EU-wide study on the available technologies for the energy transition in the fisheries sector and will launch a new multi-stakeholder energy-transition partnership (ETP) for the EU fisheries. The Director General praised the engagement of the ACs in energy transition.

Report on the Common Market Organisation for fishery and aquaculture products.⁹

The objective of the Common Market Organisation (CMO) regulation is to ensure a level playing field for all fishery and aquaculture products marketed in the EU, whether they originate in the EU or are imported. The CMO is an integral part of the Common Fisheries Policy and it contributes to achieving sustainability in the exploitation of living marine resources. CMO played positive role in increasing competitiveness.

In conclusion, **the Director General** invited all ACs to take action and join forces.

Questions:

The BSAC EBM WG Chair praised the package for its comprehensive content and asked about its implementation at regional level through a new joint special group for Member States, with stakeholders as observers.

The MEDAC asked the Commission to whether the ACs will be included in this special group. They underlined the need for transparent discussions of all elements of the package.

The Director General answered that the joint special group will be composed of fisheries ministries and environment ministries of Member States and will not undermine the work of the ACs. Its task will be to discuss several objectives of the elements of the package at Member States level.

The Director General underlined that gradual phasing out of bottom trawling will be given priority and should be implemented until 2030. The Member States are asked to propose a roadmap for implementation. She pointed to the fact that changes in the practices of the fishing sector will be compensated in the medium to longer term, as fish stocks recover and commercially fished species move from MPAs to other fishing areas through spill-over effects. Scientific evidence will be built around bottom trawling to assist the next phases.

She underlined that the Commission is fully committed to engage in process of full implementation of Article 17 of the CFP Regulation. Fishers should choose best practice solutions.

⁹ [Implementation of Regulation \(EU\) No 1379/2013 on the common organisation of the markets in fishery and aquaculture products \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/implementation-of-regulation-eu-no-1379-2013-on-the-common-organisation-of-the-markets-in-fishery-and-aquaculture-products)

The MEDAC expressed the opinion that the time frames proposed for implementation of the measures proposed in the Action Plan cannot be accepted by the fisheries sector and will result in social and economic disasters. Efforts should be made to achieve the same results without detrimental effects for the fisheries sector.

The Director General explained that the Commission has no hidden plan to eliminate fisheries. The main goal of the Action Plan is to restore healthy fish stocks, and at the same time achieving and maintain sustainable fisheries. She underlined that there is a direct link between the profitability of the sector and healthy fish stocks. To this end, the Commission will work together with the stakeholders in a constructive way.

The NWWAC pointed out that in their letter addressed to DG Mare the ACs had proposed concrete recommendations to support ACs and asked whether the Commission will implement them.

The Director General underlined that DG Mare will make all efforts to further develop dialogue with the ACs and promote their work.

The LDAC pointed out that the policy package should be better linked to international dimension. He underlined that the InterAC meetings should be better structured to allow interventions of all ACs.

The BSAC ExCom Chair asked the Commission to provide guidelines to the ACs with respect to the provision of data for the evaluation of the landing obligation¹⁰.

The Director General replied that ACs were invited to reflect on the criteria for this evaluation. Various data on fish mortality and bycatch is needed to properly evaluate the landing obligation.

Charlina Vitcheva thanked Pascale Colson for her work and commitment and wished her nice retirement.

4. Mission Ocean presentation Kestutis SADAUSKAS, Deputy Director-General MARE

Kestutis SADAUSKAS, Deputy Director-General MARE spoke on the Mission Restore our Ocean and waters¹¹. He underlined that the ACs are an unique group of stakeholders for the Ocean Mission. The EU Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters" is one of the five missions launched in the last months. It aims to bring solutions to the main 2030 objectives, among others to protect and restore the health of our ocean and waters through research and innovation, citizen engagement and blue investments. The Mission's new approach will address the ocean and waters as one and play a key role in achieving climate neutrality and restoring nature. The Mission has high ambitions. The objective relating to the seas is to help achieve the EU objectives of protecting 30% of the EUs sea area as well as restoring marine ecosystems and 25.000 km of free flowing rivers, prevent and eliminate pollution by reducing plastic litter at sea, nutrient losses and use of chemical pesticides by 50% and make the blue economy climate-neutral and circular with net-zero maritime

¹⁰ In the Action Plan the Commission calls on Member States, the scientific community, **the Advisory Councils** and producer organisations, **by spring 2024, to provide the Commission with the key data that would be required for an evaluation of the landing obligation**. The Commission will provide guidance to that extent.

¹¹ [Restore our Ocean and Waters \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)

emissions. Cross-cutting enabling actions will support the objectives, in particular broad public mobilisation and engagement and a digital ocean and water knowledge system, known as [Digital Twin Ocean](#), an infographic explaining what the digital twin of the ocean is. The Mission supports regional engagement and cooperation through area-based “[lighthouses](#)” in major sea/river basins: Atlantic-Arctic, Mediterranean Sea, Baltic-North Sea, and Danube-Black Sea. Mission lighthouses are sites to pilot, demonstrate, develop and deploy the Mission activities across EU seas and river basins. Fisheries stakeholders can benefit from the Mission. The 2023 call is open until September 2023: for the Baltic it is called: Make Blue economy circular and neutral, and includes, among others, greening of fishing fleets. The Mission [Charter](#)¹² calls for joining efforts to achieve the three objectives of the Mission to:

1. Protect and restore marine and freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity, in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030;
2. Prevent and eliminate pollution of our ocean, seas and waters, in line with the EU Action Plan Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil;
3. Make the sustainable blue economy carbon-neutral and circular, in line with the proposed European Climate Law and the holistic vision enshrined in the Sustainable Blue Economy Strategy.

The BSAC EBM WG Chair referred to the fact that the objective of the Mission related to the restoration of rivers is very relevant for the Baltic region. River restoration, including removal of barriers to ensure river continuity and restoration of habitats needs to be continued in the region, also with the financial support of [the EU Mission](#).

The Director General agreed that restoration projects are needed for the rivers in the Baltic region, in order to remove the barriers to fish migration, on which many iconic species such as salmon, sturgeon and eel depend. The EU Mission can provide financing from HORIZON Europe to the projects offering solutions for the rivers to reach free-flow and re-establish the ecosystem. Mission lighthouses in the sea basin can assist in applying for funds.

5. Court of Auditors report on IUU presentation MARE B4 and D4

Following the request of the MAC and CCRUP, **DG MARE B4 (Pawel SWIDEREK) and D4 (Jerôme Broche)** gave a presentation on the recent [Court of Auditors report on IUU fishing](#)¹³.

The Court of Auditors (ECA) report examines the EU framework, action and spending aimed at preventing products of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing from ending up on EU citizens’ plates. The European Parliament asked the ECA to report on this issue in 2018 and 2021. The report aims to contribute to policy discussions and legal developments regarding the fight against illegal fishing. The audit covered the period from 2014 to 2020. It focused on the effectiveness of control systems for preventing the import of illegal fishery

¹² [EUSurvey - Survey \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹³ [Special report 20/2022: EU action to combat illegal fishing – Control systems in place but weakened by uneven checks and sanctions by Member States \(europa.eu\)](#)

products and the effectiveness of Member States' control systems for checking national fleets and waters. Overall, the report concludes that the control systems in place to combat illegal fishing are partially effective; although they mitigate the risk, their effectiveness is reduced by the uneven application of checks and sanctions by Member States (MS). It was recommended that the Commission monitor that MS reinforce their control systems for preventing the import of illegal fishery products, and ensure that Member States apply dissuasive sanctions against illegal fishing. The main findings included IUU certification schemes. EU action towards third countries (IUU carding system) and MS implementation of EU fisheries control rules. The control systems of MS were also looked at, how the money from EMFF were used for control purposes., MS sanctioning systems. The criteria for determining serious infringements are very uneven among MS. Sanctions are not high enough to always have a deterrent effect. Large part of infringements led to investigations – positive. Not so positive – very different national criteria are used to define serious infringements. Recommendations given by the ECA: 1. MS to reinforce control systems to prevent import of fishery products stemming from IUU fishing, among others pursue digitalisation of catch certification scheme, work with MS towards uniform use of risk identification criteria, monitor scope and quality of checks. 2. MS to apply dissuasive sanctions for IUU in a harmonised way, among others checking that MS apply sanctions for serious infringements, checking the value of sanctions is no less than economic benefit derived from infringement. Hopefully, the political agreement on these measures is to be reached in the coming months. The implementation deadline is 2024-26.

The EBM WG Chair referred to the fact that the BSAC had discussed the problem of IUU in the Baltic in relation to salmon and eel. He stated that the level of engagement in overcoming the problem and the level of sanctions differ among the EU Member States. According to the BSAC, control and inspection must increase.¹⁴.

The BSAC ExCom Chair underlined the fact that the BSAC is well aware of the IUU problems in the Baltic and has therefore developed closer cooperation with EFCA. He informed that the BSAC ExCom in June will be held in the premises of Vigo in June 2023.

The MAC and LDAC informed that they are preparing recommendations referring to the ECA report. In their view, Member States should better enforce control systems. Extra funding is needed in order to meet the deadlines for the implementation of measures set by ECA.

The representative of DG Mare pointed out that harmonisation of criteria for risk identification is ongoing. Conclusions will depend on the new legal basis (Control Regulation). He drew attention to considerable variation in fines foreseen in national

¹⁴ BSAC has an agreed position from December 2021 and [May 2022](#) (p8) that:

The BSAC calls for measures against IUU fishing for eel to be prioritised. The illegal fishery and subsequent illegal export of eel to Asia is widespread and totally unacceptable. More and serious efforts should be made to make sure that the law is complied with and that sufficient resources are allocated. Control and inspection must increase by means of targeted and joint measures between the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) and all Member States, as well as elsewhere. The BSAC calls on Member States and EFCA to provide an update with respect to control and enforcement.

legislations of the Baltic Member States for criminal sanctions. Some fines raise doubts as to their proportionality and deterrent effect. Harmonisation is needed, also with regard to the measures for eel adopted by the Council in December 2022.

6. AOB

The meeting paid tribute to Pascale Colson: she will retire 1st April after 30 years of service. She has been very much involved in the work of ACs and helped to draft financial agreements. She was always available.

The BSAC EBM WG Chair thanked Pascale Colson for keeping a special eye on the Baltic and for always being very helpful in difficult times.

All the ACs thanked Pascale Colson for all the support, dedicated time and excellent work and wished her all the best for her retirement.

Pascale Colson thanked the ACs for a wonderful tribute. She referred to the fact that the activity of the ACs had increased in the last years. To the person who will replace her she said that it is a fantastic job with nice people. She had enjoyed the work despite of all the challenges.

7. CLOSURE OF MEETING

Lena Andersson Pench thanked all participants for good discussions. She hoped that the participants had found the meeting informative. She underlined that the Commission will continue to engage in discussions with the ACs on the four pillar policy package.