



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,  
MARE.C.1/AK/ms

**Subject: BSAC follow-up letter to roundtable meeting**

Dear Mr Zielinski,

Thank you for BSAC's letter sent on 15 December 2023 as a follow-up to the roundtable meeting you had with Commissioner Sinkevičius on 7 December 2023. Your letter has retained his full attention and he asked me to reply on his behalf.

In your letter, you call on the Commission and the Member States to start opening up to stakeholder engagement in the request design stages for ICES recurring and non-recurring scientific advice. We acknowledge the relevance of the request in the context of the ongoing efforts to improve implementation of a holistic Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management and following the results of the consultation that took place ahead of the Communication on the Common Fisheries Policy. As stated during the Inter-AC meeting on 10 October 2023, MARE has already involved Member States and stakeholders on the drafting of requests on an ad hoc basis, when necessary and appropriate. In this regard, I would like to propose a dedicated meeting on how to improve coordination and processes and to discuss ICES requests.

As regards the special advice on herring of last year, I would refer to the request published on the ICES webpage <sup>(1)</sup>, as indicated in my letter to you on 10 November 2023, and to the ICES technical service of 14 December 2023 in which ICES stated that it is not in a position to assess the question of unavoidable bycatches in various Baltic fisheries <sup>(2)</sup> and that replying to the other elements of the request requires further work with an uncertain timeline so far.

Regarding socio-economic impact assessments, I understand that you have in mind a systematic exercise for each annual proposal for fishing opportunities. Here it is

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<sup>(1)</sup> [https://community.ices.dk/Committees/ACOMForum/Attachments/2023\\_Requests/23\\_14%20-%20Baltic%20Sea%20and%203a.pdf](https://community.ices.dk/Committees/ACOMForum/Attachments/2023_Requests/23_14%20-%20Baltic%20Sea%20and%203a.pdf)

<sup>(2)</sup> <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.24799266>

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important to take into account the very tight time lap between the publication of the scientific advice and the adoption of the Commission proposal.

Regarding the Advisory Councils' participation in the implementation of the Marine Action Plan <sup>(3)</sup>, your involvement as observers in the joint special group is of importance and creates the opportunity to contribute to its implementation. Progress on the implementation of the Marine Action Plan is communicated within the joint special group, as well as at other occasions such as the Inter-AC or at dedicated Advisory Council meetings.

As suggested in the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Joint Special Group under the Marine Action Plan, and as echoed in your recommendation, we are organising a technical workshop on eel that will be held online on 24 April. The save-the-date information has been shared with the Advisory Councils and the agenda will follow in due time. This event will provide an opportunity to exchange on good practices for the protection of eels. We are also working on finalising a revision of the guidance on the preparation and modification of the eel management plans, following Member States' feedback, which is aimed at helping Member States when reviewing their national plans. Once this guidance is more stable, we will see when and how best to make it available more widely to inform stakeholders.

Regarding the reference to the BBNJ agreement in the context of the protection of eels, the EU is working towards a speedy ratification of the Agreement and is already looking into its future implementation. The possibility to establish marine protected areas in the High Seas is one of the main added values of the Agreement and the EU will look into proposals to best protect marine biodiversity.

I take note of your suggestions to develop a long-term rebuilding plan for western Baltic spring-spawning herring and that the BSAC intends to invite the Norwegian authorities to an upcoming BSAC meeting to discuss the matter. Measures jointly agreed by the EU and Norway to reduce the fishing mortality of Western Baltic herring, which is now mainly taken in the Skagerrak and eastern North Sea, remain key to ensuring its long-term rebuilding. This priority also guides our position in ongoing trilateral consultations on the revision of the management model for North Sea herring, which are set to conclude this year. Therefore, a discussion with Norway is certainly welcome. Let me however mention that the Commission is the sole responsible for negotiating with third countries and that so far, Norway has been reluctant to take further actions for the management of that stock.

Yours sincerely,

Charlina VITCHEVA

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<sup>(3)</sup> COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS EU Action Plan: Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries, COM(2023)102 final