



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE.D.3/MMM

Subject: Reply to South Western Waters Advisory Council Advice on the Common Fisheries Policy

Dear Mr Lopez,

Thank you for sharing with us the recent advice of the South Western Waters Advisory Council (SWWAC) on the Common Fisheries Policy ⁽¹⁾ (CFP).

As underlined in this advice, the creation of the Advisory Councils (ACs) had an essential objective: to improve the appropriate involvement and participation of the stakeholders in the decision-making, from conception to implementation of measures or policies. The diversity of the EU fleet and coastal communities, as well as regional specificities need to be well reflected and considered in the design of the conservation and management measures.

The challenges that affect our seas are various and need to be tackled in a coherent and holistic manner. The integration of other relevant policies into the CFP is therefore strategic to tackle these challenges. Having a resilient, diverse marine ecosystem is the first step for having a resilient fishing sector capable of producing healthy, sustainable seafood products, assuring the food sovereignty and decreasing our import dependency, while maintaining and improving the livelihood of coastal communities.

I have been conveying this message on every opportunity I had in the past, and I will do once more. I hear the concerns of the fishing sector. The European standard of life cannot be maintained without a healthy ocean, and the participation of fishing sector in this is essential. I am well aware of the efforts of all stakeholders of the fishing and aquaculture sector already made, and the involvement and commitment to continue in this line.

This is why I read with a certain preoccupation the views of the SWWAC expressing that you are not being listened to or that the advice you produce are not given due consideration by the Commission and the EU Member States. I would like to reassure you that this is not

⁽¹⁾ Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy

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the case. Still, the regionalisation governance mechanism envisaged in the CFP Regulation calls for the coordination amongst all stakeholders, including Advisory Councils; and it is the Member States ultimately that are preparing and submitting the joint recommendations that will implement any new conservation measures as considered necessary, after scientific assessment.

Regarding governance, the Advisory Councils are our preferred partners to discuss any issue related to fisheries and aquaculture management and my colleagues are involved, follow and participate in as many meetings as needed.

As regards the importance of showing a strong and coherent image in the international fora, indeed in ICCAT and in other Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), the position taken by the EU reflects the consultation process between the Commission and the EU Member States. During the preparation of the annual meetings, we receive views and advice of multiple advisory councils and stakeholders. The result of this consultation process, as well as the specific framework of each RFMO determines the position taken by the EU in international fora.

This last point is particularly important for the case of North Atlantic Albacore. As explained in detail in our reply of 23 October 2023 (ref. Ares(2023)7210768) to your advice (advice 165), in 2021 ICCAT adopted a management procedure for that stock. This management procedure was the result of negotiations and compromises between the ICCAT parties. The Total Allowable Catch determined by the management procedure is set for a cycle of three years and may not increase by more than 25% between management cycles. For these reasons the EU did not propose changes to the management procedure in 2023.

We have taken note of your comments on the landing obligation. The Commission has launched a study supporting an evaluation of the landing obligation. The objective of the study is to gather data for an assessment of how the landing obligation has performed and is working, and why it is performing as it does. The evaluation will be conducted under the Better Regulation guidelines (2). The study supporting this evaluation was launched in January 2024 and is being carried out over a 12-month period.

As regards the example that you propose on by-catch mitigation, it is indeed of utmost importance to have good consultations among and with all stakeholders, and the emergency measures adopted in 2024 to reduce incidental by-catches of common dolphins in the Bay of Biscay are not an exception. The use of Article 13 of the CFP Regulation and the urgency to act is based on scientific advice (ICES, 2023) and follows the decision of the French High Court of 22 December 2023. We understand that France discussed this matter with their fishing sector, Advisory Councils, scientists and other stakeholders.

I would like to reiterate that your views are very important and considered as much as possible. For example, the latest Joint Recommendation adopted in June 2024 includes the

(2) looking at the landing obligation's functioning and impact and providing answers to the five key evaluation criteria in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, coherence (internally and externally and added value. https://commission.europa.eu/law/law-making-process/planning-and-proposing-law/better-regulation_en

views of the SWWAC ⁽³⁾. Notably with respect to the socio-economic impacts as included in the recent STECF assessment ⁽⁴⁾ on the surveillance at sea with enhanced observers and camera coverage, and increased reporting of incidental catches. As suggested by the SWWAC, the Joint Recommendation expands the use of acoustic deterrent devices, including the control of their efficiency and encourage to experiment with innovative technical devices, as well as to improve knowledge and data sharing on the dolphins' by-catches.

On the protection of the Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs), I would like to express my appreciation to the SWWAC for its continuous engagement and regular exchanges with the Commission. Since our invitation to the Deep-sea Access Stakeholder Workshop organised by ICES on 1-3 September 2020 up to the last update by the Commission on VMEs at the SWWAC working group on 16 April 2024, there has been a continuous dialogue on this file.

I note your feedback provided in the SWWAC opinion of 29 November 2023 and in the letter of the SWWAC president of 1 July 2024. I count on the support and inputs of all members of the SWWAC to the ongoing socio-economic analysis of the STECF. I can already inform you that the STECF Expert Working Group would like to organise an in-depth discussion during your meeting of 23-24 October 2024. The STECF experts are currently working on a set of questions to be sent in advance, as well as on explanations on the use of this information in the overall analysis and advice. This feedback will be crucial to inform this future STECF advice, as it will provide stakeholders' perspective for the socio-economic analysis. I encourage you to gather and communicate to the Commission the references to all existing local or national studies on the socio-economic consequences of the VMEs closures, in order to include them in this analysis.

Regarding Fishers of the future study, let me clarify that this represents a first attempt at identifying perceptions of fishers and stakeholders about what the future can hold for them rather than to "set this future in stone". Multiple avenues of participation (surveys, events, workshops) have been arranged to ensure adequate input from stakeholders: this participatory and iterative process has already enabled us to gather valuable insights and stimulate thinking and discussions around possible future conditions and challenges. We thank you for your active participation on these different occasions.

As far as the first phase of the study is concerned, it involved interviewing fishers which were chosen by the national experts of the research consortium. Following feedback from ACs and social partners, it was decided that the last phase of the study would be adjusted to ensure that all ACs and social partners could comment directly of the draft profiles of future fishers. Meetings were organised for this purpose mid-September and we thank you for your active participation.

I also wish to assure you that the role of women in fisheries is fully taken into account and will be reflected as coherently as possible in the future profiles; and that we are looking into possibilities to have partial interpretation during the conference that will present the final report in early 2025.

⁽³⁾ [Opinion N° 172](#) on measures to limit incidental catches of cetaceans in winter 2024-2025.

⁽⁴⁾ STECF(2024). 74th Plenary report (STECF PLEN-24-02), Nord J. and Doerner H. editor(s), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg).

Finally, I concur with your assessment that we need to be looking at the future of fishers as well as current circumstances. This is at the core of our Directorate-General's work and underlined by the recent launch of the evaluation of the CFP Regulation. The outputs of the Fishers of the future study and any follow-up consultations and engagement with stakeholders will also contribute to these reflections and, subsequently, help us shape the way ahead.

The decision to undertake a full evaluation of the CFP Regulation comes as a follow up to the [Fisheries and Oceans package](#) of February 2023 and its follow up. In particular, the discussions with and recommendations from the European Parliament and Fisheries Council, through Parliamentary reports and Presidency conclusions, called for an evaluation of the policy since its last reform in 2013.

Initial public feedback was sought by the Commission via the official better regulation platform, the [have your say portal](#), to which we have encouraged you and other stakeholders to provide your feedback or highlight specific earlier advice and documents (closed 6 September 2024). This will be complemented with additional public consultations and stakeholder reach out over the months to come.

I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Ms Julia Rubeck, our Advisory Councils coordinator, via the functional mailbox MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu.

Yours sincerely,

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