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EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels
MARE/C1/APP/ms

Subject: Reply to CCSUD Opinions Nos 186, 187, 188 and 189 on anchovy and common dolphins in the Bay of Biscay, the multiannual management approach, and the Western Waters multiannual plan

Dear Mr López,

Thank you for transmitting, on behalf of CCSUD, the recent opinions Nos 186, 187, 188 and 189 ([1]). I closely follow the work of the Advisory Councils and greatly value the feedback provided by the fishing sector, as it helps us to better understand your concerns, priorities and operational realities.

Allow me to address the specific issues you have raised.

- *On anchovy in the Bay of Biscay (Opinion No 186)*

We take note of your concerns regarding the future management of anchovy in the Bay of Biscay, in particular in relation to the upcoming ICES evaluation of the current management plan against the MSY B-escapement strategy. This work will feed the stock assessment process, for which advice is expected by 11 December.

We are also following this scientific work closely, given its relevance for the setting of fishing opportunities for 2027. In this context, we would like to recall that any Commission proposal should be consistent with the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy, should ensure maximum sustainable yield and apply the precautionary approach, and should be based on the best available scientific advice. The same principle applies to management plans set by stakeholders.

- *On common dolphins in the Bay of Biscay (Opinion No 187)*

Based on a joint recommendation submitted by the South Western Waters (SWW) Member States Regional Group, the Commission adopted a delegated act establishing mitigation

([1]) Our references: Ares(2026)5030006, Ares(2026)5205033, Ares(2026)6350636 & Ares(2026) 6903612, respectively for Opinions Nos 186, 187, 188 and 189.

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measures for common dolphins and other small cetaceans for 2027 ([2]), which is currently under scrutiny by the European Parliament and the Council. The act introduces a new, more flexible fishing closure regime, under which masters of Union vessels may choose an alternative closure period of 30 consecutive days between 15 January and 27 February 2027. This flexible closure is intended to provide greater operational flexibility for the fishing sector, thereby reducing economic impacts while continuing to cover the period of high bycatch risk. The closure considers the recommendations set out in your Opinion No 187, which we consider to be a positive outcome of CCSUD's work and an encouragement to continue efforts on this sensitive matter.

This autumn will be a crucial period, as the fishing sector will need to discuss the practical arrangements for implementing the new fishing closure. If managed well, this could help mitigate the impact on the ancillary sector.

We have also taken note of the request to address the pending questions raised in the Opinion No 183, notably regarding updated estimates of dolphin abundance and bycatch mortality at the finer scale of ICES divisions, as well as the effectiveness of the fishing closures implemented between 2024 and 2026 and their economic impact. These questions have been addressed in part through the work of the ICES Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC), meeting from 21-25 September 2026 in Italy (advice expected on 4 December). To complement this scientific work, the Commission is considering launching an ICES special request this autumn and will take into account your recent opinions on dolphins.

- *On multiannual management for stocks in the Bay of Biscay (Opinion No 188)*

We understand that CCSUD is looking for a more holistic, long-term management approach, including the development of harvest control rules (HCRs) and management strategy evaluations (MSEs) for key fisheries in the Bay of Biscay. To date, such approaches have been applied, at stakeholders' initiative, on a case-by-case basis to some small pelagic stocks in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian waters, to the extent to which they are consistent with the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy and based on the best available scientific advice. We recognise the potential benefits of HCRs and MSEs in providing greater predictability and stability in fisheries management.

The opinion also addresses seabass in ICES divisions 8a-b and suggests moving towards a three-year multiannual management. As discussed at CCSUD's workshop on ICES advice (held on 10 July 2026), the Commission launched an ICES special request to explore multiannual advice for several stocks, including seabass 8a-b. We will keep you informed about the advice as soon as it becomes available.

- *On Article 4 of the Western Waters multiannual plan (Opinion No 189)*

We take note of your suggestion to revise the Western Waters multiannual plan, notably by removing the "5% rule" set out in Article 4 and by introducing harvest control rules (HCR) validated by the relevant scientific body. The Commission completed a call for evidence on the multiannual plans (MAPs) and is working on the impact assessment to

([2]) Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) …/... amending Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards measures to reduce incidental catches of common dolphin (Delphinus delphis) and other small cetaceans in the Bay of Biscay. EU Register of delegated and implementing acts; https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/regdel/#/delegatedActs/3115?lang=en.

support a potential amendment of the EU MAPs. The CCSUD will be informed in due course of any developments in this regard.

I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Ms Amanda Perez Perera (Amanda.PEREZ-PERERA@ec.europa.eu), our policy officer and Julia Rubeck, our Advisory Councils coordinator, via the functional mailbox MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu.

Yours sincerely,

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Electronically signed on 27/10/2026 19:18 (UTC+01) in accordance with Article 11 of Commission Decision (EU) 2021/2121