Joint NWWAC/SWWAC/LDAC Response to the Atlantic maritime and macro-regional strategy call for evidence

Executive Summary

The joint NWWAC/SWWAC/LDAC advice calls for the seafood sector to become a fully integrated partner in the future Atlantic Maritime and Macro-regional Strategy, ensuring that the fishing industry is recognised as a strategic contributor to food security and sovereignty, sustainable marine management, coastal prosperity and the blue economy.

Better coordination of policies and funding is needed to strengthen resilience and competitiveness. The NWWAC, SWWAC and LDAC call for stronger alignment of EU, national and regional policies and funding instruments to support fleet modernisation, decarbonisation, climate adaptation, sustainable resource management and long-term economic viability for coastal communities.

The seafood sector must be fully integrated into solutions for shared maritime challenges. Fisheries should play a central role in ecosystem-based management, maritime spatial planning and innovation initiatives to address climate change, shifting fish stocks and increasing competition for marine space from activities such as offshore renewable energy development or deep-sea mining.

Knowledge exchange and stronger science-policy-industry cooperation are essential. Enhanced collaboration between industry, researchers and policymakers can accelerate innovation, improve technology uptake, support evidence-based decision-making and strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of seafood-dependent communities across the Atlantic region.

Multi-level governance must ensure meaningful stakeholder participation. Greater involvement of fisheries stakeholders in governance and decision-making processes is vital to improve transparency, reduce spatial conflicts, strengthen regulatory compliance and ensure balanced management of marine resources.

Atlantic seafood interests need a stronger voice in future EU policy and funding frameworks. Fisheries should be recognised as a strategic sector that contributes to food security and sovereignty, employment, regional development and the blue economy, with the Advisory Councils playing a pivotal role in representing sector interests and supporting implementation of the future Atlantic Strategy.

Background

In 2011, the European Commission adopted the Atlantic Maritime Strategy to boost a sustainable blue economy across Ireland, France, Portugal, and Spain. The Strategy and the subsequently launched Action Plan spurred maritime cooperation, launching over 1,200 projects and mobilising nearly €6 billion in investments by 2017. In 2020, the Action Plan was updated to align with the European Green Deal, focusing on four pillars: ports as hubs, blue skills/ocean literacy, marine renewable energy, and healthy oceans/resilient coasts.

The Strategy and Action Plan have successfully delivered a large number of projects and investments, as well as collaboration across its four pillars introduced in 2020. However, one major stakeholder group has been notably absent throughout the past 15 years: the seafood sector. Although the strategy initially sought to promote both traditional activities and newer maritime sectors, its implementation shifted priorities in a way that has often left the seafood industry feeling marginalised.

Following direct interaction with the Spanish Presidency of the Atlantic Maritime Strategy in March 2026[1], the North Western Waters Advisory Council (NWWAC), the South Western Waters Advisory Council (SWWAC), and the Long Distance Advisory Council (LDAC) have come together to put forward their members interests in contributing to shaping the proposed Atlantic Macro-regional Strategy. The following recommendations address the key problems the initiative aims to tackle as identified in the call for evidence[2].

1 Improving coordination between existing EU, national and regional policies and funding instruments while taking account of cooperation with related existing regional and international structures

Active engagement by the seafood sector in the coordination of policies and funding within the Atlantic regional strategy is crucial to securing appropriate financial support, safeguarding economic sustainability, and ensuring the responsible management of shared marine resources. Fishing activities and maritime industries operate across national boundaries, therefore greater policy coherence and cooperation are needed to address shared environmental, economic and governance challenges. Improved coordination can help maximise the effectiveness of funding programmes, strengthen resilience to climate change and other emerging pressures, and ensure that policy measures are informed by the practical realities of the seafood sector and coastal communities.

NWWAC/SWWAC/LDAC Key Recommendations

- **Strengthen policy and funding coordination:** Improve coordination between EMFAF, Horizon Europe, regional development funds and other relevant funding mechanisms to maximise investment, support fleet modernisation and decarbonisation, reduce

[1] NWWAC Horizontal Working Group meeting 05 March 2026 (link)
[2] https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/19138-Atlantic-maritime-and-macro-regional-strategy_en

administrative burdens, and enhance the sector's resilience to future economic and environmental challenges. The same principle should apply the framework of the new Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034.

- **Enhance integrated management of shared marine resources:** Strengthen alignment between regional, national and international governance frameworks to improve regulatory coherence, support cross-border data sharing and monitoring, protect ecologically sensitive areas, and promote the sustainable management of shared ecosystems.
- **Futureproofing against crises:** Promote a coordinated governance approach that strengthens the sector's resilience to climate-related changes in stock distribution, market fluctuations, and growing competition for marine space, including from offshore renewable energy developments or deep-sea mining.

2 Fostering innovative and integrated solutions to shared territorial and maritime challenges

The seafood sector should play a central role in the implementation of the Atlantic Strategy, reflecting its dependence on healthy and resilient marine ecosystems and its exposure to shared challenges such as climate change, shifting stock distributions and increasing competition for maritime space. Addressing these challenges requires integrated approaches that balance environmental sustainability with economic development, while supporting innovation, business competitiveness and the long-term viability of coastal communities. Effective collaboration between policymakers, researchers and industry stakeholders, including via the Advisory Councils, will be essential to develop practical solutions that strengthen the resilience of the sector and ensure the sustainable use of marine resources.

NWWAC/SWWAC/LDAC Key Recommendations

- **Promote ecosystem-based management:** Support management approaches that balance seafood production with environmental conservation and energy production, ensuring the long-term health, resilience and productivity of marine ecosystems.
- **Strengthen maritime spatial planning:** Ensure fisheries interests are fully integrated into maritime spatial planning processes to manage competing demands for marine space and safeguard access to traditional fishing grounds.
- **Drive innovation and resilience across the seafood sector:** Support the adoption of innovative technologies, sustainable fishing practices and digital solutions, while improving access to funding and reducing barriers for seafood businesses, particularly SMEs, to strengthen competitiveness and long-term economic resilience.

3 Facilitating knowledge exchange and the transfer of good practices and solutions

As the EU Atlantic Maritime Strategy evolves towards a broader EU Macro-regional Strategy for the Atlantic, strengthening collaboration, knowledge exchange and the dissemination of best practices will be essential to supporting sustainable growth across the seafood sector. Greater

cooperation between fisheries[3], aquaculture, processing industries, research institutions and policymakers can help bridge the gap between policy development and practical implementation, improve the uptake of innovative solutions, and ensure that successful approaches are replicated across the Atlantic region. This collaborative approach can also support stronger coastal economies, enhance business competitiveness, and improve the long-term resilience of seafood-dependent communities.

NWWAC/SWWAC/LDAC Key Recommendations

- **Promote cross-border knowledge exchange and collaboration:** Strengthen cooperation across the Atlantic region to facilitate the sharing of best practices, replicate successful pilot projects and innovations, and maximise the value of research, investment and regional expertise.
- **Accelerate innovation and technology adoption:** Support greater participation in knowledge-sharing and innovation initiatives to encourage the uptake of digital technologies, traceability systems, environmental monitoring tools and other solutions that enhance sustainability, efficiency and transparency across the seafood sector.
- **Strengthen the science-policy-industry interface:** Enhance collaboration between industry, policymakers and the scientific community to ensure that management decisions are informed by both robust scientific evidence and practical industry experience, while supporting the long-term competitiveness and resilience of coastal communities.

4 Strengthening multi-level governance and stakeholder participation

The effective involvement of the seafood sector, including fisheries, aquaculture and processing, is fundamental to ensuring that governance arrangements within the Atlantic region are both inclusive and effective. Given the transboundary nature of marine ecosystems and resources, greater cooperation between stakeholders, Member States and governance bodies is required to address shared environmental, economic and social challenges. Strengthened multi-level governance can help improve policy coherence, support sustainable resource management, enhance stakeholder confidence in decision-making processes, and ensure that the needs of coastal communities are considered alongside wider environmental and maritime objectives.

NWWAC/SWWAC/LDAC Key Recommendations

- **Mitigate spatial conflicts and secure access to marine resources:** Strengthen the involvement of the seafood sector in maritime spatial planning and decision-making processes to ensure fisheries interests are fairly represented alongside emerging marine activities, including offshore renewable energy and deep-sea mining, marine protected areas and shipping developments. This will support balanced coexistence, minimise spatial conflicts and safeguard access to traditional fishing grounds.

[3] Please note that in this document the term “fisheries” refers to both commercial and recreational sectors.

- **Promote ecosystem-based and collaborative governance:** Improve alignment between environmental and fisheries policies through multi-level governance frameworks that integrate scientific evidence with industry expertise, while encouraging co-management approaches that increase transparency, trust and regulatory compliance.
- **Enhance regulatory compliance and transparency:** Encourage the adoption of co-management approaches that actively involve industry, scientists, environmental organisations and policymakers in the design and implementation of management measures. Greater stakeholder participation especially via the Advisory Councils can improve transparency, increase confidence in decision-making processes and strengthen compliance with regulatory requirements.
- **Support future generations and sector viability:** Develop long-term, collaborative governance arrangements that provide greater certainty for the seafood sector, encouraging investment, innovation and skills development while improving the attractiveness of fisheries careers for future generations.

5 Increasing the strategic visibility and political weight of Atlantic priorities in the European policy agenda

The active involvement of the seafood sector is essential to strengthening the visibility of Atlantic priorities within the European policy agenda and ensuring that the sector's interests are effectively reflected in future policy and funding decisions. As a key contributor to food security and sovereignty, economic development, employment and the sustainable blue economy, the seafood sector has a critical role to play in shaping discussions on marine resource management, maritime spatial planning, climate resilience and regional development. A stronger and more coordinated Atlantic voice can help ensure that the region's environmental, economic and social priorities are reflected in future funding programmes, regulatory frameworks and international negotiations.

NWWAC/SWWAC/LDAC Key Recommendations

- **Strengthen recognition of seafood's contribution to food security and sovereignty, and the blue economy:** Ensure that fisheries are recognised as strategic sectors within European food systems and maritime policy, reflecting their contribution to food security and sovereignty, economic growth, employment and climate resilience. Efforts should also be made to reduce reliance on seafood imports through the sustainable growth of domestic production.
- **Secure effective representation in future policy and funding frameworks:** Strengthen coordinated engagement by the Atlantic seafood sector in the development of post-2027 funding programmes, regulatory frameworks and maritime initiatives to ensure that fisheries are adequately reflected in future policy priorities and budget allocations.
- **Supporting a Just Energy Transition and Managing Spatial Competition:** Ensure that fisheries are fully integrated into marine spatial planning and energy transition initiatives. This should include safeguarding access to traditional fishing grounds, promoting coexistence with offshore renewable energy developments, and providing the investment and

infrastructure support needed to enable the sector's decarbonisation and long-term competitiveness.

Conclusion

The success of the future Atlantic Maritime and Macro-regional Strategy will depend on the meaningful involvement of the seafood sector in its development and implementation. As a sector that is central to food security and sovereignty, coastal economies, marine resource management and the sustainable blue economy, fisheries must be recognised as key partners in delivering the Atlantic region's long-term objectives.

The Advisory Councils are uniquely placed to support this ambition. Through their established role in bringing together fisheries, aquaculture, processing interests, environmental organisations and other stakeholders, they strengthen the strategic voice of the seafood sector, improve representation in policy discussions and facilitate coordinated positions on issues affecting marine resources, biodiversity, food production and coastal communities. As trusted platforms for collaboration and stakeholder engagement, the NWWAC, SWWAC and LDAC can help ensure that Atlantic priorities are effectively reflected in future EU policies, funding programmes and governance frameworks.

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