

Meeting Report – EFCA Advisory Board

Date: 21 April 2026

Location: EFCA, Vigo (Spain)

List of participants: Annex I

1. Introduction and Advisory Councils state of play

EFCA Executive Director (ED) opens the meeting welcoming participants expressing her gratitude for the always valuable contribution of the Advisory Councils (ACs).

Participants were invited to provide updates on the activities in relation with EFCA's mission conducted in the last period (October 2025- April 2026):

LDAC (Long Distance Advisory Council) outlined the work conducted focused on the: follow-up on the CFP evaluation and feedback on the External Dimension and the functioning of the Advisory Councils (as coordinators of an Inter-AC advice; regular yearly written advices to five RFMOs (NAFO, NEAFC, ICCAT, IOTC, WCPFC), including recommendations on monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS) and fight against IUU fishing alongside conservation and management measures; and the feedback provided to the Commission on the “new generation” of Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs), including the organisation of a dedicated one-day conference in Brussels on 8 April in this topic and the presentation of the recommendations in a side event at the European Parliament (available on the website).

The LDAC representative flagged key aspects in this context, including the need strengthening and encouraging full utilisation of sectoral support, with a relevant role of EFCA on enhancing capacity building training of inspectors and control authorities, and providing technical solutions to facilitate use and compatibility of MCS tools. He also flagged the growing problem of dormant bilateral agreements (currently 9) which hampers EU distant water fleets to access the and operate in the fishing grounds of those partner countries due to the exclusivity clause. The representative also mentioned the questions made to DG MARE concerning the implementation of the revised EU control framework encompassing several topics of interest for the external fishing fleet from REM implementation to transshipments or serious infringements in case of force labour, EU IUU carding process particularly in the cases of Senegal, Ghana and Ecuador) and CATCH IT system.

Finally, the LDAC representative pointed to the EU strategy on the external fisheries action is one of the main priorities in the LDAC for the coming months. Since the last Advisory Board, the LDAC has submitted a written response to the call for evidence and had an exchange of views with Director B and his team in a bilateral meeting.

EFCA thanked the LDAC for the intervention and described the steps taken in this field under the West Africa Sustainable Ocean Program (WASOP), including the organisation of joint at-sea patrols, and welcomed LDAC work in promoting the level playing field. In the field of REM, EFCA specified that the tasks associated with this provision under the Control Regulation, pertained to the responsibility of the European Commission to which EFCA is only providing technical assistance.

CCRUP thanked EFCA's support and sustained cooperation on control and the fight against IUU in outermost regions and highlighted the need to account for regional specificities. Representatives detailed that the main focus of the AC in this period was recreational fishing, especially where it results in illegal marketing, with impacts on resources and small-scale commercial fleets. The AC proposed exploring targeted and proportionate measures (e.g. revising licences and the requirements under which they are allocated or strengthening monitoring and assessment for recreational activity).

The AC noted severe constraints in human and material resources for control authorities for French Guyana while reported ongoing worries about illegal fishing and limited tangible improvements in the current situation and appreciated EFCA's concerns.

The ED underlined that visiting the regions helps understand the operational challenges; confirming that the Indian Ocean JDP (following visits to Réunion and Mayotte) is progressing well with inspections at landing (not yet at sea), and reiterated EFCA's commitment to support solutions for French Guiana should conditions allow.

NSAC (North Sea Advisory Council) representative described the changes and disruptions experienced in both the management and the settlement of the AC, with a relocation of its offices from Netherlands to Belgium. The AC representative detailed the advice produced during the considered period including on North Sea cod, the landing obligation evaluation, the revised control regulation and data sharing guidelines for spatial restrictions via onboard navigation systems. The representative also detailed a number of advices in the pipeline, including Ocean Pact, MSFD, Vision 20240 and brown crab management among others.

The NSAC representative underlined the disproportionate administrative and financial burden the revised Control Regulation creates and informed they had joined other ACs in the joint advice requesting greater involvement of the ACs in the implementing rules and safeguards for ensuring a level playing field.

BSAC (Baltic Sea Advisory Council) presented the highlights of the work conducted during this period. They included providing advice on fishing opportunities for the Baltic Sea with emphasis on key ecosystem drivers such as low fishing pressure for several stocks, species predation, climate change or eutrophication and low salinity stressing the concerns over seal and cormorant impacts, and the establishment of a science focus group to identify gaps in advice and discuss recovery frameworks. BSAC appreciated the EFCA activity in December 2025, in Gdynia (Poland) including a patrol vessel visit and EFCA's presentation to the AC.

BSAC also echoed concerns (with other ACs) about the consultation process for delegated/implementing acts under the revised Control Regulation and looked ahead to participation in the upcoming workshop of the Advisory Councils that will likely take place back-to-back with the InterAC meeting. The BSAC asked EFCA to provide, to the extent possible, feedback to the following questions:

- Could EFCA at this stage provide an explanation or update on the status of the sampling plans related to the weighing of fishery products from small pelagic fisheries, whether these products are landed sorted or unsorted, as well as fishery products in bulk intended for feed

(i.e. industrial purposes) and demersal fishery products landed in standardised boxes? These sampling plans have been, or should continue to be, under revision. In relation to the sampling plans, could EFCA also clarify how it has ensured, or intends to ensure, that a practical and balanced solution is found that guarantees both sufficient control and takes into account the operational realities and constraints of the fisheries?

- How do consistency between sampling plans to be developed by MS is going to be ensured?

In response to BSAC questions, EFCA reported that, at the Commission request, EFCA worked with Member State control experts and scientists to develop statistically based sampling matrices for identified unsorted small pelagic landings (in Baltic Sea, North Sea, Western Waters, and Adriatic small pelagic). EFCA delivered these matrices to the Commission at the end of March 2026; they were adopted by consensus within the Member State group. EFCA noted the advice incorporates scientific criteria and is grounded on an approach of practical implementation and control, but the decision concerning the implementing rules pertains to the European Commission.

The rest of questions addressed by the BSAC will be followed up in writing, including questions on how penalties would apply where sampling discrepancies are identified, and a request for clarification on mesh size questions (16 mm for sprat, 32 mm for herring) which required further specification.

NWWAC (North Western Waters Advisory Council) thanked EFCA for the direct engagement and referenced NWWAC advice on Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2025/1766 in particular on what concerns boarding ladders. NWWAC informed they are collaborating with another ACs to organise a multi-ACs workshop with Member States Control Expert Groups on Control Regulation implementation in September 2026 and is also preparing a follow-up workshop with DG MARE that would be scheduled ideally around the 16th of July. The AC also highlighted additional workstreams including Ocean Pact/Act, Vision 2040, technical measures and recovery plans, and a joint focus group on brown crab management organised in conjunction with NSAC.

Specifically on brown crab management the AC explained that Member States have been developing a joint recommendation initiated already during the Belgium presidency, but details are still being worked out (e.g. MCRS and berried females).

SWWAC (South Western Waters Advisory Council) representative detailed the main priorities of the AC including, but not limited to, Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Vision 2040, fishing opportunities in a climate change context and dolphin bycatch for which the AC has produced advice. Specifically in relation with dolphin bycatch, the AC is requesting Commission to use available scientific results to assess the three-year fisheries closure in the Bay of Biscay, noting the upcoming presentation of the socioeconomic impacts of the closure by the STEFC.

The SWWAC representative also informed participants on the upcoming working groups on the 28 and 29 of April in Seville (Spain) that will cover cetacean bycatch, albacore, VMS and climate change impact on small pelagic species and anchovy management in the Bay of Biscay. Concerning albacore and ICCAT, the AC representative outlined the work towards the elaboration of the advice is going to count with the support of AZTI and the aim is to submit it to the Commission before the summer break. The representative highlighted that CCRUP, MEDAC and SWWAC have engaged in the joint task of better defining small-scale fisheries under a multicriteria approach. The

representative also informed participants that Sebastián Villasante from the University of Santiago de Compostela will be introducing the data on resilience of coastal communities and possibilities for strategic planning to the Members for a potential advice to the Commission.

PELAC (Pelagic Advisory Council) representative debriefed participants on the activities conducted under the concerned period, highlighting the advice produced for the Northeast Atlantic mackerel in light of the four-party arrangement concluded in December 2025 and the persisting need of a long-term approach and a rebuilding plan. Pelagic AC elaborated jointly with NWWAC on good governance practices for ACs intended to feed the Commission's work for an ACs code of conduct. The AC also focused on the work on ecosystem-based management

Pelagic AC together with other ACs requested via a joint letter Scheveningen, Baltic and North Sea to organise a workshop with the Control Expert Groups on the implementation of the revised Control Regulation and thanked EFCA for its support, in alignment with its agreed role. The representative finally informed participants that next meetings were scheduled for 1–2 July in Santiago de Compostela.

The ED noted practical inspection challenges for cetacean bycatch mitigation measures (e.g., verifying pinger functionality/placement underwater) and confirmed EFCA interest in ICCAT-related workstreams.

MAC (Market Advisory Council) representative outlined the core topics during the reporting period. The AC underlined the importance of the advice provided to the European Commission on the upcoming EU Strategy for External Fisheries Action including recommendations to strengthen cooperation with non – EU countries, aim for a reduction in the dependence on supply from third countries, address imbalances in the level-playing-field, promote binding standards on social responsibility, maintain and expand the “zero tolerance” approach to IUU fishing, promote the CATCH IT system, ensure a consistent application of control rules across Member States, engage with international partners and RFMOs to promote similar standards, support the implementation of catch certification schemes, leverage trade policy to encourage compliance, rigorous implementation of the “carding system, foster respect for decent working conditions and labour standards through the Forced Labour Regulation, the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, international standards and voluntary certification schemes, and continue to promote UNCLOS as the basis for global ocean governance.

The MAC representative also highlighted advice to the European Commission on the terms of reference of the STECF Annual Economic Report of the EU Fishing Fleet, including recommendations to encourage the Member States to continuously improve the quality and quantity of data, to include a special chapter on the economic impact of the lack of agreement between coastal States on stocks sharing arrangement as well as a special chapter on the age of fishing vessels / fleets, and to further strengthen and increase the preponderance of the forward-looking sections of the report in comparison with the retrospective ones.

Furthermore, the MAC representative highlighted recent advice on the competitiveness, in the context of the Commission's targets for simplification and reduction of administrative burden, including stress testing related to the landing obligation, functioning and funding of Producer Organisations, EU sectoral fundings, submission of catch certificates, and food safety rules, plus the organisation of Implementation Dialogues on the competitiveness of the post-harvest supply chain,

international trade, and interoperability. The MAC adopted advice on the negotiations of the EU–UK SPS Agreement, including harmonisation of SPS requirements, maximisation of the sharing of SPS-related data, and harmonisation of other legislation.

Finally, the MAC representative informed of ongoing work to develop advice on operational stabilisation and strategic alignment of CATCH advice on the upcoming DG MARE studies on administrative burden related to the Fisheries Control Regulation, and joint advice with the LDAC on addressing risks in global squid fisheries through strengthened EU import controls and transparency.

The ED thanked MAC for the intervention highlighting the importance of work on forced labour in alignment with the amended Control Regulation and also highlights that ensuring an harmonised sustainable legal and traceable fisheries products is an aim we all share. The ED also pointed out that EFCA representation will attend the 10th anniversary of MAC scheduled on the 10th of June.

2. EFCA's Annual Report 2025

EFCA informed participants on the main outcomes of the draft 2025 Annual Report to be considered for approval by the Administrative Board. The Agency shared with participants that in 2025 99% of the work program was fully implemented and 100% of the budget allocation was executed. The annual report will be made public once approved by the Administrative Board.

The Agency also presented the main outcomes of the report summarised as follows:

- 48,245 coordinated inspections reported within the framework of the seven EFCA's Joint Deployment Plans, with 5,132 cases of suspected infringements reported. Discussion noted that changes in suspected-infringement rates may reflect detection capability as well as underlying compliance patterns.
- 22 specific actions implemented (Baltic Sea, North Sea, Western Waters) and 7 specific campaigns implemented (Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea), based on regional risk analysis.
- EFCA continued to coordinate the REM technical working group. In 2025, an updated version of the REM technical guidelines was finalised and published (referenced as published in April), incorporating technological advances and pilot-project experience across sea basin.
- EFCA assisted the European Commission and Member States with implementation, including catch-certificate analysis and participation in evaluation missions. Countries referenced for support included Panama, Guyana, Suriname, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, and Ghana; EFCA accompanied missions to Ghana and Mauritius.
- EFCA, EMSA, and Frontex coordinated and/or participated in multipurpose maritime operations (notably an Adriatic Sea operation coordinated with Italian, Croatian, and Slovenian authorities; approx. 35 days of operations). Additional multipurpose operations were referenced in the Baltic Sea, Black Sea, and the Channel.
- EFCA referenced completion of the e-FISHMED project (Northern Africa) and ongoing/starting programmes including WASOP (West Africa; started in November), SWIOP (Sustainable West Indian Ocean programme; recently assigned), and preparation of a Central Africa programme (ODEBAC). These projects were described as supporting cooperation at sea, inspections, capacity building, coordination, and legislative support to combat IUU fishing.

- Operations included chartered offshore patrol vessels (OPVs) supporting multinational inspection teams (189 Union inspectors deployed; approx. 450 inspections at sea referenced), RPAS/drone capability (noted as present permanently in the Mediterranean with seasonal Atlantic deployments), and fixed-wing air surveillance (approx. 260 flight hours; 33 flights in the Mediterranean and 24 flights in Baltic/Western Waters).

The Agency also informed participants that EFCA is planning the organisation of the first “EFCA Industry Day” in October 2026, aiming at gathering companies and authorities of Member States to map technical options for better fisheries control. The use of drones and RPAS were mentioned as examples.

CCRUP asked EFCA whether data from outermost regions was available from the totals presented per JDP. EFCA replied they will facilitate the data as in previous occasions disaggregated for Azores and Madeira. CCRUP also requested EFCA to include the 9 outermost regions in EFCA’s maps.

NSAC intervened pointing out a potential weakness of the system for measuring engine power at sea and safety concerns for at sea inspection, suggesting the use of lifelines before getting in the ladder. EFCA replied that is aware of potential difficulties in the implementation of engine power provisions under the revised Control Regulation and informed participants that the kick off meeting of the Working Group on Engine Power, following Article 39a of the Control Regulation, is organised for the 6th of May in Madrid.

LDAC asked EFCA for further information on combined operations under the scope of the WASOP project and whether these operations were targeting any specific fishery. EFCA informed that combined operations have been organised with Cabo Verde, Ghana, Cote d’Ivoire, and Liberia. They are not species driven. Further actions are expected in this sense in the Indian Ocean within the context of the SWIOP projects that has just started. In addition, EFCA developed further in the context of the African projects and informed participants that, in this context, a training on CATCH is planned jointly with the Commission for WASOP countries exporting to the EU.

3. EFCA’s Single Programming Documents (SPD): Draft SPD 2027

EFCA informed that this is an information point to be presented to the Administrative Board seeking for their input. The Agency presented the draft work programme 2027-2031, that foresees a continuation of the ongoing work, updating participants on the procedure and mechanisms to provide feedback from the Board and the European Commission with expected final adoption in October 2026.

4. Rotation of the Advisory Board representative in the EFCA Administrative Board

The Mediterranean Advisory Council will continue to represent the Advisory Board at the Administrative Board Meeting until March 2027.

5. AOB

No items were raised under AOB Section.

Annex 1: List of participants

Advisory Councils: Daniela Costa and Ruben Farias (CCRUP), Alexandre Rodríguez (LDAC), Violaine De Neef (MAC), Tamara Talevska and Peter Ronelov Olsson (NSAC), Irene Prieto and Mo Mathies (NWWAC), Jose Beltran (PelAC and SWWAC), Henrik Kruse Nielsen (Denmark), Zoltan Roman (Hungary), Ancuta Kazimirovicz and Simion Dragos (Romania). On behalf of the MEDAC no one was able to attend due to a clash with another meeting (GFCM SRC Central Med meeting).

EFCA: Susan Steele (Chair/Host); Pedro Galache (Head of Unit 5); Patricia Sánchez Abeal (Deputy Head of Unit 5); Cristina Morgado (Head of Unit 2); Leon Bouts (Deputy Head of Unit 2); Rafael Duarte (Deputy Head of Unit 3); Maria Cornax (Administrator- Unit 5)