



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels  
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Mr. Andrew CLAYTON  
Project Director - Ending Overfishing in  
Northwestern Europe  
The Pew Charitable Trusts

**Subject: Follow-up to the meeting with NGO representatives on the functioning of the Advisory Councils**

Dear NGOs representatives,

Thank you for having participated in the meeting on the functioning of the Advisory Councils on 16 September. Advisory Councils have an important role to play in the Common Fisheries Policy and we are very grateful for the work they are doing. The advice they produce is an important part of the consultation around the annual setting of TACs and quotas, but also for other fisheries management measures adopted via regionalisation. Advisory Councils are enshrined in EU legislation, and will remain our main stakeholder forum.

I listened with high interest to the issues and difficulties you are facing in some Advisory Councils. While I understand that the situation varies a lot from one Advisory Council to another, I agree with you that there is a scope for improvement, which we have to initiate. Advisory Councils were set up to gather all stakeholders around the same table to have bottom-up approach in the EU decision-making process and to increase transparency in how stakeholders interact with the Commission. Throughout the years, they have proven that they can function successfully.

For the Advisory Councils to function properly, all stakeholders representing different interests must of course participate. Having a number of NGOs leave would be a big step backwards. It would make the Advisory Councils less representative and thereby inevitably weaken them. On the other hand, NGOs would also lose an important channel of influence, as they would no longer be able to contribute to the regionalisation process via the Advisory Councils. All sides would lose.

While we cannot interfere in the day-to-day management of Advisory Councils, we are ready to engage in finding out solutions. However, for that, we need all actors, certainly

also the NGOs around the table of dialogue. I cannot see how we could identify solutions without a dialogue among all the stakeholders.

Let me give you a set of actions I intend to put in place shortly in order to react promptly:

- 1) As a follow-up to the meeting of 16<sup>th</sup> September, I will send a letter to all chairs and secretariats in order to inform them of our meeting and its results. I will recommend that this letter is distributed to all members, so that all stakeholders are aware of the situation and may participate in the reflections on possible solutions.
- 2) There will be a reflection in DG MARE to identify solutions that could be put in place quickly.
- 3) At the beginning of November, we will organise an inter-Advisory Council meeting to discuss functioning issues as we did last year. In line with last year's meeting, we will propose to all members to raise issues and come with proposals or best practices. To increase transparency, I would recommend that such interventions are prepared in cooperation with the chair and secretariat of each Advisory Council and that it involves all stakeholders.
- 4) We will propose training to newly nominated chairs and secretariats.
- 5) As I said during the meeting, it is not realistic to modify the CFP Regulation. However, a modification of the rules on the functioning of the Advisory Councils<sup>1</sup> that were set in the Commission Delegated Regulation is a possibility that should be explored in order to address some of the issues highlighted in the meeting. On 18 September, we wrote you to bring forward ideas on such a modification. Based on the proposals we will receive, we will explore the possibility of modifying the delegated act in order to improve the functioning of the Advisory Councils.

With all this in place, I hope things may evolve quickly in the sought direction. In parallel, I count on your positive and cooperative approach, and look forward to having NGOs back in the Advisory Councils. I would like to thank you once again for your commitment and substantive contribution to our joint endeavour for more sustainable fisheries, improved environment and increase transparency. Thank you also for the open and frank discussion and I look forward to our constructive working together.

Yours sincerely,

Charlina VITCHEVA

Cc: all Chairs and Secretariats of Advisory Councils.

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<sup>1</sup> See Delegated Regulations 2015/242 (OJ L 41,17.2.2015, p.1) and 2017/1575 (OJ L 239, 19.9.2017, p.1)