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EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels
MARE.B.2/AD

Subject: Regional management of small pelagic species in West Africa: implications for the European Union's external action

Dear Mr Lopez,

Thank you for the Long-Distance Advisory Council (LDAC) advice on a regional management of small pelagic species in West Africa: implications for the European Unions' external action, adopted on 4 September 2026, building on the Council's previous work on this important topic.

The EU recognises the central importance of small pelagic species to West Africa's marine ecosystems, food security and coastal livelihoods. We share the concern, supported by recent scientific advice from the Committee for Eastern Central Atlantic Fisheries (CECAF), that several of these shared stocks are under significant pressure and require coordinated regional management. Given the transboundary nature of these resources, we agree that their sustainable management requires strengthened regional cooperation, while preserving the responsibilities of individual coastal States for fisheries management, monitoring, data collection and control within their respective jurisdictions.

In this context, the EU supports regional initiatives aimed at improving cooperation, strengthening science-based decision-making and promoting sustainable management of small pelagics. We are therefore pleased that the 2025 Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission (CSRP) Ministerial Conference marked an important step forward by endorsing regional coordination of national management plans for small pelagics and approving common management measures for the sub-region.

As you know, CECAF operates in a context where there is no comprehensive regional fisheries governance framework coordinating management arrangements between coastal States and countries fishing on the high seas and with the mandate to adopt binding conservation and management measures on the basis of scientific advice. The EU's long-standing objective has therefore been to promote a reform process aimed at transforming CECAF into a fully-fledged RFMO. While support from other members for this process remains limited, the EU will continue to advocate for this objective.

At the forthcoming 24th session of CECAF, the EU will continue to promote stronger scientific cooperation, more robust stock assessments, broader involvement of relevant stakeholders and progress towards a regional science-based fisheries management framework.

We recognise the role that the CSRP can play in facilitating cooperation and coordination among its member countries. Any further strengthening of regional arrangements should, however, build on existing institutional frameworks, ensure clear complementarity with CECAF and other relevant regional initiatives, and avoid duplication of mandates and structures.

We welcome the LDAC's suggestion to explore the possibility of a regional Team Europe Initiative dedicated to small pelagics. Such an approach could provide an opportunity to improve coherence between EU and Member State actions, bringing together instruments and expertise in support of scientific research, fisheries governance, food security, climate resilience and sustainable local value chains.

The EU recognises the contribution that regional programmes such as WASOP can make to strengthening ocean governance and supporting sustainable blue economy development in West Africa. Where relevant and in line with its objectives and scope, WASOP may complement other EU-supported initiatives addressing scientific knowledge, institutional capacity and regional cooperation. However, the coordination of bilateral fisheries partnerships, regional scientific initiatives and fisheries management arrangements should be ensured through the appropriate existing frameworks and institutional channels, rather than assigned to WASOP.

Improving the availability, quality and comparability of fisheries data is essential for effective management of shared stocks. The EU therefore supports efforts, in cooperation with CECAF and the relevant coastal States, to strengthen the collection, harmonisation, analysis and exchange of data on catches and landings across all fishing segments, including artisanal, industrial, EU and non-EU fleets.

We also recognise the importance of better understanding the dynamics of small pelagics destined for fishmeal and fish oil production, and their implications for food security, regional markets and artisanal processing activities. This requires reliable information and coordinated efforts by the countries concerned and relevant regional organisations.

Through sectoral support under SFPAs, the EU continues to assist partner countries in strengthening their scientific and fisheries management capacities. Support for scientific research, improved data collection, the sharing of scientific information and participation in regional research campaigns will remain important areas of cooperation.

The EU agrees that sustainable fisheries management should go hand in hand with the promotion of food security, nutrition, employment and resilient coastal communities. Through sectoral support under SFPAs, as well as wider EU cooperation instruments, the EU can contribute to improving post-harvest infrastructure, conservation, transport and local processing capacities, thereby supporting the availability of fish for local consumption and the development of sustainable value chains.

We also recognise the importance of taking account of the social and economic dimensions of fisheries management, including employment opportunities, the role of women in artisanal processing and the effects of management measures on coastal communities. These considerations are relevant both to the design and implementation of sectoral support and to the evaluation of the impact of EU-supported interventions.

Finally, we support the involvement of fisheries stakeholders, scientists, professional organisations and civil society in discussions on regional management priorities. Existing bilateral and regional dialogue structures, including Joint Committees under SFPAs, can provide useful platforms for consultation and cooperation. Opportunities to strengthen cross-border dialogue and the involvement of small-scale fisheries and women in the processing sector should also be explored, building on existing initiatives and ensuring that such mechanisms contribute effectively to the implementation and monitoring of management measures.

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

Yours sincerely,

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