

DRAFT MINUTES

37th LDAC Working Group 4 Meeting Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements with third countries (SFPAs)

10 March 2026, 10:00-13:30h CET/GMT+1

Venue: Hotel Martin's Brussels EU Hotel

Bvd. Charlemagne 80, 1000 Brussels Schuman

Chair: Béatrice Gorez

Vice Chair: Ángela Cortina.

1. Welcome and opening of the meeting by the Working Group 4 Chair

The Vice Chair, Ms Ángela Cortina, opened the meeting by conveying apologies from the Chair, Ms. Béatrice Gorez, who cannot attend today due to medical reasons.

Therefore, Ms. Cortina chaired the meeting and welcomed all members, observers and representatives of the European Commission, thanking them for their attendance and active participation.

She also referred to the recent celebration of the International Women's Day (8 March), acknowledging the growing role and visibility of women within the fisheries sector, including fishing vessel skippers, scientific and/or control observers, net makers and other professionals whose contribution continues to strengthen the sector.

The whole list of members and observers is included as **Annex I**.

2. Adoption of the minutes of the last WG4 meeting – Brussels, 14 October 2025.

The minutes of the previous meeting are deemed as approved without any comments.

3. Adoption of the agenda.

The draft agenda was adopted without amendments.

4. Briefing from MARE and exchange on views on present and future SFPAs

4.1. Update from MARE on current state of play of SFPAs in force and negotiations

The Chair welcomed Ms. **Virginie Battu-Eriksen**, Deputy Director responsible for International Ocean Governance and Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements at DG MARE, thanking her for attending the meeting and for maintaining an open dialogue with the LDAC.

Ms Battu-Eriksen informed members that the European Commissioner had requested the services of DG MARE to work on the development of a new generation of Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs).

She explained that the Commission intends to strengthen the existing framework by improving different components of the agreements, including:

- access arrangements;
- sectoral support;
- cooperation with local stakeholders and fishing organisations;
- scientific cooperation;
- transparency;
- social aspects;
- contribution to sustainable fisheries management.

She underlined that the Commission does not currently foresee the need to amend the basic legislative framework governing SFPAs. Instead, efforts are focused on improving the way existing agreements and protocols are negotiated and implemented.

Update on ongoing negotiations:

Regarding the current state of negotiations, Ms Battu-Eriksen informed members of the following developments:

Seychelles:

Negotiations remain the Commission's highest priority due to the strategic importance of the agreement for the European tuna fleet. She explained that although the Protocol expired on 24 February 2026, intensive contacts are taking place with the Seychellois authorities in order to minimise the duration of the interruption.

Negotiations remain difficult due to two main issues:

- the financial conditions requested by Seychelles;
- political considerations affecting the negotiations.

The Commission is making every possible effort, including contacts at the highest political level, to reach an agreement as soon as possible.

Gabon:

Negotiations remain temporarily blocked.

The Head of Unit responsible for SFPAs is currently in Gabon with the objective of helping unblock the negotiations and creating the conditions to resume discussions.

Mauritania:

Negotiations are progressing at a satisfactory pace. The third round of negotiations is currently underway and the Commission expects discussions to be concluded before the summer. The most sensitive issues will be addressed during this final phase.

Mauritius:

The negotiating mandate is currently under discussion within the Council.

The Joint Committee meeting originally foreseen has been postponed until April due to logistical difficulties affecting international air transport.

The Commission expects to combine this meeting with the first negotiating round.

Morocco:

The Council adopted the negotiating mandate in January 2026. The Commission has already contacted the Moroccan authorities proposing possible negotiation dates. Given the political sensitivity of this agreement, discussions will continue at the appropriate diplomatic level.

Questions from the floor by the WG4 members:

Seychelles:

Ms Anne-France Mattlet (Europêche Tuna Group) stressed the importance of reaching an agreement rapidly. She noted that the European tuna fleet is unable to assume a significant increase in fishing fees and expressed concern that negotiations might not succeed if the current position of the Seychellois authorities remains unchanged. She also asked whether the Commission perceived a change in the political attitude of Seychelles towards the European Union.

In reply, Ms Battu-Eriksen acknowledged that negotiations involve both political and financial considerations. She explained that contacts are taking place at ministerial level and confirmed the Commission's commitment to finding a balanced solution capable of ensuring continuity of fishing activities.

Mauritania:

Mr Javier Garat (CEPESCA) referred to the biological closure affecting the shrimp fleet operating under the Mauritania SFP. He explained that vessels targeting shrimp have also been obliged to stop fishing despite not targeting octopus, the species that justified the closure. He argued that this decision was adopted without an adequate scientific basis and appears inconsistent with the objectives of the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement.

Mr Garat suggested that the denomination of Category 1 in the future Protocol should be amended so that it clearly refers to "*shrimp fisheries excluding octopus and lobster*", thus avoiding similar situations in the future.

Gabon:

Mr Garat also referred to the fisheries opportunities in Gabon. He noted that after several scientific campaigns carried out by the Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO), sufficient knowledge exists to reopen the shellfish category. Otherwise, other foreign fleets could ultimately benefit from the scientific work undertaken by the European fleet.

Ms Battu-Eriksen thanked him for these comments and confirmed that they would be transmitted to the Commission services responsible for the negotiations.

ACTION AGREED

- **The European Commission B3 unit committed to provide a written reply regarding the issues raised on the Mauritania biological closure and the shellfish category under the Gabon negotiations.**

Transparency and beneficial ownership:

Ms Vanya Vulperhorst (Oceana) recalled previous discussions held during negotiations with Guinea-Bissau concerning transparency and beneficial ownership of fishing vessels. She referred to the positive example of Seychelles, where transparency initiatives under the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI) have facilitated public access to ownership information.

She asked whether the Commission intends to reinforce transparency clauses and provisions regarding beneficial ownership in future SFPAs, particularly in agreements currently under negotiation such as Mauritania.

Ms Battu-Eriksen replied that transparency remains one of the priorities under consideration in the context of the new generation of SFPAs and that the Commission is assessing how these provisions can be strengthened while respecting the legal framework.

4.2. Exchange of views with MARE on [LDAC advice on new generation of SFPAs \(October 2025\)](#)

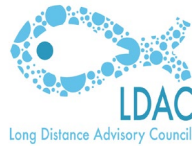
The WG4 members welcomed the Commission's reflection on the future of SFPAs.

Several interventions highlighted the need for the future agreements to improve not only environmental sustainability but also economic and social sustainability.

Mr Juan Manuel Trujillo (ETF) underlined that competitiveness, decent working conditions and social standards should become central elements of the future agreements.

Ms Vanya Vulperhorst asked how the Commission intends to improve compliance with the existing transparency and non-discrimination clauses and whether additional implementation mechanisms are being considered.

Mr Alexandre Rodríguez (LDAC Secretariat) referred to the growing number of dormant agreements and stressed the need for greater coherence between regional fisheries policies and the network of SFPAs.



In her reply, Ms Battu-Eriksen explained that the Commission is currently carrying out a horizontal reflection based on recent evaluations of the SFPAs system.

Among the areas under consideration are:

- strengthening the contribution of SFPAs to employment and sustainable fisheries;
- improving regional cooperation, particularly for tuna agreements;
- reinforcing scientific data collection and scientific capacity in partner countries;
- increasing transparency and dialogue with civil society;
- improving social conditions;
- addressing the issue of dormant agreements;
- adapting the EU financial contribution where fishing opportunities are no longer fully utilised.

She concluded that SFPAs continue to be fit for purpose and remain one of the most effective instruments available to the European Union for promoting sustainable fisheries governance and combating IUU fishing in partner countries.

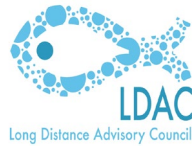
The Chair thanked Ms Battu-Eriksen for her comprehensive presentation and for the constructive dialogue with LDAC members.

4.3. Update on LDAC Conference on New Generation of SFPAs (Brussels, 8 April 2026)

The Chair informed members about the workshop hosted by the LDAC in partnership with the European Economic and Social Committee on the future of Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements, scheduled to take place in Brussels on 8 April 2026.

This workshop will provide an opportunity for DG MARE officials, MEPs, LDAC members and African key stakeholders and national administrations to discuss together how the new generation of SFPAs can be further improved and to identify priorities for the new generation of SFPAs to feed the ongoing EU deliberations on this subject for the external fisheries action.

Mr Javier Garat (CEPESCA), speaking in his capacity as member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), welcomed the initiative and expressed his satisfaction that fisheries issues are receiving increasing attention within the EESC. He noted that the newly appointed President of the NAT Section has shown a strong interest in fisheries matters and



that the Committee is willing to contribute to discussions on the future of the Common Fisheries Policy and its external dimension.

Mr Julio Morón (OPAGAC) suggested that the LDAC should seek a meeting with Charlina Vitcheva, Director-General of DG MARE, and with Director of International Fisheries Fernando Andresen, in order to better understand the Commission's expectations regarding the contribution of the Advisory Councils to the ongoing reflection on the future of the Common Fisheries Policy. He stressed that this process should also provide an opportunity to assess the value added and impact of the Advisory Councils in supporting evidence-based fisheries governance.

Mr Alexandre Rodríguez, LDAC Secretary General, agreed that this internal reflection represents an opportunity to demonstrate the contribution made by the Advisory Councils to European fisheries policy over the years.

Mr Juan Manuel Trujillo (ETF) supported this view and suggested that discussions on the future role of the Advisory Councils should involve the entire European fisheries sector and not only individual stakeholder groups.

5. Governance, transparency, and regional coordination (SRFC, CECAF, ATLAFCO) - small pelagics fisheries in West Africa

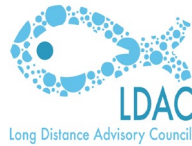
5.1- Reflection on [LDAC advice on small pelagics](#) and [EC reply](#): identification of key topics to follow

The Chair recalled that the LDAC adopted and submitted its advice on the sustainable management of small pelagic fisheries in West Africa to the European Commission on 13 May 2025. The Commission's reply was received on 6 November 2025 and acknowledged many of the recommendations put forward by the LDAC.

Members agreed that the advice constitutes a solid basis for continuing the LDAC's work on this issue, while recognising that the deterioration of sardinella stocks remains one of the main fisheries management challenges in the region.

The Chair informed members that the next phase of work should focus on identifying practical recommendations aimed at improving the conservation and management of sardinella, while promoting greater coordination between the different EU-funded regional initiatives operating in West Africa.

Particular reference was made to projects such as WASOP and to the importance of avoiding duplication of efforts through stronger cooperation between regional organisations and stakeholders.



Members also discussed the possibility of strengthening cooperation with organisations already working in the region, particularly our partners AFRIFISH-Net and ATLAFCO-COMHAFAT, in order to exchange information and identify areas of common interest.

5.2- Next steps: ACTIONS AGREED

- **Following the submission of the LDAC advice on small pelagics and the Commission's reply, the Secretariat will convene a Focus Group to prepare further advice on improving the management of small pelagic stocks in West Africa, with specific reference to sardinella stocks.**
- **The LDAC Secretariat will continue activating and resuming the work with their partnerships with AFRIFISH-Net and COMHAFAT, to strengthen cooperation on this subject.**

6. Draft LDAC Advice on "Protocol for the Prevention and Eradication of Harassment in Fishing Vessels"

Mr Juan Manuel Trujillo (ETF) thanked all members participating in the Focus Group for their constructive work over the previous months.

He recalled that the objective of this initiative is to contribute to ensuring that fishing vessels provide safe and respectful working environments for all crew members through the establishment of effective prevention protocols against labour and sexual harassment.

He also highlighted the recent entry into force of the amendments to the IMO STCW-F Convention regarding training requirements, considering that this development reinforces the relevance of the LDAC initiative.

Ms Aurea Ramos, representing CCOO's Diversity Secretariat, delivered a presentation describing the changing social and demographic reality of distant-water fisheries.

She highlighted the increasing diversity of fishing crews, the growing participation of women on board—including scientific observers—and the need to prevent situations of harassment that may affect workers' dignity, human rights, labour rights and vessel safety.

She explained that the draft advice promotes a policy of zero tolerance towards any form of harassment or intimidation on board fishing vessels and aims to provide practical guidance for operators, employers and crew members.

Members welcomed the initiative and thanked both speakers for their valuable contributions.

The Chair informed members that the draft advice had already been approved by Working Group 4 and subsequently submitted to the Executive Committee.

Looking ahead, members agreed that additional work should focus on defining practical measures aimed at providing immediate protection and assistance to victims.

ACTIONS AGREED

- **The draft LDAC advice on protocols against labour and sexual harassment on fishing vessels will be sent for approval to the Executive Committee**
- **The Focus Group will be reconvened in the coming months in order to prepare a complementary document defining immediate measures to protect victims of harassment on board fishing vessels. And report at the next WG4 plenary meeting.**

7. State of play of LDAC advice and future work on:

7.1- Dormant agreements

The Chair informed members about the progress made on the LDAC reflections concerning the new generation of Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements.

Members welcomed the reflections presented earlier by DG MARE and agreed that the work carried out by the LDAC should contribute to the Commission's ongoing review of the SFPA framework.

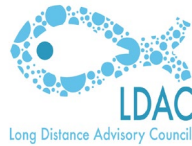
Special attention was devoted to the relationship between dormant agreements and the exclusivity clause, as well as to their possible impact on ensuring a level playing field for European operators.

Members considered that greater legal certainty and policy coherence will be required in future agreements in order to avoid situations where certain agreements remain formally in force but are no longer operational.

The discussion also referred to the questions previously submitted by the LDAC to the European Commission and the replies received.

ACTIONS AGREED

- **The LDAC Secretariat will convene the Focus Group to continue discussing dormant agreements and the operation of the exclusivity clause.**
- **The Focus Group will continue examining possible responses to the question raised by the European Commission:**
"What to do with the exclusivity clause and dormant agreements which might undermine the level playing field and be detrimental to the EU fleet and fisheries value chain?"



7.2.- EU Fishing Companies with Investments and Operations in Third non-EU Countries

The Chair recalled the longstanding work carried out by the LDAC concerning EU capital fishing companies with investments and operations in third countries.

She informed members that the LDAC is still awaiting a detailed reply from the European Commission to its letter entitled *"Need for a detailed response to LDAC advice to consider the role of fishing joint ventures and especially those that promote sustainability and transparency"*, transmitted on 3 February 2026.

Members reiterated the strategic importance of fishing joint ventures within the external dimension of the Common Fisheries Policy and underlined the need for the Commission to clarify its future approach to these investments.

ACTION AGREED

- **Await the European Commission's reply in writing to the LDAC letter on fishing joint ventures sent on 3 February 2026 prior to take any further step.**

13:15h- AOB

Mr Jean-Christophe Vandeveld (The Pew Charitable Trusts) informed members about an upcoming technical workshop jointly organised by PEW and the Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission (SRFC), to be held from 19 to 21 May 2026.

The workshop will focus on the shared management of small pelagic fisheries in West Africa, paying particular attention to the development of harvest strategies and other scientific management tools.

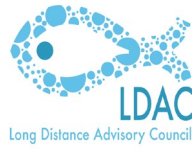
He explained that the meeting will mainly target fisheries managers and scientists and thanked the LDAC for its continued cooperation on this subject.

The Chair welcomed the information provided and thanked PEW for keeping the LDAC informed about initiatives relevant to the Working Group's activities.

No additional items were submitted under Any Other Business.

Before closing the meeting, members briefly returned to the discussion on the future of SFPAs and reiterated the importance of maintaining close dialogue with the European Commission throughout the ongoing reflection process.

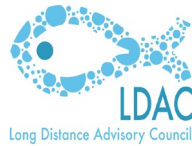
The Chair thanked the representatives of DG MARE for their openness and willingness to engage with stakeholders, as well as all members for their constructive contributions throughout the meeting.



She also thanked the interpreters for their impeccable work and the LDAC Secretariat for the organisation of the meeting and their continued support to the Working Group.

Meeting was adjourned at 13:30h

END



ANNEX I: LDAC Working Group 4 attendees Brussels, 10 March 2026

MEMBERS OF WORKING GROUP 4

1. Ángela Cortina. Opana / OPP3/ Agarba
2. Julio Morón. OPAGAC
3. Anertz Muniategui. ANABAC
4. Vanya Vulperhorst. OCEANA
5. Sergio López. OPP BURELA
6. Iván López. AGARBA/CEPESCA
7. Javier Garat.CEPESCA
8. Emil Remisz. High Seas Fish Producers Organization
9. Josephine Woronoff. The Pew Charitable Trust
10. Janne Posti.Conxemar
11. Anne-France Mattlet. Europêche tuna group
12. Julien Daudu. EJF (Zoom)
13. Juan Manuel Trujillo. ETF
14. Michel Goujon. ORTHONGEL
15. Ignacio Fresco. OCEANA (Zoom)
16. Yago Rosado. OCEANA
17. Jean-Christophe Vandeveld. Pew
18. Aivaras Labanauskas. Lithuanian Long Distance Fisheries Association
19. Francisco Fernández. OPROMAR/ANACEF
20. Juana Parada. ORPAGU
21. Margot Angibaud. EUROPECHE
22. Daniel Voces.EUROPECHE

OBSERVADORES

23. Aurea Ramos. ETF
24. Rebeca Álvarez. ETF (Zoom)
25. Susana Vázquez. ETF (Zoom)
26. Stephanie Czudaj. GIZ
27. Virginie BATTY-HENRIKSSON. EC (B3 Deputy Head of Unit)
28. Mariana CORTE-REAL. EC
29. Juan Acacio. SGP

LDAC SECRETARIAT

30. Alexandre Rodríguez. LDAC
31. Manuela Iglesias. LDAC
32. Marta de Lucas. LDAC (Zoom)