



DG MARE

Joint inter-Advisory Councils meeting (18 Jan 2021, via Interactio, 14:30 – 18:30)

Minutes

1. OPENING REMARKS – DIRECTOR GENERAL MS VITCHEVA

Ms. Charlina Vitcheva (DG MARE, Director General) welcomed the participants with introductory remarks. She praised the hard work of the ACs, which are embedded in the CFP Regulation and are essential governance tools in the context of regionalisation. They enable a comprehensive consultation of all fisheries-related stakeholders and provide a set of knowledge and expertise that is key to policy development and implementation. She therefore emphasized the need for a transparent, balanced and impartial functioning of the AC.

Ms. Vitcheva invited all stakeholders to tackle the shortcomings in the functioning of the ACs in a positive mood and proactive attitude. She referred to the departure of some NGOs from several ACs as a very unfortunate step backward, putting at risk the credibility and good working of these stakeholders-led bodies, and invited them back at the table of dialogue. Only via ACs can stakeholders have a decisive influence on the course of policy-making and implementation.

ACs are enshrined in the EU legislation, Ms. Vitcheva recalled. She made clear that ACs would remain the main stakeholder forum informing and advising the Commission on fisheries-related matters, and that their recommendations would always have a higher weight than those issued by a single organisation or group.

The Director General thanked the ACs for the commitment they already showed in addressing the issues that have arisen. This proactive and constructive attitude from all actors involved and upheld efforts in increasing the mutual understanding of the various interests are essential to ensure a genuine cooperative approach.

Ms. Vitcheva highlighted the importance of such inter-AC meetings, as they allow ACs to discuss issues of common interest and learn from each other. They are also meant for the Commission to update ACs on key policy developments, so that ACs can provide the Commission with good quality recommendations in return.

Ms. Vitcheva thanked the ACs for their continuous efforts and stamina in providing advice despite the circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 150 recommendations reached the Commission in 2020, which is impressive. The crisis hit hard the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, but also showed their key role in providing food and jobs and in sustaining the livelihood of coastal communities. They will have to be part of the recovery, the underlying principle of which is and will remain sustainability.

Ms. Vitcheva informed participants of the Commission's work to deliver on the objectives set out in the European Green Deal, the Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and the Farm to Fork Strategy, highlighting upcoming key deliverables such as the *Report on the implementation of the Technical Measures Regulation*, the *Action Plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems*, the *Strategic Guidelines for the sustainable development of EU aquaculture*, the *initiative for a strong and sustainable EU algae sector*, the *review of the marketing standards for fisheries and aquaculture products*, the *EU food supply and food security contingency plan* and the *EU strategy on offshore renewable energy*. She also informed about the state of play in the negotiations on the Commission's proposal for a revision of the Control Regulation, for which a political agreement between the co-legislators now seems under good way. Stakeholders are heavily involved in all these files and the ACs' contribution is crucial, Ms. Vitcheva reminded.

Ms. Vitcheva provided the participants with a brief overview of the outcomes of the negotiations on fishing opportunities for 2021, starting with the Atlantic and Skagerrak. Because of Brexit, only 25 EU-only-fished TACs were discussed. She welcomed that the coherence with the MSY objective and the additional measures introduced to protect and rebuild stocks that are not in a good shape in line with the provisions of the multi-annual plans. She also noted that the Council had agreed to follow the precautionary advice more closely. As regards TACs shared with the UK, the Council decided, based on the Commission's proposal, to proportionally roll over the TACs for 2020 into the first 3 months of 2021, with a few exceptions to this (mainly for seasonal species and when advice indicated at a particularly deep cut). The outcome on deep-sea species is in line with the Commission's proposal and with scientific advice. Together with the outcome of the Baltic fisheries negotiations in October, 14 out of 15 TACs exclusively managed by the EU are set at MSY for 2021. 12 TACs out of 17 will be in line with precautionary advice.

Ms. Vitcheva thanked ACs for their cooperation and work in the Mediterranean and Black Seas, where important progress in setting fishing opportunities was achieved. She encouraged the ACs involved to continue in this direction and to ensure good cooperation in the future. For the Black Sea specifically, the Council agreed on the Commission's proposal to rollover quotas for sprat and turbot, keeping the same quantities as in 2020. For the Adriatic, the Council set effort and fleet capacity limits on both small pelagic and demersal, based on the GFCM decisions. On the western Mediterranean MAP, after a long and intensive discussion with the Member States involved, the Fisheries Council agreed to decrease the fishing effort by 7.5% in addition to the 10% effort reduction for 2020 that was already included in the Western Mediterranean multi-

annual plan. With this outcome, the EU remains on a path towards reaching MSY by 2025, Ms. Vitcheva said. Spain and France committed to adopting additional closure areas for 2021, while Italy committed to implementing further effort reduction. All have reiterated their commitment to reaching MSY. Emphasising the need to be ambitious on the sustainability side in order to bring socioeconomic benefits to the Mediterranean and Black Seas fleets, Ms. Vitcheva invited stakeholders and Member States to strengthen their efforts in fully implementing the MAP.

On Brexit, the Director General welcomed the successful conclusion of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, which is key to ensure the sustainable management of the resources in the North-East Atlantic and the stability and continuity of the fleets, both for the UK and the EU. Ms. Vitcheva said to be very proud of the result, which is a good and balanced agreement. It is sustainable, creates the stability needed, ensures access to the UK waters, and maintains the EU as the leading nation in fisheries. The Commission will continue to push the EU agenda for sustainable fisheries. Although there has been a transfer of quotas to the UK, the agreement has a very solid and CFP-consistent fisheries chapter that will ensure stability for the next ten years. DG MARE is committed to implementing the agreement and to working with most affected fleet segments and communities on support measures, together with the Member States, under the EMFAF and the Brexit Adjustment Reserve (BAR). Definitive TACs for 2021 are being discussed with the UK, Norway and other coastal states. Ms. Vitcheva announced that a technical meeting on Brexit will be shortly convened with those interested.

2. HOW TO IMPROVE THE ACS' PERFORMANCE AND FUNCTIONING?

Chair **Lena Andersson Pench** (DG MARE, Director for Directorate D) welcomed the participants and presented the objectives of the meeting, i.e. discuss ways to improve the functioning of the Advisory Councils and update ACs on key policy developments affecting fisheries and aquaculture. She thanked the ACs for their valuable contributions to the preparation of this inter-AC meeting and handed over to Valerie Tankink for a presentation of the Commission's working paper.

Ms. Valérie Tankink (DG MARE, Head of Unit D3) quickly went through the 7 areas of improvement identified by the Commission in the working paper sent to ACs before the Christmas break. This paper builds on the contributions ACs send earlier and includes a few reflections from the Commission. The areas of improvement are as follows:

1. Evaluating the functioning and performance of the ACs
2. Making sure all opinions are heard and respected
3. Reinforcing the impartiality of the chairs and secretariats
4. Addressing the uncertainty associated to the classification of stakeholders
5. Easing the engagement of OIGs in ACs activities
6. Enhancing the relations between the Commission and the ACs and between ACs
7. Promoting and valuing the work of the ACs

Poll 1: Asked whether this paper covers all the areas that would need improvement, 18 participants said yes, 5 said no and 1 abstained.

2.1. Presentation of good practices and ideas by the Advisory Councils

Mr. Gonçalo Carvalho (PELAC, Sciaena) gave a presentation focusing on the good practices that were developed in PELAC and have ensured a good functioning of the AC. PELAC has indeed a tradition of respectful and collaborative working, and issues only advice when consensus is reached. Best practices can become more prescriptive when formally enshrined within the rules of procedures and the legal statutes of the AC. An external performance review will be carried out in 2021, looking at these possible improvements.

According to Mr. Carvalho, key to PELAC success is that chairs are seen to be impartial and act in that way, respecting both industry and OIG views during policy and advice discussion. OIGs must feel confident taking the floor during meetings without any difficulties.

Rules for the appropriate representation of OIG positions in meeting notes, reports and recommendations are crucial too. AC Members should also agree on rules for the proper representation of OIG and industry views at external meetings and events, to make sure only AC-established positions are transmitted on behalf of the AC.

Mr. Carvalho concluded emphasising the importance of respecting each other's view when trying to build consensus and working collaboratively.

Mr. Esben Sverdrup-Jensen (Chair of the BSAC) shared his experience as chair of the BSAC, a position he was appointed at in 2018 following a first unfruitful attempt to nominate a chair a couple of months before. He focused on some of the good practices the AC has put in place since then.

In order to avoid financial barriers to being a member of the BSAC and allow for all organisations to take part in the meetings as active participants, a flat membership fee set at 300 euros/year was decided. It was also agreed to compensate the WG chairs for the time and efforts invested in the AC.

The rules of procedures were bolstered to give more clarity on the role and duties of the chair, the secretariat and the different bodies composing the AC, therefore avoiding misunderstanding on how the AC operates.

Since 2006, the BSAC has an honorary chair of the General Assembly, elected from outside the AC membership, whose role proved to be decisive in several occasions, Mr. Sverdrup-Jensen said.

BSAC also strived for the best representation possible: its ExCom was extended to 30 members as to better cater for small-scale fisheries. A management team was set up with the aim to better share responsibilities, steer the activities of the AC and help the secretariat with administrative tasks under the lead of the ExCom.

Last, the BSAC has tried to work beyond its advisory role, providing room for learning and exchanges on specific issues related to the Baltic ecosystem. During “theme sessions”, speakers from scientific backgrounds are invited to present and foster the members’ understanding of what is happening in the Baltic Sea, an ecosystem that has experienced worrisome changes over the past years.

The BSAC is currently running an external performance review looking at best practices and room for further improvement.

Mr. Kenn Skau Fischer (Chair of the NSAC), gave a presentation on the NSAC experience and good practices. He first highlighted the various issues affecting the functioning of the AC, starting with Brexit. With the UK leaving the EU, the NSAC faced a “brain drain” situation where many OIGs and industry representatives, with much expertise and knowledge, had to leave the AC, also leading to an imbalance in the representation of interests. The AC had to move its secretariat from Aberdeen to the Netherlands, implying learning of new relations between the chairs and the secretariat.

Other issues faced by the NSAC relate to internal communication shortcomings; old and unsolved grievances passed on to the new management and secretariat; lack of document, participation and feedback from the Commission, diminished prominence of Advisory Councils; diverging interpretation of the CFP (should ACs have a national or a regional approach?); perceived lack of influence on policy-makers and built-up frustrations enhanced by COVID and the lack of physical contact.

Mr. Skau Fischer then presented the best practices that the NSAC has been able to implement. A management team and a Board meet regularly, balanced representation at internal meetings is encouraged, representation at external meetings is agreed beforehand, and a performance review has been initiated by the secretariat. Chairpersonship positions are promoted to OIGs, minority opinions are presented in a transparent and equal way, the procedures and protocols are followed thoroughly, and respect and integrity of the chair is ensured.

Mr. Skau Fischer stressed the need for a spirit of a collective, recognising and acknowledging the diversity of the group. He invited to nurture empathy and understanding, as well as to building consensus while respecting differences in opinions. Maintaining openness is key to ensure a constructive and collaborative approach, Mr. Skau Fischer underlined.

Mr. Alessandro Buzzi (MEDAC, WWF) focused his presentation on the rules of procedures and legal statutes of MEDAC, as these were gradually modified to enshrine good practices and foster a constructive dialogue between the industry and the OIGs. In 2019, NGOs raised several

internal issues, triggering a process leading to the modification of the AC functioning and written rules of procedures.

Among the new rules is one compelling working group members to strive to find unanimous position in the adoption of their reports if they are to be accepted by the ExCom. Minority statements are always included in the reports, which are to be adopted by simple majority by the voting members of the WG.

The President's Office, which coordinates the work of the General Assembly and of the Executive Committee, is composed of industry members for 60% of it (3 members), and of OIG members for the remaining 40% (2 members). This ensures a balanced representation of all interests, in line with the provisions of the CFP. The President cannot vote and must carry out his/her mandate with absolute impartiality.

The members of the Executive Committee must act in the best interests of the MEDAC and are responsible for any single actions not agreed on before the General Assembly. Resolutions of the ExCom and the General Assembly are adopted by consensus. When consensus is not possible, dissenting opinions are recorded in the resolutions agreed by the majority of the present and voting members.

Mr. Buzzi then shared the outcomes of the internal debate that has been taking place internally following the letter NGOs sent to Ms. Vitcheva in July 2020. Little feedback from the members was collected, mainly pointing out to issues in the functioning of other ACs, Mr. Buzzi said. A performance review was suggested so that the MEDAC could identify and share best practices, but the ExCom held in Thessaloniki in June 2019 rejected the proposal. The reason is that an external financial audit had already been carried out a few months before. The ExCom also agreed that only a process guided by the EU, ensuring a harmonised approach to performance reviews across ACs, could have beneficial outcomes. It would therefore be the condition for a performance review to be carried out in the MEDAC.

While MEDAC agreed that no further statutory or functional modifications are needed at that stage, OIGs suggested introducing the requirement for each advice idea to be formally supported by at least 1 industry and 1 OIG member.

Mr. Pedro Reis Santos (Secretary General of the MAC) delivered a presentation on how to attract new organisations to the AC membership. He presented the different steps of the process the AC went through to attract new members, starting with national authorities. Letters were sent to all Member States to explain the role, legal basis and work programme of the AC, encouraging them to participate in meetings as active observer, provide technical, logistical and financial support, and promote membership request among national stakeholders. Video calls followed with Member States active in the MAC to discuss possibilities of cooperation and participation in meetings as well as current membership and relevant active stakeholders.

As for OIGs, specific efforts were put on networking, taking the opportunity of European Parliament or Commission events to exchange words and business cards. Internet, joint reports

and press releases by NGOs (e.g. Blue Manifesto), exchanges with other ACs and suggestions from current OIGs were also important sources of information.

The process led to positive results, since one new NGO joined the Executive Committee. The geographical balanced also improved, as the AC welcomed its first members from Romania and Croatia. Still, the AC faced a number of difficulties doing this exercise. NGOs often lack financial capacity and human resources to join the AC, and their local/regional scope contrasts with the wide geographical scope of the MAC. The specific and “in-between” nature of seafood markets topics makes it difficult to address for many fisheries or food NGOs. Last, national authorities have very different approaches to the Advisory Councils, some being active observers in meetings, some only part of the mailing list, and others providing financial support.

Building in this experience, Mr. Reis Santos suggested actions for AC secretariats, the European Commission and the Member States. Secretariats should proactively contact potential members, national authorities and permanent delegations of EU regions. They should develop promotional material and be efficient at using social media. The European Commission should encourage the Member States to promote ACs and participate in their meetings, promote AC membership when communicating to third stakeholders, and support promotion campaigns to raise awareness on their work and added value. Last, Member States should promote AC membership amongst national stakeholders, and organise local meetings in collaboration with the ACs, to meet relevant stakeholders and provide information.

Alexandre Rodríguez (Secretary General of the LDAC) shared his AC’s experience in preparing, carrying out and following-up on the performance review it carried out. His presentation shed light on the objectives, methodology, recommendations and actions undertaken following this exercise. The performance review was made upon the LDAC’s own initiative and was carried out in two phases, running from 2018 to 2020. It was carried out by an independent and external reviewer, using a mix of qualitative interviews, analysis of written documentation and legislation, and attendance to meetings.

The first phase led to the formulation of 4 key recommendations: 1) better prioritise topics, 2) foster informal and collaborative work to increase the preparatory work, 3) improve the follow-up of advice through decision-making and 4) strengthen international cooperation with key partners/organisations. For each of these recommendations, follow-up action were decided and implemented. For instance, a feedback process was developed to follow-up with recommendation 1. It helped combine a long term vision with short term actions, with a view to revising priority topics identified in the annual work plan and adapt them to DG MARE targeted consultations and policy objectives.

6 other areas of improvement were identified after phase 2: 1) address internal functioning issues (strategic priorities, internal cohesion and gender issues), 2) advice and communication to partners, 3) networking and policy work, 4) communicating to a wider audience, 5) LDAC’s member responsibility and 6) monitoring progress.

More details on the follow-up actions are available in the slides of Mr. Rodríguez’ presentation.

Poll 2: Asked which of the 7 areas of improvement mentioned above need the most urgent action, participants replied ‘promotion of AC work’ (9 votes), ‘evaluation of the ACs performance’ (4 votes) and ‘relations with the Commission’ (3 votes).

2.2. Exchange of views

Mr. Yordan GOSPODINOV (Chair of the BISAC) expressed his gratitude to DG MARE for organising this meeting. The BISAC supports and has implemented most of the good practices presented today. Mr. Gospodinov expressed his wish to have more inter-AC meeting of this type organised several times a year, since BISAC is a relatively young and small AC and is eager to learn from the experience of other ACs. Mr. Gospodinov regretted that the BISAC is not able to collaborate more with other ACs. He thanked the secretariat of the BISAC for its work, and mentioned the difficulties faced by his AC in collecting membership fees and attracting new members. He drew on the presentation from Mr. Reis Santos and invited Member States to help BISAC attract representative from small-scale fisheries. Mr. Gospodinov would be interested in trainings for chairs, especially for working group chairs. He concluded by wishing everyone a lot of success in the implementation of the CFP.

Mr. Emiel BROUCKAERT (ExCom Chair of the NWWAC) gave a brief overview of the situation in the NWWAC, which is highly impacted by Brexit. Several issues in the functioning of the AC were reported by environmental NGOs and were already discussed in meetings. Efforts were made to try to identify issues that are specific to the NWWAC. The outcomes of this process fed into the contribution sent to the Commission in December, many items of which can be found in the working document distributed prior to this meeting. The NWWAC is now awaiting the outcomes of its focus group on Brexit to update its rules of procedures. It will cater for the new relations with the UK but will also factor in the latest discussions on the improvement of the functioning of the AC.

Mr. Javier OJEDA (Chair of the AAC) pointed out to 3 specific points. The first relates to performance reviews. The AAC is a relatively young AC and is for now focusing on internal quality reviews rather and external performance reviews (they might be considered in the future). Mr. Ojeda underlined the value of benchmarking across ACs, via similarly-structured reviews. The second point relates to the reinforcement of impartiality. Mr. Ojeda stressed the need for independent secretariats, with which all members can feel comfortable working. The third point relates to membership and participation. Many OIGs put financial reasons forward to explain their dissatisfaction towards the ACs. However, it has more to do with where members put their efforts in and the establishment of priorities, Mr. Ojeda said. If OIGs feel that they cannot make a difference in the ACs, they will simply not put their efforts there.

Mr. Ivan LOPEZ (Chair of the LDAC) underlined the key roles of secretariats in marking the AC work in a smooth and efficient way. It is important to ensure that secretariats do not work for the chair and reminds all member of their obligations. They are therefore the ones who need to

be trained. Mr. Lopez suggested to set up a permanent inter-AC technical committee, including the Commission, where the secretariats from the different ACs could learn from each other. Mr. Lopez also reminded that ACs vote on very few occasions. Decisions are mostly taken by consensus, and minority opinions are always reflected and recorded. In order to make sure every opinion is represented, all WGs should be co-chaired by two chairs, one from the industry and the other one from the OIGs. Last, Mr. Lopez shared his concerns about the possible limitation of terms, because chair positions are difficult to fill in and because no one should be forced into such a position. LDAC also agreed not to financially compensate chairs, money being invested into the development of advice exclusively.

Mr. Gianpaolo BUONFIGLIO (Chair of the MEDAC) invited to look at the shortcomings of Annex III to the CFP Regulation, which according to him failed to provide a set of rules applicable to all ACs. No specific definitions for the specific bodies composing the ACs was provided, nor provisions on how these bodies should interact with each other, Mr. Buonfiglio said. This results in very different ACs in terms of structure and functioning. The MEDAC has strived to stick to the very letter of the 60/40% rule, and to make sure all views are communicated to the Commission by recording minority opinions. The chair cannot vote in the ExCom. Mr. Buonfiglio reminded that the MEDAC secretariat was selected after a call for candidates and under the supervision of DG MARE, which should in principle ensure its impartiality. The MEDAC could agree to an external performance review if all the ACs adopt the same framework. Last, Mr. Buonfiglio asked the Commission to inform the ACs of the upcoming consultations soon enough so that they have time to look into the topics and provide contributions in the most appropriate way.

Mr. Niels HÖGLUND (BSAC member) reminded that ACs are embedded in the EU legislative framework. As such, the Commission has a number of requirements and expectations towards the ACs. It should aim at making them more clear and visible to ACs. Mr. Höglund invited the Commission to reflect on how to make sure recommendations follow these requirements (i.e. make sure it helps implementing the CFP and follows scientific advice). Expectations on both sides (from the Commission perspective but also the ACs' perspective) on the role, purpose and functioning of the ACs could be further clarified. Mr. Höglund emphasised the need to train secretariats as well. He also called for the ACs to be given a more predictable work path, a sort of calendar of what is expected to come in terms of policy initiatives and consultations in the year ahead.

Mr. Esben SVERDRUP-JENSEN (Chair of the BSAC) expressed his wish to see AC advice more clearly reflected in the Commission's proposals. ACs sometimes struggle to see their recommendations properly followed-up and taken on board throughout the decision making process. This translates in little reward for the members. Mr. Sverdrup-Jensen invited the Commission to reflect on how to improve this specific aspect.

Mr. Guus PASTOOR (Chair of the MAC) underlined how important it is to have all opinions heard. The MAC faced difficulties ensuring this in the beginning, mainly because there was a misunderstanding of the statutes and lack of clarity regarding the different stages of the advice development. These issues were solved by clarifying the duties of each body within the AC. The

management team is very helpful in preparing the work before it goes to the different bodies, Mr. Pastoor said. Another condition for ACs to function well is that they maintain good relations with the Commission and provide real added value. Working groups should be established together with the advice of the Commission, so that ACs know what to focus on. The Commission should also be very clear on what the priorities are for the next years. Mr. Pastoor reminded that even though COVID is hindering the ACs, there are also good sides to it. It showed that they could be as effective and efficient using modern technology. Online meetings could be further encouraged in the future.

Mr. Serge LARZABAL (SWWAC), who could not take the floor during the meeting due to technical issues, sent a written contribution to the Commission the day following the event. It highlights four good practices that the SWWAC has put in place in the past years to cope with problems in its functioning. Members of the Executive Committee are designated internally within each of the two groups of stakeholders; the chair and vice-chairs have a prominent role in formally approving the advice and are extensively consulted on the day-to-day functioning of the AC; the secretariat was reshuffled in 2017 as to better share the work between its members; and recommendations include, to the best extent possible, all views within the body of the advice without having a minority statement at the end of the document. Mr. Larzabal also mentioned that a consultation process was launched internally in November 2020 to collect feedback from members (especially NGOs) on how to improve the functioning of the AC, but that no contributions had been received so far.

2.3. Conclusion and next steps by the Commission

Ms. Lena Andersson Pench thanked the speakers for excellent presentations and the participants for their valuable contribution to the discussion with many useful points. She recalled MARE's strong commitment to the ACs. The Commission will consider providing ACs with a timetable on topics, a sort of working arrangement with DG MARE to help them plan for the work ahead. The Commission also needs to improve its internal functioning and coherence towards ACs. Following this meeting, it will reflect on how to improve the follow-up of the advice received. More inter-AC meetings will be organised. The next one will take place after Easter and will be dedicated to presenting the actions undertaken by the Commission as a follow-up to this inter-AC meeting. The Commission already started looking into the amendment of the delegated act laying down the rules on the functioning of the Advisory Councils.

3. KEY DEVELOPMENTS ON IMPORTANT FILES

- **New strategic guidelines for aquaculture, Farm to Fork Strategy, New Algae initiative**

Ms. Lorella de la Cruz Iglesias (DG MARE, A2) provided participants with a short update on the new strategic guidelines for aquaculture, the Farm to Fork Strategy and the new algae initiative. The adoption of the new Strategic Guidelines for the sustainable development of EU aquaculture is expected in spring. The Guidelines will aim to consolidate lessons learnt in the cooperation framework laid down in the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation, and will provide guidance to increase the sector's sustainability and competitiveness. The review of the 2013 Guidelines¹ should cover the different aspects of environmental sustainability of aquaculture activities, including sustainable feed sources, limitation of nutrient loading or prevention of escapees. It should also aim at promoting the positive impact of certain types of aquaculture, such as farming of low trophic species (eg. molluscs or algae), or aquaculture contributing to the preservation of ecosystems such as ponds and wetlands. Another key aspect of the guidelines will be to promote the recognition and valorisation in the market of the efforts made by the industry in terms of sustainable food production, in line with the objectives set in the Farm to Fork Strategy. Member States are also invited to review their own national strategic guidelines.

The Farm to Fork Strategy stresses the importance of algae as a source of proteins. The Commission will develop a specific and comprehensive initiative for the development of algae production and use in the EU, taking into consideration the conclusions from the Blue Bioeconomy Forum established by the Commission. This initiative for a strong and sustainable EU algae sector will set out how to increase the sustainable production of algae products. The indicative date for adoption is first quarter 2022.

The Commission is also working on a contingency plan to ensure the EU preparedness to ensure the resilience of the seafood sector in case of crisis. Its adoption is expected by the end of the year.

The Commission is also revising its standards for the marketing and processing of fisheries and aquaculture products. Sustainability is at the core of the review. An impact assessment was published in April last year. A consultation was launched in September and will run until February. The Commission hopes to have a legislative proposal this year.

- **Sustainable Blue Economy Communication**

Ms. Isabelle Viallon (DG MARE, A3) briefly presented the upcoming Commission Sustainable Blue Economy Communication. She thanked the Advisory Councils for their joint advice issued in reply to the consultation launched on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy. Fisheries and aquaculture are important parts of the blue economy and as the new communication calls for a cross-sectoral approach to it, it is important to get the ACs feedback. It is valuable and the Commission will make sure it is properly taken on board when preparing the final communication.

¹ [COM\(2013\) 229 final](#)

This initiative takes place in the wider policy context of the European Green Deal and post-COVID-19 recovery. Many changes are expected to affect the maritime economy in the next few years, such as digitalisation, climate change and the aftermath of the pandemic. The new approach for a Sustainable Blue Economy will aim at promoting decarbonisation, zero pollution, circularity and biodiversity, and will foster interactions and synergies between Blue Economy sectors. This shift from blue growth towards a cross-sectoral approach will facilitate coexistence of activities and create positive externalities for the economy, the environment and the well-being of coastal communities.

The Communication is set to be adopted in spring. It will not contain much detail on fisheries, but it takes them into full consideration. It will reach the Advisory Councils in April probably. The Portuguese presidency is preparing Council conclusions on the sustainable blue economy. This should give a clear roadmap for years to come.

Q&A

Pedros Reis Santos asked Isabelle Viallon to react to the joint AC advice on a sustainable blue economy. She will liaise with him bilaterally to provide such feedback.

- **EU Multi-annual Programme for data collection and report on the Data Collection Framework implementation and functioning**

Ms. Annette Hurrelmann (DG MARE, C3) updated participants on the data collection framework and EU multiannual programme for data collection (EU MAP). The DCF is the backbone for scientific advice under the CFP. The collection of scientific data is organised under the DCF Regulation², and then ‘translated’ into concrete data collection requirements for Member States through the EU MAP (a delegated and implementing act^{3,4}), accompanied by templates for Member States work plans and annual reports on data collection. The EU MAP and the templates are currently being revised in view of the new EU MAP entering into force on 1 January 2022.

The Commission has worked intensively to prepare the new legal act. The Commission intends to put a very strong emphasis on regionalisation. This will help to further improve data collection in such areas as incidental catches of sensitive species, recreational fishing, or freshwater aquaculture. It will also help integrate the results from pilot studies into the data collection framework.

The process started in 2018. The adoption of the implementing and delegated decision on the EU MAP is now set to happen in spring this year, followed by the templates in summer.

² Regulation (EU) 2017/1004, [OJ L 157, 20.6.2017, p. 1–21](#)

³ Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2019/909, [OJ L 145, 4.6.2019, p. 21–26](#)

⁴ Commission Delegated Decision (EU) 2019/910, [OJ L 145, 4.6.2019, p. 27–84](#)

The [report](#) to the European Parliament and the Council on the DCF Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 gives a very dense background on the practical organisation of data collection in the EU.

- **State of play of the implementation and revision of the Control Regulation**

Ms. Francesca Arena (DG MARE, D4) presented a state of play of the implementation and revision of the Control Regulation⁵, a key legislative challenge for 2021.

In the Parliament, the draft report of MEP Clara Aguilera introduced 91 amendments to the proposal. Other members of the PECH Committee tabled a total of 1038 amendments. Most of them concern the Control Regulation with relatively few amendments on the EFCA founding Regulation⁶ and the IUU Regulation⁷ and on the date of application of the entire Regulation. The vote in PECH Committee will take place in the coming weeks. In the Council, the Croatian, German and now Portuguese presidencies have been working on a compromise text. The Portuguese presidency hopes to see the compromise adopted and start trilogues with the European Parliament during the first semester of 2021.

At the same time, DG MARE is investing a lot of resources in the implementation of the current Control Regulation. The Regulation provides that every 5 years, the Commission should report on its implementation. It is now about to finalise the second 5-year report for the period 2015-2019. This second report focuses exclusively on implementation by the Member States. It will be accompanied by a “synopsis report” summarising data received from the Member States. The report is supported by an external study on Member States sanctioning systems, which is about to be finalised. The adoption and publication of the proposal is expected in early April. A communication event (most likely a webinar) will follow, to which all ACs are invited.

- **Biodiversity Strategy: Technical Measures report and Action Plan**

Ms. Valérie Tankink (DG MARE, D3) updated the ACs on the upcoming Technical Measures Report and Action Plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems, a key deliverable under the Biodiversity Strategy. Article 31 of the Technical Measures Regulation⁸ requires the Commission to report to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the Regulation. The Commission will come forward with specific recommendations intended for follow-up by the ACs and the Member States groups in the context of regionalisation. Ms. Tankink thanked the ACs for the work already ongoing on that matter. The Commission needs solid contributions from the ACs to be able to build a report as soon as possible. To develop the Action Plan, the Commission will base on science but also on elements from the stakeholders and the Member States. Once the Technical Measures Report is out, the Commission will further consult with various stakeholders on what specific actions can

⁵ Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009, [OJ L 343, 22.12.2009, p. 1–50](#)

⁶ Regulation (EU) 2019/473, [OJ L 83, 25.3.2019](#)

⁷ Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008, [OJ L 286, 29.10.2008, p. 1–32](#)

⁸ Regulation (EU) 2019/1241, [OJ L 198, 25.7.2019, p. 105–201](#)

be put forward to meet the objectives of the Biodiversity Strategy. For now, the focus is on assessing the implementation. Contributions from the ACs are thus essential.

DG MARE works very closely with DG ENV on all files related to the Biodiversity Strategy. Many upcoming initiatives are relevant for the ACs, such as the ones on restoration targets or ocean observation. DG MARE will try to keep alerting ACs when such consultations are out.

Q&A

Q: Javier Ojeda asked the Commission to provide information on the new Taxonomy Regulation⁹, specifically why it overlooks aquaculture and seems disconnected from other initiatives under the European Green Deal.

A: The Commission took good note of the question and will come back by writing to the AAC as soon as possible.

Q: Niels Höglund asked that the Commission provide very early warnings to ACs when initiatives such as the ones presented today appear on the agenda. He also said that ACs sometimes find themselves uncomfortable replying to consultations via non-tailored questionnaires since they do not allow to express minority opinions. Written contributions are more appreciated and it would be good if the Commission could accommodate consultation requests to the specificities of the Advisory Councils.

A: The Commission will send ACs a list of priorities to help them plan their work. Reflection on how to best design consultations to meet the specific needs of the Advisory Councils can certainly be undertaken.

4. AOB

No other point was raised.

5. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING AND NEXT STEPS

Ms Lena Andersson Pench concluded the meeting by thanking all participants for their active contribution and for the quality of their presentations. She also thanked the ACs for their constructive attitude, which gives a solid basis to move forward. Many ideas for improvements came up with which the Commission can act upon swiftly. She already announced a specific session on Brexit (information will follow) and another inter-ACs meeting in Spring, and restated DG Vitcheva and the entire DG MARE's strong commitment towards this exercise.

⁹ Regulation (EU) 2020/852, [OJ L 198, 22.6.2020, p. 13–43](#)

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