



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE/B3/ADC

Subject: Reply to your advice on regional efforts in West Africa towards sustainable management of small pelagic stocks

Dear Mr López,

Thank you for submitting on 16 May 2025 the Long-Distance Advisory Council (LDAC) advice on a regional management of small pelagic stocks in West Africa, as a follow-up to the LDAC working group 4 on Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs) held on 11 March 2025 in Brussels.

I would like to apologise for the late reply to your letter, which is fully due to an administrative oversight on our behalf. Please be assured that we are taking steps to prevent such delays in the future.

Firstly, please allow me to congratulate the LDAC for the well-coordinated work in preparation of the above-mentioned advice, which has led to its adoption by consensus by the Executive Committee. I very much appreciate the effort that the LDAC has invested in that advice.

Your recommendation builds on the outcomes of the last CECAF working group on the state of small pelagic resources off the coast of North-West Africa, held in July 2024, which showed the alarming situation of small pelagic in the region. In this context, you have proposed a set of recommendations for the Commission to consider in its work on the new generation of Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs), ensuring they are in line with our wider regional strategies and priorities for Africa.

Be assured that the European Commission is aware of the state of small pelagic resources off the coast of North-West Africa which must be regarded from a regional perspective, as these fish populations are transboundary, migrating across the exclusive economic zones of multiple countries.

The CECAF small pelagics North working group (WG) meeting (20 to 28 May 2025) provided new stock assessment results and management advice for small pelagic fish

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species in the waters of Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia, and Spain (Canary Islands). In 2025, all stocks are assessed as either fully exploited (4 stocks) or overexploited (5 stocks). This was confirmed during the recently held CECAF Scientific Sub-Committee meeting (from 29 September to 2nd October) in Mindelo, Cabo Verde.

On strengthening scientific research, fisheries governance and cooperation at regional level, the EU continues its financial support for scientific research and promotion of CECAF as a centre of scientific expertise for the region through regional programmes (e.g. OEBAC) financed by the Global Europe - Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).

Regarding the renewal and strengthening of support for on-going regional efforts in the management of small pelagic stocks in West Africa, our position remains unchanged in favour of turning CECAF into a fully-fledged Regional Fisheries Management Organisation capable to take binding decisions.

In that context, science-based fisheries management is crucial to ensure that targeted fish stocks, including through the SFPAs, do not impact local food sources critical to food security and contribute to local value chains for human consumption. The EU continues to provide to partner countries with whom it has active SFPAs with sectoral support to improve their capacity to monitor and sustainably manage their fisheries stocks. Strengthening scientific research and advice is and will remain one of the main priority areas of EU's sectoral support.

On the new generation of SFPAs, the mission letter of Commissioner Kadis outlines the development of a new generation of SFPAs that is aligned with the EU's broader regional strategies and priorities — particularly in Africa and in the Indo-Pacific. This includes fostering a consistent and coordinated approach to sustainable fisheries across all multilateral fora and bilateral dialogues. In line with our objectives under the European Ocean Pact, the new generation of agreements will prioritise sustainability, fairness and transparency, and will seek to ensure that we have a coherent and complementary network of SFPAs. This work is ongoing.

In terms of support to food security and nutrition, the EU and its Member States' investments can play a crucial role in strengthening the artisanal fishing sector. By prioritizing investments in essential infrastructure and equipment, such as improved landing sites, cold storage facilities on board and onshore, and enhanced processing capabilities, initiatives can significantly boost the capacity of small-scale fishers to preserve and market their catches for local consumption. This not only helps maximize the nutritional contribution of small pelagic fish like sardinellas to food security but also mitigates economic and safety risks associated with longer fishing trips, ultimately fostering a more sustainable and resilient fishing community. The 2023 evaluation study of the SFPAs concluded that indirect employment of EU operations under the framework of SFPAs was estimated to support close to an additional 15 000 jobs in the third countries, mostly in industrial tuna processing plants. About 60% of employment positions in the processing sector ($\approx$ 9 000) are occupied by women.

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

Yours sincerely,

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