

## **Draft Terms of Reference for STECF EWG**

### **Validation of selected sustainability indicators and underlying methodologies for the revision of the EU marketing standards for fisheries products**

#### **Background**

Under the Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system<sup>1</sup>, DG MARE has been developing with the support of the STECF fisheries-specific sustainability criteria and indicators that can feed into the labelling of food products.

In May 2021, the STECF released a report on “Criteria and indicators to incorporate sustainability aspects for seafood products in the marketing standards under the Common Market Organisation”<sup>2</sup> (EWG 20-05). This report proposes transparent methods of measuring and communicating along the supply chain some sustainability aspects of fisheries and aquaculture products (FAPs), based on scientifically sound, simple and verifiable criteria and indicators. Among the eight criteria suggested for fishery products by the STECF report, three have been identified by DG MARE as key sustainability hotspots: (i) fishing pressure (i.e. sustainability of the targeted stock), (ii) impact on the seabed and (iii) impact on sensitive species.

A follow-up report on the “Validation of selected sustainability indicators and underlying methodologies”<sup>3</sup> was published in December 2022 (EWG 22-12). The report endorsed the indicators on the sustainability of the targeted stock and impact on the seabed and proposed scientifically robust methods to determine a product grading (score) of these indicators on a 5-scale (e.g. A to E), which could in the future be incorporated in a general or fishery-specific sustainability label. The methods are suitable to grade both EU products and imported products on the two sustainability criteria mentioned before. The Commission is currently planning to operationalise these two methods through a publicly available IT tool.

While this is already finalised for the impact on the seabed, more work is required for the indicator on stock sustainability. This concerns, in particular, stock assessment data from ICES, GFCM and various other RFMOs, incl. for migratory species. For that purpose, an initial data gathering exercise was carried out by an ad-hoc team of experts. The experts have also developed a preliminary ‘pilot tool’, which can be used to determine the grade (score) of a given product based on the species and catch area.

EWG 22-12 also explored the possibility of a third graded indicator on the impact of the fishing activity on sensitive species. The development of such an indicator would be significantly more complex than the other two already finalised indicators and the STECF could not conclude

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<sup>1</sup> [Communication from the Commission to the EP and Council - Farm to Fork Strategy](#)

<sup>2</sup> [EWG 20-05](#)

<sup>3</sup> [EWG 22-12](#)

whether actual development and operationalisation of this indicator is actually feasible at all. An ad-hoc team of experts has been established to explore possible approaches to that end.

### **Task 1: Assess and validate the data gathered and the pilot tool developed by the ad-hoc expert team**

Objective: The outcome of this task should support DG MARE in the development of an IT tool for the stock sustainability grading of fisheries products marketed in the EU that could be made publicly available in the future. A preliminary pilot tool will be available for the EWG to test the implementation of the approach proposed in EWG 22-12. Notably, the envisaged final tool will use a different IT system and will be hosted on a Commission platform, so the pilot tool should not be seen as a beta version of the final tool that will be made available for external users.

In its assessment, the EWG should pay attention to the following aspects:

- Data coverage: Is the overall coverage sufficient for the development of a final tool? Are there significant gaps, for example assessment data still missing for commercially significant species on the EU market, where that data should in principle be available?
- Implementation of the method / decision tree developed in EWG 22-12: Are the grading results generated by the pilot tool in line with the proposed approach? Are there bugs or striking grading results that should be further examined?

For the elements above, the EWG could define a set of 50-100 [tbd] priority stocks / species, that are the most commercially relevant on the EU market (covering both landings and imports).

- Recommendations for periodic data updates (frequency / point in time)
- Recommendations for the development of the final IT tool and its testing

### **Task 2: Assess the approach proposed for a grading of the impact on sensitive species**

Objective: The outcome of this task should enable DG MARE to take a decision whether the approach suggested by the ad-hoc expert team should be further pursued and, if so, what the next steps should be.

In its assessment, the EWG should pay attention to the following aspects:

- Scope of the proposed approach: Is the scope of considered sensitive species sufficient for a meaningful and robust indicator?
- Data availability: Can the proposed approach be scaled up to cover all global fisheries that are commercially significant for the EU market? Are there severe data gaps that would make the methodology, when applied beyond EU waters, difficult or insufficiently robust?
- Data consistency: Does the proposed approach allow for a consistent grading method across regions and species, similarly as the indicators on stock sustainability or seabed impact?

- Operationality: To which degree is the approach feasible on the basis of easily available input data, i.e. species, gear category and catch area? If not at the present stage, what could be the next developments regarding the most complete grading system (e.g., including a limited number of extremely sensitive species, number that may increase in the future) and the least complete grading system (e.g., overall bycatch by pseudo-metier eventually including interaction with sensitive species) to allow operationality also beyond EU waters?