

**STECF PLENARY MEETING 25-01
24 – 28 MARCH 2025, ISPRA, ITALY**

Draft Terms of Reference

1.	Introduction.....	3
2.	List of participants	3
3.	Information to the Plenary.....	3
4.	STECF Initiatives.....	3
5.	Assessment of STECF EWG reports	4
	5.1. EWG 24-16: Implementation of the Technical Measures Regulation	4
	5.2. EWG 24-09: VMEs socio-economic impact assessment.....	4
	5.3. EWG 25-01: Methods: Stock assessments in the Western Mediterranean Sea 2025.....	4
6.	Additional requests submitted to the STECF plenary by the Commission.....	5
	6.1. Update of the STECF EWG 24-17 report using the updated VUR indicators for the FR OMR fleet segments.....	5
	6.2. Assessment of the Joint Recommendation of the South-Western Waters High-Level Group, aiming to exclude all bottom gears except the longliner “piedrabola” to operate in certain VMEs areas established in Commission implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1614	5
	6.3. Assessment of Joint recommendation on conservation measures in Nordvästra Skånes havsområde in the Kattegat	8
	6.4. Now included in 7.3.....	9
	6.5. Review of the request to reopen the bank of Chamelea gallina for mechanised dredges boats in the Ebro Delta.....	9
	6.6. Evaluation of Joint Recommendation on a derogation from MCRS for Venus Clams in certain Italian waters.....	11
	6.7. Assessment of the Joint Recommendation for haddock.....	12
	6.8. CFP monitoring – for early advice by 04/04.....	13
	6.9 Technical and scientific advice on the innovative fishing device Trap-line	14
7.	Items/discussion points for preparation of EWGs and other STECF work.....	15

7.1. Update on Guidelines for the data transmission monitoring tool and way forward on the assessment of data transmission issues.....	15
7.2 EWG 25-10: FDI methodology and EWG 25-05: FDI methodology and datacall	16
7.3. EWG 25-06: Stock assessments in the Western Mediterranean Sea 2025: Hake in GSA 1-5-6-7 and in 8-9-10-11	16
7.4. Potential EWG: Review of the scientific advice and processes in RFMOs.....	18
7.5. Potential EWG: Apprehending, assessing and predicting climate change impacts on international fisheries	18

1. INTRODUCTION

[Does not belong to the ToRs but is listed here to avoid confusion with the section numbering when editing the plenary report.]

2. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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3. INFORMATION TO THE PLENARY

4. STECF INITIATIVES

5. ASSESSMENT OF STECF EWG REPORTS

5.1. EWG 24-16: Implementation of the Technical Measures Regulation

Request to the STECF:

STECF is requested to evaluate the findings of the STECF Expert Working Group meeting and make any appropriate comments and recommendations.

5.2. EWG 24-09: VMEs socio-economic impact assessment

Request to the STECF

STECF is requested to evaluate the findings of the STECF Expert Working Group meeting and make any appropriate opinion.

5.3. EWG 25-01: Methods: Stock assessments in the Western Mediterranean Sea 2025

Request to the STECF:

STECF is requested to evaluate the findings of the STECF Expert Working Group meeting and make any appropriate comments and recommendations.

6. ADDITIONAL REQUESTS SUBMITTED TO THE STECF PLENARY BY THE COMMISSION

6.1. Update of the STECF EWG 24-17 report using the updated VUR indicators for the FR OMR fleet segments

Background provided by the Commission:

The Commission launched an ad hoc contract for two experts for updating the STECF EWG 24-17 report to include the VUR and VUR90 technical indicators in the assessment of balance for the French fleet segments in the outermost regions. The outcome of the adhoc contract will be made available to STECF prior to the plenary meeting.

Request to the STECF

The STECF is requested to comment on the outcome of the adhoc contract, more specifically on the updated traffic light table(s) and sections of report EWG 24-17.

6.2. Assessment of the Joint Recommendation of the South-Western Waters High-Level Group, aiming to exclude all bottom gears except the longliner “piedrabela” to operate in certain VMEs areas established in Commission implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1614

Background provided by the European Commission

Pursuant to the Deep-sea access regulation (EU) 2016/2336, a list of 87 areas where Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) occur or are likely to occur has been established by Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1614⁽¹⁾. The Deep-sea Access Regulation provides that below a depth of 400 meters all bottom gears shall be prohibited in all areas listed.

Council Regulation (EC) No 734/2008 provides for all definitions relating to the Deep-sea Access Regulation, namely:

⁽¹⁾ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1614 of 15 September 2022 determining the existing deep-sea fishing areas and establishing a list of areas where vulnerable marine ecosystems are known to occur or are likely to occur

- **bottom gears** are described as “*bottom gears’ means gears deployed in the normal course of fishing operations in contact with the seabed, including bottom trawls, dredges, bottom-set gill nets, bottom-set longlines, pots and traps*”,
- **vulnerable marine ecosystems** are “*any marine ecosystem whose integrity (i.e. ecosystem structure or function) is, according to the best scientific information available and to the principle of precaution, threatened by significant adverse impacts resulting from physical contact with bottom gears in the normal course of fishing operations, including, inter alia, reefs, seamounts, hydrothermal vents, cold water corals or cold water sponge beds. The most vulnerable ecosystems are those that are easily disturbed and in addition are very slow to recover, or may never recover*”
- **significant adverse impacts** (SAIs) are defined in line with the FAO Guidelines of 2009² as “*impacts (evaluated individually, in combination or cumulatively) which compromise ecosystem integrity in a manner that impairs the ability of affected populations to replace themselves and that degrades the long-term natural productivity of habitats, or causes on more than a temporary basis significant loss of species richness, habitat or community types.*”

Article 9(6) of the Deep-sea Access Regulation foresees the **removal of areas** from the established list of VMEs areas “*on the basis of an impact assessment*” and “*after consulting the competent scientific advisory body*” provided that “*appropriate conservation and management measures have been adopted which **ensure that significant adverse impacts on VMEs in that area are prevented***”.

Request to the STECF

The STECF is requested to carry out an assessment of the conservation and management measure proposed by the Joint Recommendation which is the reintroduction of the longliners “*Piedra bola*” into 11 VMEs areas, with a view to determine if this measure ensures that significant adverse impacts on VMEs in those areas are prevented or indeed whether SAIs do not occur according to the type of gear, described as semi-pelagic longliner in the JR and scientific reports submitted . This assessment should be made in line with the criteria set in the **Deep-sea Access Regulation (EU)2016/2336 framework** and based on the evidence provided by the results of the scientific projects ISPAMER (2023-2025) and PALFON-EMV Project (2023-2025).

The STECF is furthermore requested to assess the compatibility of the proposed measure with the objectives and conditions set out in **Article 12(3) and (4) of the Technical Measures Regulation (EU) 2019/1241**, in particular: (i) whether the proposed measure is compatible with the objectives of Article 2 of the CFP, (ii) whether the proposed measure is as stringent as current measures under Union law and (iii) whether the proposed measure ensures that the environmental impacts of fishing activities on seabed habitats are in line with point (j) of Article 2(5) of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013, which is

(²) FAO (2009) [International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-sea Fisheries in the High Seas](#)

to be coherent with the Union environmental legislation, in particular with the objective of achieving a good environmental status by 2020 as set out in Article 1(1) of Directive 2008/56/EC, as well as with other Union policies.

In details:

1) Assessment pursuant to the Deep-sea access regulation framework

The STECF is required to review the suitability and potential effectiveness of the proposed conservation and management measure, which is to allow the reintroduction of the longliners “Piedra Bola” into 11 VMEs closed polygons and to take over the ban for all other bottom gears in those 11 VMEs areas, in ensuring that significant adverse impacts³ on VMEs in those areas are prevented.

In doing so, STECF is requested to carry out an assessment of the proposed conservation and management measure based on the **review** of the evidence provided in the projects ISPAMER (2023-2025) and PALFON-EMV Project (2023-2025), developed by the Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO), in line with the **seven points requirements of the FAO Guidelines**, para. 47, as prescribed by article 9(4) and 9(6) of the Deep-sea Access Regulation. For this, the STECF can rely on the ICES advices on the list of areas where VMEs occur or are likely to occur (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024).

Furthermore, STECF is requested to compare the impact of the Piedra bola against the impact of bottom trawls and to this end may refer to the study by Pham et al. (2014) “[Deep-water longline fishing has reduced impact on Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems](#)” published in Nature in April 2014, which estimated that the impact of bottom trawling on deep-water corals and sponges on seamounts in the Northeast Atlantic is likely to be 296 to 1,719 times higher than the impact of deep-sea longline fishing.

2) Assessment pursuant to Article 12 of the Technical Measures Regulation

STECF is requested to assess compatibility of this proposed measure with the **objectives and conditions set out in Articles 12(3) and (4) of Regulation 2019/1241**.

Such measures shall be compatible with the objectives of Article 2 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013, be at least as stringent as measures under Union law, and ensure that the environmental impacts of fishing activities on seabed habitats are in line with point (j) of Article 2(5) of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 (“be coherent with the Union environmental legislation, in particular with the objective of

³ Article 2: “‘significant adverse impacts’ means impacts (evaluated individually, in combination or cumulatively) which compromise ecosystem integrity in a manner that impairs the ability of affected populations to replace themselves and that degrades the long-term natural productivity of habitats, or causes on more than a temporary basis significant loss of species richness, habitat or community types.”

achieving a good environmental status by 2020 as set out in Article 1(1) of Directive 2008/56/EC, as well as with other Union policies”).)

Key Documents and References

- Joint Recommendation of the South-Western Waters High-Level Group aiming to exclude the longliner “piedrabola” from the prohibition to operate in certain VMEs areas, established in Commission implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1614 + Annexes and References
- [FAO \(2009\)](#) International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-sea Fisheries in the High Seas
- [ICES. 2024](#). Advice on areas where Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) are known to occur or are likely to occur in EU waters.
- [ICES. 2023](#). Advice on areas where Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) are known to occur or are likely to occur in EU waters.
- [ICES. 2022](#). EU request for a Technical Service to provide data output of the ICES 2021 advice on the deep-sea access regulation (ref. (EU)2016/2336) as coordinates for EU waters area only.
- [ICES. 2021](#). EU Request to advise on the list of areas where VMEs are known to occur or are likely to occur and on the existing deep-sea fishing areas (ref. (EU)2016/2336).

6.3. Assessment of Joint recommendation on conservation measures in Nordvästra Skånes havsområde in the Kattegat

On 6 November 2024, the North Sea Member States (with Sweden as initiating Member States) submitted to the Commission a joint recommendation suggesting conservation measures for the Natura 2000 site Nordvästra Skånes havsområde in the Kattegat.

The joint recommendation entails the division of the site in three parts (North part, no-take part and South part). The conservation measures consist of:

1. the prohibition of mobile bottom contacting gears in the entire site.
2. the prohibition of longlines, static and fyke nets as follows: (i) in the North area, only half of the year (ii) in the South area, all the year -except that specific permits can be issued if compatible with the marine protected area.

A specific use of fyke nets (with specific technical measures) for recreational fisheries is allowed in the North and South throughout the year.

Control measures: notably the use of AIS for all vessels. The provisions in Article 50.3 of Regulation (EU) 1224/2009 (Fishing Restricted Areas) apply to all vessels (this is in addition to the measures that apply by default).

Request to the STECF:

1. Review the suitability and potential effectiveness of the proposed conservation measures to minimise the negative impacts of fishing activities on the marine ecosystem and ensure that fisheries activities avoid the degradation of the marine environment.
2. Assess to what extent the proposed measures: a) correspond to the ecological requirements of the habitats and species protected in the relevant Natura 2000 sites and contribute towards achieving the conservation objectives of the sites (in relation to fishing as a pressure); b) and to what extent the proposed measures can prevent: (i) deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species and (ii) significant disturbance of species protected in the site, as required by the Habitats Directive.
3. Comment on whether the proposed control measures are adequate in relation to the proposed management measures.
4. If possible, comment on how the proposed conservation measures may affect the fishing activity in the proposed management zones. This should include identification of the fleets concerned, their economic dependence on the proposed management zones, their potential to reallocate the fishing activity (displacement) and potential economic and ecological consequences.
5. If possible, comment on the continuation of recreational fisheries throughout the year in the Northern and Southern areas, and the use of the technical measures for carrying out such fishery (whether it is a selective fishery).

6.4. Now included in 7.3

6.5. Review of the request to reopen the bank of *Chamelea gallina* for mechanised dredges boats in the Ebro Delta

Background provided by the Commission:

Article 19 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1967/2006 concerning management measures for the sustainable exploitation of fishery resources in the Mediterranean Sea ('MEDREG') requires Member States to adopt management plans for fisheries conducted by trawl nets, boats seines, shore seines, surrounding nets and dredges within their territorial waters.

In 2014, the Autonomous Community of Catalonia prepared the first management plan for mechanised dredges exploiting mollusc bivalves (*Donax* spp., *Chamelea gallina* and

Callista chione). The draft plan and its technical information were assessed by the STECF in November 2014 (PLEN 14-03). After revision, it was adopted by Order ARP/362/2015 of 15 December. The validity of the plan ended on 22 December 2018. In 2019, the Directorate-General for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs (DGPAM) of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia proposed a revised plan, taking into account the results of a scientific monitoring carried out between 2016-2018 by the DGPAM and the consultancy TECNOAMBIENTE, as well as recommendations from the co-management committee and direct fishers.

In 2019, the new Management Plan provided information on fisheries using mechanized dredges and on the stocks they exploit, particularly donax clams (*Donax ssp.*), venus clams (*Chamelea gallina*) and smooth clams (*Callista chione*). Taking into an account the latest results from monitoring, the plan proposed a package of measures to reduce fishing effort, including the closure of fisheries for venus clams and smooth clams.

In October 2024, Catalonia asked to reopen the fishery for the “chirla” (*Chamelea gallina*) bank for boats with mechanized dredgers in the Ebro delta. Catalonia considers this “fishing ground, open for exploitation by the fleet of boat dredgers since November 2023, shows a clear recovery of the bank, with the best abundance and biomass data recorded in recent years”.

Request to the STECF

TOR 1.

Advice and assess whether the documents provided and the existing management plan in Catalonia contain adequate elements in terms of:

1.1. The description of the fisheries

- Recent and historical data on catches (landings and discards) of the species concerned, fishing effort and abundance indices such as catch-per-unit-effort;
- Data on length-frequency distribution of the catches, with particular reference to the species subject to minimum sizes in accordance with Annex III of the MEDREG;
- An updated state of the exploited resources; and
- Information on economic indicators, including the profitability of the fisheries.

1.2. Objectives, safeguards and conservation/technical measures

- -Objectives consistent with Article 2 of the CFP and quantifiable targets, such as fishing mortality rates and total biomass;
- - Measures proportionate to the objectives, the targets and the expected time frame. In particular, if any, the proposed modifications of the management plan i.e. closure of certain fishing grounds, fishing effort reductions and the duration of management plan;

- - Safeguards to ensure that quantifiable targets are met, as well as remedial actions, where needed, including situations where the deteriorating quality of data or non-availability places the sustainability of the main stocks of the fishery at risk; and
- - Other conservation measures, in particular measures to fully monitor catches of the target species, to gradually eliminate discards and to minimise the negative impact of fishing on the ecosystem.

1.3. Other aspects

- Quantifiable indicators for periodic monitoring and assessment of progress in achieving the objectives of the plan.

TOR 2.

If deemed necessary, provide any recommendations and guidance on how to obtain improved scientific/technical supporting material for the monitoring and the management plan. This could be done in terms of collection of data, evaluation of the status of the target stocks, evaluation of conservation measures, impact on the marine ecosystem and monitoring programme.

6.6. Evaluation of Joint Recommendation on a derogation from MCRS for Venus Clams in certain Italian waters

Background provided by the Commission:

The landing obligation has been compulsory since 1 January 2017, for the species that define the fisheries (other than small pelagics) and that are subject to a minimum conservation reference size (MCRS) according to Annex IX of the Technical Measure Regulation adopted in July 2019.

The fisheries targeting the mollusc bivalve Venus clams (*Venus gallina* – as originally described – or *Chamelea gallina*) are therefore subject to this provision. Between 2019 and 2020, Italy submitted to the European Commission a proposal for a three year discard plan for the fisheries targeting Venus clams by hydraulic dredges in the certain Italian waters. Following STECF advice, a high survivability derogation was granted for 3 years and a 3 year derogation to MCRS. The latter derogation expired on 31st December 2022 and following STECF evaluation a new derogation was granted via the Delegated Regulation (EU) n. 2022/2587 of 18 August 2022 amending Regulation (EU) n. 2019/1241 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the minimum reference size for the conservation of Venus clams (*Venus spp.*) in certain Italian territorial water until 31st December 2025. As the current derogation is expiring at the end of the year, on 11 March the IT administration submitted a new Joint Recommendation to support the derogation from the MCRS of 25mm for Venus shells in the Italian waters of the following GSAs: 9-10-11 and 17-18. After the entry into force of the new Technical Measures Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2019/12419) Member States have the possibility to develop joint recommendations that can be used to amend certain regional baseline

selectivity standards through the Commission empowerment to adopt delegated Acts on the basis of these joint recommendations. This permits the tailoring of detailed and technical rules so as to take into account regional specificities. The alternative measures should, as a minimum, lead to such benefits for the conservation of marine biological resources that are at least equivalent to the ones provided by the baseline standards. As such, the joint recommendation shall not lead to a deterioration of baseline standards and also aim at achieving the objectives and targets set out in Articles 3 and 4 of Regulation (EU) 2019/1241. The new Joint Recommendation is supported by a study which evaluates the possible effects of re-defining the MCRS.

Request to the STECF

STECF is requested to review and make any appropriate comments and recommendations on the joint recommendation for the fisheries targeting Venus clams in the relevant IT territorial waters of the GSAs 9-10-11- 17-18 and its supporting study focusing only on the request for an extension of MCRS derogation for 5 years . In particular, STECF is requested to:

- Assess the potential past and future (limited to a 5 year MCRS derogation duration) impacts on the stock of the proposed change in the MCRS for Venus clams from 25 mm to 22 mm on exploitation rates and stock biomass.

In making this evaluation, STECF is asked to take into account the works of the STECF EWG 15-14, 16-0625, 19-01, 19-02, PLEN 20-01, 22-01 as well as EWG 22-16⁴ , and of the European Parliament.

6.7. Assessment of the Joint Recommendation for haddock

Background provided by the Commission

The Scheveningen Group submitted a Joint Recommendation on 30 October 2024 requesting an amendment to the current discard plan for the North Sea and further technical measures in the North Sea as provided for in Article 15(5) b, ii, of the basic regulation and Article 15(2) of Regulation (EU) No 2019/1241. The JR requests for the use of a T90-cod-end to be permitted for vessels fishing with bottom trawls and seines in fisheries in the whole, as well as for a de minimis exemptions for haddock below MCRS up to a maximum of 1.5% of the total annual catches of haddock in the ICES division 3A. It should be noted that a joint recommendation from the Scheveningen Group on De

⁴ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC132157>

minimis exemption for Haddock was examined during STECF PLEN 23-03 and by EWG 23-04, which conclusions were reviewed by STECF 23-04 & 23-06.

There has been observations by fishers of an increased abundance of haddock below MCRS since 2021. According to fishers, mesh size does not have any significant impact on reducing unavoidable bycatches of haddock as the bycatch of juvenile haddock gets trapped among the larger fish. A larger mesh size would therefore result in a loss of catch of the targeted species. The Scheveningen Group's request is based on the fact that the fishing gears on which the exemptions are conditioned provide the best possible selectivity.

To support the JR, the Scheveningen Group submitted a report from the Danish Institute for Aquatic Resources (DTA Aqua). This report evaluated trials aimed to reduce bycatch of juvenile roundfish while maintaining marketable flatfish. This report concluded that that the T90-cod-end reduced the retention of juvenile roundfish and improved the retention of smaller sized marketable flatfish. The scientific trial further documented a significant reduction of cod and haddock up to a size of 43 cm and 40 cm, respectively.

Request to the STECF

The STECF is requested to assess the present Joint Recommendation and its supplementary annexes. Specifically, the STECF is requested to review and make any appropriate comments and recommendations on (1) the proposed technical measures, and (2) the De minimis exemption for haddock taking account of the conclusions issued by STECF PLEN 23-03 and STECF 23-04 & 23-06.

6.8. CFP monitoring – for early advice by 04/04

Background provided by the Commission

Article 50 of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP; Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013) stipulates: "The Commission shall report annually to the European Parliament and to the Council on the progress on achieving maximum sustainable yield and on the situation of fish stocks, as early as possible following the adoption of the yearly Council Regulation fixing the fishing opportunities available in Union waters and, in certain non-Union waters, to Union vessels."

Request to the STECF

STECF is requested to report on progress in achieving MSY objectives in line with the Common Fisheries Policy.

6.9 Technical and scientific advice on the innovative fishing device Trap-line

Background provided by the Commission:

According to ICES, an innovative fishing gear is a gear or a significant component of a gear that is different from the baseline in the current EU regulations or, in the absence of such legislation, different from the gear commonly used in a specific sea basin (area) in EU waters.

Recent reports from ICCAT highlight the emergence of a new fishing gear: “**trap-lines**” (Spanish: Lazo; Italian: Esca multifilo per pesce spada or Trappole per pesce spada). Initially introduced in Spanish and Italian fleets, this gear has quickly spread to other fleets.

According to Garibaldi et al., this gear has reportedly been in use since at least 2021, presenting several challenges for researchers. One key issue is defining CPUE, particularly because the gear itself is not officially defined, and therefore lacks a formal framework that would enable CPCs to collect and report data. Additionally, the impact of this gear needs to be assessed in terms of target species, bycatch species, socio-economic relevance, and environmental impact to allow managers to implement sound, evidence-based measures.

In its 2023 report, the ICCAT SCRS requested Contracting Parties to implement measures that ensure this new gear is recorded in logbooks and fishery databases. It also urged further research to determine the extent of its use, including when it was introduced into fisheries, historical catch data, its geographic distribution (Atlantic, Mediterranean, or both), the fleets utilizing it, the number of vessels involved, whether it is used alone or in combination with longline gear, and, if so, in what proportion.

Furthermore, the SCRS requested CPCs to conduct CPUE analyses specific to this gear for both target and non-target species.

Lastly, in its advice on technical measures to be tested in the Mediterranean Sea (Ref. 251/2024, dated 23rd October 2024), MEDAC requested the Commission to refer the assessment of this new fishing gear to the STECF, particularly regarding its environmental and socioeconomic impacts. According to several sector operators in various Italian and Spanish maritime districts, many characteristics of this gear appear to optimize swordfish fisheries—not only in terms of catch capacity but also in its socio-economic and environmental dimensions. Additionally, MEDAC has provided data collected by UNIMAR, which will be submitted to the STECF.

Request to the STECF

STECF is requested to provide technical advice on this new device, whether it qualifies as a fishing gear or a selective device, along with its characteristics.

Advice is also sought on the likely impact of this device on selectivity and its potential effects on fisheries, particularly swordfish fisheries and other highly migratory species. Additionally, any evidence STECF may find regarding the use of this gear to target other species should be considered.

STECF should consider potential economic, social and environmental impacts of the gear, the latter notably on by-catches.

Furthermore, advice is requested on a roadmap of additional assessment to be carried out for its inclusion in the EU legal framework. (Including, but not limited to, potential need for a pilot project—if not already in place—to further assess the device.)

7. ITEMS/DISCUSSION POINTS FOR PREPARATION OF EWGS AND OTHER STECF WORK

7.1. Update on Guidelines for the data transmission monitoring tool and way forward on the assessment of data transmission issues

Request to the STECF

DTMT guidelines and assessment cycle were revised and applied in 2024. STECF is requested to reflect on the new assessment cycle whether and to what extent has it improved the data transmission issues assessment. In order to complete the assessment cycle of data issues in the DTMT as to the follow-up given to data issues, COM proposes to cross-check the data issues open since 2018 with the data available in JRC databases through ad hoc contracts, to be assigned per data call type, i.e. Med and Black Sea (Med & BS), Fisheries Dependent Information (FDI), socio-economics (Annual Economic Report (AER), aquaculture, processing). As there are distinct differences between the data calls, an individual approach is needed per data call, to meet the goal of closing the cycle. The experts assigned will need to have access to: (i) data in the JRC databases, (ii) the actual DTMT issues and (iii) the EWG reports on Annual Reports and Work Plans, that deal with data issues.

Specifically for the Med and BS, this process would entail the following steps:

- Launch an ad hoc contract after the EWG on stock assessment, to re-run scripts to check the data and verify issues identified in the DTMT;
- Ask MS to check and resubmit data in the next Med & BS data call;
- Launch an ad hoc contract to check updated data after the Med & BS data call, between July and September to verify whether issues have been addressed.

The above process describes an annual cycle and a separate ad hoc contract needs to be launched to address the backlog of data issues.

For the FDI, since data is checked during the EWG, this exercise would be only relevant for data submitted up to last year to clear the backlog of DTMTs.

On socio-economics, the EWG this year probably will check the most recent data issues (to be confirmed with EWG focal regarding the ToRs), so the exercise is relevant for the backlog.

STECF is requested to discuss the proposed way forward and revise the TORs of the ad hoc contracts (to be provided as background document).

7.2 EWG 25-10: FDI methodology and EWG 25-05: FDI methodology and data call

Request to STECF

STECF is requested to discuss the organisation of these EWGs, clarify the workflow and discuss the draft ToRs.

7.3. EWG 25-06: Stock assessments in the Western Mediterranean Sea 2025: Hake in GSA 1-5-6-7 and in 8-9-10-11

Request to STECF

Following previous discussions on stock assessments in the West Med (including in Plenary and during relevant EWGs), STECF is requested to discuss the organisation of EWG 25-06, clarify the workflow and discuss the draft ToRs. The STECF is requested to take note of documents transmitted by Spain to the Commission and provided as background documentation with particular attention to the technical aspects outlined therein.

The hake stocks in the Western Mediterranean assessed by STECF are the most vulnerable stocks under the West Mediterranean MAP and are drivers of the fishing effort regime in the MAP. In 2024 the STECF advice has determined both stocks being below Blim and subject to high overexploitation which has fed into 2025 Council Fishing Opportunities Regulation.

For these reasons, there has been an increased level of scientific and political scrutiny on these stocks. STECF PLEN 24-03 identified a number of areas for improvement in the data. GFCM WG Hake, to which STECF participated in March 2025, set out a number of guidelines and good practices on how to improve the hake assessments in general and in particular for Hake GSA 1-2-5-6-7 and GSA 8-9-10-11. Finally, STECF PLEN evaluated a technical contribution from Spain on this topic in PLEN 25-01.

On the basis of the above STECF EWG 25-06 is requested to: i. update the stock assessment of Hake GSA 1-2-5-6-7 in first priority and GSA 8-9-10-11 in second priority,

if time allows; ii. consider the good practices suggested by GFCM WKHKE aiming at overcoming some limitations in the current assessments (ToR 1);iii. based on ii. then provide an updated assessment (ToR 2). In September EWG 25-0x this revised model(s) should be run with data up to 2024 to provide the most updated advice.

Considering there will be a request to GFCM to update the benchmarks in cooperation with STECF, and in line with STECF PLEN 24-03 conclusions for HKE 1-7 and HKE 8-11 as well as discussions held in GFCM WKHKE, boundaries are not under scrutiny in EWG 25-06.

Draft ToRs of EWG-25-06

TOR 1

Input Data:

For HKE 1-7 and HKE 8-11 assess availability and compile historical time series of total landings and if available landings@length, assess if there are unsampled métiers that could give better LFDs for the larger size individuals to better estimate selectivity at age, consolidate the MEDITS data and address current issues for Age 4. For HKE 8-11 no outstanding data issues, other than missing/late MEDITS and sampling issues in GSA 10.

Biological Parameters:

Considering that for HKE 1-7 the growth parameters seem outdated/inconsistent, and that GFCM WG Hake proposed a number of guidelines, also for HKE 8-11, STECF EWG should:

- Consider the exploration of additional **growth functions** (e.g., Schnute).
- **Retrieve historical and recent ALK** that may inform the growth, even based on few years data, covering older individuals.
- **Account for growth dimorphism** when slicing (commercial catch and survey index), either using ALKs or growth parameters by sex (in case of non-availability, borrow information from neighboring areas, and perform some sensitivity analysis)
- **Statistical age-slicing** instead of deterministic one could be something to be attempted when ALKs are not available; Should the slicing be made on quarterly basis? (Check sensitivity to such a procedure)
- To build the combined stock object, **perform weighted average** (using numbers-at-age by sex) to compute weight-at-age, natural mortality, maturity, etc.; **natural mortality and maturity vectors** can be derived according to numbers at age by sex and then merged into a single vector.

- **Explore alternative growth functions** – including sex-structured: this can be done externally; the use of a4aGr could be explored and tested to include alternative growth functions
- Test **M vectors** consistent with updated VGBF
- Evaluate if **moderate selectivity in the oldest ages** in the assessment may lead to larger fishing mortalities estimates and/or overly pessimistic biomass depletion levels. To address this point consider the impact of different fleets, especially bottom trawlers, and longlines, and ensure that selectivity patterns align with the biological knowledge.
- test the **implementation of plus group in the survey**, as it may drive the assessment results, especially in the absence of adult's information

TOR 2

Stock Assessment models:

On the basis of the outcomes of TOR 1,:

- for HKE 1-7 the current base model is the accepted a4a assessment, performance of this model to be checked with above data/parameters changes.,
- based on available expertise in the EWG, experts could explore other stock assessment models, only for HKE 1-7 as HKE 8-11 is formally benchmarked, accounting also for the GFCM WGHake guidelines. The EWG could compare model runs across models and advise on the best performing model.

7.4. Potential EWG: Review of the scientific advice and processes in RFMOs

Request to the STECF

STECF is requested to discuss and advice the Commission on the feasibility, opportunity, timeliness discuss of the draft ToRs provided by MARE for a potential EWG, and to advice on the best way forward.

7.5. Potential EWG: Apprehending, assessing and predicting climate change impacts on international fisheries

Request to STECF

STECF is requested to discuss the draft ToRs provided by MARE for a potential EWG, and to identify in exchange with MARE on the best way forward.