

STECF PLENARY MEETING 24-01
11 MARCH 2024 – 15 MARCH 2024

Draft Terms of Reference (28/02/2024)

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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

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

3. INFORMATION TO THE PLENARY

4. STECF INITIATIVES

5. ASSESSMENT OF STECF EWG REPORTS

5.1. EWG 23-18 Fisheries sustainability indicators

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. In particular STECF is asked to comment on the following:

- The EWG's findings and conclusions following its testing of a pilot tool that operationalises an indicator (previously developed in EWG 22-12) to score a given fisheries product in relation to the sustainability of the targeted stock / species.
- The methodology proposed by the EWG for an **indicator on the impact on sensitive species** and its scoring and, in particular, the conclusions of the EWG in terms of the feasibility and operability of that indicator.

5.2. EWG 23-15 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.

5.3. EWG 24-01 Fishing effort regime for demersal fisheries in West Med - evaluations of closure areas and advancement on the models**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.

Specifically, STECF should evaluate the conclusions of the EWG in respect to the proposed way forward for a unified model and ways to address some of the identified limitations in the current models. STECF should advise, in particular in respect to TOR 4 of the EWG, on the suitability of the proposed model and its additional developments for the required analysis and on the feasibility of the emerging roadmap for the application of a unified model for EMU 1&2.

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

6.1. Assessment of a Joint Recommendation for amending the Technical Measures Regulation regarding the “sprat box”

Background provided by the Commission

This joint recommendation submitted by the Scheveningen Group concerns the technical measures for sprat fisheries in an area along the Danish North Sea coast called “the sprat box”. Part C, point 4, of Annex V to Regulation (EU) No 2019/1241 of 20 June 2019 provides that fishing with any towed gear with a codend mesh size of less than 32 mm or static nets less than 30 mm mesh size is prohibited in a defined area along the Danish North Sea coast “the sprat box” in the period from 1 July to 31 October. This prohibition was initially introduced in order to protect herring, which is caught as bycatch in the sprat fishery.

Considering that recent scientific data further confirms previous conclusions on bycatch of herring in the sprat fishery and that the suspension of the sprat box has no harmful impact on the ecosystem, including the herring stock, the Scheveningen Group requests that the sprat box provision is repealed from the technical measures set out in Regulation No 2019/1241.

Request to the STECF

STECF is requested to review and make any appropriate comments and recommendations on the proposed removal of the sprat box.

In particular, STECF is requested to confirm whether the proposed removal of the sprat box would not affect negatively the bycatch of herring in the sprat fishery and will not have harmful impacts both on the ecosystem and on the herring stock.

6.2. Assessment of the review and analysis of socio-economic data relating to the TAC of Pollack in 8abde

Background provided by the Commission

On 12 December 2023, the Council of Ministers for Fisheries reached a political agreement to set a provisional TAC for pollack in ICES divisions 8abde, at the level of 500 tonnes for the period from 1 January to 30 June 2024. This agreement was then part of the Atlantic fishing opportunities regulation for 2024 adopted by the Council on 10 January 2024. It was published in the Official Journal on 11 January 2024.

Recital 15 of the Atlantic fishing opportunities regulation for 2024 explains:

*"Article 5(3) of the Western Waters MAP provides for the management of mixed fisheries with regards to by-catch stocks taking into account the difficulty of fishing all stocks at MSY at the same time, especially in situations where that leads to a premature closure of the fishery. Mixed fisheries considerations in the Bay of Biscay published on 14 November 2023 indicates that, if horse mackerel is excluded, pollack (*Pollachius pollachius*) is the most limiting stock for demersal fisheries in the Bay of Biscay for three fishing segments out of 21. Given the socio-economic data submitted by one of the Member States concerned, suggesting that for pollack in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian waters (ICES subarea 8 and division 9a), mixed fishery considerations point to the difficulty of fishing all TACs fully, more time is needed in order to assess the socio-economic impact of the setting of fishing opportunities for pollack for fishers active in this mixed fishery (sole (*Solea solea*) and Norway lobster). For that reason, a provisional TAC for pollack in the Bay of Biscay (divisions 8abde) should be set for the first half of the year. On the basis of the ICES advice of 30 June 2023 regarding pollack in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian waters, and taking into account the seasonality of the fishery, the level of that provisional quota should be fixed at 500 tonnes from 1 January 2024 to 30 June 2024. Such a provisional TAC aims to ensure fishing activities can continue while the data is being assessed, until the Council sets a definitive Union TAC."*

In order to clarify the process following the setting of the provisional TAC, the Commission adopted the following **statement on pollack in the Bay of Biscay and in the Iberian waters**: *"Article 5(3) of the Western Waters multiannual plan provides for management of mixed fisheries with regards to by-catch stocks taking into account the difficulty of fishing all stocks at MSY at the same time, especially in situations where that leads to a premature closure of the fishery. Such difficulty should be demonstrated and supported by specific, reliable and verifiable socio-economic data. Where the difficulty to fish all stocks at MSY occurs, the Commission invites the Member States to submit socio-economic data from verifiable sources, in particular obtained through the EU Data Collection Framework. The Commission takes note of the submission made by France stating that the TAC set by the Council for the pollack stock in the Bays of Biscay and Iberian waters would result in the premature closure of mixed fisheries, leading to serious socio-economic consequences. If and when France submits specific, reliable and verifiable socio-economic data to substantiate the choke effect for their fleet segments in the Bay of Biscay, the Commission will assess and consider based on that assessment submitting a proposal for an in-year amendment for 2024 fishing opportunities, to adjust this TAC, as appropriate. The same approach would be considered by the Commission for Spain and Portugal should they provide specific, reliable and verifiable socio-economic data."*

On 19 January 2024, the report *ad-hoc* 2398 was delivered following the Commission's request to review and analyse the socio-economic data relating to

pollack in the Bay of Biscay. This report has been produced to inform the current request.

Request to the STECF

The STECF is requested to:

- 1) Review the findings and conclusions of the ad-hoc report 2398 of 19 January 2024 to inform policy.
- 2) Indicate what is the level of TAC needed to avoid that the pollack TAC in divisions 8abde would generate a 'choke effect' in the targeted fisheries of sole and Norway lobster for the last 6 months of 2024, taking into account the difficulty of fishing all stocks at MSY at the same time.

6.3. Assessment of A Joint Recommendation regarding fisheries management measures under article 11 and 18 of the CFP Regulation for protection of sandbanks at two Natura 2000 sites designated under the Habitats Directive

Background provided by the Commission

The Netherlands and Germany submitted a joint recommendation proposing conservation measures to manage fisheries in several areas of the Dutch and German parts of the Dogger Bank. The overall aim is to ensure the protection of sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time (habitat type H1110) in accordance with the Habitats Directive 92/43 EEC. The purpose of the fisheries management measures is to reduce the pressure on the benthic habitat from bottom contacting fishing gear and contribute to achieving conservation objectives in accordance with the Habitats Directive.

The German and Dutch management zones will be closed to the following mobile bottom contacting gear types: beam trawl (TBB), bottom otter board trawl (OTB, OTT, PTB, TBN, TBS, TB) and dredges (DRB, HMD). In addition, the German and Dutch management zones will also be closed to demersal seines: Danish anchor seine (SDN), Scottish seine (fly dragging) (SSC), Scottish pair seine (fly dragging) (SPR), Seine nets (not specified) (SX) and boat or vessel seine (SV).

Request to the STECF

STECF is requested to review and make any appropriate comments and recommendations following the reports from two dedicated ad-hoc contracts with relevant experts to support the evaluation of the joint recommendation.

STECF is requested to:

- 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;
- 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 conservation objectives of the sites; b) Assess to what extent the proposed measures are capable of preventing deterioration of habitat types, habitat of the species and significant disturbance of species protected in the site, as required by the Habitats Directive. If the assessment shows that the proposed measures are insufficient, identify any additional measures needed to: a) prevent deterioration of habitat types, habitat of the species and significant disturbance of species protected in the site; b) achieve conservation objectives of the sites;
- Comment on whether the proposed control, enforcement and compliance regime (comprising alert zones surrounding the management areas and monitoring of vessel position) are adequate and sufficient to ensure a proper enforcement of the measures proposed for the management zones;
- Comment on how the proposed conservation measures may affect fishing activity of the fleets that currently operate 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 and potential economic and ecological consequences.

6.4 Information on QualiTrain project developments on data quality tools

Background provided by the Commission

QualiTrain project (FRAMEWORK CONTRACT Med & BS – EASME/EMFF/2020/OP/021, Specific Contract No. 3) was launched in December 2022 to implement technical work on quality checks and data checking, as well as prepare, coordinate and organise technical trainings and information sessions on consolidated data quality R tools.

The project QualiTrain is structured in 6 tasks:

Task 0: Project management and coordination

Task 1: Finalisation and consolidation of data quality checks applied during EWG 22-03;

Task 2: Carrying out of data quality checks for the 78 remaining stocks of annex II (not checked by EWG 22-03);

Task 3: Proposal of additional stocks driving the fishery for each MS in the Med & BS and carrying out of data quality checks for these stocks;

Task 4: Organisation, preparation and carrying out of trainings for Med & BS national experts;

Task 5: Advise on the way forward, in terms of improving data coverage and quality in the Med & BS region.

In particular, Task 1 consolidated two R tools, namely RDBqc (working on commercial data, <https://github.com/COISPA/RDBqc>) and RoME (working on rough survey data in MEDITS format, <https://github.com/COISPA/RoME>), aimed at carrying out data quality checks on the following data call formats to store aggregated data:

MARE & BS: https://dcf.ec.europa.eu/data-calls/medbs_en

FDI: https://dcf.ec.europa.eu/data-calls/fdi_en

AER (only for cross-checks): https://dcf.ec.europa.eu/data-calls/aer_en

GFCM DCRF: <https://www.fao.org/gfcm/data/dcrf/en/>

Task 1 integrated in RDBqc and RoME the data quality functions developed in STREAM¹, RDBFIS [2] and MEDITS (Bertrand et al., 2022 and Spedicato et al., 2019) coordination group initiatives, extensively documenting the tools and provided worked examples in Vignette.

The two R tools were also integrated in the Regional Data Base for Mediterranean and Black Sea (RDBFIS²) in order to internally check the data before the submission to the end-users.

Finally, the two tools will be used to carry out the quality checks in the tasks 2 and 3 of QualiTrain project and will be used in the training organized in task 4 to disseminate the use of these tools among the experts, of the different MS, involved in the preparation of the data calls. A first online training took place with Med & BS national experts on 3-5 October 2023 and a second training will take place on 15-19 April 2024 in Bari, Italy (registrations open until 17th March 2024).

Request to the STECF

STECF is requested to take note of the Qualitrain project and the possible synergies of the Qualitrain outcomes to STECF work and to identify the relevant EWGs, linked to DG MARE data calls, the importance of limiting, to the extent possible, modifications to the current templates of the data calls listed above, as this would result in the need to modify not only the R packages using those formats but also to verify again the integration of the packages within the Regional Data Base for Mediterranean and Black Sea (RDBFIS). The Qualitrain coordinator (Isabella Bitetto)

¹ <https://datacollection.jrc.ec.europa.eu/mare-2016-22-strengthening-regional-cooperation>

² <https://medbsrdb.eu/>

is available to present the point in the relevant EWGs, should this be considered relevant.

STECF is requested to draw the attention of the relevant EWGs to the fact that, including new fields in the middle of the previous template columns and modifications of the names of the columns, unless necessary, will have a significant impact on the ongoing work of consolidating data quality checks in the Med & BS.

When a modification is considered necessary, we kindly ask to keep the Qualitrain coordinator (Isabella Bitetto, Bitetto@fondazionecoispa.org) and the RDBFIS coordinator (Stefanos Kavadas, stefanos@hcmr.gr) informed, in order to plan the package modifications accordingly.³

6.5. Evaluation of the West Mediterranean EU MAP in line with Art.17 (2) of Regulation EU 2019/1022

Background provided by the Commission

In line with Art 17 (2) of the the West Med MAP, by 17 July 2024 and every three years thereafter, the Commission shall report to the European Parliament and to the Council on the results and impact of the plan on the stocks concerned and, on the fisheries, exploiting those stocks, in particular as regards the achievement of the objectives set out in Article 3.

Request to the STECF

STECF is requested to review and make any appropriate comments and recommendations on the achievement of the objectives set out in Article 3 (1 and 2) of the West Med MAP since its adoption and up to the most recent year of implementation and scientific advice:

1. The plan shall be based on a fishing effort regime and shall aim to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the CFP listed in Article 2 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013, in particular by applying the precautionary approach to fisheries management, as well as to ensure that exploitation of living marine biological resources restores and maintains populations of harvested species above levels which can produce MSY.

³Bertrand, Jacques A., et al. "The general specifications of the MEDITS surveys." *Scientia marina* 66.S2 (2002): 9-17.

Spedicato, Maria Teresa, et al. "The MEDITS trawl survey specifications in an ecosystem approach to fishery management." *Sci. Mar* 83.S1 (2019): 9-20.

2. The plan shall contribute to the elimination of discards by avoiding and reducing, as far as possible, unwanted catches, and to the implementation of the landing obligation established in Article 15 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 for the species which are subject to minimum conservation reference sizes under Union law and to which this Regulation applies.

6.6. Evaluation of the ad-hoc contract for the exploration of methodological approaches for the estimation of Fmsy ranges under the West Mediterranean EU MAP (Regulation EU 2019/1022)

This is a placeholder, discussion on this ad-hoc contract have just started with STECF Secretariat and Bureau.

6.7. Review of the derogation for shore seines in certain territorial waters of France (PACA and Occitanie)

Background provided by the Commission

In accordance with Article 13(1) of Regulation (EC) No 1967/20065 (henceforth the Med Reg), the use of towed gears is prohibited within 3 nautical miles of the coast or within the 50 m isobath where that depth is reached at a shorter distance from the coast. At a request of a Member State, derogation from Article 13(1) may be granted, provided that the conditions set in Article 13(5) and (9) are fulfilled.

A general condition for all derogations is that the fishing activities concerned are regulated by a management plan in accordance with Article 19 of the Med Reg. According to paragraph 5 of Article 19, the measures to be included in the management plan shall be proportionate to the objectives, the targets and the expected time frame and shall consider:

- the conservation status of the stock or stocks;
- the biological characteristics of the stock or stocks;
- the characteristics of the fisheries in which the stocks are caught;
- the economic impact of the measures on the fisheries concerned.

Shore seine fishing is carried out from the shore in shallow depths and targets a variety of species (e.g. common Pandora, Mediterranean horse mackerel, European pilchard). This traditional fishery is in a phasing-out process, while 37 vessels were operating in 2014, there were only 17 in 2022. On 4 May 2022, France published a Ministerial Order reducing the maximum allowable effort from 1 386 to 638 days per year.

On 2 June 2014, the Commission adopted Implementing Regulation (EU) No 587/2014 (2) establishing for the first time a derogation from Article 13(1), first

subparagraph of Council Regulation (EC) No 1967/2006 as regards the minimum distance from coast and depth for shore seines fishing in certain territorial waters of France (Languedoc-Roussillon and Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur).

This derogation was extended several times, including recently with the adoption of Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/2362 which expires on 25 August 2024. French authorities have expressed their wish to renew the derogation after that deadline.

Request to the STECF

The STECF is requested to review the implementation report of the 'shore seines' fishery and the additional documents provided to support the French request to renew the derogation. The STECF is also requested to present its findings and make appropriate comments with respect to the conservation and management requirements/objectives stipulated by Council Regulation (EC) No 1967/2006 ("MedReg") and by the Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013.

More specifically, STECF is requested to advise and comment on whether the documents provided contain adequate and up-to date scientific and technical justifications ensuring that the conditions of the MedReg are still fulfilled, in particular that:

- There are particular geographical constraints, such as the limited size of the continental shelf along the entire coastline;
- The fishery has no significant impact on the marine environment;
- The fishery involves a limited number of vessels and does not contain any increase in the fishing effort with respect to what is already authorized by Member States;
- The fishery cannot be undertaken with another gear;
- The fishery is subject to a management plan and carry out a monitoring of catches as requested in Article 23;
- The vessels concerned have a track record of more than 5 years;
- The fishery does not interfere with the activities of vessels using gears other than trawls, seines or similar towed nets;
- The fishery is regulated in order to ensure that catches of species mentioned in Annex IX of Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 with the exception of mollusc bivalves, are minimal
- The fishery does not target cephalopods.
- The fisheries are highly selective and have a negligible effect on the marine environment; and
- The fisheries do not operate above seagrass beds of, in particular, *Posidonia oceanica* or other marine phanerogams

6.8. Management plan for mechanised dredges in Andalusia, Spain

Background provided by the Commission

Under Article 19 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1967/2006¹ (hereafter "MEDREG"), Member States are expected to adopt management plans for fisheries conducted by trawl nets, boats seines, shore seines, surrounding nets and dredges within their territorial waters.

In 2013, the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) introduced new elements for conservation such as the target of maximum sustainable yield (MSY) for all the stocks by 2020 at the latest, the landing obligation and the regionalisation approach.

In line with these two regulations, the plans shall be based on scientific, technical and economic advice, and shall contain conservation measures to restore and maintain fish stocks above levels capable of producing MSY. Where targets relating to the MSY (e.g. fishing mortality) cannot be determined, owing to insufficient data, the plans shall provide for measures based on the precautionary approach, ensuring at least a comparable degree of conservation of the relevant stocks.

The plans may contain specific conservation objectives and measures based on the ecosystem approach to achieve the objectives set. In particular, it may incorporate any measure included in the following list to limit fishing mortality and the environmental impact of fishing activities: limiting catches, fixing the number and type of fishing vessels authorized to fish, limiting fishing effort, adopting technical measures (structure of fishing gears, fishing practices, areas/period of fishing restriction, minimum size, reduction of impact of fishing activities on marine ecosystems and non-target species), establishing incentives to promote more selective fishing, conduct pilot projects on alternative types of fishing management techniques. The last management plan (MP) for mechanised dredges fishing off the Mediterranean coast of Andalusia was implemented in 2019 and was in force until 31 December 2023. STECF has previously reviewed earlier versions of the MP in 2010 (STECF PLEN 10-03), 2013 (STECF PLEN-13-03), 2017 (PLEN 17-01) and 2019 (STECF PLEN 19-03)

TOR 1. Assess whether the management plan contains 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 IX of Regulation (EU) No 2019/1241;
- 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, advice whether the proposal in terms of total annual catches would ensure a sustainable exploitation of the target stocks (i.e. *Donax trunculus*, *Callista chione*, *Acanthocardia tuberculata* and *Chamelea gallina*);
- Safeguards to ensure that quantifiable targets are met, as well as remedial actions, where needed, including situations where the poor 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 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.
- If deemed necessary, provide any recommendations and guidance on how to obtain improved scientific/technical supporting material for the 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.

6.9. CFP Monitoring – for early advice by 22 March

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.

6.10. Assessing results of ad hoc contracts on technical specifications of codends and devices to reduce wear and tear and selectivity devices

Background provided by the Commission:

Regulation (EU) 2019/1241, the “Technical Measures Regulation” (TMR) entered into force mid-2019 and introduced a new approach regarding the design of detailed regulations regarding the design and operation of some fishing gears. Rather than top-down detailed regulations, the TMR established the essential measures and allowed for the develop specific measures at regional level under the regionalisation process contained in Article 18 of the Common Fisheries Policy¹ (CFP Regulation) - joint recommendations feeding into delegated acts). In addition to regionalisation, the TMR empowers the Commission to establish certain technical details for the design and operation of fishing gears by way of implementing acts.

Some of the key design features of fishing gears that have a significant influence on selectivity include mesh size, twine thickness; the number of meshes around the cod-end circumference; the position and mesh size of square mesh and other escape panels and the attachment of certain devices to protect the gear from wear and tear.

Therefore, to maintain a minimum level of selectivity in demersal trawl fisheries these factors need to be regulated.

The two contracts commissioned will revise these elements for the Mediterranean and Black Sea and Atlantic perspective.

Request to the STECF:

STECF is requested to assess the results of the reports and made recommendations and comments on the findings.

In particular, STECF is requested to assess whether the specifications detailed in the ad hoc, stemming from previous regulations, are still relevant and should be regulated.

6.11. Assessing the results of the ad-hoc contract: study on two indicators used to assess the balance between fleet capacity and fishing opportunities in the Outermost Regions.

STECF is requested to review and make any appropriate comments and recommendations on the ad hoc contract’s report and its findings.

6.12. Assessing a request from Finland for a scientific fishery for Baltic salmon

Background provided by the Commission

Since 2022 ICES has provided a zero-catch advice for Baltic salmon in subdivisions 22-31. For 2022 and 2023 ICES however considered that under certain conditions some directed fisheries could continue in subdivisions 29 North to 31. For 2024 ICES advised that this consideration was maintained only for subdivision 31. Consequently, the Council prohibited for 2024 directed salmon fisheries in subdivisions 29 North and 30.

On 26 February 2024 Finland notified to DG MARE a project for a scientific fishery of salmon in subdivisions 29 North and 30 involving an undefined number of recreational fishers and all commercial fishers who in 2022 or 2023 reported a catch of at least 20 salmon (estimated by Finland to be about 45 fishers). Scientific fisheries by recreational fishermen are legally not possible under the applicable legislation. A possible scientific fishery involving commercial fishers must comply with the conditions set out in article 25 of the Technical Measures Regulation (EU) 2019/1241. When a project involves more than six vessels, the Commission must seek, if appropriate, the STECF's advice if the level of participation is justified on scientific grounds. As the Finnish project seems to involve all main salmon fishers and Finland expects to take up its entire salmon quota, it is appropriate to seek STECF's advice.

Request to the STECF

The STECF is requested to assess if the level of participation of commercial fishermen in the scientific project is justified on scientific grounds. If this was not the case, the STECF is requested to estimate, to the extent possible, what a justified level of participation would be.

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

7.1. Outcomes and considerations on the VMEs Scoping Meeting to discuss and analyse the availability of bio-economic models and of data for assessing the economic impact of VMEs in Member States

STECF is requested to discuss the outcomes and considerations on the VMEs scoping meeting held on 20 February (including in terms of MS contribution and models used).

STECF is requested to define the next steps and the timeline for these and make any appropriate comments and recommendations.

7.2. STECF reflections on the indicators (SHI, SAR, economic) used for the assessment of balance of the fleets in the outermost regions.

STECF plenary is requested to reflect upon input provided regarding alternative approaches applied to the current indicators, in the outermost regions.

7.3. Update on Guidelines for the data transmission monitoring tool and of the Work Plan and Annual Report templates

STECF is requested to:

- (1) Agree on improved data issues assessment cycle and the monitoring tool, proposed by the Commission (MARE and JRC), previously discussed in STECF 23-01.
- (2) Approve an update of the guidelines for the data transmission monitoring tool, previously approved by STECF 23-01.
- (3) Discuss and approve improvements to Work Plan and Annual Report guidelines and code list, in view of harmonising MS input for the DCF IT platform.

7.4. Preparation of EWG 24-02: Methodologies for Mediterranean stock assessments and the estimation of reference points

STECF is requested to discuss the draft TORs.

7.5. Preparation of EWG 24-05 on social data in fisheries

TORs published on the STECF website.

The EWG on social data will be, inter alia, analysing 10 additional National Fisheries Profiles (produced through ad hoc contracts). Along with the existing 3 profiles, DG MARE is planning on publishing these profiles on the JRC website in the course of 2024, as per the recommendation of the STECF in Report 23-17.

The STECF is requested to clarify what the process would be for STECF to endorse all of these National Fisheries Profiles (review requirement, etc) and consider having 2 rapporteurs for the July Plenary given the amount of work entailed.

7.6. Preparation of EWG 24-06 on Outermost Regions

7.6.1. The French Guiana waters

In the context of the annual Fishing opportunities regulation, the Commission authorises vessels from Venezuela, via a licensing system (45 licences), to fish for Red Snapper (*Lutjanus purpureus*) in the waters off the coast of French Guiana on a yearly basis. Since several years however, there is a recorded uncertainty regarding the management of the stock of red snapper targeted by Venezuelan vessels, that has been referenced in the 2021 STECF Plenary report⁴. The French authorities have commanded a new report by IFREMER scientific institute, which delivered results in 2023.

The STECF is requested to assess the conclusions of the IFREMER report and advise on measures to recover the red snapper stock in Guiana waters through the licensing system and via technical measures.

7.6.2. Guidelines for the assessment of balance in the outermost regions

STECF is requested to discuss the draft ToR for the Outermost regions as follows, “EWG is requested to provide views and concrete recommendations on the current suite of indicators (COM(2014) 545 final) applied for the assessment of balance of the fleets in the outermost regions”.

7.6.3. Recommendations ahead of update of the DCF workplans by Member States for the Outermost Regions

STECF is requested to discuss the draft TORs for the EWG.

⁴ Opinion “6.3 Guyana snapper”, Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) – 66 th Plenary Report (PLEN-21-01).