

STECF PLENARY MEETING 24-03
11 – 15 NOVEMBER 2024

Draft Terms of Reference

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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 24-11: Evaluation of Fisheries Dependent Information (FDI) for EU Fleets

DG MARE focal person: Martin Chemnitz Mortensen (MARE D3)

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.

STECF was provided with the draft report of the EWG, including [3 electronic annexes (Annex 3 – Exemptions coding tables, Annex 4 – Exemptions data extract and Annex 5 - Maps of effort and landings)].

5.2. EWG 24-12: Fishing effort regime for demersal fisheries in West Med

DG MARE focal person: Anne-Cecile Dragon, Chato Osio (MARE D1), Giacomo Petrucco (MARE A4)

Request to the STECF

STECF is requested to review the report of the STECF Expert Working Group meeting, evaluate the findings and make any appropriate comments and recommendations, especially in regard with the results of the ad-hoc contracts reviewed in STECF PLEN 24-02 (ToR 6.10) and STECF PLEN 24-03 (ToR xx) as well as in regard with the recently adopted EWG 24-10 on the stock assessments of demersal fisheries in the western Mediterranean Sea. STECF should ensure that the executive summary and overview tables also tailor an audience of policy makers.

Additional request

Background provided by the Commission

Background

Following the adoption of the West Mediterranean MAP, in 2019 STECF suggested that as a guide to progress towards FMSY in 2025 STECF would provide advice for F and catch based on a 6

year linear change in F from 2019 to 2025. The details of this approach are laid out in Section 4.4.1. Table 2.3 provides a summary by stock of progress to 2020, based on F2020 in the most recent assessment.

In EWG 21-11, STECF introduced the concept of F transition to enhance the monitoring of the progress towards the Fmsy or Fmsy proxy speed of achievement. Tables showing if the stock was ahead or behind transitions were thus incorporated in the advice. STECF concluded that the annual values of the advised catch based on FMSY Transition 2022 and the status of F in 2020 relative to the FMSY Transition 2020 provided important information for the follow up of the objectives of Multi-Annual Plans.

With the development of a STECF methodology for the estimation of Biomass reference points in EWG 22-03, Blim and Bpa became available for a number of stocks with analytical assessments. Subsequently EWG 22-09 started applying an F reduced for the stocks below Bpa and STECF wrote:

Of the 8 stocks estimated as below Bpa, STECF observes that in 2021, five are forecasted to be below Bpa at the start of 2023 and the catches for these stocks are therefore recommended to be reduced below catch at FMSY in order to increase the likelihood of biomass being above Bpa in the short term. The values in Table 2 include these reductions (Reduced F). STECF notes that all the assessments are based on short data series and some degree of uncertainty remains. However, STECF considers overall that the values presented in Table 2 provide robust guidance on the magnitude of changes in F and catches required to reach FMSY by 2023 and those provided in Table 3 provide guidance for a linear transition to reach FMSY in 2025.

F reduced B<Bpa is based on ICES advice rule when SSB in TAC year is less than Bpa, and has never been tested in Mediterranean fisheries effort regimes:

$$F_{\text{reduced}} = F_{\text{MSY}} \times \text{SSB}_y / B_{\text{pa}}$$

and it had the overall aim of showing how to reach Fmsy earlier than 2025.

This approach has endured in 2023 as well as in 2024 and for the stocks below Bpa it has been the basis for the STECF catch and F advice (FMSY Reduce B<Bpa is based on ICES advice rule when B in TAC year is less than Bpa) in the stock assessment EWGs (23-09) and it was listed an option in EWG 24-10. While the Fmsy reduced provides indications on how to reach Fmsy and Bpa faster via F and catch reductions for a given stock, the West Mediterranean EU MAP does not operate on catch limits/TACs (with the exception of ARS and ARA) but on a fishing effort regime for the trawl fleets operating in a mixed fisheries context.

With the Fmsy objectives becoming legally binding in 2025, the newly defined Fmsy ranges and the safeguard measures from Art 6 of the MAP, the implementation of the MAP has entered into the long term phase. In this context, EWG 24-12 was requested to build management scenarios that would provide advice to reach Fmsy while accounting for safeguard measures and the EWG was requested to test as targets both the Fmsy and F reduced in line with the ICES/EWG 22-09 methodology outlined above.

In this exercise it became apparent that to build F reduced scenarios with the 4 models (IAM, ISISFIH, SMART, BEMTOOL), modelers had to update the value of F reduced for each year of the projection to account for the SSB variations in relation to Bpa, as this is in practice an harvest control rule instead of an F target. Overall, it is not clear how appropriate it is to use the ICES F reduced HCR in the context of the West Mediterranean MAP.

TOR 1

STECF PLEN is requested to assess if the methodology and HCR for deriving F reduced for the most vulnerable stock, as an alternative F target in the simulations for the West Med MAP effort regime, has been formally simulation tested for the EU West Med MAP effort regime regulating the mixed demersal fishery. STECF is requested to assess if the available information is sufficient to evaluate the performance of this HCR in terms of risk to the stock, stability of the fishery, probability of fisheries closure and economic performance to compare trade-offs in probabilistic terms.

In addition STECF should:

- Evaluate if the current F reduced HCR could be modulated in a different way (e.g. non linear) to account for the different nature of the management via effort to ensure a more progressive increase of SSB to reach Bpa, and what would be trade-off in terms of risks of fisheries closure, biological risk as well as socio-economic terms;
- Evaluate if the F reduced HCR can generally lead to a high probability of fishery closure and to underfishing of the other stocks in the fishery; Evaluate if in the current context of the four models (IAM, ISIS-FISH, SMART, BEMTOOL), the trade-off between effort levels, risk of fisheries closure and stability of the fishery can be properly assessed.

5.3. EWG 24-13: Balance/Capacity

DG MARE focal person: Antonios STAMOULIS (MARE D3)

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.

5.4. EWG 24-14: Economic Report on the EU aquaculture

DG MARE focal person: Giacomo PETRUCCO (MARE A4)

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.

5.5. EWG 24-15: Evaluation of Work Plans for data collection and data transmission issues

DG MARE focal person: Monika Sterczewska, Melissa DUFLOT (MARE C3)

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. The following topics are particularly pertinent for DG MARE:

- 1) MS follow-up in new work plans on RCG recommendations, previous STECF evaluations (WP, AR, DT)
- 2) Evolution of MS work plans compared to 2022-2024, also including policy development (e.g. Marine Action Plan) and integration of previous pilot studies, if not done until 2024.
- 3) Integration of regional WP into national WP: observed progress towards more coordinated data collection to satisfy end-user needs, recommendations for improvement

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

6.1. Assessment of the situation relating to the TACs of pollack in ICES divisions 8abde, 8c and 9-10

DG MARE focal person : Caroline Alibert-Deprez, Christoph Priebe (MARE C1)

Possible STECF rapporteur: tbd

Background provided by the Commission

Further to STECF assessments of the review and analysis of socio-economic data relating to the TACs of pollack in ICES divisions 8abde (STECF PLEN 24-01), 8c and 9-10 (STECF PLEN 24-02), there was evidence for potential “choke” phenomenon triggered by reduced pollack TACs, set in line with ICES advice.

Taking into account Article 5(3) of the Western Waters MAP, the Council of Ministers decided to set the TACs at the levels of 959 tonnes, 108 tonnes and 132 tonnes respectively. In addition to this decrease by -35% compared to 2023 levels, the Council adopted additional conservation measures to rebuild the stock’s biomass, namely i) the increase of the minimum size (from 30 to 42 cm), ii) the limitation of recreational fisheries (catch and release Jan-April, 1 fish/day) and iii) the prohibition of directed fishing on the stock.

Request to the STECF

Considering that the ICES advice has been provided for 2 years, 2024 and 2025, the STECF is requested to assess whether the situation for the 3 TACs of pollack in 2025 will differ from the situation in 2024.

In this context, the STECF is asked to assess the flexibilities offered by swaps, inter-annual flexibilities, and inter-area flexibilities.

6.2. Recommendations of the Regional Coordination Groups

DG MARE focal person: Kostopoulou Venetia, Leonie O’Dowd, Monika Sterczewska (MARE C3)

Background provided by the Commission

The Liaison meeting took place online on 24 and 25 of September 2024. Recommendations of the Regional Coordination Groups were put forward.

Request to the STECF

STECF is requested to analyse the recommendations of the RCGs in the light of their possible impact on the scientific advice process (stock assessment, annual economic report, management measures assessment) and to inform the Commission on the possible effect of the recommendations on the data coverage, quality and availability.

6.3. Joint recommendation on fisheries conservation measures in the marine protected area Havet king Ven in the Baltic Sea (Article 11 CFP)

DG MARE focal person: Maria AIRA MARTIN (MARE C1)

Background provided by the Commission

On 9 September 2024, the Baltic Sea Member States (with Sweden as initiating Member States) submitted to the Commission a joint recommendation on conservation measures for the Natura 2000 site Havet king Ven. According to the joint recommendation, the main purpose is to minimize the risk for bycatch of the Belt Sea harbour porpoise. The recommended fisheries conservation measures consist in a prohibition for fishing with all types of static nets without the simultaneous use of active acoustic deterrent devices with the aim of reducing the risk of by-catch of the Belt Sea harbour porpoise.

Request to the STECF

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) 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.

Comment on whether the proposed control measures are adequate in relation to the proposed the management measures.

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.

6.4. Joint recommendation on fisheries conservation measures for the protection of reef structures in five Danish Natura 2000 Areas in the North Sea and Skagerrak (Article 11 CFP)

DG MARE focal person: Maria AIRA MARTIN (MARE C1)

Background provided by the Commission

On 17 July 2024, the North Sea Member States (with Denmark as initiating Member States) submitted to the Commission a joint recommendation on conservation measures for four Natura 2000 sites located in the Danish EEZ: Thyborøn Stenvolde (EU site code: DK00VA348), Jyske Rev, Lillefiskerbanke (EU site code: DK00VA257), Store Rev (EU site code: DK00VA258), Gule Rev (EU site code: DK00VA259; and for one Natura 2000 sites located in the Danish part of the Skagerrak (between the baseline and 12 nm): Lønstrup Rødgrund (EU site code: DK00VA301). The measures entail a prohibition to fish with mobile bottom contacting gears. The management measures are supported by specific control measures.

Request to the STECF

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) 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.

Comment on whether the proposed control measures are adequate in relation to the proposed the management measures.

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.

6.5. West Med MAP: Analyses of the ad-hoc contracts France & Spain

DG MARE focal person: Anne-Cecile Dragon, Chato Osio (MARE D1), Giacomo Petrucco (MARE A4)

Background provided by the Commission:

Background documents are published on: <https://stecf.ec.europa.eu/meetings-calendar/past-meetings>

Request to the STECF

The STECF is requested to evaluate the results of the ad-hoc contract for EMU 1 - France and EMU 1 - Spain. The STECF should use the same basis as discussions as done for ToR 6.10 during STECF PLEN 24-02. TORs for this ad hoc contract:

TOR 1: Provide an overview on the implementation of the crisis mechanism in the respective Member State. This should include the legal framework.

TOR 2: Develop and populate a database with the available data on paid subsidies in the MS regarding the fleet segments used in the bio-economic models of the West Med Map evaluations (economic fleet segments, specific fleet segments in Italy).

TOR 3: Provide an overview on the measures of temporal and permanent cessations in the MS. This should include an overview on payments already issued and planned funding in the future.

TOR 4: Analyse AER data regarding operational subsidies for the time period 2012-2022 in France, Italy and Spain. This information should reveal how the last years may have been different from the years before the COVID-19 crisis. This provided data overview should be specified by countries and fleet segments.

Finally, STECF is requested to compile the information from the ad-hoc contracts conducted on Italian data (contract xxx), French data (contract xxx) and Spanish data (contract xxx) in order to complete the outputs from STECF EWG 24-12 report.

6.6. Evaluation of updated JR and MP for transparent goby in Gulf of Manfredonia

DG MARE focal person: Chato Osio (MARE D1)

Request to the STECF

Following the conclusions of STECF PLEN 24-02, Italy was notified the main technical comments from STECF and requested to update the JR and MP. Italy agreed to do so and provided the additional information. The revised documents were transmitted on xx/xx/2024 to the Commission.

Request to the STECF

STECF is requested to revise the updated MP and JR on the basis of TOR 6.5 from PLEN 24-02, to address specifically the outstanding points and revise its conclusions on the possibility of granting the requested derogations.

6.7. Evaluation of Italy's national management plans in line with MedReg and the CFP

DG MARE focal person: Chato Osio (MARE D1)

Background

Under Article 19 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1967/2006 (hereafter referred to as "MEDREG"¹), 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 (CFP²) 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

¹ Council Regulation (EC) No 1967/2006 of 21 December 2006 concerning management measures for the sustainable exploitation of fishery resources in the Mediterranean Sea, amending Regulation (EEC) No 2847/93 and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1626/94. [OJ L 409, 30.12.2006, p. 11–85.](#)

² Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1954/2003 and (EC) No 1224/2009 and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 2371/2002 and (EC) No 639/2004 and Council Decision 2004/585/EC. [OJ L 354, 28.12.2013, p. 22–61.](#)

maintain fish stocks above levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield or MSY. Where targets relating to the MSY (e.g. fishing mortality at MSY) 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 shall also contain specific conservation measures based on the ecosystem approach to achieve the objectives set. In particular, they 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 fisheries, conduct pilot projects on alternative types of fishing management techniques, etc.

In 2011, Italy submitted consolidated management plans for demersal fisheries to the European Commission (EC). In January 2018, Italy submitted new management plan which should were examined by the STECF PLEN 2018-01. The 6 new plans cover the following areas: GSA 9, 10, 11, 16, 17-18 and 19. The plans were prolonged until 2023 and further extended by an additional year in 2024. With the plans expiring on 31st December 2024, Italy needs to adopt new plans following the STECF evaluation. New demersal plans should account and work in synergy with the EU obligations stemming from the EU West Mediterranean MAP and the GFCM obligations stemming from the adopted MAPs for the Adriatic ³and Strait of Sicily.

Request to the STECF

- 1) To assess and advice whether the management plans for marine commercial fishing in the territorial waters of the Republic of Italy contains adequate elements in terms of:

The description of the fisheries

³ https://gfcml.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/CoC/EWiQ72wF6gpPrZ5_qnQcz0Bi8N2mTN6LhdX9QlbyGN9YA
https://gfcml.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/CoC/Ef_elH5PcHNKh6ao1n3jyYMBjJzqEkjs7TYfN04eciaF3A
<https://gfcml.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/CoC/EYf2ib7DWNRDv41S-efTTJsBp3q13F2489qoif3dZxx1mw>
<https://gfcml.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/CoC/EbY3psmy13ZMhPiBoK2wNpQB0I7pqAHCjfKQ8OB2z5isGA>
https://gfcml.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/CoC/EaYYi8NoI8tlpVWUUGQ3KwUBgGj6lwJTs2mXedd4cSC_FA

- Recent and historical data on catches (landings and discards) of the species concerned, fishing effort and abundance indices such as catch-per-unit-effort (or CPUE).
- 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.
- Information on economic indicators, including the profitability of the fisheries.

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 and aligned to the relevant West Med MAP or GFCM MAPs .
- Measures proportionate to the objectives, the targets and the expected time frame.
- 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 aligned to the relevant West Med MAP or GFCM MAPs.
- 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.

Other aspects

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

6.8. Follow-up of the STECF EWG 24-10

DG MARE focal person: Anne-Cecile Dragon, Chato Osio (MARE D1)

Background provided by the Commission:

STECF EWG 24-10 was requested to evaluate the stocks status for up to 20 commercial stocks managed under the EU West Mediterranean MAP. In this context the EWG raised comments on the possibility of updating certain benchmarks.

Request to the STECF

Considering the discussion and the request from the EWG for an update in Hake benchmarks, STECF is requested to:

- assess if there is new scientific evidence that would require a departure from the current agreed stock boundaries for EMU 1 and EMU 2⁴.
- Identify the main data issues to be resolved
- Identify possible alternative stocks assessment models that could suit these stocks and the data features.

Considering possible improvements in the data, provide guidance on trade-off between possible alternative stocks assessment models, like inter alia SPICT⁵ or other statistical catch at age models, that could suit these stocks and the data features.

6.9 Evaluation of the ad-hoc contract on the FishGenome Roadmap for and the potential use genomic data to supplement stock assessment

DG Mare focal person: KOSTOPOULOU Venetia, O'DOWD Leonie, DUFLOT Melissa (MARE C3)

Background provided by the Commission

The Tender contract "FishGenome: Improving cost-efficiency of fisheries research surveys and fish stocks assessments using next-generation genetic sequencing methods" aimed to investigate whether next-generation DNA sequencing methods can:

- 2) Reduce the need for conventional trawl-based fishing surveys for demersal or benthic fish stocks in EU waters;
- 2) Support faster and cheaper fish stock's assessments and biodiversity analyses of marine species assemblages.

FishGenome assessed the suitability of the genomic data to provide key parameters for fisheries stock assessment such as:

- o Stock absolute abundance and survival from Close Kin Mark Recapture (CKMR) data,
- o Age from epigenetic DNA methylation (DNAm) data,
- o Biomass (relative abundance) from environmental DNA (eDNA) data,
- o Stock structure, connectivity and sexing from restriction site Associated DNA Sequencing (RAD-Seq) data.

⁴ consider inter alia the results of MEDUNITS project

https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/document/download/3b394b0e-a126-4e57-b062-b43fa30562eb_en?filename=StudyAdvancingFisheries-HZ0122151ENN.en_.pdf

⁵ State of fisheries in Catalonia 2023, Part 2: Stock assessment (ICATMAR, 24-06) – icatmar

Accordingly, FishGenome performed six reviews on these genomic tools which were used as the foundation to design Pilot studies to test these tools in a relevant context. Following the reviews and the pilot studies, a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis was performed and resulted in a proposed timeline for the short, medium- and long-term application of these genomic methods, presented in the FishGenome Roadmap. The roadmap identifies the implementation needs, actions and objectives, appropriate strategic pillars (genomic techniques, survey and logistics, scientific advice and stock assessment, financial and economic aspects, governance and other policies), time frame and potential outcomes.

This roadmap provides key information on whether and how genomics could become part of the methodological tools applied to samples from regular research surveys, describing the potential steps, the pathway and the timeline for a progressive implementation of the genomic methods in stock assessment.

Background documents including the FishGenome report and the roadmap were shared with STECF after the STECF PLEN 23-02 and after the STECF PLEN 23-03.

The outputs and final report of the FishGenome project are published on: [Improving the cost-efficiency of fisheries research surveys and fish stocks assessment using next-generation genetic sequencing methods \(europa.eu\)](#)

Request to the STECF

During the STECF PLEN 23-02, DG MARE presented the FishGenome project results and introduced the roadmap to the STECF committee. During the STECF PLEN 23-03, DG MARE initiated a discussion on the FishGenome roadmap, presenting those aspects of the roadmap of relevance to STECF, and where the consortium considered STECF to play a role. Drafting ToR for FishGenome follow up was highlighted as one of the next steps. This ToR was presented during the STECF PLEN 24-03, during which the launch of an ad-hoc contract was agreed on. In this contract, the experts were requested to: (1) extract the relevant points from the roadmap that directly refer to, or are related to STECF; (2) propose possible ways to follow-up on these actions described in the FishGenome Roadmap and the role that STECF could play in this process, (3) for those actions that cannot be followed up by STECF presently, explain the reasons why and/or propose a tentative timeline for future action and /or an alternative appropriate (4) argue on the benefits and challenges of using genomic data (similar to those used in FishGenome) for stock assessment, based on their experience.

Therefore, STECF is requested to evaluate and discuss the outputs of the STECF experts ad-hoc contract on FishGenome Roadmap and make any appropriate comments and recommendations.

6.10 Assessment of joint recommendation contacting a request for de minimis exemption for lemon sole

DG Mare focal person: Thomas BREGEON (MARE C5)

Background provided by the Commission

Following the TAC alignment for lemon sole in December 2023, the Commission services suggested that the North Western Waters and the Scheveningen Regional Groups would act promptly to compile a joint recommendation seeking a de minimis exemption for lemon sole. In response to this suggestion, the Regional Groups submitted a joint recommendation to the Commission, which the STECF evaluated in STECF 24-04.

Based on the subsequent report from the STECF 24-04 it was requested to provide more and better data in support of this JR. This, combined with the reactions from MS to the STECF report drove to the adoption by the North Western Waters and the Scheveningen Regional Groups of a new JR submitted to the Commission on 25 October. This renewed Joint Recommendation requests a de minimis exemption for catches of lemon sole by vessels using beam trawls (TBB) of mesh sizes equal to and above 80 mm equipped with the Flemish panel in Union waters of ICES subareas 4 and 7d, on the basis of avoiding disproportionate costs due to the handling of unwanted catches, considering the challenges the fishing sector will face due to the TAC alignment. The request is for a quantity of lemon sole which shall not exceed 5% of the total annual catches of that species in this fishery.

It was calculated in the JR that the increase in mesh size has profound negative economic implications for sole. For the Belgian beam trawlers, an economic loss of 640 773 Euro in sole in 7d is calculated if nets of 90mm are used instead of 80mm. For the ICES area 4 there would be a loss of 341 000 Euro in sole if nets of 90mm were used. An 8% and 12% loss in yield respectively.

Taking account of the cost in sorting the lemon sole, no possibility for more selectivity and the low discard percentage, the regional groups request that the joint recommendation for exemptions to the 2024-2027 landing requirement can be expanded to include a de minimis exemption for lemon sole for beam trawlers (TBB) using mesh equal to or above 80 mm and equipped with the Flemish panel in ICES areas 4 and 7d.

Request

To satisfy the request from the STECF and to ensure a swift process, the launch of an ad-hoc contract was agreed on. In this contract, the expert was requested to (1) collate and finalise a draft review, based on the joint recommendation for lemon sole, STECF 19-01 and the EWG 24-04 (including the use of FDI data to quality control the total tonnage values outlined in the Joint Recommendation), of the supporting (catch data) documentation for **de minimis exemption** on the basis of avoiding

disproportionate costs of handling unwanted catches, and (2) in the event of the data provided being insufficient for a comprehensive assessment, provide suggestions in the draft conclusions on how the assessment could be enhanced.

STECF is requested to evaluate the results of the ad-hoc contract and review the joint recommendation underpinning the de minimis exemption for lemon sole, and make any appropriate comments and recommendations.

6.11. Assessment of Joint Recommendations on directed fisheries for squid

DG Mare focal person: Thomas BREGEON (MARE C5)

Background provided by the Commission

At STECF PLEN 24-02 the Scheveningen Group and the North Western Waters Member States Regional Group proposed to increase the minimum mesh size applicable to vessels engaged in directed fishing for squids. Following this plenary, STECF evaluated that in principle increasing mesh size is one way to improve selectivity of the fisheries. However, STECF was not able to assess the potential effects of the proposed increase in mesh size as no supporting information was provided to STECF.

Following this, the NWW submitted a revised JR on 29 October 2024, which proposes increasing the current mesh size of towed gear in directed fishing for squid (at least 40 mm in the whole area) to at least 80 mm for bottom trawls and seines in ICES divisions 7a-e, 7g-h and 7k, while keeping the baseline mesh size of at least 40 mm for towed gear in ICES subareas 5 and 6, for pelagic otter trawl within the 12 nautical miles zone in ICES division 7e, and for bottom trawls and seines in ICES division 7j. It will do so by amending Part B ("Mesh sizes") of Annex VI ("North Western Waters") of the Technical Measures Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 that establishes a framework for technical measures for the conservation of fisheries resources and the protection of marine ecosystems.

This revised JR includes more scientific analysis from France, the Netherlands and Ireland on catch data, ICES areas and gear use of their respective fleet. Considering that the improvement in selectivity is fairly intuitive, the High-level group does not submit any additional scientific studies or data related to this joint recommendation.

Request for the STECF

The STECF is requested to review and evaluate this revised Joint Recommendation submitted by the North Western Waters Member States Regional Group following the conclusions of STECF PLEN 24-02, and make any appropriate comments and recommendations to the proposed measures.

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

7.1 Preparation of EWG on VMEs

DG Mare focal person: Caroline Alibert-Deprez

Background provided by the Commission

In the context of the review of the established list of areas where VMEs are known to occur or are likely to occur (1) building on the opinion of the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee on Fisheries in 2023 (2), the European Commission has requested the STECF to carry out a refined analysis of the socio-economic impacts of the VMEs closures according to scenarios presented in the ICES advices (3), namely to analyse and compare the current closures (2021 advice) and the closures under Scenarios C and D (2024 advice⁴). This exercise has been launched early 2024 with the creation of an STECF Expert Working Group (EWG 24-09) and a scoping meeting on 20 February 2024 with Member States and Advisory Council. It is expected to include a literature review, an analysis based on the DISPLACE model and to collect feedbacks from the Advisory Councils in October 2024. The Expert Working Group will be meeting on 17-21 February 2025, preparing for the expected conclusion of this work at the STECF Plenary of March 2025.

Request

In view of the EWG, a preliminary report on the state of play and future advancement prospects of the process is requested, taking stock of the first deliveries such as the literature review and the first discussions held with the Advisory Councils in the month of October.

If possible, the response could outline some preliminary findings from the DISPLACE model projections.

7.2 Assessment of changes in types of and topics for requests to STECF

DG Mare focal person: Agnieszka Sadowska (MARE C3)

Background provided by the Commission

The mandate of the current STECF has started on 1st July 2022 and runs until the first Plenary of 2025, with a view to be renewed as of the 2025 July Plenary. Compared to previous periods, the current STECF has been consulted during the current mandate on more sustainability related requests from the COM. Other topics that depart from the “classical” fisheries related requests, such as fleet management or elements of CFP evaluation, have also gained in frequency.

Request

Against this background, the STECF is asked to outline the main challenges which have been encountered during the current mandate with respect to the expertise necessary to address the ensemble of requests and consultations that have been received. STECF should assess how the existing distribution of fields of expertise in the committee relate to the distribution of the types of/topics for requests that were received. It should also be evaluated, in a longer-term historic perspective, what type of work and topics have become more or less prevalent during the last couple of mandates of STECF and, related to this, what scientific expertise has been in more or less demand.