

Aquaculture Advisory Council

Executive Committee meeting

Brussels, 06th February (09:00-13:00)
Copa-Cogeca – Rue de Treves, 61

Minutes

Attendants: **Javier Ojeda** (Chair), **Marc-Philip Buckhout** (Vice-Chair), **Paul Denekamp** (Stichting Vissenbescherming), **Bruno Guillaumie** (EMPA), **Luisa Alvarez** (FEDEPESCA), **Ole Christensen** (FEFAC), **Douglas Waley** (Eurogroup for Animals), **Angeles Longa** (Consello Regulador do Mexillon de Galicia), **Pier Antonio Salvador** (COPA), **Bernhard Feneis** (Cogeca), **Erik Bjorn Olsen** (Danish Society for a living sea), **Anne-Laure Prego-Cauchet** (CNC), **Giuseppe Prioli** (AMA), **Phil Brooke** (CIWF), **Ioannis Pelekanakis** (Federation of Greek Maricultures), **Kathryn Stack** (FEAP), **Marco Gilmozzi** (FEAP), **Pedro Reis Santos** (MAC), **Cécile Fouquet** (AAC Secretariat), **Charlotte Musquar** (AAC Secretariat), **Pascale Colson** (DG MARE), **Dominique Leveil** (DG MARE), **Julia Rubeck** (DG MARE), **Ewan Geffroy** (DG MARE trainee)

Abbreviations: **FG** (Focus Group), **WG** (Working Groups), **MS** (Member States), **WP** (Work Programme)

Agenda

1. Welcome words by the Chair

The Chair affirms that he strives to make sure he acts in an impartial way, as established in the statutes of the AAC. However, **the Chair** considers that at the same time he must also be fair, flexible and independent. Creating a friendly working environment can help to have an effective AAC and rich and enjoyable debates in which all members will feel comfortable.

Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius had been invited by the Chair to participate in yesterday's General Assembly meeting but was not able to join due to the short notice. He will, however, try to join the AAC for the General Assembly in September. **The Chair** acknowledges that he did not pass the invitation letter to the Commissioner through the ExCom for revision to be effective because of the short time available. Most ExCom members agreed with the way the invitation letter had been handled but some considered it unfortunate. **The Chair** said that he understands that his actions might not always please everybody but that he had strictly followed the Statutes of the AAC. He recalled that article 8.4 of the Statutes clearly state that the Chair may freely invite people whose presence is deemed beneficial as an observer for ExCom and General Assembly meetings. The Chair considers that having Commissioner Sinkevicius in the opening of the meeting would be beneficial for the AAC. Furthermore, **the Chair** expressed that he had received a rather

aggressive email from AAC member Birdlife Europe (all ExCom members were in copy) because of this invitation letter matter the he considers unfair and requests AAC members to measure their words in their communications. Nevertheless, hereinafter he will consult the ExCom next time he plans to send relevant letters signing as Chair.

The Chair mentions that he has been asked by **the Secretariat** to sign a thank you letter for Italy regarding money that was received by the AAC. He requests the ExCom members' approval to sign the letter. There is a general opinion that letters that this one should not require any permission by the ExCom. **The Chair** mentions that this was an example of why some flexibility is needed.

Birdlife, not present in the meeting, had announced their intention of leaving the AAC but **the Chair** hopes that they will reconsider their decision.

The Vice-Chair (Marc-Philip Buckhout) confirmed that **Birdlife** had indeed left the AAC and that an official paper should follow shortly.

2. Adoption of the agenda and approval of the last ExCom minutes (October 30th 2019)

A point on the taking of photographs during AAC meetings was added under the "AOB" item on the agenda.

The agenda is adopted with this change.

The minutes are adopted with no changes.

3. Membership: Update on Brexit and UK members statute by the secretariat

The secretariat explains that there is no problem in 2020 for the UK members and their membership fees, as the exit will only happen by the end of 2020. All the rules remain the same until the end of the year.

ACs' secretariats share information on common matters such as this one. **DG MARE** has already communicated to the LDAC and the MAC that for the AC members that are international organisations, they should not reapply as an AC member if they move their seat from the UK. They must only communicate this change to the secretariat, who should seek confirmation of backing from the new Member State. CIWF, for instance, has its head office in the UK. They won't need to reapply as AAC members but they will need to ask their new country - the Netherlands- to formalise their authorisation to be an AAC member.

Also, we now have a clearer idea of the UK members' status as observers in the future as DG MARE has answered a NWWAC question on this. The **AAC members** feel that it would be unfair to reimburse non-members in the future, even if they are from the UK.

It seems that although reimbursing active observers is possible (the delegated regulation says so), the decision is up to each AC, depending on its interests.

However, **the secretariats** still have a series of questions pending regarding the members who will have to leave: our fiscal year ends in November, so that would mean that we'd have to give back their fee.

For **the Chair**, as several of our members are based in the UK, the AAC has to strike the right balance between observers and members who pay a fee. We will need to make decisions regarding the reimbursement conditions.

Pier Antonio Salvador (COPA) suggested that observers cover their own expenses. **The Vice-Chair Marc-Philip Buckhout and Luisa Alvarez (Fedepesca)** agreed.

The Chair agreed that this made sense for regular observers but that we should however consider reimbursing more exceptional guests and proposed that the ExCom reflects about it in the next months.

4. Renewal of the secretariat services and periodic evaluation of the AAC

Process and information by the secretariat

-Renewal of the Secretariat

The Chair wanted to highlight the main benefit of having an external secretariat: impartiality. He also wished for **the European Commission** to take note of this perspective. **Pascale Colson (DG MARE)** agreed that having an external and independent secretariat is indeed a good solution.

The three-year contract with AliénorEU concerning the provision of secretariat services ends in October 2020. The AAC will have to advertise its renewal and choose the most appropriate applicant.

A first questionnaire sent to the AAC members will allow the members to evaluate the quality of the secretariat.

The Vice-Chair Marc-Philip Buckhout suggested the creation of a FG to follow up this process.

A focus group was created, with **Marc-Philip Buckhout** and **Bruno Guillaumie** as members.

Bruno Guillaumie (EMPA) wanted to emphasise the importance of foreseeing sufficient time as this process requires a strict methodology. He also approved of the externalisation of the secretariat and suggested the constitution of a written calendar with the steps to follow. He also suggested **the Treasurer Addy Risseuw** to be added to the FG.

-Periodic evaluation of the AAC

The Chair informs members that two questionnaire proposals have been

created: one that will be sent once a year and another one after each meeting.

Regarding the questionnaire for the periodic evaluation of the AAC, **Bruno Guillaumie (EMPA)** suggested that two points are added: evaluation of the invited representants of the European Commission (are they attending? Are they relevant?) and the speed of the drafting as well as the availability in several languages of the meetings minutes. He also suggested that a specific tool should be developed to ensure the respect of the GDPR. The person managing the data should not be the same one that analyses it.

Angeles Longa (Consello Regulador do Mexillon de Galicia) suggested that we remove the question about the quality of the recommendations as this should be reviewed during the drafting of the recommendation.

Giuseppe Prioli (AMA) and **Bernhard Feneis (Cogeca)** both pointed out that it was difficult to share the recommendations within the Member States if they were not translated. It was also suggested to translate the minutes of the meetings. **The Chair** understood the problem, but also recalled that this was a question of budget. However, the Chair mentions that translations should be decided depending of the matter and the MS in which they may be of interest. There will be a meeting with the European Commission in the spring concerning the functioning of the ACs where we could get more information on our options. **He will however include this question in the next discussion about the budget.**

Pascale Colson (DG MARE) thought both questionnaires were interesting and could be used as a best practice example at the next inter-ACs meeting.

5. Recently approved recommendations

- Second recommendation on the EU strategic guidelines

The Chair informed the members of the ExCom that the WGs members have already decided to start working on the third recommendation.

He added that, in general, even though the recommendations produced by the AAC were of high-quality content, they should be more of them, recommending them to be shorter and with a clearer message.

Bruno Guillaumie (EMPA) reported the request of WG2 to meet with DG ENVI in order to present the Recommendation on the Specific Protection of Shellfish Water Quality and be able to come back to the June meeting with a political answer. **The request is approved by the ExCom.**

Julia Rubeck (DG MARE) informed the members that the answer from the European Commission will be coming soon, the process being lengthy due to calendar constraints.

- Recommendation on the Revision of The Fisheries Control System

Bruno Guillaumie (EMPA) requested a meeting with the Rapporteur (Clara Aguilera (Spain - S&D)) to discuss the points that were put forward by the AAC in its recommendation about aquaculture vessels and recreational shellfishing. **It was agreed by the ExCom that the secretariat would organize a meeting with MEP Aguilera and Bruno Guillaumie (WG2 Rapporteur) and the WG Chairs.**

The secretariat was also request to inform the members about the calendar for the foreseen discussions and adoption of the control regulation.

6. Ongoing work of the AAC

- Preparation of the next European Maritime Day workshop

The Secretariat announced to the members that the workshop proposal for the EMD had not been selected by DG MARE.

Bruno Guillaumie (EMPA) suggested that the workshop initially planned for the European Maritime Day in Cork could instead take place in the National Shellfish Marine Cultures Exhibition in Vannes (France) on September 23-24, 2020. **He will investigate this possibility, including in terms of cost for the AAC.**

- WG topics

The WGs have a budget of 12.000€ each to contract experts, but this budget has not fully been used last year by WG 1 and 3 and could therefore be used in other budget lines. **The secretariat invited the Chairs of the WGs to plan their future activities and inform before May of each year if they think that the budget will not be fully be used.**

Bruno Guillaumie (EMPA) suggested that working programmes were developed for a pluriannual vision of the deliverables. This would allow to better plan the budget.

Giuseppe Prioli (AMA) underlined that this was a missed opportunity: the work of the WG3 is very important and there would have been an opportunity to make more recommendations, for instance on management tools dedicated to space for aquaculture. It would be very interesting recommendations for the Member States and the regions.

The Chair agreed with these remarks **and reminded that this was the responsibility of each WG's Chair.**

7. AAC external activities:

- Results of the AAC/MAC European Parliament Lunch Seminar (European Parliament, 12th November)

This meeting was organised to inform the European Parliament about what ACs do.

After the meeting, **MEP Peter Van Dalen (The Netherlands – ECR)** proposed that some PECH Committee members should be designated as contact points for the ACs. A list of the ACs is currently being circulated among them. A good practice was also put into place and every email that the PECH secretariat receives from the ACs is forwarded to all the PECH Committee members.

The secretariat indicated that the AAC meetings appear on the monthly PECH Committee newsletter. Moreover, the PECH Committee members are invited at each meeting.

- Information point on meetings attended on behalf of the AAC by the Secretariat, the Chair and the Vice-Chairs:
 - Inter-ACs Secretariats meeting (Web meeting, 10th January)

The ACs secretariats have decided to meet every 6 months (via Skype) to share information about common budgetary matters or policy topics (such as consumer information, plastics...). Some ACs suggested the idea to better coordinate in order to draft more common recommendations on topics of shared interest. The next meeting will be organised by the AAC secretariat in April.

- BSAC, NSAC, NWWAC & PelAC workshop on the impact of the requirements of the Single Use Plastics Directive and the Port Facilities Directive on the fishing sector (Brussels, 28th January) and Workshop: Re-imagining Fishing Gear in a Circular Economy (28 January 2020)

The secretariat and **the Vice-Chair Marc-Philip Buckhout** attended this meeting. Aquaculture is also concerned and the topic is big and deemed to evolve. The FG on Marine Litter is working on a recommendation.

- MAC meetings (29-30 January)
 - Ecolabels Workshop

Pedro Reis Santos (MAC) explained that an eventual co-organisation with the AAC had been discussed. **The Chair** suggested that members of the AAC that were also members of the MAC would give input. **The AAC members decided not to get involved in the co-organisation of this workshop.**

- Caviar Labelling

There is an on-going e-mail procedure to decide if the MAC ExCom approves the AAC recommendation or wants to amend it. This topic raised the bigger issue of consumer information and **Pedro Reis Santos (MAC)** reported that a final decision would be taken about caviar labelling before moving towards a second advice addressing consumer information, as it had been decided to keep them as separate issues.

The Chair asked **Luisa Alvarez (Fedepesca)** for her opinion as member of the MAC. She explained that the MAC has been working for a long in this FG on the issue related with the origin for processed and canned products. Several organisations, including Fedepesca, believe that it should be mandatory to inform about the origin for canned and processed products when they contain one single fish product that supposes more than 50% of the total amount.

It seems that it could be possible to achieve an agreement on this issue with people from the industry but we have to wait for the opinion of the MAC's working group 3 and its Executive Committee.

Pascale Colson (DG MARE) added that it would be indeed interesting to have an own AAC recommendation on this broader topic of consumer information.

The AAC will work on this topic within its WG3 and prepare a recommendation for the Commission

8. AAC Budget: update on ongoing financial year by the secretariat

- Localisation of the AAC meetings

About the venues that are offered to us by Member States, the Chair reminded that what happened with Austria should not happen again.

Bernhard Feneis (Cogeca) reminded the ExCom that Germany would be taking the Presidency of the Council on the second part of 2020. He will send a letter regarding the hosting of the AAC General Assembly of September: Munich, Berlin or even Brussels (Representation of Bavaria to the EU) could be an option.

The ExCom agreed that, considering that the AAC wanted to invite the Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius to the next General Assembly, Brussels would be the first choice. Then Munich, as a second choice, and Berlin as a third.

The Secretariat reminded the ExCom that any free of cost meeting room was welcome and that we just need the space, we can take care of renting the translation booths.

- Budget

The Secretariat gave an update about the budget:

- The AAC has received more money than the previous year, thanks to the contribution of two new Member States: Finland and Portugal. A contribution should also be received from Germany, but no news about the UK.

- Expenses: half of the budget for meeting rooms has already been used due to the price of renting a conference room at the Thon Hotel. A solution really needs to be found for the localisation of the meetings.
- Translation remains expensive but more money could be used on this line if the members decide so.
- Legal advice: a lawyer's advice was requested in 2018-2019 but the invoice came late and should therefore be integrated in the 2019-2020 budget.

9. Any other business

- Photographs taken during the meetings

The Secretariat will draft a formal document about the rules of the AAC concerning this topic.

- Reimbursements

The AAC has been very cautious with its budget and will continue to do so, but until now but there is space for increasing, for instance, the per diem. However, as increasing other budget lines was also discussed during the meeting, it is necessary to remain cautious. **The Secretariat will explore the options** (what would be the budget impact of raising the per diem to 75 EUR or 90 EUR.

10. Date and place of the forthcoming meeting

Initially planned on the 11th June 2020, in Brussels, the next ExCom meeting will take place on July 16, 2020 in a room offered by the CNC in Paris.