



Conclusions and results from the EMD AC side event: EU Advisory Councils: stakeholder engagement in policy making for sustainable fisheries & aquaculture production and value chains

The 2024 edition of the European Maritime Day took place in Svendborg, Denmark, on 30-31 May 2024 at the SIMAC Academy - Svendborg International Maritime Academy. It was organised by the European Commission, the Municipality of Svendborg and the Danish Maritime Authority. On occasion of the event, Advisory Councils (ACs) were offered the opportunity to organize a workshop titled “EU Advisory Councils: Stakeholder Engagement in Policymaking for Sustainable Fisheries & Aquaculture Production and Value Chains”. The workshop was attended by more than 100 participants with all very different prior knowledge of ACs.

The aim of the side event was to highlight the importance of participatory governance/stakeholder engagement through Advisory Councils for effective fisheries and aquaculture management, socio-economic, and conservation aspects. Through analysis of their functioning, the intention was to improve the understanding of their role in policy consultation processes and to brainstorm recommendations for improved stakeholder engagement for sustainable and productive aquatic ecosystems, a thriving blue economy, and vibrant markets.

First, the moderator, Mark Dickey-Collas, former Chair of the ICES Advisory Committee, provided an outline of the history and function of the regional ACs. As foreseen under the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation, these organisations were initially established in 2003 to advise the European Commission and EU Member States on fisheries. With legislative changes, the ACs expanded to cover broader topics. Comprising 60% of fisheries and aquaculture value chain representatives (e.g., primary producers, processors, retailers trade unions) and 40% of Other Interest Groups (OIG) representatives (e.g., environmental and development NGOs, women in fisheries, etc) in their Executive Committees. The ACs collaborate with a wide range of partners, including knowledge providers, fisheries management bodies, scientific organisations and regional conventions. They serve as think-tanks, developing consensus-based advice through working groups or focus groups. They engage with diverse stakeholder groups, requiring varied techniques, as stakeholders respond differently. This often leads to challenges in meeting strict deadlines, as more time is required for getting consensus among different stakeholders.

Moving onto the next section, three speakers (bio in Annex 1) shared real-life cooperation examples, addressing shortcomings and suggesting improvements in decision-making. Through the discussion in the panel, the ACs aimed to raise awareness about their role in shaping fisheries and aquaculture policies, with information on the importance of stakeholder engagement/opinion and with concrete examples through case studies.



Antonia Leroy (Head of Ocean Policy at WWF European Policy Office), emphasised the rarity and importance of the ACs, providing a unique global perspective for policymakers. She highlighted the positive exercise of aiming for consensus in advice development. The ACs engage in dialogue between industry and OIGs, to reach agreement where possible, which has been successful in instances, such as advice on the EU Fisheries Control Regulation and RFMOs management measures.

While agreeing to disagree can foster understanding, challenges arise when discussions become overly intense or adopt inappropriate tones. NGOs, with limited capacity, may struggle to effectively participate, leading to power imbalances. Leroy noted improvement in this regard over the years, aided by Chairs and Secretariats facilitating constructive discussions.

Looking ahead, Leroy suggested that the ACs would benefit from more technical discussions and stakeholder learning in an open dialogue, with reduced political discourse. Regular updates from the Commission and maintaining open dialogue are key aspects of the ACs that should be preserved.

Jesper Raakjær (Group Chief Visionary Officer at Port of Aalborg & Professor in Fisheries Governance & Port Development at Aalborg University) reflected on the functioning of the ACs based on his extensive experience. As a former member and Executive Committee Chair of the Pelagic AC, he described the PelAC as a well-functioning and homogeneous group. Fishers actively participated in meetings, and there was effective representation of both the industry and OIGs. Appropriate representation of OIG views was also facilitated by a collaborative approach in chairing Executive Committee meetings, with both the industry ExCom Chair and the OIG Vice-Chair involved. This, together with the positive work culture and coordinated positions, facilitated discussions. Efforts were made to reach consensus and avoid political views, although often required significant effort.

However, Raakjær also pointed out some constraints. PelAC must interact with three different regional groups — the Scheveningen Group, NW Waters Group, and SW Waters Group — which has proven troublesome due to a lack of coordination among them. He mentioned that the 2013 CFP reform represented a step back, as the good relationship established between the Commission and the ACs during the initial period slowly deteriorated. After the reform, DG MARE became less involved in negotiations, discussions, and deliberations in PelAC, showing less interest in engaging in technical discussions. Additionally, there was a large turnover of Commission staff attending meetings.

Marta Ballesteros (Marine Social Scientist at IEO-CSIC Spain and Expert in Fisheries Governance and Management) emphasised the crucial role of the ACs in the marine governance system. While acknowledging their importance, she noted room for improvement in their functioning and in the larger system they belong to. The ACs facilitate iterative and structured dialogue, replacing previously fragmented stakeholder interactions, with transparent and accountable processes.



Since their creation in 2003, ACs have represented a diverse reality with legal statutes based on their founding locations. The legal framework influences their operations. Balancing efficiency and democracy is a constant challenge due to time constraints. While the ACs face numerous barriers, they cannot solve all problems. Ballesteros highlighted that, while changes in the governance system impact their effectiveness, maintaining legitimacy is crucial.

Once the scene had been set by the panel, the moderator then turned to the main part of the workshop - the breakout session (*Ask Me Anything Bootcamp*). He explained that the purpose was to brainstorm recommendations to policymakers to improve stakeholder engagement and AC functioning, in co-creation with the audience, who were expected to take the role of “stakeholders”.

The audience was split into 4 groups each led by 2 AC secretariats: GROUP 1: NSAC - Tamara Talevska, CCRUP - Laura Jordão, GROUP 2: NSAC - Kateryna Urbanovych, MAC - Pedro Reis Santos, GROUP 3: SWWAC - Chloé Pocheau, BSAC - Guillaume Carruel, GROUP 4: MEDAC - Rosa Caggiano, AAC - Justine Marrot. In addition, Alexandre Rodriguez from LDAC was coordinating the information gathering for the next stage of the event.

To facilitate these exchanges, AC secretariats had agreed on open and general questions, to allow participants to be creative and put forward new ideas. They served as guides, to the discussions in each group without pre-empting the results.

The themes covered by the groups included: Membership and composition, Policy making process, Role of ACs and interactions with recipients of advice, and Output of advice (where it goes and communications). Hereunder are the main topic discussed and ideas put forward:

Themes	Propositions formulated						
Membership and composition	<i>Important to focus on ability to be member and actively take part</i>	<i>Environmental NGOs would like a 50-50 distribution of membership to ensure a level playing field</i>	<i>Diversity of members has increased on both sides: should all voices have the same weight?</i>	<i>How to guarantee that people represent their organisation and not their personal interest?</i>	<i>Important to ensure a fair and safe space for representatives taking part in meetings to foster active participation</i>	<i>Financial help could be provided to support participation of members that cannot afford it</i>	<i>Scientists and policy makers (specifically local level) should be included in discussions as some are also stakeholders.</i>
Policy making process	<i>Consensus reaching and creating a common understanding (agree to disagree) is the essential challenge. A consensus advice is more effective and usually more acceptable</i>	<i>NGOs working in coalition can help them increase their impact</i>	<i>Interactions with scientists could be even more regular and formalised</i>	<i>Contact of ACs with policy makers should be prioritised and ACs recognised as a legitimate channel to do so: Enhanced role/weight of ACs in consultations</i>	<i>We need more commitment from policy makers to adopt the ACs advice, more recognition to encourage participation</i>	<i>Relation between the secretariat and DG MARE is essential: ACs should be proactive and share knowledge and information</i>	<i>Need to be careful that the recommendation does not become too weak trying to reach consensus: there is a balance to find</i>
Role of ACs and interactions with recipients of advice	<i>Meeting preparation should be supported by secretariat</i>		<i>Interpretation can facilitate participation</i>	<i>Clear information on how the advice is taken into account by the Commission is important: how can we measure the impact?</i>		<i>AC should continue working together where necessary</i>	
Output of advice	<i>Stakeholders use various types of information sources including scientific reports, NGOs documents and newsletters</i>			<i>ACs should communicate their work through different communication channels using different levels of details</i>		<i>AC reaching out to the EP could improve coordination and the impact of ACs advices</i>	



Responses and questions were recorded in real-time in a shared document. After the interactive sessions, the document was processed through *Chat-GPT* to try to showcase how these ideas could translate into a “*dummy advice*”. The question prompted to *Chat-GPT* was

I need to produce a position paper with recommendations based on the words attached. The theme of the advice is "how to improve the role and functioning of the EU Fisheries Advisory Councils as stakeholder bodies engaging in policy making for sustainable fisheries & aquaculture production and value chains".

The raw output from *Chat-GPT* is attached in Annex 2. It was briefly presented to the audience as a conclusion of the event.

The output presents challenges and recommendations. Some recommendations are already in place today and are part of the regulation (e.g., reserving at least 30% of seats for some specific groups, conducting performance reviews every 5 years). Other recommendations propose to broaden and standardise ACs communication, coordination with the Commission (tracking system to monitor the incorporation of AC advice) and outreach (include the European Parliament (EP) and other relevant bodies). Finally, some of the recommendations derived from this work go further and propose new membership (scientists and academics), new structure (create a dedicated research arm within the ACs, establish a liaison office within the AC), and new reporting (how AC recommendations are incorporated into policies).

The moderator, Mark Dickey-Collas, concluded the workshop by highlighting that the ACs are EU-wide legally established entities with significant impact on policymakers as knowledge brokers and ground-testers, and that they have a relevant role to play, particularly in the upcoming large-scale transitions towards sustainability. In this process, they are open to new constructive members who want to co-create EU fisheries and aquaculture policies.

ACs will take home the *dummy advice* and analyse it in more details to see what next step could be taken to make us of an expert-revised version of this document.

He thanked participants and invited them to share [the brochure](#) prepared by the AC secretariats summarising the role of Advisory Councils.



Annex 1: Speakers Bio

Marta Ballesteros

Dr Marta Ballesteros works at the IEO-CSIC. She has facilitated multi-level, multi-national stakeholders' platforms in the European Union (e.g. MAREFRAME project), stakeholders dialogues at ICES (e.g. Workshop on scoping stakeholders on production of operational guidance on assessment of benthic pressure and impact from bottom fishing) as well as high-level policy dialogues (e.g. DG-MARE, ICES, STECF round table for implementing an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management) or management strategy evaluation processes (e.g. MATH4FISH project). Research topics include governance, stakeholders' interaction, fisheries policy, and management. She has participated in the STECF report on the Social data in the EU fisheries sector (2022,2023), co-chaired the ICES Workshop on Implementation of Stakeholder Engagement Strategy (WKSTIMP, 2023), the European Workshop on Science-Industry Research Collaboration (2021), and the Socioeconomic Subgroup of the Technical Expert Group on Data for Marine Spatial Planning (2021-2023).

She has been a visiting scholar at Indiana University, Duke University and University of California Santa Cruz. She was convenor for the Theme Session "Putting more science in stakeholder engagement in marine research and policy processes (ICES ASC, 2023) and is convenor for the session "Improving marine governance with interdisciplinary research and cross-sectoral approaches" at the MSEAS 2024 Conference. She is also a member of the Scientific Steering Committee of the Integrated Marine Biosphere Research (IMBeR).

Mark Dickey-Collas

Dr Dickey-Collas is an experienced marine scientist, operating independently as 'Dickey-Collas Marine.' He has expertise in the provision of scientific advice to governments for marine conservation, fisheries, biodiversity, and ecosystem-based management. He has over 30 years' experience, with a decade in Northern Ireland, in the Netherlands, and in ICES HQ, Denmark. Initially he specialised in pelagic fish and fisheries, and moved into the realm of EBM, and then became Chair of the ICES Advisory Committee. His scientific experience spreads across population dynamics, ecosystem modelling, conservation, stakeholder engagement and the policy/science interface. Mark oversaw the production and delivery of >250 pieces of annual advice to governments in the north Atlantic. He left ICES in December 2023 and is an adjunct professor at DTU-Aqua and now a member of the IUCN Fisheries expert group, council member of the Marine Biological Association of the UK and a member of the Defra (UK) biodiversity expert committee. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3154-8039>

Antonia Leroy

Dr Leroy is the Head of Ocean Policy at WWF European Policy Office. She leads the implementation of WWF's objectives to secure healthy ocean ecosystems and sustainable fisheries at EU level. With a background in International Law, she is an expert on ocean





governance with specific focus on fisheries, marine spatial planning, marine protected areas, and offshore renewable issues.

WWF European Policy Office is a member of several Advisory Councils and expert working groups concerning EU policy preparation such as the Market Advisory Council (MAC), the Long Distance Advisory Council (LDAC), the Member States Expert Group (MSEG) in Maritime Spatial Planning and the Marine Strategy Coordination Group. The mission of the WWF European Policy Office is to ensure that policies are adopted and implemented to sustainably manage and use our seas, as well as to secure the protection of marine wildlife and habitats for the benefit of people and nature.

Jesper Raakjær

Dr Jesper Raakjær is Group Chief Visionary Officer at Port of Aalborg and professor in Fisheries Governance and Port Development at the Centre of Blue Governance at the Department of Sustainability and Planning, Aalborg University. An adjunct professor at the Department of Marine Affairs, University of Rhode Island. He holds a DSc. (political economy, 2009) and PhD (institutional economics, 1992) from Aalborg University. Employed at CBG since its foundation in 1994, where he was appointed Research Professor in 2000 and AAU Professor in 2008. He has been involved in numerous large international research projects focusing on institutional aspects of marine and fisheries governance both in developed and developing countries. He has been on long-term research stays in Canada, Iceland, South Africa, and the USA. He has served in many executive positions both in academia and the private sector and was chairperson of the Pelagic Advisory Council 2016-2022 and joined ExCom in 2009 representing the AIPCE.



Annex 2: Chat GPT output: “Dummy advice” - Position Paper

Enhancing the Role and Functioning of EU Fisheries Advisory Council

Introduction

The EU Fisheries Advisory Councils (ACs) play a crucial role in shaping policies that ensure sustainable and productive fisheries and aquatic ecosystems. However, there are significant opportunities to improve their functioning and effectiveness as stakeholder bodies. This paper outlines key recommendations to enhance the role of ACs in policy making, drawing on feedback and insights from stakeholders.

1. Membership and Composition

a. Diversify Representation

Current Challenge: The ACs often face imbalances in representation, with larger industry players dominating discussions, leading to underrepresentation of small-scale fisheries (SSF), consumer groups, and NGOs.

Recommendation:

- Quota System: Implement a quota system ensuring that at least 30% of council seats are reserved for representatives from SSF, NGOs, and consumer groups. This can help balance the perspectives and ensure a more inclusive approach to decision-making.
- Active Recruitment: Engage in targeted recruitment efforts to bring in representatives from these underrepresented groups, providing support and training as needed to ensure effective participation.

b. Ensure Geographical Balance

Current Challenge: Representation within ACs often skews towards certain regions, neglecting the diverse needs and conditions of various EU areas.

Recommendation: Proportional Representation: Adjust membership to ensure proportional representation from all EU regions. Establish sub-councils or working groups focused on specific geographical areas to ensure localized issues are adequately addressed.

c. Integrate Scientists and Academics

Current Challenge: Scientists and academics are typically observers, limiting their influence on policy recommendations.

Recommendation: Full Membership: Integrate scientists and academics as full members of the ACs. Their expertise is essential for grounding recommendations in the latest scientific research and ensuring evidence-based decision-making.

2. Role of ACs in the Policy-Making Process

a. Build Influence and Trust

Current Challenge: ACs are not fully trusted or utilized by all stakeholders, limiting their influence on EU fisheries policies.

Recommendation: Transparency and Accountability: Enhance transparency by regularly publishing reports on how AC recommendations are incorporated into policies. Conduct annual public forums to discuss AC activities and their impact, building trust among stakeholders.

b. Adopt Consensus Recommendations

Current Challenge: Recommendations often reflect majority views, ignoring significant minority opinions.



Recommendation: Strive for Consensus: Ensure all recommendations strive for consensus and document divergent opinions when consensus cannot be achieved. This provides a more comprehensive view to policy makers.

c. Enhance Regional and International Contributions

Current Challenge: Limited engagement in regional and international fisheries management forums.

Recommendation: Active Participation: Enhance the advisory role of ACs in regional working groups and international fisheries management organizations (RFMOs). Assign dedicated representatives to these bodies to ensure continuous and effective participation.

3. Interaction with Policy Recipients

a. Improve Relevance and Timeliness of Advice

Current Challenge: Advice is often not timely or aligned with the needs of the European Commission (EC) and Member States (MS).

Recommendation: Coordination: Develop a calendar of key policy decision dates and align AC activities to provide timely input. Establish a liaison office within the ACs for better coordination with the EC and MS.

b. Ensure Evidence-Based Recommendations

Current Challenge: Recommendations may lack strong scientific or technical backing.

Recommendation: Dedicated Research Arm: Create a dedicated research arm within the ACs for ongoing scientific and technical support. Partner with research institutions and fund targeted studies to support AC recommendations.

c. Develop Follow-Up Mechanisms:

Current Challenge: Lack of clarity on how AC advice is incorporated into legislation.

Recommendation: Tracking System: Implement a tracking system to monitor the incorporation of AC advice into EU legislation. Publish annual reports detailing the uptake of AC recommendations.

4. Communication and Outputs

a. Enhance Communication Strategies

Current Challenge: Limited public awareness and understanding of the role and work of ACs.

Recommendation: Comprehensive Communication Strategy: Develop a strategy that includes regular updates, newsletters, and social media engagement. Use different languages and formats to reach diverse audiences.

b. Broaden Engagement Beyond EC and MS

Current Challenge: Engagement is mainly limited to the EC and MS.

Recommendation: Wider Engagement: Broaden engagement to include the European Parliament (EP) and other relevant bodies. Schedule regular briefings with EP committees to present AC findings and recommendations.

c. Conduct Regular Performance Reviews

Current Challenge: No formal mechanism for assessing AC effectiveness.

Recommendation: Independent Reviews: Conduct regular, independent performance reviews every five years. These reviews should assess the effectiveness of ACs and provide actionable recommendations for improvement.

Conclusion

By implementing these recommendations, the EU Fisheries Advisory Councils can become more inclusive, influential, and effective in contributing to sustainable fisheries management and healthy aquatic ecosystems. These changes will enhance stakeholder engagement, ensure balanced representation, and improve the overall impact of the ACs on EU fisheries policies.