



AAC Policies

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Procedure for follow-up on recommendation

- 1. The FG leader analyses the reply received using the AAC template.**
- 2. The FG leader drafts a proposal to be approved by the FG.**
 - This may be done by written procedure or it may require an FG meeting depending on the 'complexity' of the recommendation and the reply received.
 - Having consulted with the WG chair the FG decides if the follow-up can be approved by the WG by written procedure or if it needs to be discussed and approved at a WG meeting.
- 3. The FG draft is approved by the WG either by written procedure or at a WG meeting.**
- 4. The follow-up actions that involve the EC, the member states or the European Parliament are coordinated by the FG leader, the WG chair, the secretariat and the chair.**
- 5. The WG Chairs will report on the actions carried out at the WG meeting.**



Procedure for handling consultations on research project proposals

The AAC does **not** give priority to commend on research projects proposals as it is not a core objective of the AAC.

The **general policy** is that the AAC does not provide input to research project proposals, but exceptions are possible if the scope of the project may have significant implications on the preparation of an AAC recommendation ('work in progress') or if the results may significantly add to the impact of a prior recommendation.

The **deadline** for providing input project proposal may be short and invitations are therefore handled by emergency procedures:

- A. The chair of the AAC and the secretariat recommend to the Management Committee (ManCom) on whether a project proposal is 'significant' or not.
- B. The ManCom mandates a Working Group to prepare a response.
- C. The chair of the relevant WG decides on the response. This may involve the creation of a new Focus Group or a reference to a prior AAC recommendation.
- D. The ManCom approves the response.



AAC Financial Compensation Policy

Definition of a rapporteur:

A rapporteur is an AAC member representative that has been mandated by a Working Group to work on a draft recommendation.

Compensation policy for a rapporteur's work:

AAC rapporteurs do not *per se* receive any financial compensation from the AAC.

The AAC can provide financial compensation to 'rapporteurs' up to 4.000 € per report following an application from a rapporteur's organisation if the AAC finds that the request is justified.

The compensation is formalised via the signature of a contract between the rapporteur's organisation and the AAC. The contract includes a specific assignment letter, detailing the work to be carried out, the timeline as well as the payment conditions.

Budget implications:

- Compensation of all AAC rapporteurs for 2022-2023: 8.000 EUR
- Compensation of EMPA rapporteurs for 2022-2023: 8.000 EUR
- Rapporteurship + scientific expertise budget unused in 2022-2023: 2.000 EUR





Translation Policy for the Recommendations

All AAC recommendations are translated into **French, Italian, Spanish and German**. In addition, recommendations are – upon explicit request - also translated into **Greek, Polish, Romanian and Portuguese** on a case by case basis.

Draft recommendations will be edited to ensure good quality of drafting.

Translating recommendations serves the purpose of disseminating their messages better among national authorities and within the AAC members' membership.



Policy on participation in external events

This policy aims to provide guidance on the AAC's participation in external events.

The AAC welcomes invitations on aquaculture events from EU public institutions and Member States' public authorities and gives priority to such invitations. The chair has the mandate to accept such invitations and may consult the ManCom or ExCom if in doubt.

In this context, 'external events' refer to invitations where the AAC is asked to present itself, a recommendation or a good practice developed by the AAC or the European Commission.

Does the AAC accept the external invitation?

The Common Fisheries Policy calls on the AAC to promote the development of sustainable aquaculture activities and the Strategic Guidelines includes several AAC dissemination/promotion activities.

Invitations to external events are shared with the ExCom and the AAC chair decides on accepting invitations on the following conditions:

1. The AAC is invited to present itself, a **recommendation** or a **good practice**.
2. The host/organiser/participants are considered **relevant stakeholders** in the context of the Strategic Guidelines.
3. The **programme/agenda items** are relevant to the AAC.
4. An AAC **representative** is willing and available to present the recommendation or the good practice.

Who gives the presentation?

The AAC representative is selected according to the following order of priority:

For a presentation on a recommendation or a good practice:

1. The AAC member organisation **rapporteur** who has had the lead on the recommendation/good practice in question.
2. The **chair of the WG** responsible for the recommendation/good practice in question.
3. The **vice-chair of the WG** responsible for the recommendation/good practice in question.
4. The **chair of the AAC**.

For a presentation on the AAC:

1. The **chair of the AAC**
2. The **secretariat of the AAC**

The AAC representative must only present AAC positions that are reflected in the recommendation/good practice or attuned with the ExCom prior to the event.



AAC Observers policy

AAC Statutes and Rules of Procedure (RoP)

Statutes article 8 (4), 4 (1) and 8 (2)

The chair may authorize any person whose presence is deemed to be beneficial based on the agenda of the meeting, as an observer, to attend the GA and ExCom meetings.

The meetings of the GA and the ExCom shall be open to the public; the latter modified by “unless in exceptional circumstances”.

Rules of procedure article 11 (1 – 3)

Representatives of the aquaculture operators and other interest groups from third countries may - at the discretion of the ExCom - be invited to participate in the AAC and WG as active observers when issues that affect them are discussed.

Representatives of the European Commission, other European institutions, Member States and additional representatives of Member Organisations shall be permitted to attend any meeting of the AAC.

The AAC shall not be responsible for meeting the costs of attendance of observers. Observers shall not be entitled to vote.

Practices supplementing the Statutes and Rules of Procedure

1. The ExCom has decided (in 2022) to keep on reimbursing former UK AAC members who wish to attend physical Working Group meetings.
2. Working Documents are shared with the observers ahead of the Working Group meetings. The Chair may decide otherwise on an *ad hoc* basis for specific Working Documents
3. Observers can be invited to attend Focus Group meetings on an *ad hoc* basis when issues that affect them are discussed. Focus Group working documents may then be shared with them.
4. Inviting observers to attend AAC meetings is a way of attracting new members.
5. Observers are invited to the lunches organised by the Secretariat when meetings are organised physically. The WG dinners are open to AAC members, EC and MS representatives only.
6. The AAC reimburses the travel expenses of Member States' experts that attend physical meetings¹.

¹ New Guidance Document adopted on 11/08/2023 on the use of ACs Grant, 13.3 ANNEX X - Experts' travel expenses, Point 2: “PUBLIC SECTOR EXPERTS (representing a public body from a Member State): public sector experts are entitled to reimbursement of travel expenses. A daily allowance per meeting and an accommodation allowance will be paid only if such allowances are provided for in the rules of procedure of the advisory council. Reimbursements will be paid in euro value on a bank account in the name of the Member State, one of its ministries or a public body.”





7. Observers are entitled to have the floor at all AAC meetings.
8. Observers should be registered in the European Transparency Register.



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Improving the involvement of external experts

Context:

The performance review suggested that “The AAC members rate the involvement of external experts to qualify recommendations to be somehow satisfactory”. This was the lowest score in the section about the quality of AAC recommendations.

4 respondent’s comments supplemented the answers:

- *“The quality of “experts has a wide range! from VERY poor to sometimes excellent most are “reasonable” not regarding the money they get for the job! including money I would kick out some of them directly.*
- *“I have rated 8 because there is always room for improvement but I’m quite satisfied”*
- *“All external experts are not of the same level. [meaning, some of them are very bad]”*
- *“The recommendations are well composed and consulted on - although I am not always in agreement with the content. External consultants are always helpful and good to improve content and objectivity in recommendations.”*

The ExCom agreed to include improving the involvement of external experts in the action plan.

When does the AAC call for external experts?

The AAC requests experts in two cases:

- To inform the Working Group members about a specific topic. These experts take part to the meetings for free.
- Via an external call based on Terms of Reference for the preparation of a specific scientific report drafted with a financial compensation.

A. Experts invited at Working Groups:

The experts invited to present about their activities at the AAC WG meetings are either designated by the WG Chair or Vice-Chair when preparing the agenda, or by the European Commission when the expert needed is an official.

For EC officials, the AAC secretariat writes to DG MARE to request a briefing about a specific topic and DG MARE nominates the relevant person to be contacted (even if in other EC Directorate-Generals such as SANTE, ENVI, etc...). The requested expert is occasionally unavailable during an AAC/WG meeting, and the substitute may not always have the same level of expertise as the person responsible for the case. In such situations, the WG Chair might decide to either accept the substitute or schedule a separate online event when the EC expert can attend, taking into account the extra costs and scheduling.

B. Experts selected for the preparation of a study:

Another kind of external experts are those chosen by a WG to prepare a study that will inform the AAC members about a specific topic. The AAC foresees a yearly budget of 12.000 EUR for this purpose.

When a WG decides to call for an external expert, Terms of Reference are drafted and approved before being published. The expert selection is made by the Chair, Vice-Chair and AAC secretariat and approved by the Focus Group and the Working Group. The expert is then contracted for a maximum period of a year to





deliver its work.

The comments received in the performance review about this kind of experts are positive.

How to improve the quality of external experts?

The AAC can aim at improving the experts chosen by the WG Chairs but those designated by DG MARE cannot be chosen.

The secretariat always liaises with the EC person who will be in charge of the presentation, not only to organise the logistics of its presence but also to make sure that the AAC specific needs and request will be tackled by the presentation. Despite this, some experts did not always respond to the brief.



The ManCom's tasks, responsibilities and decision powers

The independent performance review action plan includes a description of the role of the ManCom.

The Commission Delegated Regulation 2022/204, the statutes and the Rules of Procedure of the AAC delegates the following tasks and decision powers to the ExCom and the General Assembly (GA).

Item	2022/204		Statutes		Rules of Procedure	
	ExCom	GA	ExCom	GA	ExCom	GA
ExCom members		Appoints		Elect		Appoints
AAC Chair and Vice-chairs		Designate	Propose	Designate		
WGs					Establish	
Observers/experts					Invite	
Statutes/RoP: Amendments			Propose	Adopt	Propose	Adopts
Member classification		Decide	Decides	Validate	Decides	Validate
Membership fee equitable		Ensure				Ensure
Annual report/Strategic Plan/budget	Prepare	Approve		Approve	Prepare	Approve
Recommendations/suggestions	Adopt		Adopt		Adopt	

AAC responses to Commission Guidance Documents are presumed adopted as recommendations.

The statutes stipulate that the members of the Management Committee (ManCom) are the Chair of the AAC, the Chairs of the Working Groups, the Vice Chairs of the AAC and the treasurer and that the AAC Chair may convene the ManCom "to coordinate their activities and management of the AAC".

The ManCom's tasks, responsibilities and decision powers vis - á - vis the ExCom are as follows:

	ManCom	ExCom
Decisions	Approves budget proposals from the Chair/Secretariat not exceeding 10.000 €	Informed on decisions
	Research projects (internal policy)	
Responsibilities	Monitors the completion of recommendations included in the Strategic Plan	Informed on deviations
	Proposes allocation of topics between WGs	Approves
	Assists the Chair/Secretariat with the follow up on recommendations	Decides on new actions not included in a recommendation



Tasks (ad hoc)	Carries out specific tasks mandated by the ExCom	Informs the ManCom on tasks
	Cooperates with the Chair/Secretariat on preparing meetings with DG MARE and OMC meetings	Approves AAC talking notes
	Guides the Chair/Secretariat on membership applications and internal AAC procedures	Approves/adopts



AAC/ExCom strategic objectives and tasks

The independent performance review action plan calls on the ExCom to introduce strategic objectives for the AAC to improve the balance between operational and strategic tasks.

This analysis considers the legal framework (the Common Fisheries Policy, the Commission Strategic Guidelines and the Commission Delegated Regulations) and the AAC statutes and Rules of Procedure).

1. Legal framework

1.1. Policy objectives: Common Fisheries Policy (1380/2013)

Article 43 states that the Advisory Councils (AC) shall contribute to the achievement of the objectives set out in Article 2.

Article 2 relates mainly to fisheries, but the following 8 objectives concerns aquaculture:

1. Ensure that aquaculture activities are environmentally sustainable in the long-term and are managed in a way that is consistent with the objectives of achieving economic, social and employment benefits, and of contributing to the availability of food supplies.
2. Ensure that aquaculture activities avoid the degradation of the marine environment.
3. Contribute to the collection of scientific data.
4. Promote the development of sustainable aquaculture activities to contribute to food supplies and security and employment.
5. Contribute to an efficient and transparent internal market for aquaculture products.
6. Contribute to ensure a level-playing field for aquaculture products marketed in the Union.
7. Consider the interests of both consumers and producers.
8. Be coherent with the Union environmental legislation and other Union policies.

This can be condensed into 4 thematic AAC working areas if objectives 2, 7 and 8 are assumed to be included in the term "sustainable development":

1. Sustainable aquaculture development and management.
2. Promotion to contribute to food supplies/security and employment
3. Scientific data
4. Markets

Article 34 on "Promoting sustainable aquaculture" stipulates that the Commission shall establish non-binding Strategic Guidelines on common priorities and targets for the development of sustainable aquaculture activities aimed at promoting sustainability and contributing to food security and supplies, growth and





employment.

Article 44 stipulates the tasks of the Advisory Councils:

1. Submit recommendations and suggestions on matters relating to the management and the socio-economic and conservation aspects of aquaculture to the Commission and to the Member State concerned.
2. Inform the Commission and Member States of problems relating to the management and the socio-economic and conservation aspects of aquaculture propose solutions to overcome those problems.
3. Contribute, in close cooperation with scientists, to the collection, supply and analysis of data necessary for the development of conservation measures.

If an issue is of common interest to two or more Advisory Councils, they shall coordinate their positions with a view to adopting joint recommendations on that issue.

1.2. Strategic objectives: Commission Strategic Guidelines (COM(2021) 236 final

It follows from article 34 in the Common Fisheries Policy, that the Strategic Guidelines shall aim at:

1. Improving the competitiveness of the aquaculture industry and supporting its development and innovation.
2. Reducing the administrative burden and making the implementation of Union law more efficient and responsive to the needs of stakeholders.
3. Encouraging economic activity.
4. Diversification and improvement of the quality of life in coastal and inland waters.
5. Integrating aquaculture activities into maritime, coastal and inland spatial planning.

The existing Strategic Guidelines establishes 4 objectives:

1. Building resilience and competitiveness.
2. Participating in the green transition.
3. Ensuring social acceptance and consumer information.
4. Increasing knowledge and innovation.

The annex includes + 100 actions to the Commission, the Member States and the AAC.

The Strategic Guidelines is supported by The European Parliament, The European Economic and Social Committee, The Committee of the Regions, the Council and the AAC.

1.3. Tasks: Commission Delegated Regulations (CDR) on the AC (2015/242;



2017/1575;2022/204)

This Delegated Regulation lays down detailed rules on the functioning of AC as referred to in Article 43 of the CFP. This includes stating the tasks that the ExCom shall perform:

Prepare the annual report, the annual budget and the annual Strategic Plan (SP).

Adopt and submit recommendations and suggestions to the COM and the MS.

Carry out an independent performance review at least every 5 years and include shortcomings in an action plan.

It is assumed that “suggestions” and responses to Guidance Documents will take the form of recommendations.

2. AAC strategic objectives and tasks

The legal context leads to the conclusion that the strategic objective for the AAC is to contribute to the achievement of the objectives in the Strategic Guidelines by carrying out 4 tasks:

1. Implement AAC actions in the Strategic Guidelines.
2. Adopt and submit recommendations to the Commission and the Member States.
3. Implement actions following the independent performance review.
4. Prepare the annual report, the annual budget and the annual Strategic Plan.

2.1 Strategic Guidelines

a) Establish a stronger link between the Strategic Guidelines and the AAC Strategic Plan

Most AAC actions are interrelated with and dependent on Commission actions and several also relies on Member States actions. Annex 1 lists the AAC actions and the interrelated actions.

The AAC actions listed in the Strategic Guidelines should be included in the AAC Strategic Plan, but a coordinated approach requires, that the Commission informs the AAC about their planned actions. This will also provide the AAC with the opportunity to influence the included actions.

The AAC Strategic Plan for 2024-2025 only includes 2 generic actions related to the Strategic Guidelines:

- Provide input to Guidance Documents
- Aim at improving the dissemination of information to the EU aquaculture stakeholders

Ideally, the Commission, the Member States and the AAC should jointly agree on the annual actions to ensure a coordinated execution of the actions. This requires a transparent and structured procedure for linking and coordinating the AAC Strategic Plan to the Strategic Guidelines.

b. Establish a consultation procedure for the adoption of Guidance Documents

The AAC has asked the COM to establish a formal and transparent consultation procedure for the adoption of Guidance Documents. This is a strategic task given the importance of the Guidance Documents.



c. Mid-term assessment of the SG

The Commission will in 2025 carry out a mid-term assessment of the Strategic Guidelines: (i) the progress made in developing the recommended actions in the annex; and (ii) the efficiency of these actions in helping achieve the objectives laid down in the strategic guidelines, with the possibility of adapting actions accordingly.

The AAC will prepare a recommendation to take stock of the results achieved and propose solutions to the weaknesses in the current set-up and new actions to include in the SG. Such actions could relate to previous and planned AAC recommendations not included in the current SG (per example organic aquaculture).

d. Annual survey on Member States

The Commission has confirmed that they will carry out annual surveys to monitor progress and impact of the implementation of the Strategic Guidelines, the Member States Multi Annual Strategic Plans and the EMFAF.

The AAC will evaluate the summary reports and consider appropriate actions.

2.2 Recommendations

a. Distinguish between own initiative and SG recommendations

The AAC should distinguish between own initiative (per example blue crab) and SG recommendations (per example on the Guidance Documents) and the AAC actions identified above may lead to new recommendations to be included in the Strategic Plan for 2024-25.

The AAC WGs and the ExCom should give priority to recommendations listed in the Strategic Guidelines and the AAC Strategic Plan.

b. Follow up on previous recommendations

The Chair/Secretariat follow up on previous recommendations with support from the ManCom, but the ExCom can decide to include a (sub) recommendation in the ExCom's agenda to accelerate decisions making. Such (sub) recommendations must be selected carefully to avoid overloading. A guiding principle could be only to include SG recommendations and own initiative recommendation that impact the aquaculture sector – per example:

- Aquaculture Policy Reform
- Communication campaign
- Organic aquaculture
- Economic sustainability indicators STECF report
- Annual survey to MS on progress and impact (SG/MNSP/EMFAF)
- Consumer information
- Priorities Aquatic Animals Welfare Reference Centre (AAWRC; in progress)



It is also proposed to consider previous recommendations to be included as actions in the revised SG.

2.3 Independent performance review

a) Establish a document on internal policies/best practices

4 of the actions from the independent performance review concerns internal policies:

- Chair/Secretariat proofread draft recommendation before ExCom adopts.
- Only include presentations linked to recommendations at WG meetings
- Chair/Secretariat prepare a draft on the involvement of external experts
- Consider more frequent ExCom meetings (translation/cost?)

It is important that the internal policies are properly recorded and catalogued to ensure organisational memory and continuity.

b) Introduce an ExCom annual wheel

3 of the actions from the independent performance review introduces new annual ExCom tasks:

- Communicate efforts that have an impact on EU/Member States policies.
- Establishing annual strategic objectives/tasks.
- Attune EC work programme with AAC strategic plan.

They supplement the 5 current annual tasks (report, SP, budget, DG MARE grant application and General Assembly).

It is proposed to introduce an annual ExCom wheel to increase the transparency and support the planning of the ExCom's annual activities. It is per example important to know the EC work programme before discussing actions with the DG MARE and drafting the AAC Strategic Plan.

2.4 AAC Strategic Plan

The layout and the content of the AAC Strategic Plan should be revised to consider the proposals referred to above and a protocol with milestones for its preparation and adoption should be developed.

3. Statutes and Rules of Procedure

The AAC statutes and Rules of Procedure includes the following ExCom tasks:

- Propose AAC chair and vice-chairs.
- Convene the General Assembly.
- Establish Working Groups.
- Invite observers and experts.
- Propose amendments to the statutes and the Rules of Procedure.
- Decides on members classification (to be validated by the General Assembly).



- Prepare the annual report, the budget and the Strategic Plan.
- Adopt recommendations and suggestions.

4. Conclusion on ExCom strategic and tactical tasks

This document aims at improving the balance between ExCom strategic and tactical tasks, but it also introduces important (new) actions and measures aimed at improving the functioning of the AAC.

The ExCom annual wheel has been introduced. It includes the ExCom's legally binding tasks to ensure timely execution. Such tasks are considered as tactical.

The strategic tasks are divided into ad hoc and internal policy related tasks. An ad hoc task is 'closed' once the objective has been met whereas an internal policy task could be included in the annual wheel once it is considered operational.

The table below presents an overview on the note, that the strategic tasks are dynamic by nature and that the tables must be updated on a regular basis.

ExCom annual wheel (tactical tasks)
Annual report
Annual budget
Annual Strategic Plan
General Assembly
ExCom meetings
Inter-AC meetings
DG MARE meetings
EC grant (request and report)
Annual achievements
Annual Strategic Plan

ExCom Strategic tasks (AH: Ad hoc, IP: Internal policy)	
Evaluation CFP	Recommendation (AH)
Strategic Guidelines	Establish stronger link between the Strategic Guidelines and the Strategic Plan (IP)
	Consultation procedure for the Guidance Documents (AH)
	Recommendation mid-term assessment/consider previous recommendations (AH)
	Recommendation annual survey to Member States (IP)
Recommendations	Distinguish between own initiative and Strategic Guideline recommendations (IP)
	Select and follow up on prioritized recommendations (IP)



Independent perf. review	Document on internal policies/best practises (IP) Attune EC work programme with the Strategic Plan (IP)
Annual Strategic Plan	Revise lay-out and content (IP); develop protocol for preparation and adoption (IP)
Annual wheel	Include update on strategic tasks (IP)

Annex: Interrelated Commission, Member States/AAC actions in the Strategic Guidelines.

