Regional Coordination Group
Long Distance Fisheries

Regional Coordination Group
For Long Distance Fisheries

RCG LDF 2023 REPORT

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Acronyms

CECAF	Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy
CINEA	European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency
COM	Commission
CP	Contracting Parties
DCF	Data Collection Framework
DGMARE	Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
ECON	Economical issues
EU MAP	Multiannual Union Programme for data collection
EWG	Expert Working Group (of STECF)
ICES	International Council for the Exploration of the Sea
IMROP	Mauritanian Institute of Oceanographic Research and Fisheries
INRH	(Moroccan) National Institute of Fisheries Research
ISSG	Intersessional Subgroup
JSC	Joint Scientific Committee (of SFPA)
JC	Joint Committee (of SFPA)
LDAC	Long Distance Advisory Council
LDF	Long Distance Fisheries
LM	Liaison Meeting
MS	Member State
NAFO	Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organisation
NANSEA	North Atlantic, North Sea and Eastern Arctic
NC	National Correspondent
NPFC	North Pacific Fisheries Commission
NWP	National Work Plan
OP	Observer Programme
RCG	Regional Coordination Group
RCM	Regional Coordination Meeting
RDB	Regional Database
RDBES	Regional Database & Estimation System
RFMO	Regional Fisheries Management Organisation
RoP	Rules of Procedure
RWP	Regional Work Plan
SCS	Scientific Council Summary- NAFO
SFPA	Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement
SG	Sub Group
SMEFF	Sustainable Management of External Fishing Fleets (Regulation)
SPRFMO	South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation
SSC	Scientific Sub-Committee
STECF	Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries
WGRDBESGOV	ICES Working Group on RDBES Governance

1 Executive summary

The 2023 RCG LDF meeting was held in a physical form in **Palanga, Lithuania** from July 3rd to 6th.

The group reviewed the progress in regional coordination since 2022, the outcomes of the 19th Liaison Meeting and feedback from the end-users. The group also reviewed the Long Distance Fisheries activity by MS in CECAF, SPRFMO, NAFO and other areas with the use of updated 2022 data provided by MS through the Regional Database (RDB). Data were uploaded by MS to the Regional Database hosted by ICES in support of the RCG work.

It was noted that for the outermost regions (EU waters around French Guiana, Martinique and Guadeloupe islands (FAO area 31) and EU waters around Mayotte and La Réunion islands (FAO area 51)), no data is provided to this group. At the 2023 Liaison Meeting, the RCG LDF will address the lack of a designated body for these regions and will subsequently stress the delivery of the data in response to the 2024 call in order to achieve a comprehensive overview of the fisheries in the outermost regions.

In 2023, being the second year the RCG LDF dealt with the NAFO area, following a decision taken in 2021 to move the NAFO area under the realm of the RCG LDF, the Group continued to familiarize with NAFO procedures and MS activity in the NAFO area.

Based on an analysis of the updated fisheries overviews, the RCG LDF concluded that there is no need for amendments to the NWPs for 2024 and beyond in respect of the long distance fisheries in the areas of CECAF, SPRFMO and NAFO.

The EU accession to the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC) potentially adds new fishing areas to the competence of the RCG LDF and new needs for data collection coordination. However, as the EU fleet is not authorised yet to undertake any fishing operation in the NPFC area, there are no data collection needs yet.

In 2021, common RoP for RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic were adopted by the NC decision meeting in September. Following this decision, the RCG LDF reviewed the option to align its RoP with the common RoP to avoid the situation where one MS as a member of two or more RCGs would need to adhere to a different set of rules. The Group concluded that the current situation is not causing any conflicts for the MS.

The ISSG SPRFMO-OP continued its work in 2023 with a series of online meetings to address a newly required SPRFMO observer programme accreditation procedure to prepare for data collection in the SPRFMO area beyond 2024. Based on the plan of action for the OP accreditation process implementation, which was developed by this ISSG and which was accepted by COM and MS concerned in 2022, NLD, DEU, LTU and POL cooperate under the leadership of NLD to obtain SPRFMO accreditation for the EU Observer Programme. In January 2022, the EU delegation has formally announced at the SPRFMO 10th annual session the intention to start the accreditation process.

The group discussed suggestion from STECF EWG 23-08 that MS should report the achievements under multilateral agreements in their respective Annual Reports, even when that particular MS did not conduct the respective sampling., In contrast, the RCG LDF recommends that only the MS that conducted the sampling under a multilateral agreement should report on the achievements (*i.a.* in order to avoid multiple counting of samples) and the MSs participating in the agreement, but not having conducted the sampling, refer to the MS' Annual Report being responsible for the sampling. The RCG LDF also suggests that the guidance on reporting achievements under multilateral agreements in the Annual Reports should be revised to clearly refer to the MS having conducted the sampling.

No recommendations were proposed by the RCG LDF 2023.

The draft agreements on the extension of the CECAF and SPRFMO Multilateral Agreements will be proposed to the relevant NCs at the Decision Meeting in September 2023.

As the second term of the current chairmanship ends in 2023, the group unanimously elected **Maksims Kovsars** (LVA) as the new chair of the RCG LDF – to be formally approved by relevant NCs during the Decision Meeting in September 2023.

The next RCG LDF meeting is planned for early July 2024 (the week 2–5 of July or alternatively 9-12 July), and Spain kindly offered to host this meeting in Cadiz or Tenerife (t.b.d.). As a back-up options, Poland and The Netherlands also flagged the offer to host next RCG LDF meeting.

2 Introduction

2.1 General

After the online 2020-2021 RCG LDF meetings, the 2022 meeting was held in a hybrid format, with a group of participants attending the meeting physically and others connecting to the meeting through the online ZOOM communication platform. Based on the experience of meeting in hybrid mode and following discussion at the end of the 2022 meeting, the Group decided to hold next meeting in a physical form only.

The 2023 physical RCG LDF meeting took place in Palanga, Lithuania from July 3rd to 6th. All participants were greatly impressed by the great hospitality of the meeting hosts and the excellent technical working conditions, for which **the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania** is highly acknowledged.

The Group addressed all Terms of Reference set for the 2023 meeting and made an overview of the EU long distance fisheries over the previous year(s) in order to evaluate the scope for required regional coordination in the area of data collection. Based on the decision taken in 2021, the RCG LDF extended its geographical scope by including the NAFO area, and during both the 2022 and 2023 meetings, the Group overviewed the EU fishery in NAFO in the context of historical background and current status of sampling in this area.

The continued availability of a SharePoint hosted by **ICES** proved to be very efficient again in support of organising the work before, during and after the meeting. The ICES Datacentre is thanked for all RDB work carried out in preparation of this meeting and to facilitate the upload of RCG LDF data.

Thanks are also due to **the RCG's Secretariat** for very valuable organizational assistance before, during and after the meeting.

2.2 Legal requirements

2.2.1 Background of RCG LDF

The EU Data Collection Framework (DCF) establishes a framework for collecting economic, biological and transversal data by Member States (MS). This programme provides the basic data needed to evaluate the state of fishery resources and the fisheries sector.

Before the current Regulation, the RCG LDF (at that time RCM) stemmed from the Data Collection Framework (EC Regulation no. 199/2008), establishing a community framework for the collection, management and use of data in the fisheries sector for scientific advice regarding the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). According to this regulation and without prejudice to their current data collection obligations under Community law, Member States (MS) were obliged to collect primary biological, technical, environmental and socio-economic data within the framework of a multi-annual national programme drawn up in accordance with the Community programme.

According to EC Regulation 665/2008, laying down detailed rules for the application of Council Regulation (EC) 199/2008, and its technical Decision 2010/93/EU specifying practical aspects for data collection, actions planned by MS in their national programme should be presented according to the predefined regions.

The coordination of the data collection was recommended at regional level and specific meetings were in charge of facilitating this and these meetings aimed to identify areas for standardisation, collaboration and task sharing between MS. RCMs were held annually with participants from each MS involved in fishing activity in the respective region. Being an end-user, RCM LDF launched data calls to gather the information needed to complete its tasks.

From mid-2017 onwards, regulation 199/2008 was repealed and replaced by a new regulation. As a basic principle, the new Regulation (REGULATION (EU) 2017/1004) stipulates that "...Member States shall coordinate their data collection activities with other Member States in the same marine region and shall make every effort to coordinate their actions with third countries having sovereignty or jurisdiction over waters in the same marine region." Apart from the requirement to establish Regional Coordination Groups (see the following section), the Regulation also foresees the participation and contribution by the relevant MS as well as their respective National Correspondents. The EU data collection requirements were further detailed in Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2016/1251 (EU-MAP).

In 2019, this Decision was administratively transformed into two different decisions without any modifications to the actual obligations:

- Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2019/909 establishing the list of mandatory research surveys and thresholds for the purposes of the multiannual Union programme for the collection and management of data in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. Such decisions can be decided by the Commission directly; they do not need scrutiny by the European Parliament and the Council.
- Commission Delegated Decision (EU) 2019/910 establishing the multiannual Union programme for the collection and management of biological, environmental, technical and socioeconomic data in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. A delegated decision has to follow the normal procedure, i.e. it needs the scrutiny by the European Parliament and the Council.

The difference between the Delegated and Implementing decisions is of a legal nature. Delegated acts are legally binding acts that enable the Commission to supplement or amend non-essential parts of EU legislative acts, for example, in order to define detailed measures. The Commission adopts the delegated act and if Parliament and Council have no objections, it enters into force. Implementing acts are legally binding acts that enable the Commission – under the supervision of committees consisting of EU countries' representatives – to set conditions that ensure that EU laws are applied uniformly.

The above two Commission Decisions were revised and replaced by new Decisions in 2021:

- Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/1168 of 27 April 2021establishing the list of mandatory research surveys at sea and thresholds as part of the multiannual Union programme for the collection and management of data in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors from 2022.
- Commission Delegated Decision (EU) 2021/1167 of 27 April 2021 establishing the multiannual Union programme for the collection and management of biological, environmental, technical and socioeconomic data in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors from 2022.

2.2.2 Establishment of RCG LDF

In 2017 the RCG LDF held two meetings, and during the 2nd meeting, the requirement for a formal establishment of the RCG was discussed and concluded upon by all parties present at the meeting. This conclusion led to the following statement regarding the establishment of RCG LDF:

Having regard Article 9.2 of REGULATION (EU) 2017/1004, stipulating that regional coordination groups shall be established by the relevant Member States for each marine region, and, having considered all regions outside EU waters as a marine region and in continuation of the previous definition of the RCM marine regions and having relevant Member States present at a meeting succeeding the RCM LDF 2016, the Regional Coordination Group for Long Distance Fisheries has been established upon opening of the 2nd RCG LDF meeting on November 22, 2017 in Copenhagen, Denmark.

2.3 Terms of Reference

The following terms of reference were set for RCG LDF 2023:

1. **Review progress since 2022 following up the Liaison Meeting or other expert groups reports**

2. **Review feedback from end users**
   - CECAF/ SPRFMO / NAFO
   - Other input received

3. **Analyse data from 2022 RCG LDF data call**
   - Data compilation, providing overviews of fisheries
   - Consider inclusion of emerging fisheries
   - Feedback from WGRDBESGOV / comments on experience RDB upload

4. **Regional data collection, analysis and storage**
   - State of play of sampling in CECAF, SPRFMO and NAFO areas in 2022
   - Discuss possibility of new data collection requirements related to EU joining the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC)
   - Discuss potential implications of the SMEFF Regulation (Regulation 2017/2403 on the sustainable management of external fishing fleets)

5. **Future data collection set up in CECAF/SPRFMO/NAFO**
   - CECAF future data needs
   - Feedback from ISSG SPRFMO-OP on the EU Observer Programme accreditation procedure adopted by the SPRFMO
   - NAFO current and future data needs

6. **AOB**
   - Discuss relevant upcoming calls for tender, studies
   - Review option of harmonization/unification of the RCG LDF RoP with RoPs of other RCGs
   - Election of a new chair
   - Place and date of the next RCG LDF:

2.4 Structure of the report

ToR addressed by the 2023 RCG LDF meeting are referred to in the following sections of the report.

ToR 1 - in section 5

ToR 2 - in section 6

ToR 3 - in section 3

ToR 4 - in section 7

ToR 5 - in section 8

ToR 6 - in section 9

Recommendations/Decisions stemming from this group are summarised in section 10.

2.5 Participants and agenda

The agenda of the meeting is included in Annex 1 and list of participants is provided in Annex 2.

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3 2023 RCG LDF data call (ToR 3)

3.1 Response to 2023 data call

Prior to the 2023 annual RCG LDF meeting, a data call was lauched to collect landings and effort data. In 2022, the RCG LDF stated that: "*As a baseline, from 2023 onwards, only the MS contributing to the relevant areas under the remit of the RCG LDF (based on the 2022 response) will be asked yearly, while the data call is expanded to all non-landlocked MS once every three years. The next data call addressing all non-landlocked MS will be in 2025.*" In line with this statement, a selection of MS (See table 3.1.1) was addressed with the 2023 call. The 2023 data call was sent to all National Correspondents of these MS. The data call requests to upload the data into the RCG Regional Database (RDB), hosted and maintained by ICES in Copenhagen.

The call was launched on May 24th while setting the deadline for submission at June 26th. As in previous years, a request for an active response indicating the absence of long-distance fisheries was also included in the data call and a specific request to also upload data when only a few vessels are active in the region.

The following list provides a general overview of the responses received by RCG LDF. This overview doesn't discriminate between the various types of responses received. Some contributions were updated beyond the deadline for various reasons, however, this was not considered a major issue as the work could be completed in time. MS are reminded that data can be updated throughout the year, and MS are encouraged to do so where applicable. In particular, some MS still may update historic data.

Table 3.1.1 Overview of 2023 data call response

MS	Response (Y/N)	Activity last year (Y/N)	Data provided (Y/N)
Belgium	No request 2023	NA	NA
Bulgaria	No request 2023	NA	NA
Croatia	No request 2023	NA	NA
Cyprus	No request 2023	NA	NA
Denmark	No request 2023	NA	NA
Estonia	Y	Y	Y
Finland	No request 2023	NA	NA
France	No request 2023	NA	NA
Germany	Y	Y	Y
Greece	No request 2023	NA	NA
Ireland	No request 2023	NA	NA
Italy	Y	Y	Y
Latvia	Y	Y	Y
Lithuania	Y	Y	Y
Malta	No request 2023	NA	NA
Netherlands	Y	Y	Y
Poland	Y	Y	Y
Portugal	Y	Y	Y
Romania	No request 2023	NA	NA
Slovenia	No request 2023	NA	NA
Spain	Y	Y	Y
Sweden	No request 2023	NA	NA

3.2 Sampling obligations facilitating future multi-annual work plan, including emerging fisheries

Analysis of data uploaded to the RDB allows to detect if there are any substantial changes in fishing pattern or volume of landings for those stocks which are not currently subject to data collection and cross-checking this data with the DCF obligations enables to conclude if any emerging fisheries should be included in the future data collection programme.

In 2021, the RCG LDF has identified the need to extend the sampling program to new stocks as a result of the EU acceding the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC). Those MS whose vessels are planned to enter this new fishery should analyze the scope of the fishery data that NPFC requires to collect prior to commencing fishing. Once it is known which MS' vessels will be active in this new region, the issue of coordination of activities will be analyzed by the RCG LDF.

3.3 Data compilation, providing overviews of fisheries

Based on the RDB data and based on the work done by the intersessional subgroup (ISSG) on fisheries and sampling overviews, the RCG LDF produced standardized annual fisheries overviews with graphs and maps, to get more information out of the data available. The future structure of the overviews will be discussed intersessionally.

All the tables from section 4 of this report are prepared with the use of a dedicated script. The tables are being produced on a yearly basis, so by using an automatic way of filling the tables, a huge amount of time is saved. Preparing these tables in advance of the meeting lowers the workload of the participants significantly, allowing them to focus mainly on the data analysis.

Regarding the future work on the overviews, the main point of focus is to adjust the script by using new data format of RDBES. Additionally, for better comparison between designated regions, harmonization of the graphs and maps is necessary.

To make the overviews as useful as possible, it is extremely important that the MS upload their data to the Regional Database. All countries should include the information on the Subpolygon in the data provided as this will allow to carry out more detailed spatial analysis.

The current RDB catch and effort overview for the RCG LDF can be found on the SharePoint site – "RCG_LDF_annual_overview_2022_final".

3.4 Comments on experience with RDB upload

In the past, the RCG LDF commented on issues concerning the overwriting rules for data uploads to the RDB. The RCG LDF requested the WGRDBESGOV to seek a solution allowing to upload landings data for the same country/species/area combination for different regions. The WGRDBESGOV addressed the issue, and from 2022 onwards, the overwriting rules have been adjusted in line with the RCG LFD request. Also, species lists have been updated to facilitate the upload of data by MS.

However, the above issues concerning overwriting rules do not seem to effectively address the concerns of all Member States concerned. For Spain and Portugal, some discrepancies have been detected in several métiers while comparing the data provided to the RDB and those downloaded directly from the RDB concerning the 2014-2018 data. These discrepancies suggest that the renewed data provision is not fully

included as an update to existing RDB data and old data seem to remain in the RDB. The ICES data centre was asked to study the issue. Pending the outcomes, the data provided in this report shall be treated with care and by no means be used as official data. As the differences are relatively limited, it is not anticipated that the differences will have an effect on data collection obligations.

Also, it should be noted that the whole series from 2014-2022 will be resubmitted next year due to missing data from the Canary Islands. Moreover, it is anticipated that MS will be requested to resubmit their time series in full when the transition to the RDBES has taken place (see section 3.7 on the 2024 RCG data call).

Metier assignment

Criteria of metier assignment in the artisanal fishery from the Canaries were recently updated. The main problem with the allocation of fishing trips to métiers is the existence of a highly polyvalent fleet where three metiers (for fishing small pelagics, demersal fish and tuna) can be used in the same fishing trip. This cannot be easily uploaded to the RDB as, according to the RDB exchange format, a trip can only be assigned to one of the metiers. New data from the Canary Islands was expected to be uploaded for the period 2016-2018, but due to the complex process of métier assignment, this task had to be postponed. The process of metier assignment was completed for the years 2019-2021, but it is still under analysis for the previous years (2014-2018). The new RDBES exchange format, which will be compulsory in 2024, allows to allocate metiers on the haul level. In addition, no data have been provided for 2022 due to internal issues. It has therefore been decided to postpone it to the following year and provide the full time series for these fisheries (2014-2018 & 2022-2023).

Species

Although the species reference tables have been updated after being reported in Annex 3 of the RCG LDF 2022 report, a total number of 111 bycatch species of the Spanish demersal fisheries was not uploaded with the species name for the period 2014-2022. They were uploaded with the name of the closest taxa (genus, family, order), when possible. It was decided to wait for all the data to be uploaded once they are processed and to make the changes at the same time. A new list of species, complementary to the RCG LDF 2022 report, is provided in Annex 3.

3.5 Updates to RDB references

As in previous years, during the RCG LDF and the preparatory process, it became apparent that some references to species, ports and metiers were missing from the RDB, thus hampering complete uploads. As missing codes were identified during upload, ICES responded swiftly to any requests made directly by MS when uploading the data. These quick actions are much appreciated. Other issues became more apparent when analysing the data at the RCG LDF. The ICES WGRDBESGOV will be requested to discuss these omissions and to update the references.

Annex 3 provides the overview of references to be added to the RDB to facilitate both current as well as upcoming data uploads. Apart from the codes currently missing, in the near future, additional codes and references need to be included to prepare for the imminent expansion of the area of governance for this RCG, e.g. to include the North Pacific region.

3.6 Feedback from WGRDBESGOV

As a user, RCG LDF has a stake in the RDB developments and governance. The RCG LDF is therefore represented in the RDB Governance group: WGRDBESGOV. Over the past years, WGRDBESGOV addressed specific issues related to RCG LDF work and will continue to do so. At the most recent WGRDBESGOV meeting (December 2022), two recommendations were identified to be of direct relevance to RCG LDF, see table 3.6.1.

Table 3.6.1 Recommendations relevant to RCG LDF

Id	Year	Recommendation	Recipients
1	2023	To restart the ISSG Data Quality (on hold since 2022) to develop a procedure to check the quality and completeness of the data uploaded to the RDBES. This could be done in a similar way as the for the ICES VMS/Logbook data call, where a QC group run a script to generate a data quality report by country and send it to the NCs The RDBES core group has started working on this and checking the quality of CL and CE tables, but it needs to be further developed and extended to sampling data. The work done and the ideas for the future are explained in detail in section 4.3 of WGRDBESGOV report.	RCG NANSEA RCG Baltic RCG LDF
2	2023	To invite third Countries to the Technical Meeting, when RDBES related issues are addressed. In the past, some of the proposals and initiatives of the RCG regarding the RDBES, were hampered by the fact that only EU Countries participate in the RCG. Then, scripts and reports developed by the RCG could not be applied to the data of non-EU Countries, even if the subject of the analysis was a shared stock. This recommendation aims to overcome this obstacle.	RCG NANSEA RCG Baltic RCG LDF

RCG LDF response:

1: The RCG LDF discussed the recommendation, and in line with the response by RCGs NANSEA-Baltic, the RCG LDF is of the opinion that there is no added value in restarting the RCG ISSG on Quality aspects. Checking the quality of the data beyond the required standards needed to facilitate regional coordination is not within the remit of the RCGs but should remain the responsibility of the end users. Consequently, the RCG LDF concluded not to (re) start the ISSG.

2: The RCG LDF discussed the recommendation and sees the rationale for it regarding stocks under the remit of ICES where third countries take part in the advisory process and their data is uploaded to the RDB(ES) while not being represented in the RGCs. For RCG LDF purposes, third countries are not of relevance in terms of coordinating EU data collection activities, nor is their data included in the RDB(ES) for advisory purposes. Thus, the RCG LDF doesn't see the need to invite third countries for this specific issue. Notwithstanding the aforementioned decision and in line with the RCG RoP, third countries having an interest in RCG LDF activities are welcome to join the RCG as an observer.

Apart from the direct recommendations to the RCG LDF, the WGRDBESGOV discussed various topics of direct and indirect relevance to this group. The main change having an impact on the RCG LDF work is the

transition from RDB to RDBES from 2024 onwards. The foreseen change has been addressed in the planning of the 2024 data call (See section 3.7 below).

3.7 Preparation of 2024 data call

Despite the deadline in 2023, some data was still being updated beyond the deadline. However, the late updates didn't pose problems when processing the data. However, the RCG LDF, again, wishes to prepare the yearly data at an earlier stage prior to the meeting, to facilitate both a timely upload as well as to conduct preparatory work before the meeting (e.g. producing complete fisheries overviews). The deadlines should be set in line with the dates of the RCG LDF in 2024 and the provisions in the current DCF (1 month response time). Ideally, the deadline for data submission is 1 month before the meeting, as this will also allow ICES to contribute to the data extraction if needed while leaving sufficient time to prepare data and tables prior to the meeting. During the 2023 meeting, some MS indicated that an earlier deadline may pose problems as they await LDF data from vessels coming in the mid-second quarter.

Pending the move to RDBES, the 2024 data call will request, at a minimum, data from 2017 onwards but will invite MS to deliver/update older data to the RBD when possible. As in previous years, MS are continuously encouraged to upload data (and update when needed) prior to the RCG data call. This will allow for a less stressful upload, and once done, only last year's data needs to be uploaded, which should be a routine job by then. Prior to the data call, a quick scan of the Eurostat database will be done by the RCG LDF data coordinator to explore potential new areas to be highlighted in the call.

The current RDB(ES) roadmap foresees a transition to the RDBES in 2024. Should this roadmap be in force, the RDB will only be available for downloads from 2024 onwards, thus allowing future comparisons of the times series provided. To avoid discrepancies e.g. between metiers etc., and having to shoehorn old data into the new format, the RCG LDF requests MS that provided data up to 2023 to provide all data to the new RDBES, as far back in time as possible. This will also allow for alignment with the most up-to-date metier codification. This opinion has evolved from the 2022 meeting, where RCG LDF indicated to strive to a full transition of historic data. Should new fisheries emerge or MS re-engage in previous activities, MS are requested to provide data in the RDBES as far back in time as possible. Repository for storing metier codes, reference lists for species, script, reports is RCGs/Metiers at master · ices-eg/RCGs · GitHub

In general, once the RDB is phased out (not foreseen before 2027), RCG LDF will store a full extraction of the data to secure future availability of the data.

The RCG LDF briefly discussed the inclusion of requesting data from all outermost regions as listed under Table 1 of COM Decision 2021/1167. This decision does not refer to the RCG LDF as the responsible body, yet data from EU waters around Madeira and Canary Islands (FAO area 34.1.2) is provided in response to the current call. The main reason being located in FAO area 34 (CECAF). For the other outermost regions mentioned in Table 1 (EU waters around French Guiana, Martinique and Guadeloupe islands (FAO area 31) and EU waters around Mayotte and La Réunion islands (FAO area 51)), no data is provided to this group. At the 2023 Liaison Meeting, the RCG LDF will address the lack of a designated body for these regions and will subsequently stress the delivery of the data in response to the 2024 call in order to achieve a comprehensive overview of the fisheries in the outermost regions.

4 Review of EU Long Distance Fisheries activities

4.1 CECAF area

After the RCM LDF 2015 decision of including "Canary Islands" as a new fishing ground, the three fishing grounds considered for CECAF are:

FISHING GROUND	Area	FAO divisions
Madeira	EU waters	34.1.2
Canary Islands		
West Africa	Non-EU waters	34.1.1; 34.1.3; 34.3.1, 34.3.3, 34.3.6, 47*

** Note that the fishing ground where the EU is operating in Angola (FAO 47.1.1, 47.1.2 and part of 47.1.3) is considered in CECAF area of competence, as de facto situation.*

In Madeira and the Canaries, only Portuguese and Spanish vessels, respectively, operate and the fisheries/metiers are already included in respective National Work Plans and therefore, coordination between MS on data collection is not needed.

Fishery data are presented separately for the three Fishing grounds: "West Africa", "Madeira" and "Canary Islands".

FISHING GROUND "WEST AFRICA"

The information below describes the general types of fisheries in the relevant West African CECAF areas by MS (2022) as an overview of the CECAF fisheries carried out by EU fleets. Some fisheries cover very large areas along the West African shelf. As non-EU countries also conduct fisheries in this area, the catches taken by vessels of EU MS constitute only a part of the total catches.

Demersal fisheries are mainly carried out by the Spanish fleet, with a limited activity of other countries such as Italy, Portugal and Greece, being Spain and Italy, the only MS reporting their activity for 2022. The other EU MS (The Netherlands, Poland, Germany, Latvia and Lithuania) are operating pelagic trawlers in a small pelagic fishery, currently developed in waters off Morocco and Mauritania and with fishing possibilities in Guinea-Bissau. In addition, there is a fleet of Spanish purse seiners targeting small pelagics in North-Morocco and two Spanish demersal vessels that have operated as pelagic trawlers very occasionally in Mauritania and/ or Guinea-Bissau, using fishing licences for small pelagics. An overview of species fished by EU MS in the CECAF area in 2022 is presented in "*RCG_LDF_annual_overview_2022_final*" available on the RCG's SharePoint.

In most cases, EU fisheries have been carried out in this area under bilateral Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs) between the EU and the coastal States. However, there are other fisheries developed in the CECAF area, under direct authorizations (SMEFF regulation), independent from these SFPAs. This is the case of the demersal fisheries carried out by Spanish vessels in Guinea, Congo, Angola, Sierra Leone (and

previously The Gambia[1]), reported for the first time in the RCG 2019. Likewise, the participation of Italy in the RCG LDF 2020 for the first time allowed to clarify that reported Italian demersal fisheries in CECAF waters during the period 2015-2019 were mostly carried out in Guinea and Sierra Leone, under direct authorization regime. In 2021, fisheries in Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau were developed within SFPAs while fisheries in Guinea, Sierra Leone, Congo and Angola were carried out under direct authorizations.

Table 4.1.1 General types of fisheries in relevant CECAF areas by MS (2022 data)

FISHING GROUNDS	FISHERY	AREA	COUNTRIES
West Africa	Small pelagic	Morocco and/or Mauritania	Lithuania, Latvia, Germany, The Netherlands, Poland, Spain
	Demersal fish	Angola*, **	Spain
	Demersal fish	Morocco	Spain
	Demersal fish	Mauritania	Spain
	Demersal fish	Senegal	Spain
	Demersal fish	The Gambia	Spain
	Crustaceans	Congo*	Spain
	Crustaceans	Angola*, **	Spain
	Crustaceans	Guinea-Bissau	Spain
	Crustaceans	Mauritania	Spain
	Cephalopods-finfish	Guinea-Bissau	Spain
	Demersal fish	Guinea-Bissau	Italy
Madeira	Deep-water species	Madeira	Portugal
	Small pelagic		
	Demersal fish		
	Molluscs (cephalopods & limpets)		
Canary	Small pelagics Demersal species	Canary Islands	Spain

** Fisheries developed with direct authorizations.*

*** Angola (FAO 47) is considered in CECAF area of competence, as de facto situation.*

The responsibility for coordination of research activities in the area, stock assessments and providing scientific advice for stock management lies with the Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (CECAF). In addition, the Joint Scientific Committees (JSCs) of the SFPAs between the EU and the partner countries

[1] Spanish vessels operated under direct authorisations regime until the signature of the new Agreement and the relevant Protocol between the EU and The Gambia in July 2019, within which a new fishing category for deep water trawlers targeting black hake is allowed.

(Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau) play an important role in setting an independent scientific cooperation framework between the EU and the coastal states. For the SFPA EU-The Gambia, the idea is to set up a JSC that will be joint with the EU-Senegal JSC.

The situation of the SFPAs, by country, is described in the following sections:

Morocco[2]
The current SFPA was signed in March 2019, together with the relevant protocol for a duration of 4 years. Although this protocol establishes the same fishing categories as the previous one (Categories 1 to 6), catch limits for Category 6 (pelagic trawlers fishing for small pelagic species) are now established with monthly and annual ceilings. The SFPA expires 17th of July 2023.

Mauritania[3]
The last SFPA between the EU and Mauritania and its implementing Protocol was signed in December 2021, allowing some métiers included in the EU Data Collection Framework to be used for a six years period.

Senegal[4]
The last Protocol in the framework of the relevant SFPA between the EU and Senegal was signed in November 2019 for a duration of 5 years, including fishing possibilities for trawlers targeting black hake.

The Gambia[5]
A new SFPA between the EU and The Gambia was signed in July 2019 and the relevant Protocol will last for a period of 6 years. Fishing opportunities for black hake trawlers are also included.

Guinea-Bissau[6]
The current Protocol on the implementation of the SFPA between the EU and Guinea-Bissau was signed in June 2019 for the period 2019-2024. In addition to the previously existing categories (finfish/cephalopods, shrimps, tuna), it includes a new category of vessels targeting small pelagics with pelagic trawls, which has not been used so far.

The following tables, based on the data provided to the RCG LDF by MS, show the main fishing activities aggregated over the entire CECAF North and South fishing areas, i.e. including both SFPA and SMEFF activities. Table 4.1.2 shows total fishing effort (from 2020 to 2022). Tables under 4.1.3 show total landings for each year from 2014 to 2022.

[2] https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/fisheries/international-agreements/sustainable-fisheries-partnership-agreements-sfpas/morocco_en
[3] https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/fisheries/international-agreements/sustainable-fisheries-partnership-agreements-sfpas/mauritania_en
[4] https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/fisheries/international-agreements/sustainable-fisheries-partnership-agreements-sfpas/senegal_en
[5] https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/fisheries/international-agreements/sustainable-fisheries-partnership-agreements-sfpas/gambia_en
[6] https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/fisheries/international-agreements/sustainable-fisheries-partnership-agreements-sfpas/guinea-bissau_en

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Table 4.1.2 Effort (fishing days) by country and metiers from 2020 to 2022(Fishing ground: "West Africa").

Metier_lvl6	Country	2020	2021	2022
LLS_DEF_0_0_0	ESP	1066	831	900
LLS_DEF_0_0_0	PRT	54		
LLS_DEF_6_0_0	ESP	69	34	27
MIS_DEF_0_0_0	ESP	190	282	314
OTB_CRU_>=40_0_0	ESP	6643	6868	7631
OTB_DEF_>=70_0_0	ESP	1528	1895	1662
OTB_DEF_>=70_0_0	ITA	710	639	563
OTB_DEF_>=80_0_0	ESP	287	139	
OTB_MCF_>=70_0_0	ESP	1168	990	712
OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	DEU	108	119	84
OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	ESP	246		
OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	LTU	612	518	567
OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	LVA	643	525	626
OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	NLD	231	441	415
OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	POL	62		6
PS_SPF_0_0_0	ESP	526	199	31

Table 4.1.3 Landings (tons) by country and metiers from 2014 to 2022 (Fishing ground: "West Africa").

Metier 2014	DEU	ESP	LTU	LVA	NLD	POL
LLS_DEF_0_0_0		1750				
LLS_DEF_6_0_0		296				
MIS_DEF_0_0_0		48				
OTB_CRU_>=40_0_0		4879				
OTB_DEF_>=70_0_0		5138				
OTB_DEF_>=80_0_0		11947				
OTB_MCF_>=70_0_0*		5681				
OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	5837	6918	103084	57560	72819	36314
PS_SPF_0_0_0		4				

Metier 2015	DEU	ESP	ITA	LTU	LVA	NLD	POL
LLS_DEF_0_0_0		1306					
LLS_DEF_6_0_0		456					
MIS_DEF_0_0_0		244					
OTB_CRU_>=40_0_0		4142					
OTB_DEF_>=70_0_0		6841	569				
OTB_DEF_>=80_0_0		18582					
OTB_MCF_>=70_0_0		19152					
OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	18096			47294	14303	18373	16493
OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0				22			
PS_SPF_0_0_0		1395					

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Metier 2016	DEU	ESP	ITA	LTU	LVA	NLD	POL
LLS_DEF_0_0_0		2798					
LLS_DEF_6_0_0		273					
MIS_DEF_0_0_0		100					
OTB_CRU_>=40_0_0		4055					
OTB_DEF_>=70_0_0		10006	505				
OTB_DEF_>=80_0_0		8095					
OTB_MCF_>=70_0_0		33514					
OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	20607			67615	47742	39226	30464
PS_SPF_0_0_0		696					

Metier 2017	DEU	ESP	ITA	LTU	LVA	NLD	POL
LLS_DEF_0_0_0		2714					
LLS_DEF_6_0_0		186					
MIS_DEF_0_0_0		89					
OTB_CRU_>=40_0_0		5942					
OTB_DEF_>=70_0_0		12723	2111				
OTB_DEF_>=80_0_0		4215					
OTB_MCF_>=70_0_0		26946					
OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	24614			41119	48730	32997	12531
PS_SPF_0_0_0		1674					

Metier 2018	DEU	ESP	IRL	ITA	LTU	LVA	NLD	PRT
LLS_DEF_0_0_0		2141						119
LLS_DEF_6_0_0		52						
MIS_DEF_0_0_0		56						
OTB_CRU_>=40_0_0		4964						
OTB_DEF_>=70_0_0		19931		2033				
OTB_DEF_>=80_0_0		5233						
OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	22180	740			32107	62320	18562	
OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0			746					
PS_SPF_0_0_0		728						

Metier 2019	DEU	ESP	ITA	LTU	LVA	NLD	PRT
LLS_DEF_0_0_0		3049					92
LLS_DEF_6_0_0		15					
MIS_DEF_0_0_0		56					
OTB_CRU_>=40_0_0		5469					
OTB_DEF_>=70_0_0		15634	1514				
OTB_DEF_>=80_0_0		4501					
OTB_MCF_>=70_0_0		6615					
OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	16303	782		67306	39514	19481	
PS_SPF_0_0_0		122					

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Metier 2020	DEU	ESP	ITA	LTU	LVA	NLD	POL	PRT
LLS_DEF_0_0_0		2308						42
LLS_DEF_6_0_0		8						
MIS_DEF_0_0_0		114						
OTB_CRU_>=40_0_0		4891						
OTB_DEF_>=70_0_0		10769	649					
OTB_DEF_>=80_0_0		5508						
OTB_MCF_>=70_0_0		7099						
OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	17631	2175		45308	38497	30399	2994	
PS_SPF_0_0_0		1101						

Metier 2021	DEU	ESP	ITA	LTU	LVA	NLD
LLS_DEF_0_0_0		1479				
LLS_DEF_6_0_0		5				
MIS_DEF_0_0_0		188				
OTB_CRU_>=40_0_0		5306				
OTB_DEF_>=70_0_0		11238	1001			
OTB_DEF_>=80_0_0		2932				
OTB_MCF_>=70_0_0		4686				
OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	12056			38006	36529	31988
PS_SPF_0_0_0		430				

Metier 2022	DEU	ESP	ITA	LTU	LVA	NLD	POL
LLS_DEF_0_0_0		1244					
LLS_DEF_6_0_0		5					
MIS_DEF_0_0_0		219					
OTB_CRU_>=40_0_0		6501					
OTB_DEF_>=70_0_0		9752	724				
OTB_MCF_>=70_0_0		3268					
OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	9261			38691	38077	29515	265
PS_SPF_0_0_0		90					

As indicated in section 3.4, discrepancies on landings data are found in some Spanish metiers when comparing RDB and directly downloaded data for 2014-2018. This suggests that the updated data are not fully integrated and old data still exist. These discrepancies are especially noted for the metier OTB_MCF_>=70_0_0 where there are differences of thousands of tonnes.

Thus, considering only the period 2019-2022 for those Spanish metiers for which considerable differences are noted, we observe that the métier OTB_DEF_>=70_0_0 experienced a sharp decrease in landings from 2019 to 2020, keeping a relatively steady trend during the last three years, around 10,500 tons. The landings for OTB_CRU_>=40_0_0, which represents shrimper trawlers, progressively increased from around 4 000 tonnes in 2006 to a maximal value of 6 500 tonnes in 2022. Landings for OTB_MCF_>=70_0_0, representing cephalopod-finfish trawlers, experienced a steady decrease from around 7000 tons in 2020 to 3268 tons in 2022.

For artisanal fisheries fishing in Morocco, there was a significant decrease in landings for artisanal purse seiners (PS_SPF_0_0_0) in 2020-2022 and artisanal longliners, specifically LLS_DEF_6_0_0 from Spain and Portugal in 2019-2022, both attributed to a drop in fishing efforts in those respective periods. In 2021-2022, there were no Portuguese activities in this métier, and Spanish activity was very low. Landings from the metier LLS_DEF_0_0_0 (longliners in Mauritania) are extremely low since 2018, also linked to very low fishing effort.

For pelagic trawlers represented by the métier OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0, the landings steadily decreased since 2019 to values below 120 000 tonnes in 2021 and 2022.

The landing statistics in West African waters of the CECAF area from 2014 to 2022 show a significant drop in 2015, followed by an increase in 2016. However, from 2016 to 2022, there has been a consistent decreasing trend in landings. These changes can be attributed to variations in the catches of small pelagics in certain countries and the impact of the SFPAs, which resulted in periods of inactivity for EU vessels in specific years.

Table 4.1.4 Total EU landings (tons) in the West African waters of the CECAF area from 2014 to 2022. Data provided through the RDB.

Year	Total_EU_landings_t
2014	312275.6
2015	167269.3
2016	265697.4
2017	216591.5
2018	171911.0
2019	180453.6
2020	169493.9
2021	145843.5
2022	137611.5

Tables 4.1.5 – 4.1.6 show the results of métier ranking for effort and landings criteria respectively for EU fishing activity in the CECAF area. Although under the new DCF, effort is no longer a criterion for sampling obligations, effort distributions over the different metiers provide however insights in possible shifts in fishing activities.

Table 4.1.5 Percentage of average effort of the different metiers of EU fleets operating in the CECAF area (West Africa) (period 2020-2022). Calculation based on fishing days. Metiers are comparable to previous reports. Metiers included in the 90% threshold are marked in bold.

Metier	FishingDays	EffortPerc
OTB_CRU_>=40_0_0	**7047.33**	**51.07**
OTB_DEF_>=70_0_0	**2332.33**	**16.90**
OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	**1734.33**	**12.57**
OTB_MCF_>=70_0_0	**956.67**	**6.93**
LLS_DEF_0_0_0	**950.33**	**6.89**
MIS_DEF_0_0_0	262.00	1.90
PS_SPF_0_0_0	252.00	1.83
OTB_DEF_>=80_0_0	222.33	1.61
LLS_DEF_6_0_0	43.33	0.31

Table 4.1.6 Percentage of average landings (period 2020-2022) of different métiers operating in the CECAF area (West Africa). Métiers are comparable to previous reports. Métiers included in the 90% threshold are marked in bold.

Metier	LandingWeight_ton	LandingsPerc
OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	**123797.3**	**81.12**
OTB_DEF_>=70_0_0	**11377.4**	**7.46**
OTB_CRU_>=40_0_0	**5566.2**	**3.65**
OTB_MCF_>=70_0_0	5017.7	3.29
OTB_DEF_>=80_0_0	4431.5	2.90
LLS_DEF_0_0_0	1691.1	1.11
PS_SPF_0_0_0	540.3	0.35
MIS_DEF_0_0_0	173.7	0.11
LLS_DEF_6_0_0	6.0	0.00

According to the métier ranking, some changes were observed for 2022 as compared to previous years within the same metiers (Tab. 4.1.5 & 4.1.6). With regard to métier ranking for landings (Tab. 4.1.6), the métier OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0, targeting small pelagics, has slightly decreased by 0.1%. The métier OTB_DEF_>=70_0_0, targeting demersal fish, decreased also by about 0.54%. Both metiers together constitute 89% of the landings. Together with the metier OTB_MCF_>=70_0_0, targeting cephalopods, the threshold of 90% is exceeded and these three metiers are selected for sampling. In case of métier ranking for effort (Tab. 4.1.5), five métiers were selected for sampling, including four demersal métiers targeting crustaceans, cephalopods and demersal fish and one métier targeting small pelagics. The order of the three most important metiers has changed from 2021 to 2022. The effort of metier OTB_DEF_>=70_0_0 increased by 3.4% whereas the effort of the metier OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0 decreased by approximately 1.2%. Both metiers have changed places in the ranking. Other métiers targeting both small pelagics and demersal species were also included in previous years due to their relevance in CECAF fisheries and their inclusion in respective SFPAs fishing opportunities. Therefore, no major changes occurred in the métiers sampled during the period analyzed.

In order to know the sampling obligation of demersal stocks by the different Member States (MS) according to their shared proportion in total EU catches, the last three years of average landings of those stocks that are jointly fished by different MS and selected for sampling, were estimated and their proportions in the total EU landings calculated. The demersal stocks jointly fished by different MS are the southern pink shrimp *Penaeus notialis* (supposedly declared as *Holthuispenaeopsis atlantica* by Italy and as *Penaeus* spp. by Spain), the common octopus *Octopus vulgaris* and the cuttlefish *Sepia* spp. (*Sepia officinalis* and/or *Sepia hierredda*), fished by Spain and Italy. Following the 10% criteria (EU MAP), **Spain should continue sampling the three shared stocks considered. In addition, the proportion of *Sepia* spp and *O. vulgaris* fished by Italy in the last three years was higher than 10% and Italy should therefore consider these for sampling.** Italian data for 2019-2022 were based on licences for cephalopod-finfish (category 1 of the SFPA) in Guinea-Bissau in year 2022.

An overview of species fished by EU MS in West African waters of the CECAF area in 2022 is presented in "*RC_ LDF_annual_overview_2022_final*".

FISHING GROUND "CANARY"

The data of the Canary artisanal fleet was available for 2019-2021 for the first time through the RDB. After having faced some problems related to the allocation of fishing effort to the three different metiers established in the Canary Islands (small pelagics, demersal and tuna), criteria for metier allocation of effort from artisanal fleets were standardized in 2022. The difficulty of this issue relies on the high polyvalence of the fleet involved, which uses a large set of traditional fishing gears (multi-gear) and targets a high variety of species (multispecies). The Canary fleet mostly operates under the minor-gear license, which allows fishermen to use several gears in the same fishing trip, in a way that even the three métiers (small pelagics, demersal and tuna) can be developed in one single fishing trip.

Data already provided for 2014-2018 (Tables 4.1.7 and 4.1.8) might need further correction according to the new metier allocation criteria. This work is still ongoing and these data is expected to be provided next year along with the 2023 data which couldn't be provided this year due to technical issues. Data for 2022 are shown although they were not provided to the RDB due to the same technical issues. These data will be provided in the coming months.

Efforts of both the demersal metier MIS_DES_0_0_0 and purse seiners (PS_SPF_10_0_0) show a decreasing trend since 2019 to 2022. While landings of the demersal metier follow the same decreasing trend than effort, a slight increase can be noted for landing of small pelagics.

Table 4.1.7 Effort (fishing days) by metiers for the Canary Islands. 2014-2022.

Country	Métier (level 6)	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
ESP	PS_SPF_10_0_0	2716	3462	3403	4068	2693	3597	3084	2819	2554
	MIS_DES_0_0_0	29206	28775	28833	29102	32328	32259	31635	32959	30793

Table 4.1.8 Landings (tons) by metiers for the Canary Islands. 2014 to 2022.

Country	MÉTIER (level 6)	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
ESP	PS_SPF_10_0_0	1965	2165	2406	2780	1897	1484	1525	1650	1513
	MIS_DES_0_0_0	1079	1063	1030	1599	2380	1819	1479	1260	1248

FISHING GROUND "MADEIRA"

The archipelago of Madeira is characterised by a narrow insular shelf, oligotrophic waters and steep slope. These bio-geographical features have always imposed limitations on fishing, since target species population biomass is reduced, particularly in the neritic zone (until *ca.* 200m). Consequently, the Madeiran fishing fleet operates mainly offshore, though still inside its Economic Exclusive Zone (FAO 34.1.2), targeting mainly deepwater species and/or migratory fishing resources.

Monthly sampling was conducted for the métiers LLD_DWF_0_0_0 (drifting longlines targeting deep water fish, mainly *Aphanopus* spp.), LLS_FIF_0_0_0 (set longlines targeting finfish species, mainly Sparidae and Serranidae), PS_SPF_16_0_0 (purse seine for small pelagic fishes) and MIS_MOL_0_0_0 (several gears

targeting limpets *Patella aspera* and *Patella ordinaria*) by the artisanal fleet around the Madeira archipelago in 2022.

In 2022, approximately 34% of the total fishing effort of Madeira was accomplished with the metier LLD_DWF_0_0_0 (Table 4.1.9). The landings of finfish operated with the metier LLS_FIF_0_0_0 represented 18% of the total, and the catches performed by the metier MIS_MOL_0_0_0 represented 7%.

Table 4.1.9 Effort (fishing days) by metiers for Madeira. 2014-2022.

Country	Métier	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
PT	FPO_FIF_30_0_0*	130	146	157	362	304	255	207	278	231
	LHP_FIF_0_0_0*	340	560	801	841	934	1071	790	492	310
	LHP_SPF_0_0_0*	15	23	54	7	37		64	6	
	LLD_DWF_0_0_0*	4266	4473	3992	4217	3640	4078	3391	2113	2342
	LLS_FIF_0_0_0*	921	954	866	1241	1626	1326	997	1210	1265
	LLS_MOL_0_0_0*	21		13	1		12	16	7	
	LLS_SPF_0_0_0*	19						39	28	
	MIS_FIF_0_0_0	19	13	7						
	MIS_MOL_0_0_0*	537	893	655	661	581	536	586	517	492
	MIS_SPF_0_0_0	29	57	96						
	PS_SPF_16_0_0*	531	600	614	561	543	622	278	247	223
	FPO_CRU_30_0_0			2	10					
	LHP_MOL_0_0_0*			9	43	25	11	58	27	68

*There are inconsistencies between landing data extracted from the RDB and the ones uploaded by Madeira. Data from these years and metiers are highly overestimated from the real data (see section 3.4).

The metier LLD_DWF_0_0_0 targeting black and intermediate scabbard fishes represented approximately 55% of the total landings in 2022 (Table 4.1.10). Small pelagic fishes (*Trachurus picturatus* and *Scomber colias*) represented 8%, apart from tuna which represented 32% of the total catches. Despite representing only 2% of total landings, the demersal fish fishery (LLS_FIF_0_0_0, LHP_FIF_0_0_0), takes on an important economic value in local markets.

Concerning the métier MIS_MOL_0_0_0 targeting limpets, which also represented 2% of total landings, monthly sampling was only conducted from April to October in order to comply with the regional legislation in force (e.g. closed season from November to March).

Table 4.1.10 Landings (tons) by metiers for Madeira. 2014-2022.

Country	Métier	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
PT	FPO_FIF_30_0_0	1	2	2	5	5	2	4	8	5
	LHP_FIF_0_0_0	4	6	9	15	27	34	24	25	13
	LHP_SPF_0_0_0	<1	<1	1	<1	<1	NA	1	<1	NA
	LLD_DWF_0_0_0	1983	1918	1965	2252	2232	2292	2155	1882	2269
	LLS_FIF_0_0_0	27	31	24	42	65	53	41	92	76
	LLS_MOL_0_0_0	<1		<1	<1		<1	<1	<1	
	LLS_SPF_0_0_0	<1						2	1	
	MIS_FIF_0_0_0	<1	<1	<1						
	MIS_MOL_0_0_0	73	150	119	108	79	74	96	82	80
	MIS_SPF_0_0_0	1	1	1						
	PS_SPF_16_0_0	516	772	953	472	432	452	226	283	334
	FPO_CRU_30_0_0			<1	<1					
	LHP_MOL_0_0_0			<1	2	1	<1	1	1	3

The landings of deep water species increased approximately 17% in relation to 2021. The opposite trend in landings was verified for demersal fish (LHP_FIF_0_0_0 and LLS_FIF_0_0_0) with a decrease of 24% in relation to the previous year.

An overview of species fished by Portugal in Madeira during 2022 is presented in "*RCG_LDF_annual_overview_2022_final*".

4.2 SPRFMO area

EU fleet activities in the SPFRMO area are reported since 2012. In 2013, only one vessel under the Lithuanian flag was active with a negligible landings volume. In 2014, two EU vessels (one under DEU and one under NLD flag) were fishing in the SPRMFO area. In 2015, Dutch and Lithuanian fisheries were reported (and sampled under the sampling agreement between Poland, Lithuania, Germany and The Netherlands) in the SPRFMO area. Two fishing vessels were engaged in this area in 2016 (under DEU and POL flags) and in 2017 (under NLD and LTU flags). Only one fishing vessel was actively fishing in this area both in 2018 (LTU flag) and in 2019 (POL flag). In 2020, the entire EU quota was transferred to Chile. For this reason, no activities of EU vessels took place in the SPRFMO area in 2020. Three EU vessels (under DEU, LTU and POL flags) were active in this area in 2021. In 2022, only two EU vessels (POL and LTU flags) were fishing in this area. Based on information received directly from the vessels' operator, four EU vessels are planning to fish in the SPRFMO area in 2023.

Until 2018, the effort (in fishing days) and landing data from the SPRFMO area were provided by MS to the RCG LDF in Excel files. For the 2019 RCG LDF meeting, data were provided in a mixed form, some in Excel files and some were uploaded to the RDB. In reply to the 2022 and 2023 data calls regarding fishing activity, data related to the fishery in the SPRFMO area were uploaded to the RDB.

Table 4.2.1 SPRFMO small pelagic fishery effort (fishing days) by country from 2014 to 2022.

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020*	2021	2022
DEU	218		180					177	
NLD	151	108	33	133					
LTU		87		186	131			40	146
POL			39			87		98	117

Table 4.2.2 SPRFMO small pelagic fishery total landings (tons) by country from 2014 to 2022.

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020*	2021	2022
DEU	10669		9935					16700	
NLD	10223	11045		13414					
LTU		13756		16020	10235			9034	32400
POL			2751			12293		29663	31851

* No fishing activity by the EU vessels in 2020, as the whole EU quota for *Trachurus murphyi* was transferred to Chile.

An overview of species fished by EU MS in the SPRFMO area in 2022 is presented in "*RCG_LDF_annual_overview_2022_final*".

4.3 NAFO area

Following a recommendation from the RCG NANSEA, a decision was taken in 2021 to move the NAFO area under the realm of the RCG LDF.

The RCG LDF started to become familiar with NAFO procedures and MS activity in the NAFO area. At the moment, there is no specific document on the data needs of NAFO or the Scientific Council. Unlike ICES, NAFO does not hold a database with all the biological raw data. Those data are with the national institutions or with the designated experts for each stock. The RDBES could be utilised in the future to provide NAFO with those data.

An RCG LDF subgroup on NAFO continued their work of characterizing the EU fleet/fisheries in the NAFO area, identifying the countries involved, métiers, species, catches and sampling. An overview of effort and landings by EU MS in the NAFO area, based on RDB data, was presented in the RCG LDF 2022 report. This year, the overview of targeted species and stocks were looked into (Table 4.3.1). MS are targeting the same stocks, but it is not reflected in the metier tables, as different metiers are used for describing similar fisheries.

The problem with using different overlapping metiers will be solved in the near future when all data will be stored in the new RDBES database where non-overlapping metiers are agreed.

Table 4.3.1. Landing data from 2021 in tonnes from FAO Area 21 by country and by assessed stock. Combined landings from non-EU countries and EU share of total landings is also presented. Stocks in grey background are under moratorium in 2022. Green cells indicate that biological sampling is done for the stock (EU share in 2021 landings, calculated based on NAFO STATLANT 21A, using the NAFO Data Extraction tool on 4 of July 2023).

Species	Stock	DEU	ESP	EST	LTU	PRT	Non-EU contries	EU share in 2021 landings
American plaice (*Hippoglossoides platessoides*)	3LNO		140	77		89	699	30%
American plaice (*Hippoglossoides platessoides*)	3M		16	18		47	1	99%
Cod (*Gadus morhua*)	3M		86	68		676	1 196	41%
Cod (*Gadus morhua*)	3NO		68	49		140	191	57%
Greenland halibut (*Reinhardtius hippoglossoides*)	SA 0 + 1 Offshore	1 673					34 763	5%
Greenland halibut (*Reinhardtius hippoglossoides*)	SA 2+ 3KLMNO		4 515	515		2 553	7 612	50%
Redfish (*S. mentella and S. fasciatus*)	3LN		441	707		3 238	6 718	39%
Redfish (*S. mentella and S. fasciatus*)	3M		1 688	685		5 445	327	96%
Redfish (*S. mentella and S. fasciatus*)	3O		802	315		2 810	744	84%
Roughhead grenadier (*Macrourus berglax*)	SA 2+3		82	46		6	71	65%
Northern prawn (*Pandalus borealis*)	3M		16		1 588	20	3 067	35%
Skates	3LNOPs		2 901	26		260	842	79%
Squid (Illex spp)	SA 3+4		17	9		54	10 591	1%
White hake (*Urophycis tenuis*)	3NOPs		270	2		94	295	55%
Witch flounder (*Glyptocephalus cynoglossus*)	3NO		23	22		3	471	9%
Wolffish (Anarhichas spp)	SA 1	4					263	2%
Yellowtail flounder (*Limanda ferruginea*)	3LNO		173	315		25	14 218	3%

This overview shows that all stocks assessed by NAFO are being sampled and that some scope exists on coordinating sampling between the MS collecting data for the listed shared stocks. Once the detailed spatial and technical coverage (on the metier level 6) of the sampled stocks will be identified in the forthcoming work of the RCG, further steps can be taken towards regional coordination of sampling these NAFO stocks.

In 2022, Tom Blasdale, the Scientific Council coordinator from the NAFO secretariat, attended the meeting. He explained that official catch and effort data are sent to NAFO through EUROSTAT and that NAFO Secretariat, at the beginning of the year, sends letters to Contracting Parties (CPs), asking for oceanographic and biological data. CPs or Members States (MS) send all their available information to the Secretariat/Scientific Council in the form of a document called National Report, published in the NAFO Scientific Council Summary (SCS) documents series. Currently NAFO did not identify major issues with EU data that need coordination nor that there is a lack of data from EU side needed for the stock assessment.

4.4 Other areas

Based on the responses to the 2023 RCG LDF data call, the following overview of fishing activities in other areas than CECAF or SPRFMO was made.

The Area 47 listed in Tables 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 does not include fishing activity in Angola, even though it belongs to area 47. This is because Angola is considered in CECAF area of competence, as *de facto* situation and therefore, is included in the tables for the West Africa area (section 4.1).

Table 4.3.1 Effort (fishing days) from other regions by country from 2014 to 2022.

Area	Country	Metier_level_6	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
41	LTU	OTM_CEP_32-69_0_0		2							49
47	IRL	OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0					9				
47	LTU	OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0		223	26						
47	NLD	OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	44			7					
47	POL	OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	182	255	140	249	178				

Table 4.3.2 Landings (tons) from other regions by country from 2014 to 2022.

Area	Country	Metier_level_6	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
41	LTU	OTM_CEP_32-69_0_0		70							639
47	IRL	OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0					746				
47	LTU	OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0		21008	1140						
47	NLD	OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	7706								
47	POL	OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0	25324	41426	20429	37802	27072				

Based on these overviews, RCG LDF concluded that for the time beeing, there is no need for regional coordination in the above mentioned "other areas". However, this does obviously not void the

responsibilities for MS to execute sampling programmes when and where required under the regulations applicable for the respective area.

An overview of species fished by EU MS in other areas in 2020 is presented in "*RCG_LDF_annua_overview_2022_final*".

5 Review progress in regional co-ordination since the 2022 RCG (Tor 1)

5.1 Follow-up of the RCG LDF 2022 recommendations and 19th Liaison Meeting

The RCG reviewed the report from the 19th Liaison Meeting. As described in the report, the role of the LM is to assist the Commission on data collection issues. This role aligns with EU Reg 2017/1004 article 9 (6) "Regional coordination groups shall coordinate with each other and with the Commission, where issues affect several marine regions". LM mainly streamlines the recommendations from the various RCGs and provides additional support where and when needed.

The 2022 RCG LDF yielded two recommendations that were presented at the LM.

- Recommendation 2022-1: Inclusion of new and updated reference codes in the RDB Recommendation 2021-2: Inclusion of new and updated reference codes in the RDB
- Recommendation 2022-2: Extension of the SPRFMO and CECAF Agreements into 2024

No specific comments were received concerning these recommendations. 2022-1 was addressed at the 2022 WGRDBESGOV meeting and followed-up by the ICES data centre. 2022-2 was addressed by the 2023 RCG LDF and will be concluded at the 2023 Decision Meeting (see section 7.5).

5.2 Feedback from the ISSG 'Métier and transversal issues'

The work done to address the tasks by the ISSG Métier and transversal variable issues were presented during the RCG LDF meeting.

The main outcomes from ISSG are as follows:

- The maintenance of métier reference list pan-regionally and métier script
- Introduction of a métier level 7 for large pelagic fisheries
- Suggestion for pan-regional management of métier codes and responsibilities
- Métier descriptions.

The RCG LDF appreciates the work done by the ISSG and expecting the productive collaboration in future.

There were no objections for the adoption of suggested procedures for managing the reference list of métier codes, agreement on roles between RCG LDF and ISSG and the approval of updated pan-regional metier list.

The ISSG was questioned about the added metiers on level 7 which were established based on Spain's request for the Large Pelagics fisheries, as it was important for them to keep the target species for RCG LP. The RCG LDF considers that there is no need for metiers on level 7 to be assigned to this RCG even if some bycatch of large pelagics occurred in some areas. It was highlighted that the RCG LDF data-call requests submission of effort and landings data calculated on the metier level 6.

5.3 STECF EWG 23-08 comments on reporting achievements under multilateral agreements

The RCG LDF was made aware that the STECF EWG 23-08 (Brussels, 19-23 June 2023) suggested that MS should report the achievements under multilateral agreements in their respective Annual Reports, even when that particular MS did not conduct the respective sampling.

The RCG LDF, in contrast, recommends that only the MS that conducted the sampling under a multilateral agreement should report on the achievements, as

1) the reporting responsibilities under multilateral agreements, clearly stated in the agreement, lie within the MS responsible for the sampling;
2) any data extract on the achieved samples across multiple MS would lead to multiple counting of samples if the suggestion of the EWG would be applied;
3) reporting on achievements of another MS adds an unnecessary burden to both the MS which actually conducts the sampling on behalf of other and to MS which did not conduct the sampling.

In the templates and guidance for DCF Work Plans and Annual Reports (COM Decision 2022/39), MS are asked to "*refer to the other Member State's sampling scheme*" for the planning of sampling in the Work Plans in the case of a multilateral agreement, whereas the reporting on achieved sampling is not clearly spelled out. It is currently not clear if MS are expected to report "0" samples in case another MS was responsible for sampling (as no "NA" indication is allowed) or eventually report on the achievements of the other MS. **The RCG LDF thus suggests that the guidance on reporting achievements under multilateral agreements in the Annual Reports should be revised to clearly refer to the MS having conducted the sampling**, i.e.

- the MS responsible for the sampling should report the achieved number of samples, measurements, etc., whereas
- the MSs participating in the agreement, but not having conducted the sampling, refer to the MS being responsible for the sampling.

6 Feedback from end users and 2022 state-of-play (Tor2)

6.1 CECAF AND JSCs of SFPAs

6.1.1 CECAF

The CECAF scientific Subcommittee (SSC) met last time in Nouakchott, Mauritania, 05-09 December 2022, with the attendance of Spain, The Netherlands (both virtually) and the EU (face to face and virtually). The recommendations of the last four assessment Working Groups (WGs), carried out in 2022, were adopted by the SSC. The four last CECAF WGs were:

- Demersal Species Working Group – North, held in Dakar, Senegal from 6 to 10 June 2022. Spain is the only EU MS which is member of this WG.
- Small Pelagic Working Group – North, held in Dakar, Senegal from13 to 16 September 2022. Spain, the Netherlands and the EU are members of this WG. Only Spain attended physically this WG, although it was preceded by a number of virtual preparatory meetings, also attended by The Netherlands and the EU.
- Demersal species Working Group – South that met in Praia, Cabo Verde from 20 to 29 September 2022. Spain is the only EU MS, which is member of this WG.
- Small Pelagic Working Group – South, held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire from 22 November to 1 December 2022. None of the EU MS are members of this WG. However, taking into account the new possibilities of fishing small pelagic within the SFPA between the EU and Guinea-Bissau, together with the important bycatch of small pelagic by the cephalopods-finfish fleet within the same SFPA, the potential participation of some MS to the WG Small Pelagic-South could be envisaged for the future.

The EU MS that are CECAF members and participate in these WGs should provide fishery and biological information from their fisheries in the areas. The data calls are directly sent by the WG chair persons to the participants. Spain provided fishery and biological information (length frequency distributions, maturity, length-weight relationship, sex-ratio, etc.) for most small pelagic and demersal stocks required. Due to the difficulties of embarking scientific observers on small pelagic fleets in 2020-2023, no biological information on small pelagic stocks was provided to the small pelagics North WG during these past years. Note that the problem related to the placement of EU scientific observers is further elaborated in section 6.1.3. The four FAO/CECAF WGs on the Stocks Assessment, together with the CECAF SSC, were held during the inter-sessional period of the RCG LDF. The reports of these meetings are not available yet and thus, new research recommendations affecting fishing information and biological samplings from the EU fleets cannot be provided to this RCG, with the exception of general recommendations of the WG of Small Pelagic-North. Thus, research recommendations affecting fishing information and biological samplings from the EU fleets for the two other WGs are from the last published reports. They are summarized below with an updated response from the RCG LDF.

FAO Working Group on the assessment of small pelagic fish off northwest Africa, 2022 (FAO, 2022[7])

General recommendations from the 2022 WG that might affect stocks exploited by the EU in Morocco (artisanal purse seiners and pelagic trawlers) and Mauritania (pelagic trawlers) were presented in the summary report of the SSC. More detailed recommendations by species might be available in the 2022 WG report not published yet. Furthermore, the 2023 WG meeting took place from 18-28 July and will provide detailed updated recommendations. The general recommendations currently available from the 2022 summary report are:

- Improving the quality of the length frequency data that serve as basic data entry to apply the LCA and Y/R models.
- Improving biological sampling by increasing the number and size of samples and to ensure that all size ranges and fleet segments are covered throughout the year.
- Strengthening work on age reading of sardine, sardinella, horse mackerel and chub mackerel, through regular sampling and reading of all size classes throughout the year and through stimulation of regional exchanges of samples and results.

RCG 2023 response: The main recommendations have been noted and taken into account since the end of 2018, when the new program of observers onboard pelagic trawlers, coordinated by Poland, was implemented. (See Section 6.3 for comments on the execution of the joint sampling programme in CECAF).

FAO/CECAF WG on the assessment of demersal resources – subgroup north, 2019 (FAO, 2020b[8])

Some recommendations affecting the data collection of stocks exploited by the EU were:

Black hake (*Merluccius polli* and *Merluccius senegalensis*)

These recommendations affect the EU black hake fishery developed in Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal and The Gambia.

- Providing more detailed information on the lengths discarded and the estimated discards in order to incorporate them in the assessments.
- Improve the monitoring of catch, effort and length for black hake as a target and bycatch species for all Spanish fleets operating in Mauritania and Senegal.
- Coordination between IEO (Spain) and IMROP (Mauritania), CRODT (Senegal) and FD (The Gambia) to develop and implement the proposed harmonised scientific observers methodology would improve efficiency.

[7] FAO. 2022. Small pelagic fish Working Group North 2022 – meeting summary. Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (CECAF). Scientific Sub-Committee. Nouakchott, Mauritania, 5–9 December 2022. CECAF/SSCIX/2022/4a. December 2022. 22 pp.
[8] FAO. 2020b. Report of the FAO/CECAF Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Resources – Subgroup North. Nouakchott, Mauritania, 2–10 December 2019. CECAF/ECAF 20/83. Rome. https://doi.org/10.4060/cb1539b

Co-funded by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund

RCG 2023 response: Spain continues to meet the requirements in relation to monitoring of catch, effort of black hake from Morocco, Mauritania and Senegal. In addition, length sampling from landings in the Spanish Port of Cadiz are carried out under the DCF, through the IEO Information and Sampling Network. However, providing detailed information on discards have been hampered by decreased level of the observers coverage due to a number of reasons, including the shipowners' reluctance of embarking observers and the lack of availability of observers willing to embark in the hard working and living conditions on these vessels (see section 6.1.3).

Demersal fish

Pagellus bellottii, P. acarne, Pagellus spp, *Dentex macrophthalmus, Pagrus caeruleostictus, Sparus* spp., *Arius* spp., *Pseudotholitus* spp., *Plectorhynchus mediterraneus* and *Epinephelus aeneus* – some of these species are fished as bycatch by the EU demersal fleets.

- Strengthen the collection and provision of bio-ecological data of main stocks (length frequencies, sex-ratio, age, zone and period of reproduction).

RCG 2023 response: Spain continues to meet the requirements in relation to length sampling of *Pagellus bellottii* and *Dentex macrophthalmus,* as retained bycatch species of the black hake demersal fleet in Morocco, Mauritania and Senegal. This is achieved through concurrent samplings of landings from this fleet performed in the Port of Cádiz through the IEO Information and Sampling Network. However, no more completed information on the biology of these species can be obtained because of the limited observers sampling performed in 2022 due to the above mentioned issues (see section 6.1.3).

Shrimps (*Parapenaeus longirostris* and *Penaeus notialis*)

These recommendations affect the EU shrimper fisheries carried out in Mauritania.

Deep water rose shrimp (*Parapenaeus longirostris*)

- Continue and extend the biological sampling programme of catches to the main landing ports and onboard shrimp trawlers;
- Regularly update the biological parameters of this species.

Southern pink shrimp (*Penaeus notialis*)

- Improve knowledge of the biology of this species.
- Continue the biological sampling programme for Mauritanian catches.

RCG 2023 response: In 2022, Spain partially met the requirements in relation to length and biological samplings of *P. longirostris* and *P. notialis*, as target species of the Spanish shrimper fleet in Mauritania. However, only three fishing trips were sampled from the four planned. Problems on availability of observers for Spanish fleets in West African started to hamper the compliance of the requirements of the DCF and therefore, from CECAF recommendations (see section 6.1.3).

FAO/CECAF WG on the assessment of demersal resources – subgroup south, 2017 (FAO, 2019[9])

General recommendations:

- To improve data collection and analysis for priority species or species groups.
- To improve species identification and the system of data collection by species, carry out sampling so that the species can be better separated in catches and catch statistics in order to improve knowledge on the species composition of species groups (Sparidae, *Dentex* spp., *Pseudotholithus* spp., coastal shrimps etc).

The specific recommendations affecting the data collection of stocks exploited by the EU were:

Demersal fish south, Subgroup 1: *Pseudotolithus elongatus, Pseudotolithus* spp., *Galeoides decadactylus, Pomadasys* spp., *Arius* spp., *Cynoglossus* spp. and Sparidae- Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Cape Verde, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.

Some of these species are fished as bycatch of the EU demersal fleet in Guinea-Bissau and other fleets from EU MS that might fish in other countries under direct authorizations.

The work carried out revealed important gaps in current knowledge about the stocks in these areas. In order to address these, CECAF recommended to:

- Resume the collection of biological data by sampling on board the demersal industrial fisheries vessels, giving priority to the main species, so as to obtain a complete catalogue of the basic biological parameters.
- Intensify sampling for length frequencies and species composition of catches including bycatch in all the main fisheries.

RCG 2023 response: After the reopening of the fishery in Guinea-Bissau in 2019 within the last Protocol of the SFPA, Spain resumed their Programs of Observers onboard cephalopod-finfish trawlers and shrimper trawlers to meet the requirements in relation to length sampling of these bycatch species of demersal fisheries in Guinea-Bissau, either as retained bycatch species (concurrent sampling) or discarded species. However, no observers have been deployed on the cephalopod-finfish fleet since 2022, due to their reluctance of embanking as their salaries seems not to be in line with the work conditions (see also section 6.1.3). The shrimper fleet is sampled in alternate years in the coastal states with SFPA and possibilities for this fishery. This means, one in Mauritania and one in Guinea-Bissau. As in 2022, observations were made in Mauritania, no new information could be obtained for Guinea-Bissau.

Shrimp South - Southern pink shrimp (*Penaeus notialis*) and Deepwater rose shrimp (*Parapenaeus longirostris*) - Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe, Gabon, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola.

[9] FAO. 2019. Report of the FAO/CECAF Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Resources – Subgroup South. Libreville, Gabon, 6–15 September 2017. CECAF/ECAF series no.18/79. Rome. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

These recommendations affect EU shrimper fleets operating in Guinea-Bissau through SFPAs and Spanish shrimpers fishing in waters off Guinea, Congo and Angola through direct authorizations.

- For Angola, monthly size and biological sampling of this species on board vessels are recommended.
- Sampling of biological parameters should be initiated for the countries where this is not done.

RCG 2023 response: Spain resumed the Program of Observer onboard shrimper trawlers in Guinea-Bissau in 2021 after a period with no fishery (December 2017-July 2019) and the 2020 gap, due to IEO administrative issues and COVID related issues. As in 2022 observations were made in Mauritania, no new information could be obtained from Guinea-Bissau.

Spain initiated in 2018 an Observer Program onboard shrimper trawlers in Angola, that had to be stopped in 2019 and 2020 (IEO administrative issues and COVID related issues) and newly resumed in 2021. In 2022, only one fishing trip could be sampled from the four planned. First, problems on the availability of observes mentioned above limited the possibility of higher coverage. In addition, the observer deployed for the fourth quarter had to be evacuated as he got ill with typhus and no sampling could be performed.

Cephalopods - Octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*), cuttlefish (mainly *Sepia hierredda*) and squid (*Loligo vulgaris*) - Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, C. Ivoire, Ghana, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe, Gabon, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola.

These recommendations affect EU cephalopods-finfish trawlers operating in Guinea-Bissau through SFPAs or in others coastal States through direct authorizations and other EU demersal trawlers catching these species as bycatch.

- To conduct biological studies on cuttlefish throughout the subregion. Specifically, information is needed on monthly mean weight in catches, biometric relationships (length–weight, mantle length–total length), monthly maturity indices and length at first maturity.

RCG 2023 response: On 2022, Spain could not contribute to meet the requirements in relation to length and biological samplings of *O. vulgaris* and *S. hierredda*, as target species of the Spanish cephalopod-finfish fleet in Guinea-Bissau for reasons explained above (see also section 6.1.3).

6.1.2 JSCs of SFPAs

The Joint Scientific Committees (JSCs) of mixed Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPA) between the EU and West African countries are relevant end users of the information collected under the DCF on the EU fisheries developed in some CECAF countries (Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau). This information is generally provided to the JSCs through data calls launched by the EC (DG MARE) to the MS with fishing activity in these West African countries.

JSC EU- Morocco

The most recent annual JSC with Morocco was held in Casablanca on 30-31 May 2023, with one complementary online meeting on the 27th of June. The report is close to be finalised and published, however, a definite final version has not been available yet during the RCG LDF 2023 meeting; therefore, the recommendations from the JSC-2021 for the different fishing categories that had been reported during the 2022 RCG LDF meeting remain valid:

- Category 2 (small-scale, bottom longline fishing, North): to reinforce the monitoring of the species targeted by this category in order to have the scientific elements needed for the sustainable management of this fishery. Particular attention must be paid to species with an unfavourable status, in particular: scabbardfish (Family *Trichiuridae*) and red seabream (*Pagellus bogaraveo*).
- Category 4 (demersal fishing with bottom trawls and bottom longlines, South): to increase the number of scientific observers embarked to obtain better information on discards; to set up a program for monitoring the Atlantic pomfret *Brama brama* in the Moroccan zone in order to asses it; to further analyse the biological cycles of the concerned stocks in the area.

RCG 2023 response: The use of fishing opportunities in Moroccan waters for categories 2 and 4 has drastically decreased from 2019 to 2022. The use of licences in relation to those offered has decreased from 28% to 6%, for Category 2. For Category 4, the use of licences for black hake trawlers has decreased from 80% to 20%, with one single licence used in 2021 and 2022 while the one of longliners targeting *Brama brama* has decreased from 9% to none in 2021 and 2022. Thus, the scarcity of observers onboard Spanish vessels (see section 6.1.3) together with the low activity of these fleets makes it extremely difficult to carry out samplings onboard and thus, to follow the recommendations above.

A limited number of observed fishing trips of Spanish black hake trawlers in the CECAF area was carried out in Mauritanian fishing grounds under the EU-Mauritania SFPA.

JSC EU-Mauritania

The EU-Mauritania JSC has continued its collaboration under the new SFPA. The most recent JSC meeting was held in Nouadhibou, Mauritania from 13 to 18 March 2023; the report is close to be finalised and published, however, a definite final version has not been available yet during the RCG-LDF 2023 meeting. The latest published EU-Mauritania JSC report is from several extraordinary virtual JSC meetings in June-July 2022 for the purpose of reviewing and evaluating draft proposals of a "sustainable fisheries management plan for small pelagic species, applicable to all fleets operating in Mauritanian waters" according to Article 9(9) of the new protocol (Bouzouma *et al.* 2022)[10].

The JSC recommended strengthening scientific observation at sea and improving the coverage for all the different segments catching small pelagics, this including EU pelagic trawlers.

[10] Report available at: https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-09/report-jsc-mauritania-2022-06-07_fr_0.pdf

RCG 2023 response: recommendations are taken into account since the end of 2018, when the new program of observers onboard pelagic trawlers, coordinated by Poland, was implemented. (See Section 6.3 for comments on the execution of the joint sampling programme in CECAF).

JSC EU-Senegal (and the Gambia)

The most recent JSC meeting took place in Madrid, Spain from 24 to 26 January 2023[11], with participation of two scientific observers from The Gambia. Sampling recommendations concerning the black hake fishery were made for both the EU and the Senegalese fleets (Röckmann *et al.*, 2023)[12]:

- Strengthening the collection of data through the implementation of on-board observer programs, for both the Senegalese and the EU fleets,
- Obtaining length class distribution of black hake (retained and discarded).
- Further studying the biology of the two black-hake species, within the framework of regional collaboration.

RCG 2023 response: Spain continues sampling length frequency distribution from landings (thus, retained fraction) of black hakes in the Spanish Port of Cádiz, through the IEO Information and Sampling Network. They include length sampling from Senegal, when the fleet has been operative in this fishing ground. However, neither discards sampling nor biological samplings can be performed without scientific observers onboard these vessels. As explained above, the number of fishing trips of black hake trawlers with scientific observers in 2022 was limited and all of them were carried out in Mauritanian waters, the main fishing ground of this fleet in the CECAF area.

The scarcity of observers onboard Spanish vessels together with the low activity of these fleets makes it extremely difficult to carry out samplings onboard and thus, to follow the recommendations above. A limited number of observed fishing trips of Spanish black hake trawlers in the CECAF area was carried out in Mauritanian fishing grounds under the EU-Mauritania SFPA

JSC EU-Guinea-Bissau

The ninth meeting of the JSC EU and Guinea-Bissau (GB) was held in Olhão, Portugal, from 19 to 23 June 2023, only two weeks before the RCG. The report has not been published yet and thus, sampling recommendations presented below are from the previous JSC meeting, held in 2022 (Sobrino *et al.*, 2022)[13].

[11] https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/fisheries/international-agreements/sustainable-fisheries-partnership-agreements-sfpas/senegal_en#scientific-advice

[12] Report available at: https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/2023-report-jsc-senegal_fr_2.pdf

[13] Report available in: https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-08/report-jsc-guinea-bissau-2022_pt.pdf

- Increasing the observers coverage to a monthly basis, considering that the current EU DCF coverage levels do not meet the needs required by the JSC.
- Promoting the collection of catch data from EU vessels at haul level.

RCG 2023 response: As previously explained, the IEO Program of Observers onboard Spanish fleets in West Africa is facing serious problems related the observers reluctance to embark (see section 6.1.3). This hampered the possibility of having any observation onboard the cephalopod-finfish fleet after 2021 while the shrimper fleet was observed only in Mauritania in 2022. The recommendation of increasing the observer's coverage to a monthly basis would involve increasing the number of scientific observers onboard both fleets. In addition, annual observations should be simultaneously carried out onboard the shrimper fleet, both in Mauritania and Guinea-Bissau. This could be changed in the Spanish sampling Program but cannot be done without ensuring the ability of having observers willing to embark.
Catch data from Spanish demersal vessels are currently provided by the Spanish Secretary of Fisheries to IEO, from the e-logbooks, on a daily basis.

6.1.3 RCG reflection concerning the difficulties to embark scientific observers in the CECAF area

Small pelagic fleet

Observer obligations currently differ in the different SFPAs and protocols.

Under the EU-Morocco SFPA, Category 6 vessels are obliged to embark a Moroccan "control" observer at all times. According to the Moroccan Institute for Fisheries Research (INRH), these observers are also trained to carry out scientific tasks.

Under the newly renegotiated EU-Mauritania SFPA and protocol, Category 6 vessels fishing in the Mauritanian EEZ are obliged to embark two "scientific observers" at all times. In Mauritania, scientific observers should be provided by the Mauritanian institute for fisheries research (IMROP), which is currently lacking the capacity to do it. The RCG suggests that the EU-Mauritania Joint Committee should agree on organising the required scientific observer coverage jointly. Specifically, the RCG proposes to facilitate the embarkation of one (or two) EU scientific observer by directly involving the existing multilateral agreement that coordinates the EU's joint sampling programme of pelagic fisheries[14], when Mauritanian observers are not available. For such cases, a simple procedure for smoothly embarking EU observers under these SFPAs should be developed between the COM, the 3rd country, and the relevant flag MS with the involvement of the EU vessel's operator. Such a simplified procedure that allows for direct contact between the EU joint sampling program coordinator and vessels' operators should remove the existing problems with the embarkation of EU observers.

Furthermore, in order to avoid the argument of "lack of space" **for additional** crew on board, every scientific observer that is embarked, whether from the 3rd country or from the EU, could be detracted from the obligatory percentage of national crew that small pelagic (Category 6) vessels have to embark; this should be agreed for each SFPA at the level of the SFPA's Joint Committees (JCs).

[14] Multi-lateral agreement between Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, The Netherlands and Poland for biological data collection of pelagic fisheries in CECAF waters (https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/repository/)

Demersal fleet

As already mentioned in previous sections, Spain being the main actor in demersal fisheries in the CECAF area has experienced serious difficulties in recent years in embarking scientific observers on vessels involved in demersal fisheries. Spanish observers are mostly engaged by a subcontracted company (outside IEO) selected through a public tender.

Coordination of IEO and coastal States institutions in relation to scientific observer Protocols was expected as an output of the Specific Contract No12 "*Study on improvement for the analysis and exploitation of observer reports in EU fisheries from NW African waters*"[15]. However, this has not been achieved so far, due to the fact that none of the involved 3rd countries perform regular scientific observations. It is important however to note, that the study did succeed in developing harmonized observer manuals, and that all experts involved in the final observer workshop did approve these manuals. Thus, a standardized method is available[16], but still it has to be utilized through the full implementation of national (3rd countries) and EU DCF scientific observer programs and further coordination and collaboration with the coastal states.

The level of observer coverage has been significantly reduced in Spain due to a number of reasons, including the shipowners' reluctance to take observers onboard, but also due to the lack of availability of observers willing to embark on that the small demersal vessels because of the very hard working and living conditions. This reluctance of observers is further deepened by the fact that their salaries do not seem to be in line with the working conditions. As a result, potential observers are basically discouraged from working for the Spanish observer sampling programs.

The RCG LDF expressed the view that increasing the level of incentives for observers would be at least a partial solution to this problem. Although the IEO, as the program coordinator, has no influence on the social conditions on vessels engaged in demersal fisheries in the CECAF area, it seems that the IEO as the commissioning entity should be given greater control over the remuneration of observers when determining the terms of the contract with external service provider.

6.1.4 Information on data transmission from EU vessels to SFPA and EU administrations

The 2023 EU-Morocco Joint Scientific Meeting discussed extensively the problems related to data transmission to the different administrations. This joint scientific expert group has always been concerned about discrepancies between the different data sources: a) Moroccan data, jointly validated by the Moroccan administration in Rabat and by DGMARE, b) EU ACDR data provided by Member States under the control regulation, and on top of this, c) EU fisheries and biological data provided by EU member states under the EU DCF regulation.

[15] Report available at: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/18f4fe14-e745-11ea-ad25-01aa75ed71a1

[16] Manuals available at: https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/fisheries/international-agreements/sustainable-fisheries-partnership-agreements-sfpas/mauritania_en

Small pelagic fleet

With respect to the small pelagic fleet, DGMARE informed about the most recent conclusions of the EU-Morocco JSC. It concluded that currently the procedure adopted by Morocco seems to be clearer and more precise than the data transmission procedure in the EU, because of the following:

- Through a "Fishing Activity Report" (FAR) in the electronic logbook, Moroccan authorities receive one sheet per vessel each day before 0:00, signed jointly by the vessel's captain and the Moroccan observer, who is on board all category 6 vessels in Moroccan waters at all times – example of FAR presented at the end of this section. The presence of these observers ensures that there are generally no (or only a few) misidentified species.
- The sheets are sent each day spent at sea by a vessel, regardless of whether or not it has made any catches, i.e. these sheets indicate the days at sea and not the days fished.

The RCG helped in clarifying the procedure for transmitting data from category 6 vessels to the EC via EU Member State administrations: Also, in the EU electronic logbooks are used, following provisions of the Control Regulation. Daily catch report, indicating the estimated whole weight of the daily catches is sent electronically to the MS administration. The MS administration in turn forwards this information to DGMARE. Furthermore, the Control Regulation also requires that captains send landing declarations (with already known volume for each species) before each landing. It is currently not clear to the RCG LDF at which point of the process electronic data are sent to the Moroccan administration and by whom.

The RCG supposes that the differences between catch and effort declarations to Morocco and to the EU originate from the differences between days at sea and fishing days.

The RCG further supposes that the Moroccan sheet is filled by the Moroccan observer and then approved by the captain, whereas the E-logbook system is filled directly by the captain.

Demersal vessels

Catch data from Spanish demersal vessels are currently provided by the Spanish Secretary of Fisheries to IEO, from the e-logbooks, on a daily basis.

It is not clear why E-logbook data from Spanish vessels are not provided to SFPA 3rd country administrations, whereas IEO does receive this data from these vessels in electronic form. Instead, the Moroccan administration, for example, receives handwritten sheets, that are often illegible. This problem seems unnecessary, as the e-logbook data are available, and should thus be resolved asap in all SFPAs.

Conclusion: There is a need to clarify the data reporting and transmission procedures within the EU (between vessel operator, Member State administration and the DGMARE), and to the 3rd country administrations.

Moroccan "Fishing Activity Report" (FAR)

Fiche quotidienne de captures et productions

NAVIRE	INDICATIF	PAVILLON
CADRE D'EXERCICE	LICENCE	DATE: (JOURS, MOIS, AN)

Zone de pêche (position moyenne) Lat°: Long°: Prof°:

CAPTURES EN TONNES

SARDINE	MAQUEREAU	CHINCHARD	SARDINELLE	ANCHOIS
FAUSSE PECHE	AUTRES (A PRECISER)			

DETAIL DE LA CPATURE ACCESSOIR (QTE):

PRODUCTION CONGELEE, EN TONNES

Sardine		Sardinelle		Maquereau		Chinchard	
Quantité	Traitement*	Quantité	Traitement*	Quantité	Traitement*	Quantité	Traitement*

Anchois		FARINE	CAPTURE ACCESSOIRE	Autre
Quantité	Traitement*			

*Etêté et éviscéré
Découpage manuel ou Découpage à la machine

DETAIL DES REJETS AVEC QTE EN (TONNES):

REMARQUES ET SIGNATURES:

LE CAPITAINE	L'OBSERVATEUR
NOM ET PRENOM:	NOM ET PRENOM:
Signature:	Signature:

6.2 SPRFMO

With regard to the SPRMFO, its website gives clear details on the data required and the format for data submission.

There were no changes in SPRMFO Data Standards adopted in May 2018 (*CMM 02-2022 Conservation and Management Measure on Standards for the Collection, Reporting, Verification and Exchange of Data*), published on the organization's webpage. Thus, from the perspective of EU fishing activity, the Data Standards provided for no changes to data requirements in 2022 sampling year.

In 2022, the SPRFMO Commission has adopted a revised *"Conservation and Management Measure Establishing the SPRFMO Observer Programme"* (CMM 16-2022). One of the key changes related to the entry into force of the obligation to have on board fishing vessels operating in the SPRFMO area the scientific observers sourced from a national observer programme or service provider accredited by SPRFMO – the new date of entry into force of this obligation is 1st January 2025. Until 31 December 2024, Member States may continue using their own non-accredited national observer programme or service provider to meet observer coverage requirements.

Intersessional activity of the RCG LDF Subgroup addressing the EU Observer Programme accreditation is described in Section 8.3.

6.3 State-of-play 2023 data collection

6.3.1 SPRFMO

In 2020, in addition to the travel restrictions that made it impossible to place observers onboard fishing vessels during the COVID-19 pandemic, no biological sampling could be performed due to the fact, that the whole EU fishing quota for Chilean jack mackerel (*Trachurus murphyi*) in this year was transferred to Chile.

In 2021, sampling in SPRFMO was hampered due to various reasons:

- Serious COVID-19 development in Poland in the first quarter. The pandemic slowed down in the summer season but increased dramatically again in the fall (with a very high death rate).
- Safety measures taken at the Institute employing observers, including ban on at sea sampling (lifted in May 2022) and ban on travelling abroad.
- Problems with observers availability (COVID-19 infections, COVID related family issues, staff reduction, not available due to the engagement in a number of other projects).

In 2021, three EU fishing vessels were active in the SPRFMO area (under DEU, LTU and POL flags). Placing observers onboard vessels fishing in Pacific in 2021 was a great logistical challenge due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on people's movement still in force, including i.a. obligation for observers to be in possession of a negative COVID PCR test prior to departure to South America and on arrival there, with 2-3 days of quarantine after arrival (and another PCR test on disembarkation prior to boarding the return flight). Despite those challenges, in March and April 2021 a scientific observer was on board the vessel flying the DEU flag. In June 2021, another observer travelled to Panama first to board the reefer vessel which took him on the fishing ground. After observing two transhipments at sea from two EU fishing vessels, the observer boarded at sea a DEU fishing vessel which transported him to fishing ground to board the target POL vessel. The

SPRFMO requirement to have a minimum 10% observer coverage in terms of fishing trips was achieved and exceeded by having four fishing trips observed out of total of 10 fishing trips executed by EU vessels in 2021.

In 2022, two EU vessels were active in the SPRFMO area (under POL and LTU flags). Two observers were placed onboard POL vessel in April in Panama – after one fishing trip one observer returned to Poland in May and the second one stayed onboard for next two fishing trip until the end of June.
In July, another observer boarded the LTU vessel in Chile and collected data over the course of two fishing trips. The SPRFMO requirement to have a minimum 10% observer coverage in terms of fishing trips was achieved and exceeded by having five fishing trips observed out of total of nine fishing trips executed by EU vessels in 2022.

In 2023, the EU vessels' operator planned to start fishing operations later due to the involvement of vessels in another area and the planned conversion of vessels. On June 22nd an *ad hoc* meeting was organized in Katwijk in the Netherlands between Dutch operator (member of the Pelagic Freezers Association), RCG LDF coordinator of the joint sampling programme (POL) and representatives of the Centre for Fisheries Research (CVO, NLD) – RCG LDF members. The main purpose of the meeting was to exchange and refresh information on the operational plans of the EU fishing fleet in the SPRFMO area and the requirements of the fisheries data collection program. One of the results of this meeting was the agreement to embark a scientific observer on one of the four EU vessels planned to operate in the SPRFMO area in 2023. Due to the unavailability of Polish observers in such a short time, it was agreed to employ a Dutch observer from CVO. The observer departed to Chile already on June 26th and on June 29th the first fishing trip started.
Poland confirmed its plans to place observers on other EU vessels to reach the goals of collecting data from EU vessels engaged in fishery in this area as well as to have a minimum 10% coverage of fishing trips in 2023 as required by the SPRFMO conservation measures.

6.3.2 CECAF

Madeira

Under the 2022 Portuguese Data Collection Work Plan, monthly concurrent samplings on shore were performed for the main métiers operated by the local fleet in Madeira waters. Stock specific landing sampling for deep water species, mainly targeting *Aphanopus* spp. (LLD_DWF_0_0_0) covered 57 trips and 7731 individuals. With regards to molluscs there was a noticeable increase in the sampling effort and in the number of individuals sampled (27 trips and 1151 individuals sampled) in relation to 2021. Concerning the purse seine fishery, targeting small pelagic fishes (PS_SPF_16_0_0), 60 fishing trips and 10040 specimens were sampled. Finally, 929 individuals were sampled from 7 trips of demersal fishes.

Canary Islands

For the metier PS_SPF_10_0_0 (artisanal fleet targeting small pelagics), one fishing trip per month is planned to be sampled at sea in Tenerife Island (concurrent length sampling) together with stock-specific sampling at the main landing places carried out by the IEO sampling network for the target species (*Scomber colias, Trachurus* spp., *Sardinella aurita* and *Sardina pilchardus*). In addition, monthly biological sampling of the main target species is carried out in the laboratory. For the metier MIS_DES_0_0_0 (artisanal fleet targeting demersal species), five fishing trips per month are planned to be sampled at sea in Tenerife Islands (concurrent length samplings). Moreover, monthly length samplings of main landed species are also planned to be carried

out by the IEO information and sampling network. The species abundances are very variable, a fact that caused deviations in both directions (*Sparisoma cretense* more than planned and small pelagic species less than planned). Regarding some biological variables of small pelagic species, (eg, *Sardina pilchardus*, *Sardinella aurita*), the impossibility to obtain samples at market in the months with low catches caused a lower number of sampled individuals than planned.

West Africa

Until the end of 2017, data collection of small pelagics in CECAF waters was arranged for through a multi-lateral agreement between Germany, Lithuania, Latvia, The Netherlands and Poland. For this agreement, NLD operated as the coordinator for the programme. The actual work was subcontracted to a dedicated partner having a vast experience in the region.

Following the conclusions from the second meeting of the RCG LDF in 2017 (Copenhagen, November 2017), the new multilateral agreement was concluded upon shortly after the meeting for period 2018-2020 with Poland coordinating the data collection in the CECAF waters. In February 2018, a meeting was held in The Hague, The Netherlands, between the representatives of the Polish National Marine Fisheries Research Institute (NMFRI - coordinator of the joint sampling programme), the Dutch Wageningen Marine Research and the Dutch fishing companies engaged in the fishery for small pelagics in the CECAF area. The purpose of this meeting was to set up the rules of cooperation between the NMFRI and the Dutch vessels' operators in executing the joint sampling programme and in placing Polish observers on board the fishing vessel operating in the CECAF area. Contacts have also been established with operator of the Polish vessels active in the CECAF area.

In March 2018, in cooperation between Institutes from Germany, The Netherlands and Poland, a new "Manual for scientific observers on board EU pelagic trawlers in CECAF area" was set, with two fishing trips per quarter and per area planned to be sampled by observers.

In 2018, despite the efforts made, placement of observers on board the Dutch vessel operating in the CECAF area was possible only in December, mainly due to lack of space on board the vessels.

In 2019, biological data were collected by Polish observers during two fishing trips in Mauritanian waters in the first quarter on board a Dutch vessel. Despite attempts made, placement of observers on board the EU vessels operating in the CECAF during the remaining period of 2019 was not possible due to lack of space on board the vessels, caused by the fact that SFPA rules oblige the vessels to embark a certain (quite large) percentage of crew from the SFPA country.

At the beginning of 2020, attempts were made to deploy observers during the first quarter of the year. However, according to information received from vessel operators, there were no plans to start pelagic fishery in January and February. First information from a vessel moving to Moroccan grounds were received late March 2020 when the restriction on people's movement due to the COVID-19 pandemia were already in place in Poland, including border closure and closure of air traffic, making it impossible for scientific observers to leave the country.

In 2021, no sampling in CECAF was performed due to various reasons, including those described above for the SPRFMO area (section 6.3.1).

Despite the issues mentioned above an attempt was made in April 2021 to place an observer on a NLD vessel but when the vessel's operator indicated the possibility to take an observer onboard in May-June, no

observer was available. From July 2021 onwards, no EU fishing activity was planned in neither Mauritanian nor Moroccan waters. Apart from the above, vessel operators are usually reluctant to take scientific observers onboard vessels fishing in Moroccan and Mauritanian waters due to the obligation of embarking a certain % of crew and observers from those countries.

In April 2022, a POL vessel operator offered to take a scientific observer onboard, and the observer was ready to travel early June. However, in May, a fire broke out on the vessel causing the vessel to leave the fishing ground in an emergency, and thus cancelling the plans to send an observer. It was not possible to deploy observers on board the vessels fishing in the CECAF area in the second half of 2022 due to reluctance of the vessel operators to take scientific observers onboard vessels fishing in because of lack of space.

Spanish small pelagic purse seiners operating in Morocco were sampled by the IEO information and sampling network, at landings in the Spanish port of Barbate (Cádiz, SW Spain). Monthly length samplings (both concurrent and anchovy-stock specific samplings) are planned. However, the Spanish fleet operated in the Moroccan fishing ground only two months and thus, length samples are only available in those months. Landing samples for biological sampling of anchovy *Engraulis encrasicolus* and for sardine *Sardina pilchardus* from North–Morocco were not obtained for those months, due the limited catch obtained.

In relation to demersal fisheries, the Spanish demersal metiers operating in West Africa should be sampled by the IEO at-sea observers programs. In 2022, the observer programmes resulted in sampling only 3 out of 4 trips planned for shrimper trawlers and 6 out of 16 planned for the black hake trawlers (both in Mauritania). None of the 4 trips planned for the cephalopod-finfish trawlers in Guinea-Bissau could be sampled. Sampling actions have been hindered by different issues, depending on the fishing ground or métier (lack of space, refusals, travel difficulties, etc.). However, the common problem affecting all Spanish demersal fleets was the lack of observers available for embarking, as they refuse to do it in hard working and living conditions with the low incentives they are currently receiving. Ideally, this problem should be tackled by the competent authorities to avoid the non-compliance with the DCF, and thus to the end-users (CECAF and JSCs) requirements.

A potential solution to the problems of embarking scientific observers on EU vessels (both demersal and small pelagic fleets) is presented in section 6.1.3.

7 Regional data collection analysis and storage (ToR 4)

7.1 Launched mechanisms to continue strengthening regional cooperation including funding

At the beginning of 2021, the COM launched following MARE/2020/08 grants:

- Streamline, on regional work plans for the Mediterranean and Black Sea region www.streamlineproject.eu;
- Fishn'Co, on regional work plans for the NANSEA and Baltic, including RCG ECON and large pelagic fisheries www.fisheries-rcg.eu/fishnco;
- SecWeb, on setting up a secretariat for the RCG work www.fisheries-rcg.eu/secweb/; and
- RDBFIS on the Mediterranean and Black Sea database https://medbsrdb.eu/.

The projects of direct interest to the RCG LDF members - Fishn'Co and SecWeb - were finalized in February 2023 and brief summaries of the outcomes of those project were provided to the Group.

7.2 Potential new data collection requirements related to EU joining the North Pacific Fisheries Commission

Based on information received prior to and during the 2023 meeting, there will be no data collection needs in the NPFC area yet, as the EU fleet is not authorised yet to undertake any fishing operation in the Convention area.

7.3 Potential implication of the SMEFF Regulation

Concerning the SMEFF regulation[17], the group discussed the following issues and updates concerning SMEFF fisheries.

DGMARE launched a new **Fishing Authorisations** website:

https://ec.europa.eu/oceans-and-fisheries/fisheries/fishing-authorisations/screen/authorisations

This website is part of the actions to implement the SMEFF Regulation (EU 2017/2403) and particularly its Article 39.2 on the publicly accessible data. It increases the transparency on the activities of the EU external fishing fleets by providing data on fishing authorisations granted during the last 10 years.

Users can search for the main details of the authorisations and related vessel characteristics. At the same time the website lists all bilateral and multilateral arrangements, which are providing the opportunities for the EU external fishing fleets to operate.

[17] Regulation (EU) 2017/2403 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2017 on the sustainable management of external fishing fleets, and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1006/2008. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32017R2403

The table below provides an overview of EU vessel activities under "SMEFF" direct authorisations in 2022, preliminary data of 2023 (and in brackets, already foreseen activity towards the end of 2023 and in 2024):

	Angola	Congo	Falkland Is.	Guinea	Namibia	High seas
ESP	2022, 2023	2022, 2023	2022, 2023	2023	2022	2022, 2023
LTU						2022, 2023
PRT						2022, 2023
POL						(2023, 2024)

SMEFF needs as regards data collection and research programmes

As in 2022, the group discussed again the need to cooperate on data collection and on potential research surveys if more than one EU MS is fishing in a "SMEFF area". However, participants emphasized that the SMEFF regulation does not oblige MS to share related information/ data with each other. Therefore, it was highlighted that under the current SMEFF regulation, DGMARE cannot enforce such collaboration.
The group discussed whether there are specific data collection needs of SMEFF fisheries. As the CFP applies to SMEFF fisheries, they also fall under the regular data collection programmes of the DCF. Species lists under the EU-MAP will have to be updated along the way. However, the RCG recommends to take a flexible approach, *i.e.* not to hide behind the tables and potentially lacking species in the tables. If SMEFF fisheries catch species that are not yet included in the EU-MAP, then these fisheries do need to be monitored, and the RCG should advice on the best data collection approaches. The RCG LDF repeated the need to communicate all SMEFF related scientific survey and data collection activities to the RCG, as it had been concluded in 2022 that the RCG LDF itself is the relevant platform for MS to discuss all issues related to data collection and scientific research programmes related to SMEFF fisheries.

SMEFF study progress update

The "*SMEFF study*"[18] that kicked-off in April 2022 is now half way. The study gathers, reorganizes and reanalyses dispersed information with a view to provide an easily consultable and updated document or inventory, that describes the fishing operations, the target species/stocks and bycatch species, their conservation status and exploitation patterns. For the fishing operations on the high seas, this study also considers the presence of VMEs. The findings of this study are expected to facilitate the work processes of fishing operators, MS authorities and the EC around the granting of fishing authorisations in non-EU waters. Some RCG members are working on the study.

The study has already carried out a systematic review of the literature supplemented by the consortium's expert understanding of the fisheries in the areas of interest; pertinent information sources have been compiled.

[18] Full title: "Scientific and technical knowledge of the EU-fisheries, exploited stocks and sensitive marine habitats in the high seas and third countries waters not subject to SFPA and/or RFMOs jurisdiction" (EASME/EMFF/2019/014 Specific Contract No. 04)

Also, a description has been compiled of recent and ongoing fisheries activities by EU fishing operations in FAO fishing areas 34, 41 and 47, including both the high seas and EEZs of nations not party to ongoing SFPA agreements. Fisheries descriptions are based on four main data sets: i) EU vessel landings (provided by DG MARE), ii) Global Fishing Watch (GFW) data (held by MRAG), iii) landings and VMS information on the Spanish fisheries (held by IEO-CSIC), and iv) landings data from coastal State's EEZ (requested from coastal State fisheries departments).

Currently, the consortium is focussing on innovative ways to assess the current conservation status, exploitation patterns and other biological information of target and bycatch species/stocks impacted by EU distant water fleets. For data limited stocks, the consortium is developing a generic conceptual approach and an operational structure including proposals of objective (minimum) criteria to demonstrate how the requirements of the SMEFF regulation are being or could be fulfilled.

Conclusion:

The group concluded that facilitating timely and transparent exchange of information on ongoing and envisaged SMEFF fisheries between operators, MS, the RCG and the EC would be crucial to ensure that SMEFF operators from different MS fishing in the same SMEFF areas start collaborating on data collection and scientific research programmes.

7.4 Time frame for RCG LDF actions

Based on the Rules of Procedures currently relevant for the RCG LDF, the following general milestones are considered current for organizing the RCG work, including the data call and organisational aspects. In practice, due to day-to-day issues and practicalities, not all deadlines can be met. However, given the nature of the work, participants (heavily) being involved in other groups, and shifting timelines due to external factors, some flexibility is required to be able to organize this meeting.

When	What (incl. reference to RoP Article)	Who
t – 2 months (at the latest)	Formal request if an independent organisation or individual seeks to attend an RCG meeting as an observer (11.2). Note that SPRFMO and CECAF have a standing invitation to the RCG LDF (11.7)	Any organisation or individual
t – 2 months (at the latest)	• Inspect EUROSTAT data to identify new areas of relevance. • Launch data call according to schedule: 2023: RDB call to all MS active in relevant regions (based on 2022 contributions) 2024: RDB call to all MS active in relevant regions (based on 2023 contributions) OR	Chair (or delegated data coordinator)

When	What (incl. reference to RoP Article)	Who
	RDBES call to all MS active in relevant regions (based on previous contributions) to upload historic data as well as 2023 data 2025: RDBES call to all non-landlocked MS	
t - 2 months	Provide details of accommodation, travel and other organizational information relevant for the meeting. (4.4)	Host Member State
t – 6 weeks	Consult members regarding observers (11.2)	Chair
t - 1 month	Provide details on participants to the chair	NC's of participating MS
t - 1 month	Provide draft agenda to participants	Chair
t – 4 weeks	Inform observers whether or not invited	Chair
t	Annual technical meeting (4.1)	All participants
t + 2 weeks (at the latest 2 months before the decision meeting)	Circulate proposed decisions to the relevant MS for consideration prior to the decision meeting (if any). Circulate draft regional workplan (if any) for decision to NCs (8.6)	Chair

7.5 RCG LDF decision meeting

In order to ensure an efficient continuation of the data collection, the draft agreements on the extension of the CECAF and SPRFMO Multilateral Agreements will be proposed to the relevant NCs at the Decision Meeting in September 2023 (see section 8.2).
also formal acceptance of the relevant NCs will be awaited for the election of **Maksims Kovsars** (LVA) as the new chairman of the RCG LDF (see section 9.4).

8 Future data collection set up in CECAF/SPRFMO (ToR 5)

8.1 Data collection of small pelagics in the CECAF area – future Data needs

At the 2017 RCG, a renewed agreement was reached for sampling small pelagics in CECAF waters. This agreement covered the period 2018-2020. At the 2020 meeting, the RCG agreed that the best option available would be to extend the current agreement. Subsequently, at the decision meeting in September 2020 this agreement was extended to the end of 2023.

As the agreement is ending in 2023, and in line with the 2022 RCG LDF recommendation, RCG LDF discussed a further extension of the agreement into 2024 to align with an updated agreement for SPRFMO (see section 8.2)

The continued issues related to the embarkation of EU observers in the last few years have resulted in incomplete sampling coverage. The issue is further addressed in sections 6.1.3 and 6.3.2.

8.2 Data collection of small pelagics in the SPRFMO area

At the 2018 RCG LDF meeting, the multi-lateral agreement between Germany, Lithuania, Poland and The Netherlands for sampling small pelagics in SPRFMO waters was extended to 2020. At the 2020 meeting, similar to the CECAF agreement, the RCG agreed that the best option would be to extend the current agreement, which was approved at the decision meeting in September 2020 by extending the agreement to the end of 2023.

As the agreement is ending in 2023 and in line with the 2022 RCG LDF recommendation, RCG LDF discussed extending the agreement into 2024, as this will be the last year under the current SPRFMO monitoring obligations. Starting from 2025 onwards, new obligations will be in place based on observer requirements. RCG LDF concluded, therefore that the extension of the current agreement into 2024 is appropriate to ensure an efficient continuation of the data collection under the current obligations. Following the conclusion, a draft text for the extension of the CECAF and SPRFMO agreements will be prepared after the meeting. The agreement will be proposed to the relevant NCs at the Decision Meeting in September 2023.

8.3 Feedback from ISSG SPRFMO-OP

Regarding the future SPRFMO requirements as provided for in the "Conservation and Management Measure Establishing the SPRFMO Observer Programme" (CMM 16-2022), and in particular the requirement for observer programme to undergo the SPRFMO accreditation procedure, the 2020 RCG LDF concluded that "This issue needs to be addressed in the upcoming years to prepare the ground for a solid solution once the OP commences. RCG LDF will initiate intersessional work to progress on this during the year."

To meet the above obligation and following a RCG LDF recommendation 2020-2, the Intercessional Sub-Group on SPRFMO Observer Programme (ISSG SPRFMO-OP) was established with a kick-off meeting in May 2021.

After the 2021 RCG LDF annual technical meeting and Liason Meeting in September, RCG LDF ISSG SPRFMO-OP continued internal discussion with the aim to have a clear picture of accreditation process.

Twelve ISSG SPRFMO-OP meetings were organized in 2022-2023 until the RCG LDF technical annual meeting in July 2023:

- The second ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting on 26 October 2021;
- The Institutes and the industry representatives meeting on 27 October 2021;
- The third ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting on 8 December 2021;
- The fourth ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting on 21 December 2021;
- The fifth ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting on 17 January 2022;
- The sixth ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting on 25 April 2022;
- The seventh ISSG-OP meeting on 22 June 2022;
- The eighth ISSG-OP meeting on 12 July 2022;
- The ninth ISSG-OP meeting on 9 November 2022;
- The tenth ISSG-OP meeting on 13 January 2023;
- The eleventh ISSG-OP meeting on 23 February 2023;
- The twelve ISSG-OP meeting on 12 April 2023.

The Minutes of the key meetings of ISSG SPRFMO-OP in 2022-2023 are provided in Annex 4 to the report[19]. In December 2021, the plan of action was determined on the way the accreditation should be arranged. The agreed plan of action for the OP accreditation process implementation provides for:

- Germany, Lithuania, Poland and The Netherlands appointed a national focal point for the accreditation process – respectively Christoph Stransky, Vilda Griuniene, Irek Wojcik, and Sieto Verver;
- The Netherlands acts as project leader for the process. Scientist Tom Bangma (Wageningen Marine Research) coordinates the project and is the focal point in communication with MRAG (MRAG Ltd is an independent fisheries and aquatic resource consulting firm and has been selected to evaluate SPRFMO Member States' observer programs against the requirements set out in CMM 16-2022).
- Initiate the accreditation process by announcing the planned accreditation at the 10th annual SPFRMO meeting on 24-28 January 2022;
- Germany, Lithuania, Poland and The Netherlands to identify candidate observers to establish a pool of observers to undergo the accreditation process.
- This observer pool will form the basic team of EU observers that will undertake the observer trips from 2025 onwards.
- Consultation with MRAG to outline the accreditation process;
- Addressing administrative requirements and documentation according to SPRFMO CMM 16-2022 (Q4 2022 – Q1 2023);
- Evaluation by MRAG (Q1-Q4 2023);
- Finalization accreditation (Q4 2023 or Q1 2024 at the latest);
- Setup multilateral agreement between Germany, Lithuania, Poland and The Netherlands to set up and arrange practical implementation of the observer programme (on 2024 on RCG LDF annual technical meeting).

[19] *The eleventh and the twelve ISSG-OP meeting Minutes are not included (only technical issues were discussed).*

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When the plan of action for the OP accreditation process implementation was concluded (on the fourth ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting on 21 December 2021), it was circulated to MS's Ministries and the European Commission. The EU delegation has made the announcement in the SPRFMO 10th annual session (24-28 January 2022) about the intention to start the accreditation process. Also, during the SPRFMO annual session, minor changes concerning the accreditation process were adopted:

- The accreditation deadline was extended until 01/01/2025;
- The timeframe to finish accreditation in 6 months was removed.

In 2022, five meetings of ISSG SPRFMO-OP were arranged, the most important of them was the seventh meeting on 22 June 2022. The aim of this meeting was to discuss the plan of action for the OP accreditation process with representatives from MRAG, to consider the next steps forward and to set the timeframe for the process of collecting documents.

MRAG representatives prepared a Manual document (Accreditation assessment) for the accreditation process. The main accreditation steps are listed in the table below.

Date	Actions
Annual Commission Meeting	Members, CNCP or service provider (applicant) provides notification of intention to be assessed.
Following Annual Commission Meeting	Assessor (MRAG Ltd) contacts each applicant and agrees a timetable for the assessment process (Starting at time T) and shares assessment guidelines.
T + 0 days (Start of process at least 6 months before Commission meeting i.e. prior to 6th August 2022)	Assessment process to begin with applicant. Applicant provides all required documentation to assessor, in country visits or online meetings take place to discuss information provided by applicant.
T + 14 days	Assessor will liaise with applicants as appropriate (including, but not limited to, bilateral consultations) and may request additional documentation if substantive or essential information is missing
T + 28 days	Assessor receives additional documentation requested during assessment process and collates all materials
At least 120 days before Annual Commission Meeting (i.e by 9th October 2022)	Assessor provides Draft Preliminary Evaluation Report to applicant for comment Following this Applicants will be offered 30 days for Bilateral consultations to ensure that they have an opportunity to provide additional information and corrections relevant to their evaluation
At least 90 days before Annual Commission Meeting (i.e. by 8th November 2022)	Assessor provides Preliminary Evaluation Report(s) to Applicant(s) and Secretariat
60 days before Annual Commission Meeting (i.e. by 8th December 2022)	Assessor provides Final Evaluation Report(s) including recommended conditions and incorporating feedback received on the preliminary evaluation.
30 days before CTC meeting (i.e. 7th January 2023).	Secretariat circulates the Final Evaluation Report(s) as an Annexes to the SPRFMO Observer Programme Implementation Report
Annual Commission Meeting (6th February 2023)	The Commission evaluates all reports and recommendations and will decide whether to grant accreditation (including specified conditions).

The deadlines as stated in the above table are indicative. Overall, the representatives from MRAG confirmed that they are trying to fulfil the terms and meet the deadlines stated in the table, but the evaluation process can last longer. "T" in this table means the starting point, i.e. when an applicant provides all required documentation to the accreditation evaluator. The discussion between MRAG and the applicant concerning the information provided can be arranged in country visits or online meetings. In case of the EU Observer Programme, four scientific institutes will be evaluated. According to the deadlines - the finalization and grant of the accreditation is expected on Q4 2023 or Q1 2024. After granting accreditation, new updates of the accreditation will be mandatory every 5 years.

The eighth ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting was organized on 14 July 2022 during the annual technical meeting of RCG LDF. The project leader Tom Bangma presented to the group the practical guidelines for the documents upload. Concerning the process of the evaluation for all nominated SPRFMO observers, The Netherlands proposed to organize the training courses for them in Wageningen Marine Research institute.

After the annual technical meeting of RCG LDF 2022 the process of document upload begun. Four folders in the TEAMS group were created, one for each Member State. Observer declaration and observer provider declaration forms were created, approved and signed by all MS. The submission of a first set of documents for MRAG evaluation (self-declaration of good conduct, observer declaration, observer provider declaration, template for the observer ID card) was done on Q1 2023.
ISSG SPRFMO-OP continued internal discussion in three meetings in 2023. MS continued to upload the required documentation.
After the annual technical meeting of RCG LDF 2023 ISSG SPRFMO-OP will continue the work of collecting and submitting the required documentation. Further discussions between relevant EU MS concerning the accreditation process will be organized.
The main tasks:

- To address response from MRAG concerning the first submission of the documentation.
- In Q4 2023 – Q1 2024 to submit all required documents for MRAG evaluation.
- To develop the training methodological material.
- To finalize the accreditation processes until the annual meeting of RCG LDF in July 2024.

The next ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting will be held in the autumn of 2023.

9 Any other business (ToR 6)

9.1 Rules of procedures for future RCG work

The Rules of Procedure for the RCG LDF were established on 9th of July 2018 by the following MS coordinating their data collection activities for Long Distance Fisheries in 2018: Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Spain and Poland. Since Portugal has also become a member of RCG LDF, the RoP were also adopted by Portugal in September 2020.

In 2021, common RoP for RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic were adopted by the NC decision meeting in September. Following this decision, the 2022 RCG LDF reviewed the option to align its RoP with the common RoP to avoid the situation where one MS as a member of two or more RCGs would need to adhere to a different set of rules. The 2023 RCG LDF concluded that the current situation is not causing any conflicts for the MS.

From 2022 onwards, the governance of data collection in the NAFO area falls under the remit of RCG LDF. Resulting of this move, Estonia became a new member of RCG LDF. Therefore, pending the revision of the current RoP and with the approval of Estonia, RCG LDF considers Estonia to be a full member of the group as if Estonia was included in the current RoP.

9.2 Surveys, studies and pilot projects

The RCG LDF did not propose new surveys, nor studies or pilot projects.

9.3 Call for tenders for studies in support of the CFP

The following project proposal has been submitted with the support from RCG LDF:

- Horizon Europe grant under the call topic: HORIZON-CL6-2023-BIODIV-01 (Biodiversity and ecosystem services). The REDUCE project proposal "Reducing Bycatch of threatened megafauna in the East Central Atlantic was submitted at the end of March 2023, with a letter of support from RCG LDF chair (in Annex 5).
  The support letter declared the assistance of the RCG LDF to REDUCE consortium by facilitating the link with the relevant fisheries experts and groups that might be of interest for the project and the overall aim to achieve significant progress regarding the reduction of unwanted by-catches of Protected, Endangered and Threatened Species in the East Central Atlantic Area. The proposal has been successful and the project implementation is expected to start in the coming months.

Additionally, the RCG´s Secretariat, as part of the short-term strategy to ensure future operation and funding to establish a long-term supportive structure for Regional Coordination Groups, is applying for the following tenders/grants:

- Call for tenders MARE/2023/LVP/0002- Actions in support of the Regional Coordination Groups' work under the Data Collection Framework (DCF) Regulation. Negotiated procedure for low value contracts. CETMAR Foundation is going to submit a tender, deadline 21st July 2023. At most 6 months contract.

- EU action grant in the field of Scientific Advice for Fisheries under the EMFAF. *CINEA call: EMFAF-2023-PIA- FisheriesScientificAdvice – Improving scientific knowledge to strengthen the science-basis of management decisions under the CFP.* The CETMAR Foundation is developing a proposal as a single entity application to apply for the RCGs Secretariat services during 2024-2025 (18 months). Deadline 19th Sep 2023. CETMAR is currently in the process of gathering letters of support from the RCGs´network: NCs, chairs of RCGs and ISSGs, and key end-users.

9.4 Chairmanship, timing and venue of the RCG LDF meeting in 2023

The second term of the chairmanship of Irek Wójcik (Poland) ends in 2023. The group unanimously elected **Maksims Kovsars** (LVA) as the new chair of the RCG LDF – to be formally approved by relevant NCs during the Decision Meeting in September 2023.

The 2024 RCG LDF meeting is expected to be held in early July. Most likely, the dates will fall into the week 2–5 of July or alternatively 9-12 July.

Regarding the venue, Spain invites the group to visit Cadiz or Tenerife (t.b.c.) for its next RCG LDF meeting. As back-up options, Poland and The Netherlands also flagged the offer to host next RCG LDF meeting.

The following table provides an overview of the venues and chairmanship of this RCG.

Year	Venue	Chair
2023	Palanga, Lithuania	Irek Wójcik (Poland)
2022	Funchal, Madeira (Hybrid meeting)	Irek Wójcik (Poland)
2021	Online WebEx meeting	Irek Wójcik (Poland)
2020	Online WebEx meeting	Irek Wójcik (Poland)
2019	Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Spain	Sieto Verver (The Netherlands)
2018	Riga, Latvia	Sieto Verver (The Netherlands)
2017	Copenhagen, Denmark Hamburg, Germany	Sieto Verver (The Netherlands)
2016	Vilnius, Lithuania	Sieto Verver (The Netherlands)
2015	Hamburg, Germany Cádiz, Spain	Irek Wójcik (Poland)
2014	IJmuiden, The Netherlands	Irek Wójcik (Poland)
2013	Constanza, Romania	Irek Wójcik (Poland)
2012	Madrid, Spain	Irek Wójcik (Poland)
2011	Ljubljana, Slovenia	Maria Teresa Garcia (Spain) and Dirk-Jan van der Stelt (The Netherlands)
2010	Madrid, Spain	Maria Teresa Garcia (Spain) and Jaime Mejuto (Spain)

9.5 Draft ToR 2024

Draft Terms of Reference – RCG LDF 2024

1. **Review progress since 2023 following up the Liaison Meeting or other expert groups reports**

2. **Review feedback from end users**
   - CECAF/ SPRFMO / NAFO
   - Other input received

3. **Analyse data from 2023 RCG LDF data call**
   - Data compilation, providing overviews of fisheries
   - Consider inclusion of emerging fisheries
   - Feedback from WGRDBESGOV / comments on experience RDB upload

4. **Regional data collection, analysis and storage**
   - State of play of sampling in CECAF, SPRFMO and NAFO areas in 2023
   - Discuss possibility of new data collection requirements related to EU joining the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC)
   - Discuss potential implications of the SMEFF Regulation (Regulation 2017/2403 on the sustainable management of external fishing fleets)

5. **Future data collection set up in CECAF/SPRFMO/NAFO**
   - CECAF future data needs
   - Feedback from ISSG SPRFMO-OP on the EU Observer Programme accreditation procedure adopted by the SPRFMO
   - NAFO current and future data needs

6. **AOB**
   - Discuss relevant upcoming calls for tender, studies
   - Review option of harmonization/unification of the RCG LDF RoP with RoPs of other RCGs
   - Place and date of the next RCG LDF

10 Recommendations / Decisions

No recommendations were proposed by the RCG LDF 2023.

For Decision Meeting in September 2023 – approval by the relevant NCs:

- The proposed agreements on the extension of the CECAF and SPRFMO Multilateral Agreements (from section 7.5);
- Approval of **Maksims Kovsars** (LVA) unanimously elected by the Group as the new chair of the RCG LDF (from section 9.4).

11 Annexes

Annex 1: Agenda for LDF 2023

Regional Co-ordination Group for the Long Distance Fisheries

(RCG LDF 2023)

Palanga, Lithuania

3rd - 6th July 2023

Agenda

Monday:
15:00 seat-in, connect and set up
15:30 - 18:30 meeting time

Tuesday - Wednesday:
9:00 - 17:00 meeting time

Thursday:
9:00 - 13:00 - meeting time
(*end time pending the progress made*)

General
Coffee-break 10:30 & 15:30
Lunch 13:00 – 14:00

Work Plan

Monday, 3rd July 2023

15:00 – 15:30 : Seat-in, set up connections etc.

15:30 – 18:30 : Plenary session

- Welcome, introduction, organization (task sharing) & "house" rules
- Discuss ToRs, adopt agenda, appoint rapporteurs

➔ **ToR 1 Review progress since 2022 following up the 19th Liaison Meeting report**
- *Follow-up of recommendations / output RCG LDF 2022*
- *Review of the outputs of the 19th Liaison Meeting*
- *Participation to the WGRDBESGOV (update)*

➔ **CECAF related ToRs and discussions**
- *ToR 1 Review progress since 2022 following up the 19th Liaison Meeting report*
- ***ToR 2: Review feedback and recommendations from data end users***
  - *ToR 2: Discuss feedback from CECAF groups*
  - *ToR 2: State of play of pelagic sampling in CECAF area in 2022*

- ***ToR 5 Current and future data collection set up in CECAF***
  - *ToR 5 CECAF future data needs*

➔ **SPRFMO related ToRs and discussions**

- *ToR 1 Review progress since 2022 following up the 19th Liaison Meeting report*
- ***ToR 2: Review feedback and recommendations from data end users***
  - *ToR 2: Discuss feedback from SPRFMO*
  - *ToR 2: State of play of pelagic sampling in SPRFMO area in 2022*
- ***ToR 5 Current and future data collection set up in SPRFMO***
  - *ToR 5: Feedback from ISSG SPRFMO-OP*

➔ **NAFO related ToRs and discussions**

- ***ToR 2: Review feedback and recommendations from data end users***
  - *ToR 2: State of play of sampling in NAFO area - historical background and current status*
  - *ToR 2: Discuss feedback from NAFO*
- ***ToR 5: NAFO current and future data needs***

➔ **ToR 4: Regional data collection, analysis and storage**

- *Consider future mechanisms to continue strengthening regional cooperation, including outcomes from projects under MARE/2020/08 Grant:*
  - *Fish'n'Co (development of draft RWP)*
  - *SecWeb (Implementation of generic tools for RCGs: RDB, Web, Secretariat)*
- *Discuss possibility of new data collection requirements related to EU joining the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC)*
- *Discuss potential implication of the SMEFF Regulation*

Tuesday - Wednesday, 4th – 5th July 2023

9.00 – 17.00 : "subgroup" session / Plenary session (depending on the progress and needs)

➔ **ToR 3 Analyse data from 2022 RCG LDF data call**

- *ToR 3 Data compilation*
- *ToR 3 provide overviews of fisheries*
- *ToR 3 Consider future inclusion of emerging fisheries*
- *ToR 3 Identify sampling obligations facilitating current multi-annual work plan*

- *ToR 3 Share and comment on experiences related to RDB upload / feedback from WGRDBESGOV*

➔ **ToR 6 AOB**

- *Review option of harmonization/unification of the RCG LDF Rules of Procedure (RoP) with RoPs of other RCGs*

Thursday, 6th July 2023

9:00 – 13:00 : Plenary session

➔ **Discuss outcomes and conclusions ToR 3,4,5,6**

➔ **Report assemblage and reading**

➔ **ToR 6 AOB:**

- *Discuss relevant upcoming calls for tenders/proposals and studies*
- *Election of the new RCG LDF chair*
- *Place and date of the next RCG LDF*

➔ **Adoption of the draft report**

Closure of the meeting

Annex 2: List of participants

Name	Email address	Organization
Christine Röckmann	christine.rockmann@ec.europa.eu	EC, DG MARE
Christoph Stransky (NC)	christoph.stransky@thuenen.de	Thünen Institute of Sea Fisheries (DEU)
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Eva García Isarch	eva.garcia@ieo.csic.es	Instituto Español de Oceanografía (IEO, CSIC) (ESP)
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Loreta Brazinskaite	loreta.brazinskaite@zum.lt	Ministry of Agriculture (LTU)
Maksims Kovsars	maksims.kovsars@bior.lv	Institute of Food Safety, Animal Health and Environment "BIOR" (LVA)
Ricardo Alpoim	ralpoim@ipma.pt	IPMA - Portuguese Institute for Sea and Atmosphere (PRT)
Sieto Verver (NC)	Sieto.Verver@wur.nl	CVO-WUR (NLD)
Susana Rivero	secretariat@fisheries-rcg.eu; srivero@cetmar.org	RCG Secretariat - CETMAR
Vilda Griuniene (NC)	vilda.griuniene@zum.lt	Ministry of Agriculture (LTU)

Annex 3: The overview of references to be added to the RDB to facilitate both current as well as upcoming data uploads

Port	LOCODE	Country
Morocco Unknown	MA999	MOROCCO

Species	AphiaID	English name	FAO
Pteromylaeus bovinus	105861	Bull ray	MPO
Monacanthidae	125610	Filefishes, leatherjackets nei	FFX
Liza spp	126031		LZZ
Pampus argenteus	127075	Silver pomfret	SIP
Trigloporus lastoviza	154462	Streaked gurnard	CTZ
Argyrosomus hololepidotus	218632	Southern meagre(=Mulloway)	KOB
Pontinus accraensis	274681	Ghanean rockfish	PIS
Patella tenuis crenata	752563		WPT
Argyrosomus spp	843355	Meagres nei	RXY
Dasyatis spp	843432	Stingrays nei	STI
Syacium guineensis	275838	Papillose flounder	YGL
Lafoeidae	1609	?	N/A
Chionobathyscus dewitti	234650	N/A	CHW
Muraenolepis microps	234742	Smalleye moray cod	MOY
Dissostichus mawsoni	234836	Antarctic toothfish	TOA

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Annex 4: Minutes of the key meetings of ISSG SPRFMO-OP 2022-2023

RCG LDF Intersessional Subgroup on the SPRFMO Observer Programme (ISSG SPRFMO-OP)

Meeting date: 9 November 2022 (online)

Meeting purpose: The 9th ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting was organized for further discussions concerning preparation of the documents to MRAG (MRAG Ltd is an independent fisheries and aquatic resource consulting firm and has been selected to evaluate SPRFMO Member States' observer programs against the requirements set out in CMM 16-2022).

Background

MS currently involved in fisheries activities and data collection in SPRFMO are: DEU, POL, NLD and LTU. MS are collecting data in SPRFMO area on the basis of the "*Multi-lateral agreement between Germany, Lithuania, The Netherlands and Poland for biological data collection of pelagic fisheries in SPRFMO waters*". The agreement is valid until the end of 2023, Poland having the role of coordination of the sampling program.

Participants

Irek Wójcik (DCF NC POL, RCG LDF Chairman), Sieto Verver (NLD), Christoph Stransky (DCF NC DEU), Vilda Griūnienė (DCF NC LTU); Tom Bangma (Project leader, NLD), Benoit Marcoux (COM).

Aim of the meeting

Over 2021-2022, many meetings and discussions concerning SPRFMO Observer Programme (OP) accreditation were organized:

- The Technical Meeting regarding the SPRFMO Observer Programme organized by COM on 10 March 2021;
- First meeting of ISSG SPRFMO-OP on 12 May 2021;
- the Second Technical Meeting regarding the SPRFMO OP initiated by the chairman of the Regional Coordination Group for Long-Distance Fisheries (RCG LDF) and organized by COM with representatives from MRAG (SPRFMO Accreditation Evaluator) on 25 June 2021;
- Discussions in RCG LDF annual session 5-7 July 2021;
- The second ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting on 26 October 2021;
- The Institutes and the industry representatives meeting on 27 October 2021;
- The third ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting on 8 December 2021;
- The fourth ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting on 21 December 2021;
- The fifth ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting on 17 January 2022;
- The sixth ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting on 25 April 2022;

- The seventh ISSG-OP meeting on 22 June 2022;
- The eighth ISSG-OP meeting on 12 July 2022;

The ninth ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting was organized on 9 November 2022 and the aim was to discuss the procedures and timetable for collecting the documents required for observer programme accreditation.

Discussion

The current situation. The accreditation process in EU falls under a dedicated Intersessional Subgroup (ISSG) of the RCG LDF. The most feasible option for carrying out accreditation is to apply for a accreditation by MS institutes. The Netherlands act as project leader for the process - Tom Bangma (Wageningen Marine Research institute) coordinates the project. Germany, Lithuania, Poland and the Netherlands identified observers to establish a pool of observers to undergo the accreditation process. Also, the initial international team of data collection experts working towards accreditation was appointed.
Tom Bangma presented to the group the practical guidelines for the documents upload. Four folders in the TEAMS group were created, one for each Member State. Vilda Griuniene informed, that the access to the folder is secured by codes. Sieto Verver indicated the problem - Wageningen Marine Research institute's TEAMS folders are secured from the external users. It was decided to renew the connection to the folders and to ensure that all Member States can access folders on the TEAMS platform until the next meeting.
The main requirements for documents were discussed shortly.
Tom Bangma presented observer declaration and observer provider declaration forms, which every Member State's selected observer and institute/university needs to sign and to add to the accreditation document list.
The forms were approved by the group, no comments or remarks were provided, only it was decided to add logos of all institutes/universities, which take part in the SPRFMO observer programme, to the declaration forms.
Also, during the meeting, the group decided to start to gather portfolio documents for the selected observers. The requirements for documents e.g. visas and work permits, medicine certificates, training experiences were discussed. Irek Wojcik provided practical examples from previous observer trips (Poland is implementing biological data collection in the SPRFMO area since 2016). Summarizing, Tom Bangma undertook the initiative to prepare the required documents list for observer portfolios and to present it in the next meeting.

Finally, Tom Bangma as a project coordinator, encouraged MS to provide the documentation without the required documents list in order to optimize the time and to align with the schedule.

Discussions on a feasible next meeting date and time took place.

Conclusions and follow-up 9th ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting

- The observer declaration and observer provider declaration forms were approved by the group.

- To start collecting documentation according to the SPRFMO CMM 16-2022 and MRAG manual and to provide this information in the MS folders on the Teams platform.
- Trying to avoid duplications and misunderstandings, to prepare the required document list for selected observers and to present it in the next meeting;
- Next ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting: 21 December 2022. Further discussions concerning preparation of the documents are expected between EU MS.

RCG LDF Intersessional Subgroup on the SPRFMO Observer Programme (ISSG SPRFMO-OP)

Meeting date: 13 January 2023 (online)

Meeting purpose: The 10th ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting was organized for further discussions concerning preparation of the documents to MRAG (MRAG Ltd is an independent fisheries and aquatic resource consulting firm and has been selected to evaluate SPRFMO Member States' observer programs against the requirements set out in CMM 16-2022).

Background

MS currently involved in fisheries activities and data collection in SPRFMO are: DEU, POL, NLD and LTU. MS are collecting data in SPRFMO area on the basis of the "*Multi-lateral agreement between Germany, Lithuania, The Netherlands and Poland for biological data collection of pelagic fisheries in SPRFMO waters*". The agreement is valid until the end of 2023, Poland having the role of coordination of the sampling program.

Participants

Irek Wójcik (DCF NC POL), Sieto Verver (NLD), Christoph Stransky (DCF NC DEU), Vilda Griūnienė (DCF NC LTU); Tom Bangma (Project leader, NLD), Benoit Marcoux (COM).

Aim of the meeting

Over 2021-2022, many meetings and discussions concerning SPRFMO Observer Programme (OP) accreditation were organized:

- The Technical Meeting regarding the SPRFMO Observer Programme organized by COM on 10 March 2021;
- First meeting of ISSG SPRFMO-OP on 12 May 2021;
- the Second Technical Meeting regarding the SPRFMO OP initiated by the chairman of the Regional Coordination Group for Long-Distance Fisheries (RCG LDF) and organized by COM with representatives from MRAG (SPRFMO Accreditation Evaluator) on 25 June 2021;
- Discussions in RCG LDF annual session 5-7 July 2021;
- The second ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting on 26 October 2021;
- The Institutes and the industry representatives meeting on 27 October 2021;
- The third ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting on 8 December 2021;
- The fourth ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting on 21 December 2021;
- The fifth ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting on 17 January 2022;
- The sixth ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting on 25 April 2022;
- The seventh ISSG-OP meeting on 22 June 2022;
- The eighth ISSG-OP meeting on 12 July 2022;

- The ninth ISSG-OP meeting on 9 November 2022;

The tenth ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting was organized on 13 January 2023 and the aim was to discuss the procedures and time table of collecting documents.

Discussion

The current situation. The accreditation process in EU falls under a dedicated Intersessional Subgroup (ISSG) of the RCG LDF. The most feasible option for carrying out accreditation is to apply for a accreditation by MS institutes. The Netherlands act as project leader for the process - Tom Bangma (Wageningen Marine Research institute) coordinates the project. Germany, Lithuania, Poland and the Netherlands identified observers to establish a pool of observers to undergo the accreditation process. Also, the initial international team of data collection experts working towards accreditation was appointed.

Tom Bangma introduced to the group a draft list of observer portfolio documents, containing evidence of observer qualifications; evidence of previous experience; observer's curriculum vitae; self-declaration signed by the observer; copy of passport; copies of visas and work permits; copy of medical certificate for fitness at sea; copy of certificate for survival at sea, copy of certificate of basic safety training and copy of vaccinations certificate. Representatives from MS decided to approve the list with some changes (e.g. copies of visas and work permits, vaccination certificates will be provided by special request).

Project leader Tom Bangma provided modified observer declarations and observer provider declarations forms with the universities/institutes logos and informed that signed forms from Germany and Lithuania were received. Also, the Netherlands and Lithuania started to upload observer portfolio documents on the Teams platform. Tom Bangma asked MS to start to submit the documents or to add missing documents to complete the observer portfolio document folders until the next meeting.

After the round of questions and discussions concerning self-declaration of good conduct, observer declaration and observer provider declaration forms and the template for the observer ID card, it was decided to submit these templates and ask for feedback from MRAG before taking further action. Also, it was decided to contact the representatives from New Zealand (New Zealand reached the SPRFMO accreditation in 2021) with a request to share good practice about the process of accreditation, provided documents etc. Tom Bangma took the lead and responsibility to contact MRAG and New Zealand representatives and to inform all MS as soon as possible about the outcomes.

Concerning the process of the evaluation for all nominated SPRFMO observers and organizing the training courses, Sieto Verver informed that the process is progressing, but some difficulties were identified. The main idea was to have two-three days training organized by the Wageningen Marine Research institute, but the training methodological material should be developed prior to that, based on the detailed scientific information, supported by pictures and illustrations. The preparation of methodology is a time-consuming and thorough process. MS will be informed in the next the meeting about the progress.

Discussions on a feasible next meeting date and time took place, due to the fact that some tasks required a longer period for the implementation, the next meeting was planned at the end of February.

Conclusions and follow-up of the 10th ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting

- To submit a first set of documents for MRAG evaluation (self-declaration of good conduct, observer declaration, observer provider declaration, template for the observer ID card).
- To continue collecting documentation according to the SPRFMO CMM 16-2022 and MRAG manual and to provide this information in the MS folders on the Teams platform.
- To develop the training methodological material.
- Next ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting: 23 February 2023. Further discussions concerning preparation of the documents are expected between EU MS.

Annex 5: RCG LDF chair's letter of support for REDUCE project

Att. Jacob González-Solís
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Ecologia i Ciències Ambientals 08028 Barcelona
Avda. Diagonal, 643 Spain
jgsolis@ub.edu

Subject: Letter of support to the proposal: REDUCE "Reducing Bycatch of threatened megafauna in the East Central Atlantic"

Dear Dr. González-Solis,

Through this letter I, the undersigned, would like to express my readiness to cooperate in the project "Reducing Bycatch of threatened megafauna in the East Central Atlantic" that is expected to apply for a Horizon Europe grant, under the Call topic: "HORIZON-CL6-2023-BIODIV-01-5 "Understanding and reducing Bycatch of Protected Species".

Due to my background as the manager of the implementation of DCF in Poland and due to my current role as Chair of the Regional Coordination Group for Long Distance Fisheries (RCG LDF) I can offer my assistance to REDUCE consortium by facilitating the link between this and the relevant fisheries experts and groups I have links with.

While I am RCG LDF chair I can declare a standing invitation to the consortium for participation in the RCG annual technical meeting to discuss possible cooperation. I can also declare this RCG's openness to new ideas and research approaches and outcomes regarding the reduction of unwanted by-catches of Protected, Endangered and Threatened Species in the East Central Atlantic Area, as this makes part of the area in the remit of the RCG LDF.

If the proposal is granted, I will convey your offer to the RCG to enable discussion about the scope that can be accepted and feasible for such collaborations.

I believe that the objectives of the REDUCE proposal are important to achieve significant progress towards phasing out by-catches by co-creating pathways to accelerate the shift towards sustainable fisheries and biodiversity policy objectives at national, EU and international levels.

Therefore, I believe that the participatory approach planned in REDUCE represents an excellent opportunity to contribute to the conservation of marine biodiversity.

I am expecting REDUCE project to provide stakeholders with new knowledge and technologies, recommendations, relationships, and decision tools to guide our own strategy and activities in the forthcoming years.

Looking forward to a positive outcome from the evaluation stage,

21/03/2023

Ireneusz (Irek) Wójcik
National Correspondent (DCF) and Chair of the RCG Long Distance Fisheries
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Department of Logistics & Monitoring
National Marine Fisheries Research Institute
ul. Kołłątaja 1, 81-332 Gdynia

Signature and signature date

Co-funded by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund