



Fisheries Data Collection 21st Liaison Meeting

**Meeting between the Chairs of RCGs, key end users,
European Commission DG Mare and JRC**

Report

4th November 2024



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES
Fisheries Policy Atlantic, North Sea, Baltic and Outermost Regions
Unit C.3 — Scientific Advice and Data Collection

**REGIONAL COORDINATION GROUPS
For Fisheries Data Collection**

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RCGs Secretariat

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Term	Description
AC	Advisory Council
AER	Annual Economic Report (for the European fishing fleet)
BSAC	Black Sea Advisory Council
BFT	Bluefin Tuna
CECAF	Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy
CKMR	Close-Kin-Mark-Recapture
CPCs	Contracting Parties and Cooperating non-contracting Parties
DCF	Data Collection Framework (follow up of DCR)
DCRF	Data Collection Reference Framework
DG MARE	Commission's Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
DTMT	Data Transmission Monitoring Tool
EC (or COM)	European Commission
EM	Electronic Monitoring
ERA	Economic Report of EU Aquaculture
ETP	Endangered, Threatened and Protected Species
EU	European Union
EU-MAP	Multi Annual Programme for Data Collection
EWG	Expert Working Group
FDI	Fisheries-dependent information
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GFCM	General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean
ICCAT	International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas
ICES	International Council for the Exploration of the Sea
IOTC	Indian Ocean Tuna Commission
ISSG	Intersessional Subgroup
JRC	Joint Research Centre
LDAC	Long Distance Advisory Council
LDF	Long Distance Fisheries
LM	Liaison Meeting
LP	Large Pelagics
MAC	Market Advisory Council
MAP	Marine Action Plan
Med&BS	Mediterranean & Black Sea (region)
MRF	Marine Recreational Fisheries
MS	Member State(s)
MSFD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive
NAFO	Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization
NASCO	North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization
NC	National Correspondent (DCF)
NPFC	The North Pacific Fisheries Commission
NWP	National Work Plan
PGECON	Planning Group on Economic Issues
RCG	Regional Coordination Group
RCM	Regional Coordination Meeting
RDB	Regional Data Base (of the RCM/RCG)
RDBES	Regional Data Base and Estimation System
RDBFIS	Integrated Fisheries Information System for the Mediterranean and Black Sea
RFMO	Regional Fisheries Management Organization
RoP	Rules of Procedure
RWP	Regional Work Plan
SAC	Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries
SAF	Stock Assessment Form
SIOFA	Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement
SPRMFO	South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization
SSF	Small Scale Fisheries
STECF	Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries
TAF	Transparent Assessment Framework

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Term	Description
VME	Vulnerable Marine Ecosystem
VMS	Vessel Monitoring System
WG	Working Group
WGRDBESGOV	Working Group on Regional Data Base and Estimation System Governance

Introduction

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

21th Liaison Meeting (LM) between the Chairs of the Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs), key end users (ICES, STECF, RFMOs), JRC and the Commission met on September 24 & 25, 2024 on a hybrid meeting. The meeting was opened by the Commission and the LM chair introducing the ToRs and topics that would be of interest to discuss with the end-users. Following the ToRs, the meeting addressed common topics through interaction with end users of the first day as well as among the various RCGs on the second day. Due to the wide range of topics addressed during the meeting, some discussions and conclusions are only directly relevant to a specific group or end user. By discussing the topics in this forum, additional input and insights are gained as well as improved shared responsibility and commonalities.

On the end user interaction: the main end users acknowledged the good cooperation with relevant RCGs. In some cases, the interaction is formalised through dedicated meetings or even a dedicated RCG contact person. Other interactions are mainly built on the annual technical RCG meeting. Many of the end users have started to work on data platforms for data storing and /or data calls, making the end users requirement clearer and more transparent and hopefully easier for the Member States (MS) to respond to. Regional databases are acknowledged as the backbone for storing and dissemination of DCF data. Dedicated developments were discussed as well as the current status of the development of the Regional Database RDBFIS for Med&BS as currently under development through a MARE framework contract study while for the RDBES an update on the implementation and further development was presented. There were further discussions on how to ensure the alignment on the FDI data call with the Annual Economic Report (AER) on capacity, effort and landings, as the data is transmitted repeatedly which leads to duplication of work and an increased number of inconsistencies. It was highlighted that if changes are made in the data call variables, it will have a large effect on all other data bases as well, therefore changes in format should be made with caution and in close cooperation with the other data end users.

There were further discussions on data access and confidentiality. Different MS use very different levels of confidentiality for when data can be public. Some MS uses 3 vessels, some 5 and many countries allows use of all data. This again differs between different data calls indicating that the same MS can use different levels of confidentiality depending on the data call, but with similar data. It was decided during the LM that a workshop should be conducted on this issue with the participation of NC, scientists with understanding of end-user needs and the Commission.

End user driven DCF data collection may not always suffice for end user and more and new data were requested. As an example, it was highlighted the need for more genetics, tagging and social economic data. Furthermore, some end-users also highlighted challenges with very late submission from EU fleet and for few countries no data submission at all. Improved interaction between data collectors and end users was discussed with some end users in order to better align needs and options to collect data.

On the RoPs from RCGs there were no new updates.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

According to Article 8 of the Regulation (EC) No 2017/1004 (Data Collection Framework, DCF), Member States shall cooperate and coordinate their actions to further improve the quality, timeliness and coverage of data enabling the reliability of data collection methods to be further improved, with a view to improving their data collection activities. Further, according to Article 9(1) of the same regulation, 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.

In order to facilitate regional coordination, Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs) shall be established by the relevant Member States for each marine region (Article 9(2) of the Regulation (EC) No 2017/1004). An RCG consists of experts appointed by Member States, including national correspondents, end users and the Commission and a meeting is held annually. Regional coordination has been conducted through various constellations since 2004. In 2017, the following five Regional Coordination Groups (RCG) were operating under the DCF:

- RCG Baltic (Baltic)
- RCG North Atlantic, North Sea & Eastern Arctic (NANSEA)
- RCG Mediterranean and Black Sea (Med&BS)
- RCG Long Distance Fisheries (LDF)
- RCG Large Pelagics (LP)

In 2020, an RCG ECON dealing with data collection of economic data issues was established:

- RCG Economic Issues (ECON)

Table 1.1.1: RCGs chairs for the season 2024 – 2025, including incoming and outgoing chairs

RCG	Chairs 2023/2024	email
NANSEA	Josefine Egekvist	jsv@aqu.dtu.dk
	Rita Vasconcelos	rita.vasconcelos@ipma.pt
Baltic	Maciej Adamowicz (outgoing)	madamowicz@mir.gdynia.pl
	Vilda Griuniene (incoming)	vilda.griuniene@zum.lt
LP	Hugo Maxwell (outgoing)	Hugo.Maxwell@Marine.ie
	Jurgen Mifsud	jurgen.a.mifsud@gov.mt
	Pedro Lino (incoming)	plino@ipma.pt
LDF	Maksims Kovsars	maksims.kovsars@bior.lv
ECON	Hans van Oostenbrugge (outgoing)	hans.vanoostenbrugge@wur.nl
	Eirini Tzouramani	tzouramani@agreri.gr
	Jeppe Strandgaard Herring (incoming)	JHR@dst.dk
Med&BS	Emmanuel Tessier (outgoing)	Emmanuel.Tessier@ifremer.fr
	Charis Charilaou	ccharilaou@dfmr.moa.gov.cy
	Alexandru Gheorghe (incoming)	Alexandru.gheorghe@anpa.ro

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The RCG Baltic and RCG NANSEA are holding their meeting together although they are still formally two separate groups. In addition to the regional RCGs, a pan-regional RCG deals with collection of economic data: The Regional Coordination Group on Economic Issues (RCG ECON). This RCG is the successor of the previous group PGECON although the status of PGECON was slightly different as a subgroup of the EU Expert ⁽¹⁾ group on Fisheries Data collection.

Similarly, the Liaison Meeting is a subgroup of the EU Expert ⁽²⁾ group on Fisheries Data collection, established to assist the Commission on data collection issues. As stipulated in Article 9(6) of the Regulation (EC) 2017/1004, RCGs “shall coordinate with each other and with the Commission, where issues affect several marine regions”. In order to create a forum where issues that affect several marine regions can be assessed and discussed, a Liaison meeting is organised every year after the RCG meetings have taken place, with participation of the chairs (incoming and outgoing) of all RCGs, key end users, and the Commission.

The 21st Liaison Meeting (LM) was held as a hybrid meeting in DG MARE, Brussels on September 24 & 25, 2024.

1.2 Adoption of the agenda

After opening of the meeting, the draft agenda was adopted by the participants. See Annex 2 for the agenda of the meeting.

1.3 Terms of Reference

TOR 1 Discussion with end users

- A. Setting the scene: End-user role and new data demands (Liaison Meeting chair and COM)
- B. End-user needs and interaction: presentations from end users (ICES, GFCM, STECF/JRC, IOTC) on:
 - current interaction between the end user and RCGs/data collectors and proposals for improvement
 - data needs and data quality
 - ongoing developments
 - main changes in data calls anticipated next year

TOR 2 Data management

- A. Highlights in progress achieved in 2023-2024 in the Regional Databases for RCGs and problems identified.

⁽¹⁾<https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?do=groupDetail.groupDetail&groupID=2750>

⁽²⁾<https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?do=groupDetail.groupDetail&groupID=2750>

Introduction

B. Highlights in actions related to the future developments for Regional Databases (RCG chairs, RDBFIS, RDBES)

TOR 3 RCG activities (follow-up) Discussion on possible follow-up to the main outputs/recommendations

A. Highlights in RCG activities

B. The 2024 RCGs – recommendations and proposals for future intersessional work (Liaison Meeting and RCG chairs)

C. RCG data calls – overview of how MS responded and discussion on future use (RCG chairs)

D. Announcement of new chairs (where relevant), next meeting(s) and venues

E. Future steps in RCG pan-regional and intersessional work (i.e., regional work plans, country profiles): exchange of ideas and discussion (COM, Liaison Meeting, RCG Chairs)

TOR 4 Governance

A. Follow-up on RCG Rules of Procedures (RoP) developments in each of the RCGs (Liaison Meeting, RCG Chairs)

B. Structure of RCGs and cooperation. Discuss needs for new pan-regional ISSGs (RCG chairs)

- Status on Secretariat (current output available to RCGs)
- Diadromous ISSG (position and future participation to LM)

TOR 5 AOB

1.4 Participants (list in annex 1)

The 21st Liaison Meeting was chaired by Marie Storr-Paulsen (Denmark) and the meeting was attended by the Commission, key end users of the Data Collection and the chairs of the RCGs. Annex 1 provides an overview of the participants to the meeting and their respective affiliation.

2 DISCUSSION WITH END-USERS (TOR 1A&1B)

2.1 Setting the scene (ToR 1A)

Welcome and first introductory words by Monika Sterczewska (DG MARE). She explains that there are a few people sick in the MARE team so Venetia Kostopoulou takes the floor for the official welcome. Venetia Kostopoulou on behalf of the Head of Unit C3, Raluca Ivanescu, welcomed participants. She noted that the Liaison Meeting is an important event with a wide scope, which forms the core of the Common Fisheries Policy. The feedback of end users is important, in terms of data needs and data issues, both of which should be addressed by data collectors, but also any new, arising issues and developments. The work of RCG chairs is essential for the coordination of the intersessional work of the different RCGs, and the RCG Secretariat is instrumental in this sense. The Liaison Meeting is an opportunity to share the work completed so far, summarise achievements, present recommendations and future work plans. Two areas of work were highlighted: (1) regional work plans for new period 2025-2027 and (2) data management, in the form of developments in Regional Database Estimation System (RDBES) for the North and RDBFIS in the South and the IT platform for submission of MS reports.

Next, the chair Marie Storr-Paulsen highlighted the importance of strengthening the link between data collectors and end users. With new incoming data sources such as genetics, stomach content analysis and, camera images, discussions are needed on prioritisation. She then presented the terms of reference, outlined where to find the documents, the timelines for the report writing and mentioned the legal reference to the Liaison Meeting (LM), its objectives and its evolution over time including the dedicated day for interaction with the end users. In the end, the LM chair highlighted some of the main issues that the different RCGs would like to discuss during this meeting:

- There is an increasing demand for new data collection (Genetics, stomachs, new surveys, etc) and funding is not increasing (and maybe decreasing in the future). How can we stop / decrease sampling effort in areas where data is (presently) of limited use in stock assessment. Ex. Ages of Hake, Anglerfish, Cod (eastern Baltic).
- Optimizing survey effort.
- Data Sharing agreements. The GDPR rules are not interpreted the same way between MS, it would be very beneficial if MS were more aligned.
- Access to closed areas with scientific vessels. Currently, there is a very large difference between MS on how access to closed areas is handled; and the prevision is that some of these areas will be out of access for data collection – can we find a common way to deal with this challenge.

2.2 End-user needs and interactions (ToR 1B)

2.2.1 IOTC presentation

The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) is an intergovernmental organisation responsible for the management of tuna and tuna-like species in the Indian Ocean. IOTC Contracting Parties and Cooperating non-Contracting Parties are required to report information for the 16 species directly under the IOTC mandate as well another main shark species caught in IOTC Fisheries and ETP species.

Discussion with end-users (ToR 1A&1B)

European Union is a key contracting party (CPC) of the IOTC contributing with around 10% of the total IOTC catches in 2022. The main catches of the EU are for Industrials fisheries (25%) and for tropical tuna species (18% of the total catch of tropical tunas).

The main and persistent issues identified in European Union data provided to the IOTC are: (i) late submission of mandatory statistical data for some EU fleets (Spain), (ii) lack on information on raising discard data, (iii) limited size data coverage for some fisheries, (iv) missing data for other species than swordfish (target species) in Spanish longliners, and (v) low observer coverage in Portuguese and Spanish longline fisheries.

Important improvement was done in the EU compared with the previous year as (i) the re submission of all data for the Italian purse seine fishery (2015 – 2022), (ii) the review of issues with species composition due to changes in estimation process of the Spanish purse seine fishery for 2018, (iii) the review of fishing effort from Spanish support vessels (2015-2022), (iv) submission of observer data from Portugal longline fishery (no data since 2019), and (v) the implementation of new IOTC forms for reporting data in 2023.

The Secretariat also acknowledge the interaction with RCGS and data collectors in relation with the following activities: (i) Participation in the Western Regional Data Reporting Workshop (Nairobi, Kenya. May 2024), (ii) Participation of the IOTC Secretariat to the RCG LP intersessional subgroup meeting and annual meeting held in June 2024, (iii) Meeting with Ifremer in September 2024. Review of data status and issues in reporting for fisheries from Reunion and Mayotte and (iv) Ongoing EU-funded project (EC 1024) supporting data collection and reporting of IOTC artisanal fisheries data as well as management of data collected on bycatch species caught in IOTC fisheries.

Discussions and feed-back:

It was assuring to hear that the data quality and submission status had improved since last year however late submissions by some MS (Spain) was mentioned. From IOTC it was highlighted that a dialog was ongoing to guarantee the submission on time. Question was raised concerning the confidentiality rules applied by the IOTC and the reply was that it was mainly affecting the sharing of data.

2.2.2 ICCAT Presentation

Not attending

2.2.3 SIOFA presentation

Not attending

2.2.4 NAFO presentation

Not attending

2.2.5 ICES presentation

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) highly value the good dialogue with RCGs Chairs, both formal and informal. ICES has a dedicated team linked to the RCGs which as well is linked to the data groups and as well the Fisheries Research Steering Group, which should facilitate that the overall information flow is coherent across relevant groups in ICES, at least in the Secretariat. In terms of recommendations, the process has been established by the RCG Chairs and the ICES Secretariat ensuring an agile approach to responding to recommendations and as well a

Discussion with end-users (ToR 1A&1B)

sense-checking of recommendations prior to communication of these to recipients is working very well.

In terms of data and upcoming challenges, ICES highlighted the following points:

- Genetic information – increasing need for genetic data to separate stocks (cod, herring...); how should this data be collected, stored, etc. across data providers? GenDC project ongoing.
- Innovative Gears and the uptake of these. ICES is suggesting a WG for Innovative Gears, which (among other things) will develop a data call for the uptake of new (innovative) gears beyond trials.
- Eel, salmon and trout data: NASCO requests ICES to develop an integrated, seamless process to input data into a common database from a web-based application (aka RDBES); and in addition, the Diaspara project on standardizing the format, the quality control (QC) and data storage for eel, trout, and salmon, improving methodological aspects of the design, collection and/or management of the data collected.
- Tagging data; WKTAG this year to summarise data from recent and ongoing tagging programmes, primarily focussing on mark-identification tagging, but also using the platform to collate summary information on acoustic and electronic tagging, conducted by national institutes (2000-2022).
- Socio-economic data – primarily so far associated with non-recurrent requests, but also the EOs. New request concerning the GNSBI will need such data for a cumulative impact assessment (working through WGCEAM). Not certain any data calls will be associated with this request

The data call processes for 2025 were not envisaged changing, however, ICES is drafting a Data Calls Guidance document. This is aimed at differentiating between formal data calls going to NCs and other data requests between groups/experts within a working group.

Concerning the RDBES, ICES briefly outlined the short-term development plans and highlighted the serious concerns regarding the on-wards funding of the RDBES. Given that the RDBES will replace InterCatch, which is used by the ICES stock assessment Working Groups, the necessary development must be ensured via the MoUs/GAs with ICES' advice requesters. A shared non-recurrent request has been suggested to Norway, UK and DGMARE and other routes are being explored.

Discussions and feed-back

The eel data base and associated data call was brought up concerning the status of integrating the database currently hosted by France and as well the outlook of receiving a specific eel data call. ICES will host the database at point in time, the first step of applying the Data Profiling Tool has been taken and subsequent steps are being discussed in the ICES Data Center. As for the data call, the WKEELDATA5 was the workshop that designed the eel data call that we issued this year. There are 19 annexes in the data call and each of those annexes are prefilled with previous year's data. For 2025 there will be a WKEELDATA6 to prepare the data call that will be issued in this year.

It was raised that a more detailed mapping of the data uptake from the Assessment Working Groups would facilitate the prioritisation of sampling efforts. WGNSSK was highlighted as having produced a very useful overview and it was a clear wish that all AWGs would produce such an overview for 2025.

Funding of the RDBES database was a major concern and it was raised whether funding of this was realistic in the near future. It was discussed that the short-term development needs may be realistic to get funded by either parts of the advice requesters or even individual countries, however, the

Discussion with end-users (ToR 1A&1B)

longer-term development need to be part of the agreements with advice requesters and ICES in order to not have a high-risk framework for this essential database.

2.2.6 GFCM presentation

The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) continues to play a key role for both the conservation and sustainable use of living marine resources at all levels (biological, social, economic and environmental), and the sustainable development of aquaculture in the Mediterranean and Black Seas area. With its 23 Contracting Parties and 6 Cooperating non-Contracting Parties, the GFCM ensures the implementation of Mediterranean and Black Sea priorities through tailor-made capacity development activities is provided by the MedSea4Fish programme^[1] and the BlackSea4Fish^[2] project, aiming at putting the GFCM 2030 Strategy^[3] for sustainable fisheries and aquaculture into action in the GFCM area of application. Of particular importance is also the provision of capacity development activities for small-scale fisheries through the SSF Forum^[4], a place for small-scale fishers and fish workers from the Mediterranean and Black Sea region to come together, share good practices and learn from one another.

In terms of main achievements in recent years, among the others, GFCM adopted eleven management plans, three decisions setting management measures, a 10-year Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries, improved data collection through the implementation of scientific surveys-at-sea (e.g. demersal and acoustic) in several countries (ongoing), launched six large-scale research programmes, implemented 10 Fisheries Restricted Areas and the discards monitoring programmes in 9 countries, conducted socio-economic surveys in 8 countries, three major scientific databases launched (on sensitive benthic habitats and species, bycatch and Black sea), first assessment of incidental catches of vulnerable species and pilot testing of mitigation measures.

The collection of comprehensive, reliable, and timely fisheries-related data constantly supports the existing GFCM decision-making mechanism, based on scientific advice as formulated by its relevant subsidiary bodies. In 2024 the GFCM data calls reached the number of 130, with a constant increase throughout the recent years. The quality of the collected data, used for scientific advice and compliance assessment of Contracting Parties and Cooperating non-contracting Parties (CPCs) with existing GFCM decisions, continues to be regularly assessed through two different mechanisms that are currently in place at: i) GFCM stock assessment working groups and benchmark sessions held during the year (Stock Assessment Forms input data from both CPCs and experts), ii) Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF) online platform (fisheries data received from CPCs in reply to existing GFCM Recommendations).

Participation in the 2024 RCG Med& annual meeting was duly ensured by the GFCM Secretariat to exchange information about GFCM data calls, data quality and relevant outcomes of the GFCM-SAC which may have an impact on future GFCM requested for fisheries data to the EU countries.

GFCM further advanced on the consolidation of regional databases, including data dissemination through interactive online dashboards to consult those public data that are gathered in accordance with relevant GFCM recommendations.

Discussions and feed-back

About future development, the LM was informed that GFCM, among other relevant activities, will i) continue working on the development of a standardized reporting tool for GFCM request on stock assessment data and align stock assessment data call structure to contemporary assessment models towards optimizing data submission, ii) continue ensuring both quantitative and qualitative analysis

[1] <https://www.fao.org/gfcm/activities/fisheries/cooperation/medsea4fish/en/>

[2] <https://www.fao.org/gfcm/activities/fisheries/cooperation/blacksea4fish/en/>

[3] <https://www.fao.org/gfcm/2030strategy/en/>

[4] <https://www.fao.org/gfcm/activities/fisheries/small-scale-fisheries/ssfforum/en/>

Discussion with end-users (ToR 1A&1B)

of the provisions in GFCM management plans, against the information transmitted by CPCs, to allowing an evaluation of the effectiveness and impacts of existing management measures/plans, iii) work on streamlining, modernizing, optimizing and tailoring the existing GFCM data call process.

GFCM Secretariat will further interact with the LM on aspects in relation with feedback on the data submissions of common members, updates on relevant development in the fisheries data field, standardization and the communication with RCG Med&BS on data calls and data quality. Further, there is an ongoing discussion on data calls for aquaculture although there can be a challenge with the rule of confidentiality as many countries presently do not have a politic on this issue.

Further, there were a short discussion on the eel data and if the movement of the eel database presently in France to ICES, is aligned with the needs from GFCM. GFCM ensured that the eel data experts from Med&BS was in close cooperation with ICES to harmonize the database structure.

2.2.7 STECF presentation

Since the last LM, there have been the following STECF Expert Working Groups (EWGs) using DCF data calls:

- Processing industry (EWG 23-14, Oct 2023)
- Social data (EWG 23-17, Oct 2023; EWG 24-05, May 2024)
- Fleet economics (Annual Economic Report, AER) (EWG 24-03 & 24-07, Apr/Jun 2024)
- Western Mediterranean stock assessment (EWG 24-10, Sep 2024; EWG 24-02, Apr 2024)
- Fisheries-Dependent Information (FDI) (EWG 24-11, Sep 2024)

Concerning *processing industry* data, there is fluent interaction between the EWG and RCG ECON, where data collectors are present. Workshops and meetings are held on a regular basis and changes are implemented. In 2023, an ISSG on Fish Processing issues was held with the aim of harmonising data collection methodologies and share experiences among data collectors. The STECF report on the EU Processing Sector is highly welcome by the Market Advisory Council (MAC). The EWG 23-14 was attended by MAC and MAC has asked for the report presentation at its Working Group in Sep 2024.

As the EU-MAP does not provide a list of variables to be potentially collected, the data collection should follow the definitions and recommendations of RCG ECON as reported in the Guidelines for socio-economic variables (https://datacollection.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/d/dcf/2023_rcg-econ_tm#page=122). In order to face the lack of some data (due to optionality of the data collection), data provided by MS under the data calls have been integrated with Eurostat/SBS data. Because of this, the national chapters are different in terms of coverage and typology of indicators. Data quality and coverage is improving with MS gaining more experience in data submission and requirements, but some discrepancies with RCG ECON recommendations still remain (e.g. social data, raw material data). Regarding raw material, a low coverage was still observed. Considering this low coverage and lack of homogeneity in reporting (impacting the extent of the analysis by experts), STECF PLEN 23-03 suggested DG MARE to decide whether the call of data on raw materials is essential for the (next) reports.

The EWG 23-14 has suggested STECF to consider the possibility, for the future, of a data collection taking into account a segmentation based not only on size classes (based on number of employees) but also on the type of activity. The analysis of energy costs was, indeed, limited by the availability of more disaggregated data allowing to better identify the cost structure of fish processing firms according to different typology of processing, e.g. freezing or canning, implying different levels of energy consumption.

Discussion with end-users (ToR 1A&1B)

STECF PLEN 23-03 concluded that the time of release of EUROSTAT data (used as external sources for MS not collecting or delivering data) should be considered when planning the next EWG meeting for the processing industry (likely in 2025), to be preferably scheduled later in the year (e.g. November).

Regarding *social data*, STECF is in the process of developing and operationalising a framework for the analysis of the social dimension of the CFP. An important discussion held was on the framework, definition, method and operationalisation of National and Community profiles. As these will be the backbone of the analysis of developments in the social domain of fisheries, next to data collected under the DCF, their further development is of utmost importance. The importance to have the end-users and/or stakeholders being involved in the process of developing the framework and its indicators in order to allow data collected to become useful information is acknowledged and addressed. After a first iteration translating relevant policy/social questions into indicators, this process was extended to include a wider set of relevant questions. Representatives of RCG ECON are part of the STECF EWGs.

Currently, data collected is of limited scope. In the near future, scope, range and quality aspects will be further detailed. The alignment of definitions and methodology used across the different fora currently developing social indicators (next to STECF, these are RCG ECON and ICES WGSOCIAL) as well as aligning definitions of indicators across STECF reports is needed.

The EWG 24-05 on Social data addressed National Profiles (a further batch of profiles was produced and the format was finalised) and Community Profiles (a format was developed and a selection of potential Communities to obtain the Community Profiles was made). Based on policy/social questions of the social partners, the set of relevant indicators was extended (incl. indicator, qualitative/quantitative nature and way of collecting data). The EWG 24-05 reiterated the need to develop an online environment for the presentation of National and Community Fisheries Profiles.

As for *fleet economics*, there is fluent interaction between the AER EWGs, RCG ECON and data collectors. Workshops and meetings are held on a regular basis and changes are implemented. There is also a fluent interaction between AER and the ACs. LDAC, BSAC and MAC normally ask the EWG chairs to present the main outcomes of the AER. Some of them take part in AER meetings as observers or experts.

From next year onwards, the AER data will be made available to experts through the web dashboard developed by JRC that was tested by EWG 24-07. The dashboard is an improvement as it allows experts and end-users to directly visualize, analyse and download data (replacing data visualizations previously provided in Annex 2 of the report). The possibility to separate less active vessels from other vessels in a fleet segment has been used in the outermost fishing regions in two French territories (French Guiana and Guadeloupe). This led to improved assessments of the economic performances of those fleets. To further improve the reporting by fleet at the EU level, the Small-Scale Coastal fleet using active gears should be included in the EU overview and separated from the Large-Scale Fleet in the future. The process of forecasting the year t+1 could be improved. Member States should be able to provide data for the nowcast t+1 on a voluntary basis. A workshop facilitated by RCG ECON could be organised to develop a common methodology for this nowcast.

For *Western Mediterranean stock assessment data*, improved follow-up through the Data Transmission Monitoring Tool (DTMT) is facilitating the interaction between the EWG and data collectors. The MS should, however, be encouraged to routinely check data before uploading. R routines and related training activities were provided to the MSs through the EU projects QualiTrain and RDBFIS II. The extensive evaluation carried out in EWG 22-03 has now been completed by the QualiTrain activities (Tasks 2 and 3); results found were passed to National Correspondents straight after the RCG Med&BS annual meeting (August 2024). Most issues involve individual errors with

Discussion with end-users (ToR 1A&1B)

diverse data and cannot be easily summarised. These occur right across data types (e.g. MEDITS, landings, etc.) and countries. These have been documented in the reports produced by QualiTrain and provided to MSs. The two projects provide MSs with tools for storing the data, perform data quality checks and prepare the data in the correct format requested by the different data calls. This streamlines the work of the stock assessment EWGs. The QualiTrain tools have been tested by EWG 24-02 (Methodologies for Mediterranean stock assessments and the estimation of reference points).

There is an urgent need to review the timing and setting of the EWG on the assessment of western Mediterranean stocks (included in the western Med MAP). Data preparation and/or methodological work (EWGs) should be planned in advance to streamline the stock assessment work of the EWG.

Data calls will be similar, except there is now a requirement to obtain recreational fisheries data for future analyses. However, this will not impact the work of the EWG on stock assessment of West Med, since the priority stocks of the West Med MAP are not affected by recreational fisheries. Data at quarterly level have been requested and provided since 2017 for the species driving the fisheries. In the near future, it is expected that data provision will be mandatory at least for these species, to avoid overloading MS.

FDI data collectors are part of the experts attending the EWG, including some National Correspondents. The continuation of the methodological meeting every two years is beneficial for future development and coordination of the FDI submissions.

The amount of data (all species, all areas, all discards, etc.) leads to higher probability of errors in submissions by all MSs. Data quality is improving annually with MSs gaining more experience in data submission and requirements. FDI biological data are not fully covering all EU fishing regions, as biological data for the Med & BS regions are not requested in the data call. The first attempt to fill in the gaps of Biological information from the Med&BS data call resulted in a multiplication of data calls and a continued need to deal with data that has limited quality control, functionality or transparency.

The EWG agreed not to disseminate the refusal rate information (Table B) for this year and to have a ToR about this subject during the next methodological meeting (in 2025). The EWG noted that codes and definitions for requested information should be harmonised between FDI and AER data calls. The EWG proposed to develop a protocol to be followed when proposing changes in the data call templates, especially if the proposed change might affect other data calls. We need to make sure that all data calls and regional databases can implement the change (e.g. addition of activity level, gear and fishery columns to AER fleet definition).

For future FDI data calls, the AER EWG recommended in Tables C and D to allow entries in the CV column to take values greater than 1. Next year's data call will request data for 2024 and MS are encouraged to submit data earlier than 2013. For MSs who did not re-submit the whole time series in previous years, there will be the opportunity to send data for the period 2013-2023 to update métier codes. An update of the IDs and domain definitions needed in Med&BS and FDI data calls to make sure the same definition is used and there is a clear link between data submitted to both data calls.

Discussions and feedback:

It was pointed out by one of the RCG ECON chairs that the development of methodology for the AER nowcast is out of the scope of the RCG and should probably be conducted by STECF. The possibilities to include this work under the STECF umbrella should be discussed at the next STECF Bureau meeting.

Data management (ToR 2A&2B)

It became clear that further work is needed to include Med&BS biological data in the FDI EWG work, as well as further harmonisation of the AER and FDI data calls. There were some discussions on the pros and cons of having one database to handle all data and data calls. When one group wants to add an additional variable to their data call, this can affect the data structure in all the other relevant database and it will therefore be much more complicated to make changes.

3 DATA MANAGEMENT (ToR 2A&2B)

3.1 Highlights in progress achieved in 2023 - 2024 in the Regional Databases for RCGs in 2024 and problems identified (end users) RCG data calls (ToR 2A) and highlights in actions related to the future developments (ToR 2B)

3.1.1 RDBFIS presentation

Stefanos Kavadas, coordinator of the RDBFIS (an integrated fisheries information system for the Med&BS) presented the progress work of the project. The RDBFIS is currently running the second phase of the development, which is expected to be completed by the end of March 2025. The main points of the presentations were as follows:

- 1. Populate the system with data** - Under this activity a data call was drafted to the relevant Med&BS MS. The requested datasets cover the period of DCR and DCF programs. The JRC and GFCM provided to the consortium the requested datasets (aggregated and MEDITS data). Bilateral meetings with the MS started on December 2023 with the aim to be familiarized with the RDBFIS and to execute syntax and consistency checks on their data before uploading into RDBFIS. The progress was satisfactory for the aggregated and MEDITS data. As for the detailed biological data, the quality control and uploading processes is expected to be completed before the end of this year.
- 2. MEDIAS survey** - The integration of MEDIAS survey within the RDBFIS is considered a major achievement. The MEDIAS database was reconstructed able to keep data from acoustics, pelagic trawl and CTD activities, integrated within RDBFIS, a validation scheme and consistency checks were created, processing routines can generate the three tables submitted in the Med&BS data call (Abundance, Biomass, Abundance-Biomass), a data call is in progress, and a workshop scheduled for the end of October. The proposed Eggs&Larvae database structure has been agreed by the MEDIAS and Ichthyoplankton experts.
- 3. MEDITS survey** - The updated RoME and RoMEBS packages are available in the system. BioIndex is integrated into RDBFIS. This package facilitates the analysis of fisheries survey data (calculation and evaluation of abundance and biomass indicators, can identify recruits and spawners areas, analyse population size structures by estimating demographic indicators. A user-friendly interaction with the user has been implemented in the RDBFIS.
- 4. RDBqc & RDBprocessing updates.** In the framework of QualiTrain and RDBFIS projects, improvements were made on the R packages supporting the data quality and processing. Within RDBFIS, the packages have been updated, replacing the older versions.
- 5. AER integration** - The aim is to support the MS performing syntax and consistency checks before submitting data to the JRC. This results in a reduction of discrepancies between the AER and FDI data calls. Specific economic performance indicators for STECF EWG purposes are currently under development.
- 6. Estimating the spatial FE & landings for SSF (FDI Tables H, I)** - An innovative method to estimate the spatial effort, weight, and value of landings in small-scale fisheries (SSF) for data-limited scenarios, specifically for vessels under 12 meters in length is designed. This tool (written in R) will be integrated into RDBFIS, facilitating the estimation of fishing effort

Data management (ToR 2A&2B)

and landings in the format of Tables H & I. The tool generates maps to visualize these estimations.

- 7. EU fleet analysis** - An open access dynamic tool has developed to illustrate the evolution of the fleet dynamics in Europe (potential links with the landings, discards and value field from FDI Table A). Data from the professional fishing fleet, spanning the period from 1991 to 2023, was downloaded from the official EU Fleet Register portal. Reports can be generated based on user-defined queries about active or decommissioned fishing vessels.
- 8. Quality checks on FDI spatial data (Table H & I)** - Scripts performing quality checks on FDI spatial data has been integrated, run at MS level and it is optional to execute. Maps & error reports are produced.
- 9. RCG Med&BS, data access** - In the 2024 Med&BS meeting, the RCG set the following priority for the servicing of data calls through RDBFIS. High: Med & BS data call (obligatory from 2025); Medium: FDI (optional for 2025); Low: AER, GFCM (no timeline defined). The RDBFIS coordinator will liaise with JRC to explore if / how RDBFIS can transmit data on behalf of the Member States and receive a notification. Regarding data access, the RCG document has been adopted by RDBFIS.

Discussion & feedback:

There was no time for questions

3.1.2 RDBES presentation

The Regional Database & Estimation System (RDBES) has an important part to play in increasing transparency and improving the quality of stock assessment within ICES. It is planned that the RDBES will replace ICES InterCatch in 2027. By that time, the assessment of all stocks in ICES will be done using RDBES data in TAF, and there will be a single data call covering all type of data (catch, effort, biological estimates, recreational fisheries, by catch). To achieve this important milestone, Countries need to dedicate resources to help national data submitters, estimators and stock coordinators with the transition to the new system. WGRDBESGOV also promotes workshops and working groups which provides support in the transition.

During the meeting, the new Quality report developed by the WGRDBESGOV was presented. This report is a resource to help for data submitters to identify and correct errors on the CL and CE tables and before the submission deadline. The report is generated with an R markdown script, held in GitHub, in a public ICES repository (<https://github.com/ices-tools-dev/RDBESQualityReport>). A training WK is planned for the week 22-25th October (exact dates to be set)

The RDBES data license has been simplified and aligned with other Data Calls and data types. The proposal was sent to National Correspondents (NC) in April, and their feedback was discussed at the RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic. All countries agreed that scientific bodies need to be able to use the data in a disaggregated way, but they diverge in the rules proposed for data publication. NC need that their national confidentiality rules are ensured, and national rules are different (minimum of 3 vessels, 5 vessels...).

As a conclusion, there are two outstanding issues that still need to be solved in the revised data license: 1) Landings and effort data, and the impact of national rules, and 2) Sampling data, and the need to distinguish between non-sensitive (e.g. age, length) and sensitive (e.g. by-catch, discards) sampling data. During the RCG discussions there was a general feeling that we are running in circles and that the same problem shall occur in other data calls which are publishing their data, such as Eurostat, FDI, or even ICES reports. A question was also posed to ICES about the consequences if somebody breaks the data license rules. Finally, the RCG recommended the Commission to set up a

RCG activities (ToR 3)

Workshop for NC to clarify concepts and find the best solution for the RDBES Data License. In that WK, some legal support is needed as many questions are outside the expertise area of participants.

Finally, it was raised the need for a long-term financial solution for the RDBES. A special request to develop the RDBES was sent to the European Commission at the beginning of 2024, but it was refused due to financial constraints. The Commission asked the financial participation of other advice requestors (UK, Norway) and ICES is in communication with them. But the situation with the RDBES lack of funding is critical and a proposal to include it in the National Work Plans, a multilateral agreement, will be presented at the NC meeting. However, it must be clear that this is a short-term action, but that a long-term solution is definitively needed.

Discussion & feedback:

During the LM there were discussions on the data license as different MS use different rules for confidentiality some MS uses 3 some the 5 vessels rule. However, as the data from RDBES is also used to fill out table 2.1 in the RWP and NWP it is important that all data are available. Further the RDBES will also be used to populate the standard tables in ICES advice (landings by country) and again it is of high value that all data are available, even if for a given MS only 1 vessel has conducted all the fishing.

A comparison between EUROSTAT and FDI also highlighted that the same MS uses different confidential rules depending on the data call. This could be an effect of different scientist replying on different data call but it just highlights the need for a broader discussion on confidentiality and the need for a common understanding on which data can be used and published and which data should be handled with more care.

Further, there was also a discussion on the need for legal support for NC to take discussions on the confidentiality and what the consequence of breaking the rules are.

4 RCG ACTIVITIES (ToR 3)

4.1 Highlights in RCG activities relevant to end users

4.1.1 RCG Long Distance Fisheries

The group reviewed the progress in regional coordination since 2023, the outcomes of the 20th 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 2023 data provided by MS. Data were uploaded by MS to the Regional Database & Estimation System (RDBES) hosted by ICES in support of the RCG work. Due to technical issues at ICES, the data could not be released from the RDBES in time. MS were requested separately to provide the input files for the analysis at the RCG.

With respect to the CECAF area, the group reviewed and addressed outcomes of the CECAF Scientific Subcommittee and adopted recommendations of four assessment Working Groups carried out in last years: Small Pelagic Working Group - Northwest Africa, Demersal Species Working Group - North and Demersal species Working Group - South.

Regarding data collection in the CECAF area, data were routinely collected for Madeira and the Canary Islands under the PRT and ESP programs, respectively. For the West Africa region, data from the EU small pelagic fisheries could not be collected for another year due to the reluctance of vessel

RCG activities (ToR 3)

operators to take scientific observers on board vessels fishing due to lack of space. A reduction in sampling activity was also noted for the Spanish demersal fleets operating in West Africa, for reasons such as lack of space, refusals, travel difficulties, etc. The common problem for all the Spanish demersal fleets was the lack of observers available for embarkation, as they refused to embark in view of the difficult working and living conditions and the low incentives they currently receive. Ideally, this problem should be addressed by the competent authorities in order to avoid non-compliance with the DCF and thus with the requirements of the end users.

As regards data collection in the SPRFMO area, four EU vessels were active in 2023. The fishing season started at the end of June. In total, four EU vessels were active in the SPRFMO area. In 2023, five trips out of a total of nineteen were observed, exceeding the SPRFMO requirement of observation of at least of 10% observer coverage of trips.

In 2023, being the third year that the RCG LDF dealt with the NAFO area, following the decision taken in 2021 to bring the NAFO area under the realm of the RCG LDF, the group proposed the harmonization of sampling protocols between Member States involved in fisheries in the NAFO area.

The accession of the EU to the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC) and the acquisition of a quota of chub mackerel for the 2024 and 2025 seasons brings new fishing areas under the remit of the RCG LDF and new data collection coordination needs. The coordination of data collection activities will be initiated by the conclusion of a Multilateral Agreement on Biological Sampling in NPFC waters between Member States involved in fishing activities in the SPRFMO area.

Based on an analysis of the data submitted and the draft Regional Work Plan prepared during the technical meeting, the RCG LDF concluded that for countries that are party to one of the Multilateral Agreements, their NWP for 2025-2027 need to be aligned with the RWP by copying relevant lines into the NWP.

Discussion & feedback:

During the meeting it was discussed that facilitating a timely and transparent exchange of information on ongoing and planned 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 to cooperate on data collection and scientific research programs. This could be conducted with electronic monitoring (EM). The RCG recommends DGMARE to share the final report of the SMEFF study with the RCG-LDF members as soon as the report will be finalized.

Further there were some discussions on a RWP as the RCG LDF in many aspects are conducting a RWP already although the RWP has not been submitted. The reply was that the RCG LDF is ready to submit an RWP for 2025-2027.

There were also some discussions on the Outermost regions. Presently not all data is available, and it is also unsure which body is responsible for collecting the data in the area. There was a suggestion that DGMARE and COM should request that RCG LDF should be the assigned body to coordinate that. However, this needs also to be discussed with the NCs.

4.1.2 RCG Large Pelagics

The 2024 RCG LP held its annual technical meeting in Olhão, Portugal, from June 24 to June 26.

RCG activities (ToR 3)

Key discussions during the technical meeting covered several critical areas: including updates to the Regional Work Plan (RWP), improvements in data collection protocols, and the development of regional databases.

The RCG LP coordinated intersessional with the pan regional ISSG Metiers and transversal issues, to include information on School type/FADs in the métiers reference lists. The coordinated work led to include this new information as optional information in the DCF level 7 métier codes reference list for LP fisheries. The proposed codification is in line with IOTC:

- 1) "Fishing on schools associated with anchored floating objects ("_AF")
- 2) "Fishing on schools associated with drifting floating objects ("_DF")
- 3) "Fishing on free schools (un-associated with floating objects ("_FS")

The development of of a regional database for the RCG LP was a primary focus of the meeting. Discussions were centered on the progress of the ICES Regional Database and Estimation System (RDBES) and how to better align it with the data needs of RCG LP. The integration of various data formats and submission forms for ICCAT was a major concern.

In addition, the RCG LP held extensive discussions with MS and ICES experts to address compatibility issues between the RDBFIS and RDBES. Due to significant differences in sampling schemes, it was not feasible for Med&BS MS to adopt the RDBES scheme.

Nevertheless, RDBFIS has incorporated the RDBES structure to support MS that may wish to transition to this structure. While RDBFIS can host (keep) data in RDBES format, it currently lacks quality control and processing routines. However, to avoid duplication of efforts, RDBFIS can adopt and integrate existing routines developed for RDBES, with appropriate adjustments (e.g. common exchange format for LP database).

In conclusion, the RDBFIS consortium remains at RCG LP disposal for further explanations and open to cooperation.

SecWeb 2.0 project was also a point of discussion during this RCG annual meeting; during the technical meeting the national experts and RCGs Secretariat had a fruitful exchange of questions and ideas on how to promote/reinforce the work of the RCG LP as a whole and in particular the ISSGs. The development of an e-library, e-calendar and the appointment of national experts to various ISSG were some of the points discussed.

The RCG LP reiterated for the second consecutive year to form a pan-regional ISSG on Mediterranean Sea Large Pelagics. Despite recognizing the benefits of a cooperative approach, there has been no significant progress in advancing this initiative, leaving an important issue for Mediterranean countries unresolved. It is crucial that Mediterranean NCs from the RCG LP are fully engaged, and that this issue is given the priority it deserves within both RCGs.

Regarding the development of the LP RWP, the feedback received from STECF (Oct 2023) pointed out the the need to develop a table 2.1 to be consistent with the other RWPs. The RCG LP worked intersession to develop table 2.1, the input available to populate table 2.1 was EUROSTAT data. However, this approach showed inconsistencies and strange values that do not reflect the reality. Given the importance of table 2.1 because of the implications in terms of sampling effort allocated by country, the group decided not to share among the LP RWP the values associated with the table 2.1, but only the global structure of the table. This structure is directly linked to the commission delegated decision 16.7.2021. There is a clear need for RCG LP to allocate more resources to develop the next RWP for 2028-2030.

RCG activities (ToR 3)

Discussion & feedback:

During the LM meeting there were some discussions on how to streamline the communication between the RCG Med& BS and RCG LP, and how to gain more participants or experience within the RCG LP. This could be conducted either from other regions to participate in the LP RCG to increase the experience in the group or the LP RCG members could participate in some of the pan regional ISSGs (sampling optimisation). There was also a suggestion that the RCG LP could prepare a data call to ensure more standardized data that can be uploaded to the RDBES / RDBFIS, as presently the LP have some challenges with the different formats.

Further, there were interest in the genetics CKMR experience on Bluefin Tuna, which is presently conducted on a pilot bases and not incorporated in the NWP. However, there would be possibilities to utilise the EMFAF funding for this data sampling.

4.1.3 RCG NANSEA/BAL

The RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic Technical meeting 2024 was held as one online day on June 4th and a physical meeting in Bremerhaven, Germany on June 11-14th, with a possibility to attend online. During the meeting, ISSGs presented their work as well as tasks planned for the future. Several presentations from ICES, the Commission and relevant research projects were given and discussed.

In addition to the several topics addressed throughout the year by the ISSGs and at the technical meeting, the main highlights from the RCG NANSEA and Baltic 2024 were:

- **Regional Work Plans** - Regional Work Plans for NANSEA and Baltic for 2025-2027 have been finalized after evaluation by STECF and submitted to the Commission by the agreed deadline.
- **Regional Database** - the first joint RCG-ICES data call was launched in 2024 requesting data to be submitted to RDBES. Data submitted to RDBES were used to prepare RWP table 2.1.
- **Data quality** – a template has been developed to document methods used for processing fishing activity data to answer RDBES data call. Subgroup on RDBES followed-up on quality checks developed by ICES WGRDBESGOV.
- **New methods in data collection** – an overview of new methods in data collection was prepared, e.g. genetics, electronic monitoring, computer vision AI models for use with electronic monitoring and age estimation.
- **RCG and End User interaction** - RCG chairs participated in a number of meetings with End Users to discuss relevant topics, e.g. Recommendations, RWP, RDBES, MAP, data calls.
- **RCGs Secretariat** – a general principle of cost sharing for funding the RCGs Secretariat was specified.

During the Liaison Meeting, it was reminded that the document containing [mandate and remits](#) of the RCG NANSEA and Baltic is available on the RCGs website. The document aims at defining the process of streamlining recommendations addressed to RCG. A new task is planned for the ISSG 'End User' to prepare a guide for creating recommendations and updating their status.

The communication channel for exchanging recommendations with ICES, created with the support from ICES and based on a GitHub project, fulfils its tasks of registering recommendations, updating their status and adding comments. This allows both sides of communication to keep each other updated throughout the year. Prior to the technical meeting, in 2024 a similar platform was

RCG activities (ToR 3)

preliminarily created, with the support from ICES, to exchange recommendations with the Commission. The configuration of this solution needs to be tested with users from the Commission.

At the Liaison Meeting, all recommendations addressed to End Users were presented. The recommendations addressed to ICES had been previously communicated to ICES at a meeting with ICES Secretariat representatives on September 2nd. The recommendation no. R04 'Commission to set up a Workshop for NCs to clarify data confidentiality concepts and find the best solution for the RDBES Data License' is of particular interest to many parties. Data confidentiality and data sharing rules need to be aligned between countries to clarify how data can be submitted and disseminated. The issue is important not only to RDBES but also to the FDI database. It was suggested that the participation in a future workshop on data confidentiality should include not only NCs but also experts submitting and analysing the data. This recommendation was discussed at length during the Liaison Meeting.

One of the topics receiving special attention at the technical meeting was *New elements in data collection of interest for end users*. The ISSG on Electronic monitoring technologies (EMT) started collaboration with relevant ICES working groups to coordinate work. The ISSG started discussion on the possible bilateral or multilateral agreements on sharing images for use in AI processing. New methods in data collection were summarized and their use in the context of DCF was discussed in the ISSG EMT.

During 2023-2024, the ISSG on Regionally coordinated stomach sampling worked on sampling plan, methods and manuals for North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat region. At the technical meeting, a discussion was initiated on a regional plan for the Baltic.

It was highlighted that when taking in additional sampling and/or additional new methods, without increasing budgets, a discussion needs to be started on how to agree on optimizing/decreasing other sampling on a regional level. It is relevant to identify which data end-users can be met (or better met than classical methods) by new methods; ii) it is necessary to define a process for identifying which data currently being collected are not being used by end-users, or can be collected with lower effort and intensity, in order to optimize current sampling plans, and when relevant include new data collection methods. One suggested approach is to ask end-users to document the types of data they use, e.g. for stock assessment. The RCG could then contrast this with the data that is currently collected and create a proposal to remove obsolete elements from the data collection.

In 2024, the Regional Work Plans for RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic 2025-2027 were submitted, with agreements on a regional level. They are publicly available on the data collection website (https://dcf.ec.europa.eu/wps-and-ars/work-plans_en), in the RCG website (<https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/>) and privately uploaded to the IT Platform. In the technical meeting, it was discussed how to link between the NWP and the RWP, while taking into account the guidance for the NWP. It was also agreed to start working on the RWPs for 2028-2030, which will be submitted by October 2026.

At the technical meeting, it was also recommended that MS add lines in the NWP for certain stocks that are not in table 1 of EU-MAP (EU 2021/1167) but identified by end-user needs.

In the RCG NANSEA & Baltic technical meeting, the access for survey vessels to protected areas received special attention. It is expected that in the coming years, access to survey areas will be reduced because of windmills and of Marine Protected Areas (e.g., as result of Marine Action Plan). The RCG found a need for a coordinated plan on how to deal with this, e.g., using new data collection methods, reduction of effort, modelling. An analysis is needed on the issue, possible solutions, and a workshop is suggested to ICES including both RCGs and ICES survey groups.

RCG activities (ToR 3)

The collaboration with third countries is an issue that the RCG needs to remain aware of and was addressed at the technical meeting. Much of this communication is achieved through ICES work, e.g. on the RDBES that is database both a for RCG/EU needs and for ICES stock assessment including third countries. Another example of coordination is the RCG ISSG on Metier and transversal variables, which is coordinating requests for metier codes between RCGs, ICES, FDI and third countries. During RCG technical meetings as well as ISSG work, third countries are welcome to participate where relevant, and this will also be highlighted to ISSG chairs.

Discussion & feedback:

At the LM there were some discussions regarding the recommendation on the data workshop on confidentiality, as in the present setup it was thought to be a workshop between COM and NC. However, it was concluded that it could be beneficial to invite experts with the technical knowledge.

There were some further discussions on the recommendations and decisions Database platform currently used by RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic and ICES. And whether it would be meaningful to use the same system for other RCGs. Presently, the RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic recommendations and decisions platform has two different modules; there is one module for exchanging recommendations with ICES and another one for exchanging recommendations with the Commission.

4.1.4 RCG MED&BS

During the Liaison Meeting, the relevant RCG Med&BS 2024 activities were presented as follows:

Regional Work Plan (RWP) Med&BS 2025-2027: The finalised RWP was submitted in September 2024. The RWP is available on the RCG Secretariat and DCF websites.

Data Quality: Following the development of quality check tools, and the relevant training provided to the Med&BS experts, the RCG Med&BS issued a recommendation on the use of the available quality check tools before the official submission of data. ISSG on data quality is a newly established ISSG with participants from all Med&BS MS, for performing data checks before being submitted to Data Calls.

Additional Work from the Intersessional Groups

- ISSG on sampling optimization: The group progressed in the application of the sampling optimization, and on the analyses of case studies to be considered for inclusion in future Med&BS RWP. The methodologies applied are available in the ICES SharePoint.
- RCG Med&BS participated to the Panregional ISSG on metier and transversal variables, and the ISSG on Diadromous species.

Med&BS Regional Database (RDBFIS): During 2024, RDBFIS was populated with MS datasets, following a dedicated data call and bilateral meetings that facilitated this procedure. The Med&BS RDB Steering Committee will reconvene in 2024-2025. The hosting solution of the RDB is a pending issue; the RCG issued a relevant 2024 recommendation on the intersessional work needed towards defining requirements for the future host of the RDB Med&BS. Concerning the possibility to submit data for Data Calls through RDBFIS, a Recommendation was issued in 2024 proposing a test run; if successful, MS will use RDBFIS to submit data to the 2025 Med&BS Data Call and, optionally, to the 2025 FDI Data Call.

Surveys at Sea

RCG activities (ToR 3)

- Public availability of survey data: The 2024 RCG Med&BS agrees to make survey data publicly available, excluding the last 3 years of data, under the condition that tracking of data is enabled. The MEDITS and MEDIAS Coordination Groups will prepare a document by 2025 addressed to end users, describing the changes in survey design and implementation through time.
- Survey timing: Following a Med&BS 2023 Recommendation, the 2024 MEDIAS and MEDITS Coordination Groups proposed the period of time outside the official period of the surveys that would not affect the information obtained.

Data Calls:

- Increasing demand on data calls: During the 2024 RCG Med&BS Meeting, MS raised once more their concern on the increasing number of data calls and the difficulties in addressing them all within the required deadlines. A possible prioritisation of the GFCM DCRF data calls was requested. It was decided to reconvene the Med&BS ISSG on End Users in 2025, for facilitating the managing of the increasing workload of MS with the data calls.
- Safety of data on DCRF platform: During 2024 RCG Med&BS Meeting, MS expressed concern on the safety of data uploaded on the DCRF online platform. A relevant recommendation has been made on the establishment of access rules to DCRF data for GFCM, proposing actions to be taken by DGMARE and GFCM Secretariat.

Discussion & feedback:

At the LM there were discussions if any other RCGs could make use of the Qualitrain project; the packages developed within Qualitrain have already been embedded in RDBFIS.

Further the RCG Med&BS confirmed that aggregated data has been uploaded to RDBFIS. However, detailed biological data is not yet available on RDBFIS. At the moment, the database poses some limitations for stock assessment purposes.

4.1.5 RCG ECON

RCG ECON reconvened in a hybrid meeting in Athens from the 3rd to the 6th of June. RCG ECON discussed a large variety of topics. First, the ISSG group on the quality assurance framework discussed the current DCF quality reporting elements. It compared with the European Statistical System handbook for quality reports and the ESS Reference Metadata Reporting Standards. Although the current quality assurance framework includes almost all the elements needed, there are several points for improvement, like the transparency and user-friendliness of the system. EUROSTAT is willing to help improving the quality of reporting; it is recommended that EUROSTAT assesses the quality of reporting information on the aquaculture data collection in the national plans and annual reports as a basis for 2025. The meeting on harmonising the FDI and AER data set was a hands-on workshop in which inconsistencies between the two datasets in numerous countries were revealed and discussed. It was concluded that MSs must work nationally to seek the inconsistencies and provide solutions.

Other important topics included the energy transition in fisheries and aquaculture. MSs consume a wide variety of fuel/energy. RCG ECON can facilitate the improvement of methodologies for collecting and processing fuel/energy consumption data by exchanging best practices. In addition to the methodological issues, the French experts made two presentations on distinguishing between low active and active segments and applying methods to evaluate physical capital. To facilitate the exchange of expertise on methodological issues, RCG ECON will organise an ISSG on specific topics

RCG activities (ToR 3)

next year. RCG ECON also discussed new developments in the area of social data. The STECF EWG 24-05 assessed the status of the potential indicators. The indicators are organised by categories that fit the top five priorities (social and financial status, working conditions, assessment of management measures, and generational renewal). On the 18th-19th of September, an ISSG was organised to discuss social indicators. MS discussed the intention to include potential pilots in their national plans in the meeting.

Moreover, the RDBFIS II project was presented, and RCG ECON was updated on the latest developments. Regarding organisational aspects, there was a discussion on the future of the support of RCGs by the RCGs Secretariat. The NCs presented at the meeting discussed the proposal by the Secretariat, and the MSs agreed on this commitment and the distribution of the costs proposed by the chair of the ISSG NC. JRC provided feedback from STECF meetings on the data quality in the various data calls. It was agreed that updating the definitions with the latest adjustments should become a fixed ToR on the agenda of the technical meeting, and changes should be included in the report and sent to JRC to be included on the DCF website. Finally, the focal point from the EU Commission also updated RCG ECON on the developments relevant to data collection in the EU Commission: The Regional and National work plans 2025-2027, the DCF IT platform, the DTMT, Data requests, SAF grant projects, and the Control Regulation.

RCG ECON 2024 suggested two workshops for 2024-2025, including further work on social indicators and methodological issues covering topics on energy/fuel consumption in fisheries and aquaculture, the distinction between low active and active segments, the economic effects of the distinction between active and low active vessels, evaluation of physical capital.

Jeppe Strandgaard Herring (DNK) was elected as the new Co-chair for the next two years.

Discussion & feedback:

There was (again) a discussion at the LM on how to streamline the FDI and AER data call; and how the possible changes in the data calls will have a huge impact on the databases. The aim is to streamline work, however there is need to consider a strong procedure that would assess not only the changes and data calls but also their impact.

EUROSTAT is looking forward to start working together with RCG ECON and encourage to take all the formal steps to initiate the process.

4.2 The 2024 RCGs - specific recommendations to be discussed at the Liaison Meeting and proposal for future intersessional work and streamlining work between RCGs (ToR 3A)

4.2.1 RCG Long Distance Fisheries

During the 2024 Technical Meeting, the RCG formulated five recommendations. During the Liaison Meeting, Recommendation R01 was reworded in agreement with the National Correspondent of France.

Recommendations:

- R01: Assignment of RCG LDF as designated body for data requirements and collection in outermost regions (from section 3.7).

RCG activities (ToR 3)

- R02: Establishing an ISSG on NAFO harmonization protocols for on-board sampling (ISSG NAFO-SP) (from section 4.3).
- R03: Establishing an ISSG on CECAF Observer Programme of small pelagics (ISSG CECAF-OP) (from section 6.1.3).
- R04: Assignment of RCG LDF as coordinating body for data collection in NPFC waters (from section 7.1).
- R05: Establishing an ISSG on SMEFF fisheries in the high seas, in particular FAO area 41 (ISSG SMEFF-FAO41) (from section 7.2).

Decisions:

In addition, the following decisions were forwarded to the 2023 Decision Meeting.

- D01: The proposed agreement on multilateral agreement for biological sampling in NFPC waters (from section 7.1).
- D02: Agreement on the Regional Work Plan for Long Distance Fisheries.
- D03: The proposed agreement on multilateral agreement for biological sampling in CECAF waters (from section 8.1).
- D04: The proposed agreement on multilateral agreement for biological sampling in SPRFMO waters (from section 8.2).

Discussion points:

The final draft of the Regional Work Plan was developed by the RCG LDF during the 2024 TM. Relevant MS are encouraged to incorporate the information from the RWP LDF into their National Work Plans by submitting them for the period 2025-2027.

There were discussions on the inclusion of the outermost regions in the EU MAP. France was not consulted on this issue and it was suggested that the recommendation could be adjusted to see what can be done under the umbrella of Long Distance or make a workshop to investigate the added value and end-users needs before further the modification of the EU MAP.

4.2.2 RCG Large Pelagics

During the 2024 Technical Meeting, the RCG formulated three decisions and eleven recommendations. Below are commented the ones relevant to end-user and other RCGs.

Recommendations:

- LP_2024_R01: The RCG LP recommends to the pan regional ISSG RWP the inclusion of the all the RCGs chairs and at least two national experts from each RCG in order to encompass the development of LP RWP for 2028-2030.
- LP_2024_R02: The RCG LP request a clear decision from the ISSG RWP as how to integrate the RWP into the NWP in October 2024.
- LP_2024_R03: RCG LP recommends to use only the global structure of Table 2.1 in the LP RWP without any associated values.
- LP_2024_R04: Develop common data quality indicators and data cleaning tools.
- LP_2024_R05: Develop a common bycatch data raising procedure.
- LP_2024_R06: Develop a CKMR coordinated sampling programme, pending ICCAT's Commission decision in November 2024.
- LP_2024_R07: To further enhance the ICCAT-EU/DCF cooperation and coordination.

RCG activities (ToR 3)

Decisions:

- LP_2024_D01: Approve the LP RWP which was submitted in Oct. 2023 and have it endorsed by MS in their NWP in Oct. 2024.

Discussion points:

In relation to the first and second recommendations it was discussed how to best ensure increased alignment between the RCG LP and the other RCG groups and how to increase the expertise in the RCG LP. It was suggested that instead of all other RCG sending experts to the RCG LP there were the possibility for the experts in the RCG LP to participate in some of the relevant pan regional ISSGs. Regarding the question of populating Table 2.1. other RCG chairs suggested for the RCG LP to consider launching a data call. This approach has proven to be the most efficient way to collect the landings for other RCGs. The RCG LP has decided to use the RDBES format and further discussions will be needed on data storage.

Regarding the integration between the NWP and the RWP, RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic have prepared a guideline document on how to make an integration between NWP and RWP that RCG LP could use as reference. In addition, Commission has also posted a guidance document in the DCF website related to this point of discussion.

In relation to recommendation 6, it has been shown that epigenetic aging can be used for Bluefin Tuna (BFT). There has been a model base sampling design. R06 is subject to ICCAT Commission's decision in Nov 2024. Provided that ICCAT accepts CKMR for BFT it has been highlighted that sampling can be improved if a coordinated sampling programme is established. DCF sampling schemes and workplans could be improved by centralising sampling and a tissue bank could be started to then start the sampling in 2026.

4.2.3 RCG NANSEA/BAL

During the TM 2024, the RCG formulated the recommendations listed below, which are relevant for other RCGs and were presented at the Liaison meeting:

Recommendations:

- R05: Commission to set up a Workshop for NCs to clarify data confidentiality concepts and find the best solution for the RDBES Data License. [COM]
- R06: RCG recommends ICES to organize in 2024/2025 a workshop to establish the needs in terms of data acquisition, storing, and sharing for developing and implementing AI to review data from electronic monitoring (EM) sources, and particularly to complement data collection onboard RV with EM. [ICES]
- R08: When control regulation Implementation Act is being reviewed, RCGs should be consulted when discussing the current Annexes X and XI, and article 22. [COM]
- R09: RCG recommends to establish a dialogue between the COM (DGMARE and DGENV) and Member States about the expectations from the Marine Action Plan and what is possible under the DCF. [COM]
- R16: In the context of diadromous fishes data collection, RCG recommends ICES to include DCF-related matters in the general terms of reference of the relevant ICES EGs (WGEEL, WGBAST, WGNAS). [ICES]

In addition, the ISSGs agreed for the RCG NANSEA & Baltic work 2024/2025 was presented at the Liaison Meeting, and some of ISSGs have tasks that could be relevant to other RCGs. In November

RCG activities (ToR 3)

2024 a meeting is planned for ISSG chairs to provide guidance to ISSG chairs, including presenting guidelines, year wheel, the RCG website, ways of organizing RCG work (physical meeting/regular short meetings/focused online meetings). In addition, the different roles of ICES and RCGs will be discussed, including the RCG Mandates and Remits document, and also that some of the topics can be of relevant to other RCGs/Third countries and the possibility to coordinate tasks between RCGs/Third countries.

Regarding pan-regional collaboration of the RCG work, the métier and transversal variables ISSG already communicates pan-regionally, and has presented at other RCG Technical Meetings and also invited other RCG chairs to meetings where relevant. The ISSG Diadromous also works pan-regionally, and it was highlighted that it is important to include all countries in communications about meetings and work of this ISSG, as well as of other ISSGs that are pan regional. There could be a potential for pan regional work for the ISSGs on stomach sampling and recreational fisheries.

Discussion points:

At the Liaison meeting, it was discussed how to involve other RCG chairs in the ISSG RWP, and a workflow for the work during the coming years was presented. In connection to the Marine Action plan there were discussions on how much could be added in to the NWP without extra funding. Further, the new control regulation could have an effect on the NWP as extra variables will be mandatory which are presently estimated or sampled by the scientific institutes. Further, the process at the control unit to implement the regulation is ongoing. Colleagues from the Control unit were expected joining at the NC meeting and we will follow up by correspondence.

A data confidentiality workshop was discussed on the discrepancies between the national rules and that same MS are using different rules for different data calls. If this workshop takes place, it could engage also with RDBFIS, the Control Unit, FDI, EUROSTAT. Some analyses have already been conducted on this issue showing the differences between databases. It would be beneficial to have these documents presented at a workshop.

4.2.4 RCG Med&BS

The 2024 RCG Med&BS Meeting took place in Montpellier, France between 26-30 August 2024. All formulated Recommendations were presented during the LM. No Decisions were formulated.

Recommendations:

R01 - Use of quality checks for commercial and survey data by Member States: Use of the available data quality check tools by Member States for submission to the DG MARE Data Calls and other reporting obligations. Responsible persons for follow-up actions: MSs, QualiTrain and RDBFIS II consortia, RCG Med & BS chairs.

R02 - Qualitrain work follow up through the RCG Med&BS: Setting up of ISSG on data quality to follow up the outcomes of Qualitrain project. Responsible persons for follow up actions: MSs, QualiTrain and RDBFIS II consortia, RCG Med & BS chairs.

R03 - RDBFIS use for submission of data: Use of RDBFIS for the submission of data to the 2025 Med & BS data call and optionally to the 2025 FDI data call. Responsible persons for follow-up actions: RDBFIS Consortium, RDB Steering Committee, RCG Med&BS, MS experts, COM, JRC.

RCG activities (ToR 3)

R04 - RDBFIS future hosting: Work intersessionally towards defining requirements for the future host of the regional database Med & BS. Responsible persons for follow-up actions: RDBFIS Consortium, RDB Steering Committee, RCG Med&BS, NCs, COM.

R05 - Public availability of survey data: Make DCF survey data publicly available, excluding the last 3 years of data. Responsible persons for follow-up actions: Scientific survey Coordination Groups, COM, JRC, RDBFIS consortium, RCG Med & BS, NCs.

R06 - On the establishment of access rules to DCRF data for GFCM: RCG Med&BS urges GFCM to establish rules on the use of data from the DCRF online platform by experts participating in GFCM technical meetings, for safeguarding that the relevant data will be used only for the purposes of the relevant meetings. Responsible persons for follow-up actions: DGMARE, GFCM Secretariat.

Proposal for future intersessional work: Currently there are 10 ISSGs under the RCG Med&BS, while the RCG participates in 3 Panregional ISSGs (ISSG RWP, ISSG on Metier and Transversal variables, ISSG Diadromous fishes). During the LM, the future intersessional work of the RCG Med&BS was presented, including the development of the 2028-2030 RWP Med&BS, in coordination with the Pan-regional ISSG RWP and the contribution of the relevant Med&BS ISSGs.

Discussion points:

At the LM there were some discussions on how data from the RDBFIS could be used more directly by the JRC. This could be possible in the future. There was also a discussion on the increasing numbers of data calls and how RDBFIS can help delevering these.

4.2.5 RCG ECON

Recommendations:

- R01: ISSG Evaluation of Quality Assurance Framework: For comparing quality reports, RCGECON chairs and chair of ISSG on the Quality Assurance framework will contact EUROSTAT to start this exercise with the Aquaculture case.
- R02: Organize a specific session on energy use in the upcoming ISSG on methodological issues to facilitate the exchange of methodologies to gather data on fuel/energy consumption in the fisheries and aquaculture sector.
- R03: Establish an ISSG on social aspects in September 2024 to discuss potential social indicators for possible inclusion to support the social dimension of the CFP. The working groups of STECF and ICES should continue to exchange and share experiences on social issues with the RCG ECON. Discussion on practical aspects of data collection, availability and timeline. Conclusions from this ISSG can be used in the drafting of pilot studies in the National programmes.
- R05: Organize an ISSG on methodological issues including a session on the distinction between active and less active vessels.
- R06: Organise a specific session on the topic of valuation of capital in the upcoming ISSG on methodological issues.

RCG activities (ToR 3)

- R07: Any updates to the guidelines for economic and social data must be sent to JRC after the publication of the Technical meeting report.

Discussion points:

The outstanding discrepancies between the FDI and AER datasets will be evaluated within the framework of the FDI methodological EWG. MSs must work nationally to seek the inconsistencies and provide solutions.

Moreover, Social indicators and next actions were discussed. On September 18th and 19th, an ISSG for social indicators was organised. The social indicators are shaped into four broad categories, detailed in the following sections: Social and Financial Status, Working Conditions, Assessment of management measures, and Generational status. According to EWG 24-05, the "forthcoming" social indicators are part of 38 indicators. These are considered relatively easy for MSs to develop, collect, and report in future data calls. Given that during the ISSG discussions, experts also identified some "potential" indicators as important but feasible to collect. MS discussed the intention to include potential pilots in their national work plans.

4.3 RCG data calls – overview of how MS responded and discussion on future use and further exploration by the RCGs (ToR 3B)

4.3.1 RCG Long Distance Fisheries

The 2024 data call has been sent by the RCG Secretariat to all National Correspondents of those MS contributing to the relevant areas under the RCG LDF remit. The Data Call requires data to be uploaded to the regional database currently in use: RDBES, hosted and maintained by ICES in Copenhagen. 2024 was the first year of data upload to this database.

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. All data was provided in time. However, due to technical issues at ICES, the data could not be released from the RDBES in time. MS were requested separately to provide the input files for the analysis at the RCG. Also, some errors were unveiled when additional checks were run. Manual corrections have been made to account for these errors.

4.3.2 RCG Large Pelagics

RCG LP does not organize data calls.

4.3.3 RCG NANSEA/BAL

In January 2024 a joint RCG/ICES RDBES data call was issued for the first time. All RCG NANSEA & Baltic MS responded, with some submissions and resubmissions after the deadline 2nd April. Data

RCG activities (ToR 3)

were used by the RCG for creating the RWP table 2.1 based on 2021-2023 data and to create overviews of fisheries.

A quality check workflow and a script to be used by data submitters was suggested by ICES WGRDBESGOV and discussed at the RCG technical meeting. The workflow illustrates that there can be quality checks at different levels (data submitter, RCG end users, ICES end user) and that the feedback needs to go back to the data submitter as directly as possible.

Regarding future developments of the RDBES, funding is currently missing for one of two development resources on RDBES, which will slow down future development and was identified as a critical issue in what concerns the expect timeline of RDBES progress. The development of functionalities prioritized by WGRDBESGOV includes management of upload logs (data completeness), inclusion of recreational data, FDI export module etc.

The use of RDBES of TAF (Transparent Assessment Framework) for stock assessment in ICES will be implemented gradually, and the goal is full implementation in 2027 when RDBES will replace InterCatch. After the full implementation, the RDBES data can potentially be exported to FDI including biological data and discards estimates with domain codes to link with the landings data. The RCG recommended NCs to allocate resources to the development of estimates using the RDBES data and to start filling the FDI fields in the RDBES data model.

Work is ongoing on the revision of RDBES data license, but an issue with different national rules for data confidentiality prevents the finalization of the license. In addition, there is a need to distinguish between sensitive and non-sensitive biological sampling data. The RCG recommends to the Commission to set up a workshop for NCs to clarify the data confidentiality concepts, and it was discussed at the Liaison meeting that this workshop could also include discussions on FDI and how it is dealt with in Eurostat. One of the crucial needs identified was the ability to publish data at a specific level of aggregation that allows NWP and RWP to be defined, e.g. all landings by MS and stock combinations are needed for the RWP table 2.1.

4.3.4 RCG MED&BS

During 2024 two official data calls (Part 1 and Part 2) were launched by the RCG Med&BS chairs.

Part 1 was announced end of February to all NCs, with a deadline in May, requesting data on landings for the period 2021-2023, for updating the RCG Med&BS Regional Work Plan 2025-2027 (Table 2.1 – Stocks). Part 2 was announced middle July to all NCs, with a deadline in August, requesting data on landings, effort and value by metier for the period 2021-2023, where metiers are selected from the regionally agreed list of metiers with specified coding, for using a ranking system for the Mediterranean and Black Sea. For both Data Calls, data were submitted by all Member States.

4.3.5 RCG ECON

RCG ECON does not organise data calls.

4.4 Chairmanship and venues (ToR 3C)

4.4.1 Overview of chairs, dates and venues for 2025

RCG Large Pelagics (LP)

RCG activities (ToR 3)

Chairs: Pedro Lino/Dalia Reis (PRT) as main chair and Ioannis Thasitis (CYP) as co-chair

Dates: 2-4 June 2025

Venue: Cyprus (venue to be confirmed)

RCG Long Distance Fisheries (LDF)

Chair: Maksims Kovsars (LVA)

Dates: Early July 2025 (the week 1-4 of July or alternatively 8-11 July)

Venue: Estonia kindly offered to host this meeting in Tallin.

RCG NANSEA

Chairs: Josefine Egekvis (DNK) and Rita Vasconcelos (PRT)

Dates: The next RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic TM will be on June 10-13th 2025 for the physical meeting and June 3rd 2025 for the virtual one-day meeting.

Venue: Lysekil, Sweden.

RCG Baltic

Chair: Vilda Griūnienė (LTU)

Dates and venue: same as RCG NANSEA

RCG Med&BS

Chairs: Charis Charilaou (CYP) and Alexandru Gheorghe (ROU)

Dates: 25-29 August 2025

Venue: Romania (exact venue TBD)

RCG ECON

Chairs: Irene Tzouramani (GRC) and Jeppe Strandgaard Herring (DNK)

Dates: 12-15 May 2025 (hybrid)

Venue: Copenhagen, Denmark

4.4.2 Suggested new ISSGs;

No suggestions for new ISSG

RCG activities (ToR 3)

4.5 Future steps in RCG pan-regional and intersessional work (i.e., regional work plans): exchange of ideas and discussion (ToR 3D)

4.5.1 Regional Work Plans

The regional work plans have been developed for the next period and there is templates and guidelines available on the RCG homepage and on the DCF platform on how to include the RWP in the NWP.

5 GOVERNANCE (TOR 4)

5.1 Follow-up on RCG Rules of Procedures developments in each of the RCGs (ToR 4A)

5.1.1 RCG Long Distance Fisheries

No changes were made in 2023/2024

5.1.2 RCG Large Pelagics

No changes were made in 2023/2024

5.1.3 RCG NANSEA/BAL

No changes were made in 2023-2024.

5.1.4 RCG Med&BS

No changes were made in 2023-2024.

5.1.5 RCG ECON

No changes were made in 2023-2024.

5.2 Structure of RCGs and cooperation. Lessons learned from combined 2023 RCGs. Tentative changes in structure and in RCG number (ToR 4B)

5.2.1 How to deal with the pan regional ISSGs

It was highlighted in some of the RCG presentations that there was a need for more experts and for better sampling alignment between RCGs. This was especially highlighted with respect to the ISSG RWP and ISSG Diadromous. However, there is of course a challenge if there is lack of participants to some RCGs to send the same few persons to even more groups.

5.2.2 Lessons learned from combined RCGs and Decision Meeting

This year the LM was, as it was the case last year, divided into regions to ensure a better flow in the discussions and to allow for end users to only participate in the part of the meeting where they had direct interest. This segmentation into regions is perceived as an improvement. Further last year on the second day of the meeting there was too little time for discussions; therefore, this year the agenda points on day 2 were minimised to give room for discussions among the RCG chairs.

It is still a challenge to get all relevant End-users to come and participate in the LM, either physically or online. This is a pity as the value of getting the end-users feedback is of large value for the RCG coordination.

6 AOB

6.1 Access for surveys in EU waters

Reduced scientific survey access within EU waters and alternative ways to account for lack of access was discussed during the technical meeting at the RCG NANSEA and Baltic. There was one presentation on how to reduce the effort in trawl duration and one presentation on how to model lack of stations if there was reduced sampling effort.

The challenge is that different MS have different approaches to allow or deny scientific surveys access to areas closed for fisheries. This could be Natura 2000 areas, windmill farms, etc. Some of the areas will probably not be accessible for scientific surveys, at least with the vessels and gears used presently (large vessels equipped with trawls). However, as these areas likely will increase in time alternative survey methods within these restricted areas should be investigated and it would be preferable that one or several standard methods could be recommended, instead of every MS or even company is developing their own non comparable survey methods.

The issue was brought up during the LM to get a broader view on how different regions are affected and are taking the issue into account.

The Pan regional ISSG on Surveys will have an additional ToR on the agenda for next period looking into how many MSs are experiencing challenges when applying for access to a given area. It would also be beneficial if there were a common understanding / paper from the EU Commission describing that although a given area is closed for commercial or recreational purposes it is important to allow access to the mandatory scientific surveys, not only to ensure the time series used for stock assessment but also to be able to evaluate the effect of the closed areas.

At the LM there was a discussion whether a combined workshop with the RCGs and ICES on this matter would be helpful and there are two different ways that could both be approached:

- 1.- Technical way: alternative ways to deal with the lack of access, model based or alternative gears (video)
- 2.- Legal/political way. To have a clearer description that the scientific surveys are not prohibit access to areas closed for fisheries. Ex. To start the discussion in the MAPs group.

6.2 VME – How to sample

As a discussion point the sampling in VME was discussed in respect to EU MAP 4.1 (see below)

4. **Data on the impact of Union fisheries on marine biological resources and marine ecosystems within and outside Union waters**
 - 4.1. Data shall be collected on occurrences (as a minimum the weight and/or the numbers of individuals per species, depending on the appropriate unit for a particular species) of incidental catches of all protected sea birds, mammals, reptiles and fish species, as referred to in Union legislation and under international agreements, including those specified in Table 2, and invertebrate benthic species identified as a VME (12) indicator (13). Such data shall be recorded during scientific observer trips on fishing vessels, or by the fishers themselves, using logbooks or other appropriate means. Where these data are insufficient for end-user needs, other complementary methods and observations shall be used, based on the scientific knowledge available, including risk assessments.

AOB

The definitions referred to in the EU MAP is benthic invertebrates VMEs in water depths deeper than 200 meters and should be sampled from commercial vessels.

During the RCG NANSEA& Baltic a questionnaire was conducted to investigate how many MSs were collecting vulnerable marine ecosystem (VME) benthic data and if protocols and best practise could be shared. From the questionnaire, it was evident that only Germany and partly Portugal were collecting the VME from their observer program. However, several MS recorded benthic VME species from other sampling programs mainly scientific surveys although these often did not meet the 200meter criteria and was off course not sampled from a commercial vessel.

There is an ICES database for VME species however, very few MSs are uploading the VME data collected on the surveys to this database, but is using the survey database. MS should consider if some of the benthic VME species could be uploaded to the dedicated database.

Discussion points:

During the LM it was discussed if GFCM received VME data; GFCM, data is provided on request, data is collected on the monitoring programmes but not from a dedicated survey.

Further readings on the subject:

Improving environmental sustainability of deep sea fisheries with emphasis on the conservation of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs)

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/8a9b0297-3b24-11ee-bd8d-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

[New information on vulnerable habitats and fisheries activities in the NEAFC regulatory areas \(figshare.com\)](#)

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ANNEX 1: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

The 21st Liaison Meeting was chaired by Marie Storr-Paulsen (Denmark) and the group met with the following participants:

Name	Country	Role / Affiliation	Email	Type presence
Marie Storr-Paulsen	DK	Chair	msp@aqu.a.dtu.dk	Physical
Federico De Rossi		End user - GFCM	federico.derossi@fao.org	Physical
Paolo Carpentieri		End user - GFCM	Paolo.Carpentieri@fao.org	Online
Lotte Worsøe Clausen		End user – ICES	lotte.worsoe.clausen@ices.dk	Online
Cynthia Fernandez-Diaz		End user - IOTC	Cynthia.FernandezDiaz@fao.org	Online
Christoph Stransky	DE	End user - STECF	christoph.stransky@thuenen.de	Physical
Arina Motova		End user - STECF	Arina.Motova@seafish.co.uk	Online
Maciej Adamowicz	PL	RCG BAL chair	madamowicz@mir.gdynia.pl	Physical
Irene Tzouramani	GR	RCG ECON co-chair	tzouramani@elgo.gr	Online
Hans van Oostenbrugge	NL	RCG ECON co-chair	hans.vanoostenbrugge@wur.nl	Online
Jeppe Strandgaard Herring	DK	RCG ECON incoming chair	JHR@dst.dk	Online
Maksims Kovsars	LV	RCG LDF chair	maksims.kovsars@bior.lv	Physical
Jurgen A. Mifsud	MT	RCG LP chair	jurgen.a.mifsud@gov.mt	Physical
Charis Charilaou	CY	RCG MED&BS co-chair	ccharilaou@dfmr.moa.gov.cy	Physical
Rita Vasconcelos	PT	RCG NANSEA co-chair	rita.vasconcelos@ipma.pt	Physical
Josefine Egekvist	DK	RCG NANSEA co-chair	jsv@aqu.a.dtu.dk	Physical
Monika Sterczewska	EU	DG MARE, Unit C3	monika.sterczewska@ec.europa.eu	Physical
Leonie O'Dowd	EU	DG MARE, Unit C3	Leonie.O'DOWD@ec.europa.eu	Online
Venetia Kostopoulou	EU	DG MARE, Unit C3	Venetia.KOSTOPOULOU@ec.europa.eu	Physical
Melissa Duflot	EU	DG MARE, Unit C3	Melissa.DUFLOT@ec.europa.eu	Physical
Duco Claringbould	EU	DG MARE	Duco.CLARINGBOULD@ec.europa.eu	Online
Zeynep Hekim	EU	JRC	Hekim.ZEYNEP@ec.europa.eu	Online

Annexes

Name	Country	Role / Affiliation	Email	Type presence
Frederico Cardigos	EU	DG EUROSTAT – Agriculture and Fisheries	frederico.cardigos@ec.europa.eu	Physical
Blanca García Álvarez	EU	CINEA	Blanca.GARCIA-ALVAREZ@ec.europa.eu	Online
Stefanos Kavadas	GR	RDBFIS II grant leader	stefanos@hcmr.gr	Online
Lucía Zarauz	ES	WGRDBESGOV chair	lzarauz@azti.es	Online
Rosa Maria Fernandez	ES	RCGs Secretariat	rfernandez@cetmar.org	Physical
Susana Rivero	ES	RCGs Secretariat	secretariat@fisheries-rcg.eu	Online

ANNEX 2: LIAISON MEETING 2024 AGENDA

Venue:

Borschette Conference Centre, Rue Froissart, 36, 1040 Brussels

Timetable:

Time	Duration	Topic	TOR	Presenter
Tuesday, September 24				
9:00	15 min	Meeting room open		
9:15	15 min	Walk-in & getting ready		
9:30		Welcome by the Commission	ToR 1A	COM opening speech: Raluca Ivanescu
9:45	15 min	Welcome and introduction Welcome, house rules, tour de table, adoption of the agenda, format of the report, notification of AOB	ToR 1A	Chair
10:00	20 min	End user needs and interaction: presentations from end users	ToR 1B	IOTC (Cynthia Fernandez-Diaz)
	5 min	Discussion and feed back from plenary		
10:25	20 min	Highlights in RCG activities (relevant to end users and other RCGs)	ToR 3	RCG Large Pelagics RCG chair (Jurgen)
	5 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		
10:50	20 min	Highlights in RCG activities (relevant to end users and other RCGs)	ToR 3	RCG Long Distance Fisheries RCG chair (Maksims Kovsars)
	5 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		
11:15	20 min	<i>Health break</i>		
11:35	20 min	End user needs and interaction: presentations from end users	ToR 1B	STECF / JRC (Christoph Stransky) with JRC contribution
	5 min	Discussion and feed back from plenary		

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Time	Duration	Topic	TOR	Presenter
Tuesday, September 24				
12:00	20 min	Feedback on FDI data call (metier issues, ad-hoc Med&BS, AER)	ToR 1B	Zeynep Hekim
	5 min	Discussion and feed back from plenary		
12:25	20 min	Highlights in RCG activities (relevant to end users and other RCGs)	ToR 3	RCG ECON RCG chairs (Hans van Oostenbrugge, Eirini Tzouramani, Jeppe Strandgaard Herring)
	5 min	Discussion and feed back from plenary		
12:50	15 min	End user needs and interaction: presentations from end users & and update on RDBES	ToR 1B	ICES (Lotte Worsøe Clausen)
	5 min	Discussion and feed back from plenary		
13:10	20 min	Highlights in RCG activities (relevant to end users and other RCGs). Discuss the procedures for third countries and end-users (metier group).	ToR 3	RCG NANSEA/BAL RCG chairs (Josefine Egekvist, Rita Vasconcelos, Maciej Adamowicz)
	5 min	Discussion and feed back from plenary		
13:35	1.20 Hour	<i>LUNCH</i>		
14:55	15 min	Update on RDB-ES data license / data access		Lucía Zarauz, RDBESGOV
15:10	15 min	Update on RDBFIS / data license / data access	ToR 3	Stefanos Kavadas, HCMR, RDBFIS
	15 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		
15:40	20 min	Highlights in RCG activities (relevant to end users and other RCGs)	ToR 3	RCG MED&BS RCG chair (Charis Charilaou)
	5 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		
16:05	20 min	<i>Coffee break</i>		
16:25	20 min	End user needs and interaction: presentations from end users	ToR 1B	GFCM (Federico DeRossi)
	5 min	Discussion and feed back from plenary		
16:50	15 min	Summary of the day		<i>Venetia Kostopoulou / plenary</i>

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Time	Duration	Topic	TOR	Presenter
Wednesday, September 25				
8:30	30 min	Meeting room open		
9:00	10 min	Start of the day		Chair
9:10	15 min	The 2024 RCGs - specific recommendations to be discussed at the Liaison Meeting and proposal for future intersessional work. Follow-up of Decision Making meeting (if any) and streamlining work between RCGs, RCG Data calls overview how MS responded. Announcement of new chairs, next meeting(s) and venues. Discussion on availability of chairs and possible solutions.	ToR 3A	RCG Large Pelagics RCG chair (Jurgen Mifsud)
	5 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		
9:30	15 min	The 2024 RCGs - specific recommendations to be discussed at the Liaison Meeting and proposal for future intersessional work. Follow-up of Decision Making meeting (if any) and streamlining work between RCGs, RCG Data calls overview how MS responded. Announcement of new chairs, next meeting(s) and venues. Discussion on availability of chairs and possible solutions.	ToR 3A	RCG Long distance RCG chair (Maksims Kovsars)
	5 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		
9:50	15 min	The 2024 RCGs - specific recommendations to be discussed at the Liaison Meeting and proposal for future intersessional work. Follow-up of Decision Making meeting (if any) and streamlining work between RCGs, RCG Data calls overview how MS responded. Announcement of new chairs, next meeting(s) and venues. Discussion on availability of chairs and possible solutions.	ToR 3A	RCG MED&BS RCG chair (Charis Charilaou)
	5 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		
10:10	15 min	The 2024 RCGs - specific recommendations to be discussed at the Liaison Meeting and proposal for future intersessional work. Follow-up of Decision Making meeting (if any) and streamlining work between RCGs, RCG Data calls overview how MS responded. Announcement of new chairs, next meeting(s) and venues. Discussion on availability of chairs and possible solutions.	ToR 3A	RCG NANSEA/BAL RCG chairs (Josefine Egekvist, Rita Vasconcelos, Maciej Adamowicz)

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Time	Duration	Topic	TOR	Presenter
Wednesday, September 25				
	5 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		
10:30	15 min	The 2024 RCGs - specific recommendations to be discussed at the Liaison Meeting and proposal for future intersessional work. Follow-up of Decision Making meeting (if any) and streamlining work between RCGs, RCG Data calls overview how MS responded. Announcement of new chairs, next meeting(s) and venues. Discussion on availability of chairs and possible solutions.	ToR 3A	RCG ECON RCG chairs (Hans van Oostenbrugge, Eirini Tzouramani, Jeppe Strandgaard Herring)
	5 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		
10:50	20 min	<i>Health break</i>		
11:10	15 min	Access for surveys in EU waters	?	ISSG Survey (Sieto Verver)
	15 min	Discussion/General conclusions from this session		
11:40	15 min	VME - how to sample	?	Marie Storr Paulsen
	5 min	Discussion/General conclusions from this session		
12:00	20 min	Future steps in RCG regional work plans & timelines	ToR 3D	RCG chairs
	5 min	Discussion/General conclusions from this session		
12:20	15 min	Structure of RCGs, cooperation and new panregional ISSGs and how to deal with the panregional ISSGs. Lessons learned from combined RCGs and Decision Meeting. Conclude on set-up for 2025.	ToR 4B	LP, LDF, MED&BS, NANSEABAL, ECON
	15 min	Discussion/General conclusions from this session		
12:50	10 min	Summary of the day		<i>Venetia Kostopoulou / plenary</i>
13:00	10 min	<i>Closure of the meeting by COM and chair.</i>		Chair, COM

ANNEX 3: OVERVIEW OF ALL RECOMMENDATIONS

An overview of all recommendations from the different RCGs can be found on the 2024 Decision Meeting report available on the RCGs website:

https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Report_RCGs-Decision-Meeting_2024.pdf



**Fisheries Data Collection
21st Liaison Meeting**

**Meeting between the Chairs of RCGs, key end users, European
Commission DG Mare and JRC**