



Regional Coordination Group
Long Distance Fisheries

Regional Coordination Group For Long Distance Fisheries

RCG LDF 2024 REPORT

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Acronyms

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





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SMEFF	Sustainable Management of External Fishing Fleets (Regulation)
SPRFMO	South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation
SSC	Scientific Sub-Committee
STECF	Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries
TAC	Total Allowable Catch
TM	Technical Meeting
WGRDBESGOV	ICES Working Group on RDBES Governance



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I Executive summary

The 2024 RCG LDF meeting was held in a physical form in **Cádiz, Spain** from July 2nd to 5th.

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 couldn't be released from the RDBES in time. MS were requested separately to provide the input files for the analysis at the RCG.

It was noted that data had not been requested for the following EU outermost regions: EU waters around the islands of French Guiana, Martinique and Guadeloupe (FAO area 31) and EU waters around the islands of Mayotte and La Réunion (FAO area 51). Data for these outermost regions will be requested in next year's data call.

2024 is the third year in which the RCG LDF deals with the NAFO area. Following the decision taken in 2021 to bring the NAFO area under the remit of the RCG LDF, the group proposed the harmonisation of sampling protocols between Member States involved in fisheries in the NAFO 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.

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. The Multilateral Agreement and Recommendation will be proposed to the relevant NCs at the Decision Meeting in September 2024.

The existing RoP for the RCG LDF will be revised following the inclusion of the designation of the RCG LDF as the designated body for data requirements and collection in the outermost regions and in NPFC waters.

The ISSG SPRFMO-OP continued in 2024, summarising the work done so far in relation to the accreditation process of the EU Observer Program in accordance with the requirements of the SPRFMO, and determining the effective preparation and implementation of other activities resulting from the accreditation (review and update of the observer manual, planning and organisation of training workshops for EU observers, discussion of a new multilateral agreement beyond 2024). The accreditation process was successfully completed during the SPRFMO 12th annual session in Manta (Ecuador 29 January - 2 February 2024).

The group discussed the STECF proposal EWG 24-08 on the reporting of bilateral/multilateral agreements. According to the guidelines, MS are allowed to enter "0" for the selected stocks if they are obliged to sample and they participate in a multilateral agreement and another country is responsible for sampling. These agreements should be correctly referenced in Tables 2.1, 2.2, and 2.5 using the names given in Table 1.3. The MS should report in the comment column of the tables whether sampling was carried out or not.

In total, five recommendations were proposed by the RCG LDF 2024:

- LDF_2024_R01: Assignment of RCG LDF as designated body for data requirements and collection in outermost regions;



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- LDF_2024_R02: Establishing an ISSG on NAFO harmonization protocols for on-board sampling (ISSG NAFO-SP);
- LDF_2024_R03: Establishing an ISSG on CECAF Observer Programme of small pelagics (ISSG CECAF-OP);
- LDF_2024_R04: Assignment of RCG LDF as coordinating body for data collection in NPFC waters;
- LDF_2024_R05: Establishing an ISSG on SMEFF fisheries in the high seas, in particular FAO area 41 (ISSG SMEFF-FAO41).

The draft Multilateral Agreements for the CECAF, SPRFMO and NPFC areas will be proposed to the relevant NCs at the Decision Meeting in September 2024.

The draft regional Work Plan for Long Distance Fisheries will be proposed to the relevant NCs at the Decision Meeting in September 2024.

The next RCG LDF meeting is planned for early July 2025 (the week 1-4 of July or alternatively 7-11 July), and Estonia kindly offered to host this meeting in Tallin or Tartu (t.b.d.). As a back-up options, Latvia, Poland and The Netherlands also flagged the offer to host next RCG LDF meeting.



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2 Introduction

2.1 General

From 2022 onwards, based on the experience of the online and hybrid meetings in 2020-2022, the Group decided to hold the annual technical meetings in a physical format only.

The 2024 RCG LDF physical meeting was held in Cádiz, Spain from 2 to 5 July. All participants were very impressed by the great hospitality of the meeting hosts and the excellent technical working conditions, for which the Spanish Institute of Oceanography and the University of Cádiz are to be highly commended.

The Group addressed all the Terms of Reference set for the 2024 meeting and reviewed the EU long distance fisheries of the previous year(s) to assess the extent of regional coordination required in the area of data collection. Based on the decision taken in 2021, the RCG LDF extended its geographical scope to include the NAFO area and over the last three years the Group has reviewed the EU fisheries in NAFO in the context of the historical background and the current status of sampling in this area.

Due to technical problems at ICES, the data submitted in response to the RCG LDF 2024 data call could not be released by RDBES in time, and the availability of an ICES hosted SharePoint was not available to the group.

Thanks to the RCGs Secretariat for very valuable organisational support before, during and after the meeting and for providing a OneDrive for the group's work.

2.2 Legal requirements

2.2.1 Background of RCG LDF

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

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

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

The coordination of the data collection was recommended at regional level and specific meetings were in charge of facilitating this and these meetings aimed to identify areas for standardisation, collaboration and task sharing between MS. RCMs were held annually with participants from each MS involved in fishing activity

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in the respective region. Being an end-user, RCM LDF launched data calls to gather the information needed to complete its tasks.

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.2.2 Establishment of RCG LDF

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



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

2.3 Terms of Reference

The following terms of reference were set for RCG LDF 2024:

- 1. Review progress since 2023 following up the 20th Liaison Meeting report**
- 2. Review feedback from end users**
 - CECAF/ SPRFMO / NAFO
 - WGRDBESGOV recommendations
 - Other input received
- 3. Analyse data from 2024 RCG LDF data call**
 - Data compilation, providing overviews of fisheries
 - Consider inclusion of emerging fisheries
 - Feedback from WGRDBESGOV/comments on experience RDBES upload
- 4. Regional data collection, analysis and storage**
 - State of play of sampling in CECAF, SPRFMO and NAFO areas in 2023
 - Cooperation offer from the REDUCE project
 - Discuss possibility of new data collection requirements related to EU joining the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC)
 - Discuss potential implications of the SMEFF Regulation (Regulation 2017/2403 on the sustainable management of external fishing fleets)
- 5. Future data collection set up in CECAF/SPRFMO/NAFO**
 - CECAF future data needs
 - Feedback from ISSG SPRFMO-OP on the EU Observer Programme accreditation procedure adopted by the SPRFMO
 - NAFO current and future data needs
- 6. AOB**
 - Discuss relevant upcoming calls for tender, studies
 - Review option of harmonization/unification of the RCG LDF RoP with RoPs of other RCGs
 - Place and date of the next RCG LDF





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2.4 Structure of the report

ToR addressed by the 2024 RCG LDF meeting are referred to in the following sections of the report.

ToR 1 - in section 5

ToR 2 - in section 6

ToR 3 - in section 3

ToR 4 - in section 7

ToR 5 - in section 8

ToR 6 - in section 9

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

2.5 Participants and agenda

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



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3 2024 RCG LDF data call (ToR 3)

3.1 Response to 2024 data call

Prior to the 2024 annual RCG LDF meeting, a data call was launched to collect landings and effort data. In 2022, the RCG LDF stated that: “As a baseline, from 2023 onwards, only the MS contributing to the relevant areas under the remit of the RCG LDF (based on the 2022 response) will be asked yearly, while the data call is expanded to all non-landlocked MS once every three years. The next data call addressing all non-landlocked MS will be in 2025.” In line with this statement, a selection of MS (See table 3.1.1) was addressed with the 2024 call. The 2024 data call was sent to all National Correspondents of these MS by the RCG Secretariat. The data call requests to upload the data into the current Regional Database in use: RDBES, hosted and maintained by ICES in Copenhagen. 2024 marked the first year of uploading the data to this database.

In 2023, RCG LDF concluded to request historical data and data from the outermost regions. The latter to ensure a comprehensive overview in line with the DCF requirements. However, a more in-depth analysis of the impact of such a request flagged the need to include non-EU countries and MS currently not active in the relevant regions. As the historical data is not of relevance for coordination purposes and non-EU countries are currently not present in the group, it was decided to postpone the request for outermost region to 2025 and at this stage, historical data will not be requested.

The call was launched on May 8th while setting the deadline for submission at June 21st. Only the known, active MS were addressed in the call.

The following list provides a general overview of the responses received by RCG LDF. This overview doesn't discriminate between the various types of responses received. Some contributions were updated beyond the deadline for various reasons, however, this was not considered a major issue as the work could be completed in time. MS are reminded that data can be updated throughout the year, and MS are encouraged to do so where applicable. In particular, some MS still may update historic data. All data was provided in time. However, due to technical issues at ICES, the data couldn't 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 (see section 3.4)

Table 3.1.1 Overview of 2024 data call response

MS	Response (Y/N)	Activity last year (Y/N)	Data provided (Y/N)
Belgium	No request 2024	NA	NA
Bulgaria	No request 2024	NA	NA
Croatia	No request 2024	NA	NA
Cyprus	No request 2024	NA	NA
Denmark	No request 2024	NA	NA
Estonia	Y	Y	Y
Finland	No request 2024	NA	NA
France	No request 2024	NA	NA
Germany	Y	Y	Y
Greece	No request 2024	NA	NA



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MS	Response (Y/N)	Activity last year (Y/N)	Data provided (Y/N)
Ireland	No request 2024	NA	NA
Italy	Y	Y	Y
Latvia	Y	Y	Y
Lithuania	Y	Y	Y
Malta	No request 2024	NA	NA
Netherlands	Y	Y	Y
Poland	Y	Y	Y
Portugal	Y	Y	Y
Romania	No request 2024	NA	NA
Slovenia	No request 2024	NA	NA
Spain	Y	Y	Y
Sweden	No request 2024	NA	NA

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

Analysis of data uploaded to the RDBES allows detection of any substantial changes in fishing patterns or landing volumes for stocks not currently subject to data collection. Cross-checking this data with the DCF obligations enables the conclusion of whether any emerging fisheries should be included in the future data collection programme.

8

In 2024, the RCG LDF has identified the need to coordinate the sampling program as a result of the EU acceding the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC) in 2022, and total allowable catch (TAC) of chub mackerel in the NPFC Convention Area for each of the 2024 and 2025 fishing seasons was set to EU fleet.

As it is unknown which MS' vessels will be active in this new region it was initiated to cooperate between MS (Poland, Germany, The Netherlands and Lithuania) active in SPRFMO area and to prepare the draft agreement of NPFC Multilateral Agreement based on the existing Multilateral agreement for biological data collection of pelagic fisheries in SPRFMO area. The NPFC Multilateral agreement and the recommendation will be proposed to the relevant NCs at the Decision Meeting in September 2024 (see Section 10).

3.3 Data compilation, providing overviews of fisheries

In 2024, all MS were requested to submit their data in the new format to the RDBES system. Due to technical problems at ICES after the deadline of the RCG LDF 2024 data call, the data couldn't be released from RDBES in time for the production of the Fisheries Overview. In order to ensure the availability of the data for the analysis during the technical meeting, MS were asked separately to provide the input files by e-mail.

All MS provided files containing commercial landings and effort data. Most of the time of the technical meeting was spent on harmonising the data and converting them from the RDBES format to the RDB format in order to run the r-script for the production of the Fisheries Overview.





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Once the data had been harmonised, a number of problems arose in running the r-script due to the versioning of the r-packages used and the occurrence of unexpected errors. In the end, it was decided to skip the production of the Fisheries Overview and concentrate on producing the tables for the report. All tables in section 4 of this report are produced using a dedicated script. Some errors were identified during additional checks. Manual corrections have been made to account for these errors (see section 3.4).

3.4 Comments on experience with RDBES upload

Spain

This year represents a significant shift due to the adoption to the RDBES format for the RCG data call. For this reason, the responsibility for supplying official data no longer lies with the Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO), but with the General Fisheries Secretary (SGP). This transition has introduced challenges in the data call process.

During this year's verification of data uploaded to the RCG data call (RDBES format) against official records, several issues emerged. Some species are absent from the records, indicating that not all catches are adequately represented. Inconsistencies were also identified in species categorization and depiction of fishing grounds, especially problematic in areas where multiple countries share fishing zones and landing ports.

Another concern is discrepancies between some species records after the scientific validation and their original entries in logbooks. Moreover, significant variations were noted in fishing effort and landings figures, as well as in the recorded number of trips and vessels, probably related to the absence of certain species. All these reasons raise uncertainties about data accuracy within the system.

The SGP is studying these issues. The tables included in this report are made with accurate data, so these data can be used with confidence.

For the next data call, improvements of data call process are planned, and a thorough scientific validation will be carried out.

Metier assignment

The criteria for assignment métiers in the artisanal fishery from the Canaries have recently been updated. Last year, a primary issue in allocating fishing trips to métiers was the presence of a highly versatile fleet capable of engaging in three métiers (for small pelagic, demersal fish and tuna) within the same fishing trip.

This year, the process of assigning métiers for the historical series is near completion. Despite this progress, discrepancies similar to those previously mentioned (such as missing species, inconsistencies in species grouping, etc.) have been encountered in the data provided (2021-2023). Additionally, discrepancies have been observed between the official records and modified logbooks, significant variations in figures for fishing effort and landings, and discrepancies in the recorded number of trips and vessels.

These ongoing challenges emphasize the importance of carefully managing the data presented in this report, as they highlight uncertainties regarding the accuracy of information within the RDBES system.

Species



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Due to errors identified in the data provided, certain species in the uploaded data do not correspond with those listed in the species master code list of the RDBES (assumed to be consistent with those in the former RDB). This discrepancy arises from the taxonomic classification process previously conducted by the Spanish Institute of Oceanography prior to data uploading into the now-discontinued RDB, a step that has not been applied to this year's data submission. Moreover, there are also instances of missing data, as previously noted.

As this is the first year that this data call is being carried out with the new RDBES format, all the issues indicated above will be studied in order to take the appropriate measures to correct them.

3.5 Updates to RDBES references

As in previous years, during the RCG LDF and the preparatory process, it became apparent that some references to species, ports and metiers were missing from the RDBES, thus hampering complete uploads. As missing codes were identified during upload, ICES responded swiftly to any requests made directly by MS when uploading the data. These quick actions are much appreciated. No further issues concerning codification surfaced during the analysis at the RCG.

Additional codes and references may be required to prepare for the imminent expansion of this RCG's area of governance, e.g., to include the North Pacific region.

3.6 Feedback from WGRDBESGOV

As a user, RCG LDF has a stake in the RDBES developments and governance. The RCG LDF is therefore represented in the RDBES Governance group: WGRDBESGOV. Over the past years, WGRDBESGOV addressed specific issues related to RCG LDF work and will continue to do so. At the most recent WGRDBESGOV meeting (December 2023), two recommendations were identified to be of direct relevance to RCG LDF, see table 3.6.I.

Table 3.6.I Recommendations relevant to RCG LDF

Id	Year	Recommendation	Recipients
1	2023	WGRDBESGOV recommends the RCGs to make a plan to develop the FDI export module, that is, a functionality allowing the RDBES to be used to fulfil the FDI data call. Background It has been a desire since the inception of the RDBES that it can be used to fulfil the FDI data call. However, it is not a straightforward process. During the last years, WGRDBES have worked intersessionally in order to get the needed variables into the RDBES data model. However, next steps will need a well-defined plan and dedicated workforce to be accomplished (production of the tables, need for a capacity table, integration of the RDBES estimations...). To restart the ISSG Data Quality (on hold since 2022) to develop a procedure to check the quality and completeness of the data uploaded to the RDBES.	RCG NANSEA RCG Baltic RCG LDF
2	2023	WGRDBESGOV recommends the RCGs to revise the roles and permissions developed by WKRAISE&TAF (1 & 2) and define what do they need for their work.	RCG NANSEA RCG Baltic RCG LDF



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Id	Year	Recommendation	Recipients
		Background During the WKRAISE&TAF (1 & 2) workshops, the RDBES/TAF roles and permissions were defined with a focus on the ICES stock assessment process. RCGs need to revise these roles and permission and check if they fulfil their needs, or whether they need different specifications. To invite third Countries to the Technical Meeting, when RDBES related issues are addressed.	
3	2023	WGRDBESGOV recommends ICES, RCGs and WGBYC to discuss the long-term maintenance of InterCatch, the RDBs and the WGBYC Database for historical data, and engage in an investigation of possible solutions. Background 2023 has been the last year that the RDB was used to upload new data. InterCatch will work normally until 2026, and by 2027 the assessment of all stocks will be integrated in the RDBES workflow. The WGBYC Database will also be integrated in the RDBES by 2027, with one single RDBES data call, including bycatch data. These three Databases contains a time series of data that is still relevant for ICES work (time series) and RCGs work. Still, keeping them alive reduced to a data storage facility from which historical data can only be downloaded while maintaining the new RDBES up and running for present and future data will be costly. We need to decide how to arrange this maintenance.	RCG NANSEA RCG Baltic RCG LDF
4	2023	WGRDBESGOV recommends ICES and RCGs to issue a joint RDBES Data Call in January 2024, with a deadline in April 2024. To communicate it to the NCs and ACOM. Background The RCG and ICES data calls partially overlap in time, geographical and data coverage. It is therefore advantageous that the timings and content of the RCG and ICES data calls are closely coordinated and, where possible, joint data calls are issued. In January 2024 a joint RCG-ICES data call (DC) with deadline 1st of April will be issued. The DC will ask for landings and effort data (CL and CE) from 2021-2023, and sampling data (CS) from 2022-2023, including data collected under DCF programmes (both pilots and routine).	RCG NANSEA RCG Baltic RCG LDF

RCG LDF response:

1: [Echo and support response by RCG NANSEA]

2: [Echo and support response by RCG NANSEA]

3: RCG LDF will keep, as security measure, an extraction of historical CE and CL data, when possible, upon phase-out of the obsolete databases. However, for coordination purposes historical data is of (very) limited relevance due to the shifting reference period as well as the addition of new regions under the remit of RCG LDF.

4: RCG LDF issued a separate data call, see section 3.1.

Apart from the direct recommendations to the RCG LDF, the WGRDBESGOV discussed various topics of direct and indirect relevance to this group. The main change having an impact on the RCG LDF work was the transition from RDB to RDBES from 2024 onwards. The change was addressed in the 2024 data call.



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3.7 Preparation of 2025 data call

Despite meeting the deadline in 2024, some data was still being corrected beyond the deadline. However, the late updates didn't pose significant problems when processing the data. However, the RCG LDF, again, wishes to prepare the yearly data at an earlier stage prior to the meeting, to facilitate both a timely upload as well as to conduct preparatory work before the meeting (e.g. producing complete fisheries overviews). The 2024 data analysis was primarily hampered by the technical issues at ICES. The future deadlines should be set in line with the dates of the RCG LDF in 2025 and the provisions in the current DCF (1 month response time). Ideally, the deadline for data submission is 1 month before the meeting, as this will also allow ICES to contribute to the data extraction if needed while leaving sufficient time to prepare data and tables prior to the meeting. During the 2024 meeting, some MS indicated that an earlier deadline may pose problems as they await LDF data from vessels coming in the mid-second quarter.

The 2025 data call will be addressed to all no-land locked MS requesting data from 2021-2024. 2021 is included to ensure the common first year for all MS. From 2026 onwards the data call will request data from the previous 3 years. As in previous years, MS are continuously encouraged to upload data (and update when needed) before the RCG data call. This will allow for a less stressful upload, and once done, only last year's data needs to be uploaded, which should be a routine job by then. Before the 2025 data call, a quick scan of the Eurostat database will be done by the RCG LDF data coordinator to explore potential new areas to be highlighted in the call. The 2025 call will also include the request to provide data for the outermost regions.

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

The RCG LDF, again, briefly discussed the inclusion of requesting data from all outermost regions as listed under Table I of COM Decision 2021/1167. This decision does not refer to the RCG LDF as the responsible body, yet data from EU waters around Madeira and Canary Islands (FAO area 34.1.2) is provided in response to the current call already. The main reason being located in FAO area 34 (CECAF). For the other outermost regions mentioned in Table I (EU waters around French Guiana, Martinique and Guadeloupe islands (FAO area 31) and EU waters around Mayotte and La Réunion islands (FAO area 51)), no data is provided to this group. At the 2024 Liaison Meeting, the RCG LDF will again address the lack of a designated body for these regions and will subsequently stress the delivery of the data in response to the 2025 call in order to achieve a comprehensive overview of the fisheries in the outermost regions. RCG LDF recommends a future update of EU-MAP to reflect the designation of RCG LDF as the coordinating body.

Recommendation 01: Assignment of RCG LDF as designated body for data requirements and collection in outermost regions

LDF_2024_R01	RCG LDF to take the role as designated body to monitor data collection requirements and, if needed to coordinate biological data collection in the outermost regions
Follow-up actions needed	Approval by all RCG LDF NCs and updating the RoP of RCG LDF where and when appropriate
Responsible persons for follow-up actions	RCG LDF NCs to approve and to request the EU Commission to assign the RCG LDF as the designated body for data requirements and collection in the outermost regions in future updates of the EU-MAP
Time frame (Deadline)	Decision meeting 2024

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4 Review of EU Long Distance Fisheries activities

4.1 CECAF area

The three fishing grounds considered for CECAF are:

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

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

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

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

FISHING GROUND “WEST AFRICA”

The information below describes the general types of fisheries in the relevant West African CECAF areas by MS (2023) as an overview of the CECAF fisheries carried out by EU fleets. Some fisheries cover very large areas along the West African shelf. As non-EU countries also conduct fisheries in this area, the catches taken by vessels of EU MS constitute only a part of the total catches.

Demersal fishing is mainly carried out by the Spanish fleet, with limited activity from other countries such as Italy, Portugal and Greece, with Spain and Italy being the only MS to report their activity in 2023. The other EU MS (The Netherlands, Poland, Germany, Latvia and Lithuania) operate pelagic trawlers in a small pelagics fishery, developed in waters off Morocco and Mauritania. In addition, there is a fleet of Spanish purse seiners targeting small pelagics in northern Morocco, which was not active in 2023.

An overview of the fish species caught by EU MS in West African waters of the CECAF area in 2023 is not provided due to the unavailability of extracted data from RDBES during the RCG LDF meeting.

In most cases, EU fisheries have been carried out in this area under bilateral Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs) between the EU and the coastal States. However, there are other fisheries developed in the CECAF area, under direct authorizations (SMEFF regulation), independent from these SFPAs. This is the case of the demersal fisheries carried out by Spanish vessels in Guinea, Congo, Angola, Sierra Leone (and previously The Gambia¹), reported for the first time in the RCG 2019. Italian fishing has been reported in Guinea and Sierra Leone under the direct authorisation regime. In 2023, fisheries in Morocco, Mauritania,

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

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Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau were developed within SFPAs while fisheries in Guinea, Congo and Angola were carried out under direct authorizations.

Table 4.1.1 General types of fisheries in relevant CECAF areas by MS (2023 data)

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

* Fisheries developed with direct authorizations.

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

The responsibility for coordination of research activities in the area, stock assessments and providing scientific advice for stock management lies with the Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (CECAF). In addition, the Joint Scientific Committees (JSCs) of the SFPAs between the EU and the partner countries (Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau) play an important role in setting an independent scientific cooperation framework between the EU and the coastal states. For the SFPA EU-The Gambia, the JSC meeting in 2024 was held for the first time as a tripartite meeting joint with the EU-Senegal JSC.

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

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Morocco²

The last Protocol of the current SFPA (2019-2023), expired in July 2023. The SFPA is currently dormant, and the conclusion of a new Protocol remains uncertain.

Mauritania³

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

Senegal⁴

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

The Gambia⁵

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

Guinea-Bissau⁶

The last Protocol of the SFPA between the EU and Guinea-Bissau (2019-2024) expired in June 2024. A new Protocol has been negotiated and is expected to be implemented in a few months.

The following tables, based on the data provided to the RCG LDF by MS, show the main fishing activities aggregated over the entire CECAF North and South fishing areas, i.e. including both SFPA and SMEFF activities. Table 4.1.2 shows total fishing effort (from 2021 to 2023). Tables under 4.1.3 show total landings for each year from 2021 to 2023.

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Table 4.1.2 Effort (fishing days) by country and metiers from 2021 to 2023 (Fishing ground: "West Africa").

Metier_lvl6	Country	2021	2022	2023
LLS_DEF_0_0_0	ESP	865	927	446
MIS_DEF_0_0_0	ESP	282	314	141
OTB_CRU_32-69_0_0	ESP	6868	7631	8343
OTB_DEF_70-119_0_0	ESP	2034	1662	1655
OTB_DEF_70-119_0_0	ITA	560	429	466

²https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/fisheries/international-agreements/sustainable-fisheries-partnership-agreements-sfpas/morocco_en

³https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/fisheries/international-agreements/sustainable-fisheries-partnership-agreements-sfpas/mauritania_en

⁴https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/fisheries/international-agreements/sustainable-fisheries-partnership-agreements-sfpas/senegal_en

⁵https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/fisheries/international-agreements/sustainable-fisheries-partnership-agreements-sfpas/gambia_en

⁶https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/fisheries/international-agreements/sustainable-fisheries-partnership-agreements-sfpas/guinea-bissau_en



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Metier_lvl6	Country	2021	2022	2023
OTB_MCF_70-119_0_0	ESP	990	712	636
OTB_MDD_>0_0_0	ITA	79		
OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0_0	DEU	119	84	
OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0_0	LTU	516.9	559.8	342
OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0_0	LVA	525	580	542
OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0_0	NLD	375	353	281
OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0_0	POL		6	
PS_SPF_>0_0_0	ESP	199	31	

Table 4.1.3 Landings (tons) by country and metiers from 2021 to 2023 (Fishing ground: “West Africa”).

Metier 2021	DEU	ESP	ITA	LTU	LVA	NLD
LLS_DEF_0_0_0		1484				
MIS_DEF_0_0_0		188				
OTB_CRU_32-69_0_0		5306				
OTB_DEF_70-119_0_0		14170	979			
OTB_MCF_70-119_0_0		4686				
OTB_MDD_>0_0_0			119			
OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0	25167			37992	36529	31976
PS_SPF_>0_0_0		430				

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Metier 2022	DEU	ESP	ITA	LTU	LVA	NLD	POL	PRT
LLD_DWF_0_0_0								I
LLS_DEF_0_0_0		1249						NA
MIS_DEF_0_0_0		219						
OTB_CRU_32-69_0_0		6501						
OTB_DEF_70-119_0_0		9752	724					
OTB_MCF_70-119_0_0		3268						
OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0	21914			38691	38063	30189	265	
PS_SPF_>0_0_0		90						

Metier 2023	ESP	ITA	LTU	LVA	NLD
LLS_DEF_0_0_0	610				
MIS_DEF_0_0_0	95				
OTB_CRU_32-69_0_0	6990				
OTB_DEF_70-119_0_0	8026	843			
OTB_MCF_70-119_0_0	3575				
OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0			18899	38138	22787



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Changes in métiers codes suggested by the ISSG on Métier and transversal variable issues in 2022 and adopted by the RCG-LDF in 2023, makes it difficult to analyse landing and effort trends of certain métiers that have been merged with others under the same code. This is the case of the Spanish demersal métiers for demersal trawlers OTB_DEF_>=70_0_0 and OTB_DEF_>=80_0_0 (currently merged in OTB_DEF_70-119_0_0), or the métier for Spanish longliner LLS_DEF_6_0_0, now merged with the previously existing LLS_DEF_0_0_0 and both targeting different species in different fishing grounds. Thus, the new Table 4.1.3.1 includes the historical series of landings of the Spanish métiers applying the new métier codes.

Table 4.1.3.1 Landings (tons) by Spanish metiers from 2014 to 2023 (Fishing ground: “West Africa”).

Spanish métiers	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
LLS_DEF_0_0_0	2036	1762	3071	2900	2193	3064	2316	1484	1249	610
MIS_DEF_0_0_0	48	244	100	89	56	56	114	188	219	95
OTB_CRU_32-69_0_0	4879	4142	4055	5942	4964	5469	4891	5306	6501	6990
OTB_DEF_70-119_0_0	17085	25423	18101	16938	25164	20135	16277	14170	9752	8026
OTB_MCF_70-119_0_0	5681	19152	33514	26946		6615	7099	4686	3268	3575
OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0	6918				740	782	2175			
PS_SPF_>0_0_0	4	1395	696	1674	728	122	1101	430	90	

Discrepancies are especially noted for the current metier OTB_MCF_70-119_0_0 (previously named OTB_MCF_>=70_0_0) where there are differences of thousands of tonnes during the period 2015-2017, explained by errors occurred during the uploading process in the RDB (RCG-LDF, 2023).

Thus, considering only the period 2019-2022 for those Spanish metiers for which considerable differences were noted (RCG-LDF, 2023), we observe that the métier OTB_DEF_70_119_0_0 experienced a sharp decrease in landings from 2019 to the minimal values recorded in 2023. The landings for OTB_CRU_32_69_0_0, which represents shrimp trawlers, progressively increased from around 4 000 tonnes in 2016 to a maximal value of 6 990 tonnes in 2023. Landings for OTB_MCF_70_119_0_0, representing cephalopod-fish trawlers, experienced a steady decrease from around 7 000 tons in 2020 to an average around 3 400 tons in 2022-2023.

For the artisanal longline fishery in Morocco or Mauritania (both currently combined as LLS_DEF_0_0_0), there is a significant decrease in landings from 2019 (3069 tonnes) to a minimum value of 610 tonnes in 2023. The artisanal purse seine fishery (PS_SPF_>0_0_0), corresponding to a Spanish fleet operating in North Morocco, also shows a sharp decline, with no fishing activity in 2023.

For pelagic trawlers represented by the métier OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0 (previously named OTM_SPF_>=40_0_0), the landings decreased steadily since 2019 to values below 80 000 tonnes in 2023.

Landings statistics in West African waters of the CECAF area from 2014 to 2023 show a significant decrease in 2015, followed by an increase in 2016. However, there is a continuous downward trend in landings from 2016 to 2023. These changes can be attributed to variations in the catches of small pelagics in certain

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countries and to the impact of the SFPAs, which have led to periods of inactivity for EU vessels in certain years and/or to increasingly restrictive conditions for certain fisheries.

Table 4.1.4 Total EU landings (tons) in the West African waters of the CECAF area from 2014 to 2023. Data provided through the RDB (2014-2020) and RDBES (2021-2023).

Year	Total_EU_landings_t
2014	312275.6
2015	167269.3
2016	265697.4
2017	216591.5
2018	171911.0
2019	180453.6
2020	169493.9
2021	159026
2022	150925
2023	99963

Tables 4.1.5 – 4.1.6 show the results of the métier rankings for effort and landings criteria respectively for EU fishing activity in the CECAF area. Although effort is no longer a criterion for sampling obligations under the new DCF, the distribution of effort among the different métiers provides an insight into possible shifts in fishing activity.

Table 4.1.5 Percentage of average effort of the different métiers of EU fleets operating in the CECAF area (West Africa) (period 2021-2023). Calculation based on fishing days. Métiers are comparable to previous reports. Métiers included in the 90% threshold are marked in bold.

Métier	FishingDays	EffortPerc
OTB_CRU_32-69_0_0	14076.00	74.41
OTB_DEF_70-119_0_0	1783.67	9.43
OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0	1183.53	6.26
OTB_MCF_70-119_0_0	779.33	4.12
LLS_DEF_0_0_0	746.00	3.94
MIS_DEF_0_0_0	245.67	1.30
PS_SPF_0_0_0	76.67	0.41
OTB_MDD_>0_0_0	26.33	0.14

Table 4.1.6 Percentage of average landings (period 2021-2023) of different métiers operating in the CECAF area (West Africa). Métiers are comparable to previous reports. Métiers included in the 90% threshold are marked in bold.



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Metier	LandingWeight_ton	LandingsPerc
OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0	92815.1	80.07
OTB_DEF_70-119_0_0	11498.0	9.92
OTB_CRU_32-69_0_0	6265.7	5.41
OTB_MCF_70-119_0_0	3843.0	3.32
LLS_DEF_0_0_0	1114.3	0.96
PS_SPF_>0_0_0	173.4	0.15
MIS_DEF_0_0_0	167.3	0.14
OTB_MDD_>0_0_0	39.6	0.03

According to the métier ranking, some changes were observed for 2023 as compared to previous years within the same métiers (Table 4.1.5 & 4.1.6). With regard to métier ranking for landings (Table 4.1.6), the métier OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0, targeting small pelagics, has decreased by 1%. The métier OTB_DEF_70-119_0_0, targeting demersal species, increased by about 2.5%. Together, these two métiers constitute almost 90% of the landings. Together with the métier OTB_CRU_32-69_0_0, targeting crustaceans, the 90% threshold is exceeded, and these three métiers are selected for sampling. In the case of métier ranking for effort (Table 4.1.5), only three métiers were selected for sampling instead of five in previous years, including two demersal métiers targeting crustaceans and demersal fish and one métier targeting small pelagics. The order of the three most important métiers has not changed from 2022 to 2023. The effort of métier OTB_DEF_70-119_0_0 decreased by 7.4% and the effort of the métier OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0 decreased by approximately 6.3% whereas the métier OTB_CRU_32-69_0_0 increased by 23.3%. Other métiers targeting both small pelagics and demersal species were also included in previous years due to their relevance in CECAF fisheries and their inclusion in the respective SFPAs fishing opportunities. Therefore, no major changes occurred in the métiers sampled during the period analyzed.

In order to know the sampling obligation of the different Member States (MS) for demersal stocks according to their share in the total EU catches, the average landings of the last three years for those stocks that are jointly fished by different MS and selected for sampling should be estimated and their shares in the total EU landings calculated. However, only the landings by species and by country for the last year were available at the RCG meeting and the proportions were estimated based on the 2023 data. The demersal stocks fished jointly by different MS are the southern pink shrimp *Penaeus notialis* (supposedly declared as *Parapenaeopsis atlantica* by Italy and as *Penaeus* spp. by Spain), the common octopus *Octopus vulgaris* and the cuttlefish *Sepia* spp. (*Sepia officinalis* and/or *Sepia hierredda*), fished by Spain and Italy. Following the 10% criteria (EU MAP), **Spain should continue sampling the three shared stocks considered. In addition, the proportion of *Sepia* spp and *O. vulgaris* fished by Italy in the last year was higher than 10% and therefore Italy should consider these for sampling.** The Italian and Spanish fisheries for these cephalopod species are mainly carried out in Guinea-Bissau, where both fleets operate with cephalopod-finish (category I) licences under the SFPAs.

An overview of the EU MS fishing activities in West African waters of the CECAF area in 2023 is not provided due to the unavailability of extracted data from RDBES during the RCG LDF meeting.





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FISHING GROUND “CANARY”

The criteria for métier allocation of landings and effort from artisanal fleets were improved and standardized in 2023. The difficulty of this issue relies on the high polyvalence of the fleet involved, which uses a large set of traditional fishing gears (multi-gear) and targets a high variety of species (multispecies). The Canary fleet mostly operates under the minor-gear license, which allows fishermen to use several gears in the same fishing trip, in a way that even the three métiers occurring (small pelagics, demersal and tuna) can be developed in one single fishing trip.

Landing and effort data are provided for 2021-2023 (Tables 4.1.7 and 4.1.8).

The fishing effort from the small pelagic fleet (PS_SPF_10-31_0_0) showed a decrease from 2021 to 2022 with a slight increase in 2023, whereas high variations are observed in the demersal métier (MIS_DES_0_0_0). Landings of both the demersal and small pelagics metiers show a general opposite trend, decreasing for the small pelagic metier, but increasing for the demersal one, this with a slight increase in the last year. It should be noted that the effort unit used for these small-scale fisheries are positive landing days, therefore the fishing days with no landings cannot be accounted with the available source of information.

It also worth noting that landings of small pelagics in the Canary Islands are considered uncompleted since there are significant captures of the target small pelagic species as life bait by the tuna fleet that are underreported. It is recommended to improve the reporting of these catches, with reliable catch data by species.

Table 4.1.7 Effort (fishing days) by metiers for the Canary Islands. 2021-2023.

Country	Métier (level 6)	2021	2022	2023
ESP	PS_SPF_10-31_0_0	2819	2554	3069
	MIS_DES_0_0_0	32959	30793	31899

Table 4.1.8 Landings (tons) by metiers for the Canary Islands. 2021-2023.

Country	MÉTIER (level 6)	2021	2022	2023
ESP	PS_SPF_10-31_0_0	1650	1513	1390
	MIS_DES_0_0_0	1260	1248	1586

FISHING GROUND “MADEIRA”

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

Monthly sampling was conducted for the métiers LLD_DWF_0_0_0 (Drifting longlines targeting deep water fish, mainly *Aphanopus spp.*), LLS_DEF_0_0_0 (set longlines targeting finfish species, mainly *Sparidae* and *Serranidae*), PS_SPF_>0_0_0 (purse seine for small pelagic fishes) and MIS_MOL_0_0_0 (several gears targeting limpets *Patella aspera* and *Patella ordinaria*) by the artisanal fleet in Madeira archipelago in 2023.



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In 2023, approximately 46% of the total fishing effort of Madeira was accomplished with the metier LLD_DWF_0_0_0 (Table 4.1.9). The landings of finfish operated with the metier LLS_DEF_0_0_0 represented 27% and the catches performed by the metier MIS_MOL_0_0_0 represented 9%.

Table 4.1.9 Effort (fishing days) by metiers for Madeira. 2021-2023.

Country	Métier	2021	2022	2023
PT	LLD_DWF_0_0_0	2113	2342	2060
	FPO_DEF_>0_0_0	278	231	235
	LHP_DEF_0_0_0	492	310	306
	LLS_DEF_0_0_0	1210	1265	1223
	LHP_MOL_0_0_0	27	68	4
	LLS_MOL_0_0_0	7		
	MIS_MOL_0_0_0	517	491	423
	LHP_SPF_0_0_0	6		
	LLS_SPF_0_0_0	28		
	PS_SPF_>0_0_0	247	223	228

The metier LLD_DWF_0_0_0 targeting black and intermediate scabbard fishes represented approximately 49% of the total landings in 2023 (Table 4.1.10). Small pelagic fishes (*Trachurus picturatus* and *Scomber colias*) represented 8%, apart from tuna which represented 39% of the total catches. Despite representing only 2% of total landings, the demersal fish fishery (LLS_DEF_0_0_0, LHP_DEF_0_0_0), takes on an important economic value in local markets.

Concerning the métier MIS_MOL_0_0_0 targeting limpets, which also represented 1.4% of total catches, monthly sampling was only conducted from April to October to comply with the regional legislation in force (e.g. closed season from November to March).

Table 4.1.10 Landings (tons) by metiers for Madeira. 2021-2023.

Country	Métier	2021	2022	2023
PT	LLD_DWF_0_0_0	1882	2269	2144
	FPO_DEF_>0_0_0	8	5	3
	LHP_DEF_0_0_0	25	13	20
	LLS_DEF_0_0_0	92	76	71
	LHP_MOL_0_0_0	1	3	<1
	LLS_MOL_0_0_0	<1		
	MIS_MOL_0_0_0	82	80	64
	LHP_SPF_0_0_0	<1		
	LLS_SPF_0_0_0	1		
	PS_SPF_>0_0_0	283	334	338

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The landings of deep-water species in 2023 decreased approximately 5% in relation to 2022, mainly due to a decrease of 12% in the fishing effort. The landings of small pelagic fishes that showed a pattern of stability from 2022 to 2023. An increase of 13% in landings for demersal fish (LHP_DEF_0_0_0 and LLS_DEF_0_0_0) was observed in relation to the previous year.

An overview of the Portuguese fishing activities in Madeira in 2023 is not provided due to the unavailability of extracted data from RDBES during the RCG LDF meeting.

4.2 SPRFMO area

EU fleet activities in the SPRFMO area are reported since 2012. In 2013, only one vessel under the Lithuanian flag was active with a negligible landings volume. In 2014, two EU vessels (one under DEU and one under NLD flag) were fishing in the SPRFMO area. In 2015, Dutch and Lithuanian fisheries were reported (and sampled under the sampling agreement between Poland, Lithuania, Germany and The Netherlands) in the SPRFMO area. Two fishing vessels were engaged in this area in 2016 (under DEU and POL flags) and in 2017 (under NLD and LTU flags). Only one fishing vessel was actively fishing in this area both in 2018 (LTU flag) and in 2019 (POL flag). In 2020, the entire EU quota was transferred to Chile. For this reason, no activities of EU vessels took place in the SPRFMO area in 2020. Three EU vessels (under DEU, LTU and POL flags) were active in this area in 2021. In 2022, only two EU vessels (POL and LTU flags) were fishing in this area. In 2023 four EU vessels (POL, LTU and DEU flags) were active in the SPRFMO area. In 2024 (until July) two EU trawlers (POL and LTU flags) were fishing in this area.

Until 2018, the effort (in fishing days) and landing data from the SPRFMO area were provided by MS to the RCG LDF in Excel files. For the 2019 RCG LDF meeting, data were provided in a mixed form, some in Excel files and some were uploaded to the RDB. In reply to the 2022 and 2023 data calls regarding fishing activity, data related to the fishery in the SPRFMO area were uploaded to the RDB. In 2024 data were uploaded to a new data base – RDBES (Regional Data Base and Estimation System).

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Table 4.2.1 SPRFMO small pelagic fishery effort (fishing days) by country from 2021 to 2023.

Country	2021	2022	2023
DEU	177		78
ESP	1	163	3
LTU	40	144	115
POL	98	117	185

Table 4.2.2 SPRFMO small pelagic fishery total landings (tons) by country from 2021 to 2023.

Country	2021	2022	2023
DEU	27138		36020
ESP		398	
LTU	9034	32400	16213
POL	29274	31851	34785

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An overview of the fish species caught by EU MS in the SPRFMO area in 2023 is not provided due to the unavailability of extracted data from RDBES during the RCG LDF meeting.

4.3 NAFO area

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

NAFO has implemented a commercial fishing vessel monitoring observer programme, whereby all fishing vessels (100%) in the NAFO Regulatory Area must carry an independent on-board observer for control purposes (unless the Contracting Party (CPs) operates a partial observer withdrawal). However, the information collected as part of this on-board observer programme is very limited and includes only total catch by species and fishing effort. In the case of these data, there is a protocol for sending data to the NAFO Secretariat, which compile and stores them.

But this NAFO observer programme does not include the collection of fundamental stock assessment data that would inform on catch characteristics, such as length distributions, biological and ecological information (e.g. age, length, weight, maturity, stomach contents).

In general, all Contracting Parties have scientific on-board sampling of the main commercial species caught, but the collection of these samples is not standardised among them.

NAFO has yet to develop sampling protocols that are made extensive and mandatory, in a standardised and homogeneous way for the entire commercial fleet operating within the NAFO Regulatory Area, ensuring a balanced and representative sampling of the spatial and temporal distribution of commercial catches.

By extension, there is also no data storage system organised and managed by the NAFO Secretariat, beyond the registration of catches and effort, and the spatial monitoring of the commercial fleet (VMS data).

Therefore, within NAFO, the procedure for submitting and collecting the data necessary for the assessment of the different stocks mentioned above has not evolved and remains the same as it has been for some decades. The designated expert responsible for the assessment (called DE) of a given stock contacts or is contacted by the scientists in each country responsible for the preparation and submission of the data (called national co-ordinators). These data sent to the DEs do not have a standardised format, as indicated above, but rather each national coordinator sends them in different formats, and even the same country may provide them in different formats in consecutive years. This great heterogeneity and lack of consistency in the format across countries and over time implies a great effort on the part of the DE to generate the necessary data with the appropriate input format for the assessment model.

Recommendation 02: Establishing an ISSG on NAFO harmonization protocols for on-board sampling (ISSG NAFO-SP)

LDF_2024_R02

The RCG LDF recommends the creation of a new ISSG with the main objective of harmonising and standardising, as far as possible, protocols for on-board sampling of commercial fisheries in the NAFO Regulatory Area among EU Member States

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Recommendation 02: Establishing an ISSG on NAFO harmonization protocols for on-board sampling (ISSG NAFO-SP)

Follow-up actions needed	Approval by all RCG LDF NCs
Responsible persons for follow-up actions	RCG LDF NCs to approve the establishment of the ISSG NAFO-SP
Time frame (Deadline)	Decision meeting 2024

Also, CPs or Members States (MS) send all their available information to the Secretariat/Scientific Council in the form of a document called National Report, published in the NAFO Scientific Council Summary (SCS) documents series. Currently NAFO did not identify major issues with EU data that need coordination nor that there is a lack of data from EU side needed for the stock assessment.

Since NAFO does not hold a database with all the biological raw data, the RDBES could be utilised in the future to provide NAFO with those data.

An overview of effort and landings by EU MS in the NAFO area, based on RCG data call, is presented in the RCG LDF 2024 report. The overview of targeted species and stocks has been reviewed (Tables 4.3.1, 4.3.2 and 4.3.3). MS are targeting the same stocks, The problem with using different overlapping metiers was solved by submitting data in the new RDBES database where non-overlapping metiers are agreed.

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

Species	Stock	DEU	ESP	EST	LTU	PRT	Non-EU countries	EU share in 2021 landings
American plaice (<i>Hippoglossoides platessoides</i>)	3LNO		140	77		89	699	30%
American plaice (<i>Hippoglossoides platessoides</i>)	3M		16	18		47	1	99%
Cod (<i>Gadus morhua</i>)	3M		86	68		676	1 196	41%
Cod (<i>Gadus morhua</i>)	3NO		68	49		140	191	57%
Greenland halibut (<i>Reinhardtius hippoglossoides</i>)	SA 0 + 1 Offshore	1 673					34 763	5%
Greenland halibut (<i>Reinhardtius hippoglossoides</i>)	SA 2+ 3KLMNO		4 515	515		2 553	7 612	50%
Redfish (<i>S. mentella</i> and <i>S. fasciatus</i>)	3LN		441	707		3 238	6 718	39%
Redfish (<i>S. mentella</i> and <i>S. fasciatus</i>)	3M		1 688	685		5 445	327	96%



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Species	Stock	DEU	ESP	EST	LTU	PRT	Non-EU countries	EU share in 2021 landings
Redfish (<i>S. mentella</i> and <i>S. fasciatus</i>)	3O		802	315		2 810	744	84%
Roughhead grenadier (<i>Macrourus berglax</i>)	SA 2+3		82	46		6	71	65%
Northern prawn (<i>Pandalus borealis</i>)	3M		16		1 588	20	3 067	35%
Skates	3LNOPs		2 901	26		260	842	79%
Squid (<i>Illex</i> spp)	SA 3+4		17	9		54	10 591	1%
White hake (<i>Urophycis tenuis</i>)	3NOPs		270	2		94	295	55%
Witch flounder (<i>Glyptocephalus cynoglossus</i>)	3NO		23	22		3	471	9%
Wolffish (<i>Anarhichas</i> spp)	SA I	4					263	2%
Yellowtail flounder (<i>Limanda ferruginea</i>)	3LNO		173	315		25	14 218	3%

Table 4.3.2. Landing data from 2022 in tonnes from FAO Area 21 by country and by assessed stock. Combined landings from non-EU countries and EU share of total landings is also presented. Stocks in grey background are under moratorium. Green cells indicate that biological sampling is done for the stock. (EU share in 2022 landings, calculated based on NAFO STATLANT 21A, using the NAFO Data Extraction tool on 3 of July 2024).

Species	Stock	DEU	ESP	EST	LTU	PRT	Non-EU countries	EU share in 2022 landings
American plaice (<i>Hippoglossoides platessoides</i>)	3LNO		57	78		78	482	31%
American plaice (<i>Hippoglossoides platessoides</i>)	3M		10	20		69	1	99%
Cod (<i>Gadus morhua</i>)	3M		339	44		1 542	1 880	51%
Cod (<i>Gadus morhua</i>)	3NO		62	32		75	150	53%
Greenland halibut (<i>Reinhardtius hippoglossoides</i>)	SA 0 + 1 Offshore	1 660	456				64 685	3%
Greenland halibut (<i>Reinhardtius hippoglossoides</i>)	SA 2+ 3KLMNO		3 981	242		2 359	3 814	63%
Redfish (<i>S. mentella</i> and <i>S. fasciatus</i>)	3LN		386	811		2 813	4 008	50%
Redfish (<i>S. mentella</i> and <i>S. fasciatus</i>)	3M		1 313	951		7 078	6	100%
Redfish (<i>S. mentella</i> and <i>S. fasciatus</i>)	3O		784	257		1 429	852	74%
Roughhead grenadier (<i>Macrourus berglax</i>)	SA 2+3		69	3		10	57	59%





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Species	Stock	DEU	ESP	EST	LTU	PRT	Non-EU countries	EU share in 2022 landings
Northern prawn (<i>Pandalus borealis</i>)	3M							
Skates	3LNOPs		278	14		143	89	83%
Squid (<i>Illex</i> spp)	SA 3+4						31	0%
White hake (<i>Urophycis tenuis</i>)	3NOPs		247			48	337	47%
Witch flounder (<i>Glyptocephalus cynoglossus</i>)	3NO		20	4		98	461	21%
Wolffish (<i>Anarhichas</i> spp)	SA I	3					175	2%
Yellowtail flounder (<i>Limanda ferruginea</i>)	3LNO		67	393			10 119	4%

Table 4.3.3. Landing data from 2023 in tonnes from FAO Area 21 by country and by assessed stock. Combined landings from non-EU countries and EU share of total landings is also presented. Stocks in grey background are under moratorium. Green cells indicate that biological sampling is done for the stock. (EU share in 2023 landings, calculated based on NAFO STATLANT 21A, using the NAFO Data Extraction tool on 3 of July 2024)

Species	Stock	DEU	ESP	EST	LTU	PRT	Non-EU countries	EU share in 2023 landings
American plaice (<i>Hippoglossoides platessoides</i>)	3LNO		124			87	167	56%
American plaice (<i>Hippoglossoides platessoides</i>)	3M		13			50	4	94%
Cod (<i>Gadus morhua</i>)	3M		606			2 443	2 851	52%
Cod (<i>Gadus morhua</i>)	3NO		60			43	120	46%
Greenland halibut (<i>Reinhardtius hippoglossoides</i>)	SA 0 + 1 Offshore	1 690					61 992	3%
Greenland halibut (<i>Reinhardtius hippoglossoides</i>)	SA 2+ 3KLMNO		4 665			2 071	7 225	48%
Redfish (<i>S. mentella</i> and <i>S. fasciatus</i>)	3LN		854			1 628	3 282	43%
Redfish (<i>S. mentella</i> and <i>S. fasciatus</i>)	3M		1 852			4 701	326	95%
Redfish (<i>S. mentella</i> and <i>S. fasciatus</i>)	3O		1 839			430	718	76%
Roughhead grenadier (<i>Macrourus berglax</i>)	SA 2+3		37				43	46%
Northern prawn (<i>Pandalus borealis</i>)	3M							





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Species	Stock	DEU	ESP	EST	LTU	PRT	Non-EU countries	EU share in 2023 landings
Skates	3LNOPs		1 804			33	54	97%
Squid (Illex spp)	SA 3+4						116	0%
White hake (Urophycis tenuis)	3NOPs		328			7	334	50%
Witch flounder (Glyptocephalus cynoglossus)	3NO		16			6	136	14%
Wolffish (Anarhichas spp)	SA I	3					194	2%
Yellowtail flounder (Limanda ferruginea)	3LNO		70				2 659	3%

This overview shows that all stocks assessed by NAFO are sampled and that some scope exists on coordinating sampling between the MS collecting data for the listed shared stocks.

4.4 Other areas

Based on the responses to the 2024 RCG LDF data call, the following overview of fishing activities in other areas than CECAF, SPRFMO or NAFO was made.

Table 4.4.1 Effort (fishing days) from other regions by country from 2021 to 2023.

Area	Country	Metier_level_6	2021	2022	2023
41	ESP	MIS_MIS_0_0_0	4466.32	5797.58	5032.14
41	LTU	OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0		49	
41	PRT	OTB_DEF_>=120_0_0			126
48	ESP	LLS_DEF_0_0_0		27.92	21.86
48	ESP	MIS_MIS_0_0_0	14.25	0.73	1.52
51	ESP	LLS_DEF_0_0_0		111.33	118.16
51	ESP	MIS_MIS_0_0_0	171.79	93.4	59.72
57	ESP	LLS_DEF_0_0_0		5.33	2.67
57	ESP	MIS_MIS_0_0_0	19	10.67	5.33
88	ESP	LLS_DEF_0_0_0		8.52	5.1
88	ESP	MIS_MIS_0_0_0	16.43		0.89

Table 4.4.2 Landings (tons) from other regions by country from 2021 to 2023.

Area	Country	Metier_level_6	2021	2022	2023
41	ESP	MIS_MIS_0_0_0	121484	138236	121841
41	LTU	OTM_SPF_32-69_0_0		639	
41	PRT	LLD_LPF_0_0_0	3666	4596	3248





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Area	Country	Metier_level_6	2021	2022	2023
41	PRT	LLS_FIF_0_0_0		8	
48	ESP	LLS_DEF_0_0_0		7	2
48	ESP	MIS_MIS_0_0_0	6		
51	ESP	LLS_DEF_0_0_0		1277	920
51	ESP	MIS_MIS_0_0_0	1271	135	
57	ESP	LLS_DEF_0_0_0		76	43
57	ESP	MIS_MIS_0_0_0	78		
88	ESP	LLS_DEF_0_0_0		1	1
88	ESP	MIS_MIS_0_0_0	5		

Based on these overviews, RCG LDF concluded that for the time being, there is no need for regional coordination in the above mentioned "other areas". However, this does obviously not void the responsibilities for MS to execute sampling programmes when and where required under the regulations applicable for the respective area.

An overview of the fish species caught by EU MS in other areas in 2023 is not provided due to the unavailability of extracted data from RDBES during the RCG LDF meeting.





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5 Review progress in regional co-ordination since the 2023 RCG (Tor I)

5.1 Follow-up of the RCG LDF 2023 recommendations and 20th Liaison Meeting

The RCG reviewed the report from the 20th Liaison Meeting. As described in the report, the role of the LM is to assist the Commission on data collection issues. This role aligns with EU Reg 2017/1004 article 9 (6) “Regional coordination groups shall coordinate with each other and with the Commission, where issues affect several marine regions”. LM mainly streamlines the recommendations from the various RCGs and provides additional support where and when needed.

The 2023 RCG LDF did not result in any recommendations and therefore no follow-up was carried out.

5.2 STECF EWG 24-08 comments on the reporting of bilateral/multilateral agreements

The selection of stocks for the WP is done independently and before the existence of any bi/multilateral agreements. MS involved in such agreements should select stocks for sampling following the same procedures used for other stocks. Transferring sampling responsibility to another MS does not imply that the stock is not selected under the MS work plan.

In accordance with the Guidelines MSs are allowed to put in “0” for the selected stocks in case that they are obliged to sample, and they are participating in a multilateral agreement and another country is responsible for the sampling. However, in the AR Comment column there must be a clear link to the multilateral agreement in Table 1.3 and a clear statement who is responsible for the sampling. These agreements should be correctly referenced in Table 2.1, 2.2, and 2.5 using the names outlined in Table 1.3. The MS should report in the comment column of the tables if the sampling was executed or not. In cases where it was not executed the comment could be “MS in charge of the sampling did not succeed in carrying out the sampling (see MS AR for detailed explanation)”. In cases of repetitive failure in execution MS should give an explanation and proposal of actions to resolve the issue within or without the multilateral agreement.





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6 Feedback from end users and 2023 state-of-play (ToR 2)

6.1 CECAF AND JSCs of SFPAs

6.1.1 CECAF

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

- Demersal Species Working Group – North, held in Dakar, Senegal from 6 to 10 June 2022.
- Small Pelagic Working Group – North, held in Dakar, Senegal from 13 to 16 September 2022.
- Demersal species Working Group – South that met in Praia, Cabo Verde from 20 to 29 September 2022. Spain is the only EU MS, which is member of this WG.
- Small Pelagic Working Group – South, held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire from 22 November to 1 December 2022. None of the EU MS are members of this WG. However, taking into account the new possibilities of fishing small pelagic within the SFPAs between the EU and Guinea-Bissau, together with the important bycatch of small pelagic by the cephalopods-finfish fleet within the same SFPAs, the potential participation of some MS to the WG Small Pelagic-South could be envisaged for the future.

The Working Groups carried out/to be carried out after the last SSC were/are:

- Demersal Species Working Group – North, held in Agadir, Senegal from 4 to 12 June 2024. Spain is the only EU MS which is member of this WG.
- Demersal Species Working Group – South, to be held in Cameroon from 3 to 13 September 2024. Spain is the only EU MS which is member of this WG.
- Small Pelagic Working Group – North, 2023 (Tenerife, Spain, 8-28 July) and 2024 (Dakar, Senegal, 25 June-2 July). Spain, the Netherlands and the EU are members of this WG. Latvia attended the WG for the first time in 2024.
- Small Pelagic Working Group – South, held in Lome, Togo, from 1 November to 10 November 2023. None of the EU MS are members of this WG. However, taking into account the new possibilities of fishing small pelagic within the SFPAs between the EU and Guinea-Bissau, together with the important bycatch of small pelagic by the cephalopods-finfish fleet within the same SFPAs, the potential participation of some MS to the WG Small Pelagic-South could be envisaged for the future. This will mainly depend on the development of these fisheries.

The EU MS that are CECAF members and participate in these WGs should provide fishery and biological information from their fisheries in the areas. The data calls are directly sent by the WG chairpersons to the participants. Spain provided fishery and biological information (length frequency distributions, maturity, length-weight relationship, sex-ratio, etc.) for most small pelagic and demersal stocks required. Due to the difficulties of embarking scientific observers on small pelagic fleets in 2020-2023, no biological information on small pelagic stocks was provided to the small pelagics North WG during these past years. Note that the problem related to the placement of EU scientific observers is further elaborated in section 6.1.3.





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The reports of the most recent WG meetings in 2023 and 2024 are not yet available, so the list of research recommendations affecting fisheries information and biological sampling for the EU fleets is taken from the most recently published reports. They are summarized below with an updated response from the RCG LDF.

FAO Working Group on the assessment of small pelagic fish off northwest Africa, 2022 (FAO, 2022⁷)

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

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

RCG 2024 response: The main recommendations have been noted and taken into account since the end of 2018, when the new program of observers onboard pelagic trawlers, coordinated by Poland, was implemented. (See Section 6.3 for comments on the execution of the joint sampling programme in CECAF).

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FAO/CECAF WG on the assessment of demersal resources – subgroup north, 2019 (FAO, 2020b⁸)

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

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

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

- Providing more detailed information on the lengths discarded and the estimated discards in order to incorporate them in the assessments.
- Improve the monitoring of catch, effort and length for black hake as a target and bycatch species for all Spanish fleets operating in Mauritania and Senegal.

⁷ FAO. 2022. Small pelagic fish Working Group North 2022 – meeting summary. Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (CECAF). Scientific Sub-Committee. Nouakchott, Mauritania, 5–9 December 2022. CECAF/SSCIX/2022/4a. December 2022. 22 pp.

⁸ FAO. 2020b. Report of the FAO/CECAF Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Resources – Subgroup North. Nouakchott, Mauritania, 2–10 December 2019. CECAF/ECAF 20/83. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb1539b>





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- Coordination between IEO (Spain) and IMROP (Mauritania), CRODT (Senegal) and FD (The Gambia) to develop and implement the proposed harmonised scientific observers methodology would improve efficiency.

RCG 2024 response: Spain continues to meet the requirements in relation to monitoring of catch, effort of black hake from Mauritania, Senegal and The Gambia. No activity occurred in Morocco in 2023 and the one in Senegal and The Gambia was limited to one fishing trip. In addition, length sampling from landings in the Spanish Port of Cadiz are carried out under the DCF, through the IEO Information and Sampling Network. However, providing detailed information on discards have been hampered by decreased level of the observers coverage due to a number of reasons, including the shipowners' reluctance of embarking observers and the lack of availability of observers willing to embark in the hard working and living conditions on these vessels (see section 6.1.3).

Demersal fish

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

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

RCG 2024 response: Spain continues to meet the requirements in relation to length sampling of *Pagellus bellottii* and *Dentex macrophthalmus*, as retained bycatch species of the black hake operative demersal fleet in Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal and The Gambia. This is achieved through concurrent samplings of landings from this fleet performed in the Port of Cádiz through the IEO Information and Sampling Network. However, no more completed information on the biology of these species can be obtained because of the limited observers sampling performed in 2023 due to the above-mentioned issues (see section 6.1.3).

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

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

Deep water rose shrimp (*Parapenaeus longirostris*)

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

Southern pink shrimp (*Penaeus notialis*)

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

RCG 2024 response: The Spanish shrimp fleet is sampled in alternate years in the coastal states with SFPAs and possibilities for this fishery. This means, one year in Mauritania and one in Guinea-Bissau. As in 2023 observations were made in Guinea-Bissau, no new information could be obtained for Mauritania.



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FAO/CECAF WG on the assessment of demersal resources – subgroup south, 2017 (FAO, 2019⁹)

General recommendations:

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

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

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

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

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

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

RCG 2024 response: Some of the above mentioned demersal fish are by-catch species of the Spanish cephalopod-fishery fleet operating in Guinea-Bissau and used to be sampled by the IEO onboard observer program. However, no observers have been deployed on the cephalopod-fishery fleet since 2022, due to their reluctance of embarking as their salaries seems not to be in line with the work conditions (see also section 6.1.3).

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

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

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

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

RCG 2024 response: In 2023, Spain partially met the requirements in relation to length and biological samplings of *P. longirostris* and *P. notialis*, as target species of the Spanish shrimp fleet in Guinea-Bissau. However, only two fishing trips were sampled from the four planned. Problems on availability of observers for Spanish fleets in West African are hampering the compliance of the requirements of the DCF and therefore, CECAF recommendations (see section 6.1.3).

Spain initiated in 2018 an annual Program of scientific observers onboard shrimp trawlers in Angola. In 2023, only one fishing trip could be sampled from the four planned. Problems of availability of observers mentioned above limited the possibility of higher coverage.

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

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

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

RCG 2024 response: In 2023, Spain could not contribute to meet the requirements in relation to length and biological samplings of *O. vulgaris* and *S. hierredda*, as target species of the Spanish cephalopod-fish fleet in Guinea-Bissau for reasons explained above (see also section 6.1.3).

6.1.2 JSCs of SFPAs

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



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JSC EU- Morocco

The most recent annual JSC with Morocco was held in Casablanca on 30-31 May 2023, with one complementary online meeting on the 27th of June (Bensbai et al., 2024)¹⁰. The sampling recommendations for the different fishing categories are:

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

RCG 2024 response: There was no activity of the fleets under these categories in Morocco until July 2023, when the Protocol expired.

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

JSC EU-Mauritania

The EU-Mauritania JSC has continued its collaboration under the new SFPA. The most recent JSC meeting was held in Málaga, Spain from the 27 to the 31 May 2024. The report was close to be finalised and published, but not available yet during the RCG-LDF 2024 meeting. The latest published EU-Mauritania JSC report is the previous JSC meeting, held in Nouadhibou, Mauritania from 13 to 18 March 2023 (Bouzouma et al. 2023)¹¹.

Some recommendations involving DCF samplings were:

- Category 1 (“Vessels fishing for crustaceans other than spiny lobster”): to closely monitor the state of stocks of the striped red shrimp *Aristeus varidens*;
- Category 2 (“Black hake -non-freezer- trawlers and bottom longliners” and 2b (“Black hake –freezer-trawlers: to encourage the separation of catches by black hake species (*Merluccius polli* and *Merluccius senegalensis*) by all fleets. On-board scientific observations play an essential role in improving the separation of all commercial species and should therefore be strengthened;
- Category 6 (“Pelagic freezer trawlers”): To overcome the problem of the lack of data on category 6 activity at sea, the JSC reiterated its recommendation that scientific observers be taken onboard all fleets targeting small pelagics.

¹⁰ Report available at: https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/document/download/a869d118-d4a9-4fb1-ae6b-6cd554f3d5b5_fr?filename=report-jsc-mauritania-2023-03-13_fr_0.pdf&prefLang=en

¹¹ Report available at: https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-09/report-jsc-mauritania-2022-06-07_fr_0.pdf





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RCG 2024 response:

- Category 1: The collection of biological information of *A. varidens* from the Spanish fleet was already included in the Spanish DCF Work Plan 2024-2027, and the Mauritanian stock is assessed in CECAF Demersal Working Group since 2022;
- Category 2 and 2b: important work in relation to separation of black hake species has been performed by Spain, through the IEO Program of Observers onboard the Spanish black hake trawlers;
- Difficulties on embarking observers onboard Spanish demersal trawlers should be reminded;
- Category 6: recommendations are considered since the end of 2018, when the new program of observers onboard pelagic trawlers, coordinated by Poland, was implemented. (See Section 6.3 for comments on the execution of the joint sampling programme in CECAF).

Tripartite JSC EU-Senegal and the Gambia

The most recent JSC meeting took place in Banjul, from 15 to 19 January 2024. The report has not been published yet and thus, sampling recommendations concerning the black hake fishery made in the previous meeting (Madrid, Spain from 24 to 26 January 2023) (Röckmann *et al.*, 2023)¹², remain valid.

Strengthening the collection of data through the implementation of on-board observer programs, for both the Senegalese and the EU fleets:

- Obtaining length class distribution of black hake (retained and discarded).
- Further studying the biology of the two black-hake species, within the framework of regional collaboration.

RCG 2024 response: Spain continues sampling length frequency distribution from landings (thus, retained fraction) of black hakes in the Spanish Port of Cádiz, through the IEO Information and Sampling Network. They include length sampling from Senegal, when the fleet has been operative in this fishing ground. However, the fishing activity in Senegal in 2023 was limited to one single fishing trip that could not be sampled. Neither discards sampling nor biological samplings can be performed without scientific observers onboard these vessels.

In 2023, the scarcity of observers onboard Spanish vessels together with the low activity of this fleet in Senegal made it very difficult to carry out samplings onboard and thus, to follow the recommendations above. A limited number of observed fishing trips of Spanish black hake trawlers in the CECAF area was carried out in Mauritanian fishing grounds under the EU-Mauritania SFP.

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





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JSC EU-Guinea-Bissau

The ninth meeting of the JSC EU and Guinea-Bissau (GB) was held in Bissau, Guinea-Bissau, from 14 to 21 May 2024. The report has not been published yet and thus, sampling recommendations presented below are from the previous JSC meeting, held in Olhão, Portugal, from 19 to 23 June 2023 (Sobrinho *et al.*, 2023)¹³.

- It was reiterated the recommendation of the previous JSC on increasing the observers coverage to a monthly basis, considering that the current EU DCF coverage levels do not meet the needs required by the JSC.
- Promoting coordination on data collection system with a view to future sharing of data from scientific observers from the EU and from Guinea-Bissau;
- Promoting to carry out a workshop to explore and analyse data from both programmes of scientific observers, including updating biological parameters.
- Promoting the collection of catch data from EU vessels at haul level.

RCG 2024 response: As previously explained, the IEO Program of Observers onboard Spanish fleets in West Africa is facing serious problems related to observers' reluctance to embark (see section 6.1.3). This hampered the possibility of having any observation onboard the cephalopod-finish fleet after 2021 while the coverage of the shrimper fleet does not reach the minimum required by the DCF. The recommendation of increasing the observer's coverage is going to be considered in the review of the DCF Spanish Work Plan for 2024-2027, that will take place in the following months. However, this will not ensure the availability of having observers willing to embark. Some joint analysis of biological data from both Guinea-Bissauan and DCF observers were analysed during last JSC meeting.

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

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

Small pelagic fleet

Observer obligations currently differ in the different SFPAs and protocols.

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

Under the newly renegotiated EU-Mauritania SFPA and protocol, Category 6 vessels fishing in the Mauritanian EEZ are obliged to always embark two "scientific observers". In Mauritania, scientific observers should be provided by the Mauritanian institute for fisheries research (IMROP), which is currently lacking the capacity to do it. DGMARE informed that the EU-Mauritania Joint Committee has taken up the recommendation of the 2023 RCG to jointly organise the necessary scientific observer coverage. In particular, the JC agreed to

¹³ Report available at: https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/publications/report-ninth-meeting-joint-scientific-committee-eu-guinea-bissau-fisheries-partnership-agreement_en



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facilitate the embarkation of one (or two) EU scientific observers by directly involving the existing multilateral agreement coordinating the EU's joint sampling programme of pelagic fisheries¹⁴, when Mauritanian observers are not available. During the recent EU-Mauritania JSC 2024 meeting, an ad-hoc virtual meeting was held with the former and current RCG chairs to start exchanges with IMROP that should lead to a simple procedure for smoothly embarking EU observers under the EU-Mauritania SFPA. Such a simplified procedure that allows for direct contact between the EU joint sampling program coordinator and vessels' operators should remove the existing problems with the embarkation of EU observers. As a result of this ad-hoc virtual exchange between the RCG and the JSC, IMROP colleagues responsible for IMROP's scientific observer programme were invited to attend this year's RCG meeting. IMROP had accepted the invitation, but a day before the start of the RCG meeting, IMROP informed the RCG chair that due to VISA issues, the IMROP colleague would not be able to join the meeting in person. Considering that the list of issues to be resolved in this respect exceeds the time available for the meeting, the RCG LDF 2024 proposes an ISSG on the CECAF Observer Programme for small pelagics (ISSG CECAF-OP). Colleagues from the Mauritanian Institute (IMROP) should be invited to attend the sub-group meetings as observers.

Recommendation 03: Establishing an ISSG on CECAF Observer Programme of small pelagics (ISSG CECAF-OP)

LDF_2024_R03:	The RCG LDF recommends the creation of a new ISSG with the primary objective of jointly organising the necessary scientific observer coverage in the CECAF Regulatory Area in cooperation with the Mauritanian Institute for Fisheries Research (IMROP)
Follow-up actions needed	Approval by all RCG LDF NCs
Responsible persons for follow-up actions	RCG LDF NCs to approve the establishment of the ISSG CECAF-OP
Time frame (Deadline)	Decision meeting 2024

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The EU-Mauritania JC also agreed with the RCG's suggestion - in order to avoid the argument of "lack of space" for additional crew on board - that any scientific observer embarked, whether from a third country or from the EU, should be deducted from the mandatory percentage of national crew that small pelagic vessels (category 6) have to embark.

Demersal fleet

As already mentioned in previous sections, Spain being the main actor in demersal fisheries in the CECAF area has experienced serious difficulties in recent years in embarking scientific observers on vessels involved

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

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in demersal fisheries. Spanish observers are mostly engaged by a subcontracted company (outside IEO) selected through a public tender.

Coordination of IEO and coastal States institutions in relation to scientific observer Protocols was expected as an output of the Specific Contract No12 “*Study on improvement for the analysis and exploitation of observer reports in EU fisheries from NW African waters*”¹⁵. However, this has not been achieved so far, due to the fact that none of the involved 3rd countries perform regular scientific observations. It is important however to note, that the study did succeed in developing harmonized observer manuals, and that all experts involved in the final observer workshop did approve these manuals. Thus, a standardized method is available¹⁶, but still it has to be utilized through the full implementation of national (3rd countries) and EU DCF scientific observer programs and further coordination and collaboration with the coastal states.

The level of observer coverage in Spain has been significantly reduced for a number of reasons, including the reluctance of shipowners to take observers on board, but also the lack of availability of observers willing to embark on the small demersal vessels due to the very difficult working and living conditions. This reluctance of observers is further deepened by the fact that their salaries do not seem to be in line with the working conditions. As a result, potential observers are basically discouraged from working for the Spanish observer sampling programs. Observers working for the IEO scientific programmes are contracted through an external service provider. The current contract with the external service provider runs until the end of 2025. The IEO expects to improve the situation described above by 2026 with a new external service contract.

6.2 SPRFMO

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

There were no changes in SPRMFO Data Standards adopted in May 2018 (*CMM 02-2022 Conservation and Management Measure on Standards for the Collection, Reporting, Verification and Exchange of Data*), published on the organization’s webpage. Thus, from the perspective of EU fishing activity, the Data Standards do not require any changes to data requirements in 2024 sampling year.

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

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

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



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

6.3 State-of-play 2023 data collection

6.3.1 SPRFMO

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

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

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

In 2021, three EU fishing vessels were active in the SPRFMO area (under DEU, LTU and POL flags). Placing observers onboard vessels fishing in Pacific in 2021 was a great logistical challenge due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on people's movement still in force, including i.a. obligation for observers to be in possession of a negative COVID PCR test prior to departure to South America and on arrival there, with 2-3 days of quarantine after arrival (and another PCR test on disembarkation prior to boarding the return flight). Despite those challenges, in March and April 2021 a scientific observer was on board the vessel flying the DEU flag. In June 2021, another observer travelled to Panama first to board the reefer vessel which took him on the fishing ground. After observing two transshipments at sea from two EU fishing vessels, the observer boarded at sea a DEU fishing vessel which transported him to fishing ground to board the POL vessel. The SPRFMO requirement to have a minimum 10% observer coverage in terms of fishing trips was achieved and exceeded by having four fishing trips observed out of total of 10 fishing trips executed by EU vessels in 2021.

In 2022, two EU vessels were active in the SPRFMO area (under POL and LTU flags). Two observers were placed onboard POL vessel in April in Panama – after one fishing trip one observer returned to Poland in May and the second one stayed onboard for next two fishing trip until the end of June.

In July, another observer boarded the LTU vessel in Chile and collected data over the course of two fishing trips. The SPRFMO requirement to have a minimum 10% observer coverage in terms of fishing trips was achieved and exceeded by having five fishing trips observed out of total of nine fishing trips executed by EU vessels in 2022.

In 2023, the EU vessels' operator started fishing operations later than usual due to the involvement of vessels in another area and the planned conversion of vessels. On June 22nd an *ad hoc* meeting was organized in Katwijk in the Netherlands between Dutch operator (member of the Pelagic Freezers Association), RCG LDF coordinator of the joint sampling programme (POL) and representatives of the Centre for Fisheries Research (CVO, NLD) – RCG LDF members. The main purpose of the meeting was to exchange and refresh information on the operational plans of the EU fishing fleet in the SPRFMO area and the requirements of the





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fisheries data collection program. One of the results of this meeting was the agreement to embark a scientific observer on one of the four EU vessels operating in the SPRFMO area in 2023. Due to the unavailability of Polish observers in such a short time notice, it was agreed to employ a Dutch observer from CVO. The observer departed to Chile already on June 26th and on June 29th the first fishing trip started. Later during the year, Polish observers were placed on each of the remaining three EU fishing vessels. The SPRFMO requirement of a minimum 10% observer coverage in terms of fishing trips was achieved and exceeded by having five fishing trips observed out of total of nineteen fishing trips executed by EU vessels in 2023.

6.3.2 CECAF

Madeira

Under the 2023 Portuguese Data Collection Plan, monthly concurrent samplings on shore were performed for the main métiers operated by the local fleet in Madeira waters. Stock specific landing sampling for deep water species, mainly targeting *Aphanopus spp.* (LLD_DWF_0_0_0) covered 53 trips and 8394 individuals. With regards to molluscs there was a noticeable increase in the sampling effort and in the number of individuals sampled (29 trips and 960 individuals sampled) in relation to 2022. Concerning the purse seine fishery, targeting small pelagic fishes (PS_SPF_>0_0_0), 52 fishing trips and 9554 specimens were sampled.

Canary Islands

For the métier PS_SPF_10-31_0_0 (artisanal fleet targeting small pelagics), one fishing trip per month is planned to be sampled at sea in Tenerife Island (concurrent length sampling), together with stock-specific sampling for the target species (*Scomber colias*, *Trachurus spp.*, *Sardinella aurita* and *Sardina pilchardus*) is carried out at the main landing places by the IEO sampling network. In addition, monthly biological samplings of the main target species are conducted in the lab.

Regarding the métier MIS_DES_0_0_0 (artisanal fleet targeting demersal species), five fishing trips per month are planned to be sampled at sea in Tenerife Island (concurrent length samplings). Monthly length samplings of the main landed species are also performed by the IEO sampling network. Moreover, a program of biological samplings at the lab was launched in 2022 for the parrotfish *Sparisoma cretense*.

Species landings are very variable, a fact that caused deviations in both directions: more individuals than planned was sampled for *Sparisoma cretense* and less for small pelagic species. Regarding some biological variables of small pelagics, (e.g. *Sardina pilchardus*), the difficulty to obtain samples at market in the months with low catches caused a lower number of sampled individuals than planned.

It should be noted that the establishment of routine acoustic research surveys in the DCF Working Plans 2025+ is envisaged. If implemented, a fishery-independent biomass indicator for the small pelagics species will be provided through these surveys.

West Africa

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





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

In March 2018, in cooperation between Institutes from Germany, The Netherlands and Poland, a new "Manual for scientific observers on board EU pelagic trawlers in CECAF area" was set, with two fishing trips per quarter and per area planned to be sampled by observers. With a joint sampling programme in the CECAF area to be concluded between relevant NCs at the September 2024 Decision Meeting, this manual for scientific observers requires a revision and updating. POL and NLD offered to update the manual prior to the September 2024 Decision Meeting in order to reflect planned new arrangements under the new multilateral agreement to be approved at this meeting.

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

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

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

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

Despite the issues mentioned above an attempt was made in April 2021 to place an observer on a NLD vessel but when the vessel's operator indicated the possibility to take an observer onboard in May-June, no observer was available. From July 2021 onwards, no EU fishing activity was planned in neither Mauritanian nor Moroccan waters. Apart from the above, vessel operators are usually reluctant to take scientific observers onboard vessels fishing in Moroccan and Mauritanian waters due to the obligation of embarking a certain % of crew and observers from those countries.

In April 2022, a POL vessel operator offered to take a scientific observer onboard, and the observer was ready to travel early June. However, in May, a fire broke out on the vessel causing the vessel to leave the





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fishing ground in an emergency, and thus cancelling the plans to send an observer. It was not possible to deploy observers on board the vessels fishing in the CECAF area in the second half of 2022 due to reluctance of the vessel operators to take scientific observers onboard vessels fishing because of lack of space. For the same reason none of the fishing trips in the CECAF area were observed in 2023.

The Spanish fleet did not operate in the Moroccan fishing ground in 2023. The EU-Morocco SFPAs expired in July 2023 and during the first half of the year this fleet developed its activity in the Spanish waters of the Gulf of Cadiz, where it also operates. As there was no fishing activity, no samplings were carried out.

In relation to demersal fisheries, the Spanish demersal métiers operating in West Africa should be sampled by the IEO at-sea observers' programs. Due to the lack of scientific observers, as explained below, in 2023, the observer programmes resulted in sampling only 2 out of 4 trips planned for shrimp trawlers (in Guinea-Bissau) and 6 out of 16 planned for the black hake trawlers (in Mauritania). None of the 4 trips planned for the cephalopod-finish trawlers in Guinea-Bissau could be sampled. Sampling actions have been hindered by different issues, depending on the fishing ground or métier (lack of space, refusals, travel difficulties, etc.). However, the common problem affecting all Spanish demersal fleets is the lack of observers available for embarking, as they refuse to do it in hard working and living conditions with the low incentives they are currently receiving. Ideally, this problem should be tackled by the competent authorities to avoid the non-compliance with the DCF, and thus to the end-users (CECAF and JSCs) requirements.

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



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7 Regional data collection analysis and storage (ToR 4)

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

According to North Pacific Fisheries Commission (here and after - NPFC) CMM 2024-07, the annual total allowable catch (TAC) of chub mackerel in the NPFC Area for each of the 2024 and 2025 fishing seasons for EU was set:

- 14,000 tonnes Olympic TAC;
- additional 6,000 tonnes of chub mackerel individual TAC.

The EU can authorize one trawler vessel during the fishing season. Taking into account the circumstances that fishing can commence at any moment (although there is currently no registered vessel) the Member States (MS) conducting fishing in SPRFMO and accordingly coordinating their sampling programs through the SPRFMO Multilateral Agreement discussed and agreed upon to coordinate data collection sampling programme with NPFC. It was decided to draft the NPFC Multilateral agreement. Shared costs were also discussed – unlike SPRFMO, where MS have their allocation percentage according to EU Regulation, in the case of NPFC, there is no allocation between MS. Therefore, it is proposed in the NPFC Multilateral Agreement to indicate an equal share for each MS. Accordingly, the recommendation will be proposed to the relevant NCs at the Decision Meeting in September 2024.

Based on the current DCF regulation (2017/1004) the EU Multiannual plan (EU-MAP) on data collection shall encompass biological data collection on all stocks caught by EU vessels outside EU waters. (art.5.2a). Following this requirement, the current EU-MAP (2021-1167) refers to the basic principle the MS shall agree at the marine region level on the data to be collected based on user needs (art. 1.4). EU-MAP doesn't list NPFC in Table I (specification of mandatory species for data collection by management area). However, the general principle as laid out in EU regulation 2017/1004 applies and doesn't exempt EU MS from sampling in the NPFC area.

The 2024 RCG LDF recommends confirming its role as the designated body for the coordination of biological sampling of EU fisheries. It proposes initiating biological sampling in the region as per the start of EU fisheries in the NPFC region and listing NPFC in future updates of EU-MAP. Furthermore, the RCG LDF recommends establishing a bilateral agreement for biological sampling as per 2025.

Recommendation 04: Assignment of RCG LDF as coordinating body for data collection in NPFC waters	
LDF_2024_R04	RCG LDF to take the role as coordinating body for biological data collection in the NPFC region.
Follow-up actions needed	Approval by all RCG LDF NC's and updating the RoP of RCG LDF where and when appropriate.
Responsible persons for follow-up actions	RCG LDF NCs to approve and to request EU Commission to reflect NPFC requirements in future updates to the EU-MAP.
Time frame (Deadline)	Decision meeting 2024

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Decision 01: Agreement on multilateral agreement for biological sampling in NFPC waters	
LDF_2024_D01	To establish and agree on a multilateral agreement for biological sampling of EU small pelagics fisheries in NPFC waters.
Follow-up actions needed	Approval by all relevant NC's
Responsible persons for follow-up actions	NCs of DEU, LTU, NLD, POL.
Time frame (Deadline)	Decision meeting 2024

7.2 Potential implication of the SMEFF Regulation

Concerning the SMEFF regulation¹⁷, the group discussed the following issues and updates concerning SMEFF fisheries.

The table below provides an overview and update of EU vessel activities under “SMEFF” direct authorisations in 2023, preliminary data of 2024 (and in brackets, already foreseen activity):

Country	Angola	Congo	Falkland Is.	Guinea	Namibia	High seas
ESP	2022, 2023, 2024	2022, 2023	2022, 2023	2023, 2024	2022	2022, 2023, 2024
LTU						2022, 2023 (2025)
PRT						2022, 2023, 2024
POL						(2025)

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SMEFF needs as regards data collection and research programmes

The CFP applies to SMEFF fisheries, they also fall under the regular data collection programmes of the DCF. Species lists under the EU-MAP will have to be updated along the way. However, the RCG recommends taking a flexible approach, i.e. not to hide behind the tables and potentially lacking species in the tables. If SMEFF fisheries catch species that are not yet included in the EU-MAP, then these fisheries do need to be monitored, and the RCG should advice on the best data collection approaches. The RCG LDF repeated the need to communicate all SMEFF related scientific survey and data collection activities to the RCG, as it had

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

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been concluded in 2022 that the RCG LDF itself is the relevant platform for MS to discuss all issues related to data collection and scientific research programmes related to SMEFF fisheries.

SMEFF study progress update

The final report of the “SMEFF study”¹⁸ is in the final review and revision process. DGMARE expects that the report will be completed and finalised for publication in the coming weeks. A final dissemination event in hybrid form is foreseen to take place in the second half of September (if possible, directly before or after the NC and RCG DCF meetings in Brussels on 24-26 September) to share the results of the study with a broader audience (DGMARE colleagues, Member States’ scientists and administrators who are working on SMEFF requests).

The SMEFF study has elaborated recommendations for the development of a **sound science-based decision framework, with associated scientific protocols required to demonstrate the sustainability of a prospective fishery**. The work is based on a thorough review of all relevant factors requiring assessment during a SMEFF request process. The main outputs of this study include:

- (1) An advice framework, consistent with the CFP, that can be applied to a variety of stocks and species, targeted and bycaught across a range of fisheries and management bodies. The framework forms the basis for decision-making using the data and information that is available for the stocks.
- (2) A series of decision trees for Member State authorities, national scientific institutes and the European Commission. The decision trees summarise how future SMEFF requests may be processed based on the findings of this study. The proposed pathway incorporates both data rich and data poor fisheries and accounts for VMEs that may be affected by proposed SMEFF fisheries.
- (3) Conclusions and recommendations from this study. Recommendations include improved data use at early stages of SMEFF requests to reveal where fisheries data may already exist for certain areas; training of national scientific institutes in carrying out productivity susceptibility analyses for fish stocks; deeper assessment of species-gear combinations and their interaction with VMEs; the establishment of a data repository and an interface, designed to allow relevant parties to determine whether a potential fishery meets the requirements of the SMEFF Regulation; a condition-based improvement system for authorised SMEFF fisheries; and a proposal of a timeframe for the review and authorisation of SMEFF request, allowing scientific rigour to be balanced with minimising administrative lag.

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The level of scientific research in FAO Areas 34, 41, and 47 varies considerably, often falling short of the standards recommended for fisheries within EU waters. The study developed various proposals to enhance data collection, analysis, and fisheries observer coverage rates, as well as to improve sample sizes for each stock. This comprehensive approach aims to incrementally enhance the overall data repository for each stock targeted or bycaught by SMEFF fisheries in terms of quantity, quality, and the types of data collected. Such

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

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improvements are intended to facilitate more sophisticated stock assessments, safeguard VMEs and ensure that European Union Member States' administrations have the most reliable information available for making informed and scientifically sound decisions regarding fishing authorisations under the SMEFF Regulation.

Conclusion:

The group concluded that also in 2023 and the beginning of 2024, SMEFF operators from different MS fishing in the same SMEFF areas have not yet started collaborating on data collection and scientific research programmes. Therefore, the RCG repeats its 2023 conclusion that facilitating timely and transparent exchange of information on ongoing and envisaged SMEFF fisheries between operators, MS, the RCG and the EC would be crucial to ensure that SMEFF operators from different MS fishing in the same SMEFF areas start collaborating on data collection and scientific research programmes.

The RCG recommends DG MARE to share the final report of the SMEFF study with the RCG LDF members as soon as the report will be finalised and before the dissemination event that is foreseen to take place in the second half of September.

Recommendation 05: Establishing an ISSG on SMEFF fisheries in the high seas, in particular FAO area 41 (ISSG SMEFF-FAO41)	
LDF_2024_R05	The RCG LDF recommends the creation of a new ISSG with the primary objective of reviewing and addressing the recommendations from the final report of the "SMEFF study".
Follow-up actions needed	Approval by all RCG LDF NCs.
Responsible persons for follow-up actions	RCG LDF NCs to approve the establishment of the ISSG SMEFF-FAO41
Time frame (Deadline)	Decision meeting 2024

7.3 Development of draft Regional Work Plan

During the RCG LDF TM, the draft of Regional Work Plan (RWP) was prepared, taking into account the comments on the reporting of bilateral/multilateral agreements proposed by STECF EWG 24-08 (see Section 5.2). The RWP was aligned with all relevant recommendations and definitions.

Five Member States are involved in the following preparation of the RWP: Germany, Lithuania, Latvia, the Netherlands and Poland. These countries are encouraged to use the relevant information from the tables and text files of the RWP when submitting their National Work Plans.

Taking into account all relevant recommendations and information from existing multilateral agreements, the structure of the LDF RWP tables is as follows:

- Table 0 - List of countries participating in the RWP. Indicates the list of tables and text boxes included in the RWP;
- Table 1.2 - List of mandatory meetings;
- Table 1.3 - List of Multilateral Agreements:
 - Multilateral Agreement on CECAF Sampling;

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- Multilateral Agreement on SPRFMO Sampling;
- Multilateral Agreement on NPFC Sampling.
- Table 2.1 - Complete list of species required for biological data collection by region, indicating the list of species for which there is a regionally co-ordinated agreement at stock level;
- Table 2.2 - List of biological variables to be collected for selected species by region. Taking into account the fact that the fishing activity of the EU distant-water fleet may vary from year to year and the difficulties in placing observers on board (see section 6.1.3), the sampling plan is defined as opportunistic without specifying the exact number of individuals to be sampled (N/A);
- Table 2.5 - List of sampling schemes and frame identifiers by country.

The following structure is suggested for the text file:

- General information - Description of the data collection framework at regional level;
- Text Box 1B: Other data collection related activities - Data collection tools and services:
 - 1 - RCGs Secretariat;
 - 2 - Regional data base and estimation System (RDBES);
 - 3 - Regional Coordination taking place in ISSGs and pan regional cooperation between RCGs;
 - 4 - Smart Dots;
 - 5 - Catch, effort and sampling overviews for RCG Technical Meeting.
- Text Box 2.5: Sampling plan description for biological data:
 - Region: Other regions (Eastern Central Atlantic (FAO area 34));
 - Region: Other regions (South-Pacific (FAO area 81 and 87));
 - Region: Other regions (North-Pacific (FAO area 61 and 67)).
- Text Box 4.2: Incidental catches of sensitive species;
- ANNEX 1.1 - Quality report for biological data sampling scheme:
 - CECAF at sea sampling;
 - SPRFMO at sea sampling;
 - NPFC at sea sampling.

At the RCG TM it was agreed that the RWP should be defined as a separate term of reference to allow sufficient time for its future revision and adoption.

Decision 02: Agreement on the Regional Work Plan for Long Distance Fisheries	
LDF_2024_D02	To establish and agree on a Regional Work Plan for Long Distance Fisheries
Follow-up actions needed	Approval by all relevant NCs
Responsible persons for follow-up actions	NCs of DEU, LTU, LVA, NLD, POL
Time frame (Deadline)	Decision meeting 2024

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7.4 Time frame for RCG LDF actions

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

When	What (incl. reference to RoP Article)	Who
t - 2 months (at the latest)	Formal request if an independent organisation or individual seeks to attend an RCG meeting as an observer (11.2). Note that NAFO, SPRFMO and CECAF have a standing invitation to the RCG LDF	Any organisation or individual
t - 2 months (at the latest)	- Inspect EUROSTAT data to identify new areas of relevance. - Launch RDBES data call to all non-landlocked MS (including outermost regions) active in relevant regions (based on previous contributions) to upload data from 2021 onwards	Chair (or delegated data coordinator)
t - 2 months	Provide details of accommodation, travel and other organizational information relevant for the meeting. (9.4)	Host Member State
t - 6 weeks	Consult members regarding observers (11.2)	Chair
t - 1 month	Provide details on participants to the chair	NC's of participating MS
t - 1 month	Provide draft agenda to participants	Chair
t - 4 weeks	Inform observers whether or not invited	Chair
t	Annual technical meeting	All participants
t + 2 weeks (at the latest 2 months before the decision meeting)	Circulate proposed decisions to the relevant MS for consideration before the decision meeting (if any). Circulate draft regional workplan (if any) for decision to NCs (7.3)	Chair

7.5 RCG LDF decision meeting

To ensure an efficient continuation of the data collection, the drafts of the new multilateral agreements for the CECAF, SPRFMO and NPFC data collection will be proposed to the relevant NCs at the Decision Meeting in September 2024 (see section 10).

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

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

A new agreement on sampling of small pelagics in CECAF waters was reached at the 2017 RCG. This agreement covered the period 2018-2020. At the 2020 meeting, the RCG agreed that the best option available was to extend the current agreement until the end of 2023. This proposal was approved at the September 2020 Decision Meeting. In line with the recommendation of the RCG LDF 2022, a further extension of the agreement was discussed, first until the end of 2023 and then until the end of 2024, to align with an updated agreement for the SPRFMO (see section 8.2).

As that the current multilateral agreement for the CECAF region expires at the end of 2024, it was decided to replicate the currently finalised SPRFMO agreement for CECAF starting from 2025. The advantage of this solution is that EU vessels carry out similar activities in both regions (fishing for small pelagic fish with the same gear), the data collection methodology is the same in both regions and the same observers are used in both regions.

The agreement will be proposed to the relevant NCs at the Decision Meeting in September 2024.

Decision 03: Agreement on multilateral agreement for biological sampling in CECAF waters	
LDF_2024_D03	To agree on a multilateral agreement for a biological sampling of EU small pelagics fisheries in CECAF waters
Follow-up actions needed	Approval by all relevant NC's
Responsible persons for follow-up actions	NCs of DEU, LTU, LVA, NLD, POL
Time frame (Deadline)	Decision meeting 2024

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Continued problems with the embarkation of EU observers in recent years have resulted in incomplete sampling coverage. This issue is discussed further in sections 6.1.3 and 6.3.2.

8.2 Data collection of small pelagics in the SPRFMO area

At the 2018 RCG LDF meeting, the multilateral agreement between Germany, Lithuania, Poland and the Netherlands for sampling small pelagics in SPRFMO waters was extended until 2020. At the 2020 meeting, similar to the CECAF agreement, the RCG agreed that the best option would be to extend the current agreement, which was approved at the September 2020 decision meeting, by extending the agreement until the end of 2023. In line with the 2022 RCG LDF recommendation, the agreement has been extended to the end of 2024, as this is the last year of the current SPRFMO monitoring obligations. New obligations based on observer requirements will apply from 2025.

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The RCG LDF concluded that the same approach should be used to collect biological samples in both the CECAF and SPRFMO regions as EU vessels carry out similar activities in both regions, the data collection methodology is the same and the same observers are used.

The agreement will be proposed to the relevant NCs at the Decision Meeting in September 2024.

Decision 04: Agreement on multilateral agreement for biological sampling in SPRFMO waters	
LDF_2024_D04	To agree on a multilateral agreement for a biological sampling of EU small pelagics fisheries in SPRFMO waters
Follow-up actions needed	Approval by all relevant NCs
Responsible persons for follow-up actions	NCs of DEU, LTU, NLD, POL
Time frame (Deadline)	Decision meeting 2024

8.3 Feedback from ISSG SPRFMO-OP

Regarding the future SPRFMO requirements as provided for in the “Conservation and Management Measure Establishing the SPRFMO Observer Programme” (CMM 16-2023), and in particular the requirement for observer programme to undergo the SPRFMO accreditation procedure, the 2020 RCG LDF concluded that “This issue needs to be addressed in the upcoming years to prepare the ground for a solid solution once the OP commences. RCG LDF will initiate intersessional work to progress on this during the year.”

To meet the above obligation and following RCG LDF recommendation 2020-2, the Intersessional Sub-Group on SPRFMO Observer Programme (ISSG SPRFMO-OP) was established.

After the annual technical meeting of RCG LDF 2023 ISSG SPRFMO-OP continued the work of collecting and submitting the required documentation.

Two ISSG SPRFMO-OP meetings were organized in 2023-2024 until the RCG LDF technical annual meeting in July 2024:

- The thirteenth ISSG-OP meeting on 5 September 2023;
- The fourteenth ISSG-OP meeting (physical in Vilnius, Lithuania) on 22-24 January 2024.

After the 12th ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting project leader Tom Bangma submitted to the assessor MRAG (MRAG Ltd is an independent fisheries and aquatic resource consulting firm and has been selected to evaluate SPRFMO Member States’ observer programs against the requirements set out in CMM 16-2022) all required documents from four scientific institutes (Thunen institute (Germany), Klaipeda University (Lithuania), Wageningen Marine Research institute (the Netherlands) and Maritime institute (Poland)). The 13th ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting was organized on 5 September 2023 with MRAG to discuss provided documents and to clarify additional documentation needed with the representatives from MRAG. According to the Manual document, MRAG representatives evaluated the submitted documents and provided remarks and conclusions. After the discussion where explanations to questions were provided, the representatives from

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MRAG confirmed that they try to fulfil the terms and meet the deadlines stated in the table and plan to provide Draft Preliminary Evaluation Report to SPRFMO secretariat. Minutes of the thirteenth ISSG-OP meeting is attached (Annex 4).

On the 26th of September MRAG provided the preliminary evaluation to the MS for review with the opportunity to add additional information. MS accepted the preliminary evaluation and on the 20th of November MRAG provided the information about submitting the documents to SPRFMO-OP secretariat.

The 14th ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting (22-24 January 2024) was organized in order to summarize the work to date related to the accreditation procedure of the EU Observer Program in accordance with the requirements of SPRFMO and to determine the effective preparation and implementation of other activities resulting from accreditation, including:

- the review and updates to observer manual,
- planning and setup of training workshops for EU observers,
- discussion on new multilateral agreement beyond 2024.

During the SPRFMO 12th annual session in Manta (Ecuador 29 January-2 February 2024) official granting for the European Union's Observer Programme was announced. So, the accreditation process was finalized successfully.

The draft version of the “*Manual for scientific observers on board EU pelagic trawlers in SPRFMO area*” was prepared and discussed. The group decided to organize a three-day workshop for EU observers by the end of 2024 (November 20-22) in Poland, at the NMFRI headquarters in Gdynia, be led jointly by Niels Hintzen (NLD), Tom Bangma (NLD), Sieto Verver (NLD) and Irek Wójcik (POL). The group also discussed the basic organizational and technical principles of the new multilateral agreement regarding the joint data collection program in the SPRFMO region, which will be in force from 2025, together with the expected maximum budget of the joint EU observer program. Based on that discussion a first version of the new multilateral agreement was drafted during the meeting. A summary of the fourteenth ISSG-OP meeting is attached (Annex 4).

In RCG LDF technical meeting the SPRFMO Multilateral agreement was analyzed so that the final version can be submitted for final decision to the relevant National Correspondents during the Decision Meeting expected in September 2024.

The ISSG discussed the future of the coordination of the sampling activities in CECAF and SPRFMO waters. All parties involved expressed the wish to continue the current setup in a similar way. The Netherlands was proposed to act as coordinating MS and renewed multilateral agreements were drafted to reflect this and to reflect the latest regulations, findings and accreditation requirements.

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9 Any other business (ToR 6)

9.1 Rules of procedures for future RCG work

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

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

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

9.2 Surveys, studies and pilot projects

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

9.3 Call for tenders for studies in support of the CFP

9.3.1 *REDUCE: Reducing bycatch of threatened megafauna in the East Central Atlantic project*

The project proposal submitted in March 2023 with the support from RCG LDF was granted, started in Jan. 2024 and will end in 2027:

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

Basic information about the project can be found through this link:
<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101135583>

The RCG LDF Chair Maksims Kavsars, invited to join the External Advisory Board for the project, attended the Project kick off meeting held in Barcelona from the 17th to the 20th of April 2024.

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The project is focused on the EU fisheries occurring mostly in the CECAF area, and its partners are willing to establish links with on-going relevant initiatives and networks such as the RCG LDF. The project coordinator Dr. Jacob Solis, from the University of Barcelona was invited and attended as observer to the first two days of the RCG LDF TM 2024 held in Cádiz. There he explained the project to the network making special emphasis on the combined strategies the project will follow to improve the ETPS bycatch monitoring and assessment in the CECAF for the EU fleets (purse seiner, long line and trawl fleets) to propose suitable mitigation measures. It was explained that one of the things the project is offering is the possibility to negotiate agreements with the fishing industry to install EMS on the vessels operating in the CECAF to enable enhanced monitoring capacity. The project, among other things, is seeking for the development of algorithms for image analysis and, with the use of AI, to enhance the capacity of the operators to estimate the bycatch and predict the bycatch risk. At the moment of the presentation there are conversations ongoing with various fleet segments in the region expecting to reach a good and representative coverage. Agreements will involve the necessary non-disclosure/confidentiality arrangements which enable the collaboration by the industry and also the achievement of the project goals.

9.3.2 RCGs Secretariat

The objectives of the RCG Secretariat during the period have been the following:

- To carry out the basic regular activities of the RCGs Secretariat as they were agreed as an outcome of the SecWeb project (January 2021 – end of February 2023);
- To manage the financial plan and specific conditions of the funding with the MS and the EC;
- To help the financial viability of the RCGs Secretariat by preparing and submitting a proposal under CINEA EMFAF-2023-PIA-FisheriesScientificAdvice. The proposal for the Project 101156582 - SecWeb 2.0.

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Achievements

From March 2023 until the end of February 2024 the RCG Secretariat was run by Fundación CETMAR with the financial support of the Member States, and a service contract, for a specific set of activities, by the European Commission (Support to the LM preparation, accomplishment and reporting, elaboration of a set of guidance and hand-over documents).

Work carried out involved the development of the following activities;; Management of the regular correspondence with all RCGs; Maintenance of basic protocols and procedures; Maintenance of virtual working spaces (on CETMAR MS teams); Updates and formatting of documents and templates; Maintenance of website, newsletter, and social media; Promotion and support to registration to the RCGs SHs database; Generation of new support/guidance documents; Preparation support, attendance and reporting to all RCGs TMs, DM and LM; Support to 5 consultation processes; Support to ISSG activities (7 ISSGs); Regular meetings with RCGs chairs (under request); Management of funding sources (contractual procedures with MS and EC, reporting, invoicing, etc); Preparation and submission of SecWeb2.0.

Specific outcomes

- The RCGs Secretariat delivered support services to all the RCGs and 7 ISSGs.
- The communication tools and platforms were maintained updated.

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- From the activities under the Service Contract by the EC:
 - Support was delivered to the preparation, accomplishment and reporting of the LM.
 - The following guidance / hand over documents were produced:
 - Regional Coordination Groups. Virtual repositories and working spaces. An overview.
 - RCGs Secretariat Functions and working protocols.
 - DISCOVER Regional Coordination Groups for Fisheries Data Collection.
 - Compilation of common documents formats.
 - These new documents have been made available on the RCGs website <https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/secretariat/>
- SecWeb 2.0 was successfully submitted and granted for funding, and the contract signed to start in June 2024. This is an EU action grant in the field of Scientific Advice for Fisheries under the EMFAF. CINEA call: EMFAF-2023-PIA- FisheriesScientificAdvice – Improving scientific knowledge to strengthen the science-basis of management decisions under the CFP.

SecWeb 2.0 was informed as an opportunity to evolve many of the tools and specific services the Secretariat is using to support the network, however there was need to negotiate and get the support from the MS in the RCGs network to grant the coverage of all the basic Secretariat activities, and this was an outcome of the TMs in 2024 for RCG ECON and NANSEA and Baltic, so all the MS in the network have now confirmed their support and identified solutions when administrative hurdles were in place.

The Secweb2.0 project will run for two years since June 24, and it will co-create and co-design with the RCGs networks the tools to be improved and the new tools and contents to be served on-line. There were provided some examples of what preliminary services and tools could be expected and remarked that the priorities and details on the functional requirements will be set by consultation with the network. More information about this initiative is available at: <https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/secweb-2/>

9.4 Timing and venue of the RCG LDF meeting in 2025

The 2025 RCG LDF meeting is expected to be held in early July. Most likely, the dates will fall into the week 1-4 of July or alternatively 7-11 July.

Regarding the venue, Estonia invites the group to visit Tallin or Tartu (t.b.d.) for its next RCG LDF meeting. As back-up options, Latvia, Poland and The Netherlands also flagged the offer to host next RCG LDF meeting.

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

Year	Venue	Chair
2024	Cádiz, Spain	Maksims Kavsars (Latvia)
2023	Palanga, Lithuania	Irek Wójcik (Poland)
2022	Funchal, Madeira (Hybrid meeting)	Irek Wójcik (Poland)
2021	Online WebEx meeting	Irek Wójcik (Poland)
2020	Online WebEx meeting	Irek Wójcik (Poland)
2019	Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Spain	Sieto Verver (The Netherlands)
2018	Riga, Latvia	Sieto Verver (The Netherlands)
2017	Copenhagen, Denmark Hamburg, Germany	Sieto Verver (The Netherlands)



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Year	Venue	Chair
2016	Vilnius, Lithuania	Sieto Verver (The Netherlands)
2015	Hamburg, Germany Cádiz, Spain	Irek Wójcik (Poland)
2014	IJmuiden, The Netherlands	Irek Wójcik (Poland)
2013	Constanza, Romania	Irek Wójcik (Poland)
2012	Madrid, Spain	Irek Wójcik (Poland)
2011	Ljubljana, Slovenia	Maria Teresa Garcia (Spain) and Dirk-Jan van der Stelt (The Netherlands)
2010	Madrid, Spain	Maria Teresa Garcia (Spain) and Jaime Mejuto (Spain)

9.5 Draft ToR 2025

Draft Terms of Reference – RCG LDF 2024

- 1. Review progress since 2024 following up the Liaison Meeting or other expert groups reports**
- 2. Review feedback from end users**
 - CECAF/SPRFMO/NAFO (NPFC if necessary)
 - WGRDBESGOV recommendations
 - Other input received
- 3. Analyse data from 2025 RCG LDF data call**
 - Data compilation, providing overviews of fisheries
 - Consider inclusion of emerging fisheries
 - Feedback from WGRDBESGOV, comments on experience RDBES upload
- 4. Regional data collection, analysis and storage**
 - State of play of sampling in CECAF, SPRFMO and NAFO areas in 2024
 - Discuss the possibility of new data collection requirements related to NPFC
 - Discuss potential implications of the SMEFF Regulation (Regulation 2017/2403 on the sustainable management of external fishing fleets)
 - Feedback from ISSG SMEFF-FAO4I on SMEFF fisheries in the high seas, in particular FAO area 4I
- 5. Future data collection set up in CECAF/SPRFMO/NAFO**
 - CECAF future data needs
 - Feedback from ISSG CECAF-OP on the CECAF Observer Programme of small pelagics
 - Feedback from ISSG SPRFMO-OP on the EU Observer Programme accreditation procedure adopted by the SPRFMO
 - NAFO current and future data needs
 - Feedback from ISSG NAFO-SP on the NAFO harmonization protocols for on-board sampling
- 6. Review and adoption of Regional Work Plan**





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7. AOB

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



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10 Recommendations/Decisions

For Decision Meeting in September 2024 – recommendations to be approved by the relevant NCs:

- LDF_2024_R01: Assignment of RCG LDF as designated body for data requirements and collection in outermost regions (from section 3.7);
- LDF_2024_R02: Establishing an ISSG on NAFO harmonization protocols for on-board sampling (ISSG NAFO-SP) (from section 4.3);
- LDF_2024_R03: Establishing an ISSG on CECAF Observer Programme of small pelagics (ISSG CECAF-OP) (from section 6.1.3);
- LDF_2024_R04: Assignment of RCG LDF as coordinating body for data collection in NPFC waters (from section 7.1);
- LDF_2024_R05: Establishing an ISSG on SMEFF fisheries in the high seas, in particular FAO area 41 (ISSG SMEFF-FAO41) (from section 7.2).

For Decision Meeting in September 2024 – decisions to be approved by the relevant NCs:

- LDF_2024_D01: The proposed agreement on multilateral agreement for biological sampling in NPFC waters (from section 7.1);
- LDF_2024_D02: Agreement on the Regional Work Plan for Long Distance Fisheries;
- LDF_2024_D03: The proposed agreement on multilateral agreement for biological sampling in CECAF waters (from section 8.1);
- LDF_2024_D04: The proposed agreement on multilateral agreement for biological sampling in SPRFMO waters (from section 8.2).



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II Annexes

Annex I: Agenda for LDF 2024

Regional Co-ordination Group for the Long Distance Fisheries (RCG LDF 2024)

Cádiz, Spain

2nd - 5th July 2024

Agenda

Tuesday:

14:00 seat-in, connect and set up

14:30 - 18:30 meeting time

Friday:

9:00 - 13:00 - meeting time

(end time pending the progress made)

Wednesday - Thursday:

9:00 - 17:00 meeting time

General

Coffee-break 11:00 & 15:30

Lunch 13:00 – 14:00

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Work Plan

Tuesday, 2nd July 2023

14:00 – 14:30: Seat-in, set up connections etc.

14:30 – 18:30: Plenary session

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

→ **ToR 1: Review progress since 2023 following up the 20th Liaison Meeting report**

- Follow-up of recommendations/output RCG LDF 2023
- Review of the outputs of the 20th Liaison Meeting
- RCG Secretariat presentation

→ **CECAF related ToRs and discussions**

- ToR 1: Review progress since 2023 following up the 20th Liaison Meeting report
- ToR 2: Review feedback and recommendations from data end users
 - Discuss feedback from CECAF groups



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- State of play of pelagic sampling in CECAF area in 2023
- ToR 5: Current and future data collection set up in CECAF
 - CECAF future data needs
- **ToR 4: Regional data collection, analysis and storage**
 - Cooperation offer from the REDUCE project
 - REDUCE EMS and electronic Observation Technologies

Wednesday - Thursday, 3rd - 4th July 2024

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

- **CECAF related ToRs and discussions (if necessary)**
- **SPRFMO related ToRs and discussions**
 - ToR 1: Review progress since 2023 following up the 20th Liaison Meeting report
 - ToR 2: Review feedback and recommendations from data end users
 - Discuss feedback from SPRFMO
 - State of play of pelagic sampling in SPRFMO area in 2023
 - ToR 5: Current and future data collection set up in SPRFMO
 - Feedback from ISSG SPRFMO-OP
- **NAFO related ToRs and discussions**
 - ToR 2: Review feedback and recommendations from data end users
 - State of play of sampling in NAFO area in 2023
 - Discuss feedback from NAFO
 - ToR 5: NAFO current and future data needs
- **ToR 2: Review feedback and recommendations from data end users**
 - WGRDBESGOV feedback and recommendations
- **ToR 3: Analyse data from 2024 RCG LDF data call**
 - Feedback on responses on data call
 - Data compilation
 - Provide overviews of fisheries
 - Consider future inclusion of emerging fisheries
 - Identify sampling obligations facilitating current multi-annual work plan
 - Share and comment on experiences related to RDBES upload
- **ToR 4: Regional data collection, analysis and storage**
 - Development of draft RWP
 - Discuss possibility of new data collection requirements related to EU joining the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC)
 - Discuss potential implication of the SMEFF Regulation

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→ **ToR 6: AOB**

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

Thursday, 4th July – Social dinner

Friday, 5th July 2024

9:00 – 13:00: Plenary session

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

→ **Report assemblage and reading**

→ **ToR 6: AOB:**

- Discuss relevant upcoming calls for tenders, studies
- Review option of harmonization, unification of the RCG LDF RoP with RoPs of other RCGs
- Place and date of the next RCG LDF

→ **Adoption of the draft report**

Closure of the meeting

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Annex 2: List of participants

Name	Email address	Organization
Christine Röckmann	christine.rockmann@ec.europa.eu	EC, DG MARE
Didzis Ustups (NC)	didzis.ustups@bior.lv	Institute of Food Safety, Animal Health and Environment "BIOR" (LVA)
Eva García Isarch	eva.garcia@ieo.csic.es	Instituto Español de Oceanografía (IEO, CSIC) (ESP)
Irek Wójcik (NC)	iwojcik@mir.gdynia.pl	National Marine Fisheries Research Institute, Gdynia (POL)
Ivone Alejandra Czerwinski Kulikowska	ivone.czerwinski@ieo.csic.es	Instituto Español de Oceanografía (IEO - CSIC) (ESP)
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Rosa M. Fernández Otero	rfernandez@cetmar.org	RCG Secretariat - CETMAR
Sieto Verver (NC)	sieto.verver@wur.nl	CVO-WUR (NLD)
Susana Rivero	secretariat@fisheries-rcg.eu; srivero@cetmar.org	RCG Secretariat - CETMAR
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Tom Bangma	tom.bangma@wur.nl	WMR-WUR (NLD)
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Zeneida Romero	zeneida.romero@ieo.csic.es	Instituto Español de Oceanografía (IEO - CSIC) (ESP)



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

Area	Code	Description
Pacific, Northwest	61	Major Fishing Area 61
Pacific, Northeast	67	Major Fishing Area 67



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Annex 4: Minutes of the key meetings of ISSG SPRFMO-OP 2023-2024

The 13th RCG LDF Intersessional Subgroup on the SPRFMO Observer Programme (ISSG SPRFMO-OP)

Meeting date: 5 September 2023 (online)

Meeting purpose: The 13th ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting was organized to overview provided documents to MRAG, to discuss mismatches and to clarify additional documentation need with the representatives from MRAG (MRAG Ltd is an independent fisheries and aquatic resource consulting firm and has been selected to evaluate SPRFMO Member States' observer programs against the requirements set out in CMM 16-2022).

Background

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

Participants

Irek Wójcik (DCF NC POL), Sieto Verver (NLD), Christoph Stransky (DCF NC DEU), Vilda Griūnienė (DCF NC LTU); Tom Bangma (Project leader, NLD), John Pierce (MRAG).

Discussion

According to MRAG representatives, the main accreditation steps are listed in the table below (table provided in 2022, so the dates are incorrect, but the timeframe is indicative and can be used with some deviation changing years accordingly from 2022/2023 to 2023/2024).

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

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In the case of the EU Observer Programme, four scientific institutes are evaluated. EU submitted to the assessor (MRAG) all required documents from four scientific institutes and now MRAG is finalizing Draft Preliminary Evaluation Report (In table row 6 - Stage in bold).

According to the Manual document (Accreditation assessment), which is attached to the Minutes, MRAG representatives evaluated the submitted documents and provided conclusions:

- I) Impartiality, independence and integrity – no comments from MRAG.
- II) Observer qualifications – all submitted documents are appropriate, no comments from MRAG.
- III) Observer training – no comments from MRAG.
- IV) Observer trainer. A few remarks from MRAG: In the provided documents there is a lack of photos of species, species definitions are incomplete. A lack of information about seabirds was also mentioned.

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Irek Wojcik (NC Poland, coordinator of observer programme) explained that all this information now is collected by observers and will be submitted soon.

- V) Briefing and debriefing. MRAG commented that the system with the vessels owners and captains can be improved. According to Irek Wojcik and Sieto Verver, it is difficult to control or to improve this process, because institutes have no legal obligations on vessels owners/captains. MRAG representatives decided to look through Australia's and N. Zealand documents (CP which were accredited by MRAG) and to provide their suggestions, how to enlarge or improve this part of Briefing and debriefing point.
- VI) Data validation process - submitted documents are appropriated, MRAG asked to provide data collection code list.
- VII) Observer identification cards – no comments from MRAG.
- VIII) Coordinating observer's placement and observer's deployments. Irek Wojcik explained about the process, how institutes and observers contact owners and captains, mainly institutes have focal points from industry – so called “fleet registrator” – and manage the process through them. Also, there is provided documentation concerning this.
- IX) Observer safety equipment. Few practical questions were raised by MRAG i.e. if all safety equipment is not provided by the vessel captain, how observer/institute acts. Irek Wojcik explained that “Safety is first” all the time – and observers can be placed on board only if the process is clear and all measures are implemented.
- X) Responding to allegations of observer misconduct. MRAG asked about the procedure or practical examples, how institutes act in these situations. Irek Wojcik explained shortly the system and provided few examples of action – if there is no evidence, that observer acted careless, just some dissatisfaction from vessel team or captain – this observer is changed by other colleagues and is assign for the missions in other vessels; but if the evidence exists about observer's misconduct – there is legal actions according to MS legislation – written warning, reprimand or dismissal.
- XI) Dispute settlement – no comments from MRAG.
- XII) Observer safety – no comments from MRAG.
- XIII) Insurance and liability – no comments from MRAG.

After the discussion, the representatives from MRAG confirmed that they are trying to fulfil the terms and meet the deadlines stated in the table and plan to provide the Draft Preliminary Evaluation Report at the end of September.

The next step after that – MRAG will be waiting for MS response and will provide the Preliminary Evaluation Report to SPRFMO Secretariat.

Probably, the next meeting date and time will take place at the end of September or in the beginning of October.

Conclusions and follow-up of the 13th ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting

To provide additional documents for MRAG evaluation.

To wait for the Draft Preliminary Evaluation Report.

Next ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting: end of September 2023.

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The 14th RCG LDF Intersessional Subgroup on the SPRFMO Observer Programme (ISSG SPRFMO-OP)

Meeting: Vilnius, Lithuania, 22-24 January 2024

Meeting purpose: The 14th ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting was organized in order to summarize the work to date related to the accreditation procedure of the EU Observer Program in accordance with the requirements of SPRFMO and to determine the effective preparation and implementation of other activities resulting from accreditation, including:

- the review and updates to observer manual,
- planning and setup of training workshops for EU observers,
- discussion on new multilateral agreement beyond 2024.

Background

MS currently involved in fisheries activities and data collection in SPRFMO are: DEU, POL, NLD and LTU. MS are collecting data in SPRFMO area on the basis of the “Multi-lateral agreement between Germany, Lithuania, The Netherlands and Poland for biological data collection of pelagic fisheries in SPRFMO waters”. The agreement is valid until the end of 2024, Poland having the role of coordination of the sampling program.

Participants

Vilda Griūnienė (DCF NC LTU), Maksims Kavsars (LVA, RCG LDF chair), Sieto Verver (DCF NC NLD), Christoph Stransky (DCF NC DEU), Irek Wójcik (DCF NC POL), Tom Bangma (Project leader, NLD).

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Discussion

The working version of the “Manual for scientific observers on board EU pelagic trawlers in SPRFMO area” was prepared before the meeting. This draft has been reviewed and amended by the group. Tom Bangma undertook the task of collating all the comments and corrections received and preparing a 'clean' version of the document to be sent to the group members for final approval after the meeting.

The group then discussed the organizational and methodological aspects of organizing the workshop for EU observers. It was initially assumed that the observers were recruited from POL (4-5 observers), NLD (3 observers), DEU (2 observers) and LTU (1-2 observers). Thus, the initial pool of observers to be trained to work on board EU vessels fishing in the SPRFMO area will consist of 10-12 observers. The role of the Observer Program Coordinator will be to select specific observers to work on EU vessels in the SPRFMO area, depending on the current availability of observer group members. Tom Bangma has presented a set of preliminary training materials which will be refined before the workshops. It was agreed that the training workshop for EU observers would be organized in Poland, at the NMFRI headquarters in Gdynia, be led jointly by Niels Hintzen (NLD), Tom Bangma (NLD), Sieto Verver (NLD) and Irek Wójcik (POL) and will last three days. The dates will be agreed upon in the coming weeks. Initial dates are approximately mid-March, mid-April or November 2024. Taking into account that the obligation to use only accredited observers in the SPRFMO area comes into force on 1 January 2025, holding the workshops even in November 2024 leaves a safe time buffer.

The group also discussed the basic organizational and technical principles of the new multilateral agreement regarding the joint data collection program in the SPRFMO region, which will be in force from 2025, together with the expected maximum budget of the joint EU observer program. Based on that discussion a first version of the new multilateral agreement was drafted during the meeting. It will be analyzed by the parties to the

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agreement so that the final version can be accepted during the RCG LDF technical meeting in July and submitted for final decision to the relevant National Correspondents during the Decision Meeting expected in September 2024.

The Group also discussed future arrangements regarding a joint sampling programme in the CECAF area, taking into account the fact that the current multilateral agreement for this area expires at the end of 2024. Two potential solutions were considered - either to extend the current arrangement whereby Poland coordinates the joint fisheries data collection program on behalf of POL, DEU, NLD, LTU and LVA, or to replicate the currently finalized SPRFMO arrangement also for CECAF. The advantage of the second option is the fact that in both regions EU vessels conduct similar activities (fishing for small pelagic fish using the same fishing gear), the data collection methodology is the same in both regions and the same observers are employed in both regions. This matter shall be further discussed at the Technical Meeting of the RCG LDF in July in order to prepare the decision on the future agreement.

Conclusions and follow-up of the 14th ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting

Final draft version of the “Manual for scientific observers on board EU pelagic trawlers in SPRFMO area” shall be presented and reviewed by EU observers (and amended if additional clarification is needed) during planned training workshop for EU observers.

The dates of the EU observers training workshop should be set in the coming weeks.

Final text of the multilateral agreement regarding the joint data collection program in the SPRFMO region shall be ready for acceptance before the RCG LDF Technical Meeting in July 2024.

The future multilateral agreement regarding the joint data collection program in the CECAF region shall be addressed at the RCG LDF Technical Meeting in July 2024.



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

Att. Jacob González-Solís
Dept. de Biologia Evolutiva Tel.+34 934 021 451
Ecologia i Ciències Ambientals 08028 Barcelona
Avda. Diagonal, 643 Spain
jgsolis@ub.edu

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

Dear Dr. González-Solis,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Looking forward to a positive outcome from the evaluation stage,



21/03/2023

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

Signature and signature date

