

Executive Committee

Minutes

Wednesday, 3 July 2024 (14:00 – 16:30 CET)

Zoom

Interpretation in EN, ES, FR

Welcome from the Chair, Yobana Bermúdez

Click [here](#) to access the Chair's presentation.

Adoption of the agenda and of the last meeting's minutes (05.06.24): adopted

Action points

- **State-of-play of the action points of the last meeting - information**
- Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO):
 - MAC to attend the 36th Session of the Committee on Fisheries (8-12 July 2024), preferably integrating the EU's delegation
 - Request to integrate the EU's delegation accepted by DG MARE
 - Secretary General to attend the entire session in Rome, while the Chair will follow some agenda points online
- Membership of the General Assembly:
 - Secretary General to continue the efforts on the representativeness of the membership
 - Introductory presentations of AECOC, NOVA, and ESSA to be scheduled for the 3 July 2024 meeting
 - Efforts on the representativeness of the membership ongoing
 - Introductory presentations scheduled (14:45 CET)
- Marine Action Plan:
 - In a future opportunity, invite representatives of the European Investment Bank to deliver a presentation about the funding available beyond the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund
 - Pending
- Scope:
 - In the context of future work programmes, explicitly mention the market-perspective in the title of the recommendations adopted
 - Ongoing



Sustainability Indicators

- **Presentation of the VeriFish project on an indicator framework to communicate responsible aquafood production and consumption patterns by Sara Pittonet Gaiarin, Trust-IT Services**

Click [here](#) to access the presentation.

Sara Pittonet Gaiarin (VeriFish Coordinator) introduced the VeriFish project. The project is funded by DG MARE through Horizon Europe's Mission 2023 "Choose Your Fish" campaign. Ms Pittonet Gaiarin explained that the project would last two years (until April 2026). She informed that the DG MARE policy officers for the project are Ms Roberta Zoppi and Ms Alessandra Portis, and that CINEA is the implementing agency in charge of project execution. The VeriFish consortium is composed of eight European partners from eight different countries: COMMpla, FORTH, Nofima, Eurofish, EuroFIR, Poseidon, PREMOTEC, and Clupea Consultancy.

Ms Pittonet Gaiarin outlined the five objectives of the project: 1) establish a framework of indicators that can be used as basis for making verifiable claims about sustainable seafood, 2) establish a Community of Practice (CoP) of organisations and stakeholders committed to promoting sustainable seafood, 3) design a prototype of a web App providing factsheets and a digital representation of the indicator framework defined by the project, to visualise different types of indicators in a uniform manner for a specific seafood type and consumer group, 4) create and distribute media products and run awareness campaigns to provide verifiable information on sustainable seafood, and 5) provide an EU Good Practice recommendation for how to efficiently organise sustainable seafood consumption campaigns, and to publish this recommendation as a CEN Workshop Agreement (CWA). Each of these objectives is linked to a specific output.

Ms Pittonet Gaiarin informed that the VeriFish consortium was gathering and assessing available data sources that provide information on the sustainability aspects of the fisheries value chain. She explained that, once this is completed, the project will develop a framework addressing four pillars: nutrition and health, production, social, and environmental. Ms Pittonet Gaiarin stated that indicators would be developed for each. A community validation and assessment tool will also be developed, with the goal of improving understanding and usability of the indicators. Following this, factsheets will be created to feed into various media products. The goal is to disseminate the framework and demonstrate how difficult it is to measure sustainability in the fishery value chain.

Ms Pittonet Gaiarin identified the stakeholder groups for whom different project outputs were intended, including seafood retailers/HoReCa, consumers and consumer associations, children, standard good practice organisations, EU citizens, policy stakeholders and funding agencies, aquaculture associations and POs, and fisheries associations and Producer Organisations. She added that MAC members could contribute to the project by helping to identify datasets and assess indicator priorities. The VeriFish Coordinator drew attention to some of the media products that will be created for children and EU citizens as a result of the project, such as flash card games, maps and calendars, and educational posters. The project intends to build on verifiable indicators and information. She also outlined some of the challenges in producing and disseminating media products, such as the



need for the consortium to provide in-house translations of materials, the difficulty of dissemination via children's networks, and the short time frame for dissemination.

The VeriFish Coordinator drew attention to other EU projects, mentioning the sister project Mr GoodFish, which was funded through the same call and with similar objectives.

Ms Pittonet Gaiarin provided an overview of the members of the project's External Advisory Board. She also informed that VeriFish would attend the Eurofish International Conference, which would take place on 25 and 26 September 2024 in Spain.

- **Exchange of views**

Janne Posti (Conxemar) asked for information about the presented project linked to DG MARE's initiative to develop three fisheries-specific sustainability indicators via STECF based on CMO information. Mr Posti also asked about how the project would address social sustainability, since there was no global standard available.

Christine Absil (Clupea Consultancy) informed that the project's consortium was initially not aware of the DG MARE initiative on sustainability indicators. When she became a member of the consortium, under Clupea Consultancy, she drew attention to the initiative. The Chair of the responsible STECF Expert Working Group was invited to become a member of the project's External Advisory Board, upon agreement with the VeriFish Steering board and availability of resources. Ms Absil explained that, while the project and the initiative from DG MARE might look similar, STECF is focused on the definition of sustainability and developing methods, while the VeriFish project is about communicating based on the methods already developed. Exchanges will take place to ensure alignment between the project and the initiative.

Sara Pittonet Gaiarin (VeriFish Coordinator) informed that the report of STECF had been shared among the consortium and will be taken into account by the project. As for social indicators, Ms Pittonet Gaiarin replied that the project will use the indicators available.

Christine Absil (Clupea Consultancy), concerning social indicators, responded that the project will use input from the FAO. The project will need to collect information based on the available indicators. As there was insufficient information and data for various indicators, the project will highlight the gaps.

Paul Thomas (EAPO) commented that there was a significant amount of work ahead on the concept of sustainability. Mr Thomas asked about the lack of representation from the fisheries sector in the project's External Advisory Board. He requested information about how fisheries stakeholders would be contacted and consulted during the course of the project.

Sara Pittonet Gaiarin (VeriFish Coordinator) acknowledged that the External Advisory Board did not cover all stakeholder groups and informed that further members could be accepted. By October 2024, a draft framework would likely be ready, so stakeholders could get involved and contribute. Stakeholders would be engaged in different ways, particularly in the development of communication materials.



Pierre Commère (PACT'ALIM) expressed concern about the high level of ambition of the project, even though it was mainly focused on communication. Mr Commère requested more information on the methodology to develop the indicators. In his view, there would be difficulty between the development of indicators and the deliverables of the project. There were already several initiatives on environmental criteria, such as the STECF's fisheries sustainability indicators, and the Product Environmental Footprint Category Rules for marine fish products. He argued that the creation of momentum was positive, but that there was a lack of clarity concerning the objectives. Concerning the involvement of stakeholders, he wanted to know whether only fresh fish products would be covered. The project's External Advisory Board did not include representatives of the processing sector, which is the sector responsible for the labelling of the products.

Christine Absil (Clupea Consultancy) responded that the list of stakeholders was not exhaustive and that contributions from other stakeholders of the fisheries supply chain will be accepted. Ms Absil recognised that there were concerns about the creation of indicators. Nevertheless, one of the consortium members, the consultancy firm Poseidon, has extensive experience in the development of indicators. She emphasised that the focus of the project is on the assessment of existing indicators rather than developing new ones.

Sara Pittonet Gaiarin (VeriFish Coordinator) recalled the methodology of the project and added that there will be a validation process for the prototypes to be developed.

The Chair encouraged members to submit any additional questions about the project to the Secretary General, so that these could be transmitted to the project's consortium.

The Secretary General informed that, prior to the meeting, he received an email message from Ms Absil about potentially formalising the involvement of the MAC with the VeriFish project.

Christine Absil (Clupea Consultancy) stated that, since several members would likely to be interested in participating in the project, in her view, it would be relevant for the Secretary General to become a member of the External Advisory Board, facilitating the liaising between the project and the MAC.

The Chair suggested that, once there was a formal invitation from the VeriFish project for the MAC to be engaged, a formal decision by the Executive Committee could be made at the next meeting or, beforehand, via a written consultation.

Membership of the General Assembly

- **Presentation of some of the most recent members:**

The Secretary General recalled that the AECOC, NOVA, and ESSA were previously approved by the Executive Committee as members of the MAC through urgent requests via email correspondence.

- **AECOC**

Click [here](#) to access the presentation.



Àngels Segura (AECOC) presented AECOC, the Spanish association of manufacturers and distributors, founded in 1977. AECOC has over 34,000 members, with 85% being SMEs, which collectively account for 20% of Spain's GDP. At its inception, AECOC's primary goal was to create a barcode system and standardise barcode processes in order to streamline data transmission and invoicing. Ms Segura stated that the organisation is a member of GS1, which is Europe's coordinating group, ensuring that all operators work in a consistent manner to improve operational efficiency. AECOC plays an important role in connecting producers and suppliers, adding value through extensive knowledge and standardisation efforts.

Ms Segura explained that AECOC's mission is to impart and share knowledge to improve efficiency across value chains. The organisation works in a variety of fields, including marketing, logistics, and administration. AECOC organises 19 monthly conferences to promote interactions between producers and other stakeholders. Ms Segura, who oversees AECOC's maritime sectors in Spain, represents more than 1,000 organisations and businesses. AECOC's Executive Committee is made up of 24 companies, including wholesalers and retailers. AECOC also hosts an annual congress, with the next one set for 2025.

Ms Segura provided examples of how standardisation has improved efficiency in the maritime sector. She highlighted AECOC's ShopperView service, which tracks consumer behaviour on a case-by-case basis. AECOC also analyses product point-of-sale trends, offers webinars on legislative changes, maps trends on a country-by-country basis, and monitors seafood products to ensure that operators understand the actions and operations of various players in their value chain. The organisation also publishes annual magazines.

- **Dutch Fish Auctions Association (NOVA)**

Pim Visser (NOVA) introduced the Dutch Fish Auctions Association (NOVA). He explained that NOVA is an organisation that represents six auction organisations operating in eight locations throughout the Netherlands, with the main auction held in Urk, also housing the white fish processing centre. Fish auctions play an important role as an intermediary between sea and land, with those in the Netherlands using a Dutch auction style, a reverse bidding system in which the price of fish decreases by one EUR as time passes.

Mr Visser explained that the Netherlands has been co-managing fisheries quotas since 1993, with all fish registered through an auction. This includes langoustines and brown shrimp. Mr Visser emphasised that, despite the importance of these auctions, landings have decreased by 50% and value by 29% over the last five years.

Mr Visser highlighted that NOVA's goal is to stay connected to the market while also ensuring compliance with EU legislation, particularly traceability and weighing regulations. He mentioned that the association has ties to similar organisations in France and Belgium.

- **European Salmon Smokers Association (ESSA)**

Click [here](#) to access the presentation.



Marian Brestovansky (ESSA) delivered a presentation on the European Salmon Smokers Association (ESSA), an organisation that represents the European salmon smoking industry and promotes its image at the EU's level. ESSA has a General Assembly and one Working Group, and its company-based membership currently numbers 12 people. Additionally, observers, usually national members, take part. Mr Brestovansky explained that ESSA was founded primarily as a technical body, with one of its notable initiatives being the creation of a listeria database available to members. The association's activities have expanded to include representing the sector at the EU level and working with a variety of stakeholders. He highlighted that ESSA focusses on discussing sector-related issues and encouraging knowledge sharing among its members. A primary goal remains to address and discuss technical issues, with all members required to implement the ESSA Hygiene Guide, ensuring consistent standards across the industry.

Work Programme of Year 8 (2023-2024)

- **Update on the implementation of deliverables by Pedro Reis Santos, Secretary General**

The Secretary General provided an update on the implementation of the deliverables under the eight operational year (2023-2024). The Secretary General recalled that the operational year runs from October to September. In order to receive the annual grant provided by the European Commission, the MAC must meet at least 50% of the set deliverables. He highlighted the eight overarching priorities set in the work programme.

The Secretary General proceeded with a detailed overview of the implementation of the planned recommendations for the eight operational year:

- Substantiation and communication of explicit environmental claims: Advice on “Substantiation and Communication of Explicit Environmental Claims (Green Claims Directive)” was adopted on 30 November 2023.
- Work Programme of EUMOFA: Advice on “Work Programme of EUMOFA, including suggestions of analysis topics and talks” was adopted on 5 June 2024.
- Analysis of market-related aspects of the new Fisheries Control Regulation: Advice on “Terms of Reference of the Study on Feasible Traceability Systems and Procedures for Prepared and Preserved Fishery and Aquaculture Products” was adopted on 24 May 2024.
- Legislative Proposal on Sustainable Food System Framework: The publication of the legislative proposal by the European Commission was postponed, and it remained unclear whether this proposal would still be published. Therefore, it was not possible to fulfil the commitment.
- 2024 Annual Economic Report on the EU Fishing Fleet: Advice on “STECF's Annual Economic Report on the EU Fishing Fleet (2024)” was published on 31 January 2024.
- Annual Report on the implementation in 2023 of the landing obligation (particularly new developments when compared to previous advice): Instead of preparing advice on the implementation of the landing obligation in 2023, Working Group 1 decided to focus on the



ongoing evaluation of the landing obligation. The Secretariat circulated a questionnaire to the members, so the aim would be to fulfil the commitment at the September 2024 meeting.

- Energy Transition (increase of operational input costs): Advice on “Energy Transition in EU Fisheries and Aquaculture” was adopted on 29 April 2024.
- Marine Action Plan: Advice on “Impact of the “Marine Action Plan” on the Market” was adopted on 6 March 2024.
- Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing: Advice on “Negotiation of EU –Thailand Free Trade Agreement” was adopted on 31 January 2024, which including a section on “the fight against IUU fishing”.
- Development of sustainability criteria for fishery and aquaculture products: Draft advice was in development under Working Group 1, so the commitment could still be fulfilled by the end of the operational year.
- Annual EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement implementation report (Border Target Operating Mode): Working Group 2 concluded that it would not be relevant to proceed.
- 2023 Economic Report on the Fish Processing Industry: Work on the topic was still to be initiated by Working Group 2. A questionnaire would be circulated to the members to prepare a draft for consideration at the September 2024 meeting.
- Integration of sustainability considerations in the Autonomous Tariff Quotas (ATQs) framework: The initiative, including supporting study, were still not made public by the European Commission, so it would not be possible to fulfil the deliverable.
- Product Environmental Footprint Category Rules (PEFCR) for unprocessed Marine Fish products: The Focus Group on Marine Fish PEFCR was reactivated by Working Group 3 to prepare the position of the MAC in the context of the Technical Secretariat’s Second Open Public Consultation.

As for the meetings planned under the work programme, the meetings had been organised as planned, so the deliverables had been met.

- **Update on the implementation of the budget by Dawlat Bik, Financial Officer**

The Financial Officer delivered an update on the implementation of the budget of the eight financial year (2023-2024), focusing on the period of October 2023 to June 2024. In terms of income, the Commission provided the largest financial contribution (almost 300,000 EUR). At the time of the presentation, the actual income had been slightly lower than the budgeted income, which was in line with standard practice, as the Commission would provide the final instalment at the end of the financial year. Due to the approval of new members, actual income from membership fees was higher than budgeted. There were still some financial contributions from Member States pending.



The Financial Officer also outlined the actual expenses in comparison with the budgeted expenses per budget category, which include: staff, participation in meetings, information and preparation of meetings, operating costs, interpretation and translation, and other contracts. As the financial year was still ongoing, the actual expenditure was still below the budgeted one. Approximately 64% of the budgeted expenditure was realised.

Work Programme of Year 9 (2024-2025)

- **Presentation of priorities, deliverables and planning by Pedro Reis Santos, Secretary General**

The Secretary General recalled that the ninth operational year would run from 1 October 2024 to 30 September 2025. In line with the Rules of Procedure, the draft work programme was prepared by the Executive Committee. In line with the applicable financial rules, the draft must be submitted to DG MARE before the end of July 2024. To comply with the Belgian Code of Companies and Associations, the work programme would be approved by the General Assembly at the January 2025 meeting.

The Secretary General explained that the proposed overarching priorities for Year (2024-2025) were quite similar to the ones of Year 8 (2023-2024). In comparison with the present operational year, the “Sustainable Food System Framework” was removed from the list of priorities, as, following the European elections, the status of the legislative proposal remained unclear, and replaced with “Common Fisheries Policy & Common Market Organisation”, as Commissioner Sinkevičius had announced a full evaluation of the policy. “Trade Agreements & Trade Policy Instruments” continued to be a priority, including the eventual public consultation on the inclusion of sustainability elements in the ATQs Regulation. As the MAC increasingly adopted advice on the matter, “Forced Labour” was included as a priority. “Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing”, “European Market Observatory for Fisheries and Aquaculture (EUMOFA)”, “Landing Obligation”, “Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF)”, and “Fisheries Control Regulation” remained priorities. In relation to the last one, DG MARE expressed interest in receiving feedback on the planned delegated acts.

The Secretary General drew attention to the “other possible issues of interest” section of the draft, which included the Farm to Fork Strategy, EU taxonomy and technical screening, the energy transition of the EU’s fisheries and aquaculture sector, the action plan to protect and restore marine ecosystems, and the EU Algae Initiative.

The Secretary General outlined the planned recommendations: “Consumer information on fishery and aquaculture products, particularly in the context of the HORECA Sector (jointly with AAC)”, “2024 Annual Economic Report on the EU Fishing Fleet”, “Evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation”, “Evaluation Common Market Organisation (under the overall full evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation)”, “Annual report on the implementation of the landing obligation”, “Market-related aspects of the revised Fisheries Control Regulation”, “Work Programme of EUMOFA, including suggestions of case studies and talks”, “Fights against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing & Forced Labour, Due diligence”, “Trade (e.g., FTAs, ATQs, GSP)”, and “Economic Report on the EU Aquaculture Sector”. He recalled that, to receive the full operating grant from the European Commission, 50% of the planned recommendations would need to be fulfilled.



The Secretary General outlined the planned meetings, which essentially mirrored the planning of the present year. The main different was that, instead of a group of virtual meetings in November, there would be a workshop on EU Producer Organisations, in line with the commitment made under the advice on “Awareness on the Role of Producer Organisations” adopted on 3 February 2023.

Pierre Commère (PACT’ALIM), while recognising that Working Group 1 was already addressing the STECF’s initiative on environmental sustainability indicators for fishery products, suggested to include a broader point on sustainability indicators under the “other possible issues of interest” section, to react to any other potential initiatives.

Paul Thomas (EAPO) commented that the supporting study on the evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy would be launched in September 2024 and last for 12 months. Mr Thomas expressed availability to work with Mr Commère on how to draft the reference to sustainability indicators to be added in the “other possible issues of interest” section.

Laure Guillevic (WFF) asked for information on whether there would be separate evaluations of the Common Fisheries Policy and of the Common Market Organisation. Ms Guillevic emphasised the importance of prioritising the Sustainable Food System Framework and the Farm to Fork Strategy.

The Secretary-General responded that, as there could be impacts on the financing, it was risky to make commitments based on the Farm to Fork Strategy and the Sustainable Food System Framework. Following the European elections and the new College of Commissioners, the future of these initiatives remained unclear. As for the full evaluations, the Secretary General clarified that there would not be a separate evaluation of the Common Market Organisation, but that it would be a significant part of the evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy, and it was the most relevant topic for the MAC.

Gerd Heinen (DG MARE) confirmed that the Common Market Organisation would be part of the full evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy. Mr Heinen suggested to rephrase the reference to these in the draft work programme to make it clearer.

Following the mentioned amendments, the Executive Committee agreed to proceed with the submission of the draft work programme to the European Commission.

- **Presentation of draft budget by Dawlat Bik, Financial Officer**

The Secretary-General recalled that the Multiannual Financial Framework, the Commission’s budget, is based on a seven-year timeframe, with a 2% annual increase to reflect inflation. Therefore, in line with previous discussions with DG MARE, the draft budget for the ninth financial year (2024-2025), with limited changes, aimed to mirror the budget of the eight financial year with a 2% increase. He further recalled that, once the annual lump-sum grant was approved, it was possible to transfer funding across different budgetary headings without requesting formal approval from DG MARE.



The Financial Officer provided an overview of the draft budget expenditures per category: staff, participation in meetings, information and preparation of meetings, operating costs, interpretation and translation, and other contracts. Staff costs remained the main expenditure.

The Financial Officer also provided a comparison between the draft budget of Year 9 (2024-2025) and the budget of Year 8 (2023-2024). Besides the 2% increase in costs across the various categories to reflect inflation, there was higher increase in the “participation in meetings” and “information and preparation of meetings” categories to reflect the new members. Income was project to increase due to an increase in the number of members, more financial contributions from the Member States, and a 2% increase in the grant provided by the European Commission. In comparison, the new budget would be a growth of approximately 4% in total when compared to the current one.

The Executive Committee agreed to proceed with the submission of the draft budget to the European Commission.

AOB

- **Focus Group on PECFR for Marine Fish Products**

The Secretary General recalled that Working Group 3 reactivated the Focus Group on PECFR for Marine Fish Products, in order to prepare a position on behalf of the MAC ahead of the Technical Secretariat’s Second Open Public Consultation. Following the launch of the public consultation in mid-June 2024, the Focus Group met on 24 June 2024. The public consultation would formally be open until mid-July 2024. While there was initially the expectation that it would be possible to provide feedback later, the Technical Secretariat clarified that, to be considered, the feedback would have to be submitted by mid-August 2024. Therefore, the Focus Group would need to accelerate the work, and the approval procedure by Working Group 3 and by the Executive Committee would have to take place via urgent written procedures at the end of July 2024.



Summary of action points

- Sustainability Indicators:
 - Once a formal invitation from the VeriFish project for engagement is received, a formal decision to be made at the next meeting or, beforehand, via a written consultation.

- Work Programme of Year 9 (2024-2025):
 - Secretariat to proceed with the formal submission of the draft work programme and of the draft budget to the European Commission.



Attendance List

Representative	Organisation	Role
Amélie Laurent	Oceana	Member
Àngels Segura	AECOC	Observer
Christine Absil	Good Fish Foundation	Member
Daniel Voces de Onáindi	Europêche	Member
Dawlat Bik	Market Advisory Council (MAC)	Secretariat
Els Bedert	EuroCommerce	Member
Emiel Brouckaert	European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO)	Member
Esben Sverdrup-Jensen	European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO)	Member
Gerd Heinen	European Commission	Expert
Iñigo Azqueta Ruiz-Gallardón	ANFACO-CECOPECA	Member
Janne Posti	Conxemar	Member
Javier Ojeda	Federation of European Aquaculture Producers (FEAP)	Member
Julien Daudu	Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF)	Member
Katarina Sipic	EU Fish Processors and Traders Association (AIPCE) / European Federation of National Organizations of Importers and Exporters of Fish (CEP)	Member
Laure Guillevic	WWF	Member
María Luisa Álvarez Blanco	FEDEPESCA	Member
Marian Brestovansky	European Salmon Smokers Association (ESSA)	Observer
Massimo Bellavista	COPA COGECA	Member
Maximilian Schwarz	Market Advisory Council (MAC)	Secretariat
Paul Thomas	European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO)	Member
Pedro Reis Santos	Market Advisory Council (MAC)	Secretariat
Pierre Commère	EU Fish Processors and Traders Association (AIPCE)	Member
Pim Visser	NOVA	Observer
Quentin Marchais	ClientEarth	Member





Market Advisory Council

Representative	Organisation	Role
Rosalie Tukker	Europêche	Member
Sara Pittonet Gaiarin	VeriFish	Expert
Thibault Pivetta	European Molluscs' Producers Association (EMPA)	Member
Vanya Vulperhorst	Oceana	Member
Yobana Bermúdez Rodríguez	EU Fish Processors and Traders Association (AIPCE)	Chair

