

Working Group 3: EU control and sanitary issues, consumer rules

Draft Minutes

Thursday, 30 January 2025 (09:00 – 12:30 CET)

Copa Cogeca (Meeting Room A), Rue de Trèves 61, 1040 Brussels

Interpretation in EN, ES, FR

Welcome from the Chair, Benoît Thomassen

[Presentation](#)

Adoption of the agenda and of the last meeting's minutes (18.09.24): adopted

Action points

- **State-of-play of the action points of the last meeting - information**
- Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation:
 - Secretariat to launch a one-month consultation for members to share their views on the impacts of package reuse targets, so that draft advice can potentially be considered at January 2025 meeting
 - Request for feedback from 27 September to 25 October 2024
 - Draft advice circulated on 5 November 2024
- Consumer Information:
 - Draft advice on “consumer information on fishery and aquaculture products, particularly in the context of the HoReCa sector” to be put forward to the Executive Committee for consideration and potential approval
 - Advice adopted on 23 October 2024
 - Letter of reply from DG MARE on 20 December 2024

Consumer Information

- **Presentation of the report “Fishy labels: What do we know about the seafood we buy in supermarkets?”, of the “Follow the Fish” movement, and of a recent poll on consumer information by Vanya Vulperhorst (Oceana)**

[Presentation](#)

Vanya Vulperhorst (Oceana) presented the findings of the “Fishy Labels: What do we know about the seafood we buy in supermarkets?” report. She explained that, alongside its advocacy efforts, her organisation conducts scientific research studies aimed at informing policy and consumer awareness.



Ms Vulperhorst outlined the study's broader policy context, explaining that the term "processed" used in the presentation encompasses both prepared and preserved fishery and aquaculture products. She highlighted a significant gap in current consumer information requirements, as there is presently no obligation to provide origin, species, or sustainability information for processed seafood or seafood served in restaurants. Furthermore, sustainability-related consumer information is not required for any seafood product.

Ms Vulperhorst emphasised that the Common Market Organisation Regulation serves as the primary legislative framework through which these issues could be addressed. She highlighted that the European Commission is beginning to address some of these gaps, referencing a recent statement by Commissioner Kadis, who underscored the importance of clear and reliable consumer information to promote sustainable consumption. According to the statement by Commissioner Kadis, origin information is particularly important, as it enables consumers to understand which communities they are supporting when purchasing seafood products.

Ms Vulperhorst noted that Oceana is advocating for decision-makers to revise the Common Market Organisation Regulation to close these gaps. This advocacy is closely tied to the "Follow the Fish" movement, a coalition of stakeholders spanning nine Member States, including seafood industry actors and decision-makers. The movement's core demand is for the revision of the regulation to ensure that basic information, such as origin, species, and fishing gear, is provided for all seafood products, both processed and unprocessed. Ms Vulperhorst also stressed the importance of including the flag state as part of the mandatory information. She outlined the signatories of "Follow the Fish" movement.

Ms Vulperhorst proceeded to present the "Fishy labels: What do we know about the seafood we buy in supermarkets?", an initiative separate from the "Follow the Fish" movement. The report showcases Oceana's analysis of 182 seafood products available in supermarkets across several Member States, assessing the extent of consumer information provided on product packaging. Explaining the rationale behind the analysis, Ms Vulperhorst highlighted that processed seafood products are extremely popular, accounting for one-fifth of all seafood consumed in the EU. Many of these products, however, fall outside the scope of the Common Market Organisation Regulation's minimum consumer information requirements. This lack of regulation increases the risk of products being linked to countries engaged in illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. She added that the study also aimed to identify potential non-compliance issues with the common market organisation for fresh and frozen seafood products.

On the findings, Ms Vulperhorst reported that, of the processed products analysed, 38% provided no consumer information, which was an unsurprising result, given that such information remains voluntary. Among those products that did provide information, 50% provided details on origin, 45% included the scientific name of the species, and only 16% indicated the fishing gear used. She highlighted that there was also limited information available regarding whether the products originated from wild fisheries or aquaculture. The analysis revealed significant disparities between Member States. In Belgium, voluntary consumer information was more commonly provided, followed by France. Spain lagged behind, with only 5% of products displaying information about fishing gear.



She drew attention to examples of good practices observed during the study and commended retailers and producers who had voluntarily adopted more transparent labelling practices.

Ms Vulperhorst explained that, to further investigate consumer attitudes towards seafood labelling, Oceana conducted a poll involving over 3,500 respondents across the EU. The results indicated strong consumer demand for more comprehensive information, with over 80% of respondents expressing a desire for additional details on seafood product labels.

Based on these findings, Oceana put forward a set of key recommendations: 1) to revise the Common Market Organisation Regulation to mandate the provision of detailed information on seafood products, including species, origin, fishing gear, production method, and flag state; 2) to add science-based sustainability criteria to labels; and 3) to extend traceability requirements to restaurants.

- **Exchange of views**

Patrick Murphy (IS&WFPO) asked whether Oceana had researched the availability of traceability data, highlighting that Irish fishers already provide such information through their electronic logbooks. Mr Murphy also requested that Oceana share the detailed results of their consumer poll.

Vanya Vulperhorst (Oceana) explained that while traceability information is generally available for fresh and frozen products in line with current requirements, Oceana's objective is to address gaps in traceability for processed products and establish consistent requirements across all categories of fishery and aquaculture products. Ms Vulperhorst referred to Fish Tales as a good example of communication of information to consumers. She expressed available to share more details on the poll, which is also publicly available on Oceana's website.

Pierre Commère (PACT'ALIM) argued that, while consumers often indicate a desire for more information, in practice, in the market, price remained the priority of consumers. Therefore, there were differences between polls and the purchasing behaviour of consumers. Mr Commère drew attention to challenges related to space limitations on packaging, suggesting that the provision of more detailed information online could be implemented. Nevertheless, efforts by the industry to provide more information online showed that less than 1% of consumers searched for the information. He signalled the interest of his organisation in engaging in constructive dialogue on the potential evolution of the Common Market Organisation Regulation.

Vanya Vulperhorst (Oceana) acknowledged the challenges raised but stressed that empowering consumers with clear information benefits both local communities and the organisations investing in sustainability. Ms Vulperhorst suggested that the European Commission could consider launching consumer awareness campaigns to complement labelling initiatives. In her view, fresh and frozen products show that it is possible to transmit information to consumers. In the case of the company Fish Tales, clients expressed preference for their products due to the additional information provided about the fishers. She argued that the next Eurobarometer survey on the topic would likely show that more than 1% of consumers are interested in accessing information, particularly young consumers.

María Luisa Álvarez Blanco (FEDEPESCA) requested information on the types of products covered by the poll, particularly if it was only about processed products.



Vanya Vulperhorst (Oceana) clarified that the poll included general questions covering fresh and frozen products as well as prepared and preserved products. The poll also included questions specifically on prepared and preserved products. She expressed availability to share more details.

Roberto Alonso (ANFACO-CECOPESCA) argued that polls are not always linked to the actual consumer behaviour. Mr Alonso disagreed that some fishery and aquaculture products were not traceable, as all products were traceable, from the perspective of the food safety legislation. Industry operators have robust traceability systems in place and can identify the origin of the products. Concerning the potential link to IUU fishing and labour regulation, he recalled the adoption of the Forced Labour Regulation, which would address those concerns. He stated that operators want to provide more information to consumers, but that there are technical and operational challenges. Even a digital tool would imply an increase in costs, particularly in a context of high inflation.

Vanya Vulperhorst (Oceana) recognised that there was traceable information across the value chain, which allowed the possibility for recalls in case of food safety issues. Nevertheless, in the case of the HORECA sector as well in the case of prepared and preserved products, there was no requirement to transmit the fisheries-specific information. Ms Vulperhorst exemplified that, recently, when organising an event at the European Parliament, her organisation wanted to cater only products caught in the EU, but that the caterers were only able to provide that information. She added that her organisation's report showed that, in Belgium, 75% of prepared and preserved products included fisheries-specific information. Therefore, there should be an effort to make the information available across the supply chain and to consumers.

Patrick Murphy (IS&WFPO) expressed concerns about the discrepancies in the message of Ms Vulperhorst's presentation and the messaging in Oceana's website. Mr Murphy called for a positive message focused on the work undertaken by operators.

Vanya Vulperhorst (Oceana) recognised that her organisation's website focused more on environmental advocacy work and expressed availability to share the feedback with the communication team. Ms Vulperhorst emphasised that Oceana wants to increase profitability for operators. In the case of the "Follow the Fish" movement, there was a focus on bringing people together to promote a level-playing-field via the empowerment of sustainable fishers and an improvement of traceability. She exemplified that two Producer Organisations recently subscribed to the movement. She added that her association believes in the provision of local, sustainably caught products.

Juan Manuel Trujillo Castillo (ETF) urged all members to focus on identifying core issues when discussing traceability. Mr Trujillo highlighted concerns regarding socio-economic sustainability, as, for example, cans of tuna from Thailand or China sold at low prices could be linked to labour exploitation and IUU fishing. He stressed that greater transparency on sustainability would allow consumers to make informed choices and avoid products associated with unethical practices. He also expressed concern about potential backtracking on progress made in addressing IUU fishing due to recent developments in the USA's market.

Vanya Vulperhorst (Oceana) agreed, emphasising that traceability requirements should include information on the flag state, as consumers might want to avoid products from certain regions,



particularly those associated with IUU fishing and forced labour. Ms Vulperhorst argued that Member States need to enforce legislation to prevent the presence of IUU products in the EU market. She highlighted that, when consumer information rules were lacking, there was more mislabelling of products, adding that studies have shown that greater transparency correlates with lower levels of mislabelling and fraudulent practices.

Giorgio Rimoldi (Unione Italiana Food) recommended refining the message around Oceana's initiatives. Mr Rimoldi argued that the assertion that there are no consumer information requirements for prepared and preserved fishery and aquaculture products was not correct, as the Food Information to Consumers Regulation applies. As for the introduction of sustainability labelling, in his view, it would have to be applied equality across food products, not singling out the fisheries and aquaculture sector. He exemplified that human rights violations affected multiple industries.

Vanya Vulperhorst (Oceana) acknowledged that the requirements of the Food Information to Consumers Regulation applied to prepared and preserved fishery and aquaculture products. Nevertheless, unlike for fresh and frozen products, the specific consumer information provisions of the Common Market Organisation Regulation did not apply. Ms Vulperhorst stated that she would welcome a Sustainable Food System Framework that would allow the comparison between different food products, especially as fishery and aquaculture products could actually perform better in comparison. Unfortunately, the legislative proposal on such initiative was no longer going to be tabled by the European Commission. She called for amending the Common Market Organisation Regulation to achieve a positive impact on the fisheries and aquaculture sector, as there was almost a 70% dependence on imports.

María Luisa Álvarez Blanco (FEDEPESCA) recalled that Ms Vulperhorst's presentation covered different initiatives. FEDEPESCA subscribed to the "Follow the Fish" movement, as consumer information should be available for all fishery and aquaculture products regardless of the point of sale and the commercial format. Ms Álvarez highlighted that the points on sustainability labelling and amendments to the Common Market Organisation Regulation were specifically initiatives of Oceana.

Hygiene and Sanitary Issues

- **Update on the upcoming legislation on the maximum levels of inorganic arsenic in certain foodstuffs by Veerle Vanheusén (DG SANTE E2)**

Presentation

Veerle Vanheusén (DG SANTE) provided an overview of the regulatory framework governing contaminants in food, specifically the upcoming legislation on the maximum levels of inorganic arsenic in certain foodstuffs. Ms Vanheusén explained that maximum levels for contaminants can be established when there is evidence that a contaminant may pose a health risk to consumers. The primary aim of such measures is to ensure that consumers are not exposed to harmful levels of contaminants through their diet.

Ms Vanheusén outlined the background to the current proposal. In 2009, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) concluded that inorganic arsenic in food is carcinogenic and that exposure levels



within the EU were too high. However, at that time, no maximum levels were established for inorganic arsenic in food. Following the adoption of a Commission regulation in 2015, occurrence data was gathered across Member States. EFSA subsequently summarised these findings in a 2021 assessment, identifying the foods that significantly contribute to inorganic arsenic exposure, including fish and other seafood.

Based on EFSA's findings, DG SANTE initiated a dialogue with Member States to establish maximum levels for inorganic arsenic across various food products, including seafood. Third countries were also given the opportunity to provide feedback during the consultation process. Ms Vanheusen explained that, following the initial proposal, additional data was submitted, indicating the need for further adjustments, particularly concerning certain seafood species. As a result, DG SANTE decided to exclude fish and other seafood from the initial draft regulation. The 2023 regulation, therefore, only covered rice, baby formula, and juices, while seafood was moved to a separate legislative proposal. This separate proposal took into account the comments received from Member States and third countries during the previous consultation. An additional public consultation was launched in December 2022, resulting in further feedback and the incorporation of new data. These insights facilitated the fine-tuning of the current proposal.

Ms Vanheusen presented the key elements of the draft regulation currently under consideration, including the proposed maximum levels for inorganic arsenic. The Commission representative highlighted that the proposal includes a transition period. Products exceeding the proposed maximum levels but already on the market would be allowed to remain available until the end of their shelf life. She outlined the timeline for adoption. A vote on the proposal is expected to take place during the first or second quarter of 2025. If adopted, the new maximum levels for inorganic arsenic in seafood and other foodstuffs would apply after summer 2025.

- **Exchange of views**

Pim Visser (NOVA) requested clarification on the moment that arsenic levels are tested, particularly whether it is at the first point of sale or at the processing stage. Mr Visser raised concerns regarding flatfish, wanting to know if the proposed threshold for flatfishes applied solely to plaice or to other flatfish species as well.

Veerle Vanheusen (DG SANTE) explained that the maximum levels apply when products are placed on the market, as defined under the General Food Law. Controls by public authorities and testing for contaminants can occur at any stage from the point the product is held by wholesalers for sale until it becomes available in retail outlets. Regarding flatfish, she confirmed that the 0.50 mg/kg threshold would apply only to plaice species, while other flatfish species the ML of 0.10 mg/kg will apply.

Pim Visser (NOVA) asked whether there was a mandatory obligation to test at the first point of sale, as, in practice, testing appeared to be conducted primarily at the wholesale level rather than at the point of first sale.

Veerle Vanheusen (DG SANTE) clarified that competent authorities are empowered to conduct testing at any point along the value chain.



Javier Ojeda (FEAP) requested information on the rationale behind setting different maximum levels for various fish species, asking whether these thresholds were based on expected intake levels.

Veerle Vanheusen (DG SANTE) responded that the maximum levels are established according to the “as low as reasonably achievable” (ALARA) principle and based on occurrence data. This approach ensures that thresholds are set at levels that do not unduly restrict food supply. Some species are more prone to heavy metal accumulation, so higher maximum levels are set to avoid the *de facto* exclusion of those species from the market, drastically impacting food supply.

Stefan Meyer (Bundesverband Fischindustrie) raised concerns about seasonal variations in arsenic levels, as migratory fish may exhibit higher exposure to arsenic depending on the time of year and location. On the maximum level thresholds, Mr Meyer suggested the establishment of action levels, which would allow operators to investigate contamination sources and take corrective action if elevated levels were detected.

Veerle Vanheusen (DG SANTE) acknowledged the seasonal variability of arsenic levels and highlighted that the extensive stakeholder consultations leading up to the proposal had taken such variations into account. Ms Vanheusen underscored that arsenic is highly toxic, causing cancer, and that EFSA required follow-up action by the Commission. The Commission representative explained that the establishment of action levels was usually for situations where occurrence data was lacking. In the case of fishery products, occurrence data has been collected since 2015. In the present case, the availability of comprehensive data allows the introduction of binding thresholds, as was also the case for mercury and cadmium. She mentioned the expectation from consumers for regulatory action, as exemplified by a recent report by Bloom on the presence of mercury in tuna products.

John Lynch (ISEFPO) wanted to know if there were health reasons for the establishment of different thresholds for different species. Mr Lynch further asked about a potential margin of tolerance and whether the levels were usually close to the maximum. He also asked whether each consignment would have to be tested.

Veerle Vanheusen (DG SANTE) explained that certain species were much more contaminated than others. A wide collection of data was undertaken. The proposed thresholds were not intended as safe levels but set at the upper percentiles of the occurrence data in the different species. This approach ensures the removal of the most contaminated products from the market without rendering any species unmarketable. Ms Vanheusen emphasised the food business operators were responsible for ensuring compliance with the maximum levels. Competent authorities occasionally conduct occasional inspections, not a routine testing of every lot. She added that detailed guidance on sampling procedures is available to operators.

Paulien Prent (Visfederatie) expressed general satisfaction with the proposed thresholds. Ms Prent drew attention to discrepancies between the version of the draft legislation presented at the meeting and a version previously shared with AIPCE-CEP. Ms Prent expressed availability to exchange bilaterally on the matter. She also inquired whether there were still any species considered data-deficient and, if so, how the Commission planned to address such gaps.



Veerle Vanheusen (DG SANTE) confirmed that the version presented during the meeting represented the final draft and was more up to date than the version previously circulated to AIPCE-CEP. Regarding data-deficient species, she assured members that sufficient data had been collected for all major species marketed in the EU, enabling the establishment of maximum levels across the board.

Pim Visser (NOVA) asked about the definition of “first placing on the market”, particularly whether it referred to sale at auction or at the wholesale stage. Mr Visser expressed concern about the practical challenges caused to fishers, if the threshold was applied at the auction stage.

Veerle Vanheusen (DG SANTE) explained that, under the General Food Law, the first placing on the market occurs when fishers sell their products. This stage represents the first opportunity for testing, and the maximum levels already apply at this point. She further noted that this approach is consistent with current practices for mercury testing. As the product is sold, the responsibility moves to the next step of the supply chain.

- **Exchange of views on the maximum levels of mercury in canned tuna products with Veerle Vanheusen (DG SANTE E2)**

Veerle Vanheusen (DG SANTE) explained that, following a recent report by the French NGO Bloom on mercury contamination in canned tuna products, the Commission services exchanged with various stakeholders, including meeting with AIPCE-CEP. The Commission services also met with Bloom.

Following the report’s publication, the Commission conducted an independent review of its own occurrence data for mercury levels in canned tuna. All samples analysed by the Commission were compliant with existing EU legislation. Data provided by the industry similarly indicated that the vast majority of products complied with established maximum levels. This contrasted sharply with the findings presented in the Bloom report, suggesting a significant divergence between the Commission’s data, Member States’ data, and Bloom’s conclusions.

Ms Vanheusen highlighted that the mentioned discrepancy could be attributed to the methodology employed by Bloom, particularly on the moisture. During the meeting with the organisation, Bloom explained that their analysis involved testing dry tuna powder and extrapolating the results to the canned product. The Commission subsequently requested that Bloom provide their sampling, analysis certificates and detailed testing protocol. While Bloom committed to share this information, the Commission had not yet received it.

Niall Gerlitz (DG MARE) asked whether there were any plans to revise the maximum mercury levels applicable to swordfish.

Veerle Vanheusen (DG SANTE) clarified that the maximum mercury levels for various species, including swordfish, were revised in 2022. During that revision, requests were made to increase the maximum permissible levels for shark and swordfish. However, due to the consistently high mercury levels found in these species, the decision was taken to maintain the existing thresholds.

Ms Vanheusen informed that, following arguments from the sector that consumers could be informed about the impact of the consumption of shark and swordfish products, the Commission services



asked EFSA to analyse the efficacy of consumption advice for those fishery product products. The opinion was expected by end 2025.

Pierre Commère (PACT'ALIM) underscored that tuna products placed on the market were compliant with the applicable legislation. In his view, the Bloom report was alarmist and exaggerated, consisting of a media attack, which significantly impacted the sector. Mr Commère argued that the report also attacked the appropriateness of the Regulations of the European Commission and of the Member States. Therefore, he wanted to know how the Commission would respond to these attacks to its regulatory legitimacy.

Veerle Vanheusen (DG SANTE) responded that the Commission, following the report's publication, had received several inquiries from Members of the European Parliament and civil society organisations. The Commission's spokesperson had been actively responding to these concerns. Ms Vanheusen stated that the Bloom report presented a broader narrative, arguing that tuna consumption itself was (to an extent) unsafe due to mercury contamination. She conceded that there was some factual basis to this claim, noting that consuming as little as one can of tuna per week could, in some cases, result in mercury intake exceeding recommended limits. She stressed the importance of encouraging Member States to issue consumer advice that balanced the health benefits of fish consumption with potential risks from contaminants, particularly in the case of children and pregnant women. Even though fishery products provide many health benefits, some species suffer from heavy pollution. To support such guidance, DG SANTE intends to mandate EFSA to conduct a comprehensive assessment study on the benefits of fish consumption versus the risks due to the occurrence of several contaminants in fish.

Giorgio Rimoldi (Unione Italiana Food) agreed with Mr Commère that the Bloom report was based on flawed methodologies and showed discrepancies in the results. The analyses were conducted by an uncertified laboratory. No information was provided on control variables or sample integrity. The wrong value of water in canned products was used. In his view, a principle of responsible information should apply to NGOs, as the report was addressed to consumers. Mr Rimoldi emphasised that, as food business operators, industry is legally obliged to provide consumers with reliable information, so he wondered why NGOs were not held to the same standards of accuracy and transparency when publishing technical reports. It could be relevant to amend the Food Information to Consumers Regulation on that matter. He highlighted that EFSA's approach to risk assessment is stricter than that of international authorities, including the FAO. He argued the EU already has the world's most robust legislation for consumer protection and that Bloom's calls for further reductions in mercury thresholds were unfounded.

Veerle Vanheusen (DG SANTE) responded that, on amendments to the Food Information to Consumers Regulation, Mr Rimoldi would need to address the relevant service, particularly as NGOs also benefited from free speech rights. Ms Vanheusen emphasised that, when the Commission is attacked, justifications are provided to defend the integrity of the legislative work. The Commission drew attention to the methodological flaws in the report, including in exchanges with stakeholders.

Íñigo Azqueta Ruiz-Gallardón (ANFACO-CECOPECA) expressed support for Mr Rimoldi's intervention. Mr Azqueta underscored that the maximum levels for mercury are based on scientific studies from



accredited laboratories. In his view, the report lacked scientific rigour, as it was from a non-accredited laboratory. He argued that public authorities should not engage with such report, as it would legitimise an organisation that did not adhere to the same scientific standards as public authorities and industry bodies. The approach of Bloom could constitute an attack on the good name of the industry.

Veerle Vanheusen (DG SANTE) admitted that the widespread media coverage following the report's publication had driven public and political interest. In its response, the Commission addressed the legal points, but the Commissions' response did not attract as much media interest. Ms Vanheusen stated that, if industry stakeholders believed they were being unfairly targeted by the Bloom report, they could consider taking legal action to address the situation. The Commission representative added that, nevertheless, the report, did touch on the fact that tuna products are heavily contaminated by mercury, which can have an impact on children and pregnant women. This complexity needs to be acknowledged in communications on this topic.

Common Market Organisation

- **Presentation on the section on consumer information requirements of the ongoing study on the Common Market Organisation commissioned by DG MARE by the external consultant**

Presentation

Séverine Renault (AND International) provided an update on the ongoing study on the CMO commissioned by DG MARE, specifically focusing on consumer information requirements. Ms Renault outlined the four key study questions being examined in relation to consumer information:

- Correspondence with Consumer Needs: To what extent are the current consumer information requirements aligned with the expectations and preferences of consumers?
- Contribution to CMO/CFP Objectives: How effectively do the current consumer information requirements contribute to achieving the objectives set out under the Common Market Organisation and the Common Fisheries Policy?
- Efficiency: Are the costs incurred by industry stakeholders to implement mandatory consumer information requirements proportionate and justifiable in relation to the benefits provided to consumers?
- Enforcement and Compliance: What is the level of compliance with mandatory consumer information requirements?

Ms Renault emphasised that the study was still ongoing, and no preliminary results on consumer information were available for presentation yet.

- **Exchange of views**

Jarek Zieliński (PFPA/ZPPR) inquired about the planned outcome of the study, asking whether the consultants would produce recommendations, particularly on implementation. Mr Zieliński stated that, from the perspective of his organisation, there was a need for greater support regarding the role of Producer Organisations within Member States.



Gerd Heinen (DG MARE) explained that the evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy was ongoing and that the Common Market Organisation Regulation was being evaluated concurrently, given the direct link between the two frameworks. Mr Heinen explained that the study was a support study, intended to feed into the broader evaluation process and the resulting Staff Working Document. The study aimed to identify opportunities for simplification and that additional guidance could emerge as a result.

Pierre Commère (PACT'ALIM) asked whether the marketing standards framework would be part of the study, since, alongside Producer Organisations and consumer information requirements, it constituted a third pillar of the Common Market Organisation Regulation. He also asked whether the Commission planned to reopen the marketing standards framework for legislative revision.

Gerd Heinen (DG MARE) clarified that the marketing standards framework was not part of the support study. Mr Heinen recalled that a dedicated evaluation of the marketing standards took place in 2019, which, in the view of the Commission services, was still valid. The Commission representative recalled the interventions, at the 29 January 2025 meeting of Working Group 1 on the freshness criteria. He added that the pillar on market intelligence of the Common Market Organisation Regulation, which includes EUMOFA, would also not be addressed specifically in the study.

Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation

- **Presentation of the “Re-thinking Fish Boxes” project by Stefania Campogianni (WWF)**

Presentation

Stefania Campogianni (WWF) presented the “Re-thinking Fish Boxes” project, a pilot initiative conducted in Italy aimed at addressing plastic pollution within the fisheries sector, particularly the use of expanded polystyrene (EPS) fish boxes. The project forms part of WWF Mediterranean’s broader work in fisheries, with a specific focus on small-scale fisheries.

Ms Campogianni highlighted that EPS fish boxes are the most commonly used packaging material for storing and transporting fish, with over 335,000 tonnes used annually across Europe. Italy is among the highest users of EPS boxes. While the advantages of EPS are well-known, including them being lightweight, cost-effective, and thermally insulating, the environmental impact of EPS waste is significant. Although EPS is technically 100% recyclable, recycling rates remain low, with less than 30% of EPS being recycled. As a result, large quantities of EPS boxes end up in landfills, and they are among the most prevalent waste items found along the Italian coastline and in Mediterranean waters. This pollution poses substantial risks to both human health and marine biodiversity.

The “Re-thinking Fish Boxes” project aimed to address this issue by preventing EPS waste from reaching the sea. The project followed a multi-step approach: developing eco-design solutions, conducting life-cycle assessments, gathering feedback from fishers, and formulating recommendations. Stakeholder engagement was central to the project, with participants including the University of Trieste, Quota Sette (eco-design experts), packaging companies, local communities, waste managers, and recyclers. Ms Campogianni stressed the importance of involving all stakeholders when developing sustainable solutions.



The eco-design process prioritised developing a solution that complied with international regulations for food safety and hygiene while maintaining technical rigour. The solution also needed to be scalable and adaptable to different contexts. Key performance indicators (KPIs) were identified to guide the eco-design process. The final eco-design solution comprised two components: an exterior wooden box and an interior r-XPS box made from 50% recycled material, with an aim to increase this to 100%. An additional layer of polyethylene was included to meet food safety requirements.

Ms Campogianni presented an evaluation comparing different alternatives based on environmental, economic, and technical criteria. The final design was piloted between June and September 2023 in two areas of Italy, during which both technical and practical evaluations were conducted. The feedback from fishers indicated several positive aspects. They found the two-component system acceptable, praised the wooden box's resistance to sunlight, water, and mechanical stress, and acknowledged the higher resistance of XPS to fragmentation. However, some challenges were noted, including the heavier weight of the wooden box, limited capacity, and the higher initial cost of the reusable system.

Based on the project findings, WWF outlined “Guiding Principles for Zero-Waste Fisheries”, including the need for science-based assessments, context-specific solutions rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, and a risk-reduction mindset. Ms Campogianni concluded by presenting the project's Key Priorities and Recommendations, which included: 1) a call for further efforts to develop food-contact-safe materials that meet regulatory standards; 2) more financial support to enable fishers and other stakeholders to adopt reusable fish boxes and access sustainable products; 3) adjustments to legal frameworks, making them simplified, harmonised, and adapted to facilitate the adoption of sustainable alternatives; 4) enhancing cooperation across the entire supply chain to ensure that all actors are aligned and working towards common goals; and 5) promoting the exchange of best practices and lessons learned to accelerate the transition towards zero-waste fisheries.

- **Exchange of views**

Yannis Pelekanakis (HAPO) requested further details regarding the physical characteristics of the redesigned fish boxes, including their dimensions, weight, cost, and capacity.

Stefania Campogianni (WWF) expressed availability to share the figures. Ms Campogianni explained that the size of the redesigned box had been adjusted to ensure compatibility with existing EPS boxes commonly used in the sector.

Adrien Simonnet (UMF) asked about the industry partners involved in the project. He noted that in France, fishers already use reusable boxes and questioned why single-use options were being promoted when reusable alternatives were available. Mr Simonnet asked about how the new packaging solution would align with the Packaging and Packaging Waste (PPW) Regulation, given that this regulation would soon mandate 100% recyclability, potentially rendering the proposed solution non-compliant.

Stefania Campogianni (WWF) clarified that the project focused on small-scale fisheries, where EPS boxes are heavily used, and recycling infrastructure is often lacking. Ms Campogianni acknowledged that France likely had adequate sanitation facilities to recycle reusable boxes, unlike some other



regions. WWF is working to ensure that fishers can access EU funding to invest in recycling facilities and alternative products, including ongoing work on bio-detergents, which would be an alternative to sanitation machinery. Another project on collection of fishing gear in Italy showed a fragmented situation. The primary objective, she stressed, is to replace EPS where it is currently used and to ensure that an effective waste collection and recycling system is in place. XPX boxes have demonstrated a lower risk of fragmentation than EPS ones.

Javier Ojeda (FEAP) emphasised the urgent need for innovation and new solutions, as the PPW Regulation posed significant challenges for the sector. Mr Ojeda highlighted that EPS boxes remain vital for fish farmers and that the regulation disproportionately affects EU producers while excluding importers. Given that the EU imports more than half of its aquatic products, Mr Ojeda argued that this discrepancy undermines the level playing field. In his view, the new rules would have a very significant socio-economic impact, which should be accounted for.

Stefania Campogianni (WWF) recognised the importance of innovation. Ms Campogianni provided the example of a project in Croatia with biodegradable algae-based boxes, but that still required the establishment of disposal systems. WWF maintains a strong position against replacing one problematic material with another that could create future challenges. She further noted that, regarding imported products, the EU should ensure that international measures align with EU standards, leveraging the ongoing negotiations for a Global Plastics Treaty.

María Luisa Álvarez Blanco (FEDEPESCA) expressed support for Mr Ojeda's intervention, as Spanish packaging legislation showed similar challenges. In her view, EPS was a material with high quality. The issue was the need for an adequate end-of-life management system. Therefore, the focus should be on the implementation of effective waste management and recycling systems for EPS, instead of on solely material substitution.

Stefania Campogianni (WWF) acknowledged the need to balance reduction efforts with practical recycling solutions, particularly to promote reuse instead of single use. A compacting system was cooperating with the project, which reduced the costs of transport. Nevertheless, investments were needed on compacting machines in local markets. There were challenges related to the volume and to the odour. The aim of WWF would be 100% collection of the material.

María Luisa Álvarez Blanco (FEDEPESCA) drew attention to a critical issue related to food safety, explaining that transporters carrying food products cannot simultaneously transport used boxes for recycling, complicating the logistics of sustainable packaging systems.

Patrick Murphy (IS&WFPO) raised concerns about the broader environmental impacts of the materials being proposed, particularly wood. Mr Murphy stressed the importance of ensuring that any alternative packaging solution genuinely represents an improvement over EPS. He asked whether the project had assessed the effectiveness of the new boxes in maintaining fish freshness.

Stefania Campogianni (WWF) responded that, on thermal capacity, the pilot study found no significant differences in performance between XPS and EPS boxes. However, Ms Campogianni expressed doubts regarding the suitability of these boxes for large-scale fisheries. She acknowledged that, in countries with efficient wood recycling systems, wooden boxes could be a viable solution.



While agreeing that plastic boxes remain an effective option, she emphasised that improvements are still needed, particularly in terms of traceability for reusable packaging. WWF plans to conduct another life-cycle assessment as well as stakeholder engagement to explore these issues in more detail. She drew attention to the importance of improving waste management.

Stefan Meyer (Bundesverband Fischindustrie) argued that it would not be possible to implement one solution for all operators and cautioned against overlooking existing systems, such as reusable HDPE boxes. In practice, wood boxes would require special transportation and cleaning, which would be impractical for companies. In terms of food safety, Mr Meyer expressed concern about the need for plastic foils as intermediate layers of plastic. In his view, there should be simple solutions that improve logistics and recyclable without mixing materials. He underscored that the experience of companies should be accounted for.

Stefania Campogianni (WWF) stated that there was space for improvement in the market, particularly in terms of traceability of boxes.

Szilvia Mihálffy (FEAP) agreed that there was a need for innovation in the market. Ms Mihálffy expressed disappointment at the lack of opportunity to exchange with DG ENV representatives on the impact of the new regulation. In her view, there was a lack of an impact assessment. Ms Mihálffy argued that while localised solutions and technical innovations are valuable, the overarching challenge lies at the sectoral level, where no viable solution currently exists.

The Secretary General confirmed that the MAC had reached out to DG ENV to talk about the PPW Regulation in this meeting but had not received a response.

Gerd Heinen (DG MARE) noted that DG MARE would follow up with DG ENV to facilitate further dialogue on the issue.

- **Consideration of the draft advice on “Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation: Impacts of the package reuse targets for the EU, fisheries, aquaculture and fish processing industries”**

The Secretary General outlined the draft advice on the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation. The Secretary General informed that, prior to the meeting, PACT’ALIM and WWF had submitted preliminary feedback. He emphasised the importance of proceeding promptly, as the regulation had already been published in the official journal of the EU.

Yannis Pelekanakis (HAPO) called for the inclusion of a recommendation on the level-playing-field. Mr Pelekanakis committed to sending specific feedback on the matter.

Javier Ojeda (FEAP) agreed with Mr Pelekanakis’s suggestion. Mr Ojeda highlighted the importance of addressing the socio-economic impact of the proposed regulation. In his view, DG ENV could be lacking sector-specific knowledge, particularly on imports and level-playing-field.

Adrien Simonnet (UMF) echoed these concerns, stressing the importance of ensuring a level playing field with third countries. He cautioned that if the regulation prohibits EU operators from using EPS



boxes while imported products continue to be packaged in EPS, it would create significant market distortions and unfair competition.

Szilvia Mihálffy (FEAP) expressed agreement with Mr Simonnet's concerns regarding the importance of ensuring equal standards for both EU and third-country products.

Laure Guillevic (WWF) acknowledged the need for compromise for the draft to proceed to the Executive Committee and asked about the timeline for finalising the advice, given the urgency of the matter.

The Secretary General responded that the timeline would depend on how quickly remaining differences could be resolved. The Secretary General launching a formal one-week urgent written procedure, once informal consensus was reached among members.

- **Way forward**

The Chair proposed that, following an informal exchange with the most interested members, the draft advice would be circulated to the Working Group via an urgent written procedure, providing all members with the possibility to provide feedback. After reaching agreement, the text would be put forward to the Executive Committee for consideration and potential adoption.

AOB

None.

DRAFT



Summary of action items

- Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation:
 - o Following an informal exchange with the most interested members, draft advice on “Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation: Impacts of the package reuse targets for the EU, fisheries, aquaculture and fish processing industries” to be considered via urgent written procedure.

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Attendance List

Representative	Organisation	Role
Alessandro Manghisi	Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC)	Member
Alexandre Bonneau	SNCE	Member
Alonso Abreu Lozano	Asociación de Armadores Punta del Moral (OPP80)	Member
Amélie Laurent	Oceana	Member
Àngels Segura Unió	AECOC	Member
Anna Rokicka	Polish Association of Fish Processors (PSPR)	Member
Aodh O'Donnell	Irish Fish Producers Organisations (IFPO)	Member
Benoît Thomassen	Federation of European Aquaculture Producers (FEAP)	Chair
Caroline Gamblin	PACT'ALIM	Member
Catherine Pons	Federation of European Aquaculture Producers (FEAP)	Member
Christine Absil	Good Fish Foundation	Member
Dominic Rihan	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation (KFO)	Member
Fabijan Hrvatin Peronja	Ribarska Zadruga Friška Riba	Member
Gaetane Le Breuil	European Fishmeal	Member
Garazi Rodríguez	APROMAR	Member
Gemma Laso	Inxenia	Observer
Gerd Heinen	European Commission	Expert
Giorgio Rimoldi	Unione Italiana Food / ANCIT	Member
Giuseppe Scordella	COPA-COGECA	Member
Hommel Kassa	SNCE	Member
Guus Pastoor	EU Fish Processors and Traders Association (AIPCE) / European Federation of National Organizations of Importers and Exporters of Fish (CEP)	Member
Iñigo Azqueta Ruiz-Gallardón	ANFACO-CECOPECA	Member
Isabel Alonzo Cabezas	Spain	Observer
Jacinta María Ramírez Ramírez	OPP72	Member
Jarek Zieliński	Polish Fish Producers Association (PFPA)	Member



Representative	Organisation	Role
Javier Ojeda	Federation of European Aquaculture Producers (FEAP)	Member
Jean-Marie Robert	Les Pêcheurs de Bretagne	Member
Jens Hons Mathiesen	Danish Seafood Association	Member
Jérémie Souben	FEDOPA	Member
Joanna Żurawska-Łagoda	Poland	Observer
João Pereira	FRUCOM	Member
Joe Emmanuel Seck	France	Observer
John Lynch	Irish South and East Fish Producers Organisation (ISEFPO)	Member
José Basilio Otero Rodríguez	Federación Nacional de Cofradías de Pescadores (FNCP)	Member
José Carlos Escalera Aguilar	FECOPESCA	Member
Juan Manuel Trujillo Castillo	ETF	Member
Juana Parada	OR.PA.GU.	Member
Julien Daudu	Environmental Justice Foundation	Member
Julien Lamothe	European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO) / ANOP	Member
Juliette Marguerite	European Salmon Smokers Association (ESSA)	Member
Jules Danto	European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO)	Member
Justine Marrot	Aquaculture Advisory Council (AAC)	Observer
Justyna Radzewicz	Poland	Observer
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
Mariano García García	Federación Andaluza de Cofradías de Pescadores	Member
Maximilian Schwarz	Market Advisory Council (MAC)	Secretariat
Niall Gerlitz	European Commission	Expert
Pablo Cadarso	CONXEMAR	Member



Representative	Organisation	Role
Patrick Murphy	Irish South & West Fish Producers Organisation	Member
Pedro Reis Santos	Market Advisory Council (MAC)	Secretariat
Pierre Commère	PACT'ALIM / Eurothon	Member
Pim Visser	NOVA	Member
Poul Melgaard Jensen	Danish Seafood Association	Member
Pruska Singhapol	Environmental Justice Foundation	Member
Roberto Alonso	ANFACO-CECOPECA / FEICOPESCA	Member
Sarah Hautier	EuroCommerce	Member
Sergio López García	OPP7 Burela	Member
Séverine Renault	AND International	Expert
Stefan Meyer	Bundesverband der deutschen Fischindustrie und des Fischgrosshandels e.V.	Member
Thibault Pivetta	European Molluscs' Producers Association (EMPA)	Member
Trond Davidsen	Norwegian Seafood Federation	Observer
Vanya Vulperhorst	Oceana	Member
Veerle Vanheusen	European Commission	Expert
Xavier Pires	ALIF	Member
Stefania Campogiani	WWF	Member
Szilvia Mihalfy	Federation of European Aquaculture Producers (FEAP)	Member
Yannis Pelekanakis	HAPO	Member
Yves Reichling	FeedbackEU	Member

