

Executive Committee

Minutes

Tuesday, 1 July 2025 (13:30 – 15:30 CET)

Zoom

Interpretation in EN, ES, FR

Welcome from the Chair, Yobana Bermúdez

Adoption of the agenda: Adopted

Action points

Presentation

- **State-of-play of the action points of the last meeting - information**
- Planning of Meetings:
 - Secretariat to circulate additional information on the organisation of the September 2025 meeting in Gran Canaria (Spain).
 - Registration for the joint General Assembly meeting opened.
 - Preliminary draft agenda and information about the venue circulated.
- Strategy for EU External Fisheries Action:
 - Once the Commission's call for evidence is published, Secretariat to circulate a questionnaire to collect input from the members for the preparation of advice by Working Group 2.
 - Launch of the Commission's call for evidence still pending

Work Programme of Year 9 (2024-2025)

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

The Secretary General delivered an update on the implementation of the deliverables under the ninth operational year (2024-2025). The operational year runs from October to September. The Secretary General recalled that, to receive the annual grant provided by the European Commission, the MAC must meet at least 50% of the set deliverables (advice and meetings).



The Secretary General highlighted the eight overarching priorities set in the work programme: (1) Common Fisheries Policy & Common Market Organisation, (2) Trade Agreements & Trade Policy Instruments, (3) Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing, (4) Forced Labour, (5) European Market Observatory for Fisheries and Aquaculture (EUMOFA), (6) Landing Obligation, (7) Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF), and (8) Fisheries Control Regulation.

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

- Consumer information on fishery and aquaculture products, particularly in the context of the HORECA Sector (jointly with AAC): A recommendation on “consumer information on fishery and aquaculture products, particularly in the context of the HORECA Sector” was adopted on 23 October 2024 jointly with the Aquaculture Advisory Council (AAC).
- Annual Economic Report on the EU Fishing Fleet: Advice on “STECF’s Annual Economic Report on the EU Fishing Fleet (2025)” was adopted on 27 March 2025.
- Evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation: Work was initiated, and a written consultation of the Working Groups was ongoing.
- Evaluation Common Market Organisation (under the overall full evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation): In line with the Commission’s public consultation, the topic was being addressed under the draft advice on the evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy.
- Annual report on the implementation of the landing obligation: Due to the lack of developments since the last piece of advice on the topic (September 2025), no new work was launched.
- Market-related aspects of the revised Fisheries Control Regulation: Advice on “Upcoming Delegated Act on Additional Rules for Traceability of Fresh and Frozen Fishery and Aquaculture Products and Marking of Lots” was adopted on 12 March 2025.
- Work Programme of EUMOFA, including suggestions of case studies and talks: Work was initiated, and a written consultation of Working Group 1 was ongoing.
- Fights against IUU Fishing & Forced Labour, Due diligence: Advice on “Fishing in the Outermost Regions” was adopted on 21 May 2025 jointly with the Outermost Regions Advisory Council. Additionally, advice on “Urgent need for effective implementation of EU import control rules across Member States” was adopted on 23 June 2025 jointly with the Long Distance Advisory Council.
- Trade (e.g., FTAs, ATQs, GSP): Advice on “Integration of sustainability criteria under the regime of Autonomous Tariff Quotas for certain fishery products” was adopted on 28 April 2025.
- Economic Report on the EU Aquaculture Sector: As discussed by Working Group 1 , a proposal of questionnaire was prepared by the Secretariat and shared with AAC Secretariat for potential joint work



The Secretary General emphasised that the MAC was on course to meet the commitments made under the annual work programme.

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

The Finance Officer delivered an update on the implementation of the budget of the ninth financial year (2024-2025), focusing on the period of October 2024 to June 2025. The Finance Officer provided an overview of the income, budgeted and actual, from the European Commission, members, and Member States. There was also income from other sources due to reimbursements from the joint meetings with other Advisory Councils, interest from a savings account, reimbursements from participating in meetings of the Advisory Board of the European Fisheries Control Agency, and remuneration from the Secretary General's involvement in the External Advisory Board of the Verifish project. He also provided an overview of the budgeted expenses in comparison with the actual expenses across the various budgetary headings.

The Finance Officer emphasised that the implementation of the annual budget was positive.

The role of social, economic and environmental standards in safeguarding fair competition for all aquatic food products and improving food security

- **Presentation of draft own initiative report by MEP Paulo do Nascimento Cabral, Member of Committee on Fisheries, European Parliament**

Paulo do Nascimento Cabral (European Parliament) delivered a presentation on the draft report "The role of social, economic and environmental standards in safeguarding fair competition for all aquatic food products and improving food security". Mr Nascimento Cabral informed that the period for amendments in the Committee on Fisheries was ongoing. The report would be voted at the next meeting of the Committee.

Mr Nascimento Cabral highlighted that the ocean provides nutritious, low-impact proteins. While the European Union is the second largest market of fishery and aquaculture products in the world, the Union relies on 70% of supply from imports. He expressed concern about the possibility of products entering the market without meeting the EU standards. In his view, it was necessary for the European Commission to go beyond a focus on environmental standards, but also to account for social and economic dimensions, while also accounting for the food security risks and the significant pressures faced by EU fishers.

Mr Nascimento Cabral argued that both internal actions and cooperation with third countries were needed, since it would not be feasible to suddenly stop imports. There should be competitiveness in the sector, while maintaining a level playing field and fairness. Through international cooperation, third countries could move closer to the standards of the EU. At the same time, it was necessary to consider that, according to the latest Eurobarometer survey, price was the main priority for EU citizens.

Mr Nascimento Cabral called for guaranteed simplified access to financing by EU fishers, for example via the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund. Furthermore, there should be targeted support for coastal regions and to the Outermost Regions to maintain vibrant coastal communities, for example through a fund similar to the POSEI scheme. He argued that funding should cover issues such as increased safety at sea and more training for fishers.



Mr Nascimento Cabral emphasised that Article 17 of the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation could be better implemented to achieve a better setting of the Total Allowable Catches. When setting these, it was necessary to account for the three pillars of sustainability. He argued that the underutilisation of fishing quotas needed to be further addressed. Overall, it was necessary to address the concerns of artisanal and small-scale fishers. In the case of the Outermost Regions, the POSEI scheme should be brought back to support incomes and the renewal of the fishing fleet, which would allow for increased sustainability.

Mr Nascimento Cabral suggested the development of a certificate or a label to clearly identify the EU origin of fishery and aquaculture products and, in the case of imports, the respect for the EU's sustainability standards. In his view, such an approach would ensure total transparency and empower consumers in their purchasing decisions.

Mr Nascimento Cabral, on the external dimension, stated that the European Ocean Pact could be used to encourage third countries, via diplomatic means, to comply with the EU standards, including through the ratification of the relevant international agreements. The Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements should also account for the described issues. In his view, it was necessary to maintain a zero-tolerance in the fight against Illegal, Unregulated, and Undocumented (IUU) fishing, while also protecting labour rights.

Mr Nascimento Cabral underscored that the Autonomous Tariff Quotas regime could be a good tool to ensure compliance by third countries with the EU standards and requirements. In his view, countries with “yellow” and “red cards” should be excluded from the trade preferences. Stronger measures should be applied concerning third countries not compliant with the EU standards. The Due Diligence Directive would also be relevant in these efforts. He stressed the importance of traceability of information across the fisheries and aquaculture value chain as well as the implementation of the CATCH IT system. He highlighted the relevance of harmonising import controls across Member States to avoid “forum shopping” across EU ports.

Mr Nascimento Cabral committed to, under the negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework, fight for maintaining specific funding for fisheries and aquaculture, which would also have to consider the evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy. He also suggested the setting-up of a “Blue Foods Action Plan”. to emphasise the importance of the fisheries and aquaculture sector.

Mr Nascimento Cabral stressed the importance of developing the EU aquaculture sector, especially since there was limited room to increase EU catches, which were based on stable quotas. He argued that it was also necessary to reduce food waste, including in the context of fish meal production. In his view, the promotion of the growth of sustainable aquaculture in the EU could also reduce external dependencies.

- **Exchange of views**

Janne Posti (Conxemar), concerning the suggestion to exclude “yellow carded” countries from the Autonomous Tariff Quotas regime, argued that mixing this regime together with the IUU Regulation would not be appropriate, as it would become a collective punishment to the operators of third countries. Mr Posti exemplified that there were cases of “yellow carded” countries with certified fisheries, for example by the Marine Stewardship Council. Additionally, the “carding system” did not account for aquaculture production by the operators of third countries, which could be fully compliant with the EU requirements.



Katarina Sipic (AIPCE-CEP) thanked Mr Nascimento Cabral for his availability to meet bilaterally at a previous opportunity, adding that the draft report touched on the main points affecting fisheries and aquaculture policy. Concerning the allegations that imports put pressure on EU fishers, Ms Sipic argued that it was the EU that put pressure on the EU fishers through the development of an uneven level-playing-field. While there were good intentions from EU legislators when setting high sustainability standards, these were then used to blame third countries. She recalled that the EU consciously reduced the EU fishing fleet, including through decommissioning schemes, to meet sustainability objectives.

Ms Sipic underscored that, across the world, operators of the fisheries and aquaculture sector lived with very limited daily income. Therefore, in her view, it was necessary to consider the impact of the proposed measures on developing countries. Strong international players, such as the EU, should not “punish” less powerful countries. She argued that the “yellow cards” should be used to strengthen cooperation with third countries.

On the suggestions for the Autonomous Tariff Quotas regime, Ms Sipic recalled that “red carded” countries were banned from exporting fishery and aquaculture products into the EU market, so they were automatically excluded from the mentioned regime. In relation to “yellow carded” countries, she agreed with Mr Posti that the different realities of third countries needed to be duly considered. She added that the regime was actually a tax exemption for EU operators, so its removal would translate into increased prices for EU consumers.

Ms Sipic emphasised the need for a strategic approach. In the case of labelling to differentiate the origin of the products and compliance with EU standards, she recalled that EU operators have investments in third countries. Fishery products could be caught in the same FAO fishing areas by fleets with different flags, so officially different origin, but in fact without biological differences. She added that ensuring EU production was a matter of national security, so incentives were essential.

Paulo do Nascimento Cabral (European Parliament) responded that all available tools, including the Autonomous Tariff Quotas regime and the IUU Regulation, should be used, since it was not possible to force third countries to adopt the same rules as the EU. Mr Nascimento Cabral recalled the importance for third countries of accessing the EU market. While the Autonomous Tariff Quotas regime lowered the cost for the EU, it also created opportunities for the operators of third countries. He exemplified that the EU was negotiating a free trade agreement with Thailand, even though Thailand was collecting raw material from various “yellow carded” countries, which could then enter the EU market. He added that the issue would be further clarified via amendments to the draft report.

Mr Nascimento Cabral acknowledged that the EU set the high standards and decommissioning schemes, as the leading continent defending the environment, even when representing a small part of global emissions. He argued that there was a lack of alignment with competitiveness objectives, so improvements to the level playing field were needed, since the EU has a very sustainable production. In his view, when setting fishing quotas, ICES and the European Commission should take into account the three pillars of sustainability. The aim should be to avoid punishing fishers, destabilising coastal communities, and impacting generational renewal. Multiannual fishing quotas should be set to avoid uncertainty in the sector.



Mr Nascimento Cabral highlighted that had recently met with the Spanish mussels sector. The sector faced misleading consumer information in the market, since there were different species imported from third countries at a lower cost, leading to a significant loss of the market share of Spanish producers. The mentioned issue would have to be addressed in the context of the negotiations of the EU-Chile free trade agreement. In his view, clear labelling would facilitate purchasing decisions of consumers.

Katarina Sipic (AIPCE-CEP) underscored the importance of strategic investment, particularly by international financial institutions and agencies, including both the UN and the European Central Bank, to help third countries in their development.

Marine Cusa (Oceana), on behalf of her organisation and of EJF, recognised that the EU established stringent requirements, but added that it meant that the EU was a leader on many fronts. While the EU production would not be sufficient to meet the consumption demands of EU citizens, imported products should meet the same requirements as EU products. She called for strong traceability systems and increased transparency.

Pierre Commère (AIPCE) drew attention to the importance of food security in the EU. Mr Commère recalled that the EU market depended significantly on supply from third countries. Therefore, traders and processors played an important role in the selection of the products to meet the needs of EU consumers. He argued that, even though the report aims to protect EU producers, it should not negatively impact the competitiveness of the EU value chain. He recognised that it was essential to fight against forced labour and against IUU fishing. In his view, there should be further support for importers and processors.

Paulo do Nascimento Cabral (European Parliament) recognised the importance of strategic investments by financial institutions, while the capital markets union was also important to ensure investments by the private sector. Mr Nascimento Cabral stated that importers that bring quality products to the EU market should be rewarded. The aim was not to create difficulties in the value chain, but to use the available tools to push third countries to improve their standards. He exemplified that the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements could be used to improve storage conditions in third countries through the creation of infrastructure. He added that it was important to ensure transparency in all the funding provided.

Mr Nascimento Cabral emphasised the need to ensure that the EU continues to have fishers, since EU fishers continuously express scepticism about a future in the sector. According to a recent study on the absorption rates of the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund, funding was not reaching producers, which demonstrated the need for simplification. He drew attention to the ambitions set in the European Ocean Pact, including the ratification of the BBNJ Agreement. At the same time, the recent decision of the Court of Justice of the European Union concerning the banning of bottom trawling in Marine Protected Areas placed further pressure on EU fishers.

Mr Nascimento Cabral argued that EU consumers should be aware of their purchases. Consumers should be able to know the origin and the quality of the products, particularly since some consumers might favour EU production or short supply chains. In his view, it was important to value local fishers and coastal communities, particularly to address the ongoing loss of local heritage. At the same time, it was necessary to recognise that external sources of proteins will be needed to supply the EU market.

Work Programme of Year 10 (2025-2026)



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

The Secretary General recalled that the tenth operational year would run from 1 October 2025 to 30 September 2026. 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 would have to be submitted to DG MARE before end of July 2025. In line with the Belgian Code of Companies and Associations, the work programme would be formally approved by the General Assembly at the January 2026 meeting.

The Secretary General explained that the proposed overarching priorities for Year 10 (2025-2026) were similar to the previous ones of the previous operational year. “Common Fisheries Policy & Common Market Organisation”, “Trade Agreements & Trade Policy Instruments”, “Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing”, “Forced Labour”, “European Market Observatory for Fisheries and Aquaculture (EUMOFA)”, “Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF)”, and “Fisheries Control Regulation” were maintained as priorities. Following preliminary feedback from MARE A4, “Competitiveness - simplification and reduction of administrative burden” was added, in line with the ongoing priorities of the European Commission. The “European Ocean Pact” was also added as a priority.

The Secretary General further explained that the “work priorities” section essentially outlined the areas of competence of each of the three Working Groups. Under the “other possible issues of interest”, reference was made to several ongoing overarching initiatives, namely the European Ocean Pact, competitiveness, the 2040 Vision for Fisheries and Aquaculture, the Strategy for External EU Fisheries Action, the energy transition of the EU’s fisheries and aquaculture sector, and the development of indicators for fishery and aquaculture products, dealing with environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

The Secretary General outlined the ten planned recommendations. Several of the suggested topics were recurrent topics, namely on “Annual Economic Report on the EU Fishing Fleet”, “Work Programme of EUMOFA”, “Fights against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing & Forced Labour, Due diligence”, “Trade (e.g. FTAs, ATQs, GSP)”, and “Economic Report on the EU processing sector”. A new periodical topic was suggested: “FAO’s Committee on Fisheries (EU’s mandate)”. The other topics related to specific initiatives, namely on “Strategy for International EU Fisheries Action”, “Evaluation of the CFP and of the CMO”, “Market-related aspects of the revised Fisheries Control Regulation”, and “Competitiveness – simplification and reduction administrative burden”. 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 also outlined the planned meetings. The planning was similar to previous years with meetings in November, January, March, June, and September, alternating between meetings online and meetings fully in person in Brussels. In the case of January 2026 meetings, there was the possibility of holding the meetings in Oostende, following the availability expressed by VVV to organise a visit to the local fish auction and aquaculture development facilities. For June 2026, the Aquaculture Advisory Council expressed interest in the organisation of a joint event to celebrate the 10th anniversary of both Advisory Councils.

The Executive Committee agreed to proceed with the submission of the proposed draft work programme to the European Commission.



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

The Finance Officer 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, the budget for the October 2025 to September 2026 period was made under the assumption that the annual contribution provided by DG MARE would increase by 2%. He recalled that, once the annual lump-sum grant was approved, if needed, it was possible to transfer funding across different budgetary headings.

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, including the difference in comparison with the previous operational year. In general, there was a 2% increase across the various categories to reflect inflation. The costs with "staff" increased by 4.11% to reflect a legal requirement, as indicated by the payroll agency, to provide an end-of-year bonus to staff. The "participation in meetings" heading was increased by 4.4% to reflect increasing travel costs of the members and of the Secretariat. The "operating costs" were increased by 18.2% to reflect the recording of office rental costs for the Administrative Officer and the Finance Officer under the services contract with EBCD, which were previously recorded in the "staff" heading.

The Finance Officer also provided an overview of the expected income, which reflected the 2% increase in the annual contribution of the European Commission. Following variations in the number of members, a 1.81% increase in membership fees was expected. An increase of 23.33% in the contributions from Member States was foreseen due to the increasing number of commitments to the voluntary provision of financial support. In comparison with the previous budget, the proposed budget represented a growth of 3.67%.

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

European Ocean Pact

- **Consideration of draft letter proposed by CCRUP on the potential new Advisory Council for small-scale fisheries**

The Secretary General informed that the communication on the European Ocean Pact mentions that the Commission will consider the establishment of a new Advisory Council dedicated to small-scale fisheries. The Secretariat of the Outermost Regions Advisory Council (CCRUP) took the initiative of proposing a letter to express concerns about such an initiative and invited the other Advisory Councils to consider subscribing.

The Secretary General recalled that the establishment of the Advisory Councils was mainly based on the principle of regionalisation of fisheries management. The membership of various Advisory Councils, such as the CCRUP, the Mediterranean Advisory Council, and the South Western Waters Advisory Council, was primarily composed of small-scale fleet representatives. Therefore, these Advisory Councils would be particularly impacted by the establishment of such a new Advisory Council.

The Secretary General underscored the overarching aim of the Advisory Councils to bring stakeholders together to develop consensus recommendations. Therefore, in his view, it would be more appropriate to



integrate the representatives of the small-scale fleet within the existing Advisory Councils. As mentioned in the proposal of draft letter, Article 4(3) of the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2017/1575, already foresees a specific provision to increase the number of seats in the Executive Committees of the Advisory Councils to ensure appropriate representation of small-scale fleets. He suggested to also mention Article 2(h) of Annex III of the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation to highlight the responsibility of Member States in determining the membership composition of the Advisory Councils.

The Secretary General suggested that, if the Executive Committee was in agreement with the initiative, to proceed with a written procedure to confirm the support from the MAC, once the final version of the draft letter was made available by the CCRUP Secretariat.

The Executive Committee agreed with the development of a joint letter on the potential establishment of a new Advisory Council for small-scale fisheries.



Summary of action points

- Work Programme of Year 10 (2025-2026):
 - Secretariat to proceed with the formal submission of the draft work programme and of the draft budget to the European Commission.
- European Ocean Pact:
 - Once available, Executive Committee to consider draft joint letter on the potential establishment of a new Advisory Council for small-scale fisheries.



Attendance List

Representative	Organisation	Role
Camille Maisonneuve	Market Advisory Council (MAC)	Secretariat
Caroline Gamblin	PACT'ALIM	Observer
Cristina Borges	Portugal	Observer
Dawlat Bik	Market Advisory Council (MAC)	Secretariat
Gaëtane Le Breuil	European Fishmeal	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
Jean-Marie Robert	Les Pêcheurs de Bretagne	Member
Joanna Żurawska-Łagoda	Poland	Observer
Justina Radzewic	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
Mafalda Freitas	European Parliament	Observer
Marek Danikowski	EU Fish Processors and Traders Association (AIPCE) / European Federation of National Organizations of Importers and Exporters of Fish (CEP)	Member
María Luisa Álvarez Blanco	FEDEPESCA	Member
Marine Cusa	Oceana	Member
Paulo do Nascimento Cabral	European Parliament	Observer
Pedro Reis Santos	Market Advisory Council (MAC)	Secretariat
Pierre Commère	EU Fish Processors and Traders Association (AIPCE)	Member
Tamas Eisenbeck	EU Fish Processors and Traders Association (AIPCE) / European Federation of National Organizations of Importers and Exporters of Fish (CEP)	Member
Yobana Bermúdez	European Federation of National Organizations of Importers and Exporters of Fish (CEP)	Chair



