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# Scientific Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) – Evaluation of Work Plans for data collection and data transmission Issues (STECF-23-16)

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## **Abstract**

Commission Decision of 25 February 2016 setting up a Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries, C(2016) 1084, OJ C 74, 26.2.2016, p. 4–10. The Commission may consult the group on any matter relating to marine and fisheries biology, fishing gear technology, fisheries economics, fisheries governance, ecosystem effects of fisheries, aquaculture or similar disciplines. This report was reviewed by the STECF at its 74th plenary meeting held in Brussels, Belgium, from 13-17 November 2023.

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## **SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC COMMITTEE FOR FISHERIES (STECF) – Evaluation of Work Plans for data collection and data transmission issues (STECF-23-16)**

### **Request to the STECF**

STECF is requested to review the report of the STECF Expert Working Group meeting, evaluate the findings and make any appropriate comments and recommendations.

### **STECF comments**

STECF notes that EWG 23-16 met virtually from 23 to 27 October 2023 to:

- evaluate updates to the Member States' (MS) national Work Plan (WP) under the Data Collection Framework (DCF) for the years 2024 and beyond (within the multi-annual period 2022-2024(2027))
- evaluate the Regional Work Plans (RWP) submitted by the Regional Coordination Group (RCG), in accordance with Article 10 of Regulation (EU) No 2017/1004
- evaluate Data Transmission issues (DTi) from the 2023 Fleet Economics data call (EWG 23-03 and EWG 23-07)
- test and provide input on the DCF IT platform

STECF considers that the EWG adequately addressed the TORs and has the following specific comments on the ToRs addressed by EWG 23-16.

#### **1. Evaluation of Member States' Work Plan updates**

STECF notes that 5 Member States (MSs) submitted amended WPs for 2024 (within the multi-annual period 2022-2024(2027)). The amendments covered the different sections of the WP, as clearly presented by the overview of the evaluations in the EWG report.

STECF notes that a 'ping-pong' information exchange was conducted as in previous years. Member States were requested to reply to the issues identified by the EWG experts during the meeting. These exchanges closed most issues by the end of the meeting, leaving only a few issues that had to be dealt with bilaterally between the Commission and Member States. The exception was France, where some issues still remained that could not be closed during the EWG and were therefore re-assessed during PLEN 23-03.

On request by DG MARE, STECF re-assessed the French WP update based on revised versions of the text and tables received during PLEN 23-03 and added a column to the EWG assessment grid (electronic annex 1), reflecting the STECF observations on the latest WP amendments. In the re-assessment of the WP, STECF concludes that France has rectified the issues reported by the EWG, leaving only very minor editorial amendments necessary for the adoption of the WP.

STECF notes that the evaluation sheets (assessment grids) and guidance for evaluators developed by STECF during 2020-2022 were used. The detailed outcomes of the evaluations by each Member State were reported in the evaluation sheets (assessment grid) to keep track of the adjustments and comments made during the multiannual WP evaluation process.

STECF observes that some Member States provided an overview of the sections in the WP that have been amended and all Member States used the colour/track changes to highlight the revisions in the WP text and tables. This was found helpful for the evaluation.

STECF notes that it is useful to give feedback on inconsistencies that are noticed after the initial review of the WP, even though the WP is already formally accepted.

#### **2. Evaluation of the Regional Work Plans**



STECF notes that the EWG evaluated the 5 Regional Work Plans (RWPs) that were provided by the corresponding Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs). The Large Pelagics (LP) RWP and the Economic Issues (ECON) RWP were evaluated by the EWG for the first time, whereas for others, this was the second for the Mediterranean and Black Sea (Med&BS) or third evaluation in the case of the Baltic and North Atlantic, North Sea & Eastern Arctic (NANSEA).

STECF notes that the EWG very much appreciated the work done by the RCGs to propose the RWPs, as they are well-structured, clearly formulated, and came with detailed annexes.

STECF notes the importance of integrating the RWP within the WP submission, as the latter is the only legally binding document and is required for the evaluation of the Annual Report (AR). The linkage between the RWP and the WP requires modifications to the WP templates and of the Master Code List. STECF notes that major modifications of the current RWP should be discussed in the forthcoming ISSG RWP meeting, scheduled early December 2023. Because of the restricted timeline of action to implement the RWP 2025-2027 in 2024, the EWG proposed interim solutions to provide a link with the RWP without modifications of the WP.

STECF notes that the EWG identified some inconsistencies between the different RWPs for a specific section as well as between Member States within an RWP. The EWG notes that there should be a consistent approach and maximum effort to follow the guidelines, as this is essential for the evaluation of the WP and AR.

STECF notes that the EWG identified a difference in the degree of completeness between the RWPs for one specific section relating to recreational fisheries.

STECF notes that the EWG provided overarching and detailed comments on each RWP that will be forwarded to the respective RCG to improve the RWPs.

### 3. Evaluation of Data Transmission issues (DTi)

STECF observes that the EWG evaluated 31 Data Transmission issues (DTi) from the 2023 Fleet Economics data call (EWG 23-03 and 23-07), which is less than the number of issues reported in the previous two years (48 issues in 2022 and 60 issues in 2021).

STECF observes that following the updated DTMT guidance and decision tree (version October 2023), most of the issues (19 out of 31), were assessed as 'follow up needed' and require in most cases (12 out of 19) a follow up/an upload of the corrected data in the following data call by the Member State.

STECF observes that according to the guidelines, the assessment option 'follow-up needed' encompasses issues in which Member States did not answer the question, the comment from the Member State to the issue is unclear and the information provided by end-users and Member State is contradictory. Additionally, the assessment criteria 'follow-up needed' also includes Data Transmission issues where Member States did not submit data or submitted incorrect data but indicated that the data/corrected data would be submitted in the next data call. To further improve the assessment of DT issues, STECF suggests that the DTMT guidance document and the decision tree is updated accordingly:

- o The DT issue should only be assessed as '**follow-up needed**' when Member States did not answer the question, the comment from the Member State to the issue is unclear, and the information provided by end-users and the Member State is contradictory.
- o If the Member State indicates that the issue (incorrect or missing data) can be resolved in the next data call, the DT issue should be assessed as '**unsatisfactory-to be revised**'. This option will more clearly indicate that missing or incorrect data might have had an impact on the end-user's work but that the issue will be solved by the Member State in the next data submission.
- o If the Member State is not able to re-upload correct or missing data, the issue should be assessed as '**unsatisfactory**'.
- o The issue type (quality, coverage or timeliness) should be added to the decision tree to provide clarity.

#### **4. DCF IT platform**

STECF observes that the EWG carried out intensive testing of the DCF IT platform for submitting and evaluating the WPs, by uploading new, already existing as well as intentionally modified WPs.

STECF notes that the EWG was overall very positive about the DCF IT platform in terms of user friendliness, the ability to explore tables, text boxes and list of annexes in parallel and the facility to do auto-formatting checks.

STECF observes that some of the data validation rules which are essential to the DCF IT platform for the evaluation of WPs and subsequently ARs are still under development.

STECF observes that there are still some inconsistencies reported by the EWG in the error list and notes that the EWG should provide comments to DG MARE on possible improvements and suggestions.

#### **STECF conclusions**

STECF endorses the outcomes of EWG 23-16 presented during STECF PLEN 23-03 and concludes that all ToRs were appropriately addressed.

STECF acknowledges that the STECF WP evaluation was simplified by the provision of a summary table by some Member States, clearly identifying the sections that have been amended and highlighting the revised parts in the text and tables. STECF concludes that this common approach is very useful and should be followed by all Member States for future evaluations.

STECF concludes that within the multi-annual WP evaluations, it is useful to give feedback on inconsistencies that are noticed after the initial review of the WP, even though the WP is already formally accepted.

STECF concludes that a lot of effort has been made to improve the regional coordination tasks and that this is reflected in the comprehensive, detailed and well-structured evaluated RWPs.

STECF concludes that the EWG based the assessment of DT issues on the revised DTMT guidance (version October 2023), including the new column 'follow-up responsibility'.

STECF concludes that the DTMT assessment option 'unsatisfactory-to be revised', for those cases where the Member State indicates that the corrected or missing data will be submitted in the next data call should be added.

STECF concludes that the decision tree has proven to be very useful in the DTi assessment. However, STECF considers that it can be further improved following assessment at the next Plenary.

STECF concludes that the functionality of the DCF IT platform is already well advanced, but it needs further development by DG MARE based on the EWG comments and suggestions for improvement.

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## **REPORT TO THE STECF**

### **EXPERT WORKING GROUP ON Evaluation of Work Plans for data collection and data transmission issues (EWG-23-16)**

**Virtual meeting, 23-27 October 2023**

This report does not necessarily reflect the view of the STECF and the European Commission and in no way anticipates the Commission's future policy in this area

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The STECF Expert Working Group (EWG) 23-16 met virtually from 23 to 27 October 2023 to (i) evaluate Member States' (MS) national Work Plan (WP) updates under the Data Collection Framework (DCF) for the year 2024 (within the multi-annual period 2022-2024), (ii) evaluate Data Transmission issues (DTi), (iii) comment on the DCF IT platform.

The work was conducted by 29 independent experts (see the list of participants in section 6). The Terms of Reference are given below.

### **1.1 Terms of Reference for EWG-23-16**

#### **Background**

Article 6 of the Data Collection Framework (DCF) Regulation (EU) 1004/2017 requires the Member States to submit to the Commission a national Work Plan (WP) for approval. It requires the Commission to request STECF to evaluate the WPs prior to their approval.

Article 9 of the Data Collection Framework (DCF) Regulation (EU) 1004/2017 allows the Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs) to submit to the Commission regional Work Plans (RWP) for approval. It requires the Commission to request STECF to evaluate the RWPs prior to their approval.

Article 11 of the Data Collection Framework (DCF) Regulation (EU) 1004/2017 requires the Member States to submit to the Commission an annual report (AR) on the implementation of their national Work Plans (WPs); and requires STECF to evaluate the quality of the data collected by the Member States.

In preparation for the STECF assessment, STECF EWG 23-16 will be convened on 23-27 October 2023. EWG 23-16 will evaluate revised WPs 2024(-2027), and 31 data transmission issues from the 2023 Fleet Economics data call (EWG 23-03 and EWG 23-07). All issues have been reported in the Data Transmission Monitoring Tool (DTMT).

The number of submitted WPs will be confirmed on 17 October, as the submission deadline is 15 October 2023. First regional work plans (RWP) for several RCGs will be submitted for the STECF evaluation.

In the first half of 2023, one STECF expert group reported 31 data transmission issues: EWG 23-03 on data from the 2023 Fleet Economics data call. The data were used by EWG 23-07 to draft the Annual Economic Report.

#### **Request to EWG 23-16**

EWG 23-16 is requested to:

*ToR 1: Evaluate the revised WPs 2022-2024(2027) and RWPs*

Experts are requested to evaluate the WPs submitted by MS and the RWPs submitted by the Regional Coordination Group, in accordance with Article 10 of Regulation (EU) No 2017/1004, considering:

- the conformity of the WPs with the contents of Articles 6 and 9 of the DCF Regulation, and with the EU MAP from 2022 onwards,
- the scientific relevance of the data covered by the WPs for the purposes laid down in Article 1(1) of the DCF Regulation, and the quality of the proposed methods and procedures,
- the conformity with the format and guidelines on the WP template (for the national work plans).

The experts should pay particular attention if the MS considered the comments provided by STECF EWG 21-17 and the Commission during the WP 2022-2024(2027) assessment, as well as the STECF

assessment of the WP amendments (EWG 22-18), and of 2022 AR (EWG 23-08). The experts should agree on evaluation criteria and format for the Regional Work Plans.

During the EWG 23-16, the experts will communicate to the MS (via the Commission) outstanding issues that require clarification and/or resubmission. The MS will provide explanations and resubmit the WPs if necessary. The communication will be streamlined in a dedicated feedback table, provided in Teams by the Commission. The exchanges with the RCG will take place after the EWG 23-16.

The experts will use the evaluation grid (background document 2). They should make sure that the language used in the evaluation is neutral, subject-related and that the comments are self-explanatory and clear. The comments are to be based on factual data. More guidance is included in the stand-alone document of assessment criteria (background document 3), and in the guidelines on the WP/AR templates (background document 4).

#### *ToR 2: Evaluate DTi from the 2023 Fleet Economics data call (EWG 23-04 and EWG 23-07)*

Regarding data transmission issues (DTi), EWG 23-16 is requested to focus on the issues from the 2023 Fleet Economics data call (EWG 23-03 and EWG 23-07) recorded in the DTMT (31 issues reported).

The experts are requested to use the DTMT guidelines for the evaluation, and to provide feedback on the guidance if necessary. The DTMT table and guidance have been modified in 2023, to better capture the follow-up that MS undertake to address the recorded issues.

#### *ToR 3: Test and provide input on the DCF IT platform*

In 2021, the Commission initiated an IT project to build a DCF platform for submitting and evaluating the work plans and the annual reports. In September 2023, the platform was tested by a group of users from several Member States, and in October, it was deployed in the production environment. The Commission intends to further test the use of the platform during the real assessment cycle, involving the STECF experts, and requests EWG 23-16 to participate in this exercise and to provide feedback on the experience.

### **EWG 23-16 report**

The EWG should produce a Word document with general explanations and an Excel file with the assessment and comments of each WP. The document should include an overview of the assessment and overall evaluation of the Work Plans (horizontal issues, spanning many MS/sea basins).

#### 1) Per Member State (National Work Plans):

- a) an evaluation of the WP content (compliance with DCF Regulation and EU MAP) and format (compliance with the template guidelines) in general and per WP section
- b) MS-specific issues relating to data collection as described in the WP
- c) regarding Data Transmission issues (DTi):
  - i) An overall evaluation of Member State performance, of main and recurring issues by Member State.
  - ii) An evaluation of Member States' responses via the Data Transmission Monitoring Tool online platform to issues raised by end users of scientific advice. The EWG is requested to evaluate DTi, and close issues which have been clarified. The data sets affected shall be underlined.
  - iii) Identify in the evaluation per Member State the comments which require a reaction from Member State (draft a summary list) and those points which are for information only.

#### 2) Per region (Regional Work Plans):

- a) an evaluation of the coverage for the region/fishery for the specific section submitted and



b) an evaluation of the planned regional coordination in research surveys and other data collection activities.

3) At EU level:

a) feedback on the DCF IT platform testing.

In their report, EWG 23-16 should identify the comments that require a reaction by the MS(s) or RCG(s) (resubmission of the WPs/RWPs or further clarification to the Commission), and those that are for potential future amendments or for information only.

The evaluation will be based on the evaluation grid and criteria (background documents 2 and 3). The EWG should pay particular attention that the submitted WPs:

- address the issues raised in the assessment grids during past evaluations
- address the issues raised in COM assessment grids
- consider RCG and STECF recommendations, in particular the recommendation concerning the RCG secretariat.

## **Background documents**

*For WP assessment ToR 1:*

1. WP 2024(-2027) submitted by the MS (folder 01)
2. WP evaluation grid (approved by EWG 21-17)
3. Stand-alone document for WP evaluation (approved by EWG 21-17)
4. Guidance on WP/AR templates (COM Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/39)
5. 2021 COM assessment grids (folder 02)

*For DTMT assessment ToR 2:*

6. [https://datacollection.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/d/dcf/DTMT\\_Guidance-Version\\_2023-04-06](https://datacollection.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/d/dcf/DTMT_Guidance-Version_2023-04-06)
7. DT issues recorded in the Data Transmission Monitoring Tool: [https://dcf.ec.europa.eu/dtmt\\_en](https://dcf.ec.europa.eu/dtmt_en) (Excel export file will be provided)
8. STECF EWG 23-04 AND EWG 23-07 report (Annual Economic Report)

*For DCF platform ToR 3:*

9. <https://acc.work-plans-reports.dcf.ec.europa.eu/>

*Additional background documents:*

The experts should consider relevant assessment files from previous STECF EWGs, including STECF EWG 21-17 (WP), EWG 22-18 (WP), EWG 23-08 (AR).

The experts may also consult previous WPs and ARs:

[https://dcf.ec.europa.eu/wps-and-ars/work-plans\\_en](https://dcf.ec.europa.eu/wps-and-ars/work-plans_en)

[https://dcf.ec.europa.eu/wps-and-ars/annual-reports\\_en](https://dcf.ec.europa.eu/wps-and-ars/annual-reports_en)

and other relevant documents (e.g. ICES reports for meetings relating to the relevant data calls, Liaison Meeting and RCG recommendations etc.)

## 2 EVALUATION OF MEMBER STATES' WORK PLAN UPDATES

### 2.1 Background information

To carry out the evaluation, the EWG was provided with the Work Plan (WP) tables and WP text (boxes) of the five MS which submitted WP updates for 2024 (within the multi-annual period 2022-2024: The Czech Republic, Cyprus, France, Greece and Portugal). The EWG used various supporting information such as relevant EWG reports (mainly from EWG 21-17), see ToRs above.

### 2.2 Evaluation criteria, assessment grid and procedures

The EWG used the evaluation sheets (assessment grids) and guidance for evaluators developed by STECF during 2020-2022 (mainly within the EWG 20-18).

### 2.3 Sub-groups and task allocation

The evaluation of WPs was split by sub-groups and experts were allocated to each sub-group according to their expertise. Each sub-group was tasked with the assessment of particular sections of the WP according to the table below.

Sub-group	Section	Expertise
1	Biological data (sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.5), corresponding parts of Annex 1.1	Biologists
2	Diadromous species (section 2.3), Recreational fisheries (2.4), corresponding parts of Annex 1.1	Biologists
3	General information (section 1), Research surveys at sea (section 2.6), Impact of fisheries on marine biological resources (section 4), corresponding parts of Annex 1.1	Biologists
4	Fishing activity data (section 3), economic & social data (sections 5, 6 and 7), corresponding parts of Annex 1.2	Economists

### 2.4 Evaluation process

During the EWG, issues to be solved were identified by the EWG experts and transmitted to the MS. The MS then replied within a short deadline and submitted the revised WP tables and text, when requested. This 'ping-pong' information exchange was completed to close the final stages of the WPs in almost all cases at the end of the meeting, leaving only a few issues that have to be dealt with bilaterally between Commission and MS.

The EWG considers that during resubmissions of WPs within a multi-annual WP period, after first initial review of WPs, it should still be possible to give feedback on insufficient or missing information in the WPs, even though the WP was already accepted before and shortcomings may have been overseen.

#### 2.4.1 General information

Three MSs amended the general section of their WP. Amendments included adding, adjusting and/or removing test studies, and updating the contact details. All amendments were considered acceptable.

#### *2.4.2 Biological data*

Of the five WPs that were resubmitted, two included declared amendments to the sections covered under biological data. These were assessed in a sub-group plenary which allowed for an in-depth look at all aspects. Responses regarding requests for clarification or for a resubmission from all the relevant MS were received during the meeting. These were checked to see if the response received was sufficient and the evaluation grid was updated accordingly. Only one MS has outstanding issues.

#### *2.4.3 Diadromous species and recreational fisheries*

Five MS resubmitted their WPs, with only minor amendments in the sections for recreational and diadromous species. As these amendments were mostly clarifications, updates on sample numbers or pure editorial changes, the changes were considered acceptable. Some minor issues highlighted during the EWG require further clarifications in future submissions. Respective guidance was provided.

#### *2.4.4 Surveys*

Three MS amended the survey section in their WP. Amendments included adding new national surveys (two MS) and/or adjustments to current surveys (three MS). All amendments were considered acceptable.

#### *2.4.5 Impact of fisheries on marine biological resources*

One MS prolonged an on-board observer scheme in section 4.2 by a year. This amendment was considered acceptable.

Regarding section 4.2, it must be noted that the European Commission adopted the Marine Action Plan on 23 February 2023. The objectives are:

- contribute to getting and keeping fish stocks to sustainable levels
- reduce the impact of fishing on the seabed
- minimise fisheries impacts on sensitive species

Consequently, it is expected from MSs to undertake efforts to improve monitoring on PETS according to the Marine Action Plan and include this in WP submission in October 2024 for the 2025-2027 WP.

#### *2.4.6 Fishing activity, economic and social data*

Of the five WPs submitted, only the French and Greek ones contained changes in the respective sections. For the Greek WP, amendments were minor editorial changes in Annex 1.2. These amendments were considered acceptable.

For the French WP, the EWG observed some inconsistencies between Tables 5.1 and 5.2 as well as Text Box 5.2, concerning clustering schemes and cluster names. The MS could solve only some of the issues during the WP evaluation, but clear guidance for solving the issues has been given.

### **3 REGIONAL WORK PLANS**

#### **3.1 Background information**

The EWG 23-16 was provided with five Regional Work Plans (RWPs): Baltic; North Atlantic, North Sea & Eastern Arctic (NANSEA), Mediterranean and Black Sea (Med&BS), Large Pelagics (LP) and Economic Issues (ECON) by the corresponding Regional Coordination Groups (RCG).

The EWG was very appreciative of the work done to propose the five RWPs. The general feeling was that they were clearly expressed, well-structured with the annexes well detailed. The following suggestions for improvement were made with the objectives of easing the upload of RWPs into the EU IT platform under development and ensure a proper link between the RWP and the WP.

## 3.2 General comments

### 3.2.1 General principles

A presentation was made by Joël Vigneau (EU grant Fishn'Co coordinator and ISSG RWP chair) on the background and context of the development of RWP for RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic and issues to be addressed during the week by STECF (see document in the electronic Annex 2). In the discussion which followed, several points were raised:

- Clarification on the mechanism of tying the RWP within the WP submission and subsequent follow up on the realisation in the Annual Report (AR). It was reminded that the legally binding document was the WP, so that RWP are only binding if it is referred to in the WP. Thereafter, the work completed (AR) is reported only at national level, which will then logically follow both the WP and RWP.
  - The question remains on how to react when a MS does not follow the provisions of a RWP, either by not referring to it in the WP or propose an altered version. To be addressed in the RCG Rules of Procedure;
- The EWG stressed that there should not be too many changes in 2024 from the version available for this EWG;
- The EWG proposed a 4C approach (coordination, coverage, consistency and comparability) as a general philosophy for RWP content;
- The EWG was informed that RCG Long Distance Fisheries (LDF) have developed long time agreements and commitments, which looks like a RWP without naming it as such. The RCG LDF is welcome to develop their agreements and commitments in a RWP form in the future.
- Some of the proposed modifications require the modification of the WP templates. The EWG understood this would take too long to be implemented and proposed interim solutions. The proposal still needs to be kept for future revision of WP templates;
- Some of the proposed modifications require modification or addition of modalities in the Master Code List.

### 3.2.2 Mechanism of action between RWP and WP

- Linkage to RWP in tables labelled differently (RWP name, Agreed at RCG, ...) with different modalities as inputs (free text, Y/N). There should be consistency in labelling throughout all tables – this may require modification of WP templates - but in the quick solution would be to use the comment column to spell the RWP name. The idea is that each line of RWP table copied and pasted to a WP should have a clear information on the source of information;
- There should be no possibility to disconnect or depart from a RWP. If some exceptional circumstances imply that the RWP provisions could not be met, this should be explained in the AR without needing to alter an approved RWP;
- The EWG recommended to use one row per MS and avoid grouping of MS. If all MS have the same information to copy/paste, the solution could be to add 'ALL' in the Master Code List. In consequence, when not all MS are involved, one row per MS would be necessary (this comment applies mainly but not exclusively to Table 1.2);

### 3.2.3 *Timeline of action*

There is a common understanding that no major modification of the current RWP should occur by the summer of 2024 (RCG Technical Meeting and Decision Meeting).

The only occasion to update the current RWP 2025-2027 as a support of the WP 2025-2027 is a final approval during the COM NC meeting in March 2024. This means that any substantial change or addition should be discussed in the forthcoming ISSG RWP meeting, scheduled early December to address the STECF feedback. The revised version of the RWP 2025-2027 will need to be circulated to all NC one month before the NC meeting.

For further minor updates, the EWG appreciates that landings and shares in Table 2.1 will be updated mid 2024 using the most recent reference years. This is not expected to change the full picture but will provide the most recent updates in the RWP to be reflected in the WP 2025-2027 proposals. A point of attention is given for Med&BS where an RCG Technical Meeting occurs late summer and there is little or no time to include updates to Table 2.1. To be discussed with Med&BS chairs.

Regarding STECF evaluation, it is important to note that the current version and evaluation corresponds to the formal evaluation. The further revisions in 2024 will not lead to a new evaluation. The guidance document for evaluators has been updated to reflect this.

### 3.2.4 *Establishing Regional Work Plans*

How decisions and RWP drafts are being formulated and officially passed is complicated. To our current understanding, ISSGs together with members of the MS have to reach a consensus, bring it forward to ISSG RWP and to the RCGs, the National Correspondents and then to the Liaison Meeting / Decision Meeting, before a RWP can be regarded as officially in place. It would be good to have a straightforward definition how this process is done.

### 3.2.5 *Adaptability of national and regional Work Plans*

As there is still a lot of development going on in assessment and data use for DCF data, adaptability of Work Plans should be kept upright, so changes and adaptations can be included along the line of developments.

For instance, eel international assessment is currently based mainly on recruitment time series. DCF mandatory data has recently been included into an ICES end-user data call for the first time but is not used in assessment yet. For salmon, the situation is similar. However, the ICES expert groups are actively developing their assessment models, that will make use of spatial data and DCF data for regional assessment.

This means that there is potential to change data needs (for end-user needs) of which the implementation into DCF data collection should not be hindered by long intervals of running multi-annual Work Plans.

### 3.2.6 *Biological data collection*

The following issues are recommendations for improvement and inconsistencies which will need to be addressed by the ISSG on the development of RWP before the finalisation of the RWP 2025-2027. One of the main drivers for EWG evaluation was the ability to link the RWP into the WP proposals and to upload the RWP on the IT platform under development.

Issues relevant to all RWPs:

- Table 0 - Check that Table 0 correctly reflects the information available
- Table 1.2 - EWG recommended to provide information for all MS and all data subsets for better clarity on where to find this information (WP or MS having no information to provide on a particular subset);
- Table 1.3 - EWG understands that the proposed information are mainly outdated information which will need to be updated during the development of WP 2025-2027 and agreed at RCG TM 2024;

- Table 2.1 - EWG recommended that a Y in column M (Regional agreement) and information in column N & O should come from a RWP and not altered in WP. If Y (column M) and N in col. N and/or col. O, the agreement for not sampling should be commented in the RWP;
- Table 2.6 - column Q and R should not refer to WP; 0 days at sea for cost sharing surveys is confusing and would deserve a comment in the table;
- EWG was surprised by the absence of Table 2.2 (Planning of sampling for biological variables) in any of the RWP proposals although there are agreements in place (see Table 1.3) and a column (M) in Table 2.1 referring on regional agreements. For those regional agreements marked in Table 2.1, there should be a Table 2.2. Such arrangements could fit into RWP 2025-2027 when agreed at RCG TM 2024.

### 3.2.7 *Diadromous species data collection*

Relevant stocks of salmon and sea trout are distributed over NANSEA and BALTIC regions. European eel is a panmictic species distributed over NANSEA, BALTIC and the Mediterranean RCG Areas. Assessment models (and data needs) differ by species and region and are still under development. Data collection is end-user driven, with ICES EGs (e.g.: WGNAS, WGBAST, WGEEL) being the most important end-users. International stock assessment for eel by WGEEL is currently based on recruitment time series and DCF data is not fully used. For salmon, the assessment situation is similar and DCF data is not yet fully utilized for assessment. WGBAST already uses large parts of the DCF data for assessment. However, WGNAS and WGEEL are actively developing their assessment models, that will make use of spatial data and DCF data in particular, for supra-regional assessment in the future.

The pan-regional ISSG Diadromous Fishes coordinates data collection for diadromous species in the NANSEA, BALTIC and MED&BS regions and mediates between end users and RCGs.

#### 3.2.7.1 Data storage

RDBES (Regional Database & Estimation System) and DATRAS (Database of Trawl Surveys) currently do not yet have the full capabilities to store all relevant eel, salmon and sea trout data collected under DCF or used in assessment (which goes beyond the EU range). Current agreement is that the functioning self-developed WGEEL and WGNAS databases will be hosted on ICES servers and the accessibility to the data for MS will be granted. Eel data from the Mediterranean Sea are already covered and stored on the eel data base, as WGEEL is an ICES / GFCM / EIFAAC joint working group.

However, it was agreed that RDBES will be used to host commercial landings data for eel, salmon and sea trout in near future. However, large parts of biological data and commercial fisheries for salmonids and eel are derived from inland water data collection and additional adaptations (e.g. creating new tables and data categories) will be needed. As a result, the data structure of RDBES will have to be modified to store the respective needed data types along with their specifications. Data experts from the respective ICES EGs and ICES Data Centre are collaborating on the matter.

#### 3.2.7.2 RWP drafts for diadromous species

There are currently no formal agreements and no decisions for RWPs for salmon, sea trout, or eel, but discussions are underway within the WGs and in the ISSG Diadromous. Outcomes of the discussions within WGs are supposed to provide towards proposing candidate RWPs. In light of the evolving data requirements for newly developed assessment methods, initial drafts for RWPs for diadromous data collection need to be formulated.

RWPs for diadromous species (to be reviewed by STECF in October 2024) should be drafted as soon as possible, ideally in early 2024, so that MS developing their WP 2025-2027 can complement the RWPs with their own national specificities.

At the moment, Text Box 2.3: "Diadromous species data collection in freshwater" states that "No regional sampling is planned". It is however still possible to add information, until June 2024.

In order to ensure comparability, consistency, coverage, and coordination of variables and methodologies in diadromous data collection in relevant areas, STECF encourages RCGs and the ISSG on diadromous species to come to agreements and develop first draft RWPs for their respective regions soon so they can still be implemented into the 2025-2027 timeframe. As revisions of RWPs are foreseen on an annual basis, this gives opportunity to amend and adapt RWPs to ongoing changes and data needs in assessment.

### *3.2.8 Recreational fisheries data collection*

For recreational fisheries, there currently are standardization approaches only between MS of the Mediterranean / Black Sea RCG. Challenges in recreational fisheries data collection are data gaps (no data collected) mostly due to lacking MS commitment, periodicity of surveys (no time series), and single instead of multispecies surveys (which provides better information on the importance of all occurring species). Also, the Control Regulation only covers species for which recreational fishing opportunities exist or which are under rebuilding plans.

Currently, there are two ISSGs for Recreational Fisheries: one for MED&BS and one for BALTIC /NANSEA Regions. The recognized end users include ICES WGRFS, GFCM WGRF, and ICCAT.

The ISSG Rec Fish for MED&BS has submitted one RWP for the MED&BS region.

### *3.2.9 Surveys*

The RWPs present all internationally coordinated mandatory surveys for their respective regions. This includes commonly agreed text and tables where planned days at sea are reflected. The Baltic and NANSEA RWPs refer to the WPs concerning the variables 'sampling activity' and 'number of sampling activities', whereas the Med&BS RWP has included this information in Table 2.6. The approach should be consistent between regions keeping in mind the WP and AR evaluation and that including the sampling activities inflates the table considerably. The EWG suggests one line per survey, MS and year. This provides an overview of MS contribution to the different mandatory surveys.

As the allocated effort in Table 2.6 is given by MS, the EWG proposes that the variables regarding coverage ('areas(s) covered') and timing ('Time period (month)') should also capture the MS contribution, rather than the entire area and time-period as indicated in Table 1 of the EU MAP Implementing Decision annex.

The variable 'Implementation year' was filled differently for the different regions. For the Baltic and NANSEA, each year was presented in a separate cell, whereas for the Med&BS, the entire period (i.e., 2025-2027) was filled. Entries should follow the guidelines, i.e., "indicate the year in which the activity will be implemented. Enter one row per implementation year and include all years from the work plan period".

Some inconsistencies in Table 2.6 were found within RWPs between MS. E.g., different filling of variable 'Type of MS participation' by LTU (RWP Baltic), DNK presenting information by stock area for BITS\_Q1 and BITS\_Q4 rather than survey area (RWP Baltic), ESP presenting information by stock area for IBTS\_Q4 rather than survey area (RWP NANSEA). The EWG encourages the MSs to fill in the table consistently.

### *3.2.10 Impact of fisheries on marine biological resources*

Stomach sampling (RWP NANSEA, RWP Med&BS): The RWPs present regionally coordinated fish stomach sampling programs. Some inconsistencies in filling Table 4.1 were found between the two RWPs. First, the variable 'Implementation year' was filled differently for the different regions. For the NANSEA, each year was presented in a separate cell whereas for the Med&BS the entire period (i.e., 2025-2027) was filled. Secondly, for the variable 'Expected number of stomachs', the NANSEA RWP reports exact numbers, whereas the Med&BS RWP reports minimum targets or NA (when the minimum target is not binding). The approach should be consistent between regions and the entries should follow the MasterCodeList.

Incidental bycatch: The Baltic, NANSEA and Med&BS RWPs follow the same structure in Text Box 4.2, including information on the list of PET species, regional database and the ongoing work on determining high risk fisheries. The EWG endorses such a consistent approach.

In the three RWPs, it is stated that:

- the MSs commit that the species listed in the PETs species list documents are recorded when encountered during the sampling activities and given high priority in case concurrent sampling cannot be implemented.
- PETs bycatch need to be uploaded into the regional database (Baltic, NANSEA) or tests are carried out that fill allow to assess incorporation of PETs bycatch into the regional database (Med&BS).
- Ongoing work will make it possible to identify high-risk fisheries from PETs bycatch, including their effort.

Text Box 4.2 in the RWP LP provides information on several implemented measures and the inclusion of monitoring sensitive bycatch species within the FRA, ESP and ITA onboard sampling schemes of tropical purse seine fisheries operating in the Atlantic and Indian oceans according to a common protocol. Given the special outline of the RWP LP, the EWG supports this approach.

### **3.3 Baltic**

#### *3.3.1 Biological data collection*

Table 2.5: Only the Baltic RWP proposes a Table 2.5 for a test Regional sampling plan. The reference year is given to be 2024. The reference year will have to be updated to 2025-2027 as soon as possible, preferably before RCG TM 2024.

#### *3.3.2 Recreational fisheries*

Regional coordination of recreational fisheries data collection is currently under development in the RCG ISSG Recreational Fisheries. Notably, the ICES Working Group on Recreational Fisheries Surveys (WGRFS) recommended to carry out multispecies surveys under the routine sampling. However, the RCGs asked WGRFS to provide a priority list of species by ecoregion, to be incorporated into the National surveys in addition to the mandatory species.

However, no agreement was reached yet on species list to be included in national sampling plan as supplementary species of Table 4. Work is ongoing and still under development.

However, as stated in the report of the RCG BALTIC/NANSEA meeting in Gdansk 2023, there is uncertainty about the feasibility of creating a comprehensive RWP for the Baltic Sea that encompasses all species due to differences in scale and intensities of recreational fisheries activities for different species. Additionally, there are problems with the periodicity of surveys, resulting in the absence of continuous time series data.

##### **3.3.2.1 Data storage**

The ISSG Recreational Fisheries for RCG Baltic and NANSEA agreed that recreational fisheries data should be integrated into the RDBES. The developments needed for this were also prioritized by ICES WGRDBESGOV. In 2023, an official data call was launched by the WGRFS, with the aim of realizing a first full test about the incorporation of this data following the templates developed with this objective.

##### **3.3.2.2 EWG comments**

In order to ensure comparability, consistency, coverage, and coordination of variables and methodologies in data collection, the EWG encourages RCGs and ISSGs on recreational fisheries for NANSEA&Baltic to



come to agreements and develop first basic draft RWPs with common methodologies (e.g. common offsite questionnaire) for their regions. As revisions of RWPs are foreseen on an annual basis, this will give opportunity to amend and adapt RWPs to ongoing changes and data needs in assessment.

To address gaps and inconsistencies in recreational fisheries data, ensuring comprehensive and reliable information for analysis and decision-making, the EWG recommends the following:

1. **Screening Survey:** conduct a thorough screening survey to identify gaps in recreational fishing data and validate each MS's licensing system. This step is crucial due to variations in data collection methods among MS, leading to inconsistencies in reporting catches based on different requirements.
2. **Multispecies Approach:** adopt a multispecies approach in data collection. Multispecies surveys are essential as they accommodate for fluctuations in effort and landings of targeted species and are not significantly more expensive than single-species data collection. The importance of this approach is emphasized by the ISSGs for Recreational Fisheries and the end users (GFCM & ICES).

### 3.3.3 Surveys

- According to Table 2.6, Estonia participates in the BITS-Q4, while the Text Box states otherwise.
- For BIAS, both SWE and DNK indicate in Table 2.6 cost-sharing, while the days at sea is set at 0. It is now not clear which MS will be conducting the cost-sharing survey.
- For BIAS, SWE and DNK, a cost-sharing agreement is indicated in Table 2.6, whereas the Text Box states otherwise (i.e., “No cost sharing agreement is in place for this survey”).
- All years from the WP period should be included in Table 2.6.

## 3.4 North Atlantic, North Sea & Eastern Arctic (NANSEA)

### 3.4.1 Recreational fisheries

Regional coordination of recreational fisheries data collection is currently under development in the RCG ISSG Recreational. Notably, the ICES Working Group on Recreational Fisheries Surveys (WGRFS) recommended to carry out multispecies surveys under the routine sampling. However, the RCGs asked WGRFS to provide a priority list of species by ecoregion, to be incorporated into the National surveys in addition to the mandatory species.

However, no agreement was reached yet on species list to be included in national sampling plan as supplementary species of Table 4. Work is ongoing and still under development.

However, as stated in the report of the RCG BALTIC/NANSEA meeting in Gdansk 2023, there is uncertainty about the feasibility of creating a comprehensive RWP for the Baltic Sea that encompasses all species due to differences in scale and intensities of recreational fisheries activities for different species. Additionally, there are problems with the periodicity of surveys, resulting in the absence of continuous time series data.

#### 3.4.1.1 Data storage

The ISSG Recreational Fisheries for RCG Baltic and NANSEA agreed that recreational fisheries data should be integrated into the RDBES. The developments needed for this were also prioritized by ICES WGRDBESGOV. In 2023 an official data call was launched by the WGRFS, with the aim of realizing a first full test about the incorporation of this data following the templates developed with this objective.

### 3.4.1.2 EWG comments

In order to ensure comparability, consistency, coverage, and coordination of variables and methodologies in data collection, EWG encourages RCGs and ISSGs on recreational fisheries for NANSEA&Baltic to come to agreements and develop first basic draft RWPs with common methodologies (e.g. common offsite questionnaire) for their regions. As Revisions of RWPs are foreseen on an annual basis, this will give opportunity to amend and adapt RWPs to ongoing changes and data needs in assessment.

To address gaps and inconsistencies in recreational fisheries data, ensuring comprehensive and reliable information for analysis and decision-making, the EWG recommends the following:

1. Screening Survey: conduct a thorough screening survey to identify gaps in recreational fishing data and validate each MS's licensing system. This step is crucial due to variations in data collection methods among MS, leading to inconsistencies in reporting catches based on different requirements.
2. Multispecies Approach: adopt a multispecies approach in data collection. Multispecies surveys are essential as they accommodate for fluctuations in effort and landings of targeted species and are not significantly more expensive than single-species data collection. The importance of this approach is emphasized by the ISSGs for Recreational Fisheries and the end users (GFCM & ICES).

### 3.4.2 Surveys

- For the triennial surveys (MEGS and SDEPM), a line is included for the execution years only. The EWG encourages this approach, under the assumption that RWP will always cover at least three years to ensure that these surveys are listed.
- The NSMEGS and REDTAS (mandatory surveys) are not included in the table as only one MS is executing this survey. However, as this concerns internationally coordinated surveys with other non-EU countries, the surveys should be included in the RWP.

### 3.4.3 Stomach sampling

- In the Text Box, it is stated: "It is to be noted that the sampling allocation is differing from one year to the other and will be balanced out over the five-year period". It should be explained what this five-year period entails.
- Text Box 4.3 is not following the WP guidelines. Therefore, MSs cannot simply refer to the RWP Textbox 4.3 in their WP.

## 3.5 Mediterranean and Black Sea (Med&BS)

### 3.5.1 General section

Table 1.2: Some MS are missing (e.g. SLO anywhere, ROU not everywhere)

### 3.5.2 Biological data collection

Table 2.1: There seems to be a mismatch between the figures and the reference years, to be further checked

### 3.5.3 Recreational fisheries

The MED&BS proposal encompasses an RWP including recreational fisheries (outlined in Text Box 2.4 and Table 2.4) which is aimed at estimating the population of recreational fishers by fishing modality and sub-region; and identifying lists of priority species by sub-region.

This would be done by means of two actions:

- a) as a binding action, MS should apply multispecies approach and collect data from off-site surveys; and
- b) as a non-binding action, MS could apply on-site samplings to validate the estimations of the off-site survey, validate the species reported in the off-site survey, collect biological data in order to propose list of priority species for the estimation of biological data and finalise the list by sub-region, and validate the vulnerable species reported in the off-site survey and propose a final list.

As general methodology for data collection, RCG MED&BS decided to follow the GFCM Handbook (Grati et al., 2021) and the experience gained by the implementation of EU pilot studies. With the aim of setting minimum standards, standardized protocols for performing off-site surveys (questionnaire to be used in a telephone survey) and on-site surveys (questionnaire to be used in face-to-face interviews) are attached as Annexes in the RWP.

#### 3.5.3.1 Data storage

As described in the RCG MED&BS 2023 Recommendations (Madrid, August 2023), RDBFIS is used as Regional Data Base and it was decided to continue the close collaboration with RDBFIS consortium through the RDB Steering Committee, ensuring the supplementary role of the Steering Committee and the technical experts group from the consortium.

#### 3.5.3.2 EWG comments

The EWG acknowledges the commitment shown by RCG MED&BS in presenting a mutually agreed proposal for a regional plan on recreational fisheries. A minor concern has emerged related to the wording in paragraph Text Box 2.4, regarding the list of priority species, which should be rephrased. Table 2.4 does not encompass the non-binding sampling. As a result, MS intending to conduct on-site sampling may face challenges in submitting data into the specified template.

#### 3.5.4 Surveys

- Implementation year is set at 2025-2027, while the values given for columns 'Days at sea planned', 'sampling activity' and 'number of sampling activities' are annual values. Entries on 'implementation year' should follow the guidelines.
- For MEDIAS, MLT in Table 2.6 for two lines ('Fish Hauls (to validate echo-traces)' and 'Hydrology') the 'days at sea planned' and 'number of sampling activities planned' are filled as NA. Entries should include a number.
- Filling of column 'Number of sampling activities planned' is not consistent, both numeric values and characters are used. It is advised that this is filled more consistently. Furthermore, a reference is made to Table 2.2 while this Table is not included in the RWP.
- The EWG encourages to present one line per survey, MS and year.

#### 3.5.5 Stomach sampling

In Table 4.1, 'sampling scheme type' is not always filled according to the MasterCodeList, i.e. the line 'Research survey at sea and Commercial fishing trip'. Entries should follow the MasterCodeList.

## 3.6 Large Pelagics (LP)

### 3.6.1 Biological data collection

The EWG stressed the need to have a Table 2.1 with their stocks of interest; this list of species should be defined by the RWG LP in collaboration with other RCG chairs. Having a Table 2.1 would clarify the scope of the RCG vs all other RCGs (how they complement each other).

The RWP LP mainly contains outputs from research project with references to published paper on methodologies, links to GitHub for database and some of the links seem outdated. Eventually, the RWP is hardly self-explanatory, some clarification for external readers would be welcome.

### 3.6.2 Incidental bycatch

The Text Box 4.2 in the RWP LP provides information on several implemented measures and the inclusion of monitoring sensitive bycatch species within the FRA, ESP and ITA onboard sampling schemes of tropical purse seine fisheries operating in the Atlantic and Indian oceans according to a common protocol. Given the special outline of the RWP LP the EWG supports this approach.

## 3.7 Economic Issues (ECON)

Article 9 of the Data Collection Framework (DCF) Regulation (EU) 1004/2017 allows the Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs) to submit to the Commission Regional Work Plans (RWPs) for approval. Prior to their approval, STECF is requested to evaluate them.

The EWG 23-16 notes that the evaluation of the RWPs submitted by the Regional Coordination Group should be performed in accordance with Article 10 of Regulation (EU) No 2017/1004, considering the conformity of the RWPs with the contents of Article 9 of the DCF Regulation. As opposed to the national workplans, the evaluation cannot consider the conformity with the format and guidelines that indeed are available only for the WP template (Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/39).

The EWG 23-16 reviewed the document entitled: "Economic Issues Regional Work Plan for data collection in the fisheries, aquaculture and fish processing sectors Version 2 (discussed at RCG Econ 2023)". The EWG notes that this Regional Workplan for the Economic issues is the first official regional programme proposed by the RCG ECON and it covers the period 2025-2027.

This document is the result of a long process that involved the Fish'nCo project, experts in RCG/ISSGs, numerous EWGs, RCG participants and NCs, thus demonstrating the relevance given to the development of the Economic RWP by all parties involved.

The revision of the RWP points out that the document contains only elements of data collection which were agreed by RCG ECON. These elements are the definitions for the economic and social variables for the 3 sectors (fleet, aquaculture and fish processing). These sections (5, 6 and 7) are considered in line with the requirements of Article 9 of Regulation (EU) No 2017/1004 because they are aimed at increasing the coordination of data collection activities among MS.

The EWG considers that there are minor adjustments that could be considered:

- SECTION 1: GENERAL INFORMATION - Data collection framework at regional level
  - This section should be better tailored on the economic context of the economic work plan. For instance, it is reported that: "The RWP Econ 2025-2027 contains the following textboxes and tables", but tables are not part of the ECON RWP.
  - Text Box 1a: Test studies description is empty as it is flagged as "not applicable". Therefore, it could be deleted.
  - Textbox 1B: Other data collection activities. This text is used to explain the work performed by ISSG. But the list of the ISSGs should include the ones established under the umbrella of the RCG\_ECON (Novel approach to the segmentation of fishing fleets, Quality Assurance Framework, Social variables, Aquaculture issues) and not the Pan-regional ISSGs relevant to other RWPs.

- SECTION 3: FISHING ACTIVITY DATA. Text Boxes 3.1 and 3.2 are flagged as “not applicable”. They could then be deleted unless there is a specific reason to keep them.
- ANNEX 1.2 - Quality report for socioeconomic data sampling scheme. EWG recommends erasing that stand-alone table provided at the end of the ECON RWP because the reference to the Handbook of statistical methods appears sufficient. This handbook has been developed for the application within the DCF economics sectors and has been approved by several groups. If deemed necessary, other reference documents can be provided.

In the context of the “Roadmap to 2024” drafted by the ISSG on the Development of Draft Regional Work Plan, these adjustments are to be considered as “elements aimed at clarifying issues or improving consistency and readability of the RWPs without altering the WP proposals”.

### **3.8 Incorporation of Regional Work Plans into National Work Plans**

#### *3.8.1 Surveys*

The EWG suggests a consistent approach for filling in Table 2.6 over the different regions, i.e., one line per survey, MS and year. This provides an overview of MS contribution to the different mandatory surveys. Consequently, as such an approach would not follow the WP guidelines, the RWP lines from Table 2.6 cannot be copied into the WP. In the WP Table 2.6, a reference can be made to the RWP in column ‘Regional work plan name’.

For Text Box 2.6, a reference to RWP (without copying in all the text) can be made in the WPs. Additional national sampling activities within a mandatory survey, can be added to the WP. National non-mandatory surveys should only be presented in the WP, not RWP.

#### *3.8.2 Impact of fisheries on marine biological resources*

##### *Stomach sampling*

The lines from the RWP Table 4.1 can be copied into WP for the relevant MSs.

If the RWP Text Box 4.3 follows the WP guidelines a reference can be made by MSs to the RWP Text Box 4.3 in their WP. However, if the RWP Text Box 4.3 does not follow the WP guidelines, information is needed in the WP on (1) aim of the study, (2) duration of the study and (3) methodology and expected outcomes of the study.

Additional national sampling activities must be added to the WP by the MS.

##### *Incidental bycatch*

MSs need to refer to the RWP in Text Box 4.2. In addition, national activities regarding incidental bycatch need to be added to the WP by the MS according to the guidelines.

#### *3.8.3 Economic and social data*

The EWG considered the issue on the inclusion of the ECON RWP in all the WPs. Considering that the RWP includes only text boxes (no tables), it should be sufficient that a link/reference is provided in the WPs to the details of the relevant RWP textbox.

The EWG suggests clarifying the timeline of that procedure as the RWP can only be referenced when it is available prior to the deadline of the WP submission. Moreover, it should be clarified where in the WP this link/reference should be provided. Furthermore, the approach to reference the relevant RWP sections should be standardized among the MS, to facilitate the evaluation process by the STECF.

### 3.9 Assessment of Regional Work Plans

#### 3.9.1 General principle

Each element of an RWP is an RCG agreement which needs to be reflected in all WPs in a Region. Reporting these agreements in WPs formalizes these as commitment by each MS. MS should thus copy all relevant information from RWP tables directly into the corresponding table in the WP to ensure consistency between WPs and RWPs. For WP textboxes, MS should make sure that a link is provided to the details of the relevant RWP text box and add national specificities, if any.

The realization of the RWP will not be reported directly through added table columns and text sections. It is the approved WPs, containing combined information from national and regional initiatives, which will be evaluated within the Annual Report evaluation process.

#### 3.9.2 STECF evaluation

Formally, the RWPs 2025-2027 have been evaluated by STECF in 2023 (EWG 23-16). An RWP is a collective piece of work, having matured in the different RCG/ISSGs, circulated in all MSs and approved in NC Decision meeting. The STECF evaluation must take this context into consideration.

Within the evaluation meeting, both RWPs and WPs are to be evaluated and this needs to be done in sequence, beginning with the evaluation of the RWPs and then the WPs. When it comes to ping-pong, if there are demands for amendments to the RWP, this will be done in collaboration with the RCG chairs. Depending on the extent for modifications there may be a need to work with all relevant NCs which will extend the ping-pong beyond the time of the meeting. A special consideration will have to be made by STECF experts on demands for modifications, as there will be a cascade effect on different WPs. In any case, all STECF comments must be reported.

For each of the sections of the RWP, evaluation of the RWPs must focus on the broader view (objectives, state of the art, expectations for each WPs, does RWP only contain elements agreed at RCGs, does RWP contains elements which would need to be updated in interim years? What to do in this case?).

No evaluation grid is proposed yet.

The EWG discussed the possibility to evaluate the RWPs in June in their version approved in spring and re-evaluate only the track changes in Oct/Nov session. It was concluded that the preference was on keeping one evaluation on the final version of RWPs before evaluating the WPs during the same meeting; therefore, 5 days for the whole meeting could be too short (5 days are already committed for the full evaluation of WPs, but that may change with the IT platform).

#### 3.9.3 Surveys

Under the assumption that one line per survey, MS and year is presented in the RWP, for evaluation the EWG suggests the following questions:

- Are all the internationally coordinated mandatory surveys in Table 1 of the EU-MAP Implementing Decision included in Table 2.6?
- Have all research surveys presented in Table 2.6 also a corresponding Text Box?
- Has a relevant international planning group been indicated for all surveys in Table 2.6?
- Is Text Box 2.6 following the guidelines of the WP?
- Is the description of each research survey method documented in the text box or in case publicly available, is there a link provided?
- If a threshold applies for a MS based on Regional agreement and/or if a cost-sharing agreement applies, is there a clear justification in the Text Box?
- Are the agreements mentioned in this Section, if any, also listed in Section 1.3

#### *3.9.4 Impact of fisheries on marine biological resources*

Stomach sampling: For evaluation of the RWP, the EWG suggests the following questions:

- Is Table 4.1 following the guidelines of the WP?
- Comments on Text Box 4.3

Incidental bycatch: For evaluation of the RWP, the EWG suggests the following question:

- Comments on Text Box 4.2

#### 4 EVALUATION OF DATA TRANSMISSION ISSUES

The EWG evaluated 31 Data Transmission issues (DTi) from the 2023 Fleet Economics data call (EWG 23-03 and 23-07 on the Annual Economic Report on the EU Fishing Fleet). For 28 DTi, MS responses were available for evaluation. Out of 31, 19 of the issues were on Coverage, 12 on quality and no issues were found on Timeliness (Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1** DT issues in the DTMT by end-user and issue type (Coverage, Quality, Timeliness).

End User	Data Call	Coverage	Quality	Timeliness	Number of issues
STECF EWG	Fleet economics	19	12	0	31

The evaluation concluded that out of the 31 DT issues that were reported in the DTMT referring to the fleet economics (AER) data call in 2023, 4 issues were justified as SATISFACTORY, and 8 as UNSATISFACTORY. In addition, 19 issues were assessed as FOLLOW-UP NEEDED because the MS and end-user comment were either contradictory or the MSs comment was unclear. In the majority of cases (12), follow up is needed by the MS. Issues that were acknowledged by the MS to be corrected were also assessed as FOLLOW-UP NEEDED where the MS stated to submit the corrected data in the following data call. Issues related to coverage, and with a medium or high severity concerning data collection and data transmission (coverage), were assessed as UNSATISFACTORY (Table 4.2).

In terms of quality related issues, in most of the cases the MS acknowledged the data issue and agreed to follow up on the commitments to upload the corrected data in the following data call. In 2023, there were less issues reported than in the previous two years (31 issues in total in 2023 compared to 48 issues in 2022 and 60 issues in 2021).

For 5 MS, the issue reported by the end-user is related to fleet segmentation and adjustment of length classes for small-scale fisheries in the Baltic according to the new EU-MAP (Table 8, Commission Delegated Decision (EU) 2021/1167). MS commented that the Guidance on the JRC data collection website was not updated according to the revised length classes at the time the 2023 Fleet economics data call was launched. As a result, the MS have not assigned the length classes correctly. All the MS concerned committed to amend the data sets and resubmit in the following data submission.



**Table 4.2** Assessment of DT issues for the Fleet economics data call in 2023 by type and severity.

STECF EWG DTi Assessment		Coverage			Quality			Total
		LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH	
FOLLOW-UP NEEDED	DGMARE	1				1		2
	MS	7			2	2	1	12
	MS/DGMARE	1			3	1		5
SATISFACTORY		1	1		1	1		4
UNSATISFACTORY		2	4	2				8
<b>Total</b>		<b>12</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>31</b>

When there is a situation that the end-user is not clear with the issue and needs to check the issue and if there is a contradiction between the end-user comment and MS comment, the EWG has marked it 'follow-up' following the DTMT guidance and selected DG MARE as the follow up responsible when the issue by the end-user was unclear and DG MARE/MS if there was contradictory response. In these cases, it needs to be clarified what would be the next step in the new assessment cycle. Both DG MARE and MS need to be informed.

## 5 DCF IT PLATFORM

After a presentation of the DCF IT platform by DG MARE, the EWG tested the functionality of the platform, commented on any problems and suggested changes. The various EWG sub-groups focused on their WP/AR sections, but also general issues are reported in the sections below.

### 5.1 Biological data

The biological subgroup was generally very impressed with the IT platform, its ease of use and ability to see in parallel the tables, the text boxes and the list of annexes. In order to further test the IT platform, it was decided to work initially with one WP (BEL) where the WP was uploaded for the first time and then the subgroup systematically checked for the warnings and errors. Some errors/warnings were fixed immediately and the program re-uploaded to see if the numbers of errors and warnings were reduced. Further tests were carried out using the Italian WP and changes made and reducing errors. Most of the work was focused on Table 2.1, Table 2.2, Table 2.5 with some in Table 2.4. This exercise was beneficial as it allowed first time user to gain familiarity with the process.

From this testing phase, the Biological sub-group comments and screen grabs of the errors were transferred into the DCF Defect Log Acceptance Testing Phase MARE spreadsheet (BUGS\_EXPERTS) tab, screengrabs were linked by the ID numbers and saved in the PrintScreen tab.

Finally, a cross reference was made with the BUGs(Defects)MARE tab where the subgroup started looking at the resolved issues to see if they were corrected and resolved. We concentrated on the rows specifically relating to Validation rules/resolved as these will be specifically linked to the guidelines. All the relevant comments regarding the specific issues were presented in Column M (If issue is resolved, any other observation/solution/notes).

The sub-group worked with a MS with a large WP (ITA) into the system and it generated new errors, e.g. there was a discrepancy in what was shown on the IT platform and that which was shown on the downloaded XL sheet. The recommendation is to work off the error comments in the downloaded XLS sheets, resolve the errors and then upload again. For this, the pointing and commenting of errors should be ascertained in the downloaded version. This will be particularly important at WP drafting stage.

Another MS (FRA) was unable to upload their WP due to the large text file, but a test was carried out by keeping only one example of annexes 1.1 and 1.2 and the upload was successful. There may be an issue with file size or with the number of pages in the IT platform, or a too short time slot for uploading.

### 5.2 Diadromous species and recreational fisheries

The subgroup on diadromous species and recreational fisheries found the IT platform and the automatic checking of submissions very helpful as it provides the opportunity to auto-check the submissions especially for formatting errors. This enhances harmonization and clarity in the submissions.

The group tested the IT platform, by uploading new, already existing as well as intentionally modified work plans. Reported Errors were then observed and discussed, and the essential errors were entered into the DCF Defect Log Acceptance Testing Phase MARE spreadsheet (BUGS\_EXPERTS) tab.

As many (mostly minor) errors occurred in some cases, it was highlighted that the error reports refer to the entire section 2, while it would be beneficial if the errors were displayed table-specific, to quickly locate and correct the errors. When uploading an excel file for WPs with intentional errors), but without drop- down format in the "frequency" column, the IT platform did not recognize these errors. Other errors (e.g. errors year of sampling) were found. Apparently, if you upload an excel without respective dropdown formatting, the system will not find these errors or the cross-check with the Master Codelist in that column did not function properly. Initial checking should prevent upload of excel files without drop down.

In the case of the Italian work plan, one error in column E of the Table 2.3, the Error message was: *Warning: If "species" is 'Salmo salar' or 'Anguilla anguilla' or 'Salmo trutta' and "Reasons for not*

*sampling" is empty then "Observation type", "Sampling scheme type", "Sampling scheme identifier" values should not be empty. The platform does not allow NA in this case but should.*

When testing on the Greek workplan for diadromous table 2.3., NA is not acceptable in columns O & P, if sampling is not conducted. NA is missing in the drop-down menu and dictionary and should be added. For Recreational Table 2.4, the Warning message read: *If column "G" - "Species present in the ms" is "N" then column "E" - "Species" should not be empty.*

Both suggestions are wrong. In Table 2.4 species are not empty. Accordingly, the error results from another error: *A lot of species are missing in vocabulary of column species – eg. Warning: Species scientific name "Diplodus sargus" is not valid or allowed. Please see Table 1 for the reference. So, it seems that the platform does not recognize all fish species.*

Warning: *If column "Is the collection of biological variables planned?" is "Y" then column "Is there a regional threshold for the collection of stock-related biological variables?" should be "Y"*

Regional thresholds are not currently established.

### **5.3 Surveys**

Some inconsistencies in reporting errors/warnings by the Platform for different MS regarding Table 2.6 were detected.

For the column 'Relevant international planning group' NA was filled by LTU, NLD and DEU. For LTU this was accepted while for NLD and DEU the platform gave an error (see also Figure 5.3.1).

For the column 'Research survey acronym' DYFS was filled by NLD and DEU. For NLD, this was accepted, whereas for DEU, the platform gave a warning (see also Figure 5.3.2).

**Figure 5.3.1** Comparison Table 2.6 between LTU (top), NLD (middle) and DEU (bottom) on column "Relevant International planning group"

**LTU**

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Table 2.1 Stocks | Table 2.2 Biol variables | Table 2.4 Recreational | Table 2.5 Sampling plan biol | Table 2.6 Surveys-at-sea

Threshold rules used	Regional work plan name	Cost-sharing agreement signed by MS	Type of MS participation	Area(s) covered	Time period (month)	Frequency	Relevant international planning group	Days at sea planned	Type of sampling activities	Num of sam activ plan
None	N	N	NA	3d	4,5	Annual	IBTSWG-ICES	2	PETS observation	6
None	N	N	NA	3d SD26	3-11	Annual	NA	36	Gillnet hauls	36

Comments: 0(0)

Warnings: 15

- If column "G" - "Species present in the ms" is "N" then column "E" - "Species" should not be empty
- If column "G" - "Species present in the ms" is "N" then column "E" - "Species" should not be empty
- If column "G" - "Species present in the ms" is "N" then column "E" - "Species" should not be empty

**NLD**

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Tables

Table 2.3 Diadromous | Table 2.4 Recreational | Table 2.5 Sampling plan biol | Table 2.6 Surveys-at-sea

regional work plan name	Cost-sharing agreement signed by MS	Type of MS participation	Area(s) covered	Time period (Months)	Frequency	Relevant international planning group	Days at sea planned	Type of sampling activities	Number of sampli activiti planne
	N	NA	Dutch coast	4,5,6	Annual	NA	4	lowed dredge	700
	N	NA	Lakes IJsselmeer and Markermeer	10,11	Annual	NA	2	trawl hauls	100

Errors: 279 Warnings: 967

Comments: 0(0)

Errors: 279

- Relevant international planning group is not valid. It should be not empty or "None" or "N/A".
- Relevant international planning group is not valid. It should be not empty or "None" or "N/A".
- Relevant international planning group is not valid. It should be not empty or "None" or "N/A".

**DEU**

European Commission | MARE DCF

Work plans | Annual reports | User management

Tables

Table 2.1 Stocks | Table 2.2 Biol variables | Table 2.3 Diadromous | Table 2.4 Recreational | Table 2.5 Sampling plan biol | Table 2.6 Surveys-at-sea

Time period (months)	Frequency	Relevant international planning group	Days at sea planned	Type of sampling activities	Number of sampling activities planned	Research survey database	Link to survey manual
5	Annual	ICES WGBFS	22	NASC values (per)	1350	DATRAS planned	http://www.ices.dk/community/groups/Pages/WGBFS.aspx
2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11	Annual	ICES WOSMS, ICES HAWG	54	ichthyoplankton hauls	595	ICES DATA BASE ON EGGS AND LARVAE	No link available
9, 10, 11, 12	Annual	ICES HARENG	5	length frequency samples	0		A detailed description is available on pages 293-310 of ICES 2019 (Item ORIGINAL CODE) ICES Scientific Reports: 19: 310 pp. <a href="http://doi.org/10.1093/ices/srz019">http://doi.org/10.1093/ices/srz019</a>
7, 8	Annual	NA	5	bandfish bycatch in fishing trawls	144	national SQL database	No link available

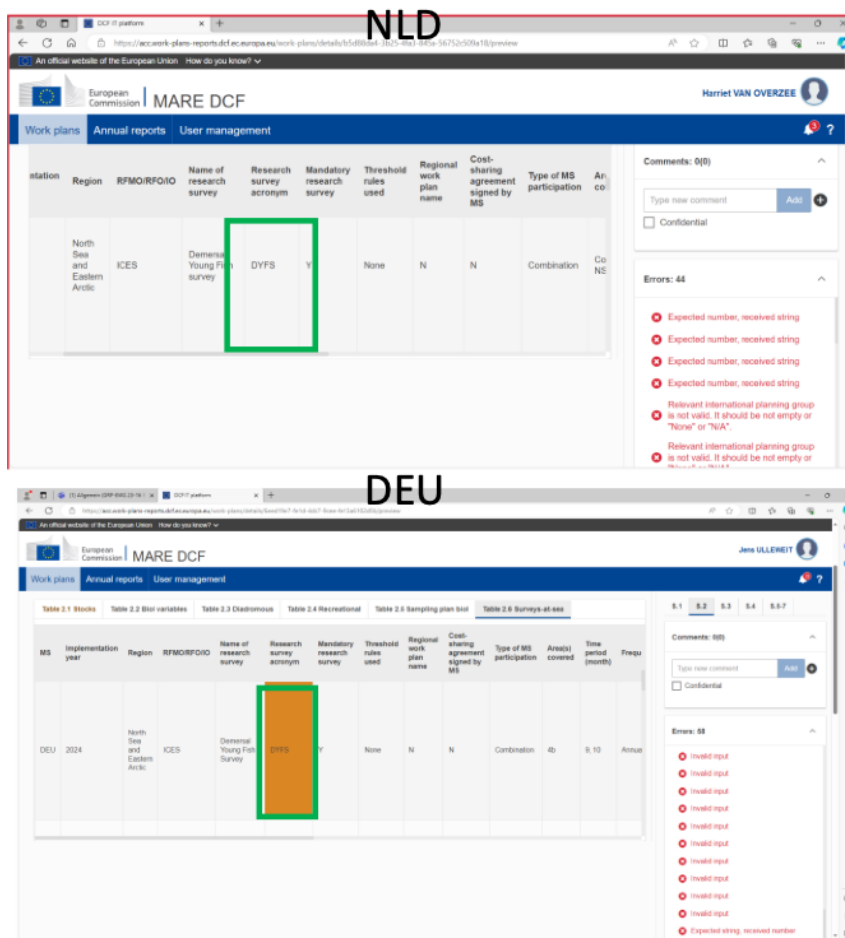
Errors: 58 Warnings: 252

Comments: 0(0)

Errors: 58

- Duplicate row
- Duplicate row
- Duplicate row
- Duplicate row
- Duplicate row
- Species "Clupea harengus" is not found in area "25-32". Please check table 1 for reference
- Species "Clupea harengus" is not found in area "25-32". Please check table 1 for reference
- Species "Clupea harengus" is not found in area "25-32". Please check table 1 for reference

**Figure 5.3.2.** Comparison Table 2.6 between NLD (top) and DEU (bottom) on column “Research survey acronym”



#### 5.4 Economic and social data

The EWG welcomed the development of the DCF IT platform for submitting and evaluating the work plans and annual reports, which has been made available to the EWG experts for testing purposes. Particular attention was given to the socio-economic sections and fishing activity (Sections 3 and 5-7), by the economic subgroup of the EWG.

The interface of the IT platform is well structured and user friendly and convenient.

The EWG tested submitting the documents and attempted to make a validation of the components included in the Excel files as well as in the error reports.

Data validation rules are the basis for the assessment of work plans and subsequently annual reports, and the IT platform should follow the checks that are already well established for this purpose in the framework of STECF EWGs. EWG notes that the two “Data validation rules” xlsx files contain a comprehensive list of cross-checks between the segments across the tables which until now have been executed manually by experts, as well as the counting of the number of variables. Most of these checks are yet still under development. Hence, the outcome cannot yet be tested. Some improvements are still required in order to use the IT platform in a real assessment cycle.

#### *5.4.1 Excel file*

In certain cases, the information included in the Table 0, column "Included (Y/N)" of the file downloaded from the platform is not in line with submitted WP document . In addition, some experts experienced that the Table 0 was not included in the downloaded file at all.

#### *5.4.2 Other points*

The EWG noted two issues concerning additional elements added by the MS in the Text document:

- i) Logos and visibility elements: Most MS have these included at least on the front page of the Text document. The downloaded files did not contain these elements.
- ii) Images: In the downloaded documents the images could not be displayed (which is important for example for surveys).

As for now, the uploaded text document is apparently no longer accessible in its original formatting and content. However, having the graphic elements available is crucial for the evaluation of the WP text. Thus far, the IT platform allows assigning relevant text boxes to corresponding parts of the WP table, which might be of relevance for the evaluation of this specific part of the WP table. But this is insufficient for evaluating the overall WP text.

#### *5.4.3 Visualisation of comparing WPs by years*

From an evaluation perspective, there are cases when it is necessary to compare the current version of the WP with the previous one, and the platform provides this opportunity which is very useful and welcomed but could be better organised and showing both versions next to each other.

#### *5.4.4 Document versioning*

The EWG discussed that for national purposes it is relevant to keep different versions of the same WP (with errors and comments included) for the same period, but finally only one final version approved by the National Correspondent could be officially submitted.

## 6 CONTACT DETAILS OF EWG-23-16 PARTICIPANTS

<sup>1</sup> - Information on EWG participant's affiliations is displayed for information only. In any case, Members of the STECF, invited experts, and JRC experts shall act independently. In the context of the STECF work, the committee members and other experts do not represent the institutions/bodies they are affiliated to in their daily jobs. STECF members and experts also declare at each meeting of the STECF and of its Expert Working Groups any specific interest which might be considered prejudicial to their independence in relation to specific items on the agenda. These declarations are displayed on the public meeting's website if experts explicitly authorized the JRC to do so in accordance with EU legislation on the protection of personnel data. For more information: <http://stecf.jrc.ec.europa.eu/adm-declarations>

<b>STECF members</b>		
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## 7 LIST OF ANNEXES

Electronic annexes are published on the meeting's web site on:  
<https://stecf.jrc.ec.europa.eu/web/stecf/ewg2316>

List of electronic annexes documents:

- EWG-23-16 – Annex 1 – Assessment grid on the evaluation of MS WP updates for 2024 (Excel file)
- EWG-23-16 – Annex 2 – Document accompanying the RWP NANSEA, RWP BALTIC (Word document)
- EWG-23-16 – Annex 3 – Amendments needed for Work Plan and Annual Report templates and guidance

## 8 LIST OF BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background documents are published on the meeting's web site on:  
<https://stecf.jrc.ec.europa.eu/web/stecf/2316>

List of background documents:

- EWG-23-16 – Doc 1 - Declarations of invited and JRC experts (see also section 6 of this report – List of participants)

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