

Council Preparation meeting between ACs and the Commission

Esben Sverdrup-Jensen, Chair of the PelAC

Dear Commissioner Kadis, allow me to congratulate you on your appointment as Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans as well as for your approval by the Pech Committee and by the European Parliament Plenary. My name is Esben Sverdrup-Jensen, Chair of the Pelagic Advisory Council, I will let my colleague, the Vice-Chair introduce herself afterwards.

The Pelagic Advisory Council focuses on all small pelagic fish stocks across EU geographical areas excluding the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. Our main species are blue whiting, mackerel, horse mackerel, herring and boarfish. Many of these key species are under shared management with Coastal States such as Norway, Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and the United Kingdom.

In recent years, we have witnessed an aggressive stance from Coastal States to marginalize the EU in consultations leading to unsustainable management practices from both environmental and socio-economic perspectives. This primarily occurs through the setting of excessive unilateral quotas by non-EU participants resulting in the overfishing of Mackerel, blue whiting and Atlanto-Scandian Herring.

For example, in 2023, ICES recommended that catches for mackerel should not exceed 782.066 tonnes. However, the sum of declared quotas reached 1.188.265 tonnes, with 943.475 tonnes officially landed. The sum of declared quotas was 51% higher than ICES's advice. Since 2010, the declared quotas have consistently exceeded ICES catch recommendation by as much as 40%.

We are now facing the consequences of Norway, Iceland, the Faroes and Greenland's actions over the past 16 years. And it is totally unclear what Russia has been and is currently fishing. The mackerel stock biomass is just above MSYBtrigger, dangerously close to falling below Blim. Meanwhile the EU pelagic sector is facing a 42% catch decrease despite consistently advocating for a comprehensive sharing arrangement.

This behaviour has recently been legitimised through a unilateral agreement among Norway, the UK, and the Faroe Islands, based on excessive and inflated unilateral quotas. For PelAC, it is clear that without a comprehensive sharing arrangement for mackerel, the stock is at long-term risk of falling below Blim, leading to ICES recommending a zero TAC. It is important to note that the EU is the only Coastal State that has shown restraint by sticking to the previous sharing arrangement, and its catches have remained in line with the quota set.

This situation also applies to Atlanto-Scandian herring and blue whiting. Addressing the quota setting at unsustainable levels by other Coastal States is essential. The Commission's proposal to update EU Regulation 1026/2012 to restrict market access for countries allowing non-sustainable fishing practices are a step in the right direction. The EU institutions should deal with this proposal with utmost urgency.





PelAC has sent several letters on this topic, highlighting the behaviour of Coastal States or suggesting improvements for inclusion in the 2025 benchmark for these stocks. Most importantly, we stress the need to ensure that ICES reference points and data used to calculate fishing opportunities are accurate.

The implementation of the revised control regulation will continue until January 2030, with intermediate measures planned for 2026. This process will primarily involve delegated and implementing acts drafted by the Commission in consultation with co-legislators. PelAC and its members were negatively surprised by the lack of a consultative process surrounding the drafting of Implementing Act Regulation EU 2024/1474, particularly regarding the derogation from the margin of tolerance.

We emphasize the need for focused consultation with specific Advisory Councils on issues relevant to their mandates and fisheries. In this case, the PelAC should have been consulted directly, given the regulation's impact on pelagic fisheries. The Commission must ensure the successful completion of the process for drafting and consulting co-legislators on future delegated and implementing act, ensuring adequate consultation of the ACs.

As a way forward, the PelAC, alongside the LDAC, NWWAC, and NSAC, is organizing an in-person control workshop planned for February 2025. Given the technical nature of the revised control regulation, we hope this workshop will be the first in a series, moving beyond a formal sea-basin approach to reflect the diversity and broad reach of the pelagic fleet. As a starting point, the PelAC and NWWAC have conducted an in-depth exercise identifying joint elements of the revised regulation that require attention, as well as specific issues and potential solutions.

Additionally, we would like to stress the importance of including Advisory Councils in other implementation forums, such as the regional control expert groups of the Member States.

Before handing the floor to my Vice-Chair, I would like to inform you that PelAC will hold its April meeting on the 2nd and 3rd in Brussels. As Chair of PelAC, I would like to extend an invitation to you to discuss pelagic species during our Executive Committee meeting on the morning of April 3rd.

Thank you for your attention and looking forward to working with you,

Merel den Held, Vice-Chair of the PelAC

In line with my colleagues, allow me to congratulate you on your appointment as Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans. My name is Merel den Held, and I serve as Vice-Chair of the Pelagic Advisory Council (PelAC).

I would like to use this opportunity to highlight a few key areas of interest for the PelAC in the coming year.

It is important to add that the scenarios described by my colleague only consider fishing pressure. We are unable to account for the impact of climate change and ecosystem change, as these are not yet incorporated into ICES advice. Considering small pelagic species' critical role in maintaining healthy food webs in the Northeast Atlantic ecosystem - as a prey for many predatory fish and other marine animals - we urge ICES to include climate change and ecosystem change in ongoing processes, such





as stock assessments, benchmark and Management Strategy Evaluations (MSE). A good opportunity to do so is the ongoing mackerel benchmark, where including these elements would provide a more comprehensive assessment of the stock. Another process is the ongoing work on an MSE for North Sea Herring, what will hopefully result in a Long Term Management Strategy agreed at coastal States level on this stock.

The second point of focus is ICES advice on non-fisheries conservation considerations for several herring stocks. As an example, for the North Sea stock, ICES has highlighted that “no activities on spawning habitats should be allowed unless the effects of these activities have been assessed and shown not to be detrimental.” Activities such as gravel extraction and wind farm development are included in ICES’s considerations.

The PelAC underlines that gravel substratum is an essential habitat for autumn-spawning herring, and non-fisheries habitat degradation can significantly impact early life-stage survival. Given the EU’s objectives under the Renewable Energy Directive, including the need to expand offshore renewable energy (ORE) deployment, we stress the importance of further research into the impacts of ORE development and gravel extraction on critical habitats. The PelAC is preparing advice on this issue, which will be published shortly.

The PelAC has been actively collaborating with other Advisory Councils on crucial topics, including joint advice on deep-sea mining alongside LDAC, NWWAC, and SWWAC. We emphasize the necessity of adopting a precautionary approach and strongly advocate for a ban on the deployment of deep-sea mining.

Additionally, we have worked with the NSAC, LDAC, NWWAC, and SWWAC to underline the importance of including EU stakeholders in the formulation of ICES advice requests. Our members have highlighted the need to develop mechanisms for incorporating new relevant data into assessments as it becomes available, even outside the benchmarking process.

The PelAC has recently established its WGIII to focus on implementing Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) and addressing the energy transition. PelAC will also actively participate in the evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and the "Fishers of the Future" end event.

The PelAC remains committed to contributing constructively to fisheries management and looks forward to engaging with the Commission on these critical issues. Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to further collaboration.

