

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ICES ADVISORY COMMITTEE (ACOM), MARCH 2023

VOLUME 3 | ISSUE 11

ICES BUSINESS REPORTS



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ICES Business Reports

Volume 3: Issue 11

Minutes of the Meeting of the ICES Advisory Committee (ACOM), March 2023

Recommended format for purpose of citation:

ICES. 2023. Minutes of the Meeting of the ICES Advisory
Committee (ACOM), March 2023.

ICES Business Reports, 3:11. 51 pp. [http://doi.org/10.17895/
ices.pub.22795355](http://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.22795355)



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i Executive summary

The advisory Committee of ICES met in plenary in Copenhagen and online between 7 to 10 March 2023. All member countries of ICES were represented (except for the representative from the Russian Federation) and observers from the Faroe Islands and Greenland were also present. ACOM considered a range of issues and proposed actions and took decisions as appropriate.

All members considered the code of ethics and professional conduct. ACOM reflected on the code of conduct. ACOM considered quality assurance, data limited methods for fisheries advice, advice drafting for recurrent advice on ecosystem services and effects, the perception of advice, and provision of advice for Barents Sea stocks. It also considered implementation of the stakeholder engagement strategy, the beta version of the inline advice, recreational fisheries, recommendations from expert groups to ACOM and benchmarks. Challenges around the provision of spatial advice, and bycatch of protected, endangered and threatened species were discussed. Plans for further consideration of rebuilding plans and reference points were agreed. The further role out of Transparent Assessment Framework was agreed, as was the approach to increase engagement in ICES projects. The Chair of the ICES Science Committee reported to ACOM and future research directions were highlighted. ACOM supported the further implementation of the Framework for Ecosystem-Informed Science and Advice (FEISA).

1 Welcome and meeting etiquette

After a welcome by the ACOM Chair and the ICES General Secretary the meeting was reminded about meeting etiquette and participants (see Annex 1) in the room and online were asked to introduce themselves in a round table of introductions. The meeting was attended by 23 ACOM members/alternates from 19 ICES member countries, observers from Greenland and Faroe Islands, ACOM Leadership, the Science Committee (SCICOM) and Fisheries Resources Steering Group (FRSG) Chairs and ICES Secretariat staff.

The agenda (Annex 2) that had been adopted via the ACOM forum prior to the meeting was presented and agenda items that would be discussed in subgroups were highlighted.

The meeting was reminded about the ICES organizational structure (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Chart of ICES organisational structure

2 Code of ethics and professional conduct and review of membership

ACOM reflected on Conflict of Interest (CoI) statement and was introduced to the new Code of ethics and professional conduct. The Chair thanked those that had been involved in drafting the document that includes sections on core values, diversity gender equality, good scientific practice, reporting misconduct, conflict of interest (Figure 2).

ACOM members were reminded to review the ACOM membership.

Whilst 2 members declared a potential conflict of interest, ACOM did not find any reason of concern related to these declared potential CoI.

Issues regarding conflict of interest were raised. There was a feeling that it had become a ritual without content. The Chair explained that for some groups issues on Conflicts of Interests had

arisen and that national Delegates have had to be consulted on the nomination of specific experts to the group. It was also mentioned that the practice is needed in cases where issues arise later in the meeting/process, and that there is a need to state in the beginning of a meeting in which role participants are attending.

The Chair agreed that there has not been a review of the CoI since it was established, it was highlighted that the Workshop on developing guidance for ensuring the integrity of scientific information submitted to ICES by data providers (WKENSURE) that met in February 2023 and has not yet reported, has looked closer on the matter of CoI and specifically at perceived CoI.

Further ACOM discussed the nature of CoI in terms of the national interest that is potentially inherent in all ACOM members. History has shown that there is a national interest in some issues, and it was suggested that declaring a CoI make awareness of the fact that members are not attending only as independent scientists, but it was at the same argued that all ACOM members are mindful of this while in ACOM and act accordingly.

It was emphasised that only a perceived conflict of interest should be declared, no conflict of interest should not be declared.

There was no agreed action in relation to this agenda item but it was suggested that it could be discussed again at the September ACOM meeting.



Figure 2. Elements in the new ICES Code of ethics and professional conduct.

<https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.21647825.v2>

3 Report of 2022

The report of ACOM activities in 2022 was presented and ACOM was invited to comment (Figure 3.1).

ACOM discussed the inclusion of socio-economic parameters in advice; there is a need to be aware of the discrepancy between the Fisheries Overviews (FO) and Ecosystem Overviews (EO) in terms of what kind of socio-economic information that is included (e.g. ACOM has rarely commented on optimal fishing selection patterns). The aquaculture overviews have more socio-economic information, as does the advice on vulnerable marine ecosystems (VME). The advice on mixed fisheries is heading down the route for fleet-based modelling. Inclusion of socio-economic information into the Fisheries Overviews can be considered by WKFO2 to be held in May this year. ACOM raised concerns about the difference between the various management policies in ICES countries in terms of mixed fisheries or wind-farms and the inclusion of socio-economics. ICES needs clear management objectives to give advice on social and economic matters, or

develop trade-off advice. In terms of ecosystem-based fisheries management (EBFM), ICES needs to engage in dialogues with requesters to navigate in the span of requests to include both ecological and social and economic components of EBFM.

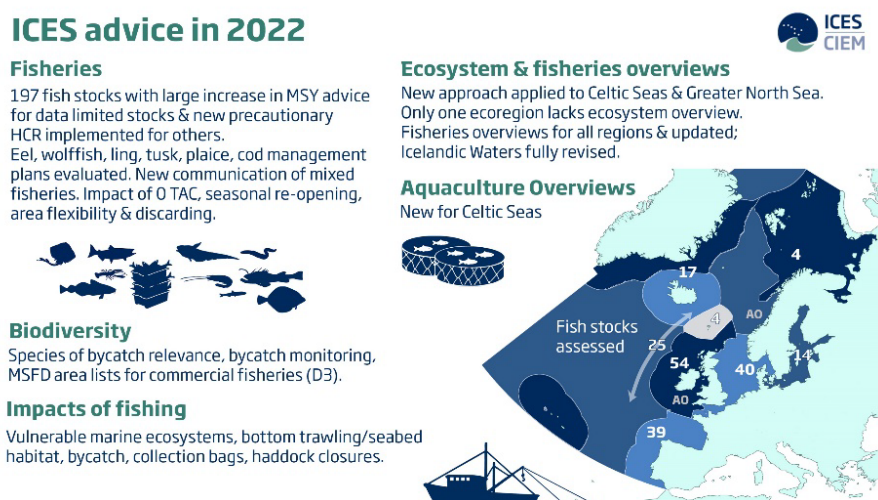


Figure 3.1. Summary of ICES advice products in 2022.

ACOM asked whether there was anything to learn from the reasons the 9 changes in the headline advice in 2022 (Figure 3.2). A challenge is the VME advice process which has been painful for all involved; the bycatch advice activities are overwhelming and the expert community cannot carry this. This is addressed in agenda item 8. The roll-out of the process outlined by the Workshop on the Development of Quantitative Assessment Methodologies based on LIFE-history traits, exploitation characteristics, and other relevant parameters for data-limited stocks (WKLIFE) should be reflected upon by ACOM; how to maintain community support, same goes for the work of Workshop on guidelines and methods for the evaluation of rebuilding plans (WKREBUILD) and Workshop on guidelines for reference points (WKREF). The ICES Guidelines for Benchmarks providing a higher degree of flexibility should facilitate the experts to take on new features without having to go through a stricter benchmarking process.

The European Union (EU) biodiversity action plan has incredibly ambitious targets and the advice requesters would like to work with ICES to implement/reach those, thus here there will be a need to adapt our activities. The ICES link with the Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV) is growing to include elements of the bird and habitat directives, as ICES is seen as partner to work towards implementation of these directives. The new Kunming-Montreal agreement (CBD) will as will imply work from ICES in terms of Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECM) and other initiatives; The North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) has already a non-recurrent request on this.

9 changes to published advice in 2022 for 2021 & 2022



Adjusted model settings:

Norwegian coastal cod, Irish Sea plaice, *Nephrops* (FU19), megrim

Changes to input data (discards, observer, catch):

Celtic Sea plaice, Black & White-bellied angler fish, bycatch of PETS

Change in basis of advice

Blue whiting (no change in catch)

Change in catch advice ≈ 9 k tonnes



Figure 3.2. Changes to headline advice in 2022.

4 Round table

Each member of ACOM was invited to comment on their national perceptions of the work and processes in the network and ACOM.

ACOM listed a broad range of issues, spanning from emerging advice needs over current advice processes and ACOM work procedures, to the recruitment of new members. Offshore marine renewable energy was mentioned by a number of ACOM members and the emerging challenges in terms of fisheries, surveying, data collection and the need for advice in this arena. With the impact on fisheries (all scales, including small scale coastal fisheries) there is a need for new types of advice, particularly around the environment protection and spatial conflicts. Advice on cumulative effects needs attention and ICES needs to be able to respond to such requests for advice. Potentially the VME advice development process can provide guidance as how to develop such advice which include trade-offs, social and economic aspects, etc.

Concerning current advice processes, EBFM and the implementation of WKLFIE methods was discussed. For EBFM, ICES will work on a more visible display of what already is done (Figure 4). Concerning the implementation of the WKLFIE methods, ACOM noted that these were taken in by the expert community however that this had been required a lot of effort from the groups. It was discussed that there is a concern for the Category 5–6 stocks which needs attention and as well the inherent hindrance in a matching increase in advised TAC when a stock recovers from a low level. ACOM noted that when the new methods result in a large discrepancy between former advice and new advice, there needs to be a focus on explaining this in the advice and potentially have a ‘transition period’ for implementing the new WKLFIE methods for such stocks.

Current inputs for EAFM from ICES



Figure 4. Current contribution to EAFM by ICES using three criteria from FAO EAF implementation monitoring tool <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb3669en>

ACOM working procedures (Cancellation of ACOM meetings to finalize advice, advice drafting group (ADG) nature, lack of engagement of ACOM in request evaluations) was discussed. ACOM expressed a need for meeting both online and physical and it was encouraged that the web conferences were not cancelled despite only few issues raised for a specific advice. The web-conferences work as well as a quality assurance tool and a means for ACOM to meet and discuss specific issues; cancelling these it takes away the feel of being a community and the verbal communication during these are important. Having the ADGs mostly online does pave the way for a higher participation but as well limit the discussions and focus of the participants. ACOM concluded that an increased engagement is needed and this could be facilitated through having the web-conferences as scheduled and a higher degree of physical meetings (e.g. a model where ADGs shift between years in terms of physical/online nature of the meeting could be considered). This of course will have implications for the associated workload for ACOM members which was reported as already being too high across ACOM members. The recruitment of ACOM alternates would lift some of this workload and as well make ACOM ready for the turn of generations (when esteemed and valued members retire), however, several ACOM members reported a difficulty in attracting new alternates.

Quality assurance and benchmark procedures was commented as having improved, in particular the preparatory phase of benchmarks, however in order to make the benchmarks successful and have implementable outcomes, the final steps need attention, e.g. getting the reference points finalised before the benchmark meeting is ending and as well have a 'test-run' with new data (could be a test-set) to see how the new benchmarked assessment converge. In terms of data, there are many new data streams arising (camera, industry data, etc.) is creating a high demand in terms of quality checks, implementation into databases, etc., the Working Group on the Governance of Quality Management of Data and Advice (WGQUALITY) was discussed as having an important role in this process. The Action Plan just published by EU will have an impact both on advice to be provided but as well on the data collection needed (small scale fisheries, trawl fisheries, etc.).

ACOM discussed the option of providing a clearer guidance for managers concerning year-to-year variation in the advice. It was suggested that the advice sheets would have a more streamlined part concerning this and ACOM concluded that a suggestion for the content and format for such a section would be discussed on the ACOM Forum after the meeting.

ACOM evaluated the communication between ACOM and the expert groups and as well between expert groups. The FRSG should be used as a forum for an increased attention to improve the communication in order to convey the science underpinning advice development and as well

the reasoning behind decided changes/added tasks. An open mind towards other views and potential new research that needs to be undertaken should be encouraged.

ICES has a good system for improving the fisheries advice, however, there is a challenge concerning the non-fisheries advice and visibility. ICES should be much more visible in new, different context where ICES can be included in reports/other actions. An example is reviews of dietary guidelines from the Nordic Minister Council where the sustainability of seafood is included without consulting ICES resulting in a less optimal output.

Lastly ACOM agreed that it was very unfortunate that no comments could be included from the Russian Federation (RF) ACOM member, who was greatly missed at the meeting. The suspension of RF continues to be a challenge for all working procedures related to stocks in that area and in general, where inputs from the RF ACOM member is missed.

Summary list of issues raised:

- Impact of offshore marine renewables energy on fisheries, surveys, data collection and advice
- EBM and EBFM
- Cumulative effects
- Lessons learnt from implementing new methods (e.g. VME, WKLIFE methods)
- ACOM working procedures and within committee engagement
- Quality assurance of data and advice
- Benchmark guidelines and flexibility
- Communication and engagement with the community of experts

5 Expert group and advice drafting group recommendations

ACOM must address recommendations to it from the expert community and from the ADGs. These recommendations are pre-screened by the ACOM and SCICOM Chairs, and the secretariat. This included in 2023 issues around the advice sheets from ACOM members and third parties.

ACOM was invited to consider these recommendations in subgroups and proposed actions in plenary.

Recommendation number ID 73

Discussion point: The wording in the “Introduction to ICES Advice on Fishing Opportunities” concerning stocks that are below B_{lim} was discussed. It had been proposed that the wording should change and clear guidance should be agreed on concerning stocks in this situation – i.e. bringing SSB above B_{lim} . It was also suggested to refer to “the start of the year” as it makes more sense than “end of the year”. However, this needs to be sense checked with the regards to for example autumn spawning herring.

This issue is to be addressed by WKREBUILD2, which was postponed, based on an extensive ACOM discussion a few months before this meeting on the forum.

Conclusion: not to change the wording. A lot of time and effort has been spent on agreeing on the formulation and thus, it is the wording ACOM has agreed to and should stand by for another year.

The hope is that WKREBUILD2 will put an end to the discussions around stocks below Blim once and for all. When a stock is below Blim, we can say “we think you should do a rebuilding plan and this is some scenarios that might be useful to you”.

Recommendation number ID 167

Discussion point: Stocks where MSY proxy is very close (higher or lower) to 1. Narrow range discussed; ‘at’ or ‘close to’, instead of ‘above’ or ‘below’.

Conclusion: Suggest no change before WKNEWREF. However, when we compare to a proxy, suggested to compare with no more than two decimal values.

Recommendation number ID 112

Discussion point: Number of digits for reference points

Conclusion: Number of digits should be the same in SAG as what is shown in the reference points table in the advice sheet.

Recommendation number ID 86

Discussion point: ACOM to consider whether using B_{MSY} instead of $MSY B_{trigger}$.

Conclusion: No. Use $MSY B_{trigger}$ or a proxy for $B_{trigger}$.

Recommendation number ID 77

Discussion point: The order of the columns in the Summary of Assessment table, so that the order becomes logic: low- point estimate- high, with a way of highlighting the point estimate

Conclusion: Agreed

Recommendation to better explain a change in advice

Discussion point: Often, the drivers behind a change in advice is not well documented in the EG report, and the ADG is scrambling around for a basis for the formulation in the advice sheet.

Suggestion: Ask the EG to look at the change in advice and ask them to identify the drivers for this change – in the EG report. However, this should be communicated via FRSG to the chairs and the groups so the reason for asking them to do this is understood.

Conclusion: On the forum for further discussion (tested with the Herring Assessment Working Group for the Area South of 62°N (HAWG) since the ACOM meeting took place)

Recommendations for making the advice sheet easier to read

Discussion point:

- Left justified text
- Off-white background to reduce the black-white contrast
- 12 point font (minimum) and 1.5 line spacing
- Removal of italics

Conclusion: While good ideas, there is an ICES style guide and there could be other ways as well. It should be taken up with the Secretariat (publications).

Recommendation number ID 149

Discussion point: more work needed for standardising the rfb rule (graphs, presentation etc.)

Conclusion: Agreed, and work has already started getting Stock Assessment Graphs (SAG) updated with the new requirements. However, clear guidance from ACOM is needed so we can adapt SAG accordingly.

Recommendation number ID 113

Discussion point: Clarification of the rb rule – should the m multiplier be applied every year?

Conclusion: Seek guidance in WKLIFE report.

Recommendation number ID 143

Discussion point: Developing the EBM framework. Use European eel as an example. Perhaps a workshop where eel is used as a working example and develop this framework. Check with the Working Group on Eels (WGEEL) experts if this is feasible.

Conclusion: Addressed in agenda item 23.

Recommendation number ID 171

Discussion point: Proposal to revise and republish the fish lists by the end of 2024.

Conclusion: Revision starts in 2024 – already discussed under different agenda point.

Recommendation number ID 169

Discussion point: Multiple concerns from the Elasmobranchs Advice drafting Group (ADGEF). ACOM is invited to consider solutions for further easing the workload

Suggestions:

1. Call for increased participation - to carry workload and spread assessments among members
2. Call for participants to take on assessments to spread the load in ADG
3. More support for assessors - within organisations and among WGEF members
4. Organise pre-annual WG meetings, specifically on DLS approaches (BOG is aware and developing plans along these lines)
5. Sharing of developed DLS R code - that includes supporting notation and examples (FRSG is aware and developing a proposal mechanism for this)
6. Convert category 5 and 6 stocks into quadrennial assessments/advice
7. New proposed methods could/should trigger dedicated EG time/meetings for preparation/uptake
8. Establishing a dialogue with the chairs of Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF) a first step to come up with workable solutions.

First step: Discussion with the chairs of WGEF. In general, plea for the National Institutes: Send more experts with relevant background to the meeting. We understand these are not commercially important stocks, but they are there, they have a growing conservation value. We should support the work of this group.

Additional concern: For cat 5–6 stocks: Do we carry on with the 20% reduction? Does it still make sense? Pass to WKLIFE.

Conclusion: Ask WKLIFE to look into this.

Recommendation number ID 2

Discussion point: Assistance for WGBYC in identify new members with expertise in rare fish and elasmobranchs to contribute to the increasing work of WGBYC on these taxa.

Conclusion: Similar issues as above (from ADGEF) regarding participation of experts with relevant knowledge. Same solution. Suggestion for expertise particularly on common skate – a lot of people out there working on this species. We need to engage them in this work (Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC)). They will need to be nominated though – and funded by Institutes.

Recommendation number ID 1x (independently submitted)

Discussion point: Stocks below B_{lim}

Conclusion: For WKREBUILD2 to look into

Discussion point: Stock development over time

Suggestion to change the order of the standard sentence and edit slightly: “Spawning-stock size is below MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa} , and B_{lim} . Although fishing pressure is below F_{msy} this level of fishing pressure may not be sustainable at current stock size level.”

Discussion point: This is the message that should be portrayed when F is below F_{MSY} and at the same time, the stock size is below B_{lim} . However, we never use/advise fishing at F_{MSY} when a stock is below $B_{trigger}$, we use a reduced F (advice rule). We have never tested F_{MSY} when we are below B_{lim} . We are sending the wrong message, if we are saying that even though the stock is below B_{lim} , we are ok because we are also below F_{MSY} . If the characterisation/formulation changes, this will have impact on the fisheries overviews.

Conclusion: This needs to be explored further and may change with the framework workshops.

Recommendation number ID 2x (independently submitted)

Discussion point: $I_{trigger}$ vs. I_{loss} . $I_{trigger}$ was introduced during the advice year (2022), and we are currently not consistent in all advice. The issue is communicating this to the end users of our advice.

Conclusion: Need for a list of stocks where this is relevant and then discussions around pros and cons of using $I_{trigger}$ vs. I_{loss} . Potentially refer the question to WKLIFE for robust answer.

Recommendation number ID 3.x (independently submitted)

Discussion point: Concerning age diversity and stock resilience. Is this something for WKREBUILD? Potential for recovery testing different scenarios (different age structures?).

Conclusion: Workshop to answer DGENV requests on MSFD criterion D3C3 work will have simulations as well testing stocks in different states. These can be used to address these issues.

Action

5 Recommendations: secretariat to input responses into recommendations database and inform correspondents

6 WGQUALITY

The Chairs of the Working Group on the Governance of Quality Management of Data and Advice (WGQUALITY) presented the group’s report and recommendations. ACOM was invited to consider the recommendations in subgroups and to discuss proposed actions in plenary.

ACOM acknowledged the great work done by WGQUALITY and the work speaks directly to ICES advice plan and its objectives. WGQUALITY recommended that ICES moves in the direction of ISO 9001:2015 “Quality management systems — Requirements”.

One of the aspects that makes the ISO 9001:2015 so attractive is its customer focus (requester in the ICES context). Also continual improvement is embedded. The credibility of the ICES advice is of importance and the corrections to the headline advice can undermine that ICES credibility. Implementation of framework like the one proposed by WGQUALITY is needed to improve

quality processes in general. Developing such a framework will take time but by putting some systems in place and learning from the previous errors will be a move towards a better-quality advice.

Recommendations of WGQUALITY to fulfil ISO 9001:2015:

- Finalise and publish an ICES Quality Manual (building on WGQUALITY draft manual)
- Implement the policies/processes/procedures that have been identified as gaps by WGQUALITY:
 - Publish an ICES Quality Policy (draft provided by WGQUALITY)
 - Finalise and implement the process for defining Quality Objectives
 - Finalise and implement the process for dealing with non-conformities

There are currently three National Institutes that are influenced by the ISO 9001:2015 requirements. If approved, the proposed quality management requirements would be applied into the ICES processes. When clarifying the presentation, the chair of WGQUALITY noted that principle 1 talks about customer focus and that is one of the base principles as the needs of requesters need to be considered. At the same time there is principle 7 with focus on managing relationships with stakeholders and other interested parties. So, both principles need to coexist and are an integral part of the requirements or foundations of the ISO 9001:2015 standards.

ACOM questioned if the approach described in WGQUALITY (which is fishing opportunities focused) could be easily focused on ecosystem service and impacts advice too. This focus was acknowledged as a weakness by WGQUALITY.

There was also a short explanation on how the group arrived to the 5 proposed processes and although there is a recognition that there are other processes the group focused on these 5 as they are the base for the Advisory Process. Another question was asked on what are the requirements for a Quality Policy. In reply it was pointed out that there are a few requirements, it needs to:

- be established by the senior leadership within the organization, and include a commitment to satisfy the requirements and maintaining for example certification
- include a commitment for continuing improvement, and be appropriate to the organization while provide a framework to set measurable quality objectives

In terms of the policy itself, WGQUALITY chose to have a shorter policy, more concise that does not need to be change often.

Clarification was sought on how the 10 principals have the continuing improvement in them. In reply that this is a difficult aspect as continuing improvement is at ICES core and can be difficult to people to pin point it but it is everywhere. This was further supported by other members saying that continuing improvement is endemic to the organization from strategic plan to the advisory and science plans were most of the content is aspirational with formulation like these are the things we do and we need to do better.

Also asked was what are the properties of quality objectives. The main aspects to be on the lookout are, that they need to be linked to the quality policy and they need to be measurable. As an example, one could think of the number of stocks being benchmarked during a specific time frame and the measure would be the number of successful benchmarks in the same time period. Also, things to have in mind are that what is defined as quality objectives needs to be important to both the organization and requesters so an objective like the number corrections made to the headline advice would be a good candidate for a quality objective. However, it is good practice to have a lower number of objectives but ensuring these are important to all.

On the recommendation for a Data Quality Manager role, the secretariat suggested that this role should probably be spread among several people as this should be something that all should be involved. There was also the fear that if the role and responsibility fall on one single person the

rest of the organization would walk away from quality issues. The role is carried out differently in different institutes.

After the presentation and opening discussion, ACOM split into subgroups to consider the presentation, the description of the processes and the quality objectives. The key messages from the subgroups are that the ISO framework was generic enough for all advice process principle 5 improvement must take primacy over principle 4-Process approach. Some groups supported and viewed as important the appointment of a quality manager. The objectives were mapped out against the principles (Figure 6). ACOM welcomes the recommendation for a Quality Management Plan and the drafted Quality Policy by WGQUALITY.

In plenary, the importance and usefulness in terms of ICES legitimacy and mandate to act with an openness to its customer relationship was emphasized. ICES has yet to find a similar field like medicine, finance where there is a degree of operational flexibility and still allow some form of documentation of the interaction. The processes described by WGQUALITY did not fully address the broad portfolio of ICES advice. The subgroups struggled to adapt the process diagram.

It was asked if the impact of decisions could be considered a reflection of ICES quality? In reply it was said that there are a lot of focus on impact and that was one of the reasons for investing in the new library. This allows ICES to find how much impact each allometric score has especially when the grey literature is being used and quoted even by the EU. Also, ICES advice is now being written into legislation which means that ICES impact is embedded. Things like ICES being mentioned in the Brexit agreement, or management plans or in the innovative gears regulation and being the only legal adviser to NEAFC all of that speaks for its relevance.

Decisions

6.1 Quality: to approve the move towards ISO 9001:2015 as a framework for ICES quality management

6.2 Quality: to adopt the draft management policy provided by WGQUALITY

Actions

6.1 Quality: ACOM to begin to implement procedures to deliver the framework and the quality management plan. It's proposed to adapt and re-write the Quality Management Plan and it will be done through the forum over the next 18 months to 2 years.



Figure 6 Mapping of objectives and concepts against principle of ISO 9001:2015.

7 Data limited methods

The Chairs of Workshop 11 on the Development of Quantitative Assessment Methodologies based on Life-history traits, exploitation characteristics, and other relevant parameters for data-limited stocks (WKLIFEXI) presented their report and recommendations. ACOM was invited to comment, agree actions, and take decisions.

WKLIFE XI in January 2023 after a hiatus. The workshop was well attended, with good enthusiasm from the members. The report has been published and was made available to ACOM. Despite its longevity, WKLIFE has remains a workshop (WK) rather than a Working Group (WG) primarily because participation is much more open for WKs allowing for a greater diversity of participants. There have been some suggestions from SCICOM that it could be established as a WG, but for now the process seems to be working and providing valuable inputs to the advisory process as a WK.

WKLIFE XI reviewed issues received from the ICES community and ACOM about application of the new data-limited methods. In most cases they provided clarifications or explanations, and based on the comments no changes to the current guidelines are needed yet. They also developed a roadmap for future work of WKLIFE, focusing on different life histories, evaluating methods for Category 4-6 stocks (stocks lacking indices of abundance), and continuing to support rollout of the new methods amongst other topics.

There were three recommendations from the meeting for ACOM to consider:

- 1) A WKLIFE XII meeting was proposed for October 2023 (with TORs drafted), - to be considered and posted on the resolution forum
- 2) Continue to apply the WKLIFE X methods for all stocks where appropriate,
- 3) Consider the principle of risk equivalence to ensure new methods with less data do not allow for a higher risk tolerance.

The FRSG chair noted that the empirical methods were adopted well for many stocks in 2022, as well as SPiCT though this was found to take a bit more work/focus from the groups.

There were some comments about the 'case specific tuning' required for some rules. This seems like a lot of work, similar to a benchmark in many ways. At present SPiCT and CHR rules were being handled in benchmark style processes, and as such do not require a request. It seemed that WKLIFE appeared to be discouraging case-specific tuning somewhat, however it was stated that the aim was not to discourage case-specific tuning, but rather to reduce expectations that it will happen for every stock because of the workload required to implement it (potentially a similar amount of work to that for Category 1 stocks). It was noted that many data-limited stocks are not knowledge limited, and there could be significant expertise and non-quantitative information available and there needs to be an easy way to bring this case-specific knowledge into the advice.

There were some concerns that the advice frequency for the rules (some are annual, some biennial) was not highlighted well enough to ACOM and requesters before application. Some requesters were surprised to find biennial advice for some stocks that previously had had annual advice. The way the rules operate (e.g. application of change limits, use of a precautionary multiplier etc.) and the way they were evaluated means that unless strongly motivated and supported by analyses, the frequency of advice should match that recommended in the guidelines. In cases where advice frequency would change with the application of the new methods, requesters of advice should be consulted in advance.

There was some clarity sought on the issue of 'risk equivalence'. WKLIFE started from the ICES risk criterion that $P(SSB < Blim)$ should be less than 5% for Category 1 stocks. The risk of dropping below $Blim$ should not increase for a stock if it uses methods from a lower data Category. For example, the previous data-limited advice methods were found to not be generically more precautionary than Category 1 approaches, which lead to the development of the new rules to improve the risk equivalence. This was also an issue that was discussed in WKREF1+2, which noted that there needed to be consistency across categories in terms of appropriate risk. It is also for this reason that WKLIFE felt comments that the new methods were perhaps 'too precautionary' were not valid, since these methods by design need to be more precautionary given the reduction in data available.

Decision:

7.1 WKLIFE: agree to maintain rollout of the new methods. There are approximately 33 stocks to apply the new methods to in 2023 (mainly from WGDEEP, WGEF, and *Nephrops* stocks).

Actions:

7.1. WKLIFE: Risk equivalence: approve further exploration and develop ToRs for WKLIFE XII to evaluate the methods with regards to risk equivalence.

7.2 WKLIFE: Produce slides to be presented to assessment WGs highlighting the answers provided by WKLIFE to various issues posed by the community in 2022. Action: secretariat

8 Ecosystem services and effects (ES&E) special request to recurrent advice

ICES has experienced challenges in the process when creating recurrent advice that originates from special requests (e.g. PETS bycatch, trade-off and VMEs). Similar challenges exist as the portfolio of ecosystem, fisheries and aquaculture overviews is completed, and further revised. An invited group of ACOM and SCICOM members prepared a briefing document and proposals to ACOM. The key stage when problems come to a head is the ADG.

Moving from special request to recurrent advice, is not a streamlined process (Figure 8). The process encounters challenges and blocks as no prior text exists when moving. A pragmatic approach is needed and the process must be rooted in the expert community meaning that ACOM should oversee and direct but not carry out the analysis. A lot of issues need to be considered including resources in community, ACOM and Secretariat; level playing field in terms of output, science, methods; policy objectives and options for QC/QA. In many cases the required factors have been missing in the process and the ADG ends up being the hub for this development while collecting evidence, drafting advice, and considering the framework which makes the ADG process difficult to manage.

To state the challenge clearly ecosystem service and effects ADGs often have three activities:

1. knowledge generation and synthesis,
2. draft advice,
3. develop framework.

Often there is carry-over of Expert Group discussions and issues to ADG. The process can be smoothed by the use of research/advice roadmaps or demonstration advice thus facilitating the transition of building the scientific evidence base for the advice development. The ADG is often

challenged by having both a development component and as well an implementation component; thus, having to both create and synthesise the knowledge and then draft the advice.

Proposed list of considerations

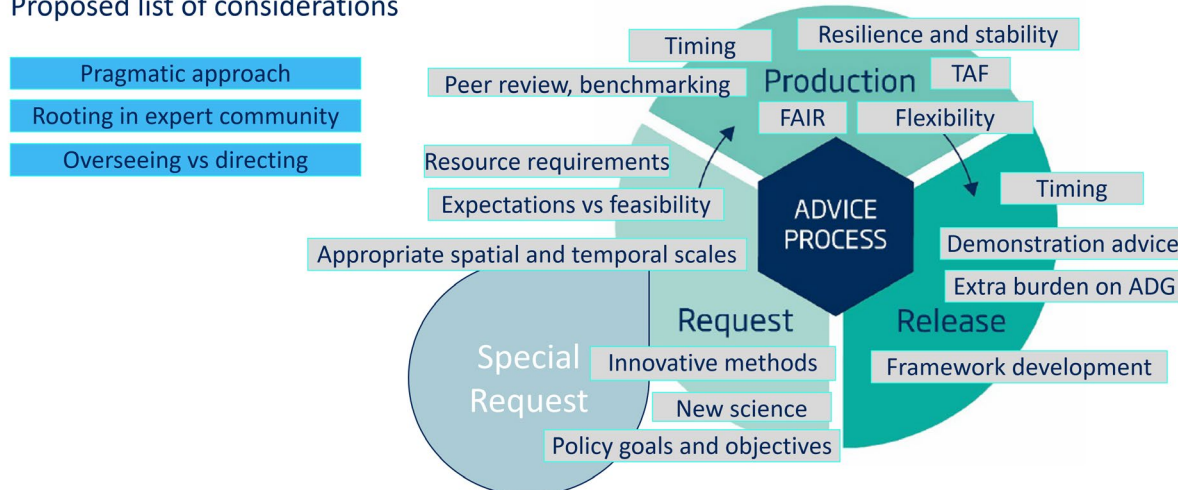


Figure 8. Schematic of challenges faced in the production of recurrent ecosystem services and effects advice.

Too many individual experts are in the expert groups and then the ADGs. This makes independence of advice difficult to ensure. There can be difficult discussions around consistency of advice *vs.* best available science. Sometimes there is insufficient documentation of methods and data (sometimes only available retrospectively). It is essential to communicate the matrix of uncertainty in the advice.

For these ADGs, virtual meetings are in some cases quite problematic so physical meetings should be encouraged. ACOM web-conferences on new types of advice should be held to engage ACOM more widely.

The trade off-advice, benthic loss advice are good examples of what can be done where the assessment\advice was marked "FOR DEMONSTRATION ONLY". These though were support by major EU Horizon projects. Demonstration advice allows for external feedback from managers and stakeholders.

The process needs to be transparent and decisions need to be documented and clear to the community, advice requesters and ACOM. It is necessary to document clearly and transparent the underlying scientific evidence. Insufficient documentation in terms of method and data is a weakness, and credible documentation is vital. The review quality and in-depth scrutiny is part of the documentation which needs to be ensured. The ADG will in many cases revert to original papers/resources in order to get the advice correct, changing the draft advice.

ACOM proposed a potential solution being labelling developing advice clearly, which could ensure sufficient iterations take place for new types of recurrent advice before it can be considered final for the advice requesters. Roadmaps could be applied as processes to avoid the knowledge creation, synthesis and translation into advice in one ADG meeting. Another way could be to apply the reviewer report as an iterative tool, allowing time for the evaluation of the underpinning science base before implementation in the advice. The expert groups should be provided with the tools to draft a robust advice or add an additional step in the process where the advice sheet can be scrutinised, reviewed and further developed prior to the advice draft arriving at the ADG.

When in dialogue with the advice requesters, ICES is not a passive voice. ICES needs to have a mandate to have flexibility to develop the evidence base and as well improve the formulation of the advice in order to make it robust and operational. Thus, iterations are required. It is imperative for ICES to stay as the key evidence provider, however, the speed with which the policy develops and the need for having underpinning advice is so high that it challenges ICES.

ACOM concluded that this issue is a clear stress point for advice and many issues described relate to the process for preparing the first draft of the advice. The ADGs can be considered a bottleneck. ACOM recommended the following approach to the ADG process:

1. **Be pragmatic and realistic.** There is a limit in the system and ICES cannot deliver everything requested.
2. Avoid enabling ADGs to have the **triple functions**: create/synthesise knowledge, draft advice and develop framework.
 - Optimum approach: the expert groups create/synthesise knowledge, the ADG drafts advice based on ACOM determined advice frameworks
 - Avoid extending EG discussions to ADG: many examples of incomplete work of EG being resolved (or not in ADG)
 - Where possible prevent overlapping membership between EG and ADG
3. **Clearly document and communicate uncertainty**, particularly for advice which might be used in legislation purposes.
4. **Insufficient documentation is an issue**, especially document methodology concurrently with the advice and document data properly.
5. **Scrutinise review quality.** Occasionally not going sufficiently deep in terms of evaluating methodology, checking validity of statements (based on literature sources), etc.
6. **Physical meetings** important and more efficient.

The roles and responsibilities of the ADG must be clearly understood. ACOM supported the recommendations in document 8.

ACOM also supported the approach of greater iterations and the use of demonstration advice. It suggested the following

- Special request advice (via request template)
- Formulation of request for recurring advice with requesters (likely in MoU)
- Consideration of high-level advice framework and potential operational objectives
- Benchmark I with stakeholders
- Demonstration advice and close engagement with requesters
- Further consideration of high-level advice framework and potential operational objectives
- Benchmark II with stakeholders
- ADG/advice release

Action

8 ES&E recurrent processes: a subgroup of ACOM will further develop the issues raised and documents 8, leading to a potential revision of chapter 1.1.2. for ACOM in September 2023.

9 Barents Sea stocks

ICES has been requested in the agreed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with NEAFC and the specific grant agreement with Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DGMARE) to provide advice in 2023 for fishing opportunities in 2024 for fish stocks in the

Barents Sea. Based on discussions on the ACOM Forum, a proposal for how this advice will be produced was given in document 09. ACOM was invited to consider these proposals, agree actions, and take decisions.

Following a Council decision in 2022, all delegates, members and experts from the Russian Federation were suspended from participation in ICES activities. Bureau has since agreed that ICES will not actively request data from the Russian Federation, and any submissions received will be considered on a case by case basis. There are a number of requests for advice on fishing opportunities in 2024 for fish stocks in ICES area 1 and 2 (EU and NEAFC), and ACOM was asked to consider the steps which can be taken to fulfil ICES obligations in light of these decisions. The Chair stressed that this was a sad and deeply unfortunate situation, the temporary suspension of Russian experts creates a real issue with provision of advice for Barents Sea stocks, posing legal risks to ICES, should this advice not be delivered.

In 2022, for 2023, Norwegian and Russian experts worked bilaterally under the auspices of the Norwegian-Russian Joint Fisheries Commission to provide advice independent of ICES. The plan by the Commission for 2023 is to repeat this approach for Barents Sea cod, haddock, Greenland halibut, capelin, beaked redfish and Northern shrimp (no TAC set by the Commission). The outputs and reports of these analyses are openly available to the public, but the unaggregated input data are not. These assessments are very likely to be carried out using the benchmarked methods previously benchmarked by ICES and with methods described in the existing stock annexes, and drawing on frameworks developed in existing MSE evaluations.

To meet its obligations to EU and NEAFC, a proposal to review the work of the bilateral Norway – Russia expert working group was tabled and discussed by ACOM. Such a review could be tasked to investigate the degree of adherence to the ICES advice principles, and to the methods outlined in the relevant stock annexes. It would also comment on whether deviations from the stock annex methods were described and the rationale for the deviations explained. The review could not assess the veracity and quality of the input data. A range of options for the outputs of this review were discussed, while after the review, ACOM would be responsible for the form of communication to requesters.

A statement from one member country was read to ACOM stating the challenges about any proposed review

Questions were raised about the timelines on which the work outside ICES, and subsequent review, would be done. Indications were that this was not fixed yet, although it is likely to be towards the end of the year. The issue of what non-Norwegian, non-Russian resource is available to complete this work was also raised. The chair highlighted that there are several other countries represented in the Arctic Fisheries Working Group, and that ACOM can ask these, or others, to work on a review. Sourcing independent reviewers was possible. Representatives of several countries indicated that, in line with national policies regarding interactions with Russian interests, their scientific colleagues would not be allowed to participate in such an exercise.

ACOM agreed that as it could not assure the quality or veracity of the input data for the bilateral work, ACOM could not give bona fide advice on these six stocks. However, it could review the processes used in relation to the benchmarks and suitable explanations of deviations from the benchmarks. The mechanism for the review still needs to be agreed and would likely be a hybrid of the options described in the Technical Services Guidelines (<https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.8347>).

ACOM concluded that, compared to options such as not providing advice, or using data-limited methods, conducting a review of the work of the external bilateral working group was likely the best approach under the circumstances. No decision was taken as yet, pending further discussions and the draft resolution for any review

Action:

9. Barents Sea stocks: ACOM will further explore the responsibilities and potential solutions.

10 Implement stakeholder engagement strategy

ACOM was reminded of the publication of the [stakeholder engagement strategy](#). The stakeholder engagement strategy was briefly presented to ACOM. Council has approved the stakeholder engagement strategy and now it is up to ACOM and SCICOM to develop the implementation plan. The first step is to have a Workshop on the implementation of the stakeholder engagement strategy (WKSTIMP). Care has been taken to ensure a diverse and competent participation in the chair appointment of the workshop. This agenda was for information and ACOM was invited to comment.

The resolution for WKSTIMP has been approved and is:

HAPISG XX The Workshop on implementing stakeholder engagement strategy (WKSTIMP), chaired by Marta Ballesteros, Spain, Ashley Wilson, UK, and Alexandre Rodriguez, Spain will be established and will meet online (16 May) in Copenhagen, Denmark (17 May) and partially hybrid (onsite and specific hybrid session on the 18 May) 2023 to:

- a) Lay out the actions necessary to achieve the goals and actions in the stakeholder engagement strategy
- b) Identify options and related costs for the implementation of the actions and propose different scenarios based on these options
- c) Considering these scenarios, and using the proposed structure shown below, draft elements of the implementation plan.
- d) Describe how the outputs of monitoring and evaluation can inform ACOM and SCICOM

WKSTIMP will report by 30 June 2023 for the attention of ACOM and SCICOM.

In the IEA group perspective, the need to engage with stakeholders is increasing, bringing these participants in related to their expertise/knowledge. A concern is whether this stakeholder engagement will involve more work/administrative tasks for the groups like was seen with the Data Profiling Tool. It will imply more consideration and work related to setting up meetings, invitations, preparing and evaluating after the meetings. There will be costs implied to several steps in the individual processes, however, a cost will as well be related to the actual implementation of the stakeholder engagement plan given the need for the ICES Secretariat managing the processes.

It was raised whether this engagement strategy can be linked to/related to the quality insurance processes. The roles and responsibilities are clearly documented and should if anything add to the quality insurance of our processes.

11 Interactive online fishing opportunities advice

ACOM was informed of the feedback to the beta version of the new interactive, online fishing opportunities advice <https://ices-taf.shinyapps.io/online-single-stock-advice/>. This agenda was for information and ACOM was invited to comment.

Shiny application developed over the past 2 years (Figure 11), the beta version was released this January. The feedback following from this release has been positive, asking for a more mobile-friendly version to be developed as well. To have a continued development and perfecting the app, ICES Secretariat would like any feedback prior to the full release, which is scheduled for June 2023.

ACOM appreciated the development; the target audience is seen wider than the 'pdf-uptakers', thus the ICES community and as well e-NGO's, managers, etc. The tool offers a good way to display the various catch-scenarios and allows for a wider range of such scenarios without over-complicating 'the advice sheet'. Comments/text from the advice sheet is a trickier thing to display, however the link to the actual pdf file is easy accessible to the viewer. In order to provide this service to an even wider community, the messaging with the online advice need to cater for a more level explanatory text to go with the graphics. This text could be made available in a 'hierarchical way', guiding the viewer through different layers.

ACOM overall found the app user-friendly and specific feed-back will be provided through the app. Some suggestions were adding risk associated with the catch scenarios, more descriptive text in the comparative scenarios and adding spatial layers.

The app will not publish the advice before the advice is released. ACOM suggested to use the app in June/July when presenting advice to their national managers.

The app

- Over 2 years of development
- Development supported by user story group composed by ACOM members
- Presented to ICES staff, WGs, ACOM, MIRIA and MIACO

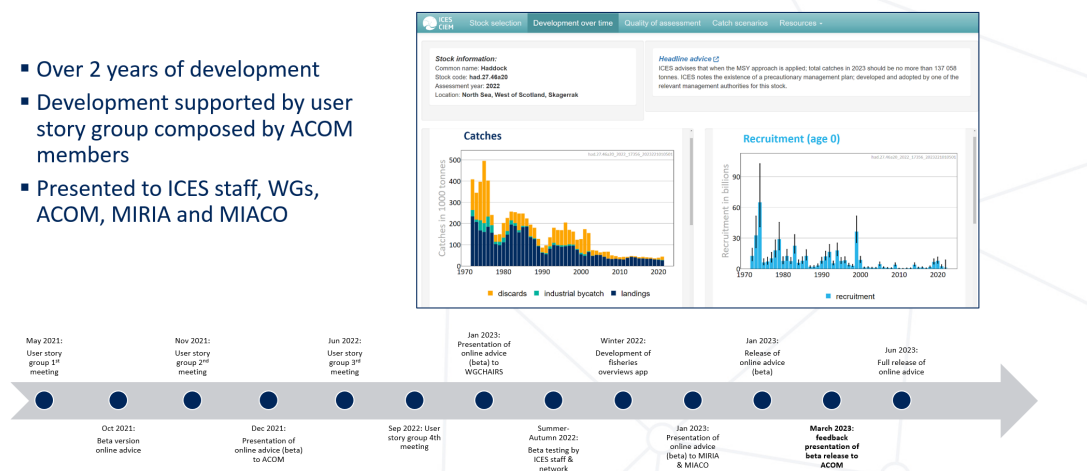


Figure 11. Development of the online fishing opportunities advice.

12 Recreational fisheries

Recommendations on recreational fisheries from expert groups, and the needs expressed by the requesters of advice on recreational fisheries, were presented to ACOM.

ACOM Leadership presented document 12. Recreational fisheries have been included in single stock advice for some stocks and in some special requests. The new grant agreement with DGMARE requests more specifically the inclusion of recreational fisheries in ICES advice. The need for knowledge on specific national regulations and lack of data available challenges the incorporation of information on recreational fisheries.

It is expected that ICES will receive more requests for advice on the extent and impact of recreational fisheries. The current structure to support the work on recreational fisheries is composed by the Working Group on Recreational Fisheries (WGRFS). Additionally, the Workshop on Recreational Fisheries in Stock Assessments, WKRFSA, will meet this year to identify barriers preventing the inclusion of recreational fisheries in the advisory process. ACOM was invited to discuss whether the current structures will suffice, whether the terms of reference for WKRFSA will contribute to manage the higher workload expected and whether ACOM should champion the process after WKRFSA takes place.

ACOM supported the process and current structures. However, it was noted that the policy goal is unclear and that can challenge the resulting advice. An ACOM member acknowledged the good development but noted the high uncertainty around the estimates. It was noted that managers need to act now despite the lack of data and that was similar to bycatch. The empirical nature of WGRFS can be a challenge for a future involvement in ICES advice. There was a suggestion to move WGRFS to FRSG to help the group get the support they need to contribute to the advisory process. ACOM and the FRSG chair agreed.

ACOM was informed that the RDBES will also look into approaches to incorporate recreational fisheries data to the database. The DCF contains all methodologies used by Member States in the annex and that will help. Regionalisation of WGRFS might help as the current scope and number of participants is huge. Some thought that to better prepare for an eventual contribution of WGRFS to stock assessments it is advisable to have WGRFS experts in the relevant stock assessments expert groups.

There is a section on recreational fisheries on the ecosystem and fisheries overviews where the activity is relevant.

The Chair of WGRFS joined the discussion and confirmed the will of the group to contribute to stock assessments. The change of steering group was tentatively accepted by the chair and also accepted the task to develop a roadmap. The content and structure of such roadmap needs to be defined further.

The WGRFS Chair also noted the challenge to report data on recreational fisheries as response to the ICES data call since the experts collecting the data often belong to different organizations than those dealing with commercial fisheries. ACOM Leadership noted this and will discuss it further with the benchmarks group.

Regarding the roadmap, 2 approaches were presented. One was to prioritize stocks where recreational fisheries is important to start with. The other approach would consist in including all stocks by default and make a case to not include them. The second approach was seen as more complete in terms of the overview it will provide and agreed as the way forward.

Actions:

- 12.1 Recreational fisheries: explore with SCICOM moving WGRFS to FRSG
- 12.2 Recreational fisheries: FRSG chair to proactively promote recreational fisheries and WGRFS to gain visibility.
- 12.3 Recreational fisheries: ToRs to be developed to request WGRFS to develop a roadmap for how to increase inclusion of recreational fisheries data into advisory processes. ACOM Leadership, ICES secretariat and WGRFS will work together to define structure, scope and content of the roadmap.

13 Perception of advice

The Workshop on accounting for fishers and other stakeholders' perceptions of the dynamics of fish stocks in ICES advice (WKAFPA) was presented to ACOM. This agenda item was for information and ACOM was invited to comment.

The need to communicate stakeholders' experiences and perceptions (sense-checking) and to consider them in the provision of the advice, the need to maintain momentum on data from the industry was explained by ACOM Leadership. It was stressed that the clear distinction between data flows from the industry (work related to workflow, processing, standardizing, quality assurance, conflict of interest issues was in progress through the Workshop on developing guidance for ensuring the integrity of scientific information submitted to ICES by data providers

(WKENSURE), the Workshop to Evaluate the Utility of Industry-derived data (WKEVUT) and other workshops) and perceptions. The next step is to ensure sense checking and enable other stakeholders that have a voice to come forward. ACOM Leadership explained further that this had been done in 2022 during WKRRCOD (Workshops on research needs and a roadmap for further research on cod in the northern shelf seas (including cod in the Celtic Seas)) by gathering recommendations from the industry. The ACOM Leadership pointed that there were key issues in terms of the link with our fish stock dynamic that needed to be considered.

The drafted terms of references of the Workshop on accounting for fishers and other stakeholders' perceptions of the dynamics of fish stocks in ICES advice ([WKAFPA](#)) were presented to ACOM. The issue of the perception of stock status was raised and ACOM agreed that this should be added to the resolution.

It was noted that it takes a considerable amount of resources to make stakeholder understand the similarities and differences in perceptions and that there would always be a difference between fishermen and science views. However, this has always been a key element of ACFM and ACOM business, and it was ACOM's responsibilities to invest efforts in this task.

It was important to get information specially on stock dynamic, fishing trends and the wider marine ecosystem because fishermen have more survey windows in time and space and our observation tables were reducing. ACOM was invited to comment on the Chairs of WKAFPA as both were employed by the industry. ACOM decided to find a third Chair to supplement the existing Chairs breadth of experience.

The proposed resolution was adapted:

Suggested change of ToR for WKAFPA discussed by ACOM:

*ToR 4. Provide the key elements of a mechanism to systematically monitor and collate information from fishers and other stakeholders on fish stock dynamics, **perception of stock status (in relation to reference points)** and fishing patterns that may be useful to evidence and understand any similarities and differences in their perceptions compared to ICES assessments. This will be posted on the forum for approval as well as suggested chair. WKAFPA is suggested to take place in the autumn/winter 2023.*

Action

13 Perceptions of advice: Secure a third chair for WKAFPA

14 Spatial advice to spatial management

ICES is facing challenges in when dealing with uncertainty in its spatial advice. ICES needs to fully consider how uncertainties in spatial advice and resolution can best be communicated to managers and how scientific evidence can be implemented in legislation. ACOM was invited to discuss the issue, agree actions, and take decisions.

The aim of this item is to generate a discussion amongst ACOM members on the specific needs of delivering spatial advice. There is already demand for ICES to provide spatial explicit advice, and the challenges this presents will have to be addressed in a coherent manner to avoid the risk of duplication of work, confused messaging and poor advice. Many requests employ common data or processes, and approaching this in a joined-up fashion will reduce these risks. Such requests can be accommodated within existing advisory processes, subject to some accommodation of the differences regarding spatial data, frameworks and uncertainty. An example given was repurposing the “stock annex” concept to describe a piece of spatial analysis or data, which could then be used in an off-the-shelf manner or benchmarked.

Currently, spatial analysis in ICES is often carried out and presented at a 0.05×0.05 degree “c-square”, scale. This approach was adopted by the working group on spatial fisheries data as the best method to assess fishing activity at the statutory minimum two-hour Vessel Monitoring by Satellite (VMS) polling frequency. The drawbacks to this approach are the relatively coarse resolution, and the variable area, relative to latitude. The adoption of an “equal-area grid” specific to ICES advisory products was discussed. Consistency across different pieces of advice (e.g. OSPAR requests, trade-off and VME advice) was felt to be essential to ICES credibility.

ACOM noted and appreciated the work being carried out by the Working Group on Spatial Fisheries Data (WGSFD) to assess the suitability of the c-square scale and incorporation of a habitat layer, recognised the need to develop a strategic approach to delivery of spatial advice across ICES, and agreed to draft terms of reference for a workshop on a strategy for spatial advice.

Action:

14 Spatial advice: ACOM will form a subgroup to draft terms of reference for a workshop to describe the challenges and propose a route to resolve those challenges for spatial advice.

15 Bycatch priorities

Requests to ICES for recurrent and special advice on the bycatch of Protected, Endangered and Threatened Species (PETS), and sensitive fish species, are numerous and substantial. ICES is following the [bycatch roadmap](#) and is in intensive dialogue with many advice requesters on bycatch. Prioritisation of efforts is required, and these are described in document 15. ACOM was invited to consider the proposal, agree actions, and take decisions.

ICES work on bycatch of protected species is ongoing and there is a need to prioritize tasks due to high workload. ICES planned activities for 2023–2025 include:

- 1) Special requests from DGENV on ‘Appropriate bycatch monitoring systems at Member State level and on regional coordination’ and from NEAFC on ‘Advice on bird bycatch in the NEAFC Regulatory Areas’

- 2) Recurrent advice to DGMARE
- 3) PETS bycatch advice section within Fisheries Overviews
- 4) Updating the species' lists of bycatch relevance (recommended by ADGFISHLIST and WCBYC in 2022)
- 5) Benchmarking PETS bycatch advice process
- 6) Revision of the roadmap for ICES advice on bycatch of PETS
- 7) Start considering a data limited approach for data poor situations
- 8) Additional special request on Baltic harbour porpoises from DGMARE with minor tasks in 2023

It was noted that the request by DGENV on bycatch monitoring will have considerable impact and both DGENV and DGMARE are pending its results.

In relation to the recurrent advice to DGMARE and Fisheries Overviews, revisions of the advice templates are needed in 2023. Among other things, DGMARE now request i) total annual mortality due to bycatch (i.e. raised bycatch rates to total fishing effort), and ii) a specific approach for data limited situations. It is noted that the special request by NEAFC on bird bycatch will be a test case of a data limited situation. A proposal for a new advice template will be put forward.

In terms of revising the list of species of bycatch relevance, it was proposed to delay the activity until 2024. The delay will allow for more time to prepare for a revision and to analyze relevant data.

There was also a proposal to delay the benchmarking of the advisory process on bycatch of protected species to 2025 with potential preparation/data evaluation workshops in 2024.

The revision of the Roadmap for ICES bycatch advice on PETS, motivated by the new EU action plan on "[Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries](#)" and the consideration of data limited approaches, requires the establishment of a dedicated subgroup of ACOM members and ICES experts. This revision will not include a full review of the species lists of bycatch relevance (currently included in the roadmap as annexes) but it will require some modifications of the lists (i.e. correction of mistakes identified in 2022). An ACOM subgroup can take on this task and propose modifications to the Roadmap by the ACOM meeting in September 2023.

One ACOM member asked how do the Roadmap and the general ICES framework to provide PETS bycatch advice differ (a diagram of the current framework was included in the presentation by the ACOM Vice-Chair). It is clarified that the framework is a schematic to put together common ground between DGENV and DGMARE but this schematic needs to be worked out more in the roadmap development. It is mentioned that the current roadmap does not have fixed deadlines or a clear path and goals to be achieved in the next 5–10 years.

In terms of data limited approaches, it is suggested to include this as a ToR for WGBYC 2023. So far there is not a consistent approach for data limited situations and to focus on threatened species/species at extinction risk would be key. Even in those situations when monitoring data and bycatch incidents exist for a given species, area, and métier the amount of data is limited.

The BEAM (Bycatch Evaluation and Assessment Matrix) approach developed by WGBYC in 2022 was mentioned. This approach considers bycatch estimates and its uncertainties and can be applied to data poor and data rich situations. For more data poor situations where no data on bycatch rates are available, a risk-based approach is needed. A potential solution to improve monitoring is not enough for some species as they are too rare to be by-caught and thus data on incidents and bycatch rates are unavailable. It is mentioned that the Regional Database and Estimation System (RDBES), which will hold PETS bycatch data in the future, will help getting more detailed bycatch data.

ACOM is asked to consider whether an additional special request on PETS bycatch can be taken on in the current intense workload situation. The initial proposal by Leadership was to not take on any more request related to PETS bycatch in the next 6–9 months given current workload. However, several ACOM members consider that ACOM should be informed about the content of the request before deciding whether the work is strategically important for ICES and whether it should be prioritized.

ACOM is aware of the stress in the system. Upcoming request on PETS bycatch will follow the usual evaluation process but unless persuaded otherwise the initial step will be not to take them on.

Decisions:

15.1 Bycatch: agreed to delay the revision of the lists of species of bycatch relevance until 2024.

15.2 Bycatch: agreed to delay the benchmarking process until 2025.

Actions:

15.1 Bycatch: an ACOM subgroup to work on a revision of the Roadmap and report back to ACOM in September (ASC). Members: Henn, Morten, Marie Julie, Colm, Jonathan, Mark, Ivone, Christian (von Dorrien).

15.2 Bycatch: the special request on Baltic harbor porpoise to be sent for ACOM consultation and usual evaluation process.

15.3 Bycatch: new templates of PETS bycatch advice (for recurrent advice and fisheries overviews) to be drafted and consulted with ACOM.

15.4 Bycatch: several priority species included in the new EU Action Plan but not in the current ICES lists of species of bycatch relevance. These should be added to the ICES data call and included in the revised Roadmap.

16 Reference points and rebuilding (WKREBUILD2 and WKNEWREF)

This followed on from the discussions on the ACOM forum and the previous decisions of ACOM (primarily September 2022). ACOM was invited to discuss the documents and potentially agree which option to approve.

In the September 2022 meeting, ACOM agreed to three different workshops to advance rebuilding plans (WKREBUILD2) and reference points (WKNEWREF and WKREFRAME). Ideally ACOM wanted WKREBUILD2 in advance of WKNEWREF and planned it for March 2023. Unfortunately, many experts had other commitments (e.g. HAWG) at the time and some ACOM members felt it should come after WKNEWREF, so it was decided to postpone it to later in 2023. The TORs for WKREBUILD2 are such that it can actually be held before WKNEWREF, and as such a new timeline has been proposed for the three workshops:

- October 2023: WKREBUILD2
- February 2024: WKNEWREF
- After ACOM March 2024 meeting: WKREFRAME

Proposed TORs for WKREBUILD2 and WKNEWREF were presented. These will be discussed and finalised via the ACOM SCICOM resolution forum.

For rebuilding plans, a process is required to ensure the quality of the evaluation and this process should be quick enough to allow for timely advice. This would likely be an “Expert Group level process” similar to the one in the new benchmark guidelines, with external review. The required process will be defined and agreed with ACOM after WKREBUILD2. For WKNEWREF, approximately 25 stocks that cover a wide range of geographical areas, life histories, exploitation histories and stock assessment characteristics are required to thoroughly test and evaluate potential reference points. A presentation of WKREF2 and planning for WKREBUILD and WKNEWREF will be done in all the assessment working groups in 2023. Expert groups will be asked to select a set of stocks to participate in WKNEWREF and WKREBUILD2. The stock assessor or someone familiar with the stock and assessment should commit to participate and contribute to the work of WKNEWREF.

This is an important issue for all requesters of advice, as noted by the Annual Meeting between ICES and Requesters of Advice (MIRIA) and at the various bilateral meetings with requesters of advice this year. A MIRIA sub-group will take place in the coming months to provide a comprehensive overview of the proposed framework and to understand the limitations and needs of advice requesters.

A standard/generic simulation algorithm using FLR libraries is being developed for use in evaluation of different reference point and rebuilding plan strategies. There is special attention being paid to the setting the initial conditions for this, which is important for rebuilding plan evaluations. The developer will attend the workshops as well for consultations and to contribute to the work.

ACOM was invited to comment on the proposed process. There were some technical comments related to the TORs: should explore %B0 (not just B0); evaluate allee effects; why is B_{loss} still being mentioned (a common reference level to compare the probability of dropping below); B0 is not *a priori* defined as either virgin biomass at start of time series or the theoretical B0 based on current conditions (though the intent of WKREF was to focus on the latter). It was noted that the current focus of this work does not include short-lived species approaches.

It was noted that in the case of simulating rebuilding plans, while the starting conditions are important, recruitment assumptions can drive rebuilding entirely and these need special attention. It would be useful to have a trade-off analysis looking at risk vs. rebuilding times.

Regarding the new simulation algorithm being developed, there was some concern that validating this during the workshop added a large extra task that was different to testing the framework itself. It would also be problematic if experts were forced to use this new tool as it is very stock dependent what you want to include in the evaluation (e.g. multi-fleet etc.) and removes the possibility for internal estimation of ref pts within the stock assessment model (e.g. as is possible for SAM). The idea is not to force experts to use this new tool, but rather to make sure there is a standard option for all stocks if nothing else is available. Having one generic tool to test strategies on a variety of stocks will be useful. If an alternative consistent method exists, it can be used.

There remains a risk that requesters of advice may not like the new framework or think ICES' proposal doesn't fit their existing legislative needs. It is clear that the determination of reference points is in ICES' domain and the current framework is in need of some change. ACOM needs to start preparing managers already for what is likely to come e.g. consider a 'sales pitch' focusing on the positive outcomes expected and rationale for the changes needed. This should highlight how any changes would not be incompatible with international agreements and should focus on advantages over current system. In the build up to the meetings with MIRIA, the ACOM chair will approach members of ACOM for support.

Decision:

16 REF & rebuild: approve the proposed process and timeline. WKNEWREF should strive to have the report ready in time for ACOM to review in advance of the March 2024 meeting.

Action:

16Ref & rebuild: Post the WKREBUILD2 and WKNEWREF TORs on the resolution forum

17 Benchmark guidelines

The benchmark guidelines have been agreed by ACOM on the ACOM Forum. The guidelines were presented to re-acquaint ACOM with the new approach. This agenda item was for information and ACOM was invited to comment.

The most important changes and points in the new forthcoming ICES Guidelines for benchmark¹ were outlined. These new guidelines were posted on the ACOM forum earlier in 2023, all comments were incorporated, and these guidelines are now considered as accepted by ACOM.

The main objectives of the new guidelines, other than outlining the benchmark process, are to:

- 1) Provide more clarity about benchmarks, especially in terms of:
 - a) Timelines
 - b) Required documentation (both input and outputs)
- 2) To be more applicable to all forms of recurrent advice (they are typically skewed toward fishing opportunities)
- 3) Give some more flexibility and responsibility to expert groups (see benchmark process 1 and 2 below)

There are now three processes:

Expert group level

- Responsibility: Completely within EG
- When appropriate: small enough changes/issues
- Identification of issue: by EG typically but also ACOM
- Timing: to be handled during the expert group meeting
- Review and oversight are within EG for most part: must be reported to ADG that something has changed in the assessment (oversight: if ADG looks at this and sees the change was more than one or two things they would reject)
- Technical documentation: change must be updated in report and stock annex (if applicable)
- Examples:
 - Fixing issues with input data (e.g. problem with one or two data points)
 - Small adjustments to the model
 - Ensuring software updates still giving same result
 - Small things with forecast assumptions etc.

¹ See: ICES. 2023. ICES Guidelines for Benchmarks. Version 1. ICES Guidelines and Policies - Advice Technical Guidelines. 26 pp. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.22316743>

- How info is presented or mapped (spatial)

Review process level

- Responsibility: EG-led/owned, and oversight still mostly with EG, but with external review.
- When appropriate: when addressing one or two larger issues
- Identification of issue: by EG or ACOM
- Timing: between expert group meetings (by correspondence). This process will, in general, require one year to complete; Expert Groups should carefully consider their workload and their ability to work within the time frame.
- Oversight: The Benchmark Oversight Group (BOG) and ACOM have to be informed by the process:
- What the issues are
- What the plan of work is
- Peer review will be done by a Review Group (RG) composed of members external to the Expert Group(s). Assistance from ICES secretariat in establishing timelines and looking for reviewers
- Documents are to be prepared before RG to allow time to properly review. RG would then report ahead of the EG meeting to evaluate results and see if they have to make any changes
- Technical documentation: change must be updated in report and stock annex (if applicable)
- Examples:
 - changing/correcting an entire time-series
 - or more substantive revisions to model setting such as changes to age ranges or natural mortality assumptions
 - review of reference points

Full benchmark

- A full benchmark process is a full review of methods, underlying conceptual assumptions, and data; it can also provide the technical basis for the provision of new advice.
- This review must include an evaluation of the appropriateness of the chosen method.
- As the full benchmark is a multi-stage process and includes participants from outside a specific Expert Group
- Oversight and governance: it is vital that the process be finished far enough in advance of the Expert Group meeting to allow for full documentation to be ready for the Expert Group, and to allow time for review by BOG and ACOM.
- Examples of full benchmark:
 - Whole new data series to be incorporated;
 - Review of indices;
 - New method or major structural change to method;
 - Stock identification issues
 - Incorporation of ecosystem advice or population dynamics
 - First time a recurrent advice is given (e.g. VME benchmark in 2022)
- Not significantly different from current benchmark process. Few changes to be aware of:
 - Updated prioritization matrix
 - More independent timeline from EG schedule

- Annex on model diagnostics (most applicable for single stock assessments)

As the last point under Full benchmark above suggests, in future, benchmark processes will be more independent from the assessment working group schedules for there to be an appropriate amount of time for experts to complete their work, and BOG and ACOM to review the benchmark results before Expert Groups implement the new methods etc. (two months ideally). This may mean some groups will not be able to incorporate methods in an upcoming meeting and may need to wait for the next meeting after. The advantages are that there is no need to scramble if problems are encountered, and it allows time to go through process properly

For fishing opportunity advice, stocks must be entered into TAF, and documentation must be updated. BOG reviews the information and recommends results to ACOM for final approval.

The language in the guidelines has been formulated to be more applicable to all kinds of advice. Furthermore, the prioritization matrix has been updated to reflect this (note: prioritization only needed for full benchmarks). Prioritization needed to match workload with resources available. The BOG Chair presented the new prioritization scheme:

SCORE	Criteria 1 – Need to improve the quality of the analyses to provide advice or new recurrent advice	Criteria 2 – Opportunity to improve the analyses	Criteria 3 – Benchmark preparedness	Criteria 4 – Perceived risks	Criteria 5 – Changing ecosystem and ability to include impact in advice	Criteria 6 – Time since last benchmark
Weight	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.1
5	Analyses to provide advice does not currently exist <u>or</u> analyses judged to be insufficiently robust to form basis of advice	Significant new data sources or critical corrections in data, <u>and</u> significant new methods for the advice will be available	Data and analyses have been tested and timelines are proposed, potential reviewers and chairs identified/suggested	Status unknown or below precautionary thresholds and under imminent threat from human activities (e.g. fish stock below B_{lim} , increased bycatch of PET species)	Strong evidence of major directional change in ecosystem and good potential to include impact in advice (e.g. ability to calculate F_{ECO} , major change in VME boundary due to change in ocean temperature)	More than 10 years or first benchmark
4	Analyses have high potential to be upgraded from empirical to more analytically based	Significant new data sources or critical corrections in data, <u>or</u> significant new methods for the advice will be available	Data and analyses have been tested but remainder of planning not complete	Status less than optimal and under imminent threat (e.g. fish stock between B_{lim} and $MSY B_{trigger}$)	Evidence of some directional change in ecosystem with ability to include impact in advice (e.g. change in population productivity that can be incorporated in model)	More than 5 but less than 10 years
3	Analyses judged to have some significant deficiencies (models and/or data) but considered acceptable	Some improvement in data or methods will be available	Data have been identified but not incorporated into new analyses – new analyses tested on previous data	Status close to optimal and some imminent threat (e.g. fish stock close to $MSY B_{trigger}$)	Evidence of some directional change in the ecosystem with some ability to include impact in advice	3–5 years
2	Analyses have no significant or only minor issues	Minor improvement in data or methods will be available	Data and potential analyses have been identified but not tested	Status close to optimal and no imminent threat (e.g. fish stock above $MSY B_{trigger}$)	Evidence of small directional change in ecosystem with some ability to include impact in advice	2 years
0	Analyses has no obvious issues	Improvement in data or methods unlikely	No preparation	Status optimal and no threat (e.g. fish stock at or above B_{MSY})	No evidence of ecosystem change	Less than 2 years

Assessment working groups will from now on be required to submit all information related to a proposing a benchmark **no later than November 30** and inform the Secretariat. An issue list and prioritization scheme will need to be filled out to be considered. The BOG

Chair also stressed that the benchmark workshop is the place to review and improve, not to do the work.

There is also an annex attached to the new guidelines to see if the models being used are appropriate. A ToR is being added to the Methods Working Group (MGWG) resolution to come up with a list of diagnostics that can be used by any of the working groups.

It was noted that the two months before the EG deadline will most likely be a stumbling block. It was also noted that it is helpful for the benchmark process to be spread out more, with short meetings (progress updates, problems encountered) in between data workshop and final assessment workshop of benchmark.

The flexibility for EGs was welcomed, but the distinctions between the different types of processes might be difficult in practice. The BOG Chair noted it would be seen, and not surprising if one process transforms to another on a case-by-case basis.

There was a question about a potential plan B if a deadline cannot be reached ahead of the EG. There are internal and external communications guidelines to keep the channels open. Another participant noted that the defunct Benchmark Steering Group had attempted to deal with these sorts of eventualities in the issue list template.

Stock assessors may need further help with when to decide which process is appropriate to the issues they need to resolve. The BOG Chair together with ICES secretariat can assist with this on a case-by-case basis.

18 Benchmark Oversight Group (BOG) recommendations

The considerations of the BOG on the proposed benchmarks for 2023 to 2024, were presented to ACOM. These proposals had been shared with ACOM via the forum prior to this meeting. ACOM was invited to consider the proposal, agree actions, and approve the initiation of the 2023/2024 benchmark process.

NOTE: the evaluation by BOG of the 2022/2023 benchmarks were ongoing, and the recommendations of the BOG will be presented to ACOM on the forum for discussion and potentially approval.

The new benchmark processes that had been approved by correspondence on the ACOM forum were outlined. The BOG Chair noted that these are still subject to minor changes, in red are items that have changed since posted on the ACOM forum based on feedback:

Process 1 – Benchmark on anchovy and sprat

- spr.27.3a4; Skagerrak, Kattegat, and North Sea sprat; SCORE: 3.5 [HAWG]
- ane.27.8; Bay of Biscay; anchovy; SCORE: 2.7; [WGHANSA]
- ane.27.9a²; Atlantic Iberian Waters anchovy; SCORE: 3.9; [WGHANSA]
- *Notes from BOG chair:* 9a anchovy tentative.

² Participation of anchovy in 9a depends on planning and outcomes of an MSE workshop first.

Process 2 – Benchmark 3 on selected elasmobranch stocks

- rjc.27.9a; Atlantic Iberian waters thornback ray; SCORE: 3.6; [WGEF];
- rjh.27.9a; Atlantic Iberian waters blonde ray; SCORE: 3.7; [WGEF];
- rjn.27.8c; Cantabrian Sea cuckoo ray; SCORE: 4.4; [WGEF];
- rjn.27.9a; Atlantic Iberian waters cuckoo ray; SCORE: 3.3; [WGEF].
- *Notes from BOG chair:* third year in a row. Due to biology best they go together.

Process 3 – Benchmark 1 on selected flat fish stocks

- ~~ldb.27.7b-k8abd; West and southwest of Ireland, Bay of Biscay four spot megrim; SCORE: 4.2; [WGBIE];~~
- sol.27.7a; Irish Sea sole; SCORE: 2.7; [WGCSE];
- sol.27.8ab; Northern and central Bay of Biscay sole; SCORE: 3.7; [WGBIE]
- ~~sol.27.4; North Sea sole; SCORE: 3.4; [WGNSSK]~~
- ~~+ anf.27.3a46~~
- *Notes from BOG chair:* This grouping has changed due to comments on ACOM Forum. Concern sole 4 too urgent to wait for survivability roadmap; concern not enough data for megrim; addition of North Sea anglerfish.

Process 4 – Benchmark on haddock and saithe

- pok.27.1-2; Northeast Arctic saithe; SCORE: 2.5; [AFWG];
- pok.27.3a46; North Sea saithe; SCORE: 3.6; [WGNSSK];
- pok.27.7-10; Saithe; NEW STOCK; [WGCSE];
- had.27.6b; Rockall haddock; SCORE: 3.5; [WGCSE].
- *Notes from BOG chair:* no comments on ACOM Forum.

Process 5 – Benchmark on horse mackerel

- hom.27.2a4a5b6a7a-ce-k8; Northeast Atlantic horse mackerel; SCORE: 3.85; [WGWIDE];
- hom.27.3a4bc7d; North Sea horse mackerel; SCORE: 3.4; [WGWIDE];
- hom.27.9a; Atlantic Iberian Waters horse mackerel; SCORE: 3.2; [WGHANSA].
- *Notes from BOG chair:* ready to go.
- [to be joined with ~~boarfish~~ after discussion of this item at ACOM]

Process 6 – Benchmark 3 on the development of MSY advice using SPiCT*

*Final list of stocks to be determined. Current candidates:

- tur.27.22-32; Baltic Sea turbot; [WGBFAS];
- sbr.27.9; Atlantic Iberian waters blackspot seabream; [WGDEEP];
- cod.27.2.coastS; Southern Norwegian coastal cod; [AFWG];
- fle.27.2223; Belt Seas and the Sound flounder; [WGBFAS];
- ~~boc.27.6-8; Boarfish; [WGWIDE];~~
- bzq.27.2628; East of Gotland and Gulf of Gdansk flounder; [WGBFAS];
- syc.27.67a-ce-j; Celtic seas lesser spotted dogfish; [WGEF].
- *Notes from BOG chair:* Boarfish already in SPiCT process this year. Might still be some others.

Process 7 – Benchmark 2 on selected flat fish stocks (TBC³)

- ple.27.21-23; Kattegat, Belt Seas, and Sound plaice; SCORE: 3.3; [WGBFAS];

³ This benchmark process will take place in either 2024 or 2025, depending on the progress made on the survivability work for these stocks (as part of the survivability roadmap special request which will run as a separate workshop).

- ple.27.24-32 Eastern Baltic Sea plaice; SCORE: 4.2; [WGBFAS];
- ple.27.7e; Western English Channel plaice; SCORE: 2.4; [WGCSE];
- ~~sol.27.4; North Sea sole; SCORE: 3.4; [WCNSSK]~~
- *Notes from BOG chair:* these are four that will be part of survivability roadmap as one but the sole 4 will move to flatfish one. Eastern Baltic not part of survivability roadmap.

ACOM commented that there was a suggestion made to add boarfish to the horse mackerel benchmark and that the SPiCT benchmark might still have changes going forward in makeup, e.g. blackspot seabream.

19 ICES Projects

ICES is engaged in a number of externally funded projects. There is a project team within the secretariat to manage the applications, processing and review of deliveries of the projects. It also works with the Bureau to ensure that the projects aid delivery of the ICES [strategy](#) and conform to the [ICES project policy](#). This process is being adapted and ACOM is being requested to provide input into the project process and evaluate areas that require project support. ACOM was invited to discuss the issue, agree actions, and take decisions.

The ICES Secretariat presented ongoing project collaborations with focus on horizon projects the advice department is involved in and are relevant to ICES advice. Areas mentioned included risk and uncertainty communication, advice visualization, stakeholder engagement, biodiversity indicators, benchmarking and Marine Protected Area identification. Benefits of project collaborations were discussed, these include expert network expansion, new research and learning opportunities, enhanced existing tools and infrastructure, improved advice delivery through visualization, enriched ICES training programme, extra resources for the secretariat in strategic areas. ACOM was asked for input in project areas prioritization, so the effort and resources dedicated to projects within the secretariat will in the future match ACOM priority areas. ACOM was asked to provide two volunteers for this work.

ACOM commented that potential for innovation and work expansion would be a great addition to the decision tree in terms of projects process.

When ICES Secretariat is requested to join competing proposals, independent teams are built within the Secretariat to avoid any Conflict of interest. ICES remains however transparent about its participation to competing proposals in accordance with the ICES project policy.

The ACOM Chair noted that ownership of projects should be shared by ACOM as a whole and not only by ACOM Leadership.

Action

19 Projects: Marcos Llope (Spain) and Marie-Julie Roux (Canada) volunteered to support the projects team in producing an initial priority list and to be the ACOM contacts for projects.

20 Transparent Assessment Framework (TAF)

Developments and activities on TAF were presented to ACOM. The secretariat team that is tasked with developing and broadening the take up of TAF was presented. This agenda item was for information and ACOM was invited to comment.

The team working on the TAF project at the Secretariat were introduced to ACOM. ACOM was given an overview of the current work being done to develop the system.

An issue was raised regarding the usability of the system. While it is felt to be useful to be able to see the code, sometimes a readme file is all that is required to get an overview, and these were felt to be not informative in some cases. With TAF, because data and code need to be in the right place, there is less need for an extensive readme file, however the comment was noted and the readme can be expanded to be more explanatory where necessary.

The issue of training in TAF for ADG and ACOM members to enable them to access TAF during the advice process was raised. It was noted that ICES is expanding its training programme and looking to schedule a support session for members of the secretariat, which could easily be expanded include ACOM and ADG chairs.

The issue of whether and how to highlight whether a stock is in TAF was discussed. This has been raised by various Advisory Councils (AC) and during the Annual Meeting between ICES, Advisory Councils and other Observers (MIACO). The benefits of doing so would be to increase the transparency of the process, and create an incentive to use it. The drawbacks could include the perception that advice and assessments not in TAF would be of lower quality, and it was noted that we do not highlight the use of other systems such as Intercatch. Current advice sheets contain a link to the relevant working group report chapter, and there was general support for linking to TAF via a simple and unobtrusive hyperlink.

Decision

20 TAF: advice sheets that have used TAF will include a link to the TAF files.

21 SCICOM report

The Chair of SCICOM reported to ACOM on recent activities, challenges and opportunities in the science network and SCICOM (Figure 21). This agenda item was for information and ACOM was invited to comment.

Some of the topics presented were:

- SCICOM and ACOM hosted 141 expert groups in 2022 with an increase of individual participants (3605 in 2022).
- Record of individuals as listeners through hybrid option but ICES has to encourage active participation in the WGs.
- The oceanographic IROC report need to be rethink and take it in 3 years cycles with updates
- Science highlights i.e. research vessels, integrated surveys, MPS, etc
- Training Group: online and physical.

- Science impact and communication groups: ACOM is asked to provide feedback on the new library.
- Data and info group developed the DPT (data profiling tool).
- Report on the three strategic initiatives
- Integration of new scientist
- Science cooperation,
- strategic areas
- Symposia
- ASC

ACOM members welcomed the report and it was highlighted that the communication between ACOM and SCICOM has improved and there needs to be a better dialogue between groups e.g. stock id with genetics or to avoid cases like the Workshop on Optimization of Biological Sampling (WKBIOP) elasmobranch maturity readings without involving the Elasmobranch Assessment Working Group (WGEF). Perhaps questions arising from benchmark processes can be posted in a centralized place and somehow scored and passed to the science committee.

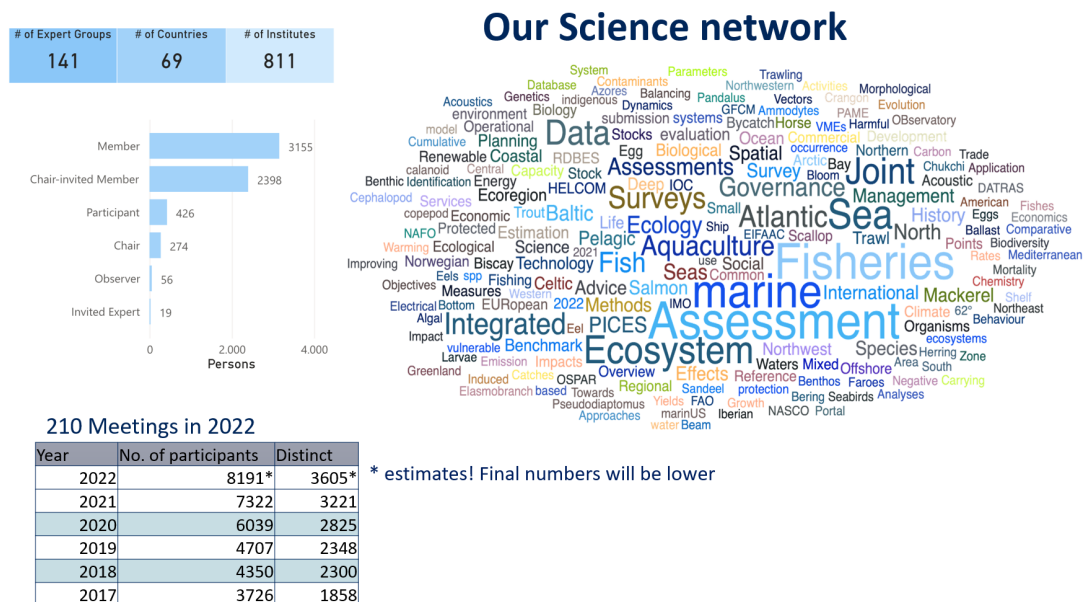


Figure 21. Activities across the network in 2022.

The Chair of SCICOM pointed out that there are different level of actions: on highest level there is identification of topics for ACOM-SCICOM meeting at the ASC. There is ACOM Leadership meeting with SG-chairs and secretariat meeting and on another level the Annual Meeting of ICES Expert Group Chairs (WGCHAIRS). Finally, there is communication group to group via recommendations and through Secretariat and the example from VMS was raised were the Joint ICES/PICES Working Group on Small Pelagic Fish (WGFSP) provided science to products, and the Secretariat work in the background to connect processes.

Another question was in relation to Ecosystem Overviews where there are ecoregions that have permanent WG as reference, but in others ICES don't have a reference WGs, i.e. Oceanic waters, Faroes, Icelandic Waters and this difficult the work and transfer of science. It was discussed

whether or not the solution is to create new group as this is not always meaningful. However ICES may need a reference ABNJ group.

22 Future Directions

At MIRIA and MIACO, the participants were asked to list medium and long-term science and evidence needs as they horizon-scan future advice. These lists were presented to ACOM, and ACOM was asked to reflect on those needs.

SCICOM and ACOM chairs presented lists for medium and long-term prioritised developments for science and evidence needs for future advice products.

Medium term 3–5 years

- Wider ecosystem considerations including ecosystem services, MSFD indicators and accounting for predator needs
- The effect of increase in marine and offshore structures, including renewable energy developments
- Spatial considerations including MPAs and OECMs, displacement of fishing fleets, distributional changes, spatially explicit models
- Operationalizing EBM
- Social-ecological trade-offs
- Aquaculture including environmental effects

Longer term 5–10 years

- Food security
- Food safety including emerging contaminants like nano- and microplastic
- Deep-sea mining impacts on fisheries
- New species
- Effect of carbon capture and storage
- Effect of habitat restoration
- Use of big data and artificial intelligence in assessments

ACOM found the process useful allowing alignment of future perspectives between MIRIA and MIACO and ACOM. However, with the usual need of a much shorter timeline for requests for advice, ACOM needs to prioritise the efforts in terms of the work the community is being asked to develop (e.g. on bycatch, spatial advice, etc.). In terms of informing policy making, ICES do have a role and this exercise with MIRIA and MIACO in terms of long-term science and evidence needs is part of this, making ICES visible and engaged (and prepared).

ACOM raised the issues of food-security/safety, it is a highly relevant objective for ICES as MSY/PA and Aquaculture advice is about advising upon a stable and sustainable production of food. The interface with socio-economic aspects needs to be looked further into. ACOM and the community could include this angle on the advice production, e.g. are the EO and FO's currently missing the services that the pressures are providing and this need to be considered.

23 Implementing EBM (FEISA) and messaging EBFM: delivery of ecosystem-informed evidence

The framework for ecosystem informed science and advice (FEISA) was presented. This is the output of the joint SCICOM/ACOM EBM group. FEISA has 2 main components; a system of indicators and a risk-based approach. The structure of the framework has changed based on feedback received by social scientists on qualitative indicators and to better highlight the trade-offs. FEISA will be published in an ICES Cooperative Report (CRR) in 2023.

The proposed **key principles/ideas** of FEISA are:

1. Knowledge plurality as the basis for ecosystem-informed science and advice
2. Ecosystem-informed science has a role in guiding the definition of operational objectives
3. Ecosystem-informed advice involves routine formulation and exploration of alternative hypotheses, scenarios, and pathways for ecosystem effects
4. Ecosystem considerations will affect the level of risk associated with the advice
5. Risk as the currency for communicating potential, demonstrated or projected consequences of alternative management options and ecosystem considerations in advice

ACOM considered these consistent with ICES advisory plan, and advisory framework and principles. The goal now is to know what is needed to implement the framework and ACOM was asked for ideas and support on the process and future direction.

In general, ACOM acknowledged the high amount of work devoted to develop the framework, thanked the contributors for the effort and gave full support.

ACOM was also briefed on a presentation on EBFM given to NEAFC Permanent Committee on Management and Science (PECMAS).

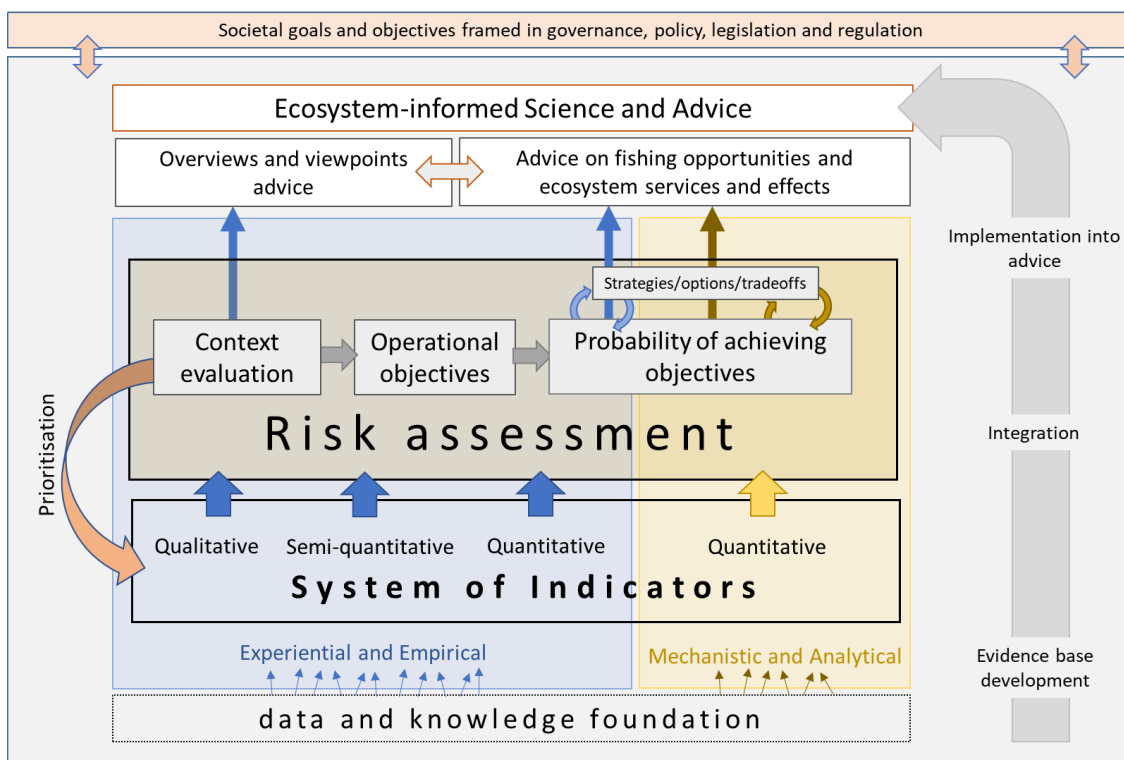


Figure 23. Schematic of the FEISA framework.

The ACOM the framework is conceptually very good but pragmatically is more difficult. The number and diversity of data streams makes the integration very complex. The upcoming CRR will help in this regard should improve the narrative.

Also, the framework would be challenged by applying it to case studies. Suggested case studies were eel, PETS bycatch, sandeel and eastern Baltic cod advice.

The issues of integration across scales was raised. It was explained that the diversity of advisory products are contextual priority versus component specific and these specific components need to be connected. Risk assessments can facilitate the scaling. Action and implementation was encouraged.

ACOM discussed the challenges on the receiving end, the governance issues around such an integrated advisory product and the need to communicate with managers. Operational objectives (principle 2 of FEISA) was seen as key for that and the engagement of stakeholders will be essential to define them. ICES role in these discussions is key.

The ACOM chair summarized the discussion points as broad support to FEISA and underpinning principles.

Actions

23.1 FEISA: collate feedback on FEISA from ACOM and SCICOM meeting

23.2 FEISA: confirm potential test case worked examples

23.1 FEISA: schedule a meeting between FEISA leads (Marie Julie, Debbi P) ACOM chair and ICES secretariat leads on EBM (Inigo and Lara) to plan next step

24 Plenary synthesis

This agenda item was used for subgroup work and further plenary discussion on quality, recommendations and the recurrent advice for ecosystem services and effects process.

25 Close

The Chair summarised the main decisions of ACOM and closed the meeting:

- Activities from 2022, highlighting concerns re potential legal cases with ICES involved. This will be discussed with Bureau in relation to the risk register.
- Roundtable gave rise to many good reflections, workload being a major one.
- WGQuality suggested draft policy was tentatively accepted by ACOM.
- DLS; ACOM accepted the WKLIFE recommendations and thanked the group for their findings, ToRs on the forum.
- Ecosystem and effects: mixed role of ADGs need to be discussed and as well finding tools (time) to enable a development without implementing along the synthesis.
- Barents Sea stocks: with regards to any potential review/technical assistance approach; no decision taken.
- Council supported the stakeholder engagement strategy and WKSTIMP ToRs has been accepted.
- Online advice demonstrated and feedback provided.
- Recreational fisheries was discussed, roadmap to be drafted by the group.
- Perception of advice, ToRs being adjusted and an additional chair to be identified.
- Spatial advice to management; proposal for a workshop which needs ToRs.
- Bycatch priorities; discussion and decision on issues in terms of the bycatch list.
- Full agreement for the WKREBUILD and WKREF3, this proposal is going forward with the community. Tool development will be explored.
- Benchmark guidelines adopted by ACOM, BOG recommendations were discussed concerning boarfish and blackspot seabream which will be followed up.
- ICES projects: MJ and Marcos will be acting as link for project proposals.
- TAF was discussed, reproducibility and transparency are the outputs, part of the QC but not a QC in itself.
- SCICOM future research discussed in relation to future advice needs.
- EBM FEISA framework being further developed.

Annex 1: List of participants

Person	Email (Person)	Role	Participation
Alain Biseau	abiseau@ifremer.fr	Member	In person
Allen Kingston	ark10@st-andrews.ac.uk	WGBYC Chair	In Person
Anndorte Burmeister	anndorte@natur.gl	Alternate observer	Online
Bjarki Thor Elvarsson	bjarki.elvarsson@hafogvatn.is	Member	In person
Bjarte Bogstad	bjarte.bogstad@hi.no	Member	In person
Christopher Zimmermann	christopher.zimmermann@thuenen.de	Member	In person
Colm Lordan	colm.lordan@marine.ie	Member	In person
David Currie	David.Currie@Marine.ie	WGQUALITY Chair	Online
David Miller	David.miller@ices.dk	ICES Secretariat	In person
Didzis Ustups	didzis.ustups@bior.lv	Member	In person
Dorleta Garcia	Dorleta.Garcia@ices.dk	Vice-Chair	In person
Eirini Glyki	Eirini.glyki@ices.dk	ICES Secretariat	In person
Els Torreele	els.torreele@ilvo.vlaanderen.be	Member	In person
Eugene Nixon	eugene.nixon@ices.dk	Vice-Chair	In person
Ewen D. Bell	ewen.bell@cefas.gov.uk	Member	In person
Henn Ojaveer	henn.ojaveer@ices.dk	Vice-Chair	In person
Inigo Martinez	inigo@ices.dk	ICES Secretariat	In person
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Annex 2: Agenda

1-Welcome & meeting etiquette (Docs 01a)

The agenda will be adopted via the ACOM forum beforehand.

Hybrid meeting etiquette will be presented.

2-Code of ethics & professional conduct & review of membership (Docs 02a, 02b)

ACOM will reflect on conflict of interest statement and will be introduced to the new Code of ethics & professional conduct.

ACOM will review the membership.

3-Report of 2022 (Doc 03)

The report of ACOM activities in 2022 will be presented.

ACOM will be invited to comment.

4-Round table

Each member of ACOM will be invited to comment on their national perceptions of the work and processes in the network and ACOM.

A list of issues will be drawn up to guide discussions during the meeting, or require attention post ACOM.

5-Expert group and advice drafting group recommendations (Doc 05)

ACOM has been requested by parts of the network to address various recommendations. These recommendations have been pre-screened by the Chairs of ACOM and SCICOM, and the secretariat. This will include issues around the advice sheets from ACOM members and third parties.

ACOM will be invited to consider these recommendations in subgroups on Thursday afternoon and report their proposed actions to plenary.

ACOM will be invited to agree actions, and take decisions after the report back from the subgroups.

6-WGQUALITY (Doc 06)

The Chairs of WGQUALITY will present the group's report and recommendations. ACOM will be invited to consider the recommendations in subgroups on Thursday morning and report their proposed actions to plenary.

ACOM will be invited to agree actions, and take decisions after the report back from the subgroups.

7-Data limited methods (Doc 07)

The Chairs of WKLIFE will present the workshop's report and recommendations. ACOM will be invited to consider the report and recommendations in plenary.

ACOM will be invited to comment, agree actions, and take decisions.

8-Ecosystem Services and effects (ES&E) special request to recurrent (Doc 08)

ICES has experienced challenges in the process when creating recurrent advice that originates from special requests (e.g. Bycatch, trade-off and VMEs). Similar challenges exist as the portfolio of ecosystem, fisheries and aquaculture overviews is completed, and further revised. An invited group of ACOM and SCICOM members have prepared a briefing document and proposals to ACOM.

ACOM will be invited to consider these recommendations in subgroups on Thursday afternoon and report their proposed actions to plenary.

ACOM will be invited to agree actions, and take decisions after the report back from the subgroups.

9-Barents Sea stocks (Doc 09)

ICES has been requested in the agreed MoU with NEAFC and the specific grant agreement with DGMARE to provide advice in 2023 for fishing opportunities in 2024 for fish stocks in the Barents Sea. Based on discussions on the ACOM forum, a proposal for how this advice will be produced is given in document 09.

ACOM will be invited to consider these proposals, agree actions, and take decisions.

10-Implement stakeholder engagement strategy (Doc 10)

ACOM will be reminded of the publication of the stakeholder engagement strategy and informed of the Workshop on implementing stakeholder engagement strategy (WKSTIMP).

This agenda item is for information and ACOM will be invited to comment.

Document 10: <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.21815106.v1>

WKSTIMP: <http://community.ices.dk/Committees/Resolutions/Lists/Posts/Post.aspx?ID=838>

11-Interactive online fishing opportunities advice

ACOM will be informed of the feed back to the beta version of the new interactive, online fishing opportunities advice <https://ices-taf.shinyapps.io/online-single-stock-advice/>.

This agenda item is for information and ACOM will be invited to comment.

12-Recreational fisheries (Doc 12)

Recommendations on recreational fisheries from expert groups, and the needs expressed by the requesters of advice on recreational fisheries, will be presented to ACOM.

ACOM will be invited to comment, agree actions, and take decisions.

13-Perception of advice (Doc 13)

The workshop on accounting for fishers and other stakeholders' perceptions of the dynamics of fish stocks in ICES advice (WKAFFPA) will be presented to ACOM.

This agenda item is for information and ACOM will be invited to comment.

14-Spatial advice to spatial management (Doc 14)

ICES is facing challenges in when dealing with uncertainty in its spatial advice. ICES needs to fully considered how uncertainties in spatial advice can best be communicated to managers and how scientific evidence can be implemented in legislation.

ACOM will be invited to discuss the issue, agree actions, and take decisions.

15-Bycatch priorities (Doc 15)

Requests to ICES for recurrent and special advice on the bycatch of Protected, Endangered and Threatened Species (PETS), and sensitive fish species, are numerous and substantial. ICES is following the [bycatch roadmap](#) and is in intensive dialogue with many advice requesters on bycatch. Prioritisation of efforts is required, and these are described in document 15.

ACOM will be invited to consider the proposal, agree actions, and take decisions.

16-Reference points and rebuilding (WKREBUILD2 and WKNEWREF) (Doc 16)

Following on from the discussions on the ACOM forum and the previous decisions of ACOM (primarily September 2022), document 16 will be presented. It contains two options for next steps for WKREBUILD2 and WKNEWREF and the proposed resolutions for the workshops.

ACOM will be invited to discuss the documents and potentially agree which option to approve.

17-Benchmark guidelines (Doc 17)

The benchmark guidelines have been agreed by ACOM on the forum. The guidelines will be presented to re-acquaint ACOM with the new approach.

This agenda item is for information and ACOM will be invited to comment.

18-Benchmark oversight group (BOG) recommendations (Doc 18)

The considerations of the BOG on the proposed benchmarks for 2023 to 2024, will be presented to ACOM. These proposals will have been shared with ACOM via the forum prior to this meeting.

ACOM will be invited to consider the proposal, agree actions, and approve the initiation of the 2023/2024 benchmark process.

NOTE: the evaluation by BOG of the 2022/2023 benchmarks is ongoing, and the recommendations of the BOG will be presented to ACOM on the forum for discussion and potentially approval.

19-ICES Projects (Doc 19)

ICES is engaged in a number of externally funded projects. There is a project team within the secretariat to manage the applications, processing and review of deliveries of the projects. It also works with the Bureau to ensure that the projects aid delivery of the ICES [strategy](#) and conform to the [ICES project policy](#). This process is being adapted and ACOM is being requested to provide input into the project process and evaluate areas that require project support.

ACOM will be invited to discuss the issue, agree actions, and take decisions.

20-Transparent Assessment Framework (TAF) (Doc 20)

Developments and activities on TAF will be presented to ACOM. The secretariat team that is tasked with developing and broadening the take up of TAF will be presented.

This agenda item is for information and ACOM will be invited to comment.

21-SCICOM report (Doc 21)

The Chair of SCICOM will report to ACOM on recent activities, challenges and opportunities in the science network and SCICOM.

This agenda item is for information and ACOM will be invited to comment.

22-Future Directions (Doc 22)

At MIRIA and MIACO, the participants were asked to list medium and long-term science and evidence needs as they horizon-scan future advice. These lists will be presented ACOM, and ACOM will be asked to reflect on those needs.

ACOM will be invited to discuss the issue, agree actions, and take decisions.

23-Implementing EBM and messaging EBFM: delivery of ecosystem-informed evidence for fisheries management (EBFM) (Doc 23)

i) Framework for Ecosystem Informed Science and Advice (FEISA)

The joint ACOM/SCICOM group on EBM synthesised a framework for ecosystem Informed science and advice. This now needs to be made operational and implemented.

ii) Profiling ICES work on EBFM

Despite the progress made, and new developments, ICES is not messaging its work on EBFM to the outside community. The work is implicit to EBFM but not explicitly identified. This has been raised as a concern by the advice requesters. Therefore, ICES is developing a communication campaign in 2023 to highlight the work and create a clear narrative about the contribution to EBFM coming through ICES.

ACOM will be invited to discuss the issue, agree actions, and take decisions.

24-Plenary synthesis

The sub groups will report back to ACOM with a synthesis of their discussions and list the potential decisions, with recommendations for those decisions.

ACOM will be invited to discuss the issues, agree actions, and take decisions.

25-Close

The Chair will summarise the main decisions of ACOM and close the meeting.

Annex 3: List of decisions and actions

Decisions

- 6.1 Quality: to approve the move towards ISO 9001:2015 as a framework for ICES quality management
- 6.2 Quality: to adopt the draft management policy provided by WGQUALITY
- 7.1 WKLIFE: agree to maintain rollout of the new methods. There are approximately 33 stocks to apply the new methods to in 2023 (mainly from WGDEEP, WGEF, and Nephrops stocks).
- 15.1 Bycatch: agreed to delay the revision of the lists of species of bycatch relevance until 2024
- 15.2 Bycatch: agreed to delay the benchmarking process until 2025
- 16 REF & rebuild: approve the proposed process and timeline. WKNEWREF should strive to have the report ready in time for ACOM to review in advance of the March 2024 meeting.

Actions

- 5 Recommendations: secretariat to input responses into recommendations database and inform correspondents
- 6.1 Quality: ACOM to begin to implement procedures to deliver the framework and the quality management plan. It's proposed to adapt and re-write the Quality Management Plan and it will be done through the forum over the next 18 months to 2 years.
- 7.1. WKLIFE: Risk equivalence: approve further exploration and develop ToRs for WKLIFE XII to evaluate the methods with regards to risk equivalence.
- 7.2 WKLIFE: Produce slides to be presented to assessment WGs highlighting the answers provided by WKLIFE to various issues posed by the community in 2022. Action: secretariat
- 8 Ecosystem services and effects recurrent processes: a subgroup of ACOM will further develop the issues raised and documents 8, leading to a potential revision of chapter 1.1.2. for ACOM in September 2023.
- 9. Barents Sea stocks: ACOM will further explore the responsibilities and potential solutions..
- 12.1 Recreational fisheries: explore with SCICOM moving WGRFS to FRSG
- 12.2 Recreational fisheries: FRSG chair to proactively promote recreational fisheries and WGRFS to gain visibility.
- 12.3 Recreational fisheries: ToRs to be developed to request WGRFS to develop a roadmap for how to increase inclusion of recreational fisheries data into advisory processes. ACOM Leadership, ICES secretariat and WGRFS will work together to define structure, scope and content of the roadmap.
- 13 Perceptions of advice: Secure a third chair for WKAFPA
- 14 Spatial advice: ACOM will form a subgroup to draft terms of reference for a workshop to describe the challenges and propose a route to resolve those challenges for spatial advice.
- 15.1 Bycatch: an ACOM subgroup to work on a revision of the Roadmap and report back to ACOM in September (ASC). Members: Henn, Morten, Marie Julie, Colm, Jonathan, Mark, Yvone, someone from Germany (potentially Christopher).

- 15.2 Bycatch: the special request on Baltic harbor porpoise to be sent for ACOM consultation and usual evaluation process.
- 15.3 bycatch: new templates of PETS bycatch advice (for recurrent advice and fisheries overviews) to be drafted and consulted with ACOM.
- 15.4 Bycatch: several priority species included in the new EU Action Plan but not in the current ICES lists of species of bycatch relevance to be added to the ICES data call and included in the revised Roadmap.
- 16 Ref & rebuild: Post the WKREBUILD2 and WKNEWREF TORs on the resolution forum
- 19 Projects: Marcos Llope (Spain) and Marie-Julie Roux (Canada) volunteered to support the projects team in producing an initial priority list and to be the ACOM contacts for projects.
- 20 TAF: advice sheets that have used TAF will include a link to the TAF files.
- 23.1 FEISA: collate feedback on FEISA from ACOM and SCICOM meeting
- 23.2 FEISA: confirm potential test case worked examples
- 23.1 FEISA: schedule a meeting between FEISA leads (Marie Julie, Debbi P) ACOM chair and ICES secretariat leads on EBM (Inigo and Lara) to plan next step