

REPORT

Meeting: **NSAC Executive Committee**
Parties: **NSAC Members, NSAC Secretariat**
Date: **24 March 2025**
Location: **Copenhagen, Denmark**
Chair: **Kenn Skau Fischer**
Rapporteur: **NSAC Secretariat**

Table of Contents

1 Welcome and introduction [Chair, Secretariat]	1
2 Report of the previous meeting [Secretariat]	2
3 State of Play of the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative [Noemi von Meijenfeldt, Dutch Ministry, and Jerome Chladek, German Ministry]	3
4 Update from the Scheveningen Group [Dirk van Guyze, Scheveningen Group Presidency]	8
5 Control Regulation implementation [Chair; Secretariat]	10
6 Post-2026 Trade and Cooperation Agreement [Chair]	11
7 Update from Demersal WG [Peter Ronelöv Olsson]	12
8 Update from Skagerrak and Kattegat WG [Claus Hjørne Pedersen]	13
12 NSAC Administrative & Financial Update [Secretariat]	16
13 Any Other Business [Members]	18
14 Closing: Date and time of next meeting [Chair]	18
15 Agreed action points	18
16 Meeting participants	20

1 Welcome and introduction [Chair, Secretariat]

Kenn Skau Fischer, Chair of the NSAC Executive Committee (ExCom) opened the meeting, welcoming all attendees in Copenhagen.

1.1 Apologies

Tamara Talevska, NSAC Executive Secretary, conveyed apologies for Merel den Held, North Sea Foundation.

1.2 Adoption of the Agenda

As no modifications were proposed, the agenda of the meeting was formally adopted.

2 Report of the previous meeting *[Secretariat]*

The [report of the previous](#) meeting was approved without amends.

2.1 Actions from the previous meeting

Talevska provided an update on action points from the previous ExCom meeting on 11 September 2024 as follows:

Action	Status
<i>(Carried forward)</i> Respective NSAC and PelAC Chairs to continue to work towards ToR for a NSAC-PelAC industrial species management FG.	<i>Can be removed from the actions lists.</i>
NSAC Executive Committee to express interest in re-establishing the NSAC Control Focus Group and submit relevant topics for the group to address. FG to prepare input for Joint-AC Workshop on Control Regulation.	<i>Complete</i>
NSAC Secretariat to arrange a presentation on the state of play of the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative at the upcoming Executive Committee meeting in January.	<i>Complete</i>
Fredrik Arrhenius to inform the Scheveningen Group of NSAC's interest in being engaged in the work of the Scheveningen Control Expert Group.	<i>Complete</i>
Fredrik Arrhenius to update the NSAC on the ongoing work in the Scheveningen Fisheries-Environmental Technical Group, envisioned to meet in September/October 2024.	<i>Complete – Scheveningen Group update on the day's agenda</i>

NSAC Members to forward to the Secretariat any comments for the upcoming Inter-AC meeting of 4 October.	<i>Complete (also ongoing for Inter-AC 8-9 April)</i>
Secretariat to draft a (potentially joint AC) letter to DG MARE, emphasizing the need to prioritize Advisory Councils in the next Joint Special Group for the Marine Action Plan meetings.	<i>Complete – relayed at Inter-AC</i>
NSAC Members to inform the Secretariat of interest in joining the upcoming Fishers of the Future workshop focused on discussing the future fishers profiles.	<i>Complete</i>
NSAC Members to submit any remaining comments to the draft NSAC Advice on Fishing Opportunities in 2025	<i>Complete</i>
Secretariat to circulate the presented paper on the reintroduction of the European Sturgeon in the North East Atlantic.	<i>Complete</i>
NSAC Members to forward questions to be potentially addressed at the MIAC meeting in January by the end of September.	<i>Complete</i>
NSAC Members to indicate interest in participating as observers in the STECF Expert Working Group on the implementation of technical measures (21-25 October).	<i>Complete</i>
Next meeting of the NSAC Executive Committee to take place on the 29th of January in Copenhagen, Denmark.	<i>Complete</i>

3 State of Play of the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative [Noemi von Meijenfeldt, Dutch Ministry, and Jerome Chladek, German Ministry]

Noemi von Meijenfeldt from the Dutch Ministry presented the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI), a voluntary, non-binding collaboration between nine North Sea countries: Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Germany, France, and the UK. Strategic support is being provided by the European Commission. The GNSBI area aligns with OSPAR regions I and II and includes relevant ICES areas and portions of the national EEZs.

The initiative responds to the intense pressures on the North Sea, one of the world's most heavily used marine regions. With limited ecological and spatial capacity, coordinated marine

spatial planning is essential. Despite ongoing efforts, Good Environmental Status remains unmet. GNSBI promotes cross-border cooperation to address climate change, biodiversity loss, sustainable food production, and safe marine operations.

Recognizing that national and sectoral approaches are insufficient, GNSBI aims to bridge gaps between sector-based fora like OSPAR, ICES, and NSEC (North Sea Energy Cooperation). It fosters cross-sector collaboration, spanning fisheries, conservation, MSP, and energy, and prioritizes stakeholder engagement.

A renewed commitment was formalized in the Antwerp Declaration (2024). The structure of GNSBI includes a Ministers' Conference (every three years) to provide high-level political guidance, and an Executive Board of Directors-General, responsible for strategic objectives and program direction. Day-to-day management is carried out by a Steering Group, consisting of representatives from the nine countries and the European Commission, as well as leaders of the working tracks.

Five thematic working tracks have been established: (1) Cumulative Impact Assessment, (2) Nature Restoration and Conservation, (3) Long-Term Perspectives of Fisheries, (4) Multiple Use of Space, and (5) Knowledge Sharing (overarching support). Work within these tracks involves alignment with existing fora, collaborative project development, data sharing, and the promotion of transboundary cooperation. For example, the cumulative impact working track is focused on harmonizing tools and methodologies with those used in other regional processes. The nature restoration track is exploring joint projects, while the multiple use of space track is investigating how co-location of marine uses can promote blue growth. A secure data-sharing platform is being developed under the knowledge track to support early-phase collaboration and build trust among participating nations.

In 2025, GNSBI will focus on strengthening of international integrated cooperation. Stronger ties with NSAC, NSEC, OSPAR, and ICES are planned. A stakeholder strategy is in progress, and early-phase MSP dialogues are being initiated to pre-empt spatial conflicts.

Planned governance activities include regular Steering Group and Director-General meetings (one held online; one in-person scheduled), and an inter-track technical meeting in April.

Durk van Tuinen (Nederlandse Vissersbond) asked whether GNSBI has coordinated with national multi-use planning efforts like the Dutch North Sea Agreement, which aims to balance conservation, wind energy, and fisheries.

Geert Meun (VisNed) added that from the Dutch perspective, there seems to be overlap between GNSBI and the North Sea Agreement, which already involves broad stakeholder coordination up to 2030, with discussions for extension. He questioned the added value of GNSBI for Dutch fisheries, noting potential duplication.

Von Meijenfeldt acknowledged the strong collaborative effort in the Netherlands under the North Sea Agreement but emphasized that such integrated planning does not yet exist across

all North Sea countries. GNSBI seeks to address shared regional challenges by treating the North Sea as a single system, aiming to identify and allocate space more effectively across sectors.

Rather than duplicating efforts, GNSBI aims to enhance regional coordination, adding value by expanding the collective capacity for transition. Dutch national processes are integrated into GNSBI, with direct involvement from the Ministry of Nature in the nature restoration track, ensuring national insights inform the regional dialogue.

Peter Ronelov Olsson (SFPO) expressed concern that GNSBI is disguise for actions further undermining and excluding fisheries, and hoped to be corrected.

Jerome Chladek of the German Ministry, and one of the two co-chairs of the working track on Long-Term Perspectives of Fisheries within the GNSBI, acknowledged the issue of fisheries spatial squeeze due to wind farms, MPAs, and other uses. He stressed that while GNSBI cannot prevent all spatial losses, it can help mitigate them through improved coordination and dialogue across Member States and sectors.

The initiative aims to address sectoral imbalances—especially the dominance of wind energy over fisheries—by fostering better inter-sectoral communication and cross-border cooperation, allowing for more balanced planning and reduced negative impacts on fisheries.

Emiel Brouckaert, Rederscentrale, questioned why GNSBI includes dedicated working tracks for fisheries and nature, but not for energy—suggesting this may unfairly single out fisheries while leaving energy largely unaddressed. He also queried whether Ireland was part of the initiative from the start, noting that the inclusion of areas like the Irish Sea, Celtic Sea, and English Channel seemed to come later.

Von Meijenfeldt responded that no changes have been made to the scope of the GNSBI since the Antwerp Declaration in November; the Channel and Celtic Sea were included from the start. As for the energy working track, she explained that the topic is already addressed through existing structures like the NSEC, and that GNSBI aims to avoid duplicating such efforts. The fisheries track is not meant to target the sector, but to ensure it has a clear long-term perspective within broader marine planning.

Chladek added that energy considerations are integrated through coordination with NSEC and its Offshore Subgroup (OSIC). A technical meeting is scheduled in Hamburg, with OSIC participation, to discuss data sharing, enabling improved transparency regarding the timing and location of offshore developments. Several technical-level members of the GNSBI are also active in NSEC forums, enabling consistent alignment, now being further formalized.

The fisheries track was established after early cross-sectoral discussions highlighted that, unlike energy or transport, fisheries lacked a coordinated long-term strategy—despite their socio-economic importance to coastal communities. GNSBI's role is to foster dialogue

between fisheries and other sectors, not to resolve all challenges, but to promote more integrated planning.

Moreover, energy is also being addressed through the multi-use working track, which focuses particularly on the multi-use of protected areas, including those with offshore wind development.

Chladek continued with an update on the GNSBI Fisheries track. The group first met over a year ago, identifying a lack of long-term perspective for fisheries as a key issue. While the concept of spatial squeeze was acknowledged, its scale and impact were debated. It became clear that assessing fisheries across the Greater North Sea, beyond national boundaries, was essential for understanding their current state and future prospects.

To build an evidence base, a study was launched to analyse spatial overlaps between fisheries, offshore wind development, and protected area until 2030. The goal is to assess impacts on fleets, ports, and regions, and to inform mitigation strategies and improve fisheries integration into MSP. Some member states noted that fisheries are still poorly represented in MSP at both EU and regional levels.

The study faced delays due to outdated or inaccessible data on wind farms and protected areas. A comprehensive and up-to-date database has now been compiled—one of the most detailed currently available. Preliminary results point to significant upcoming spatial pressures on fisheries. The study also highlighted mapping challenges and gaps in data such as transponder use. In response, a concept for regular fisheries mapping (updated every 2–3 years) was proposed to monitor evolving spatial challenges faced by fisheries. Ministers have endorsed institutionalizing this process, stressing the importance of data privacy by only presenting publicly aggregated, non-sensitive data. Completion of the study is expected by summer.

Olsson expressed surprise at the claim that fisheries lack a long-term perspective, noting that fishing has occurred in the North Sea for over a millennium. He stressed that every vessel over 12 meters is already tracked via VMS. In light of current geopolitical and food security concerns, he called for a new approach that prioritizes European food production and reduces reliance on imports.

Peter Breckling (German Industry) questioned the need for additional fisheries studies, noting that VMS and catch data have long been available and useful for understanding fishing patterns and seasonal dynamics. He expressed concern that existing data isn't being fully utilized, and asked how the initiative would account for shifting fish stocks caused by climate change, such as declining cod and increasing squid populations. He warned that new maps and studies could quickly become outdated.

Chladek responded that the issue of food security, while important, is beyond the scope of this discussion.

VMS and REM data are being used in the ongoing study, but the primary difficulty lies in collecting and consolidating offshore wind and protected area data from multiple countries, which remains fragmented. Although climate change is recognized as a key factor, reliable long-term modelling is not yet available, and attempts to include it often face criticism for being speculative. Instead, the current focus is on gathering solid historical and spatial data to quantify past fishing areas, assess upcoming losses, and understand economic and biological impacts. These data may eventually support more robust modelling efforts.

Talevska queried about the stakeholder strategy, specifically about the timeline and whether there will be an opportunity for stakeholders to provide input. In the past, a draft governance paper and ministerial declaration were shared, allowing for comments. However, there was insufficient time to send it to members for proper deliberation. As a result, input could only be provided from the Secretariat, though it was still valuable in correcting some factual mistakes related to the NSAC.

Von Meijenfeldt replied that the stakeholder engagement strategy is expected by year-end and will include multiple phases. A key step is a stakeholder workshop at European Maritime Day (EMD) in Cork this May, where feedback will be gathered to help shape the strategy. An initial stakeholder event later in the year is also being considered. Belgium and France are leading the stakeholder engagement work within the GNSBI Steering Group, and there is commitment to ensuring sufficient time and opportunity for stakeholder input moving forward.

The stakeholder engagement development is being led by Belgium and France within the steering group. Efforts are underway to ensure that sufficient time is given for stakeholders to provide input, with the aim of allowing members to be involved. The importance of cooperation and adequate time for responses was acknowledged, and the message will be taken back to the GNSBI. **(Action)**

The Chair expressed a wish to have fisheries sector involved in discussions in Fisheries Work Track and asked von Meijenfeldt to bring this back to the GNSBI, which was agreed. **(Action)**

Michael Andersen (DFPO) welcomed the GNSBI presentation, expressing optimism that the initiative could address key concerns of the fisheries sector.

Brouckaert voiced concern over the initiative's direction. He proposed an action from the NSAC in response to the presentations and answers provided. He was unsure if all relevant factors have been considered, particularly regarding databases and fisheries data, and suggested that a letter be sent to address these concerns and emphasize the importance of involving stakeholder bodies working on fisheries databases. **(Action)**

Alexandra Philippe, EBCD, noted that the GNSBI was also discussed in the Ecosystem Working Group, where the idea of a joint webinar on MSP and cross-basin collaboration had emerged. GNSBI was viewed as a central player, given its strong Commission backing. While concerns about the unequal treatment of fisheries and energy should be acknowledged, she

emphasized the value of engaging more closely with the initiative, which could allow the fisheries sector to bring forward its perspectives more effectively.

The Chair underscored that GNSBI could be seen as marine spatial planning at a higher level and encouraged NSAC sectors to explore how the initiative might support their objectives. While GNSBI has helped raise the visibility of fisheries, concerns were raised about fragmented national-level coordination. In Denmark, for example, the Maritime Agency under the Ministry of Industry is leading the process, but cross-ministerial coordination appears weak, risking loss of key sectoral input. Active involvement from stakeholders was deemed crucial. It was also appreciated that the Ecosystem Working Group, under Philippe’s leadership, had already begun to reflect on this issue.

Breckling emphasized the evolving nature of fisheries, noting historical species like tuna, sardine, and anchovy that once thrived in the North Sea. He warned that legal frameworks must be adaptable to allow for sustainable use of future resources and emphasized food security as an emerging concern—citing the recent North American egg shortage as a cautionary example. Therefore, it was stressed that those involved in fisheries must understand the need for adaptable regulations to respond effectively to changing conditions.

[4 Update from the Scheveningen Group \[Dirk van Guyze, Scheveningen Group Presidency\]](#)

Dirk van Guyze of the Belgian Presidency presented an update from Scheveningen Group. Three meetings of the Technical Group have been held in 2024—January, February, and March. A 2024 work plan was agreed, including closer cooperation with the Control Expert Group. A letter from the Control Group Chair proposed procedural improvements and greater coordination, many of which are already being implemented. It was agreed that future meeting minutes will be shared with the Control Group.

A recent Commission letter clarified the legal obligation to consult ACs. Though not new, it addressed timing misunderstandings, particularly in the South Western Waters group.

A joint recommendation (JR) on minimum mesh size and T90 technical measures was discussed and scheduled for the March STECF plenary. In contrast, the JR on detached crab claws was postponed due to lack of consensus following NSAC advice, which prompted concerns from one Member State. Sweden is expected to revisit the matter after further consideration. The JR regarding the *de minimis* exemption for lemon sole remains under discussion. Bilateral contacts with the Commission are ongoing, and a letter will soon be sent addressing the November 2024 STECF plenary report, including specific remarks on lemon sole and general questions for STECF. A draft JR on plaice box has been initiated and will be revisited in April. A potential JR on brown crab is also under review, with additional scientific input requested from the ICES Working Group. In light of NSAC’s similar interest, a collaborative workshop was suggested.

Regarding the “FISH-ENVI” group, which facilitates cooperation among Member States on conservation measures in MPAs, it was reactivated in 2021 by the Netherlands. The last meeting took place in October 2024 under Swedish leadership. Recommendations have been submitted by Germany, Denmark, Netherlands, and Sweden; Belgium's is nearly final, and France is preparing theirs. The group will continue coordination work in 2025 and may also address broader strategic topics such as GNSBI.

The Control Expert Group has adopted a two-year work plan for 2025–2026, organised around six core objectives: implementing the control regulation, advancing REM pilot projects, conducting risk assessments of non-compliance, enhancing dialogue with the fishing sector and coordination with NSAC, PELAC, the Technical Group, and the High-Level Group, reviewing national cod avoidance plans, and sharing practices on control implementation across the EU, UK, and Norway.

The Chair queried whether the Scheveningen Group was addressing the technical measures regulation and related implementing acts with ease or whether significant time is being spent on them. He also asked if the EU Ocean Pact and GNSBI were being actively addressed by the group.

Van Guyze replied that technical measures implementation has been regularly included on the agenda, but the implementing act has not yet been released by the Commission, despite repeated assurances over the past two years. Once published, it will be tabled for discussion in both the Scheveningen and North Western Waters groups.

On the GNSBI, Van Guyze confirmed it is intended to be included in upcoming discussions. An update from Belgian colleagues is expected within one to two months, though the approach for addressing it within the Technical Group is still under development.

Van Tuinen asked about the timeline for implementing the squid technical measure (40mm/280) this summer.

Van Guyze confirmed that the Commission has given assurances the measure will be adopted in time for the September season.

Geert Meun (VisNed) asked whether the JAMBAY project had been presented at the latest group meeting.

Van Guyze confirmed that three projects were presented during the last Technical Group session, including Denmark's JAMBAY project report, which prompted a brief discussion and questions. Belgian scientists also presented on precision fisheries, and the Dutch delegation gave a short update on beam trawl developments. While JAMBAY was discussed, it was suggested the topic may be better addressed in other settings due to its broader political implications.

The **Chair** that the JAMBAY project report was produced by DTU-Aqua and made publicly available two weeks ago. The report, which addresses beam trawling, plays a role in the ongoing Danish political debate on the issue. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, the

presentation was delivered in a neutral tone. The report is available to the public, and a link will be circulated to ensure access for all stakeholders. **(Action)**

5 Control Regulation implementation *[Chair; Secretariat]*

Talevska reported on the joint AC workshop held on February 5th, initiated by the NWW Advisory Council, with participation from PELAC, NSAC, BSAC, and other ACs, which held separate sessions. During the workshop, DG MARE updated participants on the planned implementation of provisions under the Control Regulation (CR), clarifying roles for Member States, the Commission, and EFCA. Key topics included remote electronic monitoring (REM), electronic logbook submissions, harmonisation of control and enforcement, and criteria for identifying high-risk vessels.

Following the workshop, the three ACs met to agree on joint advice items. Additionally, several remaining questions were sent to the Commission, though their response indicated delays due to high workload. A draft meeting report was produced shortly after the event but remains under Commission review before distribution to members.

The drafting of the Joint AC advice is ongoing. Key topics covered include stakeholder engagement, REM, electronic logbook submissions, VMS for small-scale fleets, serious infringements, weighing procedures, margin of tolerance requirements, monitoring engine power, and the use of the EMFAF fund. Further input from PELAC is expected, and members will be able to contribute through the ExCom procedure.

Philippe noted that at the last PECH committee meeting, concerns were raised about the CR's Implementing and Delegated Acts. Industry fears that compromises reached in political negotiations may be undermined at the technical level, with the Commission potentially exceeding its mandate.

The Chair noted that there is concern that through the implementing acts, the Commission is effectively reintroducing elements from its original proposal. A broader worry is that new administrative burdens are being created, affecting not only national authorities but also the sector itself.

Regarding the process of the CR's progress, at the national level, cooperation between national authorities and the fishing sector or other relevant stakeholders is taking place. However, it remains important for ACs to send a signal to the Commission on these issues.

There is also unease over the Commission's level of ambition. Key aspects of the regulation, expected to be in place by January 1st, remain unclear—particularly technical elements like REM and traceability.

Philippe added that the workshop lacked technical depth, with many key discussions handled less transparently than hoped. The Commission appeared distant, having delegated much of the technical detail to Member States. This risks uneven implementation across the EU,

especially on issues like REM and engine power. While technical clarity is needed from the Commission, overly detailed requests often receive unclear responses.

The example of engine power highlights the issue: Member States have the technical means to monitor it, but the Commission offers little guidance. The dilemma is whether to push the Commission for answers or work more pragmatically with Member States.

The workshop was seen as a missed opportunity. Although Secretariats had asked for EFCA and Member State participation, the Commission preferred a siloed setup. The lack of information exchange across actors was seen as problematic, especially given that MEPs are not always well-versed in technical matters.

The Chair noted the workshop was intended to position ACs as technical experts and to involve all relevant institutions. Instead, the Commission mainly offered general information, which felt insufficient. He observed that many Commission staff who had worked on the CR have since moved on, complicating follow-up.

Guus Pastoor (Visfederatie) stressed that the CR affects the entire value chain, including processors and traders. He questioned whether any review of existing frameworks is undertaken before new changes are introduced. Evaluating current regulations before layering new ones is needed as constant changes increase costs for businesses without clear benefit. While the need for implementation is acknowledged, there is a growing sense that ongoing regulatory changes should be critically assessed for necessity and impact.

It was agreed that the draft advice be circulated to ExCom for further comments. **(Action)**

6 Post-2026 Trade and Cooperation Agreement [Chair]

The Chair informed that the Inter-AC Brexit Forum held a physical meeting in Brussels on February 4th. Discussions continue on Brexit and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), amid changes in the Commission team

From July 1, 2026, the TCA will be fully implemented, enabling annual access negotiations. Any changes, including quota allocations, will require mutual EU–UK agreement. Quotas can be reviewed every five years starting in 2030. While the UK has signalled interest in increasing its shares, the Commission insists no changes can occur without consensus.

The UK is also using technical measures (such as MPAs and FMPs) to restrict EU fishing, as seen with the North Sea sandeel fishery closure. These actions are concerning and highlight the need for thorough preparation on the Commission's part ahead of negotiations.

An interim ruling from The Hague court on the sandeel case is expected shortly. If the UK's authority is upheld, it may set a precedent for future restrictions on EU vessels.

Talevska asked about the arbitration panel for the sandeel case.

The Chair responded that it is being handled by the International Court in The Hague, with judges from South Africa, France, and Australia. A public hearing took place at the end of January.

Philippe noted confusion about the TCA timeline. While July 1, 2026, marks the end of the transition period and opens access to waters, quota allocations remain governed by annexes and cannot change without agreement. It's unclear whether a formal TCA review is scheduled at that time.

The Chair agreed with the confusion, noting that from July 1, 2026, restrictions on access can be introduced during annual consultations, but quota sharing will remain unchanged unless jointly revised.

Brouckaert added that July 1, 2026, specifically affects fisheries access and energy cooperation. All quota changes still require mutual agreement. The rest of the TCA remains unchanged.

Pauline Stephane, CNPMM, highlighted that 2030 is the actual date for a full TCA review, including the fisheries chapter. A comprehensive review may occur around 2027, and not 2026.

The Chair concluded that the approach remains “business as usual,” though ACs and the sector have had limited influence on the Special Committee for Fisheries, which is mainly shaped by the TCA and UK priorities. Member States are finding it difficult to channel input to the Commission, and stakeholders are urged to proactively submit UK-related priorities. The next inter-AC meeting will be organised by the Long Distance AC. Members are welcome to notify the Secretariat on topics they wish to table at the upcoming meeting. **(Action)**

Ongoing stakeholder input is essential for effective Commission engagement. It was suggested that post-2026 TCA matters remain a standing agenda item. Despite the challenges, efforts to maintain UK dialogue continue, including upcoming meetings such as the NSAC July DWG&SKWG meeting on ICES advice, where Norwegian representatives will also be invited. **(Action)**

7 Update from Demersal WG [*Peter Ronelöv Olsson*]

Olsson reported from the latest Demersal Working Group, highlighting discussions on the EU-Norway-UK negotiations and updates from the Scheveningen group. Key presentations included the DTU Aqua study on sandeel habitat preferences and a management strategy evaluation for cod. Other agenda items covered the CIBBRINA project, updates from NSI focus groups, and recent advice and meetings. All materials are available online.

The recent cormorants and seals conference in Luleå gathered stakeholders from various countries and fostered constructive dialogue. A shared concern emerged over the urgent need to address growing populations of cormorants and seals, which could harm fish stocks. The

event was well-received. Looking ahead, there was a proposal to organise a follow-up conference with a stronger focus on the North Sea. The suggestion included the idea of a more targeted discussion, particularly from the perspective of fishers, addressing practical issues such as the use of gillnets. It was agreed the topic is urgent and must remain a priority.

Talevska reiterated that the discussions held at the workshop do not represent an official NSAC position. A report from the workshop will be produced, and stakeholders, including industry representatives, will be able to use it for advocacy or discussions with national administrations. NSAC and BSAC will collaborate to develop a joint position. The aim is to arrive at a balanced, broadly supported position.

Olsson highlighted troubling scientific findings, including a Danish study showing up to 81% of tagged fish were found in cormorant nests, underscoring the problem's scale. Cormorants migrate across Europe, making it a continent-wide issue needing coordinated action.

Philippe clarified that a pan-European would not mean uniform rules or fixed quotas for culling cormorants or seals across all countries. The principles of proportionality and subsidiarity in the EU treaties ensure that decisions are adapted to regional and national contexts. Any regulatory response would likely take the form of a directive, allowing Member States—and, in turn, regional and local authorities—to manage the issue according to their specific geographic and ecological situations. Therefore, such coordination should not be seen as overly rigid or alarming.

Additionally, caution was urged regarding criticism on social media. While BSAC has an official position, NSAC currently does not, meaning that public critiques of NSAC are problematic since it cannot respond on equal footing.

The Chair noted that draft advice will be produced, potentially with separate recommendations for cormorants and seals. EIFAAC will hold a stakeholder consultation on 25 April on the draft European Cormorant Management Plan under the FAO framework. Invitation will be circulated to members. **(Action)**

Anderse expressed frustration with the misrepresentation of the workshop, stressing it was meant for fact-based discussion, not advocacy.

Breckling stressed the broader challenge of moving species from "protected" to "managed" status when populations grow too large and threaten ecosystems and other protected species. He called for referencing relevant legal frameworks, such as court rulings on wolves, to place this issue within a larger conservation and management context.

8 Update from Skagerrak and Kattegat WG [*Claus Hjørne Pedersen*]

Claus Hjørne **Pedersen** reported from the Skagerrak and Kattegat Working Group meeting held on 21 March 2025. Malin Willhelmsen from SwAM presented on Swedish MPAs, followed by a discussion on speed limits near stowed gear areas. DFPO about the handling of their

consultation inputs, particularly for Kattegat, but received no clear responses; speed regulation matters were deferred to EU level regulations. Henrik Lund from (DFPO) updated on Denmark's MPAs, Danish Sea plan, and ongoing political discussions regarding protected areas. The group also discussed the Seals and Cormorants Workshop and received updates on *Pandalus borealis*. The date for the next meeting should be July 10 alongside the Demersal Working Group.

Andersen noted that a new technical WG on shrimp will be set up, but no date has been confirmed. TAC discussions for shrimp are scheduled for 11–12 June.

The Chair noted that during the last Scheveningen group, there was some discussion regarding the NSAC's advice on crab claws, specifically about whether the advice applied only to the North Sea or included areas like the Skagerrak and Kattegat. The Scheveningen group is considering a restriction specific to Swedish waters in the Skagerrak, but NSAC advised against integrating national rules into EU legislation under the CFP. This concern was noted by the Scheveningen group, recognizing that the approach seemed to confirm national legislation through EU legislation. The recommended path forward is a unified EU-level policy on crab claws within the CFP, though pressure from Sweden to maintain its national approach remains. The issue is ongoing.

9 Update from Ecosystem WG [Alexandra Philippe]

Philippe reported that two EWG meetings were held since the last ExCom—on 13 February and 30 October. Key topics included:

- A presentation on error and bias in marine conservation and fisheries literature, highlighting how oversimplified or financially driven decisions can distort perceptions.
- A discussion on the Nature Restoration Law presented by DG ENV.
- Presentations on noise pollution, offshore wind farms, and sand extraction.

NSAC Advice on Fisheries OECMs, coming from discussions in the EWG, was approved in November. Members are encouraged to stay in touch with their national ministries on these topics.

The next meeting is planned for 24–25 June, initially set for Amsterdam but may shift online as a webinar. Focusing on MSP, it could include presentation of NSAC Advice on mapping important fishing grounds and the Great North Sea Basin Initiative.

The meeting aims to showcase national MSP approaches, identify areas for collaboration, and move toward actionable advice, especially on offshore wind.

10 EU Nature Restoration Law [Peter Breckling]

Breckling reported on the 19 March Marine Expert Group meeting, which focused on the Nature Restoration Law. Vedran Nikolic (EC) outlined its governance, based on existing directives like the MSFD and habitat/species legislation. For further details, relevant files are available on the NSAC website, as similar presentation was held during the EWG.

Several projects under the law were introduced, covering habitat mapping, monitoring, and guidance development—some with large budgets (e.g. €11.8M) using remote sensing and DNA analysis. Another project supports Member State implementation efforts.

A workshop on the Nature Restoration Law was held in early March with 90 experts involved, and a report on this will be presented on April 25th. Member States shared updates on national restoration plans (i.e., Belgium). However, many of the issues discussed were not new, reflecting challenges previously encountered, such as the lack of pristine habitats for reference areas. The Netherlands shared plans for offshore wind farms and identified issues with estuaries, mud, and sand flats. However, there was little consideration of the potential impacts of climate change.

The meeting showed high activity levels in mapping, monitoring, assessment and restoration planning, though progress varies between Member States. Fisheries stakeholders were encouraged to inquire about how these plans align with fisheries management and to remain engaged in national discussions.

While public consultations on guidance are underway, timelines are tight, limiting NSAC's ability to provide a coordinated response. Nonetheless, members are urged to monitor developments and ensure fisheries perspectives are reflected in national restoration efforts.

Philippe noted that many existing practices in fisheries management can contribute to natural restoration and biodiversity conservation efforts. Rather than imposing new measures, these should be recognized and integrated into national plans and global targets. The industry has a key role in ensuring these practices are recognized and included.

Van Tuinen remarked that, with the NRL, the Netherlands is facing 40–50% protected area proposals—well beyond the original 30%. This shift has deeply affected the fishing sector, raising concerns about reversibility.

Talevska referred to NSAC advice on OECMs and asked if the Dutch government had reviewed existing technical measures and existing closed fisheries areas to assess whether they meet CBD criteria—potentially reducing the need for new protected zones.

Van Tuinen confirmed this could help but noted many of the areas are already closed—around 40–50%, with the NRL now shifting focus to coastal zones. The original 30% target seems outdated, raising concerns about overreach.

Talevska asked whether there was monitoring in place to assess the effectiveness of these measures. Without evidence of effectiveness, continued restrictions may be hard to justify. Monitoring could also support reopening areas that are underperforming.

The Chair highlighted the challenge of reopening areas that were previously closed. The NRL emphasizes the need to protect certain types of nature at specific levels. While the law is binding, its implementation varies across member states, making it crucial to have an overview of different approaches. This could be possibly tabled at EWG. **(Action)**

Breckling added that habitat maps have existed for 20 years, often showing poor status. Current projects aim to refine definitions of “good status” and clarify habitat types like reefs and sandbanks—potentially opening discussions favourable to fisheries. Having an insight into member states’ reflections on national restoration progress would be valuable. **(Action)**

11 Update on Focus Groups, external meetings & NSAC advice [*Tamara Talevska*]

Talevska reported on recent focus group activities, external meetings, and NSAC advice developments. The Social Aspects FG met on 17 February, discussing the STECF report on social data. Fishing rights were briefly addressed, but the Commission’s report is still pending. The next meeting is set for 4 April, focusing on the STECF economic report, safety, and mental health. Joint FG advice was shared with STECF Chairs, and participation in the STECF Social Dimension group is planned.

On climate change, no meetings have been held yet, but upcoming discussions (April or May) will likely cover Blue Foods’ role in food security and energy transition financing.

Since September, several external meetings took place, including on EU–UK negotiations, a meeting with the Commissioner on fishing opportunities, and the first-ever meeting on research priorities with DG MARE’s scientific unit. A focus was placed on enhancing stakeholder engagement and integrating climate considerations into scientific advice. Other meetings addressed the EU Ocean Pact and aligning marine policies with climate uncertainty.

NSAC has published 10 advice papers and received responses to two. Work continues on CFP evaluation advice, due 21 April. Mapping advice is being finalised and will go through FG, Demersal WG, and ExCom approval shortly.

The Chair proposed a short FG meeting to discuss CFP advice. **(Action)**

Andersen suggested shortening the CFP advice but supported the main messages therein.

12 NSAC Administrative & Financial Update [*Secretariat*]

For the 2023–2024 period (ending October), the final report was approved, and notification was received that the 20% balance payment would be received shortly. The total budget for the period was around 320,000 EUR, with 86% (circa 283,000 euros) contributed by the Commission.

A deficit was anticipated due to the anniversary and relocation events, initially estimated at €35,000. However, after review by Dutch accountants, the final figure rose unexpectedly to €65,000. Causes cited include inflation-related salary increases and raises. A meeting is scheduled to clarify the discrepancy. If confirmed, austerity measures may be needed.

The reserve fund currently holds €71,000. A decision is needed on whether to use part of it or adopt cost-saving measures like moving all meetings online. 2026 will be the final year of the four-year period for calculating the fixed contribution rate from the Commission, after which a re-evaluation will take place.

Pastoor noted that while a reserve of 70,000 euros exists, using the entire reserve could result in insufficient funds for daily operations. A full report on the relocation costs and anniversary expenses is needed to clarify the situation. The anniversary costs were likely budgeted, but it seems that the budget may have been exceeded. After the meeting with the accountancy, all the numbers shall be reviewed to gain a clearer understanding.

Talevska responded that the anniversary costs were not initially budgeted. She noted that PELAC faced a similar issue, with a 30,000-euro deficit due to their anniversary. Without additional events, the work plan would have stayed within budget.

Currently, NSAC's payroll and finances are managed by two accountancies (one Belgian and one Dutch), costing approx. €200 per email. Due to inefficiencies, hiring a part-time in-house accountant is being considered—pending resolution of current financial issues.

For 2024/25, NSAC received a prepayment of €230,000 (80% of a €325,000 budget), with a total Commission contribution of €289,361. Although a 2% inflation adjustment was included, it does not fully address current financial strains. As of now, half the budget has been spent, but salary costs remain unclear due to ongoing discussions between the two accountancies. An updated financial overview will be shared with ExCom.

Membership fees will be invoiced by June, with payments or signed letters of commitment due by 15 August. This is necessary to demonstrate sufficient resources for the 2025/26 grant application (due 31 August).

A performance review, as required by the Delegated Act, will begin in July, led by Mark Dickey-Collas and Ellen Johannes, with a budget of €15,000. The review will extend into Q1 2026.

The Chair touched upon the NSAC relocation process. Procedural issues were encountered with the relocation process in September/October, following the General Assembly meeting, which resulted in the delay of the statutes' submission to the court. Once finalized, the revised statutes will be sent to the General Assembly for approval and then submitted to the court. A Belgian bank account will be opened after incorporation, and the Dutch entity will be liquidated after the operational year ends in October.

After the statutes were reviewed following the last GA, an issue with seats was identified. Originally DFPO had two seats, due to past agreements. However, updated statutes now state that NSAC members can only hold one seat per organization. Board meetings were held to

discuss the issue and agree on way forward. As a result, from next year, only one payment will be made by DFPO for the ExCom.

Several meetings remain in 2024: two Ecosystem WGs, two ExComs, Skagerrak-Kattegat WG, Demersal WG, and one General Assembly. If the deficit is confirmed, ExCom will move online, while the July Demersal and Skagerrak-Kattegat WGs will remain in Brussels. **(Action)**

Talevska stressed the importance of fixing meeting dates before August to avoid rescheduling stress and coordination issues. An Excel sheet with proposed dates is available—members should comment if changes are needed. **(Action)**

A list of topics in the current work plan, along with some new ones, has also been compiled. These topics can remain, even if not all are addressed, as the commitment to the Commission is based on the topics and number of pieces of advice that are submitted. Past confusion with the Commission resulted from mismatched advice titles. Titles are intentionally broad (e.g., MSP, MPAs, Greater North Sea Basin Initiative, food security) to cover related issues. Members are encouraged to add new topics in the shared Excel. **(Action)**

13 Any Other Business *[Members]*

Stephane French members' interest in expanding the AC Fish Map—originally from the Northwestern Waters AC—to other ACs, proposing a single unified tool instead of multiple separate efforts. The estimated cost (€30,000–€40,000) was previously shared with the Secretariat, but the project has been deprioritized due to the current deficit. Still, French members believe a shared tool would be cost-effective and beneficial. The proposal received general support and should be revisited once financial issues are resolved. **(Action)**

14 Closing: Date and time of next meeting *[Chair]*

The next Executive Committee meeting will take place in summer, with date to be soon confirmed by the Secretariat. **(Action)**

15 Agreed action points

Action	Responsible party
Noemi von Meijenfeldt to inform the GNSBI Stakeholder Engagement Plan Steering Group on the NSAC timeline for giving feedback and reaffirm NSAC's interest in being actively engaged in the fisheries track.	Noemi von Meijenfeldt

NSAC Executive Committee to draft a letter highlighting stakeholder concerns on fisheries representation and the fair involvement of all key sectors (fisheries, nature, energy) in the GNSBI.	NSAC Executive Committee
Information on the JAMBAY project to be circulated to ExCom.	Secretariat
NSAC Executive Committee to provide input to NSAC/PELAC/NWWAC Joint Advice on the Implementation of the Control Regulation upon circulation.	NSAC Executive Committee
NSAC Executive Committee to notify the Secretariat of topics for the upcoming Inter-AC Brexit Forum meeting (facilitated by LDAC, date TBD).	NSAC Executive Committee
Secretariat to invite UK and Norwegian representatives to the next Demersal & Skagerrak-Kattegat WG meeting with focus on 2026 fishing opportunities (ICES advice).	Secretariat
Secretariat to circulate the EIFAAC invitation for the stakeholder consultation on the draft European Cormorant Management Plan (25 April 2025, online).	Secretariat
Future EWG meeting to table presentations on member states' progress on national restoration plans implementation and best practices.	Ecosystem WG
At the next Scheveningen Group meeting, NSAC to inquire about MS progress and coordination on nature restoration plans.	NSAC Chair, Secretariat
A FG meeting to discuss NSAC Advice on the evaluation of the CFP to be convened shortly.	NSAC Chair, Secretariat
Members to review NSAC Work Plan for 25/26 and flag any issues with proposed meeting dates for current and upcoming operational year.	NSAC Executive Committee

NSAC to revisit proposal on expanding the NWWAC Fish Map to the North Sea area upon financial issues resolution.	NSAC Executive Committee
Next meeting of the NSAC Executive Committee to take place in summer 2025; Secretariat to confirm date and time.	NSAC Executive Committee, Secretariat

16 Meeting participants

First name	Last name	Organisation
Alexandra	Philippe	EBCD
Anna	Rindorf	DTU Aqua
Claus Hjørne	Pedersen	DFPO
Dirk	Van Guyze	Scheveningen Group Presidency
Durk	Van Tuinen	Nederlandse Visserbond
Emiel	Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
Florian	Stein	German Angling Association
Fredrik	Lidnberg	SFPO
Geert	Meun	VisNed
Guus	Pastoor	Visfederatie
Jerome	Chladek	BMEL
Kateryna	Urbanovych	NSAC
Kenn Skau	Fischer	NSAC ExCom Chair
Michael	Andersen	DFPO
Noemi	Van Meijendeldt	Dutch Ministry
Pauline	Stephan	CNPMEM
Peter	Ronelöv Olsson	SFPO
Peter	Breckling	Deutscher Fischerei Verband
Solène	Prévalet	From NORD
Svend-Erik	Andersen	DFPO
Tamara	Talevska	NSAC