Regional Coordination Group
North Atlantic
North Sea & Eastern Arctic

Regional Coordination Group
Baltic

Regional Coordination Group North Atlantic, North Sea & Eastern Arctic Regional Coordination Group Baltic

RCG NANSEA AND RCG BALTIC REPORT

Part I

25 May, 6 – 9 June 2023

Gdańsk, Poland

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This document is the product of two Regional Coordination Groups under the auspices of the Expert Group on Fisheries Data Collection (EC - DCF) and does not necessarily represent the view of the EU Expert Group (NCs).

Contents

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Acronyms

ACOM	Advisory Committee
AR	Annual Report
CE	Commercial Effort
CECAF	Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy
CINEA	European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency
CKMR	Close-kin mark-recapture
CL	Commercial Landings
COM	Commission
DCF	Data Collection Framework
DG MARE	Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
DM	Decision Meeting
ECON	Economic issues
EFCA	European Fisheries Control Agency
EMFAF	European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund
EMT	Electronic Monitoring Technology
FDI	Fisheries Dependent Information
IBTS	International Bottom Trawl Survey
IC	InterCatch
ICES	International Council for the Exploration of the Sea
ISSG	Intersessional Subgroup
JRC	Joint Research Center
LDF	Long Distance Fisheries
LM	Liaison Meeting
LP	Large Pelagics
Med & BS	Mediterranean Sea and Black Sea
ML	Machine Learning
MRF	Marine Recreational Fishery
MS	Member State
MSFD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive
NAFO	North Atlantic Fisheries Organization
NANSEA	North Atlantic, North Sea and Eastern Arctic
NC	National correspondent
NEAFC	North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission
NWP	National Work Plan
PETS	Protected, Endangered and Threatened Species
QAF	Quality Assurance Framework
RCG	Regional Coordination Group
RDB	Regional Database
RDBES	Regional Database & Estimation System

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Acronyms

REM	Remote Electronic Monitoring
RFMO	Regional Fisheries Management Organisation
RSP	Regional Sampling Plan
RWP	Regional Work Plan
SCICOM	Science Committee
SID	Stock Information Database
SG	Sub Group
SSCF	Smal Scale Coastal Fisheries
SSF	Smal Scale Fisheries
STECF	Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries
TAC	Total Allowable Catch
TFA	Thematic Focus Areas
TM	Technical Meeting
VMS	Vessel Monitoring Systems

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Executive summary

The overall aim for RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic is to review the status of current issues, achievements and developments of regional coordination and identify future needs in line with DCF regulation (EU 1004/2017) requirements and the wider European environmental monitoring and management.

This was the second year for the 2022-2024 multi-annual Terms of References (ToRs) for the Regional Coordination Group North Atlantic, North Sea & Eastern Arctic (RCG NANSEA) and the Regional Coordination Group Baltic (RCG Baltic). The group met virtually on 25th May and physically in Gdansk, Poland, from 6-9 June 2023, with the possibility to connect remotely.

Five ToRs were handled during the RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic 2023 TM, with intersessional work carried out by designated ISSGs and subgroups during the RCG technical meeting. The intersessional work 2022-2023 was a setup of 15 different ISSGs, and their work was presented during the RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic 2023 TM. The output of the ISSGs is extremely valuable for the work of the TM and forms the basis of the discussions at the meeting. Next to the ISSGs, four SGs were planned during the RCG TM.

As the Regional Work Plans (RWP) need to be agreed and submitted by the autumn of 2023, this work had a big focus during the 2023 meeting, and time was allocated to plenary and subgroup discussions.

ToR 1: Alignment between data collection and end-user needs

The work on this ToR is focused on communication with end-users and following up on recommendations. The communication between the RCG and end users is done through the ISSG 'End-users', which consists of RCG chairs, Commission and ICES as the primary end-user. The group met virtually and discussed recommendations. In addition, a recommendation sense-checking meeting was set up between ICES and RCG chairs. During the TM, the roles and responsibilities of RCGs vs ICES were discussed concerning the quality checking of the data uploaded to the RDBES and the ISSG outputs on RDB Catch, effort and sampling overviews. It was agreed to update the Mandates and Remits of the RCGs document to specify this more clearly.

The Commission gave a presentation on DCF topics relating to the RCGs, including the submission timelines for the Regional Work Plans and updates of National Work Plans (NWPs); the DCF Platform; Commission support for SECWEB; the new control regulation; Scientific Advice on Fisheries (SAF) grants and published outcomes of previously funded studies. As requested by the two RCGs, a separate update was provided on the Marine Action Plan and its implication for the DCF.

ICES gave a presentation from the end-user side regarding the communication channels, recommendations and setting up of the recommendation sense checking meeting. The list of planned benchmarks was presented.

A presentation regarding the use of genetic samples for stock assessment was given, and the genetic analysis is used both for stomach content, eDNA analysis for water samples and genetics analysis on tissue samples for stock delimitation and identification. It was discussed if a separate ISSG should be created for genetic sampling. Still, it was decided to keep the coordination regarding genetic sampling in three different ISSGs: Surveys (tissue sampling), Electronic Monitoring Systems (eDNA) and Stomach.

ToR 2: Data quality in data collection

This ToR focuses on coordinating and harmonising work and methods within the regions and overviews of fisheries and sampling. The ISSGs on 'RDB catch, effort and sampling overviews', 'Metier and transversal

variable issues', 'Electronic Monitoring Technologies' and 'Surveys' are working on this ToR. In addition, feedback from the ICES WGRDBESGOV and ICES RDB/RDBES was given.

Regarding ICES WGRDBESGOV, the updated roadmap was presented, indicating that 2023 was the last year of the RDB data call. The workshops relating to RDBES development proposed for 2023 were presented, as well as the progress on intersessional work ongoing in the RDBES core group, alignment between RDBES and FDI, data quality, data confidentiality and update of the RDBES data license. Funding for future developments of RDBES development was discussed, and the possibility of storing data from diadromous species in RDBES or an RDBES clone was discussed. A workshop is planned by the end of 2023 regarding the RDBES Data confidentiality and license. All MS should be engaged in this workshop.

ICES gave an update regarding the RDB/RDBES work, presenting the work done in the RDBES core group, the development of the RDBES by the ICES Secretariat, and work on the ICES WGBYC using the RDBES data. Funding is missing to support the work on including data from sampling recreational fisheries and diadromous species. Work is ongoing regarding the alignment of RDBES and FDI, and the fields in the FDI have been mapped to the fields available in the RDBES. Some are identical, some need a conversion, and some fields are missing. The prioritization of RDBES missing functionalities was presented. Regarding the recommendation from the RCG that the RCG chairs be able to download RDB/RDBES data, a list of issues that need clarification was presented. An overview was given of the countries uploaded to the RDBES in 2022.

The ISSG on 'RDB catch, effort and sampling overviews' had created the annual and multiannual catch and effort overviews. It was the last year of the RDB data call, and the group needed to change to use the RDBES format. The workload of the ISSG was discussed, and it was suggested that the ISSG should focus on RCG work, and work and scripts for reports requested by ICES benchmarks and assessment working groups should be transferred to ICES. The ISSG suggests that historical CE and CL data could be requested, e.g. five years back, to produce a time series and that aggregated graphs could be produced for the RCG website.

The ISSG on 'Metier and transversal variable issues' continued supporting the implementation of metier codes requested in both STECF FDI and ICES RDBES, ICES WGBYC and ICES VMS/logbook data calls. The group coordinates and communicates between RCGs and end-users (STECF and ICES). Metier reports were produced, giving an overview of the metiers on different levels by region. The group started looking into the fecR package's maintenance for the fishing effort calculation and if it needs to be updated to fit with the RDBES format. ISSG issued a questionnaire on using data sources and cross-validation methods used by MS and will continue analyzing the replies in the 2023/2024 term.

The ISSG Surveys raised the question about access for survey vessels in areas that can be challenged by increased protected areas. A recommendation to the Commission is to provide guidance on the tools to ensure scientific monitoring in these areas.

From the ISSG on Electronic Monitoring Technologies, two tasks were discussed. One was regarding an inventory of the electronic data collection technologies used by MS, and the other was to examine the possibilities for a shared database of pictures to be used for machine learning. It was discussed that the ISSG should initiate coordination with groups working on related topics and that a joint meeting should be set up in 2023/2024.

The latest developments of SmartDots were presented: modules for maturity staging and ichthyoplankton identification.

ToR 3: Impact on management measures on data collection

Under this ToR, the questionnaire on COVID-19 impacts on data collection had been developed and extended to other impacts (e.g., impacts caused by legislation or the war in Ukraine). The questionnaire was sent to MS requesting information on impacts in 2022, and results were analyzed and presented at the ICES ISSG End Users meeting. As the Commission plans to issue a survey for real-time warnings if any factor impacts sampling, it was decided to put the RCG questionnaire on hold.

ToR 4: Development and implementation of Regional Work Plans

The Regional Work Plans (RWPs) should be agreed upon and submitted for review by STECF in the autumn of 2023. Therefore, extra focus was given to the ISSG RWP to present, discuss and finalize the proposals for RWP for the North Sea, North Atlantic and Eastern Arctic, and the Baltic Sea. The ISSG took over the proposals developed in the Fishn'Co project, where it was suggested that the RWPs are a "book of agreements". During the TM, work was done to make the agreements as straightforward as possible to prepare them for the September Decision Meeting.

ISSGs that feed into this ToR are Diadromous Fishes, Optimized and Operational Regional Sampling Plans, Case Study of the trawl fishery in Iberian Waters, Identification of case studies of PETS bycatch monitoring, Freezer trawler fleet exploiting pelagic fisheries in the Northeast Atlantic, the Case study of fisheries for small pelagics in the Baltic, Evaluation of data collected for the SSF at EU level, Regionally coordinated stomach sampling and Recreational fishery.

The three ISSGs for Regional Sampling Plan case studies presented their work's status. The ISSG Case study of fisheries for small pelagics in the Baltic included the agreed regional sampling plan to the Regional Work Plan. In addition, the ISSG analysed species misreporting between herring and sprat in a historical context. The ISSG 'Case study Freezer trawler fleet exploiting pelagic fisheries in the Northeast Atlantic' worked on proposing a regional sampling scheme and presented the results of a pilot study conducted, which will be extended in 2023/2024. The ISSG Case Study of the trawl fishery in Iberian Waters made a work plan with no activities during 2022/2023 but plans to start their activities in April 2024. The overarching ISSG on Optimized and Operational Regional Sampling Plans is on hold, as it had no activity during 2022/2023. It was decided to keep the group on hold during the technical meeting.

The ISSG on 'Evaluation of data collected for the SSF at EU level' is working on reviewing data available for the small-scale fisheries and the relevance of the available effort measures. They will follow the revised Control Regulation's implementation, where small-scale fisheries fishing activity will be collected. The ISSG 'Identification of case studies for PETS bycatch monitoring' reported that many initiatives are currently ongoing regarding this subject. The role of the ISSG is to work as a forum that makes an overview of the main initiatives carried out and to share it with the main end-users.

Regarding the ISSS on Diadromous Fishes during the technical meeting, the point was raised from the ISSG that the data are collected but that there is currently no common database to hold the data. There is a wish from the group that the RDBES be developed to store all diadromous species sampled data – both from commercial fisheries and from surveys.

The ISSG on Recreational Fisheries is also aware of and will follow up on the revised Control Regulation that includes reporting of recreational fisheries for certain species. The group also supports incorporating data from recreational fisheries into the RDBES.

The ISSG Regionally coordinated stomach sampling and Recreational fishery worked on the stomach sampling plan, methods and manuals for regionally coordinated stomach sampling plan in the North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat. It was highlighted that the stomachs should not only be sampled but also analyzed. The ISSG has estimated the costs associated with stomach analysis.

ToR 5: Governance

The ISSG NCs joined a subgroup with NCs attending the RCG Econ meeting to discuss the future of the RCG secretariat and find funding solutions. In addition, the ISSG will look into the process for proposing chairs and investigate the need for more pan-regionality for ISSGs.

The RCGs Secretariat presented an update of their service resulting from the SecWeb project. The secretariat supports the RCG work and is maintaining the https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/ website. A solution for long-term funding has not yet been found, and work is ongoing to find a solution.

Most intersessional groups (ISSGs) within the RCG will continue their work in 2023/2024, and two ISSGs remain on hold.

ToR 6: AOB

As some MS are experiencing high refusal rates regarding taking scientific observers onboard, it was decided to make a table where MS could provide feedback on mechanisms in place to promote the acceptance of vessel owners to take scientific observers onboard.

During the technical meeting, a demonstration was made on the stakeholder database available on www.fisheries-rcg.eu.

I Administrative details

Regional Coordination	Regional Coordination Group North Atlantic, North Sea & Eastern Arctic (RCG NANSEA) Regional Coordination Group Baltic (RCG Baltic)
Year of Appointment with the current cycle	2
Reporting year within the current cycle (1,2 or 3)	2
Chair(s)	RCG NANSEA: Dália Reis, Portugal & Josefine Egekvist, Denmark RCG Baltic: Maciej Adamowicz, Poland

Meeting venue	Meeting dates
Virtual Meeting	25 May 2023
Radisson Blu Hotel Gdańsk, Poland (Physical meeting)	6- 9 June 2023

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2 Terms of Reference

1. Propose ways to improve the alignment between data collection and end-user needs (by region)

- Define end-user needs and assess how they are met by current and future data collection.
- Define and suggest mechanisms for communication and implementation of end-user needs.
- Feedback from ICES end-user groups and RCG feedback on their recommendation.
- Improve regional cooperation for small-scale fisheries and assessing effects on the ecosystem.
- Formulate recommendation(s) for revision of EU-MAP to ensure that it is in line with end-user needs.

2. Implement and maintain data quality in data collection

- Assess the documentation of data quality procedures.
- Update on fisheries overview and sampling overview.
- Update on the development of RDB and RDBES.
- Review the outcome of regional-orientated projects and other groups.
- Develop a strategy for the implementation of electronic data capture (REM).

3. Review the impact of management measures on data collection

4. Development and implementation of Regional Work Plans

- Identify and propose potential regional workplans.
- Review and evaluate the outcome of regional-orientated projects to identify templates, content, and actions to incorporate into the regional work plan.
- Optimize the use of surveys: efficiency, multi-purpose & task sharing decisions and actions to be taken.

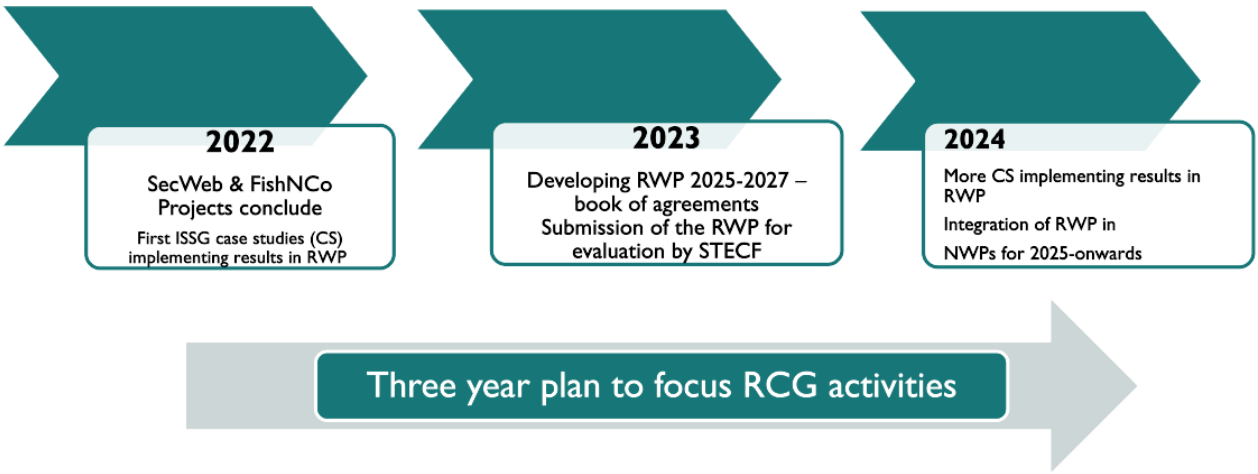
5. Propose ways to improve regional coordination and feedback on regional issues

- Review and evaluate the outcome of regional-orientated projects.
- Develop & adopt tools and working procedures for more effective regional cooperation and coordination.

6. Support of ToRs

- Promote the publication of findings, likely in the form of peer-reviewed publication (e.g. CRR) that documents the development of methodologies in the field of regional coordination & data collection and the state of scientific knowledge on the topic at the end of the 3-year TOR period.
- Identify pilot studies—decisions and actions to be taken.

3 Summary of Work plan RCGs 2022-2024



	Year 1 (2022)	Year 2 (2023)	Year 3 (2024)
End-user Needs	***Fine tune dialogue & assess additional needs***	***Fine tune dialogue & assess additional needs (cont.)***	***Fine tune dialogue & assess additional needs (cont.)***
	Review & improve feedback mechanism (benchmark, data call, SID) Cont. review end-user needs Agree on additional/obsolete parameters Exchange of recommendations	Cont. review end-user feedback (Benchmark, SID, Data calls, Surveys) Agree on additional/obsolete parameters Exchange of recommendations	Cont. review end-user feedback (Benchmark, SID, Data calls, Surveys) Agree on additional/obsolete parameters Exchange of recommendations
Data Quality	***Procedures and documentation***	***Transition to RDBES, electronic data capture***	***Transition to RDBES, electronic data capture***
	Review/Develop documentation on inventory and quality of DCF data Coordinate automation of data flows	Finalise documentation on inventory and quality of DCF data and elements to be forwarded to the regional work plan) Agree on the adoption of automated processes First draft strategy on coordinated electronic data capture	Complete transition to RDBES Complete strategy for implementation of electronic data capture

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Summary of Work plan RCGs 2022-2024

	Year 1 (2022)	Year 2 (2023)	Year 3 (2024)
Regional Sampling Plans	***Review & progress***	***Review & progress***	***Finalise***
	Review outcome of regional-oriented projects (Demersal, Pelagic, bycatch), agree on next steps to develop operational proposals for regional sampling plans	Finalise and agree on operational proposals for regional sampling plans to be forwarded to the regional work plan	Refine text and content for adoption
Regional Work Plan	***Set up basic structure, test procedure***	***Enhance structure, review procedure***	***Finalise***
	Agree on basic building blocks, develop structure and content, and agree on 1st proposal for testing.	Add further content and documentation, review and refine the process	Incorporate agreed sampling regional plans and data quality documentation, finalise STECF proposal

4 List of Outcomes and Achievements of RCG NANSEA and Baltic in this delivery period

During the second year of the 3-year RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic term, the work under each ToR has been carried out by designated inter-sessional subgroups (ISSGs). During the RCG TM ISSGs presented their main outcomes and asked for feedback from the group. As a result of the discussions, decisions, recommendations, and tasks for the ISSGs were agreed.

The RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic 2023 report is composed of three parts:

- The overview of the work done by ToR at the 2023 Technical Meeting (TM) can be found in Part I of the report.
- Part II presents the recommendations and decisions endorsed by the RCG. They will be looked at during the September Decision Meeting (DM).
- Detailed progress, outcomes and deliverables achieved in all ISSGs are described in Part III report, "Reports on intersessional subgroup (ISSGs) work 2022-2023".

5 Progress report on ToRs and workplan

5.1 ToR I Propose ways to improve the alignment between data collection and end-user needs (by region)

During this year's meeting, progress has been made under ToR I as follows:

- Feedback from the ISSG and subgroup 'End-users and RCG interaction'
- Feedback from the European Commission (DG MARE)
- Feedback from ICES as an end-user
- Making use of genetic samples to inform stock assessment

5.1.1 Feedback from ISSG & SG 'End users and RCG interaction'

This ISSG aims to review and streamline the dialogue between data providers (RCGs) and end-users to identify effective processes to meet end-user needs and allow the RCGs to prioritize their activity relating to future data collection, storage and transmission functions. The subgroup was established as a pan-regional group in 2018. The 'Mandates and remits of the RCG NANSEA & Baltic' document specifies what the RCG can facilitate. This document is available at the RCG website: https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/rcg-nansea/.

Progress during 2022-2023

Annual information meetings between ICES and the RCG chairs are held to ensure cooperation. One meeting took place between the ISSG, ICES and the COM in March 2023. The main topics discussed were:

(i) Recommendations: recommendations are managed by ICES in a GitHub, and a status was presented/discussed.
(ii) RCG questionnaires on the impact of various factors on data collection were presented to the end-users.
(iii) Follow-up on action points
The RCG Covid-19 overview of 2020 and 2021 were presented.

A virtual meeting between ICES and RCG chairs was held in May related to the sense checking of recommendations from ICES to RCGs.

Subgroup work in TM 2023

A questionnaire has been conducted since the COVID-19 pandemic on the impact on the sampling of fisheries and has been extended to other impact factors. The subgroup concluded that the questionnaire results produced had been useful but are currently not used widely enough by end-users to justify continuing the questionnaire. In addition, DG MARE plans to develop a survey to NCs to get a more real-time warning if a sampling scheme or survey is impacted by a factor. This survey can be sent out midyear or after major unforeseen events. This survey should be developed in cooperation with RCGs pan-regionally and be a targeted questionnaire, where answers are only required if sampling is impacted.

The role of RCGs vs ICES was discussed and is partly described in the 'RCG Mandates and remits' document. This document should be updated before the decision meeting in September with clarification about the role of RCGs vs. ICES, i.e., ICES has the scientific coordination, and RCGs has the decision-making process and coordination of resources among MS. Some cases were discussed:

- The RCG ISSG RDB catch, effort and sampling overviews currently produce outputs for ICES working groups. The list of groups is becoming longer, and it was agreed that the overviews made for ICES WGBFAS could be seen as a test case. The ISSG focus should be on products to be used by RCGs for regional coordination. In addition, the RCGs have access to EU MS RDB/RDBES data and not to data from third countries. Therefore, ICES should discuss how this task and the scripts developed can be taken over by ICES.
- Quality check of RDBES data: there was a recommendation from ICES WGRDBESGOV for the RCG ISSG Quality to develop quality procedures for the RDBES. It was discussed in the subgroup that the RCGs could quality check EU MS data that is used for regional coordination but not data from non-EU countries submitting the data to ICES. Quality check procedures for ICES work and advice should also be set up in ICES.
- Conversion from RDBES format to FDI. It could potentially be a task for RCGs, as it is in their interest and is also of interest to other RCGs. It will be discussed with WGRDBESGOV. This could also be a question to raise at the Liaison meeting.
- A recommendation from ICES WKEVUT to evaluate a wider use of the catch lottery system as used in Norway. It was concluded that ICES WGCATCH could evaluate the sampling design scientifically/statistically. The RCGs can comment on the logistical issues regarding this type of sampling, which requires real-time access to vessel control systems and direct communication with the vessel to request a sample.

Workplan for 2023 – 2024

1. Communication channel between ICES and RCG chairs
    - Follow-up on the proposed route of recommendations
2. Communication channel between the COM and RCG chairs
3. Update the 'Mandates and Remits' document before the decision meeting in September
4. Consider if the RCGs should have a more 'formalized' role in the Data Evaluation Workshops
5. Start a dialogue with ICES regarding ISSG Overviews outputs to ICES WGs

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA BALTIC_2023_D01: NCs approval of the updates for the 'Mandates and Remits' document specifying the roles of RCGs vs ICES

NANSEA BALTIC_2023_R01: Recommendation to ICES WGRDBESGOV to consider how ICES can take over the outputs created by ISSG RDB Overviews for ICES (WGs, Benchmarks).

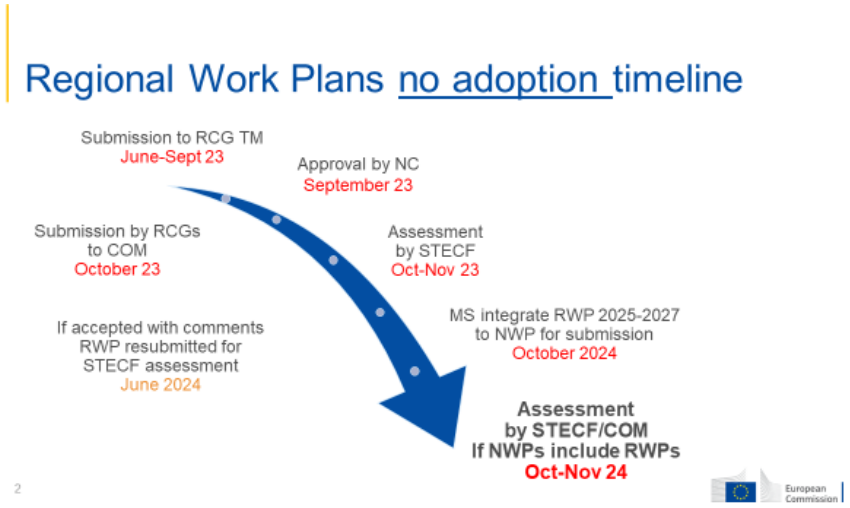
5.1.2 Feedback from the European Commission

The Commission gave a presentation on DCF topics relating to the RCGs, including the submission timelines for the Regional Work plans and updates of NWPs; the DCF Platform; Commission support for SECWEB; the new control regulation; SAF grants for scientific advice and published outcomes of previously funded studies. As requested by the two RCGs, a separate update was provided on the Marine Action Plan and its implication for the DCF.

The timelines of the **Regional Work Plan (RWP) submission** were presented on the basis that the RWP will not be adopted as a COM decision but agreed upon at the RCG level by the NCs. It is expected that RWPs will be submitted by the RCGs to the Commission in October 2023 for STECF evaluation in November. If there is a need for modification arising from the STECF evaluation, it can be re-evaluated by the following Expert Working Group on Annual Reports in June 2024. These timelines allow MS to incorporate the relevant parts of the RWP into their NWP (as STECF EWG 21-17 proposed) or to link their NWP with relevant RWP sections (esp. RCG ECON with definitions etc.) for submission in October 2024. In November 2024, STECF and COM will assess the NWP, including their regional part, which should mirror the RWP (already submitted and known by COM and STECF). COM could reject an NWP which does not include the agreed RWP. This already happened in the 2021 exercise, when COM sent back to MS comments on the inclusion of agreed RWP parts, which were not included in their NWP.

The RWP submitted in October 2023 will be for 2025-2027. The Commission expects a major NWPs 2025-2027 overhaul in October 2024 to incorporate the RWP and respond to the Marine Action Plan, even if initial WPs were adopted until 2027. Amendments to national WP in October 2023 are possible, but any WP submitted in 2023 can be analyzed for the needs of the Marine Action Plan.

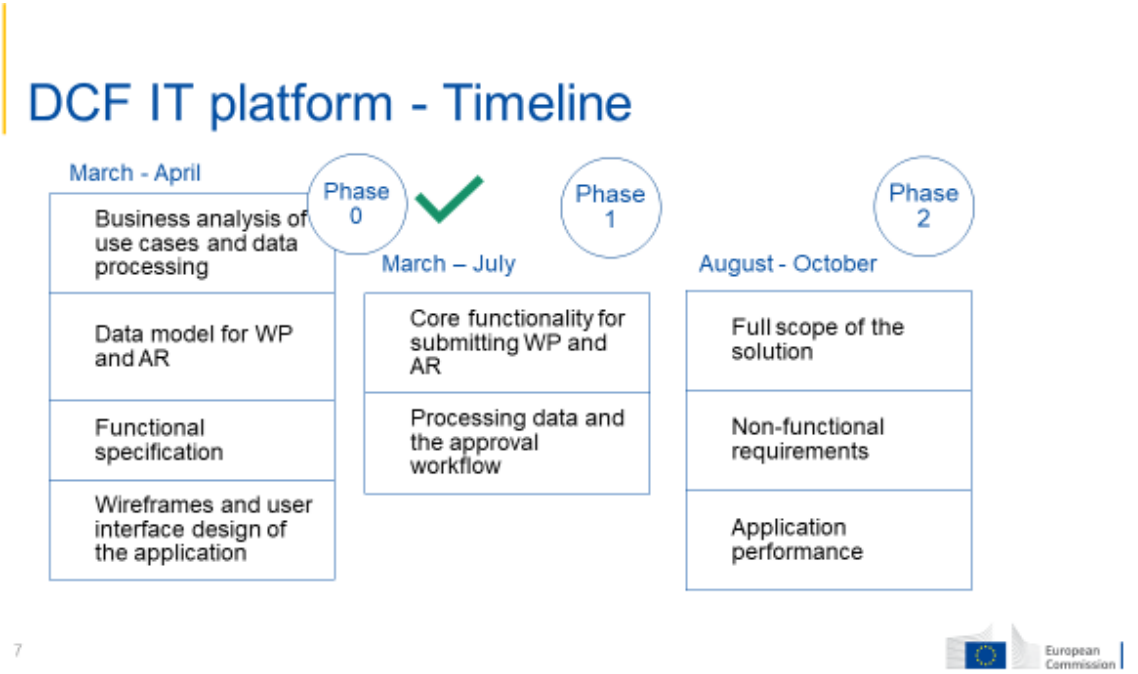
Diagrams for possible inclusion:



The DCF platform is currently under development and progressing according to schedule. The online platform is dedicated to a user interface for WPs and ARs coupled with a dedicated database, where MS can upload their NWP/AR and other DCF-related documents. The platform comprises modules and functionalities to enable online submission, STECF evaluation and follow-up, user control, as well as quality analyses and retrieval of DCF-related information and metadata. Phase 0, which includes the business analysis of use cases and data processing, the data model for WP and AR, the functional specification and the user interface design of the application, was completed at the end of April. In May, the Commission consulted on main deliverables with the IT and data expert subgroup, which is composed of NCs and DCF experts who volunteered for this task. The developer now works on the minimum viable product and has received examples of the 2022 annual

reports to obtain a realistic picture of the documents and their structure and content to be ingested into the database through the platform. A first demonstration to MARE took place in mid-June, and further user testing within the expert group is planned once a stable prototype is received. Phase 1, which is currently in progress and will be completed by July, includes the development of the core functionality for submitting WP and AR, the processing data, and the approval workflow. The concluding phase from August to October (Phase 2) entails the full scope of the solution, the non-functional requirements and the application performance.

Diagram for possible inclusion:



The **SecWeb project** under the regional coordination grant was completed in February 2023. MS are now working towards finding a long-term solution for providing secretarial services to support the RCGs. In 2023, MS are working bilaterally with the service provider, while the Commission is initiating a low-value contract for secretarial support for the RCG Liaison meeting. The announcement of a low-value contract was published on 2 June, with an expression of interest requested for mid-June, after which invitations will be sent for the negotiated procedure. Other completed MARE/2020/08 regional coordination projects were Streamline (end December 2022) and Fishn'Co, and RDBFIS (end February 2023). The maintenance and further development of RDBFIS continue under the framework contract for the provision of scientific advice for the Med & Black Sea.

The **Fish Genome** project "Improving cost-efficiency of fisheries research surveys and fish stocks assessments using next-generation genetic sequencing methods" [Contract – EASME/EMFF/2017/1.3.2.10/ SI2.790889] was completed this year. It aimed to assess the suitability of novel genomic tools to deliver essential parameters for fisheries stock assessment of commercially exploited species, which could underpin scientific advice and fisheries management. The project included the assessment of the feasibility and the value of the implementation of such tools and applied methodologies such as environmental DNA, epigenetic age determination, RAD-seq for connectivity, genotyping for stock substructure, genotyping for sex assignment and C-Kin Mark-Recapture.

The final report can be accessed via: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4cdb3dc7-f080-11ed-a05c-01aa75ed71a1

The project included a **Roadmap containing** key information on whether and how the analyzed genomic-based approaches could become part of the regular research surveys and data collection activities with short/mid/long-term actions. The RCGs are included in the roadmap and were asked to consider it and its way forward, with the roadmap made available as an internal document during the meeting.

A provisional agreement on the **revision of the fisheries control system** under the Control Regulation was reached between the Commission, the Council and the Parliament on 31 May this year, five years after the publication of the Commission proposal. The revision entails improved monitoring and traceability of catches, vessel monitoring systems (VMS) on board most vessels and electronic recording of catches, using remote electronic monitoring tools on board bigger vessels to improve the monitoring of compliance with the landing obligation. The European Parliament and the Council must formally adopt the new regulation before it can enter into force. Further details will be included in implementing acts that follow the regulation's adoption. Once available, the Commission will share any further updates on the revisions with the RCGs.

Information on the **SAF grant to improve scientific knowledge to strengthen scientific advice** for fisheries (SAF) was provided. The grant's overall aim is to promote the development and strengthening of the scientific knowledge needed for fisheries conservation and management measures in support of the CFP. The priorities related to this call are the reinforcement of policy-oriented fisheries science, better use of the collected scientific data and improved cooperation between scientists and the fisheries sector. The call also focuses on the support to the EU scientific community to develop and maintain the relevant expertise to provide high-quality scientific advice on fisheries matters. The Commission gave examples of areas for funding but emphasised that this was not an exhaustive list. Timelines were presented with an application deadline of 19 September 2023, 17:00 and links to further information provided.

CINEA Call site: https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/funding-opportunities/calls-proposals/emfaf-call-proposals-scientific-advice-fisheries_en

Funding and Tenders Portal: Funding and Tenders Portal - Scientific knowledge fisheries Grant

Info Day recording EMFAF 2023 Info Day - Call for proposals for Scientific Advice for Fisheries

In the final part of the Commission update, past EASME/CINEA studies to strengthen scientific advice were listed with links to the final reports:

Study on circular design of the fishing gear for reduction of environmental impacts	20/08/2020
An overview of the state of data collection and scientific advice in the European Outermost Regions with case study on a roadmap towards regular stock assessment in French Guiana	02/07/2021
Study on ecosystem-based approaches applied to fisheries management under the CFP (NS+BS) + (WW+ORs)	07/01/2022
Landing obligations' discard rates (NS+BS) and (WW+ORs)	31/01/2021
An overview of the effects of offshore wind farms on fisheries and aquaculture	17/02/2021
COVID-19	15/01/2021

Study on state-of-the-art scientific information on the impacts of aquaculture activities in Europe	07/09/2021
Regionalisation Lot 1 and Lot2	30/05/2022
Climate change Fisheries Lot 1	10/01/2022
Climate change Fisheries Lot 2	08/04/2022
Climate Change Post harvest Lot 1	15/09/2022
Climate Change Post harvest Lot 2	15/09/2022

Follow-up discussions within the group focussed on the difference between the DCF platform (tool for NWPs, ARs and metadata on the DCF regional and national programmes) and the RDBs, which host actual sampling and fisheries data. Further information on the SAF grants was also requested, and the Commission highlighted that available information could be found via the website, and specific questions should be directed to the grant portal so they can be responded to and published for the purpose of transparency and fairness.

The **EU Action Plan** for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries was adopted on 21 February 2023 in the 'Fisheries and Ocean package together with the CFP functioning report, relevant for DCF, e.g. recreational fisheries; the Energy transition in EU fisheries and aquaculture, relevant for possible socioeconomic data collection and the implementation report of the Common market organisation. The EU Action Plan aims to connect the environmental and fisheries policies as a means to provide a strong contribution to the delivery of the objectives of the Biodiversity Strategy, as well as current obligations under both fisheries and environmental legislation. Its objectives are to contribute to getting and keeping fish stocks to sustainable levels, reduce the impact of fishing on the seabed and minimise fisheries impacts on sensitive species. It contains actions for MS and the Commission to improve gear selectivity & address bycatch of sensitive species; protect the seabed; support the fisheries sector in the transition by maximising the use of available funds and provide the required knowledge base and governance for implementation while ensuring stakeholder involvement and outreach. While giving a high-level overview of the main actions, the presentation focussed on the DCF-relevant aspects covered in the knowledge chapter. A sound knowledge base through systematic data collection and scientific monitoring is required to assess the impact of fishing on marine habitats and species as well as to design and develop initiatives to manage fisheries and protect the marine environment. The action plan stipulates that *"this work should include designing targeted monitoring programmes to improve observations and reporting of incidentally by-caught species. The programmes should cover high-risk fisheries and the potential impacts of all relevant fleet segments, including smaller vessels. They should also look at data on recreational fisheries, including recreational fishing boats, and their impact on the stocks and the marine environment. The updated and modernised Control Regulation, once adopted by the co-legislators, will play an important role in making these improvements.[1]"*

The main actions relevant to the DCF are:

- By the end of 2023, under EU environmental and fisheries law, define objectives and specific data needs for each sea basin to monitor the impact of fishing on ecosystems and carbon sequestration, involving authorities at a regional level as appropriate and then allocating sufficient funds for these activities.

[1] COM(2023) 102 final - EU Action Plan: Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries see eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52023DC0102

- By the end of 2024, submit updated national DCF work plans to improve data collection planning and efforts, including in relation to the by-catch of sensitive species and the impact of fishing on the seabed.

The definition of objectives and specific data needs are led by DGENV, who will support MS with the advice request to ICES on appropriate bycatch monitoring systems to fulfil the requirements of Nature Directives and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and the assistance to MS for setting up threshold values for bycatch mortality under the MSFD (with the help of JRC) and threshold values on the adverse effects from fishing on seabed habitats, notably through published ICES advice on adverse effects and follow-up ICES technical service. Important RCG-related initiatives are the work of the ISSG on Bycatch, the development of the regional work plans and the ICES workshops on appropriate sampling schemes for Protected Endangered and Threatened Species bycatch (WKPETSAMP2 and 3, see ICES resolutions). The resubmissions of NWPs in 2024 for 2025-2027 are expected to include updates on the RWPs and improved monitoring of bycatch and impacts on the seafloor. In the follow-up discussion, NCs expressed concerns about the timelines of implementation, adequate effort allocation to bycatch monitoring and the STECF assessment of the NWPs in 2024 while also emphasising the need for politics within the MS. They considered that timelines are too short to redefine the regional work plans in response to the Action Plan, but recognized that many RWP elements could already support the actions therein, including the risk assessment methodology, the priority species list and regional case studies on bycatch sampling. More clarity was requested on the mandate of the special group that will work on the Action Plan.

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA BALTIC_2023_R02: The RCG recommends that when giving new legislative proposals on fisheries control, the European Commission takes into account that adequate estimation of bycatch rates to meet the conservation objectives of the CFP requires adequate monitoring of PETS incidental bycatch, adequate data on fishing effort, as well as adequate monitoring of PETS species abundance and distribution. The proposals from the European Commission should include the obligation for all fishing vessels to report in the relevant catch documents all events of incidental bycatch of PETS and to report fishing effort variables listed in EU-MAP Table 6 in a manner that allows for adequate estimation of fishing effort (see ICES WGBYC reports).

5.1.3 Feedback from ICES as an end-user

ICES gave an overview of communication means regarding recommendations, data needs, and general issues concerning data for advice. Developments in setting up data calls and data transmission through the Stock Information Database (SID), facilitating a more streamlined process, were presented, as well as the Benchmark Oversight Group (BOG) recommendations put forward to the RCG from ICES expert groups. The presentation generated some discussions, of which the main points are listed below.

Communication in general

ICES finds that there is a very good dialogue with RCGs Chairs, both formal and informal. ICES now has a dedicated Officer for the RCGs linked to the Benchmark Overview Group and data groups. This should ensure that the overall information flow is coherent across relevant groups in ICES, at least in the Secretariat. ICES

Secretariat is following the development of the SecWeb project with great interest and sees this as a potential good communication platform. Hoping this Secretariat can continue after the project is concluded. ICES Secretariat and SecWeb met during spring 2022 to share experiences and future wishes and agreed on continued work on improving the visibility of RCGs (and RCG secretariat) through the ICES community. Subsequently, ICES has placed links to the RCG website (fisheries-rcg.eu) and the RCG SharePoint site on all ICES assessment working groups and DSTSG groups like WGRFS, WGBIOP, WGRDBESGOV, etc.

Recommendations

In terms of recommendations, the process established by the RCG Chairs and the ICES Secretariat is seen as working well. A meeting with NANSEA/Baltic chairs and ICES Secretariat is suggested for late summer/early autumn to coordinate after a new list of RCG recommendations to ICES is published with the TM report.

The current recommendation system includes RCGs, where ICES groups can put forward recommendations to RCGs, and the RCGs can also put forward recommendations to the EG groups, ACOM, SCICOM and Secretariat through this system.

ICES has established a group of relevant steering group chairs and the SCICOM chair who will review and 'sense-check' the recommendations to the RCGs before sending them on. The RCG chairs will be invited to one of these meetings to facilitate fast feedback on the feasibility of the recommendations. The recommendations will be reviewed annually (or, if needed, ad hoc) in the early spring to feed the recommendations forward to the RCGs in due time for the June meeting.

Benchmarks

A list of planned benchmarks, associated issue lists and data calls are available on SharePoint for benchmarks (accessible by RCG chairs). The Benchmark Oversight Group (the BOG) under ACOM evaluates the suggested benchmarks from the expert groups using an agreed prioritization process to recommend the list of benchmarks to be conducted in year+1 and year+2 to ACOM. The expert groups suggest the benchmarks using a prioritised Issue List overview and an outline of the feasibility of having all necessary data and documented science available for the scheduled benchmark. The BOG frequently updates the selected benchmark processes regarding the status of Working Documents, etc., ensuring that all necessary material is ready at the time of the benchmark.

Data calls/Data needs

Having the expert groups draft the data call text as early as possible is encouraged, and the SiD module for data calls facilitates the 'pre-warning' of upcoming data calls. The 'big' data call is kept as stable as possible between years to facilitate easy handling and as well some sort of predictability of data needs for the data submitters.

ICES acknowledged that the timing of data calls is sensitive. It was encouraged that the experts in the relevant expert groups and the data providers within the institutes also had a communication flow, enabling a wider communication of upcoming calls. ICES Secretariat has established a GitHub project board to help manage the data calls, track the process timeline better, and facilitate quality control check points.

So far, data calls are being drafted for upcoming work, and experts are still drafting potential data calls for benchmarks. As non-recurrent requests may imply data calls, unfortunately, it sometimes results in a data call with only the 30-day warning. ICES Secretariat strives to send out informal communications to the Data Submitters once a data call need for non-recurrent requests has been identified.

Stock Information Database (SID)

Using SID as a repository for each of the stocks' data needs has been implemented, facilitating more efficient and streamlined data calls. The ability for data providers to access and download upcoming data needs immediately after the working group termination is working well, though experts still need to be encouraged/helped to get this done. More user-friendly access to up-to-date Issue Lists for all the stocks (SiD) has been implemented. The landing page for SID will be available soon with links and instructions for all modules, making it easier to navigate. A user handbook is being developed, including R-scripts for easy extraction from SiD.

In terms of data transmission failures and their reporting, the data submitter feedback module has been implemented (SiD datacall). Access to this module is granted individually (77 data submitters already have access). This pre-screening by data providers has reduced the non-transmission failures.

5.1.4 Presentation of "Making use of genetic samples for stock assessment" by Naiara Rodríguez-Ezpeleta

The presentation consisted of two parts.

Part 1: Presentation of the different genetic approaches that can be applied to fisheries/ecosystems assessment and monitoring.

Here, three main blocks are identified concerning the application of genetics to fisheries assessment, distinguished by the aim they pursue and the sample type they require.

- The first one is the genetic analysis of collected stomach contents. This discussion is now included as part of the work of the Stomach sampling ISSG, where several presentations have been made. AZTI also has an EU MAP-funded test study aiming to "Set the basics of a routine food-web monitoring program through genetic analyses of stomach contents".

- The second one is the analysis of environmental DNA, that is, DNA collected by filtering water samples that contain traces of the organisms inhabiting the water column, including large ones such as fish and elasmobranchs. This approach, being considered a biodiversity monitoring approach, could be included as part of the Electronic Monitoring Technologies ISSG, but this is still under discussion.

- The last one is the analysis of fish tissue samples with the purpose of doing stock delimitation and identification studies, close-kin mark-recapture (CKMR) projects for biomass estimation or epigenetic analyses for age determination. It was discussed that this tissue sampling for genetic analyses could be integrated into the Surveys ISSG. The second part of the presentation focused on this block.

Part 2: Presentation of the utility of tissue samples for stock assessment.

The presentation focused on the importance of collecting tissue samples, in particular for stock delimitation and identification, but which are also critical for upcoming CKMR studies, which might also require age estimation through epigenetics. Two species, the European hake and the white anglerfish, were used as examples and potential pilot studies. Genetic analyses of more than 400 hake samples collected mostly through the IBTS and observers in commercial fisheries have revealed an isolation by distance pattern that challenges the current stock structure. Additional monitoring for kinship would be required to establish the demographic connectivity of this species among the different regions. Genetic analyses of more than 1000 samples from

morphologically identified white anglerfish specimens have revealed that a variable percentage of white anglerfish catches are black anglerfish or hybrids. Additional monitoring is required to determine the precise amount of misidentified and hybrid individuals per area and its stability over time. In addition, this required monitoring for hake and white anglerfish will be critical for ongoing CKMR studies on these species, for which it has been estimated that a few thousand samples per year are needed. It was discussed that this tissue sampling for genetic analyses could be integrated into the Surveys ISSG.

Workplan for 2023 – 2024

It was discussed if the creation of a new ISSG based on genetics was needed. Still, it was suggested that this might result in a replication of an already existing ICES WG (WGAGFA, chaired by Naiara Rodríguez-Ezpeleta), which could perhaps not result in an impact on data collection, considering the needs of end users. Thus, the decision was that:

- Genetic analyses of stomach samples are integrated into the stomach sampling ISSG. Oriol Canals, a researcher from AZTI who leads the pilot study for genetic analyses of stomach content, will join the ISSG to ensure that genetic analyses are considered when establishing the stomach sampling procedures.

- eDNA is evaluated as potentially being integrated into the EM ISSG (to be discussed during the year). Naiara Rodriguez-Ezpeleta will join the EMT ISSG to evaluate the possibility of including the eDNA discussions in this group; yet, it was discussed that this approach is the least mature and the one that will perhaps take longer to be implemented.

- Tissue sampling will be included in the Survey ISSG. Naiara Rodriguez-Ezpeleta will join the survey ISSG to evaluate the implementation of a regular monitoring program for a few pilot studies.

For eDNA and tissue sampling (required for population structure, CKMR and epigenetics), the road map resulting from FishGenome will be considered, and Naiara Rodríguez-Ezpeleta has committed to do so.

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

No proposals for recommendations or decisions.

5.2 ToR 2 Implement and maintain data quality in data collection

During this year's meeting, progress has been made under ToR 2 as follows:

- Feedback from the 'WGRDBESGOV'
- Review of RDB Core group
- Feedback from the ISSG & SG 'RCG catch, effort and sampling overviews'
- Feedback from the ISSG 'Metier and transversal variable issues'
- Feedback from the ISSG & SG 'Surveys'
- Feedback from the ISSG on 'Electronic Monitoring Technologies'
- Presentation on Smartdots developments

A recommendation from the ICES WGRDBESGOV suggested restarting the ISSG Quality to develop a procedure to check the quality and completeness of the data uploaded to the RDBES. The RCG technical meeting discussed who is responsible for checking the quality and completeness of the data uploaded to ICES. It was agreed that the RCG could quality check RDBES data for purposes of the RCG work and EU MS uploading data to the RDBES within the RCG NANSEA & Baltic regions. ICES should be responsible for quality-checking data from third countries. Based on the discussion, it was decided to keep the ISSG Quality on hold during 2023/2024.

5.2.1 Feedback from the 'WGRDBESGOV'

During RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic TM, the status of the different topics under the WGRDBESGOV and the progress done in 2022-2023 was presented (more details to be found in the WGRDBESGOV 2022 report).

The structure of WGRDBESGOV for 2023

In previous years, the WGRDBESGOV had only the annual meeting in November. Due to the increased topics and the complexity of the work to be done, it was decided to establish different ISSG and an intersessional meeting in June in addition to the annual meeting in November.

The work extends throughout the year with the work done by intersessional groups and the Working groups and Workshops proposed to support the RDBES implementation. In addition, the WGRDBESGOV works in coordination with the RCGs to ensure their needs are fulfilled. The WGRDBESGOV also works in coordination with a number of ICES WG who provide technical support to the WGRDBESGOV in relation to different types of data (WGCATCH, WGBIOP, WGBYC, WGRFS).

The roadmap

	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
RDB	Data upload & download	Data download	Data download	Data download	Data download
InterCatch	Data upload & download	Data upload & download*	Data upload & download*	Data upload & download*	Data download
RDBES	Data upload & download	Data upload & download	Data upload & download	Data upload & download	Data upload & download
Data Calls	RDB DC				
	RDBES DC - 2022 d. (sept)	RDBES DC - 2023 d. (TBD)	RDBES DC - 2024 data	RDBES DC - 2025 data	RDBES DC - 2026 data
		RDBES older data? (TBD)	RDBES older data? (TBD)	RDBES older data? (TBD)	RDBES older data? (TBD)
	Recreational DC (in excel)	Recreational DC	Recreational DC	Recreational DC	Recreational DC
	IC DC	IC DC	IC DC*	IC DC*	
	WGBYC DC	WGBYC DC*	WGBYC DC*		
RDBES in stock assesment	Countries can start using RDBES data for estimations	Use of RDBES data in the assessment for selected stocks (preferably in TAF)	Use of RDBES data in the assessment for selected stocks (preferably in TAF)	Use of RDBES data in the assessment for all stocks (preferably in TAF)	Use of RDBES data in the assessment for all stocks (in TAF)
	AWG can request CL and CE data				
	Test the use of RDBES data in the assessment				

* *InterCatch/WGBYC DB Progressively phasing out: the new estimates for some stocks will not be available in InterCatch*

The Data Call

The DC is planned for September. The Data Model will be finalised in June.

Proposed workshops for 2023

- WKRaise&TAF-Flow (22,24,26 May): to test the full commercial catch TAF estimation workflow from national estimates to international stock coordination for two stocks (wit.27.3a47d and pok.27.3a47d).
- WKRDBES-INTRO2 (13-15 June): to describe and explain the Regional Database and Estimation System (RDBES) data model. Extra attention will be given to the CE and CL files.
- WKRDBES-RAISE&TAF2 (2-6 October): to reproduce national estimates uploaded in InterCatch and stock coordination done in InterCatch, using 2022 RDBES data and R scripts.
- WGRDBES-EST (16-20 October): to generate scripts for estimation methods and incorporate functions into the RDBEScore package (expected 2023).

Feedback on the progress of the different ISSG

- The Core Group: the "core" of the RDBES development.
- ISSG FDI alignment with RDBES: 12 fields incorporated in the RDBES Data Model.
- ISSG Data Quality: Quality and completeness of RDBES data were assessed. It was found that submitted effort and landings data are based on official data sources and that a large proportion of the data have less than 3 vessels at the aggregation level. WGRDBESGOV 2022 recommended that the RCG restart the Data Quality subgroup to check the Quality of the uploaded data. The group

discussed that RCGs could check the quality of data from EU countries used for coordination. The assurance of Data Quality of stock assessment shall be an ICES responsibility.

- ISSG Data confidentiality and data license: RDBES data are being increasingly used by ICES WGs, but confidentiality issues hamper the use of data. The work of this subgroup is focused on the following:
    - The revision of the Data Licence,
    - Consultation of legislative aspects with the COM,
    - Collaboration with WGBIODIV and WGSFDGOV to harmonize data licences and Data Calls.

  A WK will be proposed to work on confidentiality with all agents participating in the workflow, including Countries, COM, ICES, RCGs…
- ISSG Funding & developments: The subgroup is looking for solutions to provide funding for the essential functionalities needed but not eligible to be developed under the current funding. The Commission pointed out that they have made several contributions to the RDB/RDBES development and are open to continuing this support. A non-recurrent advice request with very clear terms of reference could be an option. The COM also proposed to explore joint funding possibilities with third countries and to look into the possibilities for funding under https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/funding-opportunities/calls-proposals/emfaf-call-proposals-scientific-advice-fisheries_en.

Other topics discussed

- Eel data: WGEEL has developed its own database containing fishery-dependent and fishery-independent data from the NANSEA and the Mediterranean. The DB is hosted in the French institute EPTB Vilaine, but WGEEL is interested in joining the RDBES to host DCF data. Two options were proposed: I) to create a specific data base for diadromous species, containing all regions and types of data, and II) to accommodate commercial data for diadromous species in the current RDBES and RDBFish, and create a separate DB for fisheries independent data.

For the RWP NANSEA:

Elements discussed in RCG TM 2023:
In view of the current developments from the regional database (RDB) to the RDBES (Regional database and estimation system) as a joint RCG and ICES sampling and stock assessment database, additional efforts are required by all relevant MS to support this transition.

Agreements and commitments for the RWP are as follows:

- Several ISSGs under the RCGs were established to use the data in the RDBES. These ISSG develop tools and (Shiny)apps to enhance the use of the RDBES by the RCGs. If ICES AWGs, WKs and WGs want to use the developed tools & apps, ICES would need to take the responsibility to make them available to all AWGs & WGs in ICES, as well as to support the use by these ICES groups. This approach would be similar to what was the case with the RDBES & SmartDots.

- RCGs to check data quality in relation to RCG work, ICES to check data quality in relation to ICES work/stock assessment, also including non-EU countries.

- All MS ensure to be engaged in a workshop to set up the RDBES Data confidentiality and license. Third countries need to be involved in this. To be finalized by the end of 2023.

- In order to have the RDBES roadmap implemented, all MS need to ensure to allocate experts to the relevant RDBES training sessions, workshops and working groups related to RCG work.

5.2.2 Feedback from ICES RDB/RDBES

The RDBES Core Group specifies the RDBES, and ICES Secretariat is developing the RDBES database and web system.

The Core Group specifications

The Core Group has had 23 meetings since last June 2022, discussing which fields to add to the data model. Auxiliary fields for ratio estimation have been added to the sample data model, and a field for non-responses was collected. The Core Group has also given feedback to the 2023 data call and answered many issues. Some examples of the discussions are, for example, the discussion on the inclusion of a new code type PositionDataIndicator/VMSdataCallIndicator suggested by the Working Group on Spatial Fisheries Data (WGSFD), it was discussed with the WGSFD, and internally in the Core Group, in the end, the WGSFD did not think the suggested changed field would be relevant. The Exclusive Economic Zone Indicator field was also added again after being changed to Exclusive Economic Zone. Twelve fields for FDI have been added to the landing and effort data model.

ICES Secretariat developments

The ICES Secretariat has developed a lot of technical functionalities during 2022-2023:

- Implement the new data model changes into the RDBES modules (DB, XSD, Checks, Converter, export)
- Checking of allowed metiers in areas
- Update of decimal fields in the RDBES - more decimals
- Extension of the logging functionality with Serilog
- Bug fixes in file-based duplicate data check in schema validation check and Upper Hierarchy check
- Dev. changes, bug fixes; Delete temporary XML files on the server after successful import
- Integrate new check for Unique DE Record In DB to screening UI
- Research and knowledge to use the GIT FLOW branching model for RDBES application
- Apply Changes in the hierarchy 9 data model all the way from file screening to DB
- Fix the Lower Hierarchy check according to the new specification. Adding check for CLdataSourceOfScientificWeight (not ExpertEval)
- Develop synchronisation API between ICES Vocabulary (RECO) and the RDBES instead of RECO Service Broker to sync RDBES by updating DB and XSDs from RDBES. Deploy Vocab API subscriber for RDBES.
- Test of Azure Pipeline to adopt CI-CD (Continues Integration - Continues Delivery) for development
- Initial work on unit test automation RDBES program modules/Components
- Adjustment of the delete functionality, including creating a check. Detect and prevent foreign key violations when deleting data from one country that requires the deletion of design records shared by other countries' data.
- Integrate on delete page: summary of deleted Design data that is connected to other countries.

The ICES Secretariat-funded development of the RDBES is ending

Years	Task completed
2020-2021	Fully operational ICES Regional Database (RDBES) with a regional estimation system such that statistical estimates for stock assessment can be produced from detailed sample data in a transparent manner
2022-2023	Incorporate detailed data on Bycatch and PETS AND/OR Recreational data (to be determined by WGRDBESGOV(SCRDB))

ICES Secretariat has funded the development of the RDBES for the last 4 years with the above milestones. ICES has no more funding for the one developer with 4 years of experience in developing the RDBES, so it is important to find funding before the developer finds a new job or the funding runs out at the end of 2023 if the RDBES development pace should stay at the same level.

Bycatch in the RDBES

At the WKPETSAMP2 on 9th March 2023, the WKPETSAMP2 chairs Katja Ringdahl and Estanis Mugerza and WGBYC chairs Allen Kingston and Gudjon Mar Sigurdsson agreed to have a meeting with Henrik Kjems-Nielsen, ICES, to agree on a road map for WGBYC's final test of the use of the RDBES as their only database.

- The WGBYC Data subgroup will look into the RDBES data model and identify the WGBYC relevant fields in the RDBES tables.
- The WGBYC Data subgroup will agree on who is testing what. The tests will probably not be with a full data set, but the tests should go through all the calculations/analysis with the available data.
- The deadline for the results of the tests is the end of July – that is ambitious, and if that is not met, then the result will first be in December 2023.

Recreational data – funding missing

- There has not been time to look into including the recreational data in the RDBES this year.
- The task to include recreational data is on the list of new data and functionalities, which should be included in the RDBES

So far, funding is missing.

Diadromous – funding missing

The ISSG for diadromous fishes invited the 16th May Henrik Kjems-Nielsen, ICES, to a session at the ISSG diadromous meeting to give an introduction to the RDBES and discuss the possibilities of using the RDBES as their database instead of the WGEEL database hosted in a French institute.

- The WGEEL database contains different data types: Catch data of commercial and recreational fisheries, aquaculture, time series (recruitment glass and yellow eel), and electrofishing sampling.

- The RDBES would probably be easy to use for the eel catch data. But for the other types of data, new tables would most likely have to be made – that is not a problem for the RDBES because that is made generic, so it is easy to add new data/tables.
- Another issue is that there is also eel data from the Mediterranean. It was suggested that there could be an agreement for the Mediterranean countries to us the RDBES for eel data.
- There will be several workshops where the WK could look at the RDBES:
  - Workshop on the development of a Spatial database and Model for Eel' (WKSMEEL) 19-20 June
  - A WK around October/November
  - A WK on landings in December
- Some participants were positive about using the RDBES, and some were more reluctant.

The way forward, the ISSG diadromous/WGEEL should contact Henrik when the group was ready to meet with the Core Group to discuss options regarding the RDBES.

The RDBES is developed to be able to easily include new data sets/types, like the diadromous data, because of the generic development structure in the RDBES. Adding new data sets/types would benefit automatically from the user and website security and the functionalities of uploading, viewing, deleting, and downloading data. So far, funding is missing compared with the previous 4 years, where ICES has paid for the development of the RDBES.

FDI export files and conversion

The Core Group has identified FDI fields needed in the RDBES to produce and export the FDI files from the RDBES. If the export of the FDI data is funded in the future, then many conversions need to be developed because very few field codes are the same between RDBES and the FDI data call.

Many of the FDI tables can be produced to a large extent from the RDBES data if the countries have uploaded data in the optional FDI fields.

However, it still requires a lot of conversion between the RDBES codes and the FDI codes. Some data:

- are completely the same, like QUARTER, VESSEL_LENGTH
- need a 1:1 conversion, like country codes FDI 3 alpha codes, RDBES 2 alpha codes
- need a conversion, like for TOTGTDAYSATSEA, (vessel GT (Gross Tonnage)*Days at sea)
- need to be fetched from the Transparent Assessment Framework, like DOMAIN_DISCARDS, DOMAIN_LANDINGS

RDBES missing functionalities prioritised

The following RDBES functionalities have not been developed and are prioritised by the WGRDBESGOV.

Functionality needed	Description of functionality	Priority (1 is highest)
Recreational fisheries data implemented in the RDBES	Make it possible to upload and download aggregated recreational data into the RDBES. The recreational data consists of three different data types: landing, effort and length distribution data. This includes developments in the RDBES: database, user interface, upload, XSDs, converter, overwriting, download, user administration, new role and testing.	1

Functionality needed	Description of functionality	Priority (1 is highest)
Upload Log implemented in the RDBES	Make it possible to upload, view and download Upload Logs into the RDBES. The Upload Log is a file which contains information from the countries on the completeness of their data uploaded into the RDBES.	1
Improvement of data viewing and adding summarising for data quality control	Improve viewing and add summarising of the uploaded data for the national data submitter. Thus, the data submitter can get an overview of the uploaded data and ensure all data have been uploaded.	1
FDI export module	Make it possible to download FDI data from the RDBES. The FDI data consist of different data types, so a number for different file formats has to be developed.	2
Finishing potential development from the very ambitious year 2023	Many system technical developments take up a lot of the time in 2023: Updating the security module, use of roles together with claims, conversions of admin pages, moving to new servers, and automatic testing. Besides that, there are the new requested developments with newly added information to the data model. On top of that, there is implementing stock definitions and needed areas and simple viewing of data. The plan for 2023 is very ambitious; therefore, there is a risk that some things have not been developed, which should be done in 2024.	2
Data quality improvements: Checks e.g. check preventing upload of duplicated landings etc.	To increase the data quality of the data in the RDBES, many checks should be developed. One of the most important checks is the check for duplicated landings upload. Many other checks should be developed.	2
Develop requests from year 2024 and 2025	The RDBES is a new system, and the more the RDBES is used, the more requests for needed functionalities will there come. Therefore, it makes sense to have room for new needed developments.	2
Optimisation of data upload to prevent long waiting time	The upload of landing and effort data does not take as long as the upload of sample data, and since the data can be uploaded independently, it makes sense to create a new queue and split the data. Thus, the data submitter will have faster upload times for some data types.	3

Data license update

In 2023, a representative group of persons will be working on updating the RDBES Data License according to the following items:

- Clarification of who should sign the 'Conditions for detailed RDBES data use'.
- Order the criteria for using the data
- Simplification
- Align with VMS Data License
- Not being "too linked" to the EU Data Collection Framework, DCF, for the non-EU countries.
- Include future access needs for RCGs and ICES advisory WG regarding roles like national estimator, stock coordinator, stock assessor, working group member and other related fisheries management groups (e.g. WGCATCH, WGMIXFISH-ADVICE/METHOD, WGRDBESGOV and WGRDBES-EST). Include other external potential users. ICES Benchmark Workshops roles like benchmark download data. Need to coordinate with WKRDBES-Raise&TAF.
- Update the rules for publication of data, which should be in the data call. (Potentially agree that 3 or more vessels in one stratum is aggregated data and can be shown)
- Confidentiality

- Confidentiality criteria are not homogeneous, and there's a need for common criteria about this issue, as in FDI, for example.
- Need to work on this issue with other groups with similar types of information reported: VMS, FDI, and COM.
- Conflict for MS to comply with both regulations: dissemination data and data protection
  → Need clear guidelines/rules, e.g., data will not be published in a way that individual vessels can be identified.

- The *confidentiality flag* field and the *vessel Ids* field in the Effort, CE, will also be included in the landing CL data and made mandatory for both CL and CE.
- The ISSG will also take into consideration the recommendation n°9 from WKRDBES-Raise&TAF about clarifying the responsibility for giving permission to detailed stock data (Section 6)
- The message to the countries uploading their data is that confidential data can be uploaded, as the user must follow the rules for publication of data.

Clarification on issues before RCG chairs can download all RDB/RDBES data

RCG recommendations from 2022: ICES give download rights of RDB/RDBES data to ISSG chairs for the ISSG

Issues were raised at the WGRDBESGOV 2022 and had to be clarified before all RCG Intersessional Subgroup, ISSG, and chairs could be given permission to download all EU countries' RDB/RDBES data. All involved parties should agree on this:

- All EU countries should agree that all RCG ISSG chairs can download all EU countries' RDB/RDBES data for all RCG regions: North Atlantic, North Sea & Eastern Arctic, Baltic Sea and Long Distance Fisheries independent of relevant or potential RCG region.
- Background information: In RDB and in RDBES, for now, it is not possible to distinguish data by RCG region in the download. The download permission is by country. That is why ICES Sec. so far has downloaded data to the specific RCGs. Though the last couple of year, the data download have only been split between LDF and NA + NSEA + Baltic. If all ISSG chairs can download RDB/RDBES data, it will mean that a chair from LDF can download all data (Baltic, NA and NSEA) from all EU countries involved in the LDF. The RCG ISSG chair can download all LDF data from EU countries. ICES Sec. will, when resources are available, work on downloading data from RDBES by RCG region.
- All persons accessing and working with RDB/RDBES data should sign the 'Conditions for detailed RDBES data use' agreement in the future – also RCG/RCG ISSG persons. How should this be implemented? It could be implemented by clicking 'Yes' to a popup window with text, a 'Yes', and a 'Cancel' button. However, the user will not take it as seriously as signing a document. Would this implementation be okay, or should we continue to request signing?
- A log of who downloaded what data for what purpose in the RDBES should be developed. When resources are available, ICES Sec. will develop a download log. What should be done until the download log is developed and implemented?
- It is a request from countries at the WGRDBESGOV 2022 that access to data should, in general terms, be limited as much as possible and only to the persons who need to work with RDB/RDBES data. When RCG ISSG chairs can download data, how will the countries' wish to limit access to the downloaded data be implemented?

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RDBES workshops in 2023

- National estimators and data submitters, stock coordinators, and stock assessors for witch flounder and saithe in the North Sea can attend the WKRDBES-RAISE&TAFFlow (22nd, 24th, 26th May, where they will estimate data from the RDBES to catch estimations.
    - *Chaired by Alexandros Kokkalis, Denmark, and Yves Reech, Norway*
- Data submitters and National estimators can attend WKRDBES-INTRO 13th – 15th June, where they will be introduced to the RDBES data model/format.
    - *Chaired by Henrik Kjems-Nielsen, ICES*
- Stock coordinators can attend the WKRDBES-RAISE&TAF on the 2nd – 6th of October, where they can get help to write raising/estimation procedures in R scripts in TAF.
    - *Chaired by Edvin Fuglebakk, Norway, and David Currie, Ireland*
- If persons have an interest and are skilled in writing R scripts, then they can attend The WGRDBES-EST on 16th – 20th October to work on developing statistical and ratio estimations in R scripts for use in TAF based on the RDBES data.
    - *Chaired by Nuno Prista, Sweden, and Kirsten Birch Håkansson, Denmark*

The countries' RDBES data uploads – data call 2022

The following explains the table of countries' different data types uploaded to the RDBES for the data call 2022. Yes, means the data type has been uploaded. Blank means the data have not been uploaded. A green background means the data type was also uploaded last year. A yellow background means the data type was uploaded this year and was not uploaded last year, so this is progress. The orange background means the data type was not uploaded this year but was uploaded last year, so this is a regression.

Country\Data type	Landing	Effort	Sample Details	Sample	Frequency Measure	Biological Variable
BELGIUM	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
DENMARK	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
England	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
ESTONIA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Faroe Islands						
Finland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
FRANCE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
GERMANY	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Iceland						
GUERNSEY	Yes	Yes				
IRELAND	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
ISLE OF MAN	Yes	Yes				
JERSEY	Yes	Yes				
LATVIA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
NETHERLANDS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Northern Ireland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
NORWAY	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes
POLAND	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
PORTUGAL	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	
Scotland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
SPAIN	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
SWEDEN	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Wales	Yes	Yes				

Data calls

- **2020**: Data call for 11 stocks
- **2021**: Data call for 19 stocks, incidental bycatch, and the sampling scheme "Small Pelagic in the Baltic."
- **2022**: Landing and effort for all species: Landings, Below Minimum Size (BMS) Landings, Logbook Registered Discard and Effort for the following FAO areas 21, 27, 34, 41, 47 and 87. Detailed biological sample data for all species in FAO area 21 and 27. Incidental bycatch for all selected species (a little more than 1000) in FAO areas 21 and 27.
- **2023**: It is expected to be similar to the one from last year, including all species. The data call will be sent around the end of June, with a data submission deadline around the end of September 2023

Workplan for 2023 – 2024

ICES Secretariat will develop the following functionalities during 2023:

- The RDBES will be updated according to the added information in the data model and changes in the table order in some hierarchies
- Stock definitions for export of data and setting the correct stock on the data
- New security functionality with new roles and access to data according to more advanced combinations of roles and stocks
- Use Active Directories for security in RDBES
- Data viewing component

The Core Group will work on the following tasks:

- Identify needed information and add it to the data model
- Answer and close issues on GitHub
- Discuss and conclude on issues from Regional Coordinating Groups and ICES Expert Groups.

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA BALTIC_2023_R03: It is recommended that the WGRDBESGOV and ICES Secretariat work together to find funding to include recreational and diadromous data into the RDBES and make an FDI conversion module and FDI data table export module for FDI data and other tasks on 'RDBES functionalities prioritised'.

5.2.3 Feedback from the ISSG & SG 'RDB catch, effort and sampling overviews'

The work developed by the ISSG was presented during the RCG TM and received positive feedback. The main aspects that RCG members raised relate to the products presented in terms of number and contents. At this moment, this ISSG is producing a set of **overview reports** for both RCGs and ICES, and it was questioned if this group should be the one responsible for providing the supporting documents to be used by ICES AWG and benchmarks. For the last 3 years, the group produced the WGBFAS overviews that were found very useful, although they need some improvements to fulfil the WG needs. However, the opinion of the RCG is that the production of overviews for AWG should be ICES's responsibility and not RCGs. This ISSG can contribute to the baseline tools to be used for this purpose, and the respective AWG can further develop them according to their needs. For now, this raises the issue of the RDBES data sharing, which still needs the license policy to be updated. On the other hand, RCG agrees that the aim of this ISSG works in a RCG context should be more related to internal use by giving support to specific issues that are raised and discussed within RCG and for which decisions need to be taken (e.g. ISSG PETS request on the sampled metiers). It will be important that the specific needs of the RCGs are presented to this ISSG in order to be able to produce the overviews accordingly.

Another point that was raised during the discussion is related to the **data quality** of the data used to produce the overviews. It is not the aim of this subgroup to perform the quality checks of the data, but the overviews produced can help to spot some errors because the information is displayed in a regional context and not only at a national level. The group thinks that the data submitters could perform the data quality checks before

uploading the data, and for this, it would be useful to have a pre-screening tool to be used at a national level to detect inconsistencies in the data. This tool would need to be developed, but it is questionable which entity should be responsible for doing it (e.g. RCG - ISSG Quality, WGRDBESGOV - ISSG Quality, etc.). From a stock assessment perspective, ICES should be the entity responsible for taking this task forward because it will then allow the inclusion of non-EU countries data checks (it will not happen if RGCs do the checks). However, the RDBES data quality checks for finer scale errors in the data should rely on the stock assessor's knowledge of their respective species/stocks.

Regarding the remaining points proposed for discussion within the ISSG work during the meeting, it was agreed that:

1. Historical data: the production of CE and CL tables will be more easily performed, so the request could start to be done in 2024. There still needs to be decided the number of years to be requested. If multiannual overviews are to be produced, 5 years could constitute a good option.
2. Collaboration with WG on Fisheries Overviews: RCG believes this collaboration should not differ from the one proposed for the other ICES WGs/AWGs, and it will be defined according to the updated data license policy.
3. Graphs for the website: It was agreed that some very aggregated graphs (static), for example, total landings in a region (all countries together), or number of fishes sampled per length or number of species sampled. RCG members suggested focusing more on the sampling information because other official data sources are already publishing landings and effort data (e.g. Eurostat).
4. Need for input for the benchmarks template: the template is ready but has not been presented in any benchmark yet. The ISSG needs to identify potential benchmark candidates to present the document and get their feedback in the next period. It was proposed to consult ICES Benchmark Oversight Group (BOG) to see the list of benchmarks to send the template and ask for feedback. RCG thinks that after this consultation, the development of these types of reports could rely on ICES tasks.
5. COM request about GNS data in the Baltic: The ISSG asked for indications on whether the report information could be shared with the COM. RCG agrees that the information should be given once it is aggregated by country, year and area. It was suggested to include a disclaimer (or responsibility text) in the report to guarantee that the data privacy aligns with the data license policy.

Workplan for 2023 – 2024

1. Incorporate feedback from the RCG, NC, LM, and WGBFAS for further development of the overviews
2. To finish the adaptation to RDBES format for CE, CL (overviews) and CS (Shiny app)
3. Sampling overviews
    - Include the possibility to be fed with multiannual data
    - Include some information on bycatch sampling
        - to answer the request by ISSG PETs
        - to show general information about the sampling
4. Incorporate feedback from benchmark templates
5. Include some graphs on the website

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Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA BALTIC_2023_R04: Request commercial landings and effort data from 2019-2023 in the 2024 RDBES data call

5.2.4 Feedback from the ISSG on " Metier and transversal variable issues"

The work done to address the following tasks by the RCG ISSG Métier and transversal variable issues was presented in the RCG TM: maintenance of métier reference list pan-regionally and métier script, the introduction of a métier level 7 for large pelagic fisheries, suggestion for pan-regional management of métier codes and responsibilities, métier descriptions, review of the fecR package, link with alternative fleet segmentation work engaged by RCG Econ, a questionnaire to evaluate the use of cross-validation methods in MS (information regarding the data availability and methods applied) and work on harmonization of AER and FDI data calls. The main feedback was that it was a very productive and useful work.

During the discussion of the work, the RCG referred that it is very important to standardise effort data (effort metrics and method to calculate them) and that the fecR package may be a very useful tool to do it. However, this package uses logbook data to estimate the effort, meaning that part of the fleet under 10 meters (SSF) is not included in that procedure. One of the main constrains to developing the fecR package to include also SSF data analysis is that the data sources used to calculate effort vary a lot among member states, and it is more difficult to perform the harmonization with these conditions. For the harmonization of the SSF effort data, some principles are already established to calculate effort, which needs further evaluation for improvements if needed. This can be done in collaboration with ISSG SSF.

The documentation of the Commercial Effort (CE) and Commercial Landings (CL) data from the RDBES was questioned regarding who should be responsible for doing it if it's looking for data quality because this seems to be an overlapping task for ISSG métiers and ISSG Quality. Since it was decided to keep the ISSG Quality on hold, the ISSG métier and transversal variable issues will propose a format for documentation of the RDBES CL and CE by MS.

The ISSG was also questioned about the use of the documentation made by this ISSG for the métier descriptions. These documents, made by region, were finalised and presented this year to the RCG. This means that from this baseline, they can be used as supporting information for specific requests from the RCG and be subject to some improvements according to end-user needs if needed. There was a suggestion for improving these reports with the inclusion of an explanation/description of the figures and what information can be learned/extracted/derived from these types of figures.

A recurrent question for the several outputs presented by this and other ISSGs regards the non-EU countries' information and how to solve the issues related to the figures, which include those countries (from years prior to Brexit). One of the comments was that the information on the non-EU countries needs to be specified in the outputs of the ISSG. As the RCGs can only access EU countries' data, the reports must clarify this.

Another question was how to include non-EU countries in the pan-regional work on the métier codes, as non-EU countries also need to response to, among others, ICES data calls, including a new reference list of métier codes developed by the ISSG. The ISSG has a member from Norway, but contact/procedures for other non-EU countries should be considered.

The commission reminded that the non-EU countries could be present in relevant RCGs for specific points that need to be clarified/tackled together. The communication between different RCGs and end users will be discussed at the Liaison Meeting.

Workplan for 2023 – 2024

1. Continue following and evaluating the implementation of the métier codes on a pan-regional level and maintaining métier codes and other reference lists and scripts.
2. Update métier descriptions from the 2023 RDBES data call (tables CE & CL). Consider the use of the métier description reports.
3. Based on information received from the questionnaires sent out in spring 2023, evaluate the use of cross-validation methods in MS to combine data coming from different declarative sources, the ongoing standard practices and develop, on this basis, best practices guidelines, with a specific focus on the RDBES CE and CL tables.
4. Work on a template to document CE and CL data uploaded to RDBES
5. Continue following up on the development of the fecR package and its efforts to calculate fishing effort metrics that are harmonized/homogenized between MS
    - Collaborate with ISSG SSF regarding the inclusion of SSF in fecR
6. Continue following the development under RCG-Econ of an alternative fleet segmentation and advice on it in order to enhance and keep the link between the two approaches (depending on the RCG-Econ work on this, especially the feedback of the 3rd workshop held in May 2023)

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

5.2.5 Feedback from the ISSG 'Surveys'

The RCG NANSEA & Baltic 2020 specified the scope of the RCGs regarding surveys as follows*: "Given the expectation that survey designs, planning and task-sharing might change in the foreseeable future, RCGs are expected to play a more substantial role in the decision-making process when it comes to budget and/or national implications. The scope of the RCG will continue to focus on the budgetary aspects and national obligations in relation to proposed changes to a survey. It may be needed to rubberstamp and approve the current survey effort by MS to act as a baseline to measure and evaluate future modifications. RCG mandates are described in the respective RoPs, and these cover survey subjects as well."*

Following this scope, the ISSG on surveys aims to underpin the more substantial role of the RCGs in the future.

The current chairs of the ISSG on Surveys are Christoph Stransky (DEU) and Sieto Verver (NLD).

The ISSG on Surveys met online 7 Nov 2022, 1 Dec 2022 and 7 Dec 2022 and had a physical half-day meeting in Copenhagen/hybrid on 16 Jan 2023. The main outcomes are described in report part III, Section 5.3.

In addition to the ISSG work, some discussion took place concerning the access to closed areas for survey purposes. Appropriate solutions to this challenge are required and will be followed up in discussion with DG MARE, following an ISSG recommendation.

Workplan for 2023 – 2024

After presenting the results of the intersessional work done in 2022-2023 to the RCG pre-technical Meeting (May 2023) and discussion at the TM (June 2023), the follow-up work of the ISSG is mainly a continuation of the work started in earlier years.

1. Renew the multilateral agreements on cost-sharing of the International Ecosystem Survey in the Nordic Seas (IESNS=ASH) and International Blue Whiting Survey (IBWSS).
2. Identify candidate surveys for future cost-sharing based on the Gothenburg 2022 meeting and subsequent updates.
3. Monitor and discuss implications of the influence of external factors on surveys from a DCF perspective and react when appropriate and requested.
4. Monitor the regionalisation process within ICES (e.g. ICES NETSEA) and act as the focal point for RCG contact.
5. Review proposed substantial changes to the design, set-up or other aspects of the survey impacting MS's Work Plan, effort and/or budget allocation, or obligations. Consider requirements to facilitate future review processes.
6. Review emerging techniques, potentially improving or expanding data collection during surveys. In particular, the FishGenome project's (roadmap) outcomes will be considered.
7. Respond to requests and recommendations addressed to RCGs relevant for this ISSG (e.g. from ICES EGs on IBWSS effort reduction, expanding participation in Downs Recruitment Survey, a continuation of ECOCADIZ survey).

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA BALTIC_2023_D02: Renewal cost-sharing agreements for WHB survey (IBWSS) (DK, DE, ES, FR, IR, NL, SE).

NANSEA BALTIC_2023_D03: Renewal cost-sharing agreements for IESNS survey (ASH) (DK, DE, IR, NL, SE)

NANSEA BALTIC_2023_R05: To provide solutions for the continuation of scientific monitoring in spatially restricted zones.

5.2.6 Feedback from the ISSG on 'Electronic Monitoring Technologies'

Electronic Monitoring

In the ISSG EMT inter-sessional meeting of 2022-2023, two tasks proposed for 2022-2023 were discussed.

Task 1. Initiate the development of an inventory of already used data collection technologies by different member states, e.g., electronic monitoring (EM), Machine Learning (ML) development, electronic measuring boards, eDNA, etc.

Task 2. Examine possibilities for a shared machine learning database (pictures or video footage of fish and shellfish) to be made available for participating Member States (MS) to develop machine learning algorithms for species identification.

Several aspects were generally discussed and generally acknowledged and agreed, also on the basis of prior feedback from MS:

- There are multiple initiatives currently being developed by countries and institutions (e.g. in research projects, in DCF national work plans and/or pilots, mostly at a national level and some at an international level) using different types of EM methods for different purposes.
- The use of use of different EM methods by EU MS and other countries for different purposes is addressed by multiple working groups of ICES (e.g. WGTIFD, WGMLEARN, WGCATCH), projects, other RCGs (namely at least RCG Large Pelagics), but there may be overlap and gaps in what is being addressed.
- Outside of specific contexts (e.g. WGs such as the ones referred to above; specific projects), there is little regional communication between MS and institutions about their work on EM. Regional coordination (e.g. promoted by this ISSG) could help with improving such communication, mapping, and contributing to strategizing the efforts of the different groups.
- There are multiple issues with data ownership/privacy concerning the use of EM methods (especially with regard to camera usage onboard commercial fishing vessels), and solutions for these issues are yet to be clarified (some possible approaches were discussed). Regional coordination (including with, e.g. ICES) could promote needed advancement.
- The development of automatic species identification and measurement in images/videos captured by EM systems depends on the processing and classification of large datasets of annotated images/videos.

Regional coordination (promoted by this ISSG) could help promote efficiency in how MS approaches this limitation, e.g. benefiting from images/videos captured by EM systems in DCF research surveys.

As a note, the ICES data centre was present at the intersessional meeting and demonstrated interest in contributing to some of these efforts (e.g. data storage, data ownership/privacy).

The ISSG group proposes to continue these two tasks with a more detailed setting, as proposed below.

In the Virtual Meeting, there was a specific time slot in the agenda for the ISSG EMT, and during this time slot, these two tasks (and all related matters) were presented according to what was discussed in the intersessional meeting.

In the Physical-Technical Meeting, there was not a specific time slot in the agenda for the ISSG EMT, and there was no specific discussion on these two tasks (and all related matters).

Genetic tools

The third task proposed for 2022-2023 was:

Task 3. Examine a possible pilot study with Pelagic Advisory Council on genetic stock identification.

The ISSG EMT decided not to address this task in a specific manner but rather broaden the scope of the task to consider the topic of genetic tools in general.

In the ISSG EMT inter-sessional meeting of 2022-2023, there was a specific time slot for a presentation from Naiara Rodríguez-Ezpeleta (AZTI and not a member from the ISSG or the RCG) on how genetic tools are and can be used to meet DCF objectives and end-user needs within the context of the DCF (e.g., for characterization of species composition and abundance in the context of surveys and stomach sampling, for characterization of population structure and estimation of population size, for resolving species identification and hybrids issues, for ageing). There was a general acknowledgement in the ISSG of the interest of such methods in the context of the DCF, and it was discussed what would be the best way to fit the topic within the RCG: in the ISSG EMT, in another existing ISSG, in a newly created ISSG, or keeping it as an isolated topic for plenary only. There was no general agreement on what could be the option to follow, but there was a general agreement that keeping it in ISSG EMT might not be the option to follow. This is because this would require having participants with the right expertise in the ISSG, while very few current members of this ISSG have sufficient expertise on the topic to advance the discussions on the topic of genetic tools in the context of collecting biological data on fisheries.

In the Virtual Meeting, there was a specific time slot in the agenda for the ISSG EMT, and during this time slot, the topic of genetic tools was presented according to what was discussed in the intersessional meeting.

In the Physical-Technical Meeting, there was not a specific time slot in the agenda for the ISSG EMT, but there was a time slot for "Making use of genetic samples to inform stock assessment". In this time slot, Naiara Rodríguez-Ezpeleta presented a shorter version of the presentation given in the ISSG meeting. Here, there was a discussion on the issue of how to frame this topic within the RCG, taking into consideration the options raised in the intersessional meeting of the ISSG. It was discussed if it should be fitted in a more method-driven way (i.e. in a new ISSG) or in a more purpose-driven way (i.e. in an already existing ISSGs). It was agreed that for 2023-2024, the topic should be addressed in a purpose-driven way. Namely, the ISSGs with a more direct link with this topic are to include a task in which this topic is considered, and if needed, they should liaise with Naiara to get expert input on the topic. Namely: ISSG Surveys should consider methods and possible outcomes related with species composition, abundance, population structure, population size, species identification and

hybrids, and ageing; ISSG Stomach Sampling should consider methods and possible outcomes related to prey species composition and abundance; ISSG EMT is to maintain for now a general approach to the topic. It was also agreed that this issue would be discussed again in the RCG TM of 2024.

As a note, during the meetings, some more particular topics were discussed, e.g., the interest in looking into the outputs (including the roadmap) from the FishGenome project, the interest of specific end-users (e.g. ICES assessment working groups in using a regional approach for implementing coordinated sampling in surveys to collect samples of particular species to address a particular issue such as Lophius hybrids, or stock definition of Merluccius merluccius).

Functioning of the ISSG EMT

In the Virtual Meeting time slot and in the Technical meeting plenary, it was highlighted that the group is missing a co-chair and representatives from France, Latvia, and Lithuania. As during the meetings, there were no proposals on these two issues, the request for a co-chair is proposed to MS and as a task for ISSG NCs, and the request for at least one representative from the above-mentioned MS to participate in the ISSG EMT is proposed to MS.

Workplan for 2023 – 2024

1. Continue the inventory of data collection technologies used in different member states, e.g., electronic monitoring (EM), Machine Learning development, and electronic measuring boards.
2. Start the discussion on elaborating a methodology to collect and annotate pictures and/or video footage of catches (fish, shellfish, and other organisms) onboard research vessels that may be used to develop machine learning algorithms for species identification/classification. Such a methodology would need to be developed in collaboration with the MS institutions implementing research surveys and ICES WG coordinating those surveys (when applicable).
3. Discuss and examine the possibilities that these annotated data are shared between Member States without breaching privacy and ownership concerns.
4. Initiate coordination with groups working on related topics, such as ICES WGTIFD, WGCATCH, potentially WGMLEARN, WGRFS; RCGs NANSEA and Baltic ISSGs (SSF, PETS, and MRF); and RCG Large Pelagics (subgroup dedicated to this topic). Namely, as a starting point, set up a joint meeting at in 2023-2024 where responsibilities from each group would be mapped and discussed.
5. Consider how genetic tools can be useful in the context of DCF. This task is also assigned (with a more specific focus) to other RCG ISSGs: ISSG Surveys (e.g. focus on eDNA for species composition and abundance, several techniques for population size, population structure, hybrids, ageing); ISSG Stomach sampling - eDNA for prey species composition and abundance).

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA BALTIC_2023_R06: Each MS to assign at least one expert to participate in ISSG EMT. An additional chair is needed.

5.2.7 Presentation on SmartDots developments – age, maturity and ichthyoplankton

SmartDots is a platform for quality assurance of biological parameters as input for stock assessment. The software was originally developed at ILVO, Belgium. In 2018, it was launched for international age reading calibration events as a tool with interconnecting software, a database for images and associated data, a web application and a reporting module which produces a report template based on a standardised statistical analysis run from an r-script. It is hosted at ICES and currently has 797 users registered from 42 countries. The ICES Working Group on SmartDots Governance (WGSMART) oversees all improvements and ensures all developments are in line with the ICES quality assurance framework (QAF). In 2023, following a request from the EU and UK, additional modules were developed for maturity staging and ichthyoplankton identification. The aim is to streamline modules with that existing for age reading, thus ensuring more efficient workflows for both users and developers. Developments were based on input and feedback from members of the ICES Working Group on Biological parameters (WGBIOP) and the ICES Working Group on Atlantic Fish Larvae and Eggs Surveys (WGALES). Continued cooperation with these groups will be necessary to ensure interoperability of vocabularies across databases, reporting modules and updating guidelines for calibration events. In addition to improving calibration across labs, SmartDots reports are now being used by some stock assessment and benchmark expert groups who are investigating how the age error data can be incorporated into their models. Ideally, the future cycle of calibration events will be aligned with that of the benchmarks.

A training course for event coordinators using the age and maturity modules has been held, with a subsequent course for the ichthyoplankton modules due in fall 2023. Published manuals are available from the ICES library, and a series of YouTube tutorials are available. Guidelines for exchanges and workshops for all modules as well as for image quality, are being updated and/or drafted and will be published in the ICES library when complete.

Future plans include setting up guidelines for reference collections in SmartDots, which will serve as training collections and as a quality assurance tool for assessing temporal trends. WGSMART can develop this module, but financing is needed.

SmartDots is on the list of recommended tools under the RWP (Regional Work Plan).

5.3 ToR 3 Review the impact of management measures on data collection

During this year's meeting, progress has been made under ToR 3 as follows:

- Questionnaire on impacts of current events on sampling and data availability

5.3.1 Questionnaire on impacts of current events on sampling and data availability

Introduction

In 2020, RCG NANSEA and Baltic started collecting and analysing information on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on commercial fisheries data collection, focusing primarily on biological sampling. In order to fulfil this task, a questionnaire was designed and circulated among MSs to capture information by country and stock. An overview of data collected from countries served as a basis for identifying data gaps in stock assessment work. Having analysed the answers from the years 2020 and 2021, it was concluded that the severity of pandemic impact on data collection has generally decreased.

In 2022, following the experience gained from analysing the impact of coronavirus on sampling and in the face of other important events, it was decided to restructure the questionnaire. The new updated version specifies the impact of different factors on data collection from commercial fisheries and research surveys. Countries were requested to fill in the spreadsheet that capture stock-related information for the respective quarters. The overview tables were pre-filled with relevant stocks from RDB. If any factor has been identified that had a negative influence on data collection, the severity of the impact on fishing effort, sampling of commercial catches and research surveys was specified in the questionnaire. The table contained a list of already identified impact factors, e.g., the coronavirus pandemic, legislation, war in Ukraine, etc. However, reporting any other factor with an appropriate description in the comments was also possible.

Feedback from the 1st and 2nd quarter 2022 was analysed, and the results were presented at the RCG 2022 Technical Meeting. The RCG suggested to continue collecting information from the remaining quarters of 2022, which was done at the beginning of 2023. The responses covering all quarters of 2022 were analysed and visualised in a series of heat maps and supporting plots separately for each region (Report part III, section I, Annex I.II). The results were presented at the RCG ISSG End Users meeting (17th March 2023).

Methods for preparing plots

The outcomes from the questionnaire were presented in a set of heatmaps showing the impact on data collection from at-sea sampling, on-shore sampling, research surveys and fishing effort. Plots were prepared separately for each region and quarter of 2022. The scoring system applied follows as 3 for High impacts (75-100%), 2 for Medium impacts (25-75%) and 1 for Low/Null impacts (0-25%). The average score for each stock and data collection activity was calculated and presented on heatmaps, together with the number of countries that responded to each question. Additionally, supplementary plots showing the types of impact factors were prepared for each region.

Overview of the answers

Having analysed the responses to the questionnaire, it can be concluded that generally, the trend is moving to less impact compared to 2020 and 2021. The coronavirus pandemic showed an impact in 1st and 2nd quarters of 2022 and then phased away. Other factors that showed an impact on data collection were legislation related mainly to fisheries closures, the war in Ukraine and high fuel prices. At-sea sampling was the most impacted element of data collection activities.

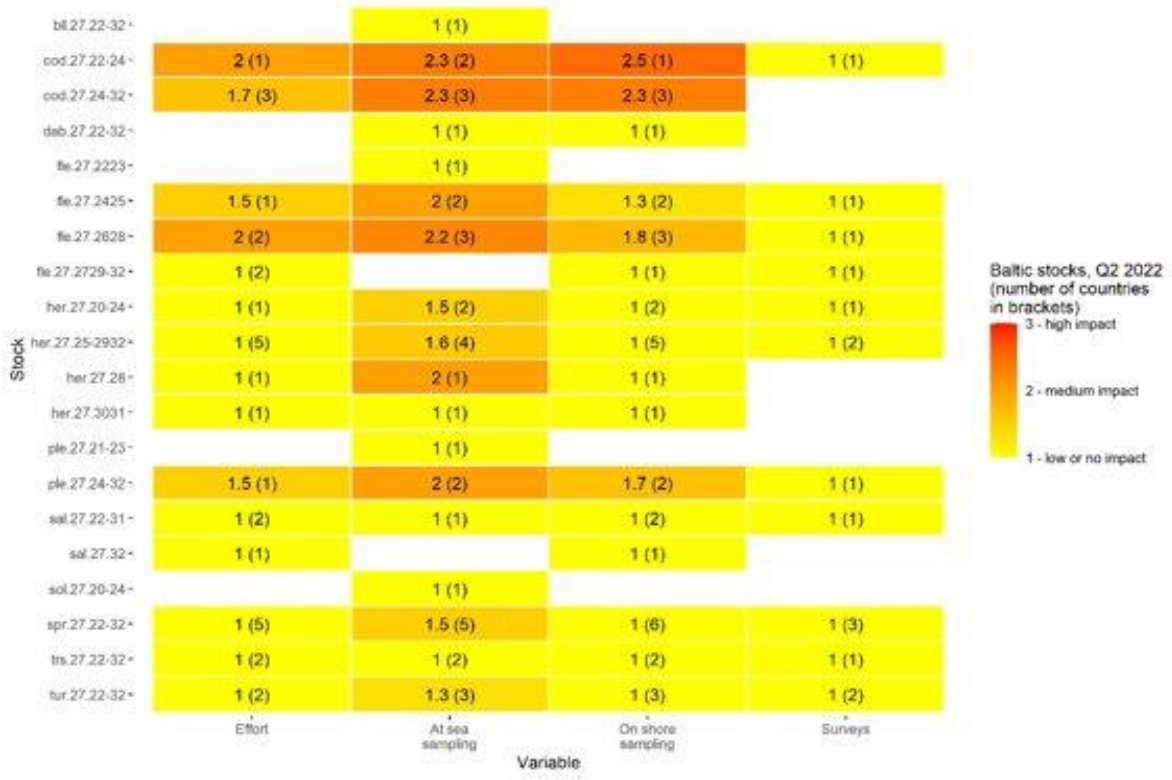


Figure 5.3.1.1. Example plot showing impact on data collection for Baltic stock.

Figure 5.3.1.2. Example plot showing the impact of different factors on data collection activities in the Baltic Sea.

General feedback on the questionnaire

The future of the questionnaire was discussed in a subgroup during the 2023 Technical Meeting. Although the results from the questionnaire were considered useful, they were not widely used by end-users. In addition, DG MARE is currently planning to develop an online tool for real-time warning if sampling from commercial fisheries or surveys is disrupted by any factor. It was suggested that RCGs could cooperate with DG MARE on this initiative. Therefore, the questionnaire on impact factors designed by RCG will not be continued.

All plots are available in Report part III, section I, Annex I.II.

Workplan for 2023 – 2024

No tasks planned for 2023-2024

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

5.4 ToR 4 Development and implementation of Regional Workplans (RWP)

During this year's meeting, progress has been made under ToR 4 as follows:

- Work on the development of Regional Work Plans
- Feedback from ISSG 'Case study of fisheries for small pelagics in the Baltic'
- Feedback from ISSG & SG 'Case study freezer trawler fleet exploiting pelagic fisheries in the Northeast Atlantic'
- Feedback from ISSG & SG 'Evaluation of the data collected for the SSF at EU level'
- Feedback from ISSG & SG 'Identification of case studies for PETS bycatch monitoring'
- Feedback from ISSG 'Diadromous species'
- Feedback from ISSG & SG 'Recreational fisheries'
- Feedback from ISSG 'Regionally coordinated stomach sampling'
- Feedback from ISSG 'Towards a regional sampling plan - Case Study of the trawl fishery in Iberian Waters'
- Feedback from ISSG 'Optimized and Operational Regional Sampling Plans'. No activity, on hold.

5.4.1 Feedback from ISSG & SG 'Regional Work Plans'

The lessons learned from Fishn'Co were that coordination might take a variety of forms and types, depending on the thematic and the related needs; this was not deemed an issue but was given to complexify the readability of the proposals. ISSG/RWP took over Fishn'Co in March 2023 and continued the work on simplifying and clarifying all textboxes of the RWPs.

After review and amendments made during the first ISSG RWP meeting, the RWP Baltic, NANSEA and Large Pelagics 2025-2027 were sent to RCG chairs for circulation during one month to all NCs on the 28th of April 2023. ISSG RWP met for the 2nd meeting (4th May) to consider all feedbacks and comments received. It is noted that less than 50% of the NCs responded to the consultation (5/13 for NANSEA, 4/8 for Baltic). ISSG/RWP addressed key issues raised by NCs and elaborated further on them, with the aim of giving any reader clear information on the RWP concept.

Eventually, during the meeting on the 23rd of May, the ISSG elaborated on a new template for structuring the information in the specific textboxes. It was asked to all ISSG chairs to review their text and amend the structure as follows:

- A first paragraph on the name of ISSG and the nature of the coordination achieved
- A short description of the coordinated activities in 2 or 3 sentences
- A clear list of points agreed upon and actions expected from each relevant MS
- A last section on elements to be discussed at RCG TM 2023

Regarding the tables of the RWPs (table 3.1, Table 2.1, Table 2.5, Table 2.6 and Table 4.1), the ISSG coordinated their completeness with key experts.

The status of all RWPs reviewed by ISSG RWP is as follows:

1. Version 1 is given to RWP received by Fishn'Co
2. Version 2 is given to RWPs, including feedback from MS after the

3. Version 3 is given to RWPs, including further modifications by ISSG/RWP
4. Version 4 is the RWPs proposed after the RCG TM

RCG TM agreed on the overall concept of RWP proposed by ISSG/RWP (i.e. clear preamble in section 1, strategic thinking in Textbox 1A, tools and services in Textbox 1B, follow-up of ISSG/RWP guidelines for filling the other technical Textboxes, the highlight of the agreements and commitments in each section, ….).

During the TM, all ISSGs interacted with ISSG/RWP and in plenary sessions in order to improve their text proposal in their sections and make sure key elements of agreements and commitments were reported. The discussion and agreements on how to deal with DNA and genetics' new developments in the different fields of data collection are reported in TextBox 1A of each RWP. The outcomes of the full week of work in RCG NANSEA and Baltic TM 2023 are in Version 4 of the proposed RWPs for both RCGs.

There were still pending issues to be resolved at the end of the TM. Some of these issues could be resolved before the September 2023 DM since these are linked to agreements to be discussed in DM; some are issues needing more developments, which could be agreed at RCG TM and DM 2024 (see next section). The other pending issues which would need longer developments, not reported otherwise in technical Textboxes, are given in Textbox 1A.

An important discussion occurred during the RCG/TM on **the final status of the proposed RWPs 2025-2027** since important key topics (see work plan for 2023-2024) may progress during the intersession to the point of agreement at reached during the RCGs 2024. It was agreed that the proposed RWPs for the period 2025-2027 should be as much finalized as possible in 2023 for the sake of NWPs 2025-2027 preparation. It was also agreed that there will be possibilities to amend and update the RWPs after the STECF and European Commission review (see Fishn'Co report on the Decision-making process) and circulation of the amended RWPs to the NCs for approval in early 2024. It was also agreed that some elements of the RWPs will need to be updated during the TM 2024 (e.g. Table 1.3 on bi and multilateral agreements and Table 2.1 on the list of required stocks). This means that **the proposed RWPs 2025-2027 from RCGs in 2023 are in draft status**.

The message to NCs is that if they are uncomfortable with any agreements and commitments reported in the RWP, then it must be further developed to clarify the issue. In this case, the agreement and commitments stated in the RWP must reflect the work to be undertaken and the given timeframe. The overall objective is to find a full consensus on the content of both RWPs.

Workplan for 2023 – 2024

As soon as possible after the RCG TM 2023, ISSG/RWP to update the proposed RWPs following the TM discussions and agreements and send the final version of RWPs to RCG chairs for circulating to all NCs before the DM.

During the DM, MS to agree on all Agreements and commitments contained in the RWP or amend or delay until further clarification (see recommendation) – ISSG/RWP to follow up on any demand by NC to adapt the RWPs before sending to STECF.

ISSG/RWP to follow-up on STECF and European Commission review and recommendations and amend the RWPs as needed for a final agreement by NCs early in 2024.

During the next intersession, the following work needs to progress in order to assess their inclusion in the final RWPs 2025-2027, either before the consultation after the STECF and EU COM review in early 2024 or during the RCG session of 2024:

- Freezer trawler – Development of a Regional sampling plan
- PETS – Identification of high-risk fisheries
- Recreational – inclusion on a list of species to be included on top of the mandatory species to be monitored
- Stomach sampling analysis for the NANSEA – agreements on MS doing the analysis on their own or commissioning other MS to do it.
- Stomach sampling for Baltic – Development of a rotating system like in the North Sea

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA BALTIC_2023_D04: MS to agree on all Agreements and commitments contained in the Draft RWP Baltic.

NANSEA BALTIC_2023_D05: MS to agree on all Agreements and commitments contained in the Draft RWP NANSEA.

5.4.2 Feedback from ISSG Small pelagic in the Baltic Sea

RCG Baltic agreed to use the fisheries for **small pelagic species** as a **case study** for the development of a regional sampling programme in the Baltic Sea. It was agreed to establish a subgroup for in-depth analyses of how a regional sampling programme for small pelagics can be established and suggest how it can be implemented. The pelagic fisheries target western Baltic herring, central Baltic herring, herring in the Gulf of Bothnia, herring in the Gulf of Riga and sprat.

Summary of progress of the ISSG activity in 2022-2023:

In the 2021 decision meeting (**D06)** 5 MS (Germany, Denmark, Poland, Lithuania, Sweden) agreed to participate in the Baltic small pelagic Regional Sampling Plan (RSP) and take part in the non-binding Regional Work Plan for 2022. 3 MS (Finland, Estonia, Latvia) agreed to participate in the Baltic small pelagic Regional Sampling Plan (RSP), but would reflect it only in their National Work Plan.

In the 2022 decision meeting (D04): NCs agreed on the development of a binding RWP 2025-2027 for NANSEA and Baltic region without formal adoption. (DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, LT, LV, PL, SE)

Work on WP/AR Table and Textbox 2.5 (biological sampling)

The ISSG has, following this decision, worked to understand the documentation needed to frame such a RSP into tables. The Fishn´Co project did a lot of the development on table 2.5, the text box 2.5, and annexe 1.1, but in the end, it was important that all MS in the region agreed and participated in developing a common understanding of the columns and agreed on how a regional table 2.5 would look like. We worked on how to fill in and understand table 2.5 through several online meetings. It was apparent that different MSs interoperated the columns in slightly different ways. Therefore, we prioritized spending several meetings discussing all the variables until all participating MS had a common understanding of the columns.

Within the regional work plans are the details of the sampling schemes expressed in a text file (annex 1.1). It is also access to those details that will allow the ISSG to work towards the ambition level goals. Summarizing the information from the different countries in annex 1.1 into a regional document has resulted in a substantial document. After the agreement in Fishn'Co, some fields in annex 1.1 are left empty as they might not be relevant to the regional sampling plan.

Analyse species misreporting between herring and sprat in a historical context.

In the 2021 decision meeting (**D07)** (8 MS (Germany, Denmark, Finland, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Sweden) agreed to:
Each MS with trawlers fishing small pelagics decided to look into the potential "historical" misreporting of the proportion of herring and sprat in their national data. The commitment includes performing an analysis, presenting it at the ISSG small pelagics in the Baltic and deciding if historical catch data should be corrected on the basis of the analysis. The aim was to feed in the benchmark process of Baltic herring stocks and sprat 2023."

Two meetings have been conducted in 2022/2023 (15 September, 15-18 November data compilation WS). In the first meeting, we had an update from all MS on the progress in the analysis, and it was decided about the format to fill out. In the second meeting at the data compilation workshop, all MS had conducted some kind of analysis (see annex 8.2 in part III of the report)

- Document present WGBFAS time series with respect to corrections.
  - Fill in a template about corrections done (or not done) in connection to historic misreporting based on the template in annex 3.
- Analyse if it is possible for MSs to use some quality indicators to check if there has been inconsistency between official numbers in catch composition and data from alternative sources (national control data, Danish control data, observer trips, scientific surveys)
- Collate quota shares by year and country.

In summary, of eight total Member States:

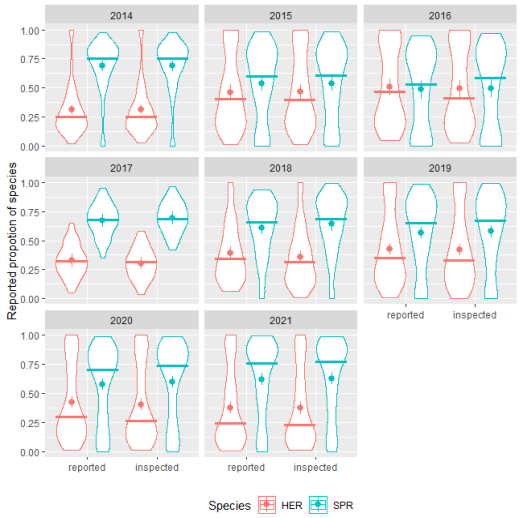
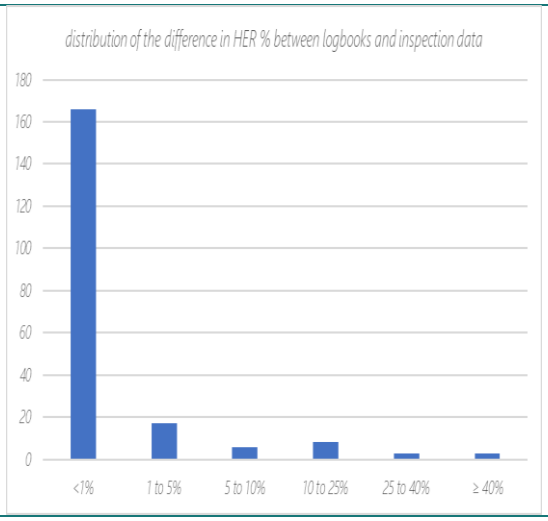
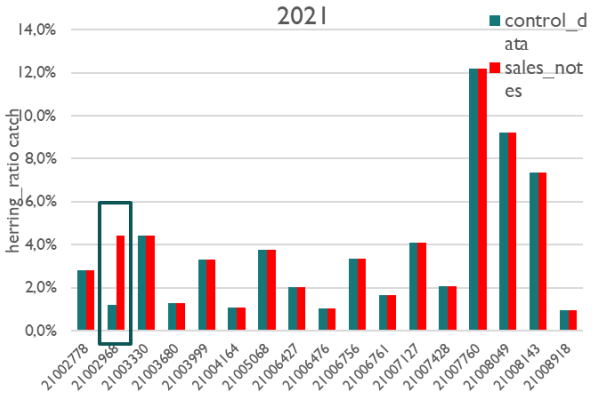
- After the analysis, five Member States (namely Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, and Poland) considered the update of the time series not needed.
- After the analysis, one Member State (namely, Lithuania) considered the update of the time series not possible, according to the Lithuanian Law.
- After the analysis, one Member State (namely, Sweden) considered the update of the time series not possible in the given timeframe and due to the uncertainty in the estimations, but possible in the future.
- After the analysis, one Member State (namely Denmark) updated the time series.

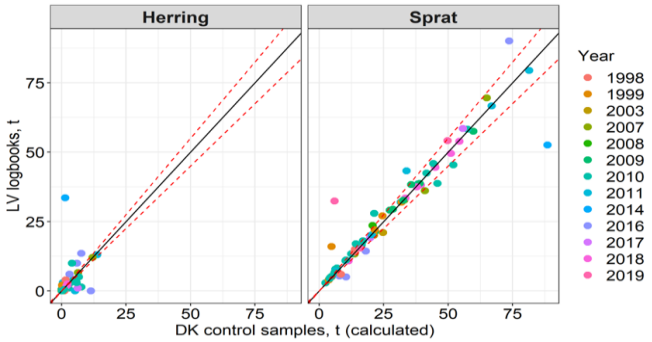
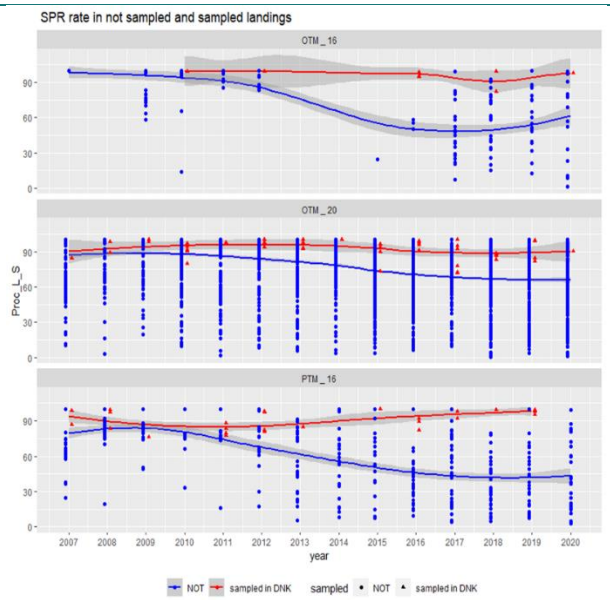
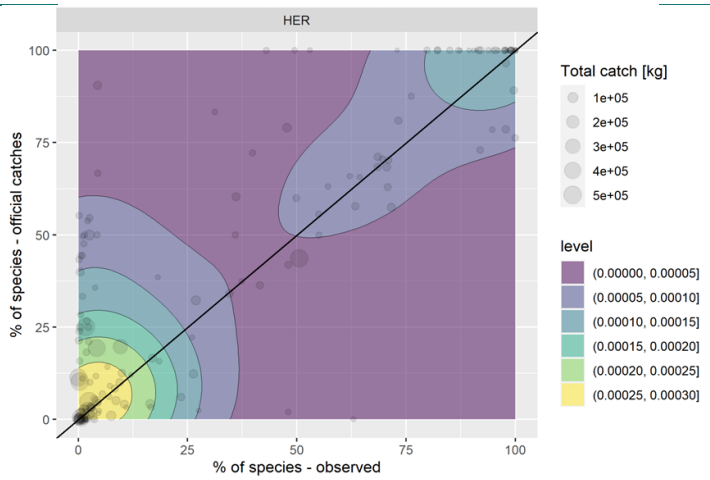
It has been highlighted that the only country updating the time series coincides with the smallest player (< 4% of total landings). Thus, the corrections did not strongly influence the overall picture. This was described as "a pity", as other sources continue to highlight the urgency of this problem. In particular, two cases have been cited:

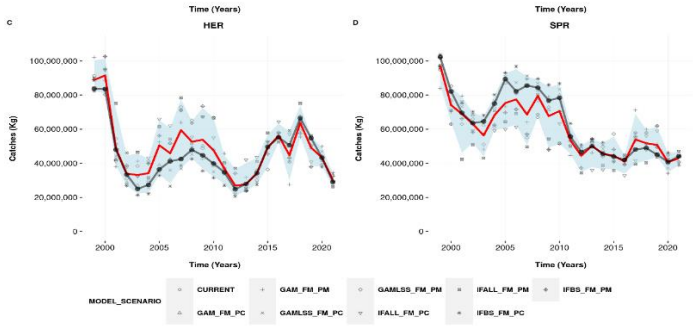
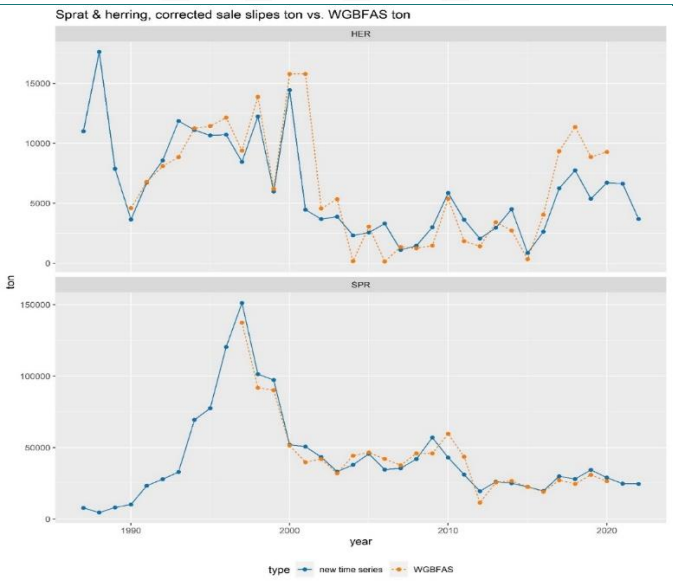
- In the context of the Baltic assessment working group, it has been highlighted the presence of a "report from the EFCA" (European Fisheries Control Agency). The report was not shown in that context, but it has been stated that these were indicating that "minimum one country, or more than one country, has huge problems with misreporting of sprat and herring".

The full analysis by MS is present in the ISSG report (report part III, section 8). Table 5.4.2.1 gives the main output by MS.

Table 5.4.2.1. *Species misreporting between herring and sprat in a historical context, main output by MS*

Country	Update	Figure
Estonia	"*No update is needed*".	
Finland	"*No clear pattern detected, 90% of control is <5% difference*"	
Germany	"95% of *dnk control match. No clear pattern. No update is needed*"	
Latvia	"*No update is needed*".	

Country	Update	Figure
		
Lithuania	*"According to Lithuanian law these estimations could not be used for correction of official landing figures"*	
Poland	*"No update as there are no indications after the analysis that data can be improved. The country will not provide new time series".*	

Country	Update	Figure
Sweden	"*The national data will not be updated in the present benchmark but might be updated in the future since there are Some indications of possible misreporting*"	
Denmark	"*Update was provided*".	

In the discussion that followed the presentation, possible misreporting was the main topic discussed, with the following inputs.

There were discussions on continuing with analysis of the possible misreporting. The co-Chair of the group expressed that there is no current plan to continue with the analysis during the 2024 as the process was carried on for two years at the moment and most countries has expressed that they do not have evidence of misreporting. The current data sources do not seem to be enough to tackle the problem and other high resolution control data (i.e. EFCA) are at the moment not available for the group. Without the access to additional control data (i.e., data to be put into contrast with reported data, e.g. EFCA) it is very difficult to act on rumors about misreporting in the herring and sprat mixed fishery in the Baltic.

It was also discussed to use the genetic to categorize the catch and then recalculate the amounts landed for each species accordingly. It seems that some projects are already working in this direction, and, in the case of Denmark, this approach had been presented both in assessment and control context.

It was highlighted as a challenge that "*in some MS, the control agency asks vessels to update the logbooks if there is discrepancy between control samples and logbook – however this is not possible to track*". Also, some Member States may have corrected the data according to the sampling, overwriting the logbooks in order to provide more accurate data but a list of the Member States using this approach has not been defined.

It has been highlighted that once Denmark increased the control activities (with all the landings being sampled in order to fulfil the contents of the European Control Regulation legislation), a general shift in the behaviour of vessels was observed with the vessels moving away from Danish harbours.

It has been clarified that Sweden had observers at sea at least since late 2021. From the experience on board, hauls catch composition sampled on board as well as total catch before landing matched the information reported from the crew. Sweden also has sampled large trawlers landings in Skagen (Denmark). From the experience at landing, sampling is challenging in this context, with agreement not always reached between the estimates made by the sampling team on board and at landing as well as between the sampling team and the third party company that carry on the control activities in Denmark. Sweden Participant to the Conference reported that data from on-board sampling have high quality but are costly, thus on-going work is focussing on the maximization of the quality of the data resulting from sampling at landing.

Workplan for 2023 – 2024

1. Continuing pilot study –in 2024 and full implementation in 2025
2. Continue to work on table 2.5, text box 2.5 and annex 1.1
3. 2025 will be the first year with the RWP
4. If possible still having focus on the possible misreporting between sprat and herring

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

5.4.3 Feedback from ISSG 'Case study freezer trawler fleet exploiting pelagic fisheries in the Northeast Atlantic'

The primary aim of this ISSG is to propose a statistically robust regional sampling scheme for the European pelagic freezer trawler fleet where both the monitoring of the pelagic target species and the incidental bycatches are taken into account. The current sampling of the fleet, which is largely Dutch owned and operate under the flags of the Netherlands, Germany, France, UK (England), Poland, is conducted by the Dutch and German administrations. The aim of the sampling is to collect biological information of the target species and monitor incidental bycatches. While there exists an element of cooperation, at present the national sampling schemes differ in extent and methodology and there is no formal arrangement or harmonization.

So far, simulation studies have been conducted to investigate annual sampling coverage for a suite of preselected stocks under various sampling schemes including random selection of individual fishing trips and vessels. Furthermore, the ISSG carried out an exercise to design a pilot study based on the NLD observer programme. The work in 2022/2023 concentrated on executing and analysing the results of a pilot study. The study focused on the North Sea herring fishery in quarter 3 2022. While the pilot study showed promising results, it focussed on only one species*area combination of the European pelagic freezer trawler fleet. In order to extend to the entire fleet, a common practically feasible protocol for all species*area combinations needs to be developed and tested.

Workplan for 2022 – 2023

The following tasks have been identified during the RCG meeting in 2023 for the attention of the ISSG in 2023/24:

1. Identify and conduct NLD and DEU pilot studies
2. Review, analyse and compare results pilot studies with NLD market sampling / DEU observer programme
3. Develop harmonized protocol for sampling the EU pelagic freezer trawler fleet

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA BALTIC_2023_R07: Identify and conduct two pilot studies in 2023/2024, one by NLD and one by DEU, for sampling EU pelagic freezer trawler fleet.

5.4.4 Feedback from ISSG 'Towards a regional sampling plan - Case Study of the trawl fishery in Iberian Waters'

This ISSG was on hold during 2022/2023, but will follow the work plan suggested below for 2023/2024.

Workplan for 2023 – 2024

I. June 2023–May 2024 and June 2024-May 2025 (starting in April 2024):
- update allocation of sampling effort to ports based on recent data from trawl fisheries in the Atlantic Iberian waters
- define the sampling plan to be implemented in the pilot study and prepare changes/additions to contracts

II. June 2025-May 2026 and June 2026-May 2027 (calendar year of 2026):
- implementation of the pilot study

III. June 2026-May 2027 and June 2027-May 2028 (starting in April 2027):
- analysis of the results of the pilot study (data for 2026, available in April 2027).
- define future steps.

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

5.4.5 Feedback from ISSG 'Evaluation of the data collected for the SSF at EU level'

Summary of progress of the ISSG activity in 2022-2023:

Regarding the incorporation of SSF data into the RDBES, a data model has already been developed for discussion with the core group. This data model had already been implemented, but this ISSG, in collaboration with the ICES WGCATCH group in this period of time, has also been working on a new table related to the quality of the data provided. This new table has been sent to the core group for discussion and approval.

Work continues in parallel with the ISSG Fisheries Overviews to improve the usability of the SSF data incorporated into the RDB. So far, the effort has focused on the usefulness of the catch and effort data (CE&CL data) from the transversal data and their usefulness for the RCGs for coordination in SSF sampling programmes. However, from now on, the objective is to work on the biological data reported through the sampling programmes (CS data). This will allow us to analyse the sampling coverage of the SSF, both at sea and onshore, metiers sampled, etc. It will also allow us to identify the main species for which biological data are available and if these are the most relevant species for these SSF in each region.

One of the biggest problems with SSFs remains to provide accurate estimates of the effort deployed by these fisheries. This is mainly due to limitations in the data sources used to provide these estimates, which are usually official or transversal data (first sale notes and logbooks). Due to these limitations, the unit of effort used is the days at sea. This means that the effort of SSFs is overestimated since the usual duration of the fishing trips in these SSFs is a few hours and not a full day, as is usually the case in more industrial or large-scale fleets. It is assumed that a fishing day by an SSF vessel is the same as a fishing day by a large-scale vessel when it is known that this is not the case. Nor the capacity in terms of the number of nets/hooks in a fishing trip used by SSF compared to large-scale. Since effort is a very important variable for providing certain estimates (e.g. bycatch estimates), the precision of this variable is critical for providing sound estimates.

During the RCG technical meeting, the Commission presented the new updates concerning the New Control Regulation. Related to SSF, one of the most relevant aspects of the Regulation is the implementation of devices on the SSF to monitor the fishing activity. The implementation of these devices could improve the effort information based on the high-resolution data that will be collected. This ISSG will make a follow-up of this Regulation once it publishes its final version, as this could impact the availability of data for scientific purposes.

Finally, it was discussed the importance of comparing the data collected from official sources to the data collected under the DCF SSF sampling programmes. This comparison should be focused on the catch information provided (e.g. Kg catch, species composition, etc.). This task is pending and could be covered in the next year, depending on the sampling information uploaded to the RDB.

Workplan for 2023 – 2024

The following tasks for the period 2023-2024 were adopted:

1. In collaboration with ISSG fisheries overviews: CS information report outputs for SSF
2. In collaboration with ISSG Metiers: SSF fisheries effort estimates improvements
3. EU Control Regulation follow-up: Impact on SSF

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

Nor proposals nor recommendations

5.4.6 Feedback from ISSG 'Optimization of PETS bycatch sampling'

Summary of progress of the ISSG activity in 2022-2023:

During this period, a lot of initiatives and demands happened at the same time under different contexts that are related to PETS bycatch. These initiatives and demands are supposed to continue in the following years. That´s why, during the technical meeting, it was discussed the role this ISSG should have in addition to the main role, which is coordinating the sampling programmes carried out under the DCF. It was decided that this ISSG should work as a forum or network that will identify and share the main initiatives, works, projects, etc., carried out by different organizations related to PETS bycatch and share it with main end users.

It could be seen that the most relevant technical part for the RCGs is mainly carried out by the ICES WGs as WGBYC, WGCATCH and others. For instance, ICES WGBYC works on providing a species priority list by ICES Ecoregion, considering different variables such as the abundance of the species, their conservation status, etc. This kind of list could be relevant for different Member States when implementing their protocols on their at-sea sampling programmes to prioritize the species to focus on. WGBYC has also been working on the fisheries risk assessment evaluation methodology, trying to improve the assessment by incorporating more detailed data in the analysis.

ICES received a special request from DGENV to organize, in 2023, several workshops, WKPETSAMP2 and WKPETSAMP3, where many relevant tasks to the RCGs will be covered. For example, issues such as how much effort is needed to provide sound bycatch estimates. In addition, and based on different simulations, how the different variables information and resolution used when providing these estimates could affect the final estimates, etc.

The incorporation of PETS data into the RDBES is also an essential task. This ISSG group, together with WGBYC and RDBES core group members, will carry out a test during 2023-2024, following the ICES RDBES roadmap to see if there are any issues in the incorporation of this data but also if this fits with WGBYC and RCGs needs.

The development of the Regional Work Plan (RWP) was also one of the main points discussed during the Technical Meeting. This includes issues related to PETS sampling. Part of this development was carried out by ISSG members in parallel with the Fishn´Co project. The main outputs from the project and what has been incorporated into the first RWP document were also discussed. This includes the potential case studies for future coordinated sampling programmes for some PETS species, as the common dolphins in the Bay of Biscay, the Harbour porpoise in the Baltic etc.

The Commission presented the New Control Regulation's main updated points that could be relevant for bycatch information. It´s the case of the implementation of different devices to all vessels independent of their size. The information collected from these devices could be helpful to improve the knowledge of the activity of some fisheries, such as the SSF, the obligation to some fisheries to install cameras onboard, etc. Also, the mandatory fields to be completed by skippers in their logbooks etc. The ISSG will follow up the main updates

from this regulation when its final version is published, specifically in those sections relevant to improving the knowledge of PETS bycatch data.

Finally, and based on the important demand on issues related to PETS, it was agreed to organize a physical meeting in 2024 spring by the members of this ISSG to define the short and mid-term plan for this group.

Workplan for 2023 – 2024

The following tasks for the period 2023-2024 were adopted:

1. Forum/network role: Coordination and communication with main end-users on PETS-related issues
2. Spring physical meeting organization
3. Short and mid-term plan for ISSG PETS based on 2023 initiatives outputs
4. Control Regulation follow-up
5. RWP development

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

Nor proposals nor recommendations

5.4.7 Feedback from ISSG 'Diadromous Species'

Main outcomes in the 2022/2023 term:

Regional Work Plans (RWPs) were discussed for diadromous data collection. ISSG diadromous believes that RWPs could help to further harmonize data collection, especially electrofishing and fisheries effort data for eel and salmonids. The direct exchange with the relevant ICES EGs (namely WGEEL, WGNAS, WGBAST, WGTRUTTA) has been further strengthened. ISSG Diadromous Fishes is recognized and considered by ICES EGs.

Efforts have been made to discuss and find solutions for ongoing discussions and unclarities regarding the use and storage of diadromous DCF data on central ICES databases (e.g. RDBES)

Assessment models for WGNAS and WGEEL are currently under active development and could potentially result in changes in end-user data needs in the foreseeable future.

Main points discussed in the RCG NANSEA/BALTIC meeting

Currently, no unified solution to host the mandatory data for diadromous species collected by member states in line with DCF exists. WGNAS and WGEEL have developed their own databases comprising data beyond DCF collected data and are currently incompatible with the RDBES data structure. **ISSG Diadromous Fishes recommends avoiding using multiple different databases for DCF data and, instead, storing and hosting all DCF-collected mandatory data on central ICES databases for better organization and accessibility for end users**.

Possibilities to store diadromous data in RDBES were discussed during the ISSGs 2022 and 2023 annual meetings and brought forward during the 2023 RCG NANSEA/Baltic meeting in Gdansk, as well as the annual meeting of the Working Group on Governance of the Regional Database and Estimation System (WGRDBESGOV) in 2023. To find a solution for this, two possible approaches were discussed at the RCG meeting:

- Solution I foresees the development of a new, specific database (potentially based on the RBDES technical backbone) for recreational fisheries and diadromous fishes that incorporates and hosts all mandatory data (Fisheries-dependent and Fisheries-independent data, including survey data (e.g., electrofishing data)) collected under DCF in the EU and DCRF in the MED/BL.

- Solution II foresees splitting data into **commercial** (including inland commercial) landings & effort data to be stored in **RDBES** and **Survey** (including electrofishing data on early life stage abundance) on a second database such as **DATRAS** (e.g., DATRAS).

Workplan for 2023 – 2024

1. Implement outcomes and recommendations in mandatory data collection that may result from ICES WGEEL and WGNAS modelling developments, ICES EG annual meetings as well as GFCM eel project and other information from relevant workshops and projects.
2. Further, strengthen a regular and direct exchange with ICES EGs and GFCM responsible experts to recognize potential changes in data needs for improvements in data collection for assessments under DCF.
3. Discuss and promote the development of Regional Work Plans to further harmonize data collection for diadromous species where applicable.
4. Motivate diadromous end-user groups and respective experts to collaborate with RBDES (and maybe DATRAS) core group(s) to find a central storage solution for DCF mandatory data collected for diadromous species.

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA BALTIC_2023_R08: Ensure funding availability for data base development and storage solution on ICES servers.

NANSEA BALTIC_2023_R09: Store and host all DCF-collected mandatory data on central ICES databases for better organization and accessibility for end users

5.4.8 Feedback from ISSG 'Recreational fisheries'

Summary of progress of the ISSG activity in 2022-2023

1. The candidate regional work plan was decided (western Baltic cod), but no progress has been made to agree on the content of a RWP for cod. It was agreed to have an 'ISSG Recreational Fisheries' meeting in the summer of 2023 to initiate the process for further RWPs.
2. In the context of end-user needs regarding the changes for recreational fisheries control and data collection, the political agreement was reached on 31st May on the revision of the fisheries control system. One of the biggest changes concerns the recreational fishery sector. The revised Control Regulation stipulates that: "*MS required to register recreational fishers and collect and report recreational catch data of certain species electronically*". So (1) MS will need to put a licensing or registry system in place registering all marine recreational fishers, and (2) MS will need to ensure that recreational fishers report catches of certain species – for which recreational fishing opportunities exist or rebuilding plans – electronically. Currently, this would affect the following species: western & eastern Baltic cod, Baltic salmon, northern sea bass and ICCAT species, e.g., Tuna. Another development highlighted was that associated with the revised European Fisheries and Aquaculture Statistics Regulation which stipulates that: "*Statistical population of natural or legal persons exercising recreational fisheries in the Union & Volume of catches from recreational fisheries exploiting marine biological resources*" need to be provided annually.
3. A species list was developed by WGRFS during the 2022 meeting covering regional seas. This was submitted to the Commission in spring 2023. The list can also be found on the SharePoint. 'ISSG Recreational Fisheries' will work on this list during the summer meeting and see how this can be included in the RWPs.
4. Like every year, some discussion time was dedicated to the progress of incorporating recreational fisheries data into RDBES. Although it was recognized that no progress had been made up until now, 'ISSG Recreational Fisheries' will support the RDBES core group to progress on this. WGRFS organizes an ICES Workshop on Recreational Fisheries in Stock Assessments (WKRFSA), which will take place on the 3rd-5th of July 2023. Prior to WKRFSA, a mandatory data call was launched (deadline 26.06.2023) to explore the inclusion of recreational data into stock assessments. This will also provide the opportunity to allow checking data formats from recreational data provided by individual MS for inclusion into the RDBES.

Workplan for 2023 – 2024

The following tasks for the period (2023-2024) were adopted:

1. Develop Regional Work Plans
2. Control Regulation follow-up impact on recreational fisheries
3. WKRFSA Follow up: Incorporation of recreational fisheries data in the assessment working groups
4. RDBES Core group supports the development of the RDBES to incorporate recreational fisheries data

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

Nor proposals nor recommendations

5.4.9 Feedback from ISSG 'Regionally coordinated stomach sampling'

Progress during 2022-2023

The work by the ISSG "Stomach sampling" was planned and conducted both offline and online. The ISSG met online twice (16 November 2022 and 28 April 2023) to work on the terms of reference.

During the 2022-2023 period, the ISSG "Stomach sampling" worked on the three ToRs listed below.

ToR 1 was dedicated to the work on and the finalisation of the stomach sampling plan, methods and manuals for the regionally coordinated stomach sampling plan in the North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat. The group met twice (15 and 14 participants) to work on this task:

- The rolling sampling scheme and the list of target species for the sampling plan were adopted, and most of the work focused during the online meeting focused on the at-sea stomach sampling manual and the laboratory stomach analysis manual.
- The step-by-step at-sea stomach sampling manual was finalised.
- The step-by-step laboratory stomach analysis manual was finalised
- The remaining task will be to discuss with the ICES data centre and agree on the data structure and uploading process of the stomach content data

ToR 2 was dedicated to the coordination of the International Bottom Trawl Survey (IBTS) and the elaboration of different options for the analysis of collected samples.

It soon became clear that active coordination of the IBTS stomach sampling was not explicitly necessary. The communication between the two groups (IBTS working group, IBTSWG, and this group) had been established, and two exchange and feedback meetings between the IBTSWG and the RCG "ISSG Stomach sampling" have been arranged. A favourable aspect that simplifies the work is the fact that some members of this RCG "ISSG Stomach sampling" are also members of the IBTSWG and are actively involved in the IBTS, which facilitates communication. The result of this communication was the collection of stomachs during the first and third quarters of IBTS in 2022 and during the first quarter in 2023.

However, it should be noted that the IBTSWG is critical to a continuation of the stomach sampling during the IBTS campaign. Sampling is an extra burden during the surveys. As stomachs already collected have not been and are not analysed systematically, freezers are getting full in most laboratories and space in freezers is limited.

In this context, it is not apparent to the IBTSWG whether the samples will be analysed in the near future. The IBTSWG recommendation is to suspend the stomach sampling for the short term until the analysis issues are solved. If funding is not available in the short-term, an indication of how long the samples being held frozen are viable should be provided.

A prerequisite for proper planning of the stomach sampling, subsequent analysis and the associated costs is an, if possible, exact estimation of the expected stomach samples by species and IBTS participating country. So

far, the list of expected stomachs was, to a large extent, correct but was missing an update of the expected numbers of minor species and elasmobranchs.

The numbers for the main species remained unchanged, sampling 2 stomachs per 5 cm length class and species (RCG NA NS&EA RCG Baltic 2022), but the previously not estimated numbers for the "minor" species and the sharks, rays and skates (elasmobranchs) were added to the total numbers. For this, all caught minor species were regarded as "sampled" for the analyses. The elasmobranchs were only sampled when the assessment of the specimen was that it was dying, and the probability of survival was evaluated as being low. Based on a review paper of Ellis et al. 2017 on the capture and post-release mortality of elasmobranchs, we estimated the numbers of expected stomachs from elasmobranchs based on a mortality rate of 10%. The resulting numbers ranged from 188 expected stomachs for France (only quarter 1) in 2025 to 1268 expected stomachs for Scotland (quarters 1 and 3) in 2025, while the numbers for the other years and countries varied between these two extremes.

Based on the updated numbers of expected stomachs, we estimated the costs for the analyses of the stomachs (**ToR 3**) for the next regional workplan period from 2025 to 2027. The expected range of costs associated with the stomach sampling and analysis were estimated based on the reported minimum and maximum costs for the analysis of one stomach (12 and 23 €, respectively) and the resulting costs for the expected ~ 5000 stomachs per year ranged from approximately 172000 to 232000 € (including the recent inflation rate in Europe):

Cost component	Average annual minimum costs (€)	Average annual maximum costs (€)
Stomach analyses + data entry	65 432	125 412
Transport of samples	11 000	11 000
Additional staff costs on-board	82 000	82 000
Data storage, processing and management	8 000	8 000
Miscellaneous expenses	5 500	5 500
SUM	171 932	231 912

Presentation and discussion of the results during the virtual one-day meeting

The results of the work on the three ToRs were presented at the virtual one-day meeting on 25 May 2023. The discussion was mainly focusing on solving the analysis issue. It was clearly pointed out by the presenter that this stomach sampling plan in currently in a crucial situation, with the IBTSWG eventually suspending the stomach sampling until the analysis of the sampled stomachs is solved. During the presentation of the ISSG work, two potential candidates for the analysis of samples from other countries (Poland and the Netherlands) were presented, and the funding of the stomach content analyses was discussed. Additionally, the potential of genetic analyses of stomach contents as a complementary method to the visual examination of stomach contents was discussed.

The topic was also discussed during a tour de table in the plenary at the Technical meeting in Gdansk dedicated to the Regional Work Plan. Several countries expressed their capacity to analyze their own stomachs (i.e. Denmark, France, the Netherlands), or are currently evaluating their capacity, and will decide further if they analyze their samples or will commission other countries for the analyses (Germany).

An extension of the perimeter of the ISSG Stomach sampling to the Baltic Sea was also discussed.

Workplan for 2023 – 2024

1. Incorporate mackerel in quarter one into the sampling plan and update the expected stomach numbers
2. Convince decision-makers to allocate financial resources for the analysis of stomach contents
3. Coordinate the stomach sampling program and the stomach content analyses
4. Follow up with ICES data centre regarding stomach database
5. Consider how stomach content DNA can be coordinated
6. Involve third countries (i.e. Norway, UK-England, UK-Scotland) in the active stomach sampling and analysis process in the North Sea

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA BALTIC_2023_R10: MS participating in IBTS to incorporate not only stomach sampling but also stomach content analysis in the national work plans.

5.5 ToR 5 Propose ways to improve the regional coordination and feedback on regional issues

During this year's meeting, progress has been made under ToR 5 as follows:

- Feedback from ISSG & SG 'National Correspondents'
- Feedback from the RCGs Secretariat
- ISSGs on hold: Data Quality, CS trawler Iberian Waters
- Review the process made in the RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic in 2022-2023
- ISSGs for season 2023-2024

5.5.1 Feedback from ISSG & SG 'National Correspondents'

During the technical meeting, a subgroup session was set up with virtual attendance of NCs that participated in the RCG Econ to discuss the future of the RCG secretariat and find a solution for funding. The following plan was agreed regarding the future of the secretariat:

- A questionnaire was sent out to all MS/NCs regarding financing.
- The gathered information should be analyzed (Anna/Els)
- The ISSC chair will call NCs from all MS to an online discussion meeting in the first week of July 2023 to decide the way forward

In addition, the ISSG chair will call the ISSG NC to an online meeting in September/October 2023, where the following tasks will be discussed:

- Process for revising the combined RoP (RCG Baltic & RCG NANSEA)
- Process/mechanism for proposing chairs
- The need for more pan-regionality for ISSGs

Workplan for 2023 – 2024

1. Find a solution for the long-term support of the Secretariat. [Already agreed to find a solution for the long-term financing and that the intention is to have a solution on the table by the Decision Meeting, September 2023.]

2. Initiate a process for revising the combined RoP (RCG Baltic & RCG NANSEA)

    - The number of RCG chairs depends on whether the Secretariat continues or not

3. Look into the process/mechanism for proposing chairs for both RCGs and ISSGs

    - Suggest a candidate for chairing the RCG Baltic - to be presented at TM 2024
    - Find chair for ISSG EMT 2023/2024

4. Look into the need for liaison between different RCGs – to make ISSG work more pan-regional.

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5.5.2 Feedback from the RCGs Secretariat

The Secretariat service of the RCGs has its most recent background in the progress made and results of the SecWeb project. Through it, the operating bases of this service were established from a practical perspective and as an outcome of the direct work with all the RCGs. Yet, it has not been possible to serve every network at the same level up to now because SecWeb could only embrace a pilot experience.

Despite this, with Secweb's activity, it has been possible to understand the dynamics and context of the different RCGs and thereby determine the effort required to attend to the essential processes of the service and also to explore financing scenarios that could allow maintaining this service in the future.

The objective of establishing a long-term stable structure revealed more complex than expected from a legal and administrative perspective, and it was determined that more time would be needed to find the mechanisms that make it viable for all the Member States. This matter was decided to be taken up by ISSG NCs.

In addition, the short-term/low-value subcontracting of the service by each Member State (MS) was launched, adapting the procedure to the legal requirements for service procurement that each MS raised (financing limit, need for a contract or not, need to open the procedure to offers from other providers...)

At present, 19 MS have committed their acceptance of the service offer received, and the process remains open to try to confirm all of them and explore different possibilities, mainly through some of the financing and contracting mechanisms with EMFAF funds announced by DG MARE and CINEA.

The activity of the RCGs Secretariat during the year 2023 has not yet reached the full scale for which it was foreseen due to the situation with the financing, and it is necessary to prioritize some activities:

It has been given priority to supporting the 6 RCGs in their Annual Technical Meetings and the celebration of the Liaison Meeting in September.

Progress is expected with the development of some new services through the RCGs website. Its maintenance is the second priority for the Secretariat:

- Repository of bilateral and multilateral agreements
- Space with content about each of the ISSGs
- A new section with information about the Secretariat
- Newsletter
- RCGs stakeholders database

The RCG stakeholders database deserves special mention. It has been launched by ILVO also as a result of SecWeb. It is expected to be a tool that greatly facilitates internal communication processes throughout the RCGs networks, as well as the visibility of the experts that make it up. All participants are strongly encouraged to enter their details into the system, which ideally should be totally fed and operational by the end of 2023.

Workplan for 2023 – 2024

- Submit a tender for the Low-value contract published by DG MARE Actions in support of the Regional Coordination Groups' work under the Data Collection Framework (DCF) Regulation
- Apply for EMFAF Call for Proposals for Scientific Advice on Fisheries (Deadline 19 September 2023)

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA BALTIC_2023_R11: All MS to include the text about the long-term funding of the Secretariat under *Textbox 1.B. Other collection activities* in their national work plans.

5.5.3 Review the process made in the RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic in 2022-2023

Progress during RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic TM 2023:

During the RCG NANSEA and RCG TM 2023, feedback on work during 2022-2023 was presented by ISSG chairs, issues discussed by the RCG, and tasks agreed for work during 2023-2024. In addition, presentations were made by the Commission and ICES. Updates were given on the RDBES developments, and presentations were made regarding the latest developments in SmartDots and genetics sampling.

Part of the work at the TM was done in subgroups. The NCs subgroup connected with NCs and the Commission representatives at RCG ECON to discuss funding of the RCGs Secretariat. The subgroup on RCG and End Users interaction discussed the roles and responsibilities of RCG vs. ICES. The subgroup on RDB Overviews discussed data-related recommendations directed to RCG and tasks for the next ISSG season.

As the RWP needs to be ready for agreement at the Decision meeting in September 2024 and for evaluation by STECF, time was allocated to present the RWP and discuss both in plenary and subgroup. Work was done to be very clear on agreements and commitments by MS when they will decide on the RWP during the Decision meeting.

Workplan for 2023 – 2024

Tasks for 2023-2024

- Propose a Work plan for RCGs 2025-2027 for the TM 2024.

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

5.5.4 ISSGs for season 2023-2024

For the intersessional work 2022-2023, 16 different ISSGs (including WGRDBESGOV, which is not a proper RCG ISSG). All ISSGs presented their results during the meeting. There was a separate session to discuss the ISSGs on hold, and it was decided to keep the ISSGs 'Data Quality' and ISSG 'Optimized and Operational Sampling Plans' on hold and to remove the ISSG 'Landing Obligation' from the list.

The set-up of working intersessional again proved to be successful in achieving the goals to make regional coordination efficient on a regional scale. The suggested next steps for the different ISSGs are presented in this report and have been endorsed by the RCG Baltic and RCG NANSEA. In total 16 different ISSGS (including WGRDBESGOV) are suggested to work actively on different tasks within different topics in 2023-2024. The overview of the suggested ISSGs for the next period is presented below (Table 5.5.5.1)

Table 5.5.6.1. *ISSGs overview for season 2023-2024*

TOR	Topic	ISSG	ISSG short name	chairs
TOR 1	End-users and RCGs	End-user and RCG interaction	End-user and RCG	RCG chairs
TOR 2	Data Analysis and Quality	RDB catch, effort and sampling overviews	RDB overviews	Ana Cláudia Fernandes, Lucia Zarauz
		Métier and transversal variable issues	Métier/transversal	Sébastien Demeneche Josefine Egekvist
		Data Quality	*Quality*	*On hold*
		Electronic Monitoring Technologies	EMT	Gildas Glemarec TBD
	Regional Database	ICES WGRDBESGOV		Els Torreele, Lucia Zarauz
		RDB Core group		Henrik Kjems-Nielsen
TOR 4	Regional Work Plans	Regional Work Plans	RWP	Joel Vigneau Maria Hansson
	Diadromous Fishes	Diadromous Fishes	Diadromous	Marko Freese TBD
	Surveys	Surveys	Surveys	Sieto Verver Christoph Stransky
	Regional Sampling plans	*Optimized and Operational Regional Sampling Plans*	*Umbrella*	*On hold*
		Case Study on the trawl fishery in Iberian Waters	CS Iberian Waters	Rita Vasconcelos
		Case Study on freezer trawler fleet exploiting pelagic fisheries in the NEA	CS pelagic freezer trawler	Harriet van Overzee Jens Ulleweit
		Case study on fisheries for small pelagics in the Baltic	CS small pelagics Baltic	Katja Ringdahl Marie Storr-Paulsen
		Evaluation of the data collected for the SSF at EU level	SSF	Estanis Mugerza
		Optimisation of PETS bycatch sampling	PETS	Estanis Mugerza
		Regionally coordinated stomach sampling	Stomach sampling	Pierre Cresson Matthias Bernreuther
		Recreational fishery	Recreational	Harry Strehlow
TOR 5	Governance	National Correspondents	NC	Anna Hasslow

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA BALTIC_2023_D06: Agree on proposed ISSGs to work during season 2023-2024 and ensure that experts and manpower are assigned to ISSG work.

5.6 ToR 6 AOB

During this year's meeting, progress has been made under ToR 6 as follows:

- Feedback on 'Mechanisms in place to promote the acceptance of vessel owners to take scientific observers onboard.'
- The stakeholder database is available on fisheries-rcg.eu website

5.6.1 Feedback on 'Mechanisms in place to promote the acceptance of vessels owners to take scientific observers onboard'

Scientific observation at sea is one of the main pillars of biological data collection on fisheries in the context of the DCF. This monitoring method provides data on fisheries catches (not only landings but also discards and incidental bycatch of PETS).

According to Article 12 of the DCF Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2017 on the establishment of a Union framework for the collection, management and use of data in the fisheries sector and support for scientific advice regarding the common fisheries policy and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 199/2008 (recast)):

"*2. The masters of Union fishing vessels shall accept onboard scientific observers and cooperate with them in order to allow them to discharge their duties while on board Union fishing vessels, as well as the use of alternative data collection methods, where appropriate, set out in national work plans, without prejudice to international obligations.*

3. The masters of Union fishing vessels may refuse to accept on board the scientific observers operating under the at-sea monitoring scheme only on the basis of an obvious lack of space on the vessel or for safety reasons in accordance with national law. In such cases, data shall be collected through alternative data collection methods which are set out in the national work plan and designed and controlled by the body in charge of the implementation of the national work plan."

Despite this, in some countries / métiers / fleets / areas, refusal rates from the industry have been/are high and even impair the achievement of the sampling plans (number of trips or vessels sampled). This is evident from data reported by countries to the FDI (Fisheries Dependent Information) data call, more specifically in Table 8 about Refusal rates (data for 2014-2020 available at https://stecf.jrc.ec.europa.eu/dd/fdi).

PRT is dealing with this issue in some fleets / métiers, and prior to the TM, contacted the RCG chairs about interest in having feedback from the different countries about how they deal with this issue. RCG chairs proposed to have a discussion on this at the RCG Technical Meeting 2023. The objective of the discussion was to Identify the mechanisms in place to promote the acceptance of vessel owners to take scientific observers onboard.

In the Physical-Technical Meeting, there was a specific time slot in the agenda for this discussion. In the discussion, the topic was introduced, and it was agreed that the time slot would be used for a first discussion on the topic, and that after the slot and before the report, each member state would give information/feedback on their process of vessel selection and contact for deployment of scientific observers onboard of commercial fishing vessels, and on the mechanisms that MS have had/have now / are planning to have to deal with refusals. These can be e.g. negative consequences (in terms of quota, license, effort, other), no actions, positive incentives (in terms of quota, license, effort, other), any system agreed with the fleet/sector (fixed rotation system), other.

Feedback from MS is summarized below in a Table. This list may not be exhaustive and completely accurate, it resulted from feedback from RCG participants and not from formal consultation through NCs:

Table 5.6.1.1. *Information/feedback on process of vessel selection and contact for deployment of scientific observers onboard of commercial fishing vessels by MS*

MS	Vessel selection	Actions / Mechanisms for dealing with refusals
PRT	Random selection of vessels above a certain LOA	- Institute (or company hired to implement this sampling) contacts vessel owners/crew. - No actions following industry refusal/s for onboard sampling.
ESP	IEO - Long Distance Fisheries - NAFO IEO - North East Atlantic non-Basque-vessels: Random selection of vessels. AZTI: Random selection of week*vessel	- IEO - Long Distance Fisheries - NAFO: The Fisheries Administration selects a vessel for onboard sampling in a given trip; includes this obligation when it emits the fishing license for that vessel for that trip; communicates this to the vessel owner. - IEO - North East Atlantic non-Basque-vessels: The institute (or company hired to implement this sampling) contacts vessel owners/crew. When there is an issue with refusals, the Fisheries Administration sends a letter to the vessel owners and Fishers Organizations about the importance of onboard sampling. - AZTI: Pay the vessel for the cost of food and drink for the observer onboard. Always send data reports (non-anonymous) on a specific trip to the vessel owner.
FRA	Selection of vessels, with replacement and unequal probability based on vessel activity.	- Institute contacts vessel owners/crew. Since 2022, vessels that respond with "soft" refusals are maintained as selection for sampling when the conditions are met in the near future. - Promote communication with Fishers Organizations and vessel owners - Distribution/Lottery of merchandise items - Implication of Fisheries Administration with Fishers Organizations when there are major issues with refusals - Each vessel goes through a security check every year and is given a security document specifying, among others, the maximum number of crew and the possibility to embark 1 or 2 special personnel (e.g. scientific observers) - Since 2023, regulation obliges each vessel with LOA >=15m to participate in an observer programme
IRE	Separate fleet by sampling frame (area). Selection of vessels with unequal probability based on landings. Vessel selection by quarter/sampling frame	- Institute contacts vessel owners/crew. - If vessels selected for onboard sampling respond with a "soft refusal" (i.e. unable to take a sampler but willing to partake in the program) then the Institute asks for a self-sample (1 haul per each 24h plus associated meta-data). Refusals are recorded trip by trip. - The institute pays an amount when the self-samples and associated meta-data are delivered.

MS	Vessel selection	Actions / Mechanisms for dealing with refusals
		- Promote communication with Fishers Organizations and vessel owners. - Always send data reports (non-anonymous) on a specific trip to the associated vessel owner.
BEL	Random selection of vessels from a list of vessels that have conditions for onboard sampling	- Institute contacts vessel owners/crew. - No actions following industry refusal/s for onboard sampling. - For a specific area, it has been difficult to implement onboard sampling. In that area, a "scientific quota" was created to be granted to vessels that take a scientific observer onboard (the quota is to be used on that specific trip with a specific limit in terms of number of days). Vessels apply for this, and a certain number of vessels are selected for sampling each quarter. - Meetings between the institute and the fishing sector.
NLD	3 fisheries are sampled: Active demersal – Trips are selected randomly from reference fleet.	3 fisheries are sampled: - Active demersal: Vessels in the reference fleets continuously go in and out of the list. Self-sampling sampling program, where the institute pays an amount when the sample is delivered. But for vessels to stay on this list, they need to accept to take a scientific observer onboard when asked to. When having issues with recruitment for the reference fleet, contact fishers organizations. Meetings between the institute and fishing sector about DCF and other projects. Annual aggregated data report (anonymous) is made public. Refusals are recorded.
	Pelagic freezer trawlers – Weighted random selection of company.	- Pelagic freezer trawlers: Three companies own all vessels. The institute contacts the randomly selected company and requests to join the next departing vessel. The company selects the vessel for a given trip and contacts the Institute. Info-day/Meetings between institute and vessel owners and crew; Always send data report (non-anonymous) on a specific trip to the company; Annual aggregated data report (anonymous) is made public on a bi-annual basis. Refusals are recorded.
	Passive fishery (more seasonal) – Non-random selection of trips.	- Passive fishery: Difficult to maintain random selection in practice. Continuous contact between observers and vessel owners and crew. No actions following industry refusal/s for onboard sampling.
DEU - NS	High sea fisheries	- High sea fisheries: Good relations with the owning companies and planning all observer activities beforehand at the beginning of the year.
	Brown shrimp fisheries	- Brown shrimp fisheries (largest fleet in number of vessels): Scientific observers onboard. In addition, with the implementation of the landing obligation, a co-sampling concept was developed by the initiative of the fishery. Fishers take bucket samples of catch, freeze them and deliver them to the Institute.
	Other fisheries: Random selection of vessels.	- Other fisheries: The Institute contacts selected vessel owners or crew. Difficult to maintain random selection in practice.

MS	Vessel selection	Actions / Mechanisms for dealing with refusals
DEU - BS	Each year randomized list of vessels, to select vessels for trips throughout the year start from the top of the list and go down along the list as needed, going back to the top of the list if needed.	- Have self-sampling and onboard sampling, with the same procedure in both. - Institute contacts selected vessel owners or crew. After 3 attempts (at different times of the day) it is considered that contact was not possible. Vessels that respond with "hard" refusals are blacklisted for one year (removed from the list to be contacted) and are back on the list in the following year. Vessels that respond with "soft" refusals are maintained in the list.
DNK	Random selection of vessels.	- Institute contacts selected vessel owners or crew. In previous years, the process has been: Vessels that respond with "hard" refusals are blacklisted for one year (removed from the list to be contacted) and are back on the list in the following year. Vessels that respond with "soft" refusals are maintained in the list. Refusals are recorded trip by trip. Since 2023, the process has been the same but with a difference: The list of blacklisted vessels is sent each year to Fishers Organization. Refusals are recorded vessel by vessel. - Always send data report (non-anonymous) on a specific trip to the vessel owner; Info-day/Meetings between institute and vessel owners and crew where data reports are shown (non-anonymous); Quarterly*Area aggregated data report (anonymous) is made public. - All trawlers in Skagerrak now have Electronic Monitoring (cameras) for control purposes.
FIN		- Onboard sampling only in a recent pilot.
SWE	Random selection without replacement within a quarter	- Institute contacts selected vessel owners. - In the case of demersal trawlers, the Institute contacts vessel owners by mail, asking them to contact the Institute to arrange a trip in the quarter. If there is no response within the quarter, the Administration informs the vessel that they risk a fine if they do not do so. - Pay each vessel a small daily amount when taking scientific observers onboard to compensate for the cost of having observers onboard (food/accommodation). - Communication with Fishers Organizations raises awareness that monitoring by scientific observers is often discussed in, e.g. MSC evaluations. - Mandatory for vessels to participate in the DCF observer program.
POL	Random selection of vessels.	- Institute contacts selected vessel owners/crew. Vessels that respond with "hard" refusals are blacklisted for one year (removed from the list to be contacted) and are back on the list in the following year. Vessels that respond with "soft" refusals are maintained in the list. - No actions following industry refusal/s for onboard sampling.
EST	NEAFC: Non-Probabilistic Judgement Sampling (NPJS). Sample one vessel per quarter and try to cover all vessels, but the final selection of a vessel is not random.	- Baltic: Where the main vessels are. No onboard sampling. - Long Distance Fisheries - NEAFC: Onboard sampling. Only one company, good communication, no issues.

MS	Vessel selection	Actions / Mechanisms for dealing with refusals
	NAFO: In practice, Census - all vessels take observer onboard.	- Long Distance Fisheries - NAFO: Onboard sampling. No issues. The regulation states that vessels have to have a control and scientific observer or an electronic reporting system. Vessels without observers will be inspected more frequently, which works as an incentive.
LVA		- Institute contacts selected vessel owners/crew. - No issues. - No actions.
LTU	Random selection of vessels that do not land in LTU (and that are not sampled onshore).	- Institute contacts selected vessel owners/crew. - No actions following industry refusal/s for onboard sampling.

5.6.2 Stakeholder database available on fisheries-rcg.eu website

A demonstration of how to register in the stakeholder database was made. It is very useful for the RCG work and secretariat to target communication. https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/Database/

https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/stakeholders/

Integrating Stakeholder Database into Fisheries Website: A Practical Guide - Fisheries Regional Coordination Groups (fisheries-rcg.eu)

Work in progress

6 Conclusions

The approach of having the ISSG as the basis of the RCG NANSEA and the RCG Baltic will be continued. The ISSGs are encouraged to start to continue their work after the RCG TM. The output produced in the ISSGs is very productive and forms the basis of the discussions and future development of the RCG work. The back-to-back meeting of the two RCGs (i.e., RGG NANSEA and the RCG Baltic) was continued and again positively received by members of both RCGs.

Because of the support from the RCG Secretariat, in 2023, the number of chairs was reduced from 4 to 3 (i.e., one per region). The number of chairs still depends on the continuation of the RCG Secretariat and the respective reduction in workload for the chairs.

The digital one-day meeting was received positively and reduced the number of presentations during the TM. The physical meeting could connect remotely, which worked well as presenters who could not attend it could give their presentations and participate in discussions.

For ISSGs presenting their work which has issues that they would like the RCGs to discuss, it would work better to present different solutions to discuss, rather than having open questions, which are difficult to discuss in the big group and within the short time available.

It was suggested to move the dates of the meeting one week, in order to have the RCG meetings after the Annual Reports have been submitted by 31st May.

7 Next meeting

The RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic 2023 meeting will be followed up with the one-day RCG DM for NCs (27th September 2023).

Preliminary dates and venue for the next RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic TM are 11-14 June 2024 in Bremerhaven, Germany, for the physical meeting and 4 June 2024 for the virtual one-day meeting.

The chairs for the RCG NANSEA 2024 are Josefine Egekvist and Rita Vasconcelos; for RCG Baltic 2024, Maciej Adamowicz.

8 Annex 1: List of Participants

Country/ Org.	Name	Email	Comment
PL	**Maciej Adamowicz**	**madamowicz@mir.gdynia.pl**	**Chair of RCG Baltic**
PT	**Dália Reis**	**Dalia.CC.Reis@azores.gov.pt**	**Chair of RCG NANSEA**
DK	**Josefine Egekvist**	**jsv@aqua.dtu.dk**	**Chair of RCG NANSEA**; Chair ISSG Métier issues
FR	Alexis Paumier	alexis.paumier@agriculture.gouv.fr	**NC**
IE	Ailbhe Kavanagh	ailbhe.kavanagh@marine.ie	Observer
PT	Ana Cláudia Fernandes	acfernandes@ipma.pt	Chair of ISSG chair RDB overviews
DK	Anja Gadgaard Boye	angabo@aqua.dtu.dk	**NC**
SE	Anna Hasslow	anna.hasslow@havochvatten.se	**NC,** Chair of ISSG NC
SE	Annelie Hilvarsson	annelie.hilvarsson@slu.se	Participant
LT	Antanas Kontautas	antanas.kontautas@ku.lt	Participant
DE	Christoph Stransky	christoph.stransky@thuenen.de	**NC,** Chair of ISSG Surveys
PT	Cristina Rosa	crosa@dgrm.mm.gov.pt	**NC**
ES	David Espino García	david.espino@ieo.csic.es	Participant
LV	Didzis Ustups	Didzis.Ustups@bior.lv	**NC**
EE	Elo Rasmann	elo.rasmann@agri.ee	**NC**
BE	Els Torreele	els.torreele@ilvo.vlaanderen.be	**NC,** co-chair WGRDBESGOV
SE	Eros Quesada	eros.quesada@slu.se	Participant
ES	Estanis Mugerza	emugerza@azti.es	Chair of ISSGs PETS and SSF
PT	Filipa Pinho Duarte	filipa.p.duarte@madeira.gov.pt	Participant
FR	Florent Renaud	Florent.Renaud@ifremer.fr	Participant
DK	Gildas Glemarec	ggle@aqua.dtu.dk	Chair of ISSG EMT
NL	Harriet van Overzee	harriet.vanoverzee@wur.nl	Chair of ISSG CS pelagic freezer trawler NEA
DE	Harry Strehlow	harry.strehlow@thuenen.de	Chair of ISSGs Recreational fishery
FI	Heikki Lehtinen	heikki.lehtinen@mmm.fi	**NC**
IE	Helen McCormick	Helen.McCormick@Marine.ie	Participant
ICES	Henrik Kjems-Nielsen	henrikkn@ices.dk	Chair of RDBES Core group
SE	Henrik Pärn	henrik.parn@slu.se	Observer
SE	Ida Ahlbeck Bergendahl	ida.ahlbeck.bergendahl@slu.se	Observer
PL	Iga Gaca	igaca@mir.gdynia.pl	Participant
PL	Ireneusz Wójcik	iwojcik@mir.gdynia.pl	**NC**
LT	Irina Jakovleva	irina.jakovleva@zuv.lt	Participant
ES	Isabel Bruno	isabel.bruno@ieo.es	Participant
LV	Ivo Sics	ivo.sics@bior.lv	Participant
DE	Jens Ulleweit	jens.ulleweit@thuenen.de	Chair of ISSG CS pelagic freezer trawler NEA
PL	Joanna Pawlak	jpawlak@mir.gdynia.pl	Participant
FR	Joël Vigneau	Joel.Vigneau@ifremer.fr	Chair of ISSG RWP

Annex I: List of Participants

Country/ Org.	Name	Email	Comment
ES	Jose Lorenzo	jose.lorenzo@ieo.csic.es	Participant
FI	Joni Tiainen	joni.tiainen@luke.fi	Participant
SE	Josefin Sundin	josefin.sundin@slu.se	Participant
ES	Juana Poza	jpoza@mapa.es	Participant
FI	Jukka Pönni	Jukka.Ponni@luke.fi	Participant
DK	Julie Olivia Davies	joco@dtu.dk	Participant
SE	Karolina Wikström	karolina.wikstrom@slu.se	Participant
PL	Kasia Krakówka	kkrakowka@mir.gdynia.pl	Participant
SE	Katja Ringdahl	katja.ringdahl@slu.se	Participant
MT	Kelly Camilleri	kelly.camilleri.1@gov.mt	Observer
LT	Kristina Maknavičienė	kristina.maknaviciene@zuv.lt	Participant
BE	Laura Lemey	laura.lemey@ilvo.vlaanderen.be	Participant
COM	Leonie O'Dowd	leonie.o'dowd@ec.europa.eu	EU COM
IE	Linda O'Hea	linda.ohea@marine.ie	**NC**
ICES	Lotte Worsøe Clausen	Lotte.worsoe.clausen@ices.dk	ICES
ES	Lucía Canas	lucia.canas@ieo.csic.es	Participant
ES	Lucía Zarauz	lzarauz@azti.es	Co-chair of ISSG RDB catch, effort and sampling overviews; co-chair WGRDBESGOV
LV	Maksims Kovsars	Maksims.Kovsars@bior.lv	Participant
SE	Maria Hansson	maria.hansson@slu.se	Chair of ISSG RWP
DK	Marie Storr-Paulsen	msp@aqua.dtu.dk	Chair of ISSG CS small pelagics Baltic
DE	Marko Freese	marko.freese@thuenen.de	Chair of ISSG Diadromous
PL	Marzenna Pachur	pachur@mir.gdynia.pl	Participant
DE	Matthias Bernreuther	matthias.bernreuther@thuenen.de	Chair of ISSG Stomach sampling
COM	Melissa Duflot	Melissa.DUFLOT@ec.europa.eu	FishGenome roadmap
ES	Naiara Rodríguez-Ezpeleta	nrodriguez@azti.es	
ES	Norma Eréndira García Núñez	negarcia@mapa.es	Participant on behalf of NC
SE	Nuno Prista	nuno.prista@slu.se	Participant
ES	Oriol Canals Delgado	ocanals@azti.es	Participant
FR	Pierre Cresson	Pierre.Cresson@ifremer.fr	Chair of ISSG Stomach sampling
LT	Remigijus Sakas	remigijus.sakas@apc.ku.lt	Participant
PT	Rita Vasconcelos	rita.vasconcelos@ipma.pt	Chair of ISSGs Optimized RSP and CS trawler Iberian Waters
FR	Sebastien Demaneche	sdemanec@ifremer.fr	Chair ISSG Métier issues
NL	Sieto Verver	sieto.verver@wur.nl	**NC**, Chair of ISSG Surveys
RCG secretariat	Susana Rivero Rodríguez	srivero@cetmar.org	Technical support
SE	Susanne Tärnlund	susanne.tarnlund@slu.se	Participant

Annex I: List of Participants

Country/ Org.	Name	Email	Comment
PT	Suzana Faria Cano	sfcano@dgrm.mm.gov.pt	Participant
DE	Sven Stötera	sven.stoetera@thuenen.de	Participant
FI	Tapani Pakarinen	tapani.pakarinen@luke.fi	Chair of ISSG Diadromous
EE	Tiit Raid	tiit.raid@ut.ee	Participant
BE	Tim Plevoets	tim.plevoets@ilvo.vlaanderen.be	Participant
DE	Uwe Krumme	uwe.krumme@thuenen.de	Participant
LT	Vilda Griuniene	Vilda.Griuniene@zum.lt	**NC**

Group photo, Gdansk