



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

3, 10 – 13 June 2025

Lysekil, Sweden

Supported by



RCGs Secretariat



**Co-funded by
the European Union**



RCG NANSEA AND RCG BALTIC 2025 REPORT - Part I

Recommended format for purposes of citation:

ii

RCG NANSEA RCG Baltic 2025. Regional Coordination Group North Atlantic, North Sea & Eastern Arctic and Regional Coordination Group Baltic. 2025. Part I Report, 72 pgs. Part II Decisions and Recommendations, 11 pgs. Part III, Intersessional Subgroup (ISSG) 2024-2025 Reports, 157 pgs.

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Acronyms

ACOM	ICES Advisory Committee
AR	Annual Report
COM	EU Commission
DCF	Data Collection Framework
DGMare	Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
DLS	Data Limited Stocks
DM	Decision Meeting
DTMT	Data Transmission Monitoring Tool
ECON	Economic issues
EM	Electronic Monitoring
EMFAF	European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund
ETP	Endangered, Threatened and Protected Species
FDI	Fisheries Dependent Information
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
MRF	Marine Recreational Fishery
MS	Member State
MSFD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive
NAFO	Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organisation
NANSEA	North Atlantic, North Sea and Eastern Arctic
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
REM	Remote Electronic Monitoring
RFMO	Regional Fisheries Management Organisation
RSP	Regional Sampling Plan
RWP	Regional Work Plan
SCICOM	ICES Science Committee
SID	Stock Information Database
SG	Subgroup
SSCF	Small Scale Coastal Fisheries
SSF	Small Scale Fisheries





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Acronyms

STECF	Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries
TAC	Total Allowable Catch
TAF	Transparent Assessment Framework
TFA	Thematic Focus Areas
TM	Technical Meeting
VMS	Vessel Monitoring System



Executive summary

The 2025 RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic Report Part I summarizes the work carried out under various Terms of Reference (ToRs) during the first year of the current 3-year cycle, with significant contributions from various intersessional subgroups (ISSGs). The Technical Meeting (TM) in June 2025 served as a forum for presenting ISSG outcomes, evaluating progress, and discussing recommendations and decisions.

ToR I: Improve the alignment between data collection and end-user needs (by region)

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 throughout the year and discussed recommendations. Furthermore, the topic was discussed in dedicated sessions in plenary during the technical meeting.

The European Commission (COM) provided feedback on control regulation recommendations and the Data Collection Framework (DCF) IT platform, as well as on the process of identification and communication of Data Transmission Issues. Moreover, feedback was also provided on the issue of data confidentiality, especially about work that is being done to identify confidentiality aspects that are limiting data submission and sharing. Finally, reference was made to Regional Work Plans 2025-2027 and the following of 2028-2030. In addition, COM provided a summary of the new Implementing Regulation for recreational fisheries under the Revised Control Regulation. This Implementing Regulation establishes rules for monthly and annual submission of recreational catch data by Member States.

ICES offered updates on benchmarks, developments in the Stock Information Database (SID) with forecasting capabilities, in the Transparent Assessment Framework (TAF), as well as in data calls, data security and ICES recommendation system. ICES emphasized the importance of collaboration with RCGs for data quality and alignment of priorities.

Discussions highlighted that some degree of mismatch exists between data collection efforts and end-user needs, with concerns about data being collected but not fully utilized, and new data requests added without corresponding reductions or adequate funding. This underscored the need for prioritizing data collection and improving communication with end-users. Some of the key aspects discussed were data use by assessment working groups (and this was identified as the most relevant and overarching aspect), use of statistical tools for optimization of work plans, interactions with end-users about data, prioritization of effort of research surveys at sea, integration of new technologies in data collection, and also how to deal with new data requests and prioritize accordingly.

In this context, the ICES Working Group on the Optimization of Biological Sampling (WGBIOPTIM) presented open-access R-based tools designed to optimize sampling strategies, reduce effort, and improve precision. As few countries have adopted these tools nationally, RCG NANSEA & Baltic will connect with the WG to further promote the use of such tools for optimization at national and regional levels.

ToR 2: Implement and maintain 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 'RDBES 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 RDBES was given.

The Regional Database & Estimation System (RDBES) remains central to data quality and transparency for stock assessments, with full implementation targeted for 2027. The RDBES Core Group provided feedback on developments. Most MS successfully uploaded commercial landings, effort, and sample data to the RDBES in response to the 2025 data call. Future developments include recreational data formats, improved stock list management, and advanced quality checks.

The Working Group on Governance of the RDBES (WGRDBESGOV) proposed a full trial for selected stocks to prepare for the full implementation of the RDBES in 2027, covering the entire workflow from data upload to stock coordination. A series of training working groups and workshops are planned in 2025 to give support for data submitters, national estimators, and stock coordinators. Improved communication with these three latter groups of people is needed, with work towards this in progress with ICES and RCG secretariat. A single Joint RCG & ICES Data Call is proposed with distinct deadlines for ICES AWG needs, RCG overviews (April 1st for complete regional data), and FDI variables (June/August).

The ISSG for 'RDBES catch, effort and sampling overviews' continued to prepare and further develop tables and graphical outputs based on RDBES data. The ISSG identified inconsistencies in the data and emphasized the need for MS to verify their reported information. A set of main types of outputs were presented for discussion and call for other ISSGs to express their needs for specific outputs to be produced tailored to their needs to support regional coordination. For producing the RWP table 2.1, there was a discussion on the interpretation on threshold rules for mandatory sampling of stocks.

The ISSG "Métier and Transversal Variables" maintains métier codes and reference lists and evaluates any requests for adding codes. Annual and multiannual métier description reports are made to follow development in reporting by métiers. The ISSG is developing best practice guidelines for cross-validation methods and proposed a template for MS to document methodologies for RDBES CE and CL data. Challenges for Small Scale Fisheries (SSF) and passive gear effort remain, and the group will follow the implementation of the new Control Regulation.

The ISSG on Surveys successfully managed cost-sharing agreements for key surveys and stressed the importance of early consultation regarding survey changes. During the TM, the ISSG revised the tasks for the season 2025-2026.

The ISSG on Electronic Monitoring Technologies (EMT) mapped current state of EMT usage in MS and highlighted the growing interest in EMTs in the collection in different types of monitoring data, especially with the new Control Regulation which adds data requirements. The need for regional coordination and standardization to overcome data sharing and confidentiality challenges and facilitate wider adoption not only of EMT but also of Artificial Intelligence assisted EMT solutions is highlighted.

ToR 3: Assess impact of new legislation on data collection

Based on Member States responses to a questionnaire sent out before the Technical Meeting, the RCG summarized how MS addressed the Commission's expectations from the EU Marine Action Plan in their National Work Plans (NWP) 2025-2027, focusing on bycatch of sensitive species (Endangered, Threatened, and Protected species, or ETPs). In all, adaptations of NWPs from MS were especially directed at high-risk fisheries and included aspects such as incorporation of EMT in regular data collection, dedicated ETP monitoring by scientific observers at sea and enhanced data collection and sampling protocols of ETP, incorporating self-sampling, changing spatial coverage, initiating or increasing sampling coverage, and using different fishery-specific reference fleets within multi-gear fleet.

Concerns persist that SSF still mostly lack at-sea sampling or have insufficient sampling effort, often due to safety reasons for small boats or perceived low-risk. Some MS also reported monitoring ETPs bycatch through projects outside the DCF framework.

ToR 4: Revision and update of Regional Work Plans

The Regional Work Plans (RWPs) 2025-2027 were approved by the Commission and became legally binding by being referenced in the National Work Plans (NWPs) 2025-2027 submitted by the MS in 2024 and approved by the COM. The ISSG 'Regional Work Plan' is developing a strategic plan and a roadmap for the RWP 2028-2030, with the format based on the 2025-2027 RWP. All ISSGs are tasked with finalizing their roadmaps and deciding on their ambition levels for 2030.

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 ETP species 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 overarching ISSG on Optimized and Operational Regional Sampling Plans was on hold and will continue on hold in 2025-2026, as no need for reactivation was identified.

The three ISSGs for Regional Sampling Plan case studies presented their work's status. In the ISSG Case Study on the small pelagic in the Baltic Sea the regional sampling plan became a fully implemented part of the RWP in 2025, with all Baltic MS participating. The ISSG 'Case study Freezer trawler fleet exploiting pelagic fisheries in the Northeast Atlantic' is working towards a regional sampling plan, focusing on harmonizing age sampling methodology and developing a raising methodology. The ISSG 'Case Study of the trawl fishery in Iberian Waters' progressed with a preliminary survey on foreign landings and summary of recent fishing activity data and defined that the pilot study planned for 2026 will focus on sampling of landings of Portuguese vessels in Spanish ports, during the regular implementation of the national work plan of Spain.

The ISSG on Evaluation of data collected for the Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF) highlighted that the knowledge of SSF catches and effort remains a challenge, emphasizing the critical need to monitor the implementation of the EU Control Regulation regarding logbook reporting and high-resolution geospatial data for SSF. Integrating all SSF data into the RDBES is crucial for identifying sampling needs.

The ISSG 'Identification of case studies for ETPs bycatch monitoring' highlighted that continuous monitoring of the EU Control Regulation's implementation regarding ETPs bycatch is paramount. The integration of data on monitoring of ETPs bycatch into the RDBES is key, and it is necessary to know the current level of such integration, as well as what is the current monitoring coverage across the fisheries in each region and to identify sampling needs.

The ISSG 'Diadromous Species' highlighted that the DIASPARA project is improving and harmonizing data collection, exchange and assessment methodologies for diadromous species (eel, salmon, sea trout). Collaborative work is aiming to integrate DCF and RWP requirements into relevant ICES Expert Groups' Terms of Reference.

ISSG 'Recreational fisheries' focused on strengthening data collection and regulatory compliance, particularly with the Control Regulation mandating electronic daily reporting of recreational catches by 2026. This additional data source for reporting of recreational catches will co-exist with the DCF sampling of recreational fisheries. Attention was also dedicated to identifying the need for data collection on new species (not mandatory by the DCF regulation) for end-users.

The ISSG 'Regionally coordinated stomach sampling and analysis' updated its manual, intensified collaboration with WGSAM, updated the reference period for the expected stomach numbers for the North Sea sampling plan, and is exploring the development of a sampling plan for the Baltic Sea. An intercalibration workshop for stomach analysis methods is planned. The ISSG emphasized the importance of incorporating stomach content analysis (and not just collecting) in NWP's and of data upload to the ICES stomach database (and suggestions for its improvement were identified).

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

The ISSG 'National Correspondents' focused on data confidentiality, with a questionnaire collecting national input on rules preventing data disclosure and advocating for improved data request processes. They strongly recommended that ICES streamline all data calls through one formal channel to enhance follow-up, security, and traceability. Discussions also covered the urgent need for short-term funding for the RCG Secretariat for 2026 and long-term funding solutions.

The RCGs Secretariat provides crucial support for RCG activities, including website maintenance and communication. Developments ensured through the project SecWeb 2.0 are considered important, such as development of a recommendations and decision platform.

The combined RCG NANSEA & Baltic Technical Meeting setup (virtual day followed by physical meeting) proved effective, allowing for focused discussions and interactions. The ISSG structure continues to be successful in driving regional coordination, with 15 ISSGs continuing their work into 2025-2026. A new initiative involving a meeting between RCG chairs and ISSG chairs in November 2024 proved beneficial and will be repeated.



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	I
Reporting year within the current cycle (1,2 or 3)	I
Chair(s)	RCG NANSEA: Josefine Egekvist, Denmark & Rita Vasconcelos, Portugal RCG Baltic: Vilda Griuniene, Lithuania

Meeting venue	Meeting dates
Virtual Meeting	3 June 2025
Institute of Marine Research, Lysekil, Sweden (Physical meeting)	10- 13 June 2025





2. Terms of Reference

1. Improve the alignment between data collection and end-user needs (by region)

- Communication with end-users, follow up on recommendations.

2. Implement and maintain data quality in data collection

- Documentation of QC procedures, Fisheries overviews, sampling overview, follow implementation and development of RDBES, incorporating new methods in data collection.

3. Assess impact of new legislation on data collection

- Control regulation, marine protected areas, etc.

4. Revision and update of Regional Work Plans

- Revise existing and include new agreements.
- Follow up in table 2.1 species.

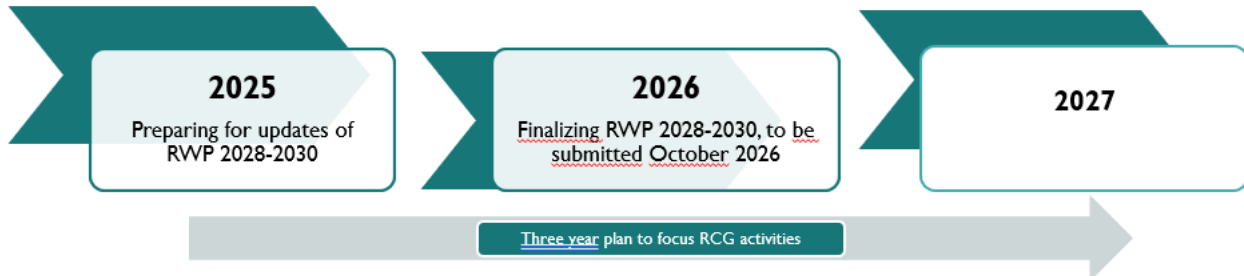
5. Propose ways to improve the regional coordination and feedback on regional issues

- Governance, continue the support by RCG Secretariat in developing and adopting tools and procedures for regional cooperation and coordination.



3. Summary of Work plan RCGs 2025-2027

Milestones and work plan for RCG NANSEA & Baltic 2025-2027



	Year 1 (2025)	Year 2 (2026)	Year 3 (2027)
End-user Needs	<i>Fine tune dialogue & assess additional needs</i>	<i>Fine tune dialogue & assess additional needs (cont.)</i>	<i>Fine tune dialogue & assess additional needs (cont.)</i>
	RCG role in Benchmarks Cont. review end-user needs Exchange of recommendations	RCG role in Benchmarks Cont. review end-user needs Exchange of recommendations	RCG role in Benchmarks Cont. review end-user needs Exchange of recommendations
	<i>Transition to RDBES, electronic data capture</i>		
Data Quality	<i>Procedures and documentation</i>	<i>Transition to RDBES, electronic data capture</i>	<i>Transition to RDBES, electronic data capture</i>
	Work on data quality of RDBES data for RCG purposes Work on procedures relating to data quality (communication between end-users and data submitters) Documentation of methods used for RDBES data by MS	Follow data from revised Control Regulation Following the implementation of RDBES in ICES stock assessment	Follow data from revised Control Regulation According to the RDBES roadmap full implementation of RDBES in ICES stock assessment
	<i>Review & progress</i>		
Regional Sampling Plans	<i>Review & progress</i>	<i>Review & progress</i>	<i>Finalise</i>
	Review potential regional sampling plans that can be added to RWP 2028-2030	Finalise and agree on operational proposals for regional sampling plans to be forwarded to the regional work plan 2028-2030	Refine text and content for adoption
Regional Work Plan	<i>Set up basic structure, test procedure</i>	<i>Enhance structure, review procedure</i>	<i>Finalise</i>
	Prepare for RWP 2028-2030	Finalize and agree on RWP 2028-2030, to be submitted by October 2026	Incorporate agreed regional work plans in NWP

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

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

During the first year of the 3-year term of RCG NANSEA and of RCG Baltic 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 to the group. As a result of the discussions, decisions, recommendations, and tasks for the ISSGs were agreed.

The RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic 2025 report is composed of three parts:

- The overview of the work done by ToR at the 2025 Technical Meeting (TM) can be found in this [Part I](#) of the report.
- In [Part II](#) the recommendations and decisions proposed by the RCGs are presented. They will be endorsed at the Decision Meeting (DM) in September by the National Correspondents.
- Detailed progress, outcomes and deliverables achieved in all ISSGs are described in [Part III](#) report “Reports on intersessional subgroup (ISSGs) work 2024-2025”.

5. Progress report on ToRs and RCG 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 European Commission
- Feedback from ICES
- Feedback from the ISSG 'End-users and RCGs'
- End-user needs and prioritizing/optimizing data collection

5.1.1 Feedback from the European Commission

Update on DCF-related activities:

- Incorporation of regional work plans into national work plans 2025-2027- Lessons learned
- Update on DCF IT platform
- DTMT update
- Data confidentiality – summary of EU survey
- Policy updates for evaluation of the CFP and the implementation of the revised Control Regulation

Achievements

DG MARE presented the Commission update on DCF-related work:

- In feedback from the 2025-2027 work plan evaluation, COM highlighted some lessons learned on how regional work plans were incorporated into national work plans based on STECF feedback (EWG 24-15). For the Baltic, there were some inconsistencies on how and if the 25% threshold rule was applied among Member States. In NANSEA, there were inconsistent national commitments to regionally agreed initiatives and test studies as well as different applications of the threshold rules. COM reminded of the timeline leading to the next cycle of regional work plans of 2028-2030 which requires submission of regional workplans in October 2026 with possible revision in summer 2027, based on STECF evaluation.
- Briefed on the ongoing efforts to address the backlog of data transmission issues recorded in the DTMT with focus on follow up issues and unsatisfactory issues marked as to be followed up. The aim is to communicate the outcome to MS later this year and to set up the annual DTMT cycle for closing off issues from previous years.
- Updated on the DCF IT platform, including the timeline for uploading 2024 annual reports. 21 MS have submitted the 2024 annual reports (ARs) via the platform. Evaluation and communication will run in parallel through the platform and by email during this transitional period.
- Summarised the outcome of the EU survey on data confidentiality completed by the national correspondents, with restrictions stemming from the legal basis like GDPR, Article 113 of the revised Control Regulation and national laws. Secondary restrictions originate from data sharing agreements and practices and are not always rooted in a legal basis.

Other updates from the Commission:

Policy Brief on the implementation of the revised Control Regulation

COM updated on the implementation of the revised Control Regulation (CR) with a focus on DCF related aspects. The drafting and negotiations of the Implementing Fisheries Control Regulation including updating Reg 404 on fishing logbooks, VMS and data transmission is foreseen to be finalized in July 2025 with adoption and publication autumn 2025. Specific elements relevant to the DCF in this regulation include new detailed rules for logbooks, including unique fishing trip ID numbers, details on sensitive species and lost gear reporting. This is to align with the expanded information requirements in Article 14 of the revised CR.

The new CR provides for some significant changes in the vessel positioning systems: From 2026, there won't be any more derogations from the VMS requirement for vessels 12-15m (Art 9). There are also new provisions for fishing vessels other than catching vessels, which must be equipped with VMS and may only operate if they are authorized (Article 7a). From 2028, there will also be requirements for fishing vessels <12m (Art. 9.3) that need to carry a tracking device system onboard to record and transmit vessel position data at regular intervals. Derogations will be possible for fishing vessels <9m until the end of 2029, if they fulfil certain conditions such as operating exclusively in the 0-6nm of flag state and spending less than 24h a sea. The VMS reporting frequency will entail harmonised rules with implementation based on a phased timeline. New rules on data validation and cross checks aim to improve the data quality and compliance.

Other Implementing Rules to be developed for 2028 include

- REM: Segments at risk / Technical specifications;
- Continuous monitoring of engine power;
- Small scale fisheries tracking and catch reporting (IT system);
- Digitalisation of traceability for prepared & preserved FAPs and Algae;
- Fishing without a vessel: weighing of catches, format and submission of the catch declaration.

An overview of the current status and timetable of the CR implementation is provided in Fig. 5.1.1.1 (green stars completed, yellow stars in progress). The significance of the new data provisions for scientific advice were highlighted by several intersessional groups (ISSGs BYC, SSCF) while the importance of specific gear parameters for the calculations of bycatch and SSCF variables was emphasized. The 2024 RCG recommendation on gear parameters and VMS frequency was provided to COM last October, and any further input is dependent on MS national positions.

CR: implementation calendar

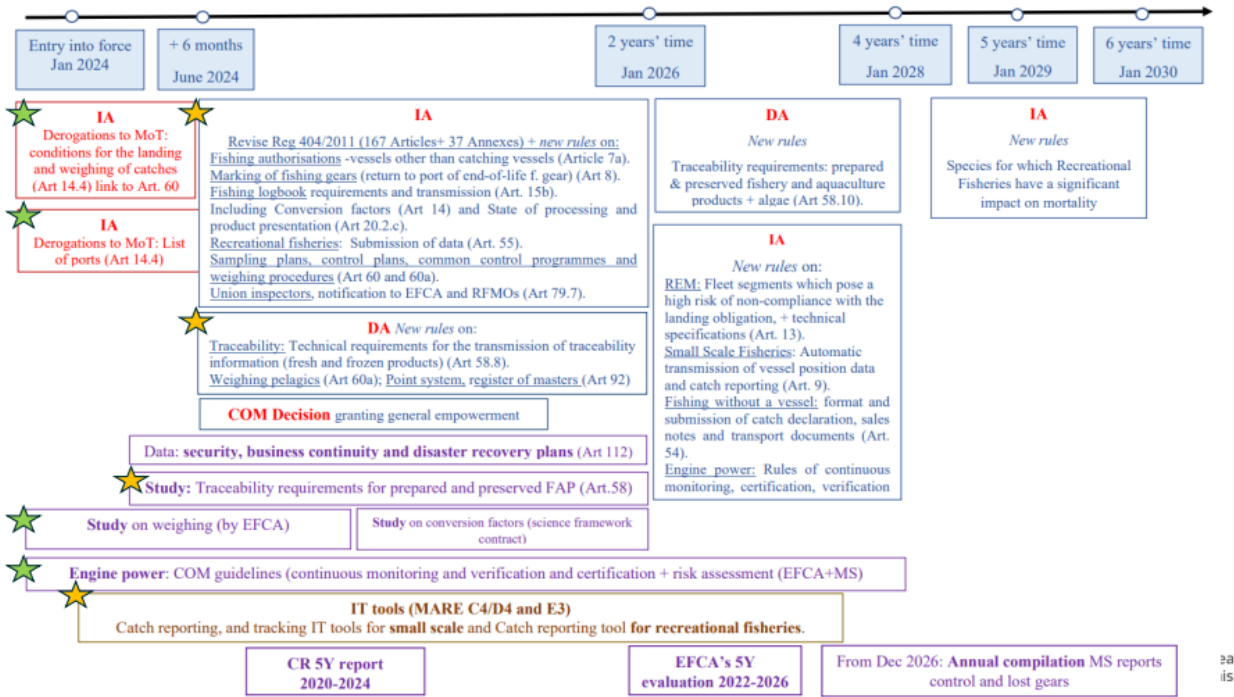


Fig. 5.1.1.1. Timetable and current status of the CR implementation (green stars completed, yellow stars in progress).

For recreational fisheries, COM provided a summary of the new Implementing Regulation, which was adopted in February 2025 and establishes the application rules of Art 55 of the Control Regulation. The regulation contains provisions on monthly and annual submissions of recreational catch data by MS to COM (Article 55.2 and 55.3) and on the marking of passive gear used by recreational fisheries.

Fig. 5.1.1.2 provides a schematic overview of MS reporting obligations on recreational fisheries according to the new implementing rules applied to article 55.2 and 55.3. For species, subject to Union conservation measures, MS need to submit monthly catch quantities and weight retained and released for species under Article 55.3. This is required at a spatial resolution of ICES statistical rectangles or equivalent GFCM geographical unit. For the annual catch reporting in Article 55.2 of species covered by fishing opportunities, multiannual plans and/or subject to the landing obligation, MS can apply their own methodologies, including those established under the DCF. Reporting is required at ICES division and subdivision or GFCM geographical subareas.

Developments for the catch reporting system are ongoing and include a modular system, as MS could opt in to the generic EU mobile application or use their national solutions to connect to the RecFishing Central Server (Fig. 5.1.1.3). Eleven MS decided to use the EU mobile app.

In follow up discussions, both COM and the RCG emphasized the need to build strong synergies between the data reporting through the control regulation and the DCF.

NEW Implementing rules – recreational fisheries & RecFishing

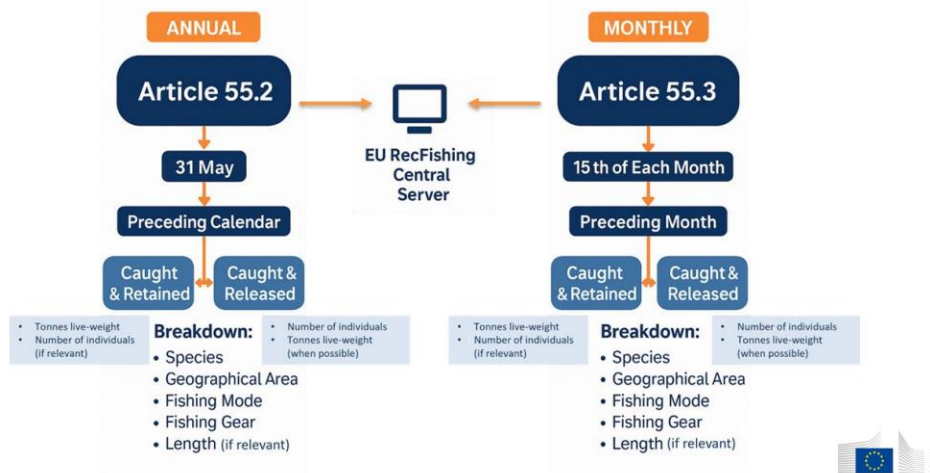


Fig. 5.1.1.2 Schematic overview of MS reporting obligations on recreational fisheries according to the new implementing rules applied to article 55.2 and 55.3.

RecFishing

A modular catch reporting system to facilitate reporting at EU level

(Development ongoing)

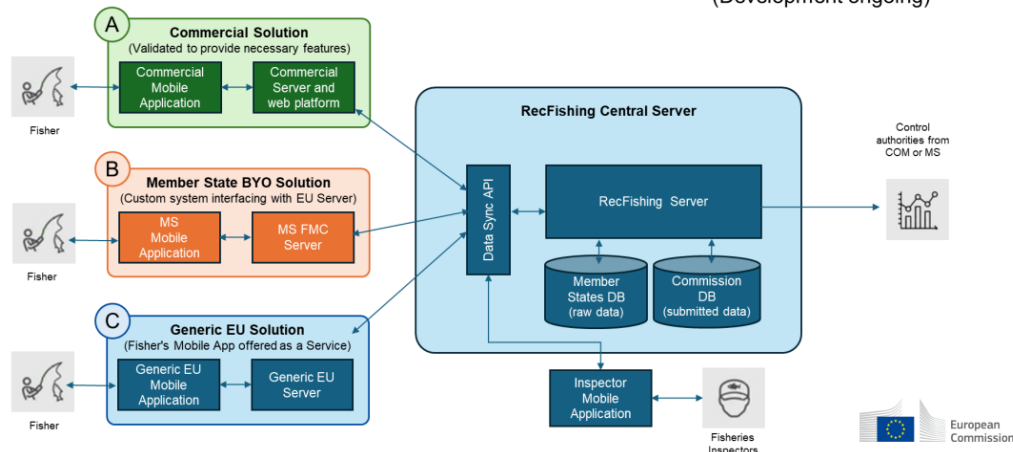


Fig. 5.1.1.3 Schematic overview of the EU recreational catch reporting modules with optional MS components

Update on Data confidentiality – summary of EU survey

DG MARE summarised the outcome of the confidentiality survey that was launched early 2025.

Discussions on data confidentiality of DCF data have been ongoing in the context of regional databases and data licenses. Previous advice was provided by COM on data confidentiality relating to the DCF and GDPR in

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Progress report on ToRs and RCG workplan

2023 and on the Control Regulation Article 113 on professional and commercial secrecy in 2024. In 2024, the RCG NANSEA and Baltic recommended a workshop on confidentiality and at the following Liaison Meeting it was agreed that this is pan regional issue and should include discussion with end user such as the STECF EWG on FDI. The ISSG NCs formed a small subgroup to work with the Commission on the identification of the main issues relating to data confidentiality and the possible organisation of a workshop. To obtain a full background of the national positions of data confidentiality of DCF data and the main legislations and restrictions applied, the group organised a detailed EU survey which asked MS for information on the three stages of the DCF data dissemination process: data sharing, data use and data publication. For the four main DCF data type categories, information was requested on the confidentiality restrictions, legal background and data sharing agreements (see Fig 5.1.1.4).

All MS replied and preliminary results were presented at the March 2025 NC meeting. On data sharing, 50% of MS had restrictions and these related mainly to socioeconomic data (9MS) and commercial data from the control regulation (7MS). The legal basis for these restrictions was primarily the GDPR, while data sharing agreements were primarily in place for the sharing of commercial data from the control regulation. Comments by MS further clarified that some restrictions were regulated by the contract between the ministry and the lab, that data can only be shared when it is part of an official data call and that data needs to come from a minimum of 3 vessels/operators for socio economic data.

On the use of data, less than a third of MS had confidentiality restrictions. These were equally related to data from the control regulation (esp. commercial) and socio-economic data, with data sharing agreements in place for most of the MS with restrictions. MS commented that experts were expected to be instructed in complying with GDPR and several MS had rules in place for a minimum of 3 or 5 vessels/units. Most concerns related to how the data is shared/restricted to end users, how end users deal with sensitive data such as bycatch and how data safety and national safeguards can be ensured when data is used.

Most restrictions applied to the publication of data with 13 MS affected. It related to all four data types with commercial data from the control regulation being the most restrictive. Rules on minimum aggregation levels (either >3 or >5 vessels/operators/units) were in place for all four data types. Comments by MS further added that for sampling data, additional restrictions included no discards from single vessels without consent. MS raised the need for a common understanding on the data that needs to be published at a certain aggregation level by end-users, as an example landing by country, stock and year.

To conclude, the EU survey obtained information on the data confidentiality restriction and national approaches by all MS. When broken down in steps, data publication was the most sensitive; socio economic was the most restrictive data category and GDPR the most used legislation. Less restrictions applied if data was requested as part of an official data call. For all data types, data sharing agreements and soft rules such as minimum of data from 3 vessels were in place to overcome confidentiality restrictions, MS emphasised that these arrangements ensured the access to data and that there could be a risk of losing this access if they were not respected. Some MS raised caution and asked to deal carefully with the issue of data confidentiality, to protect the scientific interests of research institutes that collect data on a permanent basis, as well as the stability and sustainability of the entire data collection system. The hope to align data confidentiality rules between the different EU institutions involved in data storage, data analysis and publication of fisheries data was also expressed.

Instead of setting up a generic workshop to deal with these issues, the group decided in the first instance, to propose some common ground on how confidentiality restrictions could be treated in a more standardised way. To this end, flow charts were drafted for consultation with the NCs.

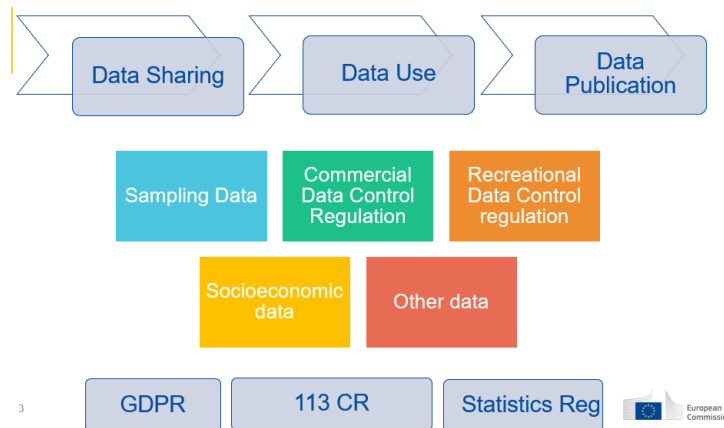


Fig 5.1.1.4: Structure of the EU survey on data confidentiality: Information was asked to NCs and national data providers on the restrictions, legal basis and data sharing agreements in the three steps of data dissemination and on each of the 5 DCF data categories as outlined.

5.1.2 Feedback from ICES

ICES presented an update on several key processes relevant to the Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs), including benchmarks, the Stock Information Database (SID), the Transparent Assessment Framework (TAF), data calls, data security, and the ICES recommendation system.

The presentation began with an overview of the benchmark process, outlining the full timeline from identifying issues within Expert Groups to their implementation two years later. RCGs were encouraged to contribute to this process, particularly through participation in data evaluation workshops, where their expertise can help identify the best available data and ensure its quality. A new benchmark website was introduced, providing up-to-date information on both current and upcoming benchmarks as soon as decisions are made by ACOM (<https://www.ices.dk/about-ICES/how-we-work/Pages/benchmarks.aspx>).

Developments in SID were also highlighted, including new features such as access to historic benchmark information, rolling issues, and a prioritisation matrix. SID now offers a 95% accurate forecast of data needs for the current and following year. ICES also explained how feedback on data quality is provided to member states, including the identification of transmission issues and reporting mechanisms to DG MARE and ACOM. Looking ahead, SID will incorporate survey linkages and generate reports on data requests by country and stock. ICES invited RCGs to provide input on future SID features to better support their work.

In terms of TAF, ICES presented developments of particular relevance to the RCGs, especially the ongoing collaboration with RDBES. This includes workshops on national estimation templates (WKTNET) and the expansion of the TAF database to store not only RDBES inputs and outputs, but also survey-derived indices used in stock assessments.

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To improve transparency and accessibility, ICES launched a new data call portal (<https://data.ices.dk/DataCalls/listDataCalls>), where users can view open, upcoming, and closed data calls, as well as track submissions by country. ICES clarified the distinction between ICES data calls, which are mandatory for member states, and Expert Group data calls, which are not. The portal also supports direct data submission for calls that do not use separate systems like RDBES or VMS.

The presentation also addressed data licensing. Public data in ICES databases are available under the Creative Commons (CC BY 4.0) license, while restricted datasets, such as those related to commercial catches, VMS, logbooks, and biodiversity, require a time-limited data use license and approval from the relevant member states. All data calls specify the applicable license type.

Finally, ICES described the current recommendation system, which facilitates the exchange of recommendations between ICES working groups and the RCGs. A structured review process involving the chairs of RCGs, ACOM, SCICOM, and relevant sub-groups ensures that recommendations are sense-checked before being forwarded. This process is currently conducted twice a year or on an ad hoc basis, with ongoing efforts to streamline communication, involve relevant stakeholders earlier, and avoid unnecessary delays.

Throughout the presentation, ICES emphasised the importance of continued collaboration with the RCGs to ensure data quality, transparency, and alignment of priorities in support of effective fisheries assessment and management.

5.1.3 Feedback from ISSG 'End users and RCGs'

This ISSG aims to maintain 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 '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/>.

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Progress during 2024-2025

At the RCG NANSEA and Baltic technical meeting, the ISSG end-users presented its activities during the 2024-2025 season. The ISSG attended WGRDBESGOV and NCs meetings and arranged end-user's meetings with ICES and the EU Commission. At the end-user's meetings, recommendations were discussed from RCGs to ICES and COM, and from ICES to RCGs, using a GitHub project set up to manage the recommendations, where the status can be updated. The recommendations are currently managed and discussed in GitHub with only access for RCG chairs. With SecWeb 2.0 there is work on a recommendations platform that could be more open to follow the status of recommendations. In addition, other relevant topics were discussed, including RDBES data topics and data confidentiality.

At the technical meeting an overview was given of recommendations completed or in action, with a status and conclusion. Where there were doubts these were clarified during discussions. Discussions on communication with end-users during the TM related to many different topics, to be followed up.

Workplan for 2025 – 2026

Suggested tasks for the ISSG work 2025/2026

- 1) Communication channel between ICES and RCG chairs
- 2) Communication channel between the COM and RCG chairs
- 3) Follow the SecWeb 2.0 project regarding development of recommendations platform.
- 4) Follow up on needs for communication with end-users based on inputs from TM.
- 5) Support process for RWP 2028-2030

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

No recommendations or decisions

5.1.4 End-user needs and prioritizing/optimizing data collection

In the two last RCG inter-sessional periods (2023-2024 and 2024-2025), discussions have been increasingly held at the RCG NANSEA & Baltic intersessional meetings and annual technical meetings about concerns with the mismatch between data collection and data use and needs from end-users as well as about how to deal with new data requests while continue to collect previously required data within the same or smaller budgets.

These issues have also been referred briefly in meetings with end-users and also in the Liaison Meeting 2024. In more detail, some of the concerns that have been addressed in these discussions have been that not all data collected are used, and not all data used are equally needed, but such data keep being collected. In addition, while some tasks are added to the DCF (e.g. ETP species sampling, Marine Action Plan) none are reduced. And also that some MS not able to implement NWP as planned due to human resource limitations or budget reduction (and in some cases this has occurred without prior communication and coordination at the regional level).

During these discussions, it has been highlighted that there is a need to prioritize data collection, and that this requires better communication with end-users about data use and needs. A detailed mapping of the data uptake from the assessment Working Groups would facilitate the prioritization of sampling efforts. WGNSSK was underlined as having produced a useful overview – but would be good to get input from RCGs on what detail is needed. It was also identified that some tools exist that can be used for optimizing sampling design and effort of national work plans, depending on what the priorities and objectives are.

Based on these discussions and concerns, two sessions were planned for the technical meeting (one for the virtual day and one for the physical/hybrid meeting) with the objective of identifying the main aspects of concern, ways forward and action points.

Session during Virtual day of the technical meeting

On the virtual day, one of the chairs of WGBIOPTIM made a presentation linking the WG with this topic. A summary is presented below.

The ICES Working Group on the Optimization of Biological Sampling (WGBIOPTIM), evolving from the former WKBIOPTIM workshop series, focuses on enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of biological data collection for fisheries assessments. Established as a formal ICES working group in 2023, WGBIOPTIM aims to support national and regional efforts in designing cost-effective and scientifically sound sampling strategies under the EU Data Collection Framework.

Through its Terms of Reference, the group has developed and consolidated a suite of open-access R-based tools—SampleOptim, SDTool, BioSim, and ADV—all available on ICES GitHub (https://github.com/ices-eg/wg_WGBIOPTIM/tree/main). These tools are designed to optimize various sampling components, including upper and lower sampling units and biological variables, in order to improve precision and reduce unnecessary sampling effort. Guidelines and technical documentation are also being finalized to facilitate broader application by national labs and regional bodies.

One notable case study was conducted in Italy, where a national subgroup applied the SDTool to optimize the 2025–2027 National Work Plan across six Geographical Sub-Areas (GSAs). The methodology integrated updated sampling data (up to 2022), species prioritization using a ranking system based on landing and landing value, considering the target species of regional management plans (e.g., GFCM Adriatic MAP). Simulation of multiple sampling intensity scenarios was carried out through resampling techniques on historical detailed data. The process allowed for a data-driven and flexible definition of Primary Sampling Units (PSUs), considering both statistical precision and practical feasibility.

The WGBIOPTIM work has already contributed to regional coordination efforts, particularly within RCG Mediterranean & Black Sea (ISSG on sampling optimization), and would be available in supporting also RCG NANSEA & Baltic and the experts interested in the sampling optimization issues.

Session during Physical/Hybrid days of the technical meeting

In a dedication session of the technical meeting, six different topics relating to data sampling prioritisation were identified, and participants of the technical meeting were split into six sub groups, with each meeting and discussing (as a regular group discussion or starting off with a “conversation café”, i.e. each person speaking in turn round the table with no direct response from the others, followed by regular discussion) and then reporting back to plenary. The six topics are listed below, together with any guidelines on sub-topics, and with a summary of the discussions reported back to plenary.

Topic 1: Feedback from assessment working groups on use of data collected under DCF

And additional sub-topics: What information / feedback do we need from end-users to be able to prioritize sampling? Can it be provided from SID/TAF/Other sources?

Several aspects were discussed, in summary:

- Reducing the data collection to maintain only the data strictly used by end-users has implications, such as:
 - There are national interests.
 - Long-term data and samples represent opportunities for future requests and research opportunities.

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- Some data and samples can be taken with little additional monitoring effort.
- Legal obligations for data collection vs. end-user needs.
- A regional approach is needed if reductions in data collection are to be made.
- Improvement of relationship with end-users. Communication about implications for data collectors on end-user requests.
- Discovering data use in assessment from TAF/SID: Possible to automate for stock assessment?

Topic 2: Can tools from WGBIOPTIM be used to optimize sampling plans at a regional level?

Note: This topic was discussed with the online participation of one of the current and one of the future chairs of ICES WGBIOPTIM. A presentation for that WG had also been presented at the virtual day of the technical meeting, in preparation for this discussion session.

Several aspects were discussed, in summary:

- The tools are based on RDB, but conversion for RDBES is being developed. They can be applied to commercial and survey data.
- Thus far, few countries have used the tools developed by WGBIOPTIM (or other equivalent) at national level.
- RCG Mediterranean & Black Sea have an ISSG on Optimization focused on this approach.
 - Should we follow the same route in the RCG NANSEA & Baltic?
 - Is it needed/worthwhile and do we have people to form the ISSG and to chair it?
- There is no formal requirement to apply this type of tools / approaches. And there is no requirement on this in the NWP template. Having that requirement or documentation would be a way to promote optimization.
 - Recommendation R13 to COM to be taken in for the next update of the NWP templates
 - Recommendation: add the following bullet points to Annex I.1: section “Sampling design and protocols” of the NWP/RWP/AR:
 - Was there an effort to optimize the sampling design and sampling protocols?
 - Documentation on efforts to optimize the sampling design and sampling protocols
- In addition, after the session an additional discussion was held about the following aspect:
 - Promoting connection involving WGBIOPTIM and WGBYC (in which David Lusseau developed SCOTI - Simulations for Characterising Optimal moniTORing Implementations, see WGBYC Report 2024¹).

Moreover, during the wrap-up session held during the last day of the technical meeting, it was discussed whether this topic should be further explored through the creation of a new ISSG of the RCG or led by the RCG Chairs through active collaboration with WGBIOPTIM. The general understanding of the participants and chairs of the RCG was that (at least for now) the second option is preferable (especially since the RCG NANSEA & Baltic has already about 15 ISSG). The approach to be implemented would be planned together

¹ICES. 2023. Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC). ICES Scientific Reports. 5:111. 334 pp. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.24659484>

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with WGBIOPTIM during this inter-sessional period (until the next annual meeting of the RCG in June 2026). Participation in the ICES WGBIOPTIM meeting is also encouraged, rather than establishing a new RCG ISSG. The supplementary information proposed for inclusion in Annex I.I (see above) is a first step in the identification of the optimization efforts already ongoing (including some outside WGBIOPTIM) and is likely to highlight future work needed in this area.

Topic 3: RCG/ISSG interaction with end-users with regards to data use and data collection

And additional sub-topics: Recommendations is the formal way, are there other ways? Discontinuation of time series currently not used (surveys, otoliths of species where it is presently not possible to read age)

Several aspects were discussed, in summary:

- Recommendation to ICES (ACOM) in preparation of RWP 2028-2030 to request for all AWG to make an overview of data used for stock assessment by May 2026, similar to overview of already prepared by WGNSSK in 2024. These overviews to be forwarded to RCG chairs. The ISSG end-user will bring it to the technical meeting in 2026.
- Overviews to form basis of future RCG recommendations and decisions, e.g., reduce data collection of specific data.
- Guidance needed on formulating recommendations
- Remind on RCG Mandates and remits document available on RCG website
- Situation where data is mandatory in regulation but not used by end-users discussed. Some examples are eel ages from the commercial fishery as well as ages from dab, brill and flounder from commercial catches in the Baltic Sea. Procedure should be developed by RCG to facilitate communication between MS, RCG and end-users
- Follow up of recommendations addressed to NCs?

In addition, the online group referred concern of resources used for collecting data sets not being used (such as age data, but others), relevance of discussing possibility of adjusting frequency of data collection. And also in what regards bycatch of ETPs, highlighted concern with at-sea monitoring not necessarily covering (and with sufficient coverage) high risk fisheries, data missing despite need for advice, and need to look at opportunities for data collection methods such as Electronic Monitoring and Self Reporting, both of which require good collaboration and trust with fisheries in both directions.

Topic 4: How to prioritize survey effort

And additional sub-topics: How do we gather information on how survey data are used? How do we coordinate on regional level if a MS need to drop a survey? Can the surveys be optimized? Single species versus multi-species surveys? Survey effort? What is the survey impact in stock assessment (how much does it change stock assessment results, and how important is the stock in relation to economy and ecosystem).

Several aspects were discussed, in summary:

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- General understanding in stock assessment community and end-users that it is a very important data input for stock assessment, so it is not expected that they would agree to drop it. It is also the most expensive data.
- Issue in some surveys with some MS dropping out and others possibly following, due to budget reductions and need to prioritize. Guidance is needed on:
 - How to proceed when such surveys are already affected,
 - How to identify which surveys have lower priority.
- To prioritize surveys an inventory list is needed: what data is the survey collecting, who is using it, for what purpose is it used, is that data the main input for stock assessment or is it contributing very little to the final outcome of the assessment (sensitivity analysis is needed: if the survey data did not exist how much would the stock assessment outcome change?) - See the recommendation R01 to for ACOM about asking assessment working groups to identify which data is being used.
 - Suggestion to draft a decision tree based to be used for cutting down or removing a survey, to document the present use of survey data. This decision tree should be based on the inventory list including which data are presently used for stock assessment and other relevant end users. For ISSG Surveys to take on with input from ICES WKUSER3?
 - This could also be relevant to address if sampling effort can be optimized? (linked with subgroup 2 about optimization tools)
 - The timeline before terminating a survey should be decided and relevant RCGs, ICES survey WGs, ICES assessment WGs and Commission should be informed.
- How to proceed, who to inform, how to put in WPs.

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Topic 5: Improved integration of end-user needs, especially regarding “new (monitoring) techniques”

Several aspects were discussed, in summary:

- Not sure if more cost efficient.
- Main goal is to complement or optimize, and not replace, but in some cases may be only option of having data (e.g. EM for SSF where at sea sampling by scientific observers is not possible, or EM or other methods when there are limited human resources).
- Observers and EM can go hand and hand (observers could ground truth/validate data and sample in parallel to allow detecting for example when AI models drift and need to be retrained).
- EM: Difference in application for fisheries dependent contexts (at sea sampling, at market sampling) and fisheries independent contexts (research surveys). Fisheries independent data could be low-hanging fruit for advancing implementation, since they are controlled environments, with fishers not involved where regional coordination could be easier, and such advancements could be applied in fisheries dependent context.
- Other methods, such as AI models for age reading, eDNA when other means not possible.

Topic 6: From a political point of view – how to prioritize to meet new requests for data

And additional sub-topics: How do we re-prioritize the data collection to meet new requests.

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Several aspects were discussed, in summary:

- A procedure is needed to outline how new requirements should be incorporated into the existing DCF. One possible approach is following the standard process for introducing new data into legislation, for approximately three years cycle — establishing a structured process where both scientific input and policy needs are considered through continuous exchange.
- If something is to be included, then presumably something else will need to be excluded from the DCF. Otherwise, a clear understanding of the funding is needed.
- The DCF was originally designed for stock assessment. Today, as it offers the best time series data, other users apply it for unrelated purposes — often requiring separate data collection. Clear prioritization is needed between the intended purpose and the actual use of the results.

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA_BALTIC_2025_R01: Recommendation to ICES (ACOM) in preparation of RWP 2028-2030 to request for all AWG in 2026 to make an overview of data used for stock assessment, similar to overview already prepared by WGNSSK in 2024. A dialogue should be established in 2025 between ICES and RCG on the information needed. These overviews to be forwarded to RCG chairs. The ISSG end-user will bring it to the technical meeting in 2026-2027.

NANSEA_BALTIC_2025_R02: Recommendation COM to add to the NWP/RWP/AR Annex I.1 the following questions: 'Was there an effort to optimize the sampling design and sampling protocols?' 'Documentation of efforts to optimize the sampling design and sampling protocols'

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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'
- Feedback from the ISSG & SG 'RCG catch, effort and sampling overviews'
- Feedback from the ISSG 'Métier issues and transversal variables'
- Feedback from the ISSG & SG 'Surveys'
- Feedback from the ISSG on 'Electronic Monitoring Technologies'

5.2.1 Feedback from ICES secretariat on RDBES and from the ICES 'WGRDBESGOV'

Feedback from ICES secretariat on RDBES

During 2024 the RDBES format have been developed further for landings, effort, and sample data. The joint ICES and RCG RDBES data call 2025 was sent 5 Feb. 2025 requesting landings, effort, and sample data for all species, with deadline April 1st, 2025. Due to changes in the format, a resubmission of effort and landings data for the years 2021-2024 was requested, and all RCG NANSEA & Baltic Member States uploaded data to the

RDBES. As some MS submitted data after the deadline, it was highlighted that MS should make sure data are uploaded before the deadline, otherwise it creates uncertainty, and the data users are pressed on time.

Future developments of the RDBES includes Upload Log included in the RDBES, Recreational data included as a separate recreational format in the RDBES, Stock list maintenance, overview and download, Advanced checks for data quality improvements, Further work on roles and access and Improvement of data viewing and adding summarising for data quality control.

Feedback from ICES WGRDBESGOV

The Working Group on Governance of the Regional Database & Estimation System (WGRDBESGOV) provides the governance function for the Regional Database & Estimation System (RDBES). The WG is composed of representatives from ICES member countries and EU Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs). Overall, the RDBES has an important role in increasing transparency and improving the quality of stock assessments. The RDBES is meant to provide support to the RCGs, ICES Assessment Working Groups (AWG) and FDI. The deadline for the full implementation of the RDBES is set for 2027. This is an ambitious goal, and it requires actions and developments at both national and ICES levels.

First, commercial landings (CL), effort (CE) and sample (CS) data need to be uploaded to the RDBES by the national data submitters. Overall, 16-21 countries (including all RCG NANSEA and Baltic EU Member States) out of a total of 24 countries successfully uploaded the requested data to the RDBES as a response to the joint 2025 RCG and ICES RDBES data call (Figure x.1). Once the RDBES is populated, data can be extracted and used by the (i) RCGs to generate overviews and (ii) national estimators to produce the national estimates in the Transparent Assessment Framework (TAF) for the ICES AWGs (and in time for the FDI export). Thereafter, the stock coordinators will use the national estimates to create the inputs in TAF for the stock assessments. To support national data submitters, national estimators and stock coordinators, a series of WGs and WGs are planned in 2025 (Table 5.2.1.1).

In order to prepare for the full implementation of the RDBES in 2027, the WGRDBESGOV proposed a full trial for a number of selected stocks prior to that date. The trial shall include all steps of the workflow, from the data upload and the production of the estimates to the stock coordination. In addition, the selected stocks (i.e. ple.27.43a20, tur.27.4, bli.27.3a47de, sol.27.7g, pil.27.8c9a, sol.27.8ab, mac.27.nea) cover different WGs, areas and countries, to involve as many countries as possible.

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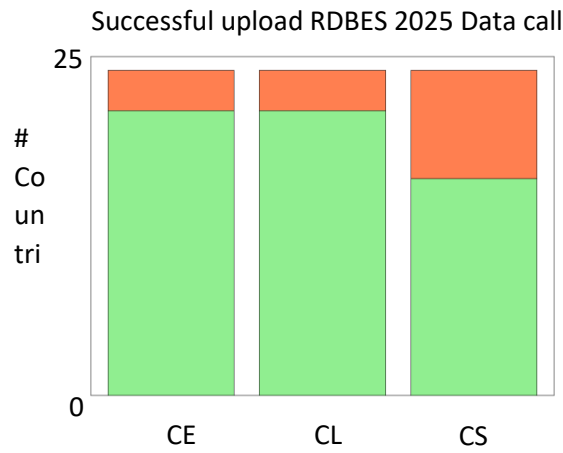


Figure 5.2.1.1: Visual presentation of successful upload by the requested countries to the RDBES as response to the joint 2025 RCG and ICES RDBES data call. Green bars indicating a successful upload and orange bars indicating no upload.

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Table 5.2.1.1: WGs and WGs planned in 2025 to give support to national data submitters, national estimators and stock coordinators

WK/WGs	Chair(s)	Dates 2025	Location	Goal	Target Group
WKTNet	Ana Ribeiro Santos, Colin Millar	27-31 Jan	Online	Create national estimation templates, TAF training.	National Estimators
Training Quality Checking CL & CE	Karolina Molla Gazi	Mid-end March	Online	Run the Quality Report, identify potential errors, provide support	Data Submitters
WKNatEst	Ana Ribeiro Santos, Jessica Graig	2-5 Jun	Online	Collaborate on reproduction of national estimations.	National Estimators
WKTNet2	Ana Ribeiro Santos, Colin Millar	16-20 Jun	Online	Create national estimation templates, TAF training.	National Estimators
WKRDBES-INTRO	Henrik Kjems-Nielsen	Mid-end Sept	Online	Introduce RDBES to new participants and provide the time slots for advanced questions.	Data Submitters/ National Estimators
WKRDBES-RaiseStock2	Siobhan Moran, to be confirmed	Oct (6-10 TBC)	Online	Reproduce the national estimates for several stocks	National estimators
WGRDBES-EST	Ana Claudia Fernandes, Richard Meitern	13-17 Oct	IJmuiden, NLD	Develop a generic ratio estimation function and RDBES visualize	National Estimators
WGRDBES-StockCoord	Sofie Nimmegeers, Kirsten Birch Hakansson	31st January	Online	Test RCEF and develop stock coordination function	Stock Coordinators
		May/June		Test RCEF and develop stock coordination function	Stock Coordinators

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WK/WGs	Chair(s)	Dates 2025	Location	Goal	Target Group
		23-24 Sept		Present RCEF to national data submitters and national estimators. Ask for feedback	National Estimators & Stock Coordinators
		21-23 Oct		Reproduce the national estimates for several stocks	Stock Coordinators

Communication

For a successful implementation of the RDBES, WGRDBESGOV concluded that they need to reinforce the communication with data submitters, national estimators and stock coordinators and make them aware of their responsibility. This is work in progress with the ICES and the RCGs Secretariat to help on developing communication materials targeted to different audiences, such as visualizations/infographics.

Training Quality Checking CL & CE

A meeting with the data submitters was scheduled two weeks prior to the joint data call deadline to run the script on the national CL and CE data. Even though many countries did not have their data uploaded to the RDBES yet, most of them were positive. The development of the quality checking script of CS data is currently on hold.

Future of data call deadlines (2027-onwards)

The RCGs and ICES AWG are the two main end users of RDBES data. However, the dates and the scope of the data required by the two entities differs. WGRDBESGOV therefore proposed to issue a single Joint RCG & ICES Data Call, where different deadlines are set depending on the needs of the end-user:

- ICES AWG deadlines

These deadlines are specific for each AWG, and they will be set a number of weeks before the dates of the group, in a similar way as they are now. The deadline is the same for data submitters and data estimators, meaning that for the specific stock both the (i) import to the RDBES, and (ii) national estimates provided in TAF need to be conducted before the set deadlines. The data uploaded for the AWG deadlines can be complete, for all stocks and variables, if national institutes have all data available by that time. But they can also be partial, if only data for the required stock are uploaded, or if some variables are not available at the time (i.e. those required for the FDI). In the case of partial uploads, the overwriting rules of the RDBES need to be taken into account in future re-uploads.

- RCG deadline

The deadline for the RCG will remain the 1st of April. By this time RDBES data will need to be uploaded to the RDBES as complete as possible, taking into account all species and all areas covered for the RCGs, and also all mandatory variables. This deadline only applies to the European Member States.

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- FDI deadline

The FDI deadline in August will incorporate FDI variables, in the case they have not been included in previous uploads. This deadline only applies to the European Member States.

Data license

There is no update regarding the data license. WGRDBESGOV is waiting for the outcome of the data confidentiality analyses.

Financing

Development of the RDBES is also still needed regarding FDI, incidental bycatch, recreational fisheries, quality checking script CS etc. Unfortunately, the EU project DataWave addressing, amongst others, the development of the RDBES was rejected.

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

The work performed by the ISSG was reported to the RCG NANSEA & Baltic and presented during the RCG Technical Meeting on 10th June 2025. The following points were highlighted:

- The ISSG met in biweekly online meetings (via Teams) from December 2024 to June 2025, dealing with specific tasks, reviewing progress and adjusting workloads: eight group meetings were carried out.
- The SharePoint (SP) for [RCG Intersessional Work](#) was used to hold documents, protocols, minutes and final overviews (04. Working documents/ISSG RDB Overviews).
- The GitHub repo <https://github.com/ices-eg/RCG-RDBES-Overviews> contains the new code and new functions to produce the overviews using the RDBES data, whereas the old repo (<https://github.com/ices-eg/RCGs/tree/master>) will be maintained to conserve the previous work based on the RDB data format.
- The RDBES data extractions were placed in a restricted SharePoint that only ISSG participants working with the data have access to ([RCG data](#)).
- Preparation of CS sampling data was managed using the RDBES Estimation Object function (RDBEScore package), which joins the different CS tables in one single object. A quality check was done before creating the sampling overviews to identify errors in the data and ensure the consistency of the report.
- The group decided to start the development of the sampling overviews in *html* format in a first attempt to show the sampling data reported, and the use of the shiny app will be a second step in the development of these sampling overviews. However, this last code will only be developed in the following years.
- The sampling overviews contain summary information on the data uploaded to RDBES and some examples of the sampling coverage.
- Inconsistencies in the biological data reported were found (e.g. length types and maturity scales used).

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- There is a need to have validation rules for uploading biological data.
- The annual fisheries overviews were produced using the same code as previous year. Only some updates in the reference lists (e.g. country codes, species list) and in the text were performed.
- Regarding the task related to taking over the production of the Table 2.1 of the RWP, contact was made with the code developers, and a meeting is planned for October.

In the RCG TM the work produced by the ISSG was presented and, besides the tasks developed, it included a set of figures both from the annual fisheries and sampling overviews. The purpose was to call the attention of participants for the information that can be provided with these reports and get feedback on the potential usefulness of these overviews. The intention is that, in the future, information included in the overviews can be fit according to specific needs/requests.

The discussion after the presentation showed the general interest on making these overview reports more used by different end users, such as RCGs (ISSGs, RWP), AWG, etc. Regarding the RWP, there was a request to evaluate what type of outputs could be useful for the preparation of the RWP, namely the completeness of the data and the sampling coverage with a need for a collaborative work among ISSGs. For example, the ISSG on small pelagic in the Baltic expressed their interest on the sampling coverage plot and the river plot (foreign landings) to assess the sampling performance, and to include them in their RSP. These graphs have been included in the RSP roadmap and have already helped to identify that some MS are not using the correct sampling scheme identifier for this RSP. Instead, they are using the national routine sampling scheme name and, for that reason, when sub setting the data to produce the overviews, their information is not included in the outputs produced. The group agreed that, as a first step, the figures included in that RWP will be produced for the ISSG on small pelagic in the Baltic, but they can also be extended to more CS under request, and if enough participants are able to contribute to the ISSG Overviews.

The overviews outputs have already started being used in WGBFAS. However, the extension for other AWG may not be so simple because almost all the other AWG include non-EU countries, meaning that the RCG cannot run the complete reports. A link with ICES will be needed for this approach and the same for the benchmarks.

It was also referred that ETP should also be included in the work of this ISSG. However, last year this ISSG realized that there are some issues for identifying the completeness of this type of data reported in RDBES and, only when there are more clarifications on how and what data is being uploaded in the RDBES, it will be possible to have some products to show information on ETP species.

An issue was also raised about some inconsistencies in the table 2.1 produced for the RWP, which do not agree with the legislation due to differences in the threshold rules. According to the EU-MAP legislation (COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION (EU) 2021/1168 of 27 April 2021) it shall be: 1) less than 10% of TAC, 2) less than 10% of landings or 3) 200 t. But according to the Guidelines for work plans (COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION (EU) 2022/39 of 12 January 2022) there is a hierarchy of rules: 1) 'TAC < 10 %', 2) 'Landings < 10 %', 3) 'Landings < 200t'. At the TM the ISSG proposed to contact the code developers to ensure that threshold rules are applied in the correct hierarchical order for the next RWP.

After the Technical Meeting, contact was made between the RCG Chairs and the COM about this issue of inconsistency of the threshold rules (for selecting a species for sampling) to be considered for the submission

of work plans. The COM clarified that all three threshold criteria were equal as stipulated in Decision (EU) 2021/1168, and that the hierarchy in Decision (EU) 2022/39 indicated only which value to fill in when multiple thresholds applied. Nevertheless, stocks with landings either below 200t, below 10% EU landings or below 10% share of TAC must be selected for sampling in case of end-user or management needs.

RCG TM Subgroup work

ISSG work was also carried out during the TM, in a dedicated subgroup where the feedback received in the plenary was discussed along with the steps for the future work.

The first point of discussion was related to the preparation of Table 2.1 from the RWP because the rules of criteria for sampling considered by the Commission are not being followed the same way in the code that produced Table 2.1 for the RWP (and NWP). The group discussed that it could happen that, if a country has more than 10% of total landings but below 200 t, would mean that there is not a minimum sampling level. As an example, this would mean that Baltic brill (presently not having an analytic assessment and not a TAC stock) with a total landing of 27 t, MS would be obliged to sample biology although this is not requested by end-users.

A possible solution to be further discussed could be that within a region, all stocks with landings below 200 t, could be reviewed and if the stocks are not using biology data in the stock assessment a standard sentence could be incorporated in the RWP stating:

This stock has, according to the hierarchy rules been selected for sampling, however the RCG has agreed that the biological sampling is not necessarily based on end-users needs.

Reason for not sampling

Code 1. No assessment presently

Code 2. Only length-based assessment (cat. 3.1)

Regarding the sampling overviews, it was discussed that the sampling data outputs are essential for evaluating and improving fisheries data quality. In the case of sprat and herring fleets, sampling coverage can be defined by stock or sampling scheme, providing a structured basis for analysis. Outputs from this process can help to identify gaps and suggest ways to enhance both data collection and sampling design.

The river plots can be useful to help interpreting sampling coverage. For example, they can reveal if countries are not sampling because their landings occur entirely abroad. Complementary data, such as landings by species and species by country, can add context and support more detailed evaluations.

A case study approach will be used to present data overviews, allowing also the identification of inconsistencies or errors that can be flagged to Member States for correction. The group suggests starting with the Small Pelagic in the Baltic RWP to determine which plots are most useful for inclusion in future reports. In the ISSG Iberian CS example, foreign landings from Portuguese vessels in Spanish ports (from OTB fleets) could be considered. These approaches can be extended to more CS/ISSG upon request, and if enough participants can contribute to the ISSG Overviews work.

Variation in length measurement types reported for the same species was also discussed. If these measurements are reported, it's important to check whether the relevant conversion factors (for the length measurement used for stock assessment) have been included. To assist with validation/correction, a list of

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species with multiple measurement types should be compiled and shared with Member States for review, keeping in mind that the table should go without the name of the countries. This process should be coordinated by ICES.

Validation rules for biological data need to be implemented and tracked—these should be added to the RDBES GitHub issues list.

Regular annual reporting enables countries to verify their data and make corrections. However, multiannual overviews, in particular, are very important for tracking long-term improvements in data quality and provide a more meaningful perspective than annual reports.

During the RCG TM, feedback on the tasks and outputs needed for ISSG SSF was also received and the information they need is listed here: 1) Using the RDBES data, compare official data with scientific estimates for the SSF. The numbers are likely to be the same in both columns, which is still considered a valuable information because it might indicate that only the official data for catches and effort are being used. It is known that in this specific fleet segment, these numbers may vary, especially for some species; 2) Identify the stocks by ecoregion, ICES division (to be decided) where the landings/effort of the SSF are relevant, and if possible, the métiers involved. Using this information, and based on CS data, identify potential gaps in biological and length data.

Workplan for 2025 – 2026

1. Develop the multiannual fisheries overviews code for producing new reports using the RDBES data format
2. Sampling/annual fisheries overviews: Prepare this information focusing on specific case studies, after identification of the relevant information to include (input from Small Pelagics in Baltic RWP, Iberian CS, Freezer trawlers, SSF, others)
3. Identify the relevant information that can be used in the RWP
4. Make scripts available to AWG (e.g. Baltic stocks) and give support if needed
5. Prepare a table with inconsistencies identified in the biological data related to length measurement types, maturity, etc. ICES to send it to data submitters to check their own data. Validation rules needed for biological data can be listed and added in the 'Issues' list in the RDBES GitHub
6. Provide input data for table 2.1 of the RWP, in collaboration with ISSG RWP experts that developed the code.

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

No recommendations or decisions.

5.2.3 Feedback from the ISSG on "Métier issues and transversal variables"

Feedback from the ISSG "Métier and transversal variables" was presented during the RCG NANSEA & Baltic Technical meeting on 3rd June 2025.

The ISSG manages métier codes pan-regionally and also presents at RCG LP, RCG Med&BS, and communicates with JRC (FDI) and ICES regarding the codes that are used in data calls. The group received request for métier codes and reference lists (species and gears) from third countries (Norway, Iceland) and on gear code for traplines from STECF. The ISSG is maintaining metier and reference lists as well as scripts and manual on GitHub: <https://github.com/ices-eg/RCGs/tree/master/Metiers>

The ISSG maintains a manual for assigning metier codes. It is available at the GitHub in html format and pdf format. The pdf format was made to start a process to get a DOI to reference to the manual.

The annual metier description report was updated from RDBES data and a multiannual report was developed on a more aggregated level to follow trends in fishery by métier.

Analysis was made on the use of cross-validation methods applied by MS for estimating transversal data, and the ISSG is working on describing best practices. The ISSG suggested and tested a template for documenting the methods used by MS for RDBES CE and CL data.

The ISSG updated the effort fecR package with disaggregation function and methods for SSF to be used for RDBES CE data. The code is available on JRC GitLab <https://dcallnet.jrc.ec.europa.eu/gitlab/r-packages/fecR>.

At the technical meeting it was raised that updated EU technical regulations have been sent out for review to MS, and that it could be recommended by MS that selective devices are reported in logbooks. This can then be included in the métier level 6 codes (there are already some métiers where it is possible to report selective devices in the last part of the level 6 codes).

Regional Work Plans 2028-2030

The main challenges are currently the SSF, passive gear effort and gear dimension. The ISSG want especially to follow any improvements resulting from the new Control Regulation until 2030 (e.g. wider implementation of geolocation data for vessels less than 12m, introduction of logbook data for SSF, etc.).

The ISSG suggest that the below text is added to the RWP Text Box 1b: "Other data collection activities" committing the MS involvement in analyses of SSF data submitted by electronic devices:

"With the new control regulation being implemented gradually until 2030, from 2028 MS will be able to evaluate data availability relating to the new obligations on SSF data transmission. MS shall agree on their contribution to this data analysis based on the data availability for SSF and the methods for calculation of effort variables for SSF involved in fisheries with passive gears.

The main focus shall be to apply a common method for calculating trips, fishing days, and soaking time for passive gears, based on information provided by MS. In addition, attention shall be given to any differences in outcomes among MS due to variations in the availability of fisheries data for small-scale fisheries (SSF).

Workplan for 2025 – 2026

1. Continue maintaining métier codes and other reference lists and scripts. Follow and evaluate the implementation of the métier codes on a pan-regional level.
2. Update and if relevant further develop métier description report (annual and multiannual).
3. Finalize the analysis of questionnaires sent out in spring 2023, to evaluate the use of cross-validation methods in MS to combine data coming from different declarative sources, the ongoing standard practices. Develop, on this basis, best practice guidelines, with a specific focus on the RDBES CE and CL tables.
4. Evaluate documentation of methodologies applied to inform RDBES CE & CL tables, i.e. collect and analyse the templates provided by countries (in answer to the RDBES 2026 data call), to document MS methods used to estimate fishing activity data for RDBES CE & CL tables
5. Continue following up on the development of the fecR package to calculate fishing effort metrics that are harmonized/homogenized between MS.
6. Identify potential issues with how grouped species are reported to the RDBES and provide guidelines. Evaluate and provide feedback on the ICES species list relation between FAO code and aphialD.
7. Make an inventory of the use of the new gear trawls in EU MS.
8. Work towards RWP 2028-2030
 - Finalize the Roadmap for RWP 2028-2030
 - Decide on what ambition level the different parts in the ISSG work is aiming for in 2030 and map current stage

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA_BALTIC_2025_R03: The RCG NANSEA & Baltic recommends that MS are requested to document methodologies applied to calculate fishing activity estimates to inform RDBES CE and CL tables, using the suggested template in the RDBES data call 2026.

5.2.4 Feedback from the ISSG & SG ‘Surveys’

The ISSG on Surveys met online on March 4, 2025, and presented its outcomes during the online meeting on June 3rd, 2025. The outcomes of the intersessional work are described in report part III, Section 5.

All tasks 2024-2025 were executed, the multilateral agreements on cost-sharing for ASH (IESNS) and IBWSS were reached for 2025, further cost-sharing exercises have not been performed (as there were no requests to do so), and the ISSG stressed that it crucial to be consulted in an early stage - at least 1.5 years in advance - in case MS wish to change (timing, effort, coverage, etc.) or discontinue surveys. During the RCG technical meeting, the tasks for 2025-2026 (see below) were agreed and the ISSG contributed to the overall RWP planning for 2028-2030.

Workplan for 2025 – 2026

1. Prepare RWP 2028-2030 contribution:
 - a. Maps (develop)
 - b. Text (update)
 - c. Tables (update and add drop-down)
 - d. Pilot studies (review outcomes and further integration, suggest new studies on EMT, genetics etc.)
 - e. Finalize the Roadmap for RWP 2028-2030
 - f. Decide on what ambition level the different parts in the ISSG work is aiming for in 2030 and map current stage
2. Follow-up on requests to develop a survey-specific cost-sharing based on previous ISSG work.
3. Monitor and discuss the implications of external factors' influence 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. Respond to requests, recommendations and proposals addressed to the RCG regarding surveys, including proposals for 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. Identify, list and suggest improvements to EU-MAP.

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

The renewal of the multilateral agreements on cost-sharing of the International Ecosystem Survey in the Nordic Seas (IESNS=ASH) and International Blue Whiting Survey (IBWSS) was moved to the ISSG NCs.

5.2.5 Feedback from the ISSG on 'Electronic Monitoring Technologies'

Participation in the ISSG EMT meetings and intersessional work was very good in 2025. Participants were generally active during the meetings, and we received detailed information from most MS on EMT usage for fisheries data collection, and on the development of imagery datasets for machine learning model training.

Feedback and discussions in the RCG TM in Lysekil showed that electronic monitoring technologies present an interest for many other ISSGs. Moreover, the new Control Regulation, which does (or will) require fishers to record and report more information from diverse electronic devices fuelled conversations on how to best use these new sources of data in the future in the DCF context. While electronic devices including electronic monitoring (EM) will likely never fully replace fisheries observers onboard fishing vessels, EMTs can efficiently complement and enhance data collection in many cases. With a generalisation of affordable EMT for fisheries in the EU, coordination between MS (and where relevant standardisation), has now become essential to smoothen the adoption of EMT on a growing number of fishing vessels, but also to help MS with little experience in these technologies to implement them rapidly and cost-efficiently. The answers to the questionnaire sent earlier this year to all of the ISSG EMT members mapped out the current state of EMT

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usage in the EU. It highlighted that at the present time EMTs are widespread across EU member states, but there is still little collaboration, which hinders the development and adoption of e.g. AI-assisted EM solutions that could reduce the cost of these technologies.

A longstanding discussion on data sharing agreements and data confidentiality (particularly regarding imagery data from EM programmes) continued during the RCG TM. Although imagery data (raw images and videos, and annotated data for computer vision model training) remain very sensitive, technologies to “anonymise” such data (e.g. by automatically blurring out individuals, markings, or any part of the image protected by GDPR) are now widely available. What is more, diverse techniques exist or are currently being developed to exploit standardised datasets stemming from different MS to train shared models, all the while ensuring that the raw data are accessible only to the original owner/uploader. Generally, it seems that most MS have reached a point where working in silos is seen as slowing down innovation and are ready to discuss the way forward in the coming years, including the best ways to share imagery data. To that end, the EMT ISSG proposed to help all willing ISSGs to reach or raise their ambition levels for the RWP and will organize meetings with other ISSGs to evaluate the interest of existing EMT solutions for data collection.

The RCG group members present at the TM, together with the ISSG EMT chairs, agreed to continue and complete the work initiated in the previous years (tasks 1-4 listed below) as they are useful to the entire RCG community to get an overview of the current state of play in the tools available to complement and facilitate fisheries data collection and possibly reduce costs. Tasks 5 and 6 relate to the RWP 2028-2030. Here, the ISSG EMT seeks a deeper coordination with other relevant ISSGs to map out the tools and advice on the specific needs for data collection. The ISSG EMT will organise regular bimonthly meetings before the next TM in 2026 and will invite other ISSG chairs to participate.

Workplan for 2025 – 2026

1. Update/Complete the inventory of labelled data owned by the MS that could be used now or in the future for training identification/classification models.
2. Continue the discussion and examination of the possibilities that these labelled data are shared between MS without breaching privacy and ownership concerns.
3. Review the Blue Paper from the EU project OptiFish on the inventory of data collection technologies used in the different member states.
4. Continue the discussion on the elaboration of 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 for the development of machine learning algorithms for species identification/classification.
5. Task in relation to the next RWP:
 - a. Elaborate a questionnaire to send to all relevant ISSG chairs to identify where EMT could help fill data collection gaps in different MS.
 - b. Review questionnaires and coordinate input to the RWP 28-30 with other ISSGs.
 - c. New section to insert to the RWP 2028-2030: “Interest of EMTs as tools for fisheries data collection”.
 - d. Finalize the Roadmap for RWP 2028-2030

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- e. Decide on what ambition level the different parts in the ISSG work is aiming for in 2030 and map current stage
6. List the possible benefits of EM(T) usage for fishers that could increase engagement to EM programmes.

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

No recommendations or decisions.

5.3 ToR 3 Review impact on management measures on data collection

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

- Marine Action Plan follow up – how was it addressed in NWP's?

5.3.1 Marine Action Plan follow up

In the RCG NANSEA & Baltic Technical Meeting of 2025 a session was held as a follow-up of the Marine Action, namely about how Member States had incorporated in their new National Work Plans of 2025-2027, submitted and approved in the last quarter of 2024, the expectations from the Commission expressed through the Marine Action Plan. These expectations included the following which is directly related to the DCF: "The Commission calls in Member States to: By the end of 2024, submit updated national DCF work plans to improve data collection planning and efforts, including in relation to by-catch of sensitive species and impact of fishing on the seabed". This session preceded the time slot dedicated to the ISSG on "Optimization on ETPs bycatch sampling". In advance and in preparation to the Technical Meeting, the Chairs of the RCG NANSEA & Baltic launched a questionnaire to the Member States, via the National Correspondents, with the objective of characterizing: How have the expectations from the Commission expressed in the EU Marine Action Plan been addressed by Member States in the new National Work Plans 2025-2027 submitted in October 2024.

In the session about the Marine Action Plan follow up, the RCG NANSEA & Baltic Chairs presented a summary of the responses provided by the Member States, where 13 out of 14 MS responded. This summary is presented below.

Questions 1 & 2: Compared to the previous national work plan (before 2025), are there any new sampling schemes "At Sea" or test studies "At Sea" in the DCF national work plan 2025-2027?

11 responses "No", 2 responses "Yes".

DEN	NANSEA & Baltic	Gill netters	Electronic Monitoring of ETPs	It is now a sampling scheme of the NWP
ESP	NANSEA	Pair trawler, Gill netters, Purse seiners, small scale fleet (set gillnetters and trammel nets)	At sea sampling for ETPs	It is now a sampling scheme of the NWP

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Questions 3 & 4: Compared to the previous national work plan (before 2025), are there any changes in the existing sampling schemes "At Sea" of the DCF national work plan 2025-2027?

5 responses "No", 8 responses "Yes".

DEU	NANSEA & Baltic	Bottom Otter Trawlers	At sea sampling	Initiated quantification of by-catch and survival rates of Greenland sharks. (Co-operation with fishery, by their initiative, based on conservation measures by Greenland).
ESP (IEO)	NANSEA Gulf of Cadiz	Purse seiners	Changed At-sea sampling to On-shore	Low bycatch and discard rates
ESP (IEO)	NANSEA	Set gillnetters, Bottom otter trawlers, Bottom trawlers	At sea sampling	Adjusted sampling effort trips to achieve discard sampling target. Adjusted ETPs bycatch sampling protocol to improve data: Recording observation time for slipping drop-outs, presorting, and/or sorting. New sampling forms specifically designed. Tagging of cetaceans before release. Recording the use of Bycatch Mitigation Devices.
ESP (AZTI)	NANSEA	Bottom otter trawlers, Pair bottom trawlers, Purse seines, SSF	At sea sampling	Collect additional information on ETP species (as a result of test study PETFISH (NWP 2022-2024). Higher sampling effort sampling of SSF (multigear).
NLD	NANSEA	Demersal active vessels	At sea sampling	Higher sampling effort. (Anticipated need from Marine Action Plan, increased coverage of less well-known type of fishery.)
NLD	NANSEA	Demersal passive vessels	At sea sampling	Higher sampling effort. (Anticipated need from Marine Action Plan combined with high-risk analysis from FishPi project.)
POL	Baltic	SSF and passive gears	At sea sampling	Higher sampling effort. (Risk of bycatch of ETPs.)
PRT	NANSEA 27.8.c	Bottom otter trawlers	At sea sampling	Initiate sampling effort. (High risk of bycatch of ETPs - marine mammals, no previous sampling in Portuguese vessels, despite sampling by other countries)
PRT	NANSEA	Long line for deep water species	At sea sampling	Higher sampling effort. (High risk of bycatch of ETPs - deep water sharks)

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PRT	NANSEA	Trammel nets	At sea sampling	Essay: Higher sampling effort and identification of three reference fleets and allocation of sampling effort: vessels targeting rays, soles and anglerfishes. (high risk of bycatch of ETPs and Discards estimation)
PRT	NANSEA	Gill nets	At sea sampling	Essay: Define sampling effort (before allocated together with trammel nets). (High risk of bycatch of ETPs and Discards estimation)
PRT	NANSEA	Pots and traps	At sea sampling	Essay: Initiate sampling effort. (Assess risk of bycatch of ETPs and Discards estimation)
SWE	Baltic	Demersal and pelagic nets	At sea sampling	Lower sampling effort (Significant decline in catches of demersal species in this fishery and region)
SWE	Baltic	Demersal and pelagic nets	Electronic monitoring	Higher sampling effort Initiate sampling in pelagic nets
SWE	Baltic	Gill nets and trammel nets	At sea sampling	Sampling coverage adjusted to include Sub Division 20. (To ensure sampling of relevant gears to enable bycatch estimations for seabirds, North Sea harbour porpoise, and other ETPs)

5 & 6: Is there any relevant métier that is not sampled at sea or is monitored at sea but without monitoring of ETP species, in the DCF national work plan 2025-2027?

10 responses “No”, 3 responses “Yes”.

However, it was discussed that there are numerous cases of métiers in several countries without at sea sampling in SSF, and this is described in detail per country and métier in a report from WGCATCH to be published soon (from a previous year but still pending publication at this moment). Additionally, it was also discussed that even at sea sampling may exist but the sampling effort and coverage but may be insufficient to estimate bycatch rates.

EST	Baltic	Small boats (<12m) in costal fishery using static gears	No At sea sampling	Only small boats (below 12m) are used. Seldom possible to put observers on board for safety reasons.
NLD	NANSEA	Beam trawl for brown shrimp	No At sea sampling	Considered low risk of bycatch of ETPs
PRT	NANSEA	Long line for demersal fishes	No At sea sampling	Considered low risk of bycatch of ETPs. Risk of bycatch of birds previously monitored outside the DCF. Inclusion in NWP will be considered in next NWP.

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PRT	NANSEA	Pots and traps	No At sea sampling	Considered low risk of bycatch of ETPs. Risk of bycatch of birds monitored outside the DCF. Essay in current NWP. Inclusion in NWP will be considered in next NWP.
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7 & 8. Does to the National Work Plan 2025-2027 refer to monitoring of ETP species bycatch implemented not within the DCF but in other contexts.

7 responses “No”, 6 responses “Yes” but replies were in different directions.

DEN	DTU Aqua receives information from the fishing industry on bycatch of mammals alongside the registration in the logbook.
FRA	FEAMPA ARP: At-sea observers program aiming at quantifying the risk of catching ETP species. It started in 2025 and was not included before in the work plan. It is described in textbox 4.2. LIFE EMM: At-sea observers program aiming at testing the efficiency of multiple ETP avoidance devices. It will start in the second semester of 2025. It is described in textbox 4.2.
IRL	Ireland’s NWP 2025 – 2027 refers to an EMFAF (and previously EMFF) funded project Text Box 1B Activity 6 – Bycatch. There is also an additional project in the pipeline, awaiting approval of EMFAF funding, which was not included in Ireland’s NWP as the project has not yet been approved. The submission is for a project titled: Impacts of fishing and pollution on ETP species.
LVA	SECTION 1: In 2025, it is planned to monitor the SB-2 segment within the LIFE REEF project with a higher sampling intensity to define the statistically sound sampling design with subsequent WP updates for 2026-2027.
POL	Text Box 4.2: Incidental catches of sensitive species Additional information on sampling schemes, pages 23-24: Mobile application (for smartphones, tablets) developed at the National Marine Fisheries Institute (NMFRI), dedicated to monitor, record and document the bycatch of protected species.
PRT	Text Box 1B: Projects LIFE CIBBRINA, Marine Beacon, REDUCE, LIFE PanPuffinus, National Action Plan for minimizing the incidental capture of marine mammals, birds and reptiles by fisheries, National Action Plan for the management and conservation of sharks, rays and chimaeras

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In all, the responses from Member States about how they have addressed in the new National Work Plans 2025-2027, submitted in October 2024, the expectations from the Commission expressed in the EU Marine Action Plan, can be further synthesized as follows:

- Two countries incorporated Electronic Monitoring of ETPs in regular data collection for high-risk fisheries (gill nets, demersal nets, pelagic nets).
- One country incorporated dedicated ETP monitoring by scientific observers at sea and enhanced data collection and sampling protocols of ETP in high-risk areas (several métiers).
- One country incorporating self-sampling for shark bycatch and survival rates (bottom otter trawl).
- One country changed spatial coverage by scientific observers at sea to improve bycatch estimation.



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- Several countries initiated or increased sampling effort by scientific observers at sea: in métiers with high risk of ETPs bycatch; or with poor knowledge; or small-scale fisheries (1 country).
- One country identified reference fleets to improve monitoring in métiers with high risk of ETPs bycatch.
- Some aspects mentioned by one/few countries, but in principle, applicable across several countries were: Métiers considered of low bycatch risk not monitored by scientific observers at sea in NWP; Smaller vessels not monitored by scientific observers at sea in NWP due to space/safety (and again there is a WGCATCH report to be published with a compilation on this).



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:

- 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 'Towards a regional sampling plan - Case Study of the trawl fishery in Iberian Waters'
- Feedback from ISSG & SG 'Evaluation of the data collected for the SSF at EU level'
- Feedback from ISSG & SG 'ETP species sampling'
- Feedback from ISSG 'Diadromous species'
- Feedback from ISSG & SG 'Recreational fisheries'
- Feedback from ISSG 'Regionally coordinated stomach sampling and analysis'
- Feedback from ISSG 'Regional Work Plan'

5.4.1 Feedback from ISSG 'Case study of fisheries for small pelagics in the Baltic'

In total close to 200 vessels are presently part of the small pelagic case study in the Baltic. In 2025 this case study went from being a case study to be a full implemented part of the RWP and all MS in the Baltic presently are participating.

	In regional plan (tons)	Outside regional plan (tons)	% in plan
DEU	15153	192	99%
DNK	27 799	1275	96%
EST	45403	9328	83%
FIN	25495	917	97%
LTU	12699	9959	59% (99% of SPR and 12.8% of HER)
LVA	57429	1641	97%
POL	66993	16394	80%
SWE	55703	13133	81%
TOTAL	278875	52839	84%

In average 90% of the fishery is covered within the sampling plan, however the % fleet covered by MS ranges between 80% of the fleet covered to 99%. This is mainly due to the small-scale fleet presently not covered in the sampling program.



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1. During the meeting it was decided to improve the coordination by having an estimation workshop where the national data was to be estimated separately, within RDBES and as a combined program. This has two purposes, firstly to ensure that all MS are familiar with the estimation routines in the RDBES and secondly to see if (and how much) we can improve the final input data to assessment by having a common estimation procedure.
2. Further it was also suggested to include the one stock presently not part of the regional sampling of the small pelagic. The herring in SD 3031 presently mainly fished by Sweden and Finland. This will include looking into age reading comparison and how the countries are presently sampling the fleet segments.
3. Optimal sampling size was investigated at the start of this ISSG. New tools have been introduced since and better data are now available. With the overall increase in sampling levels this would be good to revisit.
4. The ISSG overview group have during the last year produced and provided this ISSG with maps and charts that can inform the future decisions, ensure quality control of the data provided and whether there is a positive change in the sampling coverage. This will be used as a standard evaluation indicator for future meetings.



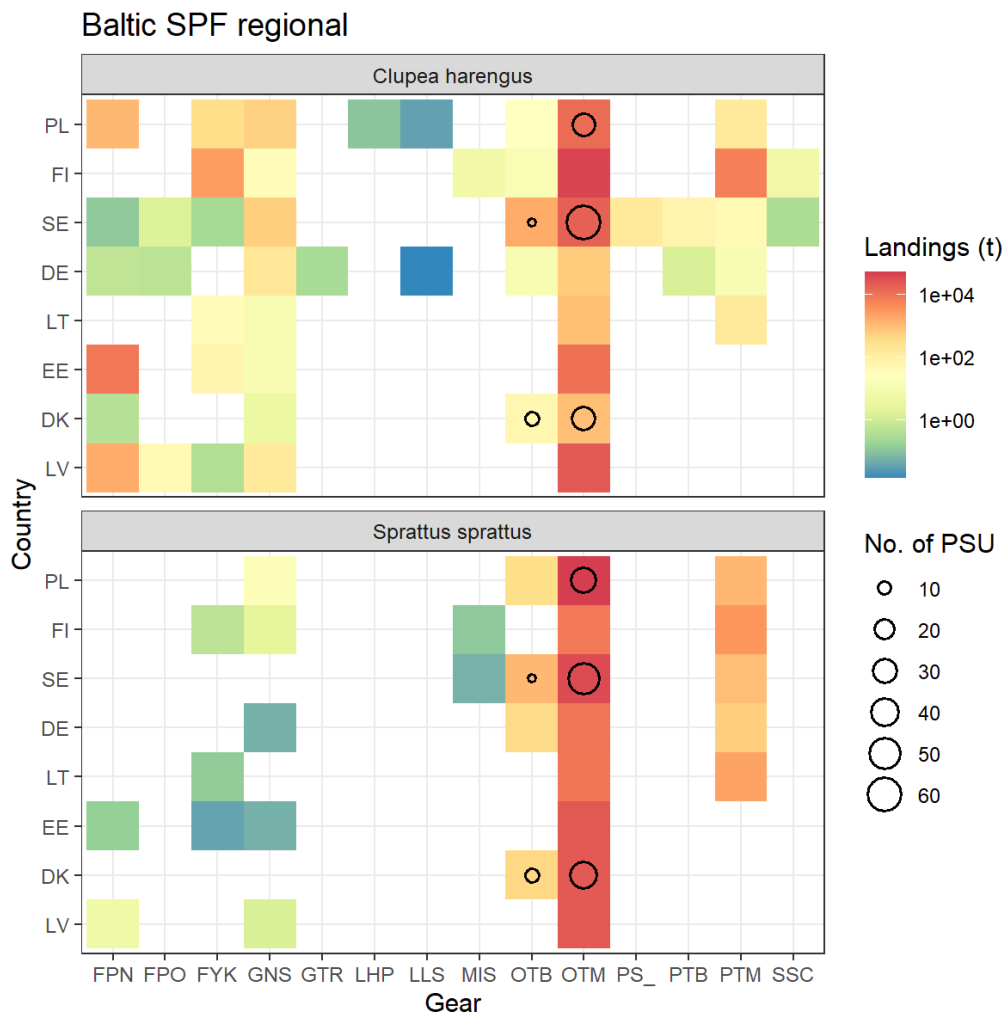


Figure 5.4.1.1 Indicating the sampling level by gear and MS. Not all MS have sampling coverage on this figure, but the reason was that data was uploaded in a different scheme to the RDBES.

5. Part of the stocks are presently not included in the regional sampling program. This is mainly the small-scale fishery with gillnetters or smaller trawlers. Presently, we do not have an overview how these segments are sampled in MS and although it is not the goal to have a common sampling strategy for the small scale fishery, we will start to investigate how different MS are conducting their sampling and whether MS can learn from each other and align their sampling strategies.

Workplan for 2025 – 2026

1. Common estimation and comparison with national estimation during workshop in September
2. Start discussions on inclusion of herring SD30-31
3. Reinvestigate tools to look at optimal sampling size/ numbers
4. Evaluate the overviews plot produced for this case study by ISSG Overview group
5. Align sampling of fleet segment presently outside the common sampling frame (small scale fishery)

6. Continue work for the RWP 2028-2030
 - Finalize the Roadmap for RWP 2028-2030
 - Decide on what ambition level the different parts in the ISSG work is aiming for in 2030 and map current stage

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

No Recommendations or Decisions

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

The pelagic freezer fleet was identified as a candidate for a regional sampling approach. The current sampling of the fleet, which is largely Dutch owned and operate under the flags of the Netherlands, Germany, France, UK (England), Poland, and Lithuania is conducted by the Dutch and German research institutes. The aim of the sampling is to collect biological information of the target species and monitor incidental bycatches. Although there exists a degree of cooperation, different approaches to sampling are adopted by the two countries. A regional sampling plan would harmonise the approach, would be less likely to have gaps in coverage whilst also resulting in increased efficiency.

So far, simulation studies have been conducted to investigate annual sampling coverage for a suite of preselected stocks, and a sampling protocol was developed and tested during several pilot studies. While the pilot studies showed promising results, it appeared that the methodology in processing the age samples needed further investigation. In 2025, a pilot study of the same species*area combination in the same year and quarter conducted by both the Dutch and German sampling programme was executed. At the time of the RCG Technical Meeting the processing of the collected data was not completed yet. Therefore, the next step is to complete processing of the samples after which the collected data within the two pilot studies will be compared. This comparison will especially focus on the methodology of age sampling.

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Workplan for 2025 – 2026

The following tasks have been identified during the RCG meeting in 2025 for the attention of the ISSG in 2025/26:

1. Analyse data collected within the 2025 DEU and NLD pilot studies
2. Further develop the harmonized protocol for sampling the EU freezer trawler fleet
3. Depending on outcome of Tasks 1 and 2: run the NLD market sampling programme executing its current protocol simultaneously with the NLD observer programme executing the harmonized protocol for sampling the EU freezer trawler fleet for a considerable amount of time (e.g. ½ year or 1 year)
4. Depending on outcome of Tasks 1, 2, 3: develop harmonized raising methodology for conducted sampling of the EU freezer trawler fleet
5. Identify if any outputs from ISSG Overviews could be useful for the ISSG work

6. Work towards a regional sampling plan to be integrated into RWP
 - Finalize the Roadmap for RWP 2028-2030
 - Decide on what ambition level the different parts in the ISSG work is aiming for in 2030 and map current stage

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

No Recommendations or Decisions

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

In the RCG report of 2024 the following work plan was suggested for 2024/2025, as well as for the following years:

I. July 2024-May 2025:

- analyse results of the survey on foreign landings implemented by IEO in 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
- consider and conceptually prepare the inclusion of the data from the regional sampling plan into the RDBES.

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.

During the intersessional period 2024-2025, the need for a new task to be developed in 2024-2025 was identified, namely:

- summarize information on Portuguese bottom otter trawl vessels landing in Spanish ports.

The work developed in 2024-2025 is presented in detail in Part III of this report. Here we present a summary:

Task “analyse results of the survey on foreign landings implemented by IEO in 2024”

Survey was implemented as planned in 2024, during sampling for the national work plan of Spain conducted by the company hired by IEO-CSIC and demonstrated the low frequency of occurrence of landings of Portuguese

vessels in the sampled Spanish ports as well as the identified the expected possibility of sampling of those landings in three of the four ports where this possibility was explored.

New Task “Summary information on Portuguese bottom otter trawl vessels landing in Spanish ports”

Based on logbook data 2021-2024, since RDBES data were not available at the time, a summary information on Portuguese bottom otter trawl vessels landing in Spanish ports was performed and characterized the number of trips and vessels landing per port and metier (for OTB_DEF, OTB_MPD and OTB_CRU), as well as the annual mean.

In addition, for each port considerations about possibility of sampling those foreign landings were compiled not only but also including based on the results of the survey (task above).

Task “update allocation of sampling effort to ports based on recent data from trawl fisheries in the Atlantic Iberian waters”

This task was not implemented since it is no longer needed for the pilot study, as is explained in the next task.

Task “define the sampling plan to be implemented in the pilot study and prepare changes/additions to contracts”

The new contract of IEO-CSIC with an external company starting from 2026 for the implementation of the onshore sampling in ports of Spain as planned in the national work plan of Spain allow for sampling of foreign landings. This change makes it possible to implement a pilot study in which foreign landings of Portuguese vessels landing in Spanish ports can be sampled.

The sampling protocol of Portugal (implemented by IPMA) and of Spain (implemented by IEO-CSIC and AZTI) was described in the RCG Report 2021. In the national work plan of Spain 2025-2027, some changes have been done in the onshore sampling protocol.

To decide on the option to implement in the pilot study of 2026, we considered: the expected outcome from each option in terms of number of foreign trips, as well as the implications in terms of additional sampling work for IEO-CSIC. The option taken is for not to include vessel country as a stratum of on shore sampling of IEO-CSIC but include foreign vessels in the sampling frame. This is likely to cause minimal impact in the observer work (since the expected number of foreign trips is very low and the total number of trips is not changed) though it is likely to result in a very low number of foreign trips sampled. In the national work plan of Portugal 2025-2027, a new sampling scheme at sea is included for sampling of Portuguese vessels operating with bottom otter trawl and starting and ending trips in Spain in 27.8c, specifically with 4 trips per year.

Task “consider and conceptually prepare the inclusion of the data from the regional sampling plan into the RDBES”

This task was postponed and will be developed during the intersessional period 2025-2026.

Workplan for 2025 – 2026

I. June 2025-May 2026:

- June 2025-December 2025: consider and conceptually prepare the inclusion of the data from the regional sampling plan into the RDBES.
- calendar year of 2026: implementation of the pilot study
- Identify if any outputs from ISSG Overviews could be useful for the ISSG work
- Work towards a regional sampling plan to be integrated into RWP
 - Finalize the Roadmap for RWP 2028-2030
 - Decide on what ambition level the different parts in the ISSG work is aiming for in 2030 and map current stage

II. June 2026-May 2027

and June 2027-May 2028:

- calendar year of 2026: implementation of the pilot study
- June 2027-May 2028: analyse results of the pilot study (data for 2026, available in April 2027)
- define future steps.

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

No Recommendations or Decisions

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5.4.4 Feedback from ISSG ‘Evaluation of the data collected for the SSF at EU level’

During the meeting, the main tasks scheduled for the previous period were presented and discussed. Improving knowledge about this fleet remains a challenge, especially regarding essential information such as catches and effort carried out. Additionally, it is important to note that most of this fleet’s activity is concentrated in coastal areas, impacting particularly sensitive habitats, including nursery protection zones, among others. It should also be considered that competition for this coastal maritime space with other users is increasing. Therefore, knowing where SSF fishing activity takes place is crucial for well-planned spatial management.

One of the most relevant points for increasing knowledge about the activity is to monitor the implementation of the EU Control Regulation in the sections related to the SSF fleet. This is especially true regarding the implementation of devices that will allow the collection of high-resolution geospatial data from this fleet.

Another fundamental aspect is the incorporation of all collected information—both official transversal information and data obtained through specific sampling programmes of this fleet—into the RDBES. This will make it possible to analyse the collected information and identify possible gaps and sampling needs based on the requirements of the main end users.

Collaboration and coordination between this ISSG and the other ISSGs working on topics related to SSF will be essential. Such coordination will avoid possible duplications and ensure that each ISSG focuses on tasks aligned with its expertise.

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Finally, efforts will also continue in the development of Regional Work Plans for this fleet.

Workplan for 20235 – 2026

The following tasks for the period 2025-2026 were adopted:

1. Intersessional meetings will take place among ISSG SSF, ISSG EMT, and Metiers and Transversal to collaborate and align SSF topics and tasks.
2. Monitor the implementation of the EU Control Regulation and Implementing Act.
3. Determine key outputs from ISSG Overviews that are crucial for improved coordination in SSF data collection.
4. Identify if any outputs from ISSG Overviews could be useful for the ISSG work
5. Work towards a regional sampling plan to be integrated into RWP
 - Finalize the Roadmap for RWP 2028-2030
 - Decide on what ambition level the different parts in the ISSG work is aiming for in 2030 and map current stage

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

No Recommendations or Decisions

5.4.5 Feedback from ISSG ‘ETP species sampling’

During the meeting, the work carried out in the previous period was discussed. Based on these discussions, the main messages that also define the work to be performed in the following period can be summarized as follows:

On the one hand, the importance of continuously monitoring the implementation of the EU Control Regulation, and specifically its Implementing Act (particularly how each Member State is implementing the recommendations made by scientists), continues to be highlighted. This is essential as it can have a significant influence when estimating bycatch of species considered as ETP.

During the meeting, the results of questionnaires conducted by the RCG chairs were presented, focusing on how each member state was increasing and improving their bycatch data collection for these ETP species considering the Marine Action Plan.

Based on the responses received, it seems evident that Member States are indeed making an effort to improve data collection. However, it is both important and necessary to delve deeper into the analysis of these results, especially regarding the sampling coverage, sampled risk métiers, etc.

The importance of obtaining the most accurate possible overview of all sampling programs aimed at increasing knowledge on ETP species bycatch was emphasized. This is a fundamental task, and the RCG and this particular ISSG will continue to work with leading expert groups such as ICES and GFCM on this topic. It is also important to coordinate this task with other RCGs and to approach it in a pan-regional manner.

Having all this information stored in the ICES RDBES is essential to identify sampling needs based on existing gaps, and to determine how to better coordinate these sampling efforts at the regional level.

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Another relevant point to consider are the sampling improvement alternatives enabled by new methodologies and tools developed for this purpose (e.g. EM).

Finally, good collaboration is still maintained with some of the main end users (e.g. ICES), but this collaboration remains more limited with others (e.g. ASCOBANS).

Workplan for 2025 – 2026

The following tasks for the period 2024-2025 were adopted:

1. Follow up of the EU Control Regulation and the Implementing Act implementation.
2. Collaborate with WGBYC and ISSG Overviews to gather information on sampling programs for ETP species (including considered metiers, their coverage, etc.).
3. Work alongside WGBYC and WGRDBESGOV to incorporate ETP species data into the RDBES, initial outputs and analysis.
4. Develop a regional sampling plan for integration into the RWP.
 - Finalize the Roadmap for RWP 2028-2030
 - Decide on what ambition level the different parts in the ISSG work is aiming for in 2030 and map current stage

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA_BALTIC_2025_R04: Recommendation for ICES WGBYC to conduct in 2025 a preliminary analysis regarding the integration of ETP species data into the RDBES. The analysis should include a comparison between data submitted for the WGBYC data call and the RDBES data call. This is to clarify if all data that are currently requested in the WGBYC data call are also submitted to the RDBES.

5.4.6 Feedback from ISSG ‘Diadromous Species’

The ISSG on Diadromous Fishes met online on March 10-11th, 2025 and presented its outcomes during the physical RCG technical meeting on June 11th, 2025.

This report summarizes ongoing initiatives of the ISSG on Diadromous Fishes aimed at enhancing data exchange, harmonizing data collection and storage, and improving assessment methodologies for diadromous fish species, with a focus on eel, salmon, and sea trout. Central to these efforts is the ongoing DIASPORA project (DIAdromous Species: moving towards new PARadigms to achieve holistic scientific Advice), which plays a key role in addressing both data needs and data storage challenges related to diadromous fish stock assessments. DIASPORA aims to improve data collection and management for diadromous fishes through a spatiotemporal inventory of data needs and the development of optimised database structures. It will also develop advanced, spatially explicit stock assessment methods and benchmark tools to improve model performance, robustness, and forecasting.

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A key priority of the ISSG on Diadromous Fishes is to strengthen direct exchange between DCF-related data collection efforts and the relevant ICES Expert Groups (EGs) concerning data requirements and their use in stock assessments. In this context, the ISSG also serves as a central platform to disseminate information and share best practices related to data collection for diadromous fish. Collaborative work is ongoing between the ICES EGs—WGRFS, WGBAST, WGEEL, WGNAS, and WGTRUTTA—to improve and standardize data collection methodologies for recreational fisheries, electrofishing, and fishing effort for diadromous species. With this background, the ISSG strive towards the integration of DCF requirements and Regional Work Plan (RWP) matters into the generic ToRs of the relevant EGs. This has already been formalized for WGEEL which now (since 2025) includes DCF and RWP-related issues as a dedicated ToR. ISSG Diadromous Fishes continues striving towards achieving a similar inclusion for WGNAS and WGBAST.

Efforts are also underway to address challenges related to the DCF data storage infrastructure, specifically within the RDBES. DIASPARA is expected to deliver robust solutions for the management and storage of diadromous fish data—an essential component of comprehensive stock assessments.

Another key objective of the ISSG is to promote the development of Regional Work Plans (RWPs) for diadromous fishes. RWPs will enable more coordinated and standardized data collection across regions, thereby improving consistency and comparability in stock assessment data. During intersessional work, the ISSG discussed the feasibility of developing RWPs for the 2028–2030 period with the relevant EGs. The outcomes are as follows:

- WGBAST (RCG Baltic): Will deliver draft RWPs for salmon and sea trout, targeting implementation during the 2028–2030 period.
- WGNAS (RCG NANSEA): Will explore the potential for RWPs for salmon, aiming to draft plans for the 2028–2030 timeframe.
- WGEEL (RCG Baltic): Will provide draft RWPs for eel, scheduled for implementation during the 2028–2030 period.
- WGEEL (RCG NANSEA and RCG Med&BS): Both groups will assess the feasibility of developing RWPs for eel and work towards drafting plans for the same timeframe.

During the technical meeting, a roadmap for RWP development for salmon, eel, and sea trout was drafted. ISSG chairs were assigned to coordinate with the respective EGs:

- WGEEL: Marko Freese & Josefin Sundin
- WGBAST: Simon Weltersbach
- WGNAS: Josefin Sundin

The chairs will support the development of RWPs in close collaboration with the experts from each EG. Outcomes and recommendations from DIASPARA, along with input from other relevant workshops and projects, will be integrated into the development of the RWPs.

Workplan for 2025 – 2026

The tasks for 2025-2026 build on the previous work and tasks and will hence follow-up on the progress made in 2024-2025:

1. Continue direct contact and exchange with EGs to get end-user feedback on data collection for assessment.
2. Use outcomes from DIASPORA to improve DCF data collection, RWP work, etc (eel, salmon, trout).
3. Get DCF & RWP as recurring TORs for WGNAS and WGBAST (and continued for WGEEL).
4. Use outcome from WG RecFish questionnaire to facilitate closer collaboration with ISSG RecFish & ICES WG on Recreational Fisheries Surveys (WGRFS).
5. RWP – provide consolidated drafts for RWPs for eel, salmon, trout in NANSEA/Baltic/Med&BS
 - Finalize the Roadmap for RWP 2028-2030
 - Decide on what ambition level the different parts in the ISSG work is aiming for in 2030 and map current stage
6. Databases – issues & open questions – continuous work for improvements.
7. Identify, list and suggest improvements to EU-MAP.

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA_BALTIC_2025_R05: Recommendation to “Provide information on potential data needs for the EU regional workplans, in relation to DCF data collection” as recurring ToR for WGNAS and WGBAST (and ensure it stays in the ToRs for WGEEL).

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5.4.7 Feedback from ISSG ‘Recreational fisheries’

The ISSG Recreational Fisheries group aimed at strengthening data collection, regulatory compliance, and regional coordination. A central focus will be the development and refinement of Regional Work Plans (RWPs), with particular attention to candidate species such as Western Baltic cod, Baltic plaice, NE Atlantic and Iberian sparids (*Diplodus sargus*, *Sparus aurata*), and perhaps also Bluefin tuna. These species have been identified as priorities to be required across all regions to ensure standardized and robust data collection.

To support this, a catalogue of data collection methods used by MS will be compiled to identify gaps and promote harmonization. In parallel, the group will address the implications of the Control Regulation, which mandates electronic daily reporting of recreational catches by 2026 and annual data submission. Thereby Member States will submit by 15th each month aggregated data collected through electronic system starting from 15th March 2026 (fisheries-dependent data) and by 31st of May each year annual data based on data collected under the Control Regulation or alternatively collected with (EUMAP) data collection mechanisms starting from 2007 (fisheries-independent data). Tasks in this area include designing surveys, assessing data quality, and producing a summary of mandatory species, the data collection systems in use (national vs EU app), and the variables being assessed. A key component of this work will be defining a priority species list through the WKRFSA – PSA assessment framework, which will help guide both national and EU-level data

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collection strategies. These efforts will require close liaison with the European Commission and MS to ensure alignment and compliance.

Under the EU Multiannual Plan (EUMAP), the group will work to identify areas, regions, or MS that currently lack multispecies data collection. Follow-up actions will be taken on Baltic plaice, which was identified as priority for inclusion in 2024, and sea breams, which are being considered as potential candidates. Continued development of the Regional Database & Estimation System (RDBES) is also planned, ensuring that data infrastructure evolves in step with the growing complexity and scope of recreational fisheries monitoring.

Finally, pan-regional cooperation will be a key theme throughout this period. The group aims to collaborate closely with ICES WGRFS, other Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs) such as those focused on diadromous species and Mediterranean recreational fisheries, and international bodies like ICCAT. These partnerships will help align methodologies, share expertise, and promote consistency in recreational fisheries data collection across Europe and beyond.

Data have been sampled for catches of plaice from recreational fisheries in the Baltic Sea by Germany. In 2025-2026 WGBFAS will test the inclusion of these data in the ICES stock assessment of Baltic plaice. It is recommended that Denmark and Sweden also start sampling catches of plaice from recreational fishery (as a first step the catches, and as a second step biological information). If it is demonstrated by WGBFAS that such data are included in the stock assessment, this data collection can later be formulated as a decision and can potentially be included in the RWP 2028-2030.

Other potential candidate species that will be explored by the ISSG for inclusion in the EUMAP-based data collection are NE Atlantic and Iberian sparids (*Diplodus sargus*, *Sparus aurata*).

Member States currently face limited financial flexibility within their DCF budgets, which constrains the implementation of pilot studies on recreational fisheries data collection. To ensure regionally coordinated sampling from relevant recreational fisheries, the ISSG will work on including it in the RWP 2028-2030.

Awareness campaigns should be launched to inform anglers about the Control Regulation and encourage engagement. These campaigns must clarify the distinction between data collection for research purposes and for control purposes.

Workplan for 2025 – 2026

- I. Regional Work Plans
 - i. Candidate species: bluefin tuna, sea breams, Western Baltic cod, Baltic plaice
 - ii. Catalogue of data collection methods by MS.
 - iii. Finalize the Roadmap for RWP 2028-2030
 - iv. Decide on what ambition level the different parts in the ISSG work is aiming for in 2030 and map current stage
2. Control Regulation
 - i. Survey designs and quality assessment; Define priority species list (WKRFS – PSA assessment)
 - ii. Summary of mandatory species, data collection system (national vs EU app), assessed variables

- iii. Liaise with Commission and MS.
- 3. EUMAP
 - i. Identify areas/regions/MS without multispecies data collection
 - ii. Follow-up: Baltic plaice (recommendation in 2025); NE Atlantic and Iberian sparids as potential candidates (*Diplodus sargus*, *Sparus aurata*)
 - iii. Dialogue with RCG Large Pelagics regarding DCF sampling of bluefin tuna
- 4. RDBES development (follow-up)
- 5. Pan-regional corporation
 - i. Collaborate with ICES WGRFS, other RCGs (e.g. diadromous, Mediterranean Recreational), ICCAT
 - ii. Dialogue with ICCAT about data format for reporting recreational fisheries for bluefin tuna

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA_BALTIC_2025_R06: Recommendation that catches of Baltic plaice from the recreational fisheries are included in the DCF data collection.

5.4.8 Feedback from ISSG & SG ‘Regionally coordinated stomach sampling and analysis’

Matthias Bernreuther presented the outcomes of the ISSG “Regionally coordinated Stomach Sampling” during the technical meeting in Lysekil, Sweden, on 12 June 2025. These outcomes correspond to the TORs for the past year, and a summary of the findings was as follows:

1. Update the data format description in the RCG stomach sampling manual to match the updated ICES stomach database format

The data format description was updated in the RCG stomach sampling and analysis manuals to match the updated data format of the ICES stomach data base (<https://www.ices.dk/data/data-portals/Pages/Stomach-content.aspx>). While this update was being carried out during the subgroup meeting, it became clear that the other parts of the manuals were also in need of a thorough overhaul. Due to time limitations these overhauls were postponed to the upcoming work cycle of the ISSG stomach sampling and are included in the ToRs for 2025/2026.

2. Communicate with WGSAM on the end-user needs / define the needs and the purpose of the data

The chairs of ISSG stomach sampling (Pierre Cresson and Matthias Bernreuther) met online with the chairs of ICES Working Group on Multispecies Assessment Methods (WGSAM; Nis Sand Jacobsen and Michael Thompson) to discuss amongst others the end-user needs and expectations, predator species selection and data deadlines. During the discussion, it became clear that WGSAM is very interested in the data from this sampling program and that the cooperation in this regard should be intensified. For this purpose, the ISSG stomach sampling will present the stomach sampling program at the WGSAM meeting in October 2025 in order to subsequently adapt the collection program more closely to the data requirements of WGSAM and to clarify open questions.

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3. Update the reference period for the expected stomachs (new reference period: 2019 to 2023) and update the expected stomach numbers by species over the 5-year rolling scheme

In order to obtain a better estimate of the expected stomachs, it was necessary to update the reference period for this estimation (old reference period: 2015 to 2019). To do this, the relevant IBTS data for 2019 to 2023 was downloaded from ICES DATRAS database and used according to the theoretical evaluation and sampling routines as described in RCG NA NS&EA RCG Baltic 2021 – Part III (chapter 15), sampling 2 stomachs per 5 cm length class for the “main” species. The less abundant species (“minor” species) were sampled on every occasion based on sampling routine.

The number of expected stomach samples decreased or remained at the same level for most main species compared to the 2015 to 2019 reference period, with the exception of haddock, where the numbers of expected stomach samples increased using the new reference period 2019 to 2023. When looking at the 5-year sampling period, it becomes evident that the total number of expected stomachs for that period decreases by almost 5000 when using the new reference period compared to the old reference period. An overview of the expected stomach sample numbers by country over the 5-year rolling sampling plan is available in the 2025 RCG NANSEA-RCG-Baltic TM Part III report.

4. Potential updates of RWPs to be finalized in 2026 for RWPs 2028-2030

The ISSG on Regional Work Plans (RWP) submitted a request to our group to discuss and elaborate on specific questions and food for thought regarding the future of the ISSG Stomach sampling in the light of potential updates of the RWPs 2028 – 2030. These questions were discussed, and the results of the discussion were reported back to the ISSG RWP and are also available in the 2025 RCG NANSEA-RCG-Baltic TM Part III report.

5. Work on a regional stomach sampling and analysis plan for the Baltic Sea

Max Lindmark and Karolina Wikström (SLU, Sweden) presented their work on the effects of reduced stomach sampling in Baltic cod. This work was conducted in the light of the discussion and recommendation during the meeting of the ISSG Stomach sampling on the cod stomach sampling program in the Baltic Sea in 2024. The recommendation elaborated from the ISSG was to reduce the sampling of cod during the Baltic International Trawl Survey (BITS) from originally sampling one cod stomach per cm length class on every haul every year, to randomly sample one haul per ICES rectangle with one cod per cm length class (details are available in the 2025 RCG NANSEA-RCG-Baltic TM Part III report).

The Baltic International Fish Survey Working Group (WGBIFS) also addressed this issue and decided to test a similar approach to the regionally coordinated stomach sampling program in the North Sea. During the winter BITS in Q4 2025 and the Q1 BITS 2026 2 stomachs per 5 cm length class of cod and turbot will be sampled at each station or a selected number of stations and the stomach contents will be analysed subsequently. After these two surveys the new sampling approach will be evaluated.

The discussion following the presentation at the technical meeting was mainly about the following points:

- It was advised to send a recommendation to WGBIFS to report back on the results of the evaluation of the alternative sampling strategy of cod and turbot in the Baltic Sea.

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- The formulation of a recommendation to ICES for a data call to receive the data of the ongoing stomach sampling program in the North Sea was discussed.
- The incorporation of e-DNA to the stomach sampling programs was discussed as a promising future technique.

Subgroup meeting on 12 June 2025

The following topics were addressed at the ISSG Stomach sampling meeting during the technical meeting in Lysekil, Sweden:

ICES Stomach data base format

During previous ISSG work on updating the stomach sampling manual, a number of shortcomings of the ICES stomach data base were identified and some opportunities for improvement were identified. These were compiled and it was decided that the best way forward would be to send the list to ICES WGSAM who should then add additional suggestions for improvement before we send this list to the ICES Data Center. Cecilia Kvaavik, Advice Data Officer at ICES proposed the formation of a small expert group to discuss and monitor this process and to determine the necessary adjustments to the stomach data base.

The following shortcoming and suggestions of improvement were discussed during the meeting:

FI: File information

No comments

HH: Haul information

It was unclear whether the station numbers may start at different numbers instead of “1”. It was clarified by Cecilia Kvaavik that although it says “sequential number” it can start from a different number (same as DATRAS format).

PI: Predator information

- 15: “Length”; if length is uploaded in mm instead of the specified cm, an error message should be received. Or the addition another variable with unit of measurement would be helpful to make it clear which unit of measurement was used.
- 22: “Regurgitated”; if any other value than 0, 1 or N/A is uploaded, an error message should be received.
- additional column: “Gutted weight” should be added (in g)
- additional column: “Gall bladder status” should be added (stage 1, 2, 3, 4 according to Robb 1992)

PP: Prey information

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- I3: “IdentMet”. Sometimes the methodology varies dependent on the prey species. Suggestion to be able to specify the identification method for every prey, not just choose one methodology for all samples. It was agreed to register highest magnification.
- Addition to 21 “UnitLngt” and 22 “Length”; a third column indicating if the length stated is Standard length or Total length (or other measurement types), as some preys are more degraded than others. The same can be applied to crustaceans’ length code (TL, CL, CW, etc.) like in the IBTS manual (ICES 2020).
- additional column: The number of parasites in the stomach should be added
- I6: The “SubFactor” variable causes confusion. This variable should be made mandatory.
- It was discussed whether there should be a vocab for certain types of “prey items”, like rocks, sand, plastic, etc. Cecilia Kvaavik mentioned that ICES could include a fixed vocab, but for the time being they are added in the column ‘Otheritems’ (Other items indicator), where ‘other count’ and ‘other weight’ can be added.

Update of the RCG stomach sampling manual for the North Sea

The procedure for updating the manual was discussed and it was decided that Joanna Pawlak from the National Marine Fisheries Research Institute (MIR) in Gdynia will start updating the manual and this draft will be the basis for the finalization of the manual in the ISSG.

Intercalibration Workshop

The need for an intercalibration workshop of stomach analysis methods and techniques was recognised during the ISSG work. The aim of this workshop is to train all participants and gain hands-on experience with a common methodology for stomach content analysis. It also provides an opportunity to learn from each other and to finalise the analysis manual together.

Joanna Pawlak supported by the chairs of the ISSG Stomach sampling will take the lead in organising and leading this workshop. Options for locations were identified as Gdynia (Poland), Ostend (Belgium) and France. The timing will probably be autumn of 2026. A list with contact persons for each country regarding stomach sampling will be compiled and members on this list will be contacted (mainly North Sea and Baltic contact persons) and will be asked to join the workshop.

References

ICES (2020). Manual for the North Sea International Bottom Trawl Surveys. Series of ICES Survey Protocols SISP 10-IBTS 10, Revision 11. 102 pp. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.7562>

Robb, A.P. (1992). Changes in the gall bladder of whiting (*Merlangius merlangus*) in relation to recent feeding history. ICES J. Mar. Sci. 49, 431-436

Workplan for 2025 – 2026

1. Coordinate the stomach sampling programs and the stomach content analyses in the North and Baltic Seas.
2. In preparation of RWP 2028-2030:
 - Finalize the Roadmap for RWP 2028-2030
 - Decide on what ambition level the different parts in the ISSG work are aiming for in 2030 and map current stage
3. Start planning a workshop to intercalibrate and compare stomach content analysis methods between all the countries involved in the sampling and analysis program.
4. Harmonize the sampling plan for the North and Baltic Seas with end-user needs (and identify additional end-users).
5. Develop evaluation methodology for ongoing 5-year North Sea stomach sampling program.
6. Development of alternative sampling and funding strategies in the event that third countries are not able participate in the regionally coordinated stomach sampling program(s).
7. Update the RCG laboratory stomach analysis manual to better match the updated ICES stomach database format.

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA_BALTIC_2025_R07: ICES WGBIFS to report back to the RCG NANSEA & BALTIC on the result of the evaluation of the new sampling strategy.

NANSEA_BALTIC_2025_R08: MS participating in IBTS to incorporate not only stomach sampling but also stomach content analysis in the national work plans.

NANSEA_BALTIC_2025_R09: MS participating in IBTS and sampling and analysing stomach contents to upload the resulting data to the ICES stomach data base.

NANSEA_BALTIC_2025_R10: Request for MS to upload historic stomach sampling data that has not previously been uploaded to the ICES stomach database.

5.4.9 Feedback from ISSG & SG 'Regional Work Plan'

Feedback from the ISSG "RWP" was presented during the RCG NANSEA & Baltic Technical meeting on 10th June 2025. There were also sub-group sessions during the TM, mainly focusing on drafting the roadmap for the RWP 2028-2030 for each ISSG.

During the year, the ISSG invited all participants to 4 online meetings including chairs from RWP Med & BS, RWP LP, RWP Econ, RWP LDF to also aim for some coherence between regions, in the further development of the RWPs.

The ISSG RWP has during the year mainly reflected and worked on:

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- Lessons learned from the process on writing the RWPs 2025-2027 to take into consideration when writing the next RWPs.
- All ISSGs to reflect on challenges, the usefulness of the work, what actions they are planning to do etc.

The ideas on way forward from the ISSG reflections during spring were used together with a fresh brainstorm to draft a roadmap (what action to happen when, by who) for the coming year. Following ISSGs were represented in the TM and worked on drafting a roadmap: ISSG surveys, ISSG Metiers, ISSG Diadromous, ISSG SSF, ISSG ETP, ISSG EMT, ISSG Overviews, ISSG Freezer trawler, ISSG Stomachs. ISSG end-user.

ISSGs Small pelagics Baltic and ISSG Recreational fisheries will need to start up the work in the near future.

The ISSG RWP recommends that all ISSGs should include tasks for the working period 2025-2026 to:

1. Finalize the Roadmap for RWP 2028-2030
2. Decide on what ambition level the different parts in the ISSG work is aiming for in 2030 and map current stage

Workplan for 2025 – 2026

1. Elaborate on a strategic part of the RWPs 2028-2030
2. Support ISSGs in:
 1. developing and finalizing their roadmap
 2. developing the level of ambitions
3. Consider the new proposed sections by the ISSGs in relation to the end user needs / efficiency / expertise needed
4. Physical meeting with ISSG chairs, RCG chairs and NCs (Jan /Feb 2026) - to enhance the input of the ISSGs to the different topics of the RWPs 2028-2030
5. Follow up draft text and tables RWP 2028-2030 from ISSGs
6. Present RWPs 2028 – 2030 to RCG TM 2026

An overview of the proposed time plan is given in table 5.4.9.1

Table 5.4.9.1: proposed time plan for ISSG RWP

2025	September-December	Work in respective ISSG to be taken further based on the outcome (roadmap) from RCG TM and in relation to text and tables in the RWPs
	September-December	Work on general parts in the RWPs (by ISSG RWP chairs)
2026	January	ISSG RWP meeting; update on the status of RWP work and collect feedback from every ISSG
	February	ISSG RWP meeting; update on the status of RWP work and collect feedback from every ISSG

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April	Text and tables ready from every ISSG - level on content/ambition level/details based on previous brainstorm and discussions
May	First draft of RWP NANSEA 2028-2030; RWP Baltic 2028-2030 - level on details based on previous brainstorm and discussions
June RCG TM	Presentation of draft RWP NANSEA 2028-2030; RWP Baltic 2028-2030;
July - September	Adjustments of RWPs
September Decision Meeting	RWPs presented to NCs
15 October	Deadline for submission on Draft RWPs 2028-2030
November - December	Evaluation by STECF - to be confirmed

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA BALTIC_2025_R11: The RCG NANSEA & Baltic recommends to COM that the format of RWP 2028-2030 will be based on the format used in RWP 2025-2027

NANSEA BALTIC_2025_D04: NCs to ensure time allocation and funding for participation of ISSG chairs, RCG chairs and NCs to participate in a physical RWP 2028-2030 meeting in January or February 2026.

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, SECWEB 2.0 project
- Feedback from WGBIOPTIM
- Review the process made in the RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic in 2024-2025
- ISSGs for season 2025-2026

5.5.1 Feedback from ISSG & SG 'National Correspondents'

The ISSG NC's work for 2024-2025 revolved around the following two main topics:

- A. Data confidentiality in relation to data submissions in response to data calls and requests.
- B. (Long) term funding and ensuring continuity of the RCG Secretarial services.

A: In response to the 2024 RCG NANSEABAL recommendation to the Commission to set up a workshop for NCs and data experts to clarify data confidentiality concepts, the Commission initiated a dialogue with the chairs of the ISSG NC and data experts, aiming to prepare the ground for the workshop. After fruitful collaboration, a questionnaire was launched directed to NCs to collect specific national input and identify national rules, regulations or legislation that may prevent the disclosure of data. The questionnaire focused on the DCF themes commercial data (including data derived from logbooks through the Control Regulation), biological data, socio-economic data and recreational fisheries data. For each theme, input was requested concerning data sharing, use, and publication. The outcomes yielded several aspects worth exploring in more detail before final steps towards a workshop can be taken. All outcomes were collected and reported at the national level in an overview document. During the RCG TM, the ISSG NC met with 22 EU NCs (or designated representatives) and invited data experts to discuss the first outcomes and the way forward. The NCs were asked whether they could agree on further dissemination of the results of the questionnaire to relevant groups such as RDBFISgov, RDBESGOV, and the EU FDI group. The decision by the NCs is pending for sharing outside the NC-group, so further details can't be provided at this stage. The ongoing process will continue into RCG work for 2025-2026.

Based on the preliminary results, increasing data requests, and NCs' wishes to better harmonise decisions and responses, steps were taken to improve both the data requests and the decision-making process. Data experts drafted a one-page document for data requesters, other than, e.g. main end-users having a predefined approval, to complete when requesting DCF data. The one-page document summarises the request and defines data responsibilities at the end-user side, including a listing of the persons responsible for follow-up. For NCs, the processes around different types of data calls were analysed from request to decision making, and these processes were summarised in flowcharts, specifying both the flow as well as the various considerations and decisions to be taken before a final response can be provided to the data requestor. The flowcharts will be further discussed and refined before being shared with the wider RCG community.

While discussing the various aspects of data requests and data calls, the group discussed the different approaches by ICES to data calls and requests, based on the nature of the requesting group and subsequently the type of (non-) advice product by a group. End-user data calls are a powerful, proven way to disclose DCF

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data. A formal data call ensures follow-up, data security and traceability of the request and data submission. Formal data calls will also allow follow-up through the established process of monitoring the (non)responses and reporting to the Commission through the data management and transmission tool. For several ICES-working groups, data requests are sent out by the respective chairs of these groups. This process is neither transparent nor considered binding; thus, data submission of mandatory collected DCF data is not obvious, as is data security and traceability. The data may end up on an individual's laptop, outside standard data protection procedures and accountability. The process will benefit from applying the standard approach by ICES when launching formal data calls, and the group recommends applying this procedure for all data requests.

B: Next to the above-mentioned topic on data confidentiality, the EU-wide group of NCs revisited the discussion on the long-term funding for the RCG Secretariat. Apart from the long-term funding, a short-term solution for 2026 is more urgent at this stage, as the 2026 funding for the Secretariat is not currently secured. In 2024, all NCs agreed to settle the 2024-2025 national contributions to the Secretariat through an agreement. Pending the outcomes of the SECWEB 2.0 project, a long-term solution can't be found now, although various scenarios were discussed. An update to the 2024 agreement is proposed to the NCs as a short-term solution. This proposal, including updated cost shares and total costs, will be discussed after the RCG, and a proposal for a decision will be drafted before the Decision Meeting in September.

In addition to the main topics, the decision-making process around the cost-sharing agreements for the IBWSS (blue whiting survey) and IENSNS (Atlanto-Scandian herring) was taken over by the ISSG NC from ISSG Surveys. The 2026 agreements will be prepared for the decision meeting in September 2025. The relevant NCs briefly discussed the agreement. The core of the agreement and actual cost-sharing principles will remain. Still, the agreements may include an overview of the staff exchange, as has already been done, to allow MS to anticipate their staff contributions to the surveys.

Workplan for 2025 – 2026

The ISSG NC proposes the following tasks for 2025-2026:

1. Activities related to the services provided by the secretariat
 1. FUNDING
 2. SECWEB 2.0 project – including setup steering committee if needed
 3. Identification of new tasks to be included in the standard services to be provided as of mid-2026
2. Data confidentiality and publications concerning data calls
3. New data collection tasks/new demands related to EU directives/Council regulations etc.
4. RWP updates as required
5. Setup cost-sharing agreements for IBWSS and IENSNS
6. Optimize internal ISSG NC communication and information flow towards NC (e.g. CR, MAP)
7. Identify, list and suggest improvements to EU-MAP

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA BALTIC_2025_D01: Renewal of cost-sharing agreements for WHB survey 2026 (IBWSS) (DK, DE, ES, FR, IR, NL, SE).

NANSEA BALTIC_2025_D02: Renewal of cost-sharing agreements for IESNS survey (ASH) (DK, DE, IR, NL, SE)

NANSEA BALTIC_2025_R12: ICES to streamline all data calls through one channel, as ICES is the requester (not an individual). This will enhance follow-up actions, registration of data submission, data security, and allow for review under the DTMT procedures between ICES and the Commission.

5.5.2 Feedback from the RCGs Secretariat, SECWEB 2.0 project

CETMAR on its role as service provider for the RCGs Secretariat submitted a project proposal under CINEA call EMFAF-2023-PIA-FISHERIESSCIENTIFICADVICE. The proposal was granted with reference contract No. 101156582 and the acronym SECWEB 2.0. to be implemented from June 2024 to May 2026.

The overall goal of SECWEB 2.0 is to further facilitate and increase the efficiency of the interactions of all the members and stakeholders of the Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs) by improving the online working environment, tools, and services offered by the RCGs Secretariat.

More specifically, the SECWEB 2.0 project objectives are:

- To address the evolving needs and requests of the RCGs network by expanding the functions and services delivered through the web.
- To enhance the effectiveness of the RCGs Stakeholders Database.
- To develop a new web-based tool enabling regular interactions processes.

This project is inextricably embedded into the intersessional work of the RCGs Secretariat because it bases on the RCG network needs and strongly relies on the interaction with the network participants.

Achievements

After the initial setup of the Project (setting up the team, establishing its management rules and procedures, making sure that all the work would not clash but support the activity of the RCGs Secretariat, and also disseminating the project within the RCGs) most of the efforts in the final term of 2024 and the first half of 2025 were devoted to the consultation of preferences and needs and to the accomplishment of the codesign activities with the RCGs.

Through questionnaires, interviews, and participatory workshops, SECWEB 2.0 identified the necessary tools and improvements, defined their core functional specifications, and prioritized the corresponding IT development tasks to ensure efficient, user-centred outcomes.

Based on the results of the questionnaire, the proposed solutions were prioritized accordingly in terms of importance:

- I. Recommendations and decisions support tool

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2. RCGs website updates and improvements
3. E-calendar & event registration system
4. E-library
5. Stakeholders database
6. Consultation tool

During the 2025 RCG NANSEA and Baltic annual meeting held in Lysekil, the RCGs Secretariat organized a participatory session on the recommendations and decisions platform and the link with the table 1.4 in the annual report. The idea of this session was to identify the links between both and discuss the convenience or not of reorganizing some of the fields in the recommendation and decisions to easier match table 1.4. The overall conclusion was that at this initial stage of the development of the recommendation and decisions tool the reordering of fields is not very relevant. The focus should be on getting the platform running taking into account the different roles within the RCGs community and their associated access rights.

Workplan for 2025 – 2026

It is foreseen that by the end of September 2025, first pilot versions of the developments will be presented for discussion, amendment and validation. And programming work will continue until every solution is ready for crash testing.

It is expected that by the end of May 2026 all the solutions are ready to become full scale operational.

Comments

ISSG chairs can contact the RCGs Secretariat and request support for communication, setting up doodle, meeting calls and launching consultation processes.

National correspondent should check the list of experts nominated to ISSGs and send their feedback to the RCGs Secretariat. If no feedback received, we will assume that the nominated people remain the same.

Directly related to the recommendations and decisions tool: the tool should foresee a notification system for approaching deadlines; in the field “Responsible for the action” make sure that each MS is listed instead of all, allowing to sort out by MS.

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

Not applicable

5.5.3 Review the process made in the RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic in 2024-2025

During the RCG NANSEA & Baltic TM 2025, feedback on ISSG work 2024-2025 was presented by ISSG chairs, issues discussed by the RCG and tasks agreed for work during 2025-2026. In addition, presentations were made by the Commission and ICES. Updates were given on the RDBES developments from ICES Secretariat and ICES WGRDBESGOV, and a presentation from ICES WGBIOPTIM updated on the progress that has been made regarding scripts that can help optimizing the biological sampling.

Part of the work at the TM was done in subgroups for discussions on Regional Work Plans, NCs discussions included setup of funding of the RCG secretariat and ongoing work on data confidentiality, the ISSG Overviews

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met to discuss the use of the Overviews by ISSGs. The ISSG Surveys and the ISSG Stomach sampling also had time for subgroup work during the TM

A focus should remain on where it is beneficial to include or invite third countries or representatives of other RCGs to ISSG work or sessions during the RCG NANSEA & Baltic Technical Meeting.

5.5.1 ISSGs for season 2025-2026

Based on intersessional work 2024-2025, 15 different ISSGs presented their results during the Technical Meeting. 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. The 15 ISSGs are continue their work on the specified tasks within their topic in 2025-2026, and an overview of these ISSGs can be seen in table 5.5.6.1. The ISSGs will be presented at the NCs Decision meeting to agree on the ISSGs to work during the season 2025-2026 and ensure that experts and manpower are assigned to the ISSG work. As the NCs are allocating manpower for the ISSG work in their budgets, it is also expected that the ISSG chairs will call for meetings to work on the tasks.

During the technical meeting, ISSG chairs were reminded to check participant lists when inviting to the ISSG meetings. The RCG Secretariat can help checking that everyone is included if added on cc. to meeting invitations. The RCG can also add ISSG meetings to the RCG calendar on the website to increase visibility around the ISSG activities.

The RCG chairs arranged a meeting for ISSG chairs in November 2024 to inform about the role of the RCGs, where to find more information at the <https://fisheries-rcg.eu> website, how we work and practical information on SharePoint, outcomes of Liaison and Decision meetings, submission of RWPs 2025-2027 and the difference in roles between ICES and RCG, and reminder of the 'Mandates and Remits' document. Different solutions for arranging ISSG meetings were presented: some have regular, short online meetings, others have a few days dedicated online workshop, and some aim to arrange a physical meeting. The ISSG chairs were reminded of the importance that ISSG chairs let the members who signed up and allocated time for the work know early in the year what is the plans for meeting and working on the tasks. ISSG chairs were also reminded to involve third countries when relevant.

As some topics are of interest of several ISSGs, and the chairs are encouraged to coordinate and keep each other informed, e.g., new Control Regulation, analysis of position data etc., meetings can be arranged to coordinate between ISSGs. It has for several years been discussed if Genetic methods should have a separate ISSG, and last year the topic was split between ISSG Surveys, ISSG EMT and ISSG Stomach. It was found that this did not work well, as the ISSGs didn't have the needed expertise on genetics. At the RCG TM it was discussed if a better communication could be set up between RCGs and ICES WGAGFA. A separate meeting will be set up during next year to discuss genetics sampling and issues, and it could be brought up at the Liaison meeting in September.

At the TM it was also discussed if a new ISSG to work on optimization of NWP should be established, but it was agreed that it would be better that relevant persons participate in ICES WGBIOPTIM.

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As the link between end-user needs and RCG and ISSG work was a focus topic of the TM, it was suggested to include relevant ISSG chairs in preparation of End-user meetings with ICES and Commission to improve the feedback.

ISSG chairs could also consider if involvement of third countries in the ISSG work would be of benefit and/or if third countries should be invited to their Technical Meeting presentation.

Table 5.5.6.1. ISSGs overview for season 2025-2026

TOR	Topic	ISSG	ISSG short name	ISSG chairs
TOR 1	End-users and RCGs	End-user and RCG interaction	End-user and RCG	RCG chairs
TOR 2	Data Analysis and Quality	RDBES catch, effort and sampling overviews	RDBES overviews	Ana Cláudia Fernandes, Lucia Zarauz
		Métier and transversal variable issues	Métier/transversal	Sébastien Demaneche Josefine Egekvis
		Electronic Monitoring Technologies	EMT	Gildas Glemarec Sander Delacauw
	Regional Database	ICES WGRDBESGOV		Els Torreele, Lucia Zarauz
RDB Core group			Henrik Kjems-Nielsen	
TOR 4	Regional Work Plans	Regional Work Plans	RWP	Maria Hansson Els Torreele
	Diadromous Fishes	Diadromous Fishes	Diadromous	Josefin Sundin Simon Weltersbach Marko Freese
	Surveys	Surveys	Surveys	Sieto Verver Christoph Stransky
	Regional Sampling plans	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 ETPs bycatch sampling	ETP	Estanis Mugerza Christian von Dorrien
		Regionally coordinated stomach sampling	Stomach sampling	Pierre Cresson Matthias Bernreuther
		Recreational fishery	Recreational	Harry Strehlow

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TOR	Topic	ISSG	ISSG short name	ISSG chairs
				Eneko Bachiller
TOR 5	Governance	National Correspondents	NC	Anna Hasslow Anja Boye Sieto Verver

Proposals for Recommendation and Decisions

NANSEA BALTIC_2025_D03: Agree on proposed ISSGs to work during season 2025-2026 and ensure that experts and manpower are assigned to ISSG work.

5.6. ToR 6 AOB

The RCG Secretariat maintains the RCG website www.fisheries-rcg.eu giving an overview of RCG activities. A description of the RCG work can be found in the '[Discover RCGs](#)' document. News can be advertised on the website, and meetings, including ISSG meetings can be added to the RCG calendar for a better overview and visibility of the work. RCG members and ISSG chairs are encouraged to keep an eye open for good stories and developments during the TM or from ISSG work that could be highlighted as a news item. There are sections on ISSG work, which needs input from ISSG chairs to be maintained.

6. Conclusions

The setup of the combined back-to-back RCG NANSEA & Baltic Technical meeting is working well and will be continued. The ISSG work is driving the progress of RCG work, and the technical meeting is a forum to present the ISSG work, evaluate the progress, discuss any issues and suggest recommendations and/or decisions.

The setup with a virtual/online day before the physical meeting focusing on presentations and preparing for the physical meeting works well and makes it possible to spend more time on interactions and discussions in the physical meeting, as well as remaining presentations and subgroup work.

During the physical meeting, it was possible to connect remotely for participants not able to attend or where only short attendance was relevant as well as for presenters.

The ISSG setup works well and makes it possible for a wider group of experts to contribute to the RCG work and forms the basis of the RCG NANSEA & Baltic. A new addition was that in November 2024 the RCG chairs invited ISSG chairs for a meeting to report back from Liaison and Decision meetings and prepare for the 2024/2025 ISSG work, it was concluded that it should be repeated in 2025.

The RCG work is supported by the RCG Secretariat, supporting the work of the RCG chairs and taking care of communication and maintenance of the fisheries-rcg.eu website. The RCG secretariat can also support the ISSG chairs to make sure that all relevant participants are invited to ISSG meetings.

During the 2024/2025 term, the ISSG RCG NANSEA & Baltic had several major achievements, from such as: the RDBES data call 2025 for the first time jointly asked for data for RCG and ICES assessment working groups; first RWPs (2025-2027) approved and became legally binding after reference made in approved NWPs; started the work for the Regional Work Plans 2028-2030 by asking all ISSGs to evaluate their work, and what they want to achieve for the next Regional Work Plans.



7. Next meeting

The RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic 2025 meeting will be followed up with the Liaison Meeting and RCG Decision Meeting for NCs (23-25 September 2025).

Preliminary dates and venue for the next RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic TM are 9-12 June 2026 in Nantes, France, for the physical meeting and 2 June 2026 for the virtual one-day meeting.

The chairs for the RCG NANSEA 2026 are Rita Vasconcelos (Portugal) and Laura Lemey (Belgium); for RCG Baltic 2026 Vilda Griūnienė (Lithuania).



Annex I: List of Participants

Country/ Org.	Name	Email	Comment	In person / Online
DK	Josefine Egekvist	jsv@aqu.aqua.dtu.dk	Chair of RCG NANSEA	
PT	Rita Vasconcelos	rita.vasconcelos@ipma.pt	Chair of RCG NANSEA	
LT	Vilda Griuniene	vilda.griuniene@zum.lt	Chair of RCG Baltic	
ES	Alba María Plaza Rodríguez	amprodriguez@mapa.es	Other;	Online
PL	Adam Lejk	adam.lejk@mir.gdynia.pl	RCG expert;	Online
SE	Alexander Hansson	alexander.hansson@slu.se	Other;	In-person
PT	Ana Cláudia Fernandes	acfernandes@ipma.pt	ISSG chair; RCG expert;	In-person
DK	Anja Boye	angabo@aqu.aqua.dtu.dk	National Correspondent;	In-person
SE	Anna Hasslow	anna.hasslow@havochvatten.se	ISSG Chair	In-person
SE	Anna Persson	anna.s.persson@slu.se	Other;	In-person
SE	Annelie Hilvarsson	annelie.hilvarsson@slu.se	Other;	In-person
LT	Antanas Kontautas	antanas.kontautas@ku.lt		Online
ICES	Cecilia Kvaavik	cecilia.kvaavik@ices.dk	ICES;	In-person
DE	Christian Von Dorrien	christian.dorrien@thuenen.de	ISSG chair;	Online
DE	Christoph Stransky	christoph.stransky@thuenen.de	National Correspondent; ISSG chair;	In-person
IE	David Currie	david.currie@marine.ie	RCG expert;	In-person
ES	David Espino García	david.espino@ieo.csic.es	RCG expert;	In-person
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