Fisheries Data Collection

23rd Liaison Meeting

Meeting between the Chairs of RCGs, key end users, European Commission DG Mare and JRC

Report

5th November 2026

Regional Coordination Group North Atlantic North Sea & Eastern Arctic | Regional Coordination Group Baltic | Regional Coordination Group Mediterranean and Black Sea | Regional Coordination Group Large Pelagics | Regional Coordination Group Long Distance Fisheries | Regional Coordination Group on Economic Issues

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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REGIONAL COORDINATION GROUPS
For Fisheries Data Collection

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Term	Description
AC	Advisory Council
AER	Annual Economic Report (for the European fishing fleet)
BSAC	Black Sea Advisory Council
BFT	Bluefin Tuna
CECAF	Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy
CKMR	Close-Kin-Mark-Recapture
CPCs	Contracting Parties and Cooperating non-contracting Parties
DCF	Data Collection Framework (follow up of DCR)
DCRF	Data Collection Reference Framework
DG MARE	Commission's Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
DTMT	Data Transmission Monitoring Tool
EC (or COM)	European Commission
EM	Electronic Monitoring
ERA	Economic Report of EU Aquaculture
ETP	Endangered, Threatened and Protected Species
EU	European Union
EU-MAP	Multi Annual Programme for Data Collection
EWG	Expert Working Group
FDI	Fisheries-dependent information
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GFCM	General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean
ICCAT	International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas
ICES	International Council for the Exploration of the Sea
IOTC	Indian Ocean Tuna Commission
ISSG	Intersessional Subgroup
JRC	Joint Research Centre
LDAC	Long Distance Advisory Council
LDF	Long Distance Fisheries
LM	Liaison Meeting
LP	Large Pelagics
MAC	Market Advisory Council
MAP	Marine Action Plan
Med&BS	Mediterranean & Black Sea (region)
MRF	Marine Recreational Fisheries
MS	Member State(s)
MSFD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive
NAFO	Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization
NASCO	North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization
NC	National Correspondent (DCF)
NPFC	The North Pacific Fisheries Commission
NWP	National Work Plan
PGECON	Planning Group on Economic Issues
RCG	Regional Coordination Group
RCM	Regional Coordination Meeting
RDB	Regional Data Base (of the RCM/RCG)
RDBES	Regional Data Base and Estimation System
RDBFIS	Regional Database and Fisheries Information System for the Mediterranean and Black Sea
RFMO	Regional Fisheries Management Organization
RoP	Rules of Procedure
RWP	Regional Work Plan
SAC	Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries
SAF	Stock Assessment Form
SIOFA	Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement
SPRFMO	South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization
SSF	Small Scale Fisheries
STECF	Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries
TAF	Transparent Assessment Framework

Term	Description
VME	Vulnerable Marine Ecosystem
VMS	Vessel Monitoring System
WG	Working Group
WGRDBESGOV	Working Group on Regional Data Base and Estimation System Governance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 23rd Liaison Meeting (LM), bringing together the Chairs of the Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs), key end-users (STECF, RMFOs, ICES), JRC, and the Commission, was held on 22-23 September 2026, in a hybrid format. The meeting was opened by the Commission and the LM chair who introduced the ToRs and the agenda and highlighted the key topics to be discussed. The LM was described as the forum where issues that affect several marine regions can be assessed and discussed, providing valuable input and insights to improve collaboration at both regional and pan-regional levels.

The first day of the meeting was dedicated to end-users and their interaction with RCGs. Contributions from SPRFMO, IOTC, GFCM, STECF/JRC and ICES were presented together with the contribution of the corresponding RCGs. End-users described the basics of their mandate and the main issues and difficulties encountered. Discussions with end-users highlighted the need to continue improving data quality (before and after submission) and ensuring that data requirements are clearly communicated and aligned with their intended use Particular attention was given to reducing unnecessary reporting burdens by improving coordination among different data calls and strengthening coordination and feedback between end-users and data providers. Some problems with the data were pointed out and potential solution were discussed. Recommendations and decisions especially relevant to end users were presented by RCGs. The interaction also identified emerging needs related to social and economic data, recreational fisheries, electronic monitoring, genetics and ETP species.

A dedicated session addressed the collection and reporting of incidental catches of protected species. Particular attention was given to the additional reporting burden arising from ICES data requests for Mediterranean bycatch data and to the role of ICES in this process. Discussions highlighted the need to streamline the requirements while ensuring that the needs of different end-users can still be met. As a main follow-up, RCG Med&BS will organise a workshop in early 2027 involving the relevant end-users, RCGs and regional database experts. A key issue to be addressed will be how to streamline requests for Mediterranean bycatch data, considering both the additional data-call burden for Mediterranean Member States and the raising and processing methods used.

Progress in the development of RDBES and RDBFIS was reviewed. RDBES is moving towards full implementation of the data flow from detailed data to national estimates over the coming years. Discussions also addressed access to RDBES data and confidentiality. RDBFIS is undergoing further development and migration to the European Commission infrastructure, with new data domains, including ETP species, recreational fisheries and diadromous species, being incorporated.

The second day focused on the coordination among RCGs. The RCGs presented the main outcomes of their 2026 work and priorities for the coming period. Common themes included data quality and harmonisation, optimisation of sampling, recreational fisheries, ETP species and bycatch, research surveys, electronic monitoring and genetics. Some agreements were reached among different RCGs regarding ongoing proposals for new codification of metiers, and the organization of the intersesional work on genetics. A proposal to change the timing of the Liaison Meeting was also presented and considered. The preparation of the Regional Work Plans for 2028–2030 represented an important part of RCG activities. Increasing financial constraints were also highlighted, particularly in relation to scientific surveys. The need to anticipate possible reductions and assess their consequences for data quality and stock assessments was recognised. Presentations showed that cross-regional cooperation is becoming increasingly important, highlighting the benefits of stronger interaction among RCGs and their intersessional groups.

Three topics of joint interest were specifically presented and discussed: (1) the progress made on RCG governance and tools supporting coordination, with special emphasis on the new platform developed by the RCG Secretariat to facilitate the recording, monitoring and follow-up of Recommendations and Decisions; (2) a proposal for greater harmonisation in the use of the terms "Recommendation" and "Decision"; and (3) the need to strengthen pan-regional coordination among National Correspondents, with a specific proposal for a new RCG for NC that would bring NCs from all regions together in a common forum. This proposal will be further explored with the Commission, including consideration of the appropriate legal and governance framework.

1 INTRODUCTION

1. 1 Background

According to Article 8 of the Regulation (EC) No 2017/1004 (Data Collection Framework, DCF), Member States shall *cooperate and coordinate their actions to further improve the quality, timeliness and coverage of data enabling the reliability of data collection methods to be further improved, with a view to improving their data collection activities*. Further, according to Article 9(1) of the same regulation, *Member States shall coordinate their data collection activities with other Member States in the same marine region and shall make every effort to coordinate their actions with third countries having sovereignty or jurisdiction over waters in the same marine region*. And according to Article 9(2), *in order to facilitate regional coordination, Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs) shall be established by the relevant Member States for each marine region*.

An RCG consists of experts appointed by Member States, including national correspondents, end-users and the Commission and meets annually. Regional coordination has been conducted through various constellations since 2004. At present, the following six Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs) are operating under the DCF:

- RCG Baltic (Baltic)
- RCG North Atlantic, North Sea & Eastern Arctic (NANSEA)
- RCG Mediterranean and Black Sea (Med&BS)
- RCG Long Distance Fisheries (LDF)
- RCG Large Pelagics (LP)
- RCG Economic Issues (ECON)

The RCG Baltic and RCG NANSEA are holding their meeting together although they are still formally two separate groups. In addition to the regional RCGs, a pan-regional RCG deals with collection of economic data was stablished in 2020: The Regional Coordination Group on Economic Issues (RCG ECON). This RCG is the successor of the previous group PGECON although the status of PGECON was slightly different as a subgroup of the EU Expert ([1]) group on Fisheries Data collection.

Similarly, the Liaison Meeting is a subgroup of the EU Expert ([1]) group on Fisheries Data collection, established to assist the Commission on data collection issues. As stipulated in Article 9(6) of the Regulation (EC) 2017/1004, RCGs *shall coordinate with each other and with the Commission, where issues affect several marine regions*. In order to create a forum where issues that affect several marine regions can be assessed and discussed, a Liaison meeting is organised every year after the RCG meetings have taken place, with the participation of the chairs (incoming and outgoing) of all RCGs, key end-users, and the Commission. The 22nd Liaison Meeting was held as a hybrid meeting in DG MARE, Brussels on September 23 & 24, 2025.

Table 1.1.1: RCGs chairs for the season 2026 – 2027, including incoming and outgoing chairs

RCG	Chairs 2023/2024	email
NANSEA	Rita Vasconcelos (outgoing)	rita.vasconcelos@ipma.pt
	Laura Lemey	laura.lemey@ilvo.vlaanderen.be
	Linda O'Hea (incoming)	linda.o'hea@marine.ie
Baltic	Vilda Griuniene	vilda.griuniene@zum.lt
LP	Ioannis Thasitis (outgoing)	IThasitis@dfmr.moa.gov.cy
	George Tserpes (incoming)	gtserpes@hcmr.gr
	Fabio Conte (incoming)	f.conte@masaf.gov.it

LDF	Maksims Kovsars	maksims.kovsars@bior.lv
ECON	Adelbert De Clercq (outgoing)	Adelbert.DeClercq@ilvo.vlaanderen.be
	Hanna Swahnberg	hanna.swahnberg@havochvatten.se
	María Valiente (incoming)	mvaliente@mapa.es
	Joonas Valve (incoming)	joonas.valve@luke.fi
Med&BS	Alexandru Gheorghe (outgoing)	Alexandru.gheorghe@anpa.ro
	Enrico Arneri	enrico.arneri@cnr.it
	Tina Blatnik (incoming)	tina.blatnik@gov.si

1. 2 Adoption of the agenda

After opening of the meeting, the draft agenda was adopted by the participants. See Annex 2 for the agenda of the meeting.

1. 3 Terms of Reference

TOR 1 Discussion with end-users

A. Setting the scene: End-user role and new data demands (Liaison Meeting chair and COM)

B. End-user needs and interaction: presentations from end-users (ICES, GFCM, STECF/JRC, IOTC) on:

- current interaction between the end-user and RCGs/data collectors and proposals for improvement
- data needs and data quality
- ongoing developments
- main changes in data calls anticipated next year

TOR 2 Data management

A. Highlights in progress achieved in 2023-2024 in the Regional Databases for RCGs and problems identified.

B. Highlights in actions related to the future developments for Regional Databases (RCG chairs, RDBFIS, RDBES)

TOR 3 RCG activities (follow-up)

Discussion on possible follow-up to the main outputs/ recommendations

A. Highlights in RCG activities

B. The 2024 RCGs – recommendations and proposals for future intersessional work (Liaison Meeting and RCG chairs)

C. RCG data calls – overview of how MS responded and discussion on future use (RCG chairs)

D. Announcement of new chairs (where relevant), next meeting(s) and venues E. Future steps in RCG pan-regional and intersessional work (i.e., regional work plans, country profiles): exchange of ideas and discussion (COM, Liaison Meeting, RCG Chairs)

TOR 4 Governance

A. Follow-up on RCG Rules of Procedures (RoP) developments in each of the RCGs (Liaison Meeting, RCG Chairs)

B. Structure of RCGs and cooperation. Discuss needs for new pan-regional ISSGs (RCG chairs)

- Status on Secretariat (current output available to RCGs)
- Diadromous ISSG (position and future participation to LM)

TOR 5 AOB

1. 4 Participants (list in annex)

The 23rd Liaison Meeting was chaired by Lucía Zarauz (Spain) and the meeting was attended by the Commission, key end-users of the Data Collection, representatives of regional databases and the chairs of the RCGs. Annex 1 provides an overview of the participants to the meeting and their respective affiliation.

2 DISCUSSION WITH END-USERS (TOR 1A&1B)

2. 1 Setting the scene

End-user role and new data demands (Liaison Meeting chair and COM)

(1)Welcome by the commission – DG MARE

The meeting was opened by DG MARE, who welcomed all participants and thanked Lucia Zarauz for chairing the Liaison Meeting for the second time. DG MARE recalled that the main purpose of the Liaison Meeting is to bring together end-users and RCG chairs, fostering closer collaboration between those responsible for collecting data and those using the data for scientific advice and fisheries management.

Key topics on the agenda were highlighted, including a dedicated session on bycatch issues, discussions on databases and data management, and the increasing amount of intersessional work undertaken by the RCGs. She noted that RCG work has expanded significantly in recent years, covering emerging topics such as electronic monitoring systems (EMS) and genetics. Thanks were extended to the RCG Secretariat, whose support has helped expand activities and improve coordination across the network.

With regard to the Regional Work Plan (RWP), DG MARE noted that the RCGs had reviewed the implementation of the current plan, identifying both successful elements and areas for improvement in preparation for the next planning period. The Commission looks forward to seeing which activities will be further developed, consolidated or newly introduced in the upcoming RWP.

Data sharing and collaboration with end-users were highlighted as important topics for discussion. In particular, attention was drawn to issues related to data dissemination and confidentiality. The Commission expressed interest in the recommendations and decisions arising from the RCG discussions on these topics.

Finally, participants were encouraged to identify both region-specific issues and topics of common interest across sea basins and fisheries. As the Liaison Meeting has now been conducted for several years, suggestions for improving its format and effectiveness were welcomed.

Housekeeping arrangements for both in-person and online participants were presented. Given the ambitious agenda, participants were informed that some flexibility with the schedule might be required.

(2)Welcome and introduction

The objectives and structure of the Liaison Meeting were presented, together with the agenda. The meeting was structured around five ToRs. The first day focused on end-users' needs and data management (ToRs 1 and 2). The second day focused on RCG activities and governance (ToRs 3 and 4). The Chair explained the arrangements for reporting and the deadlines, with the Secretariat as the contact point.

The Chair reminded participants of the topics discussed last year and those expected to be addressed this year. Key topics included sampling and data quality, bycatch and emerging methods, prioritisation and optimisation, regional databases, confidentiality and access, and Regional Work

Plans. Participants were encouraged to clearly identify data needs and priorities, as well as issues requiring coordination across regions, and to use the Liaison Meeting to raise awareness of these common needs.

2. 2 End-user needs and interaction

(1)SPRFMO

Presenter: Bernard Vigga, Data Manager, SPRFMO (South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation), Wellington, New Zealand.

Interaction with the RCG/data collectors

SPRFMO does not have a direct channel with the RCGs. Our only Member in common with the DCF system is the European Union itself, so our interaction with the RCG network is indirect. As a SPRFMO Contracting Party, the EU submits annual reports, catch and effort data, observer data, VMS positions and transshipment declarations directly to the SPRFMO Secretariat under our Conservation and Management Measures.

That data is first compiled nationally by EU Member States through DCF processes that RCGs help coordinate and is only aggregated and reported on to SPRFMO afterwards. The Secretariat only ever sees the end product.

SPRFMO will be updating its reference lists to the 2026 ASFIS species list, along with the ISSCFG gear and ISSCFV vessel type code lists. Closer alignment with the vocabularies RCGs and ICES already use, such as RDBES, at the point of national compilation would reduce reformatting and reconciliation work on both sides.

Data needs and data quality

Our core data needs remain vessel registry, catch, effort, landings, observer and biological data, transshipment, VMS, and quota and catch limit monitoring.

Since July 2025 we have been executing a Three-Year Workplan agreed by our Data Working Group, which is rebuilding SPRFMO's systems around one connected database behind sprfmo.org, rather than the fragmented spreadsheets and standalone tools we relied on previously. So far this has delivered:

- a redesigned production platform
- a complete Record of Vessels module
- stronger two factor and role-based access
- partial public access to our datasets

The main gap is Catch and Effort. The underlying data structures exist, but the full submission, validation and reporting workflow is only partially built, and we are targeting mid-2027 to complete it. Our updated ASFIS, ISSCFG and ISSCFV reference codes have been approved by the Commission but are not yet migrated into the live system.

On data quality, most of our current effort goes into reconciliation: cross checking catch, fishing activity, landings, transshipment, observer, authorisation and port records against one another, and tracking historical vessel metadata such as flag and name changes, so that VMS analysis is always read against the vessel details that applied at the time rather than today's record applied retroactively.

Ongoing developments

The main initiative underway is Stage 1 of our Data Management Platform Enhancement. It has given us a redesigned production platform at sprfmo.org and a separate training and sandbox environment, so Members can learn the system without touching live data.

Our externally hosted VMS provider, THEMIS, is linked to the Record of Vessels, and we have built scripted extraction of historical vessel metadata so that older VMS positions are read against the vessel details that applied at the time, rather than today's record applied retroactively.

We have also strengthened access control through two factor authentication and refined role-based permissions. The next major step is a phased rollout of Member self-service, covering training material, sandbox testing, a pilot group and then production, running through to mid-2027. A scientific data needs assessment is under way in parallel to develop new science data requirements that can be incorporated into the current environment.

Looking further ahead, we are scoping additional structured domains covering Port State Measures, vulnerable marine ecosystem encounters, abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear, and inspection records.

Foreseen changes in data calls

The nearest term change is a migration to updated species, gear and vessel type reference codes already approved by the Commission, running from around October 2026 to April 2027.

Further out, the Catch and Effort workflow will move from templates and email to a validated web-based submission, with Member training starting around May 2027. This is a change in how reporting is done, not only what is reported. Vessel Registry self-service for Members, covering registration, editing and bulk upload, is planned to start a little earlier, around February 2027.

We will also continue to strengthen transshipment reconciliation, reducing duplicate reporting and improving the matching of notifications, declarations and observer records.

Our current measures, CMM 01-2026, CMM 02-2026 and CMM 03-2025, remain in force. Over the coming year the Data Working Group will be publishing governance documentation setting out, data domain by data domain, the authoritative system of record, the submission channel and the validation rules that apply.

Discussions and feedback

SPRMFO emphasised the need to improve the quality of the data before submission. The Secretariat has limited staff resources, and there are 15 active members (17 in total). Correcting data after submission results in a ping pong process that is very time-consuming.

In addition, the Chair of RCG LDF clarified that they are willing to improve communication with SPRFMO and invited SPRFMO to contact him directly. He also informed participants that an invitation to attend the technical meeting is sent to all end-users each year, including SPRFMO, and that the invitation will be sent again next year.

(2)IOTC

The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) promotes conservation and sustainable use of tuna and tuna-like stocks. EU fleets reported 216.5 thousand tonnes of tuna, 5.3 thousand tonnes of billfish and approximately 1 thousand tonnes of seerfish in 2025.

Interaction with the RCG/data collectors

The IOTC Secretariat works with Regional Coordination Groups for Large Pelagics (RCG LP), and national data collectors through the scientific working parties and training workshops, including Regional Observer Scheme (ROS) training for purse seine and longline fisheries. Feedback after submissions helps resolve discrepancies and clarify reporting instructions. Official data submissions must pass through the European Commission. Continued exchanges with fleet experts are also sought to improve estimation methods and the representativeness of fisheries data.

Data needs and data quality

Resolution 26/06 will supersede Resolution 15/02 and enter into force on 18 November 2026, while Resolution 15/01 remains in force. Annual data for the preceding year are due by 30 June, with industrial longline updates by 30 December. Reporting covers species presence, retained catches, discards, georeferenced catch and effort, size frequencies, fish aggregating device (FAD) activities, buoy positions, vessel statistics, fish prices and observer information. Resolution 12/02 safeguards confidentiality through appropriate aggregation before dissemination.

The current assessment records compliance across EU fleets for retained catches, georeferenced catch and effort, and support vessel characteristics. Gaps remain in species presence, protected species interactions, discards, size frequencies, and anchored FAD activities. Data checks and clarifications are ongoing; the full assessment of 2025 data is scheduled for early 2027.

For France, priorities include reconciling species declarations, interaction and discard records, replacing aggregated size categories and reporting anchored FAD data by type. Spain needs to clarify size frequency units. Portugal needs to reconcile turtle interaction and discard records and provide missing size frequencies for black marlin and shortfin mako. Consistency across forms and complete species coverage are shared priorities.

Ongoing developments

EU support for the Scientific Committee's Programme of Work (2026–2028) and the Sustainable Western Indian Ocean Programme (2026–2029) includes a pilot Regional Sampling Framework, genetic sampling and a pilot tissue bank led by Ifremer's Indian Ocean Delegation, as well as improvements to the IOTC data and information system. These activities will strengthen data management and promote reproducible workflows aligned with FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable) principles, thereby facilitating access to and dissemination of IOTC data.

Validation will be enhanced and extended using the vrule package for allowed values and logical checks, with a Shiny application and downloadable code planned. Revisions to IOTC reporting forms 3DA and 1RC address drifting FAD characteristics, units, code lists and catches inside or outside Exclusive Economic Zones. Regional Observer Scheme (ROS) work includes reconstructing historical data gaps, harmonising code lists with IEO, AZTI and IRD, developing online validators and collaborating on IRD's ObServe system. An R package for more transparent and flexible raising methods is planned for publication on R-universe, with input sought from fleet scientists.

Foreseen changes in data calls

Forthcoming requirements include jurisdictional breakdowns of surface and longline catches, with historical catch-and-effort breakdowns to be supplied where possible within three years of adoption (Resolution 26/06). Catch-and-effort reporting for commonly caught elasmobranchs will follow the approach used for IOTC species. Mako shark reporting and retention changes under Resolution 25/09 include potential review of records through the Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch and Scientific Committee in January 2028.

Annual aggregated statistics on vessels contributing to reported catches are due by 1 January 2030 and annually thereafter. Reported drifting FAD design characteristics must align with Annex IV of Resolution 24/02. Submissions will be limited to one file per form, excluding supporting documents.

Any other issues

Implementation requires coordination between national data providers, EU scientific institutes, the European Commission and the Secretariat. Migration to the FAO website and revised reporting forms reinforce the need to maintain clear guidance and consistent code lists. Fleet expertise will be important when reviewing raising methods and resolving historical data gaps.

(3)GFCM presentation

Presenter: Paolo Carpentieri

Fishery Resources Monitoring Officer, General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

The GFCM presented an overview of its fisheries data requirements, reporting and quality assurance processes, ongoing developments and anticipated changes in data submissions, complemented by a dedicated presentation on bycatch of vulnerable species. Its data needs support the formulation of scientific advice and the adoption of management measures for Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries, in line with the GFCM 2030 Strategy. MedSea4Fish and BlackSea4Fish support national and regional capacity development and the collection and use of fisheries data.

Interaction with the RCG/data collectors

The GFCM participated in the RCG Mediterranean and Black Sea annual meeting on 31 August 2026. Exchanges covered GFCM data and information requests, the Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF), data quality processes and results, the outcomes of the 2026 Workshop on fisheries data (WKDATA), and activities under MedSea4Fish and BlackSea4Fish. The GFCM also shared relevant outcomes of the 2026 Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries (SAC) and Advisory Committee on the Black Sea (ACBS) sessions and information on forthcoming working groups and stock assessment meetings.

Data requirements and deadlines are communicated to contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties (CPCs) through the online data submission calendar, also available in downloadable PDF format. Reminder emails are sent in English and French two to three weeks before submission deadlines.

Data needs and data quality

For 2026, the GFCM identified 79 compulsory fisheries data and information reporting topics: 49 (62 percent) are related to the DCRF, while 30 (38 percent) are not directly data driven. In addition, 13 stock assessment input data calls were foreseen to support GFCM stock assessment working groups.

The DCRF manual and online platform provide a standardized framework for recurring submissions required under GFCM recommendations. These cover fishing fleets, including authorized vessels; fishing activities and landing ports; catch and effort; biological information on main species; discards and incidental catches of vulnerable species; and socio-economic variables. The framework supports the identification, collection and transmission of the data needed by GFCM subsidiary bodies to formulate scientific advice.

Data quality and use are evaluated through complementary processes. Data submitted through the DCRF online platform are assessed against five quality indicators: timeliness, completeness, conformity, stability and consistency. The assessment presented at the meeting covered 62 DCRF subtasks for reference year 2024 (transmission year 2025), excluding Task VII.1 on stock assessment input data. Stock Assessment Form (SAF) input data are evaluated by stock assessment working groups, with a focus on priority species in each GFCM subregion. Data and information required under the 11 management plans are also checked and analysed through the subregional committees and the SAC/ACBS advisory process.

Ongoing developments

A new DCRF tracker and data consultation tool provides an overview of transmitted and outstanding datasets by CPC, reference year and subtask, with a dedicated section for SAFs. It also offers data tables and dynamic charts for selected DCRF subtasks, including global fisheries figures, landings, fishing fleets and fishing effort. Information is synchronized weekly with the DCRF database.

Other planned activities included subregional committee meetings, work on vulnerable marine ecosystems and essential fish habitats, European eel, and socio-economic data. Several dates and modalities remained provisional, but the GFCM meetings webpage provides updated scheduling information.

Foreseen changes in data calls

At WKDATA in March 2026, participants discussed closer alignment between DCRF submissions and SAF input data requirements to reduce duplication and improve integration of reporting processes. The workshop also considered an ad hoc section within existing GFCM online platforms (DCRF and Monitoring, Control and Surveillance, MCS) for data and information mandated by non-DCRF reporting requirements.

The SAC and ACBS welcomed the inclusion of non-DCRF elements in existing submission systems, provided that these changes remain strictly technical, optimize processes and eliminate redundancies

without creating additional obligations for CPCs. Both committees supported harmonization of SAFs, including their pre-population with selected DCRF data. These are directions for further development rather than newly introduced reporting obligations.

Any other issues

The GFCM emphasized the connection between national data collection, regional expert analysis, scientific advice and management decisions. Monitoring programmes, research and pilot activities, surveys at sea and socio-economic surveys feed into working groups and workshops, where findings are harmonized and analysed. Advisory bodies then review the evidence and formulate advice to inform GFCM decisions. Continued coordination with data collectors and capacity development therefore remain central to improving the availability and use of comprehensive, reliable and timely data.

(4)STECF/JRC presentation

Since the last LM, the following STECF Expert Working Groups (EWGs) using DCF data calls were held:

- Social data: EWGs 25-13 (Oct 2025) and 26-02 (Jun 2026)
- Fish processing industry: EWG 25-15 (Oct 2025)
- Fleet economics (Annual Economic Report): EWGs 26-01 and 26-05 (Apr/Jun 2026)
- Western Mediterranean stock assessment: EWG 26-09 (Aug/Sep 2026)
- Fisheries-Dependent Information (FDI): EWG 26-08 (Sep 2026)

Interaction with the RCG/data collectors

Regarding social data, the STECF is operationalising a framework for the analysis of the social dimension of the CFP. National and Community Profiles are the backbone of the analysis of developments in the social domain of fisheries, next to data collected under the DCF. Their further development is of utmost importance. End-users and/or stakeholders have been iteratively involved in the process of developing the framework and its indicators to allow data collected to become useful information. Moreover, representatives of RCG ECON are part of the STECF EWGs.

There is fluent interaction between RCG ECON and collectors of fish-processing data. Discussions under RCG ECON focused on improving and harmonising data collection, including social data (TM 2025), with more recent attention to raw-material data, species identification, origin and reporting standards across MS (TM 2026). The Market Advisory Council (MAC) regularly participates as observer in the EWG on Fish Processing and requests the presentation of the STECF report to its Working Group. The latest presentation (16 Sep 2026) generated considerable interest and discussion, particularly regarding the need for more detailed and harmonised information on raw materials, including species composition, origin and sourcing patterns.

Regarding fleet economics, there is good interaction between the AER EWGs, RCG ECON and data collectors. Workshops and meetings are held on a regular basis and changes are implemented. Also, the AER EWG and the ACs interact well. LDAC, BSAC, MEDAC and MAC normally ask the EWG chairs to present the main outcomes of the AER. MAC and MEDAC attended the EWG 26-05 as observers.

For the Western Mediterranean stock assessment, follow-up through the DTMT is improving. Data quality issues affecting the assessment are described in the EWG report, for MSs to check. MSs should be encouraged to routinely check data before uploading. R tools and related training activities were provided to the MSs through the EU projects QualiTrain and RDBFIS II and III (possibly finalised through RDBFIS IV).

Data collectors are part of experts attending the FDI EWG, including some National Correspondents.

Data needs and data quality

Currently, social data collected is of limited scope (7 variables, mostly socio-demographic). The 2025 MS data submission completeness has improved significantly since the first Social Data call. Coverage and quality issues are available in the DTMT and reported in the 2026 report. As 2017 data were used as baseline, substantive issues with the quality of the data were observed that need attention by MS. Overall, advice requests by the Commission increasingly require evidence from the social dimension.

Due to the voluntary nature of fish-processing data collection, 16 MS submitted data under the 2025 EU-MAP data call. Data were complemented with Eurostat/SBS and PRODCOM for the remaining MS to ensure EU-wide coverage; consequently, the level of detail and range of indicators may differ across national chapters. Regarding raw materials, 11 MS provided data (compared with 8 MS in the previous data call). STECF stresses the importance of alignment with RCG ECON recommendations and standard FAO/ISO categories. Timeliness of economic information remains an important data need. The 2025 report tested a nowcasting approach using PRODCOM and ComExt to provide more timely estimates of key economic indicators. STECF recommends developing a harmonised projection protocol before operational use.

The web dashboard developed by JRC is used by experts and end-users to directly visualise, analyse and download fleet economic data. Additional dashboards for the regional analysis and the Outermost Regions have been developed by JRC and used for the preparation of the AER.

MEDITS data are incomplete due to omission of MSs to carry out the survey or number of necessary hauls (e.g., Covid-19 crisis, administrative issues); in addition, in some areas (e.g. GSA 5) changes in survey spatial distribution occurred over time. An increase of the length of time series of surveys (e.g., BALAR survey in GSA 5, as done for hake last year) is needed, i.e. a recovery of data before MEDITS. Missing or poorly sampled length frequency distributions (LFDs) are still an issue, especially due to necessity to go to gear level to estimate partial fishing mortalities needed for the models used by EWG on the effort regime in the Western Med. MSs need to make sure LFDs provided for each stock and fleet are scaled to the landings and discards in volume/weight those LFDs represent.

The amount of FDI data (all species, all areas, all discards, etc.) leads to higher probability of errors in submissions by all MSs. Data quality is improving annually, with MSs gaining more experience in data submission and requirements. Moreover, data calls improve regarding wording and definitions, based on the most recent feedback from data providers. FDI biological data are not fully covering all EU fishing regions, as biological data for the Med&BS regions are not requested in the data call.

Ongoing developments

There are ongoing Test Studies (7 MS) to explore new social indicators that are more suitable to provide evidence and inform decision-making on sustainable fisheries. A need has been identified for alignment of definitions and methodology used across the different fora currently developing social

indicators. Intersessional RCG ECON work and combining economists and social experts in the EWG has proven extremely useful.

Following STECF's proposal for a dedicated RCG ECON WS on fish processing, the RCG ECON TM 2026 discussed its possible scope, with a focus on raw-material methodology, harmonised reporting and traceability. The organisation of the WS will depend on the identification of priority and actual data needs. Further work should explore a common typology of processing activities (e.g. filleting, freezing, canning and smoking) to improve comparability and policy insight across MS. A harmonised nowcasting protocol for turnover, GVA and gross profit should be developed, ideally through a dedicated expert task or ad-hoc contract and subsequently tested and refined by future processing EWGs.

Definitions of small-scale coastal fishing (SSCF) in the economic data has been slightly amended to align with EMFAF definitions. The following segments are now classified under the SSCF category: PS <12m and MGO <12m. Additional chapters in the 2026 AER contain a sensitivity analysis of fuel price changes in 2026 and vessel age structure of the fishing fleet. 2025 nowcasts and 2026 forecasts are better distinguished, both in text and in tables to reflect differences in data robustness and availability.

For Western Med data, there is still an urgent need to review the timing and setting of the EWGs on the assessment of western Med stocks and the effort regime in the western Med MAP. The timing between the end of the data call and the EWG are becoming more crucial as data preparation work is needed (currently over the summer period).

The EWG proposed for the next FDI methodological EWG taking place in 2027:

- Comparison of the RDBES structure with the FDI dataset structure.
- Revision of the definition of Maximum Days at Sea in the FDI data call and update if required.
- Revision the SPECON variable and its use in FDI reporting of exemptions from the landing obligation.
- Assessment the occurrence and data availability of commercial fishing activities without vessels in MS.
- Continue the review of confidentiality questions and EWG methodological processes (scripts).

Foreseen changes in data calls

The next social data call is foreseen for 2028. Evidence (e.g. from test studies) will inform which changes are needed.

No major changes have been agreed so far for the fish-processing data call/reporting requirements.

AER EWG experts highlighted the need for better communication of uncertainty, as current estimates do not report uncertainty levels or measures of statistical robustness, limiting their usability for end users. STECF recommended exploring further automation of AER production through ad-hoc contracts, initially using the AER 2026 EU overview and selected national chapters as reference cases.

Data at quarterly level have been requested and provided since 2017 for the species driving the fisheries in the western Med. In the near future, it is expected that data provision will be mandatory at least for these species, to avoid overloading MSs. Possible historical data revisions need explanations, as they can impact stock assessments and it is necessary to explain the differences between yearly assessments beyond "the data have changed".

Next year's data call will request data for 2026. For MSs who did not re-submit the whole time series in previous years, there will be the opportunity to send data for previous years. MS are encouraged to submit data earlier than 2013.

Discussions and feedback

Regarding the WestMed outcomes, it was noted that Member States shall follow the RCG recommendation requiring Member States to apply the quality checks. The information on problems with the data needs shall be sent back to the RCGs for consideration.

The spatial coverage of MEDITS was also discussed. A historical revision by Member States may be needed.

(5)ICES presentation

An overview of end-user needs and interaction from the ICES perspective covered interaction with the RCGs, data calls and submissions, data policy and licensing, RDBES updates, ongoing developments and bycatch data.

Interaction with the RCG/data collectors

ICES maintains regular formal and informal dialogue with RCG Chairs and Secretariats to develop a shared understanding of data needs and challenges, improve recommendations, align priorities, and strengthen coordination. The collaboration connects regional data collection with scientific advice, supports improvements in data quality and usability, identifies future data needs and strengthens feedback between data providers and end users.

Data needs and data quality

Two types of data calls were described. Calls issued by the ICES Secretariat to support advice, special requests, or services established through Memoranda of Understanding (MoU). They may cover open or restricted-access data, have mandatory deadlines, and require a response from Member States. Calls issued by expert groups are usually based on their terms of reference and may only request open-access data. These data calls are managed by the group chair(s), and Member States are not required to respond.

The data-submission feedback process consists of an initial feedback review by ICES, a first round of questions is then sent to data submitters through national correspondents; review of the responses and submission of a final list to DTMT follows. Assistance is being sought from data providers and stock assessors to establish a reporting process for stocks and areas where data are not currently collected.

Most of ICES data are publicly available and require acknowledgement or citation when used. Restricted access applies where data are subject to legislation or are economically (e.g. RDBES, VMS and Logbook) or biologically sensitive (e.g. VME, Bycatch), with access determined according to the proposed use. A specific licence has been introduced in 2026 for Preliminary Catch Statistics to meet conditions linked to Eurostat reporting. ICES is continuing to follow the development of eFAS

(ecosystem Framework for Assessment and Science) and to participate in discussions on balancing confidentiality and transparency in fisheries data.

An update from the RDBES team, showed that almost all countries had uploaded all types of data, and that in 2026 the system has been used to test 9 selected stocks. There have been 29 requests for data since the previous year, mainly covering landing and effort data and, in some cases, sample data. No changes were made to the data model or format during this year.

Ongoing developments

Short-term new RDBES developments include roles for data access, viewing and downloading, as well as APIs for uploading and downloading detailed data, as well as the Catch Estimates Format (CEF) data, Stock Coordination Format (SCF) data, and transferring the data to the Transparent Assessment Framework (TAF). Further development includes incorporating recreational fisheries, bycatch and diadromous species data into RDBES. Focus is also on data validation, FDI export and continuing to support stock coordinator estimates and historical InterCatch information. As RDBES is intended to replace InterCatch and the data are essential for stock-assessment working groups, continued funding for the necessary development will need to be secured.

The Stock Information Database (SID) is moving to a new platform connected with the ICES Vocabulary database, Advice Scenarios Database (ASD) and Stock Assessment Graphs (SAG), which will make it more useful in the future, also connecting it to RDBES. The Diadromous Species Database is progressing, with key implementation activities planned for 2027 and relevant data expected to be integrated into RDBES. Work is also continuing to adapt RDBES for recreational fisheries data, with the possibility that future data calls could be managed directly through the system.

Foreseen changes in data calls

No major changes to data calls are foreseen for 2027. Information on current, upcoming and closed calls, together with information on submissions, is available through the ICES data-call webpage. Deadlines and reports for current and upcoming benchmarks are available through the ICES benchmark webpage.

Any other issues

Continued development of RDBES depends on securing appropriate funding. The AmonboFish Horizon proposal, which included work on incorporating recreational fisheries data into RDBES, was not accepted. The presentation therefore highlighted the need to support essential future developments through MoU or Grant Agreements with ICES advice requesters.

The specific licence introduced for preliminary catch statistics does not fully align with the preferred open-access approach of ICES. This reflects the continuing need to balance open access and *transparency with reporting conditions, legal requirements and confidentiality considerations.*

Discussions and feedback

The possibility of reducing the number of data calls issued directly by ICES expert groups was discussed. It was clarified that, although no official decision has been made, ICES is working towards

avoiding data calls issued independently by Working Groups. Data calls should follow the official process, and groups should clearly explain in advance how the requested data will be used.

The issue of RDBES funding was also raised by DG MARE, specifically regarding the status of the special request to develop RDBES and the need for the involvement of other advice requestors. It was reported that no feedback had been received from other advice requestors. It was suggested that this issue should also be raised with RDBES.

2. 3 RCG interaction with end users

(a)RCG Long Distance Fisheries (SPRFMO)

Prioritization of data variables.

Analysis of the submitted data showed that not all MSs had adhered to last year's recommendation on data quality. The RCG LDF recommends (LDF_2026_R01) that Member States adhere strictly to the data specifications outlined in the data call. This is particularly important with regard to the requested Métier level (MIS_MIS should be avoided) and geographical scope (fishing ground names should be provided in the 'Area of Jurisdiction' field). This applies even if certain fields are considered optional within the database format.

Decisions and/or recommendations relevant for end users (if any)

Recommendation LDF_2026_R02: The RCG LDF recommends that data extraction from RDBES cover all FAO areas except 27 and 37. Currently, data is downloaded from the RDBES based on countries' assignment to the RCG LDF. If a country has not been assigned to an RCG LDF, but has submitted data from LDF areas, it is omitted from the extraction process. LDF interests cover all FAO areas except 27 and 37.

Decision LDF_2026_D02: The RCG LDF decide to temporarily suspend the joint EU programme for collecting fisheries data in the CECAF region until the organizational and administrative issues relating to the deployment of EU observers on EU vessels are resolved. The challenges associated with deploying EU observers on EU vessels remain unchanged from the previous year.

Reducing the current requirement for 60% local crew remains a key issue for deploying observers on board to collect biological information.

Data Calls (issued by end users)

None

Any other topic relevant to end users

No EU vessels were active in the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC) area in 2025; however, an EU vessel plans to conduct an exploratory fishery in the area in autumn 2026. Biological information is planned to be collected during this fishery under the Multilateral Agreement for biological data collection of pelagic fisheries in the NPFC area.

No major changes to the types of fisheries or target species were observed, and NAFO has not identified any major issues with EU data requiring coordination or any gaps in the data needed for stock assessment. The ISSG-NAFO-SP continues to work on harmonising EU onboard sampling protocols, with plans to store biological information in the RDBES in the future.

In 2025, three EU vessels operating under Polish and Lithuanian flags were active in the South Pacific. Observers were deployed on a Lithuanian vessel in July for 46 days, measuring 8,105 jack mackerel; on a Polish vessel in September for 34 days, measuring 24,326 jack mackerel; and on a Lithuanian vessel in November for 40 days, measuring 5,272 jack mackerel. Observer coverage reached 33% of fishing trips in 2025 (three out of nine trips), exceeding the minimum target of 10%.

The RCG LDF recommend (LDF_2026_R04) setting up the mandatory observer training workshop for SPRFMO observer accreditation as they must be repeated every 3 years. The intention is to invite observers from other relevant regions (e.g. CECAF) to further strengthen cooperation.

No fishing trips were observed in the CECAF area in 2025. The current Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement (SFPA) with Mauritania is valid until 14 November 2026, and negotiations are ongoing. Reducing the current requirement for 60% local crew remains a key issue, although the Mauritanian side considers this requirement non-negotiable. The EU has also been granted a negotiating mandate for an SFPA with Morocco, but a start date for negotiations has yet to be agreed.

(b)RCG Large Pelagics (IOTC, ICCAT)

Prioritization of data variables.

The RCG LP agreed a transparent and repeatable methodology to decide which species and biological variables to sample under the DCF, in line with ICCAT and IOTC needs, and to rebuild Table 2.1 of the Regional Work Plan (RWP) 2028-2030. It is grounded in the DCF legal acts, which transpose the RFMO requirements, and is built on official ICCAT and IOTC nominal catches for 2023-2025. Three criteria are applied: (1) hierarchical thresholds on the EU quota share (≥10%), landings (≥10% of EU landings or ≥200 t) and a collective 25% rule; (2) a species override, so that listed or protected species (e.g. shortfin mako) are sampled whenever caught; and (3) a regional-context criterion, where a remarks column captures national specificities and existing coordination arrangements. The methodology is operationalised through a shared Excel template, is being validated with the National Correspondents. The resulting species lists are to be validated by October 2026, ahead of the RWP submission in mid-October 2026 (LP_2026_D05).

Decisions and/or recommendations relevant for end users (if any)

Four recommendations are addressed to the end users and the RFMOs, to be channelled through DG MARE:

LP_2026_R01 (flag irrecoverable data): the RCG LP recommends that the tuna RFMOs provide a status to flag data that were never collected, distinct from a failure to submit, so that such data are not perpetually re-requested (noted in particular for EU-Portugal IOTC observer data).

LP_2026_R02 (ICCAT Bycatch Estimator): the RCG LP acknowledges and will explore the use of the ICCAT Bycatch Estimator R package for regional bycatch and discard estimation at RCG LP level.

LP_2026_R03 (statistical correspondents): the RCG LP recommends that Member States ensure their statistical correspondents take part in RCG LP sessions on RFMO data submissions, as in some Member States they are not part of the National Correspondent ecosystem and discrepancies cannot be resolved during the meeting.

LP_2026_R04 (optional biological sheet): the RCG LP recommends that ICCAT consider adding an optional sheet to the relevant statistical or observer forms (e.g. ST09 or ST04) so that DCF biological data, both historical and future, can be reported through a routine channel, without creating an obligation for CPCs that do not hold such data.

Decisions of direct interest to end users: an interim métier code for recording the use of traplines in DCF data collection (LP_2026_D02); a successful early test converting surface-longline data from the ICES RDBES format into ICCAT forms ST04, ST05 and ST09 (LP_2026_D03); and the adoption of the three-criteria data-screening methodology to populate Table 2.1 of the RWP (LP_2026_D05).

Data Calls (issued by end users)

During their presentations at the RCG LP annual meeting, ICCAT and IOTC flagged some gaps in EU data (e.g. catch-and-effort and size data), and Member States were urged to address them ahead of the RFMOs' scientific meetings. The group noted that observer coverage is assessed per fleet and per Member State rather than cumulatively at EU level; depending on operational conditions, some Member States may over-sample while others fall below the minimum threshold, and whether an EU-level average would meet the required coverage merits further exploration. In RCG LP, the aim, alongside tracking national thresholds, is to streamline sampling at EU level through spatio-temporal optimisation of effort.

A targeted RCG LP exercise to mine archival DCF biological data for bluefin tuna could not be completed within the 2026 cycle. DG MARE confirmed, following contact with the ICCAT Secretariat, that this is not a hard-deadline requirement and can be progressed in a later cycle; the optional-sheet approach (LP_2026_R04) is proposed as the longer-term solution.

Any other topic relevant to end users (if any)

The ISSG Tropical Tuna, which coordinates EU purse-seine data collection in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean (including FAD fisheries and ETP monitoring), advanced several items of direct relevance to ICCAT and IOTC, recorded as report items rather than decisions: a common set of at-sea coverage indicators (coverage achieved, share of vessels, spatial and temporal coverage); a planned benchmarking of bycatch raising methods, comparing the traditional ratio estimator, a model-based method and the ICCAT Bycatch Estimator; the formal uptake of CPUE and abundance-index standardisation as an input to ICCAT and IOTC assessments; and standardised observer training together with a shared quality-control tool (AkadoR).

In addition, the ISSG Longlines outside the Mediterranean was reactivated under a new chair (José Carlos Báez), covering EU longline fleets across the ICCAT, IOTC and IATTC areas and their interaction with pelagic sharks. Electronic monitoring was identified as a growing priority for RFMO monitoring, with a plan to map existing EM systems and groups and to initiate a pilot with interested Member States. The RCG LP also endorsed the participation on a new pan-regional ISSG on Genetics, for standardised genetic data collection and metadata in support of stock identification, which is of growing interest to the RFMOs.

(c) RCG Med & BS

Prioritization of data variables.

The ISSG on Data Quality met in 2026 (20 experts, 9 MS); 5 MS presented data-quality checks on priority MED&BS/FDI stocks, flagging issues in catch-at-age, growth/length-weight, maturity and sex-ratio data (notably Greece, Cyprus, Romania). Conclusion: automated QC needs to be complemented by expert biological interpretation, not treated as automatic error classification.

Several MS (Cyprus, Croatia, Bulgaria, Malta) also raised, in the context of the STECF Fleet Balance EWG (25-12), that technical, economic and biological fleet-balance indicators are calculated independently – and often divergently – by both MS and STECF from the same underlying data, against outdated (2014) guidance. General consensus that a joint workshop/exchange with STECF would be useful to clarify and harmonise these methodologies.

Decisions and/or recommendations relevant for end users (if any)

Decision 03 (2026): Harmonization of the Estimation of Maturity Ogive for Stock Assessment Purposes – a dedicated online workshop for 2026–2027 to achieve a harmonised regional interpretation of maturity data.

Decision 04 (2026): Roadmap for collection of biological parameters for recreational fisheries – a data call followed by ISSG workshop(s) to agree the final species list based on end-user needs.

Recommendation 01 (2026): Setting of submission deadlines for the Med&BS Data Call in 2027 – maintaining the legal deadline only for time-critical priority stocks, with an operational deadline kept for the rest.

Data Calls (issued by end users)

The 2026 Med&BS Data Call (sent 4 May) removed the operational deadline entirely, driven by the West Med MAP stock-assessment timeline, with no resubmissions accepted after the legal deadline. This significantly reduced MS time for validation/correction and weakened the ISSG Data Quality's ability to perform pre-submission checks.

RCG Med&BS response (Recommendation 01, 2026): maintain the legal deadline only for identified time-critical priority stocks, keep an operational deadline for the rest, and communicate the approach sufficiently in advance of the 2027 Data Call.

Any other topic relevant to end users (if any)

Bycatch of protected species: following up on 2025 Recommendation R02, the ISSG on PETs (2026 meeting) adopted the GFCM species list as the baseline for priority PET species and discussed priority métiers based on the STREAMLINE project and the 2026 GFCM WGVUL high-risk fisheries analysis. National methodologies showed differing approaches and constraints across MS. No agreed common template/methodology yet exists between GFCM and ICES; the joint technical meeting proposed under R02 has not yet been held, with a dedicated session planned at this Liaison Meeting.

Med&BS Regional Database (RDBFIS): MS continued populating RDBFIS; a new RDBFIS-IV contract (Sept 2026–Feb 2028) will support the technical migration to the EU DIGIT infrastructure, finalise database population, and add new data domains (PETs, alien species, recreational fisheries, diadromous species).

Research surveys: the MEDITS Coordination Group (Málaga, May 2026) and the MEDIAS Steering Committee (Heraklion, April 2026) met with no major problems; both groups continue to face challenges related to research-vessel availability and scheduling.

(d)RCG ECON

Prioritization of data variables.

Related to the prioritization of data variables to be collected by the DCF program, RCG ECON wanted to emphasize its role as a group that regionally coordinates data collection methods. Context specific methods across MS are harmonized to ensure expected data quality. Where possible, careful consideration is made about standardisation without losing the possibility of context specific approaches.

Decisions and/or recommendations relevant for end users (if any)

Recommendation ECON_2026_R01: The RCG ECON group recommends that MSs that have included a pilot study on collection of new social data in their National Work Plan (NWP) should provide results of their pilot study at a dedicated RCG ECON ISSG WS on social aspects. In addition, the WS should include a discussion on the possibility of voluntarily disaggregation of existing variables in the Data Collection Framework (DCF), and to clarify the differences of data dependent on their source.

Recommendation ECON_2026_R02: RCG ECON recommends having a WS on data estimations of Nowcast for data on t+1 for the fisheries sector. RCG ECON chairs, experts and JRC should be present in order to explore the possibility for RCG ECON to develop a harmonized method for nowcasting for the year t+1, and to discuss the integration into annual DCF/AER workflows.

Data Calls (issued by end users)

Generally, data calls where RCG ECON contributes to are running smoothly and positive results were obtained from a consultation on the AER-FDI harmonisation effort for most MS. Dashboards developed by JRC for data quality checks and data visualisation are received positively and improve the data checking process. Data issues are identified more quickly and allows the MS to respond faster to those data issues, leaving time to finish report writing during the STECF EWG meetings. However, extra ToR requested by the end-user remain challenging due to the short time provided for in depth analyses.

RCG ECON calls upon the NC's to nominated and stimulate experts in economic and social data of fish processing and aquaculture industries to contribute to RCG ECON. The data calls remain challenging when it comes to specific and disaggregated data on energy consumption and volumes, and raw material consumption and origins (see section 4.1.1.1.4)

Any other topic relevant to end users (if any)

In response to feedback received from the European Commission on improved and extended data collection of energy transition and origin of raw materials for EU fisheries and the aquaculture sector, RCG ECON presented a possible roadmap to clarify the roles of the parties, action that can be taken by the different parties (i.e., end-user vs RCG ECON) and how a possible workshop can be organised. Extended information can be found in the RCG ECON technical meeting report (2026). Here, a brief overview of the roadmap is given:

1. Key Message to the Liaison Meeting (LM)
    - Answer to COM: RCG ECON summary with conclusions and suggestions on how to possibly proceed.
    - Inform the LM: Update at Liaison Meeting (LM).

2. Process Definition & Roles (User-Driven Approach)

- COM / STECF-EWGs (end-users): Identify the actual data needs and draft the initial Terms of Reference (ToR) with a clear focus.
- RCG ECON: Will support the discussion by evaluating the technical and operational feasibility.
- DG MARE: Will take the final decision on the process.

3. Immediate Actions with COM
   - Formulate clear questions: List of concrete, technical questions for STECF to define the data collection objectives.
   - Overview of existing data: List of which data is available (can be supported by STECF and RCG ECON).
   - Overview of data gaps: Identify clear data gaps where extra data collection is essential.

4. Actions with STECF
   - Request STECF feedback: Clarifications and information by COM together with answers from 9 MS to STECF for review.
   - Monitor the STECF agenda: Time and attention allocated to this topic for STECF meetings and EWGs. Organise agenda to ensure aquaculture sector (meeting soon) and the fisheries sector (expected around March) discussion these topics.

5. Organization of a possible Workshop (WS)
   - Workshop proposal: Formally propose a workshop with ToRs drafted by STECF once the focus is cleared.
   - Agreed participants: The workshop attendance by COM, STECF aquaculture and fleet EWG chairs, NCs, RCG ECON experts, and technical staff who know what data is currently available.
   - Workshop objective: Assess data coverage and data quality of already available data, assess the data collection feasibility of data that could fill gaps in knowledge and decide on possible NWP test studies.

(e)RCG NANSEA and Baltic

Prioritization of data variables.

The RCG NANSEA & Baltic continued the implementation of Recommendation 2025_R01, which aims to obtain a standardised overview of the data used by ICES Assessment Working Groups (AWGs) in stock assessments. During the 2025–2026 cycle, the RCG worked with ICES to develop a structured questionnaire, building on the WGNSSK approach from 2024 and incorporating feedback from ICES assessors. The questionnaire collects information by stock, country and data source, including the variables and time series available and how these data are used in the assessment process. ICES circulated the final template to AWGs in February 2026.

Initial responses were reviewed and presented at the 2026 RCG Technical Meeting. Although the feedback received indicated that the template was suitable for its intended purpose, too few responses were available for an in-depth analysis. The RCG and ICES therefore agreed to continue the follow-up with AWGs during 2026–2027, with the aim of obtaining a more complete overview that can support discussions on data collection priorities, optimisation of sampling programmes and future data needs.

Decisions and/or recommendations relevant for end users (if any)

In 2026, the RCGs NANSEA and Baltic developed a series of recommendations addressed to ICES, other RCGs, the Commission, and the Member States, with the aim of improving the efficiency, transparency, and usefulness of data collection under the DCF.

To ICES, several key proposals were put forward summarized below.

First, ICES WGRDBESGOV was asked to continue to incorporate biological data quality checks developed by ISSG Regional overviews during the data upload (R01).

As research surveys have been and are expected to continue to be affected by e.g. upcoming protected areas, OWF, and funding limitation a recommendation is put forward to the ICES survey planning groups to define survey-specific priorities, based on species/ stocks and/or spatial requirements for analytical purposes. Evaluating stepwise reduction to surveys of 10% (R02). The ISSG Case Study of fisheries for small pelagics in the Baltic put forward a proposal of change in the RDBES Data Policy to allow publication of a minimum of 3 specified types of outputs produced by the ISSG Regional Overviews (R03), but it was decided by the ISSG and RCG not to put it forward at the Decision meeting if another Decision (D06) was approved which would be make this one unnecessary.

The RCG recommended that the ICES Secretariat formally inform RCG NANSEA & Baltic of any planned revisions to the ICES ETP species list and consult the RCG during the revision process (R04). To ICES AWGs it is recommended to add "DCF, RWP and data needs" amongst the generic ToRs, more specifically this should remain a recurring Terms of Reference for WGEEL and are introduced as recurring ToRs for WGNAS and WGBAST (R05).

Lastly it is recommended to ICES that Assessment Working Groups work together with ICES WGRFS to continuously evaluate the selection of stocks in which recreational fisheries removals are relevant so that they should be incorporated into the corresponding ICES Fisheries Data Call and stock assessments. And also, that data not submitted are dealt with thorough the Data Transmissions Pipelines, and that data submitted but not used is referred in the advice sheet (R07).

The Commission also received recommendations, namely:

A first recommendation to Commission to carefully evaluate the National Work Plans on the recreational catch data collection for mandatory species defined under the EU MAP, and also to the reported collection of such data in the Annual Reports (R08). A second one, recommended to the Commission to work together with WGRFS and ISSG Recreational to evaluate how the recently implemented Control Regulation (CR) and reporting requirements interact with existing recreational fisheries sampling programmes, and that such data collected under CR are accessible to the scientific community directly involved in RCG or ICES WG frameworks (R12).

Discussions and feedback

The involvement of RCGs in the development of regional lists of ETP species was discussed. ICES has prepared a roadmap including regional lists of ETP species, and it was suggested that RCGs could contribute to the process.

2. 4 Special session on bycatch data

The purpose of the session was to follow up on Recommendation Med&BS_2025_R02, which called for improved coordination between Member States and the relevant end-users, and proposed a joint technical meeting to discuss methodologies for raising and extrapolating bycatch data, alignment of data structures and formats, and the sharing of good practices.

The recommendation arose from difficulties identified by Member States in dealing with multiple and uncoordinated data requests from different end-users, particularly regarding the ICES request for Mediterranean bycatch data. This is seen as an additional reporting burden for Member States, duplicating work already covered under GFCM and potentially leading to different interpretations of the data due to differences in sampling, the species and fisheries covered, and the methods used for raising and extrapolating observed data.

The session aimed to explore whether a common core framework could serve the needs of different end-users while allowing sufficient flexibility for national approaches and outputs. The discussion was

introduced by RCG Med&BS, which presented the background, developments since the adoption of the recommendation and the main questions that remained open.

(a)SRPFMO

Species of concern are defined in Annex 14 to CMM 02-2026, covering seabirds, marine mammals, sea turtles, sharks and other vulnerable taxa. Observer coverage levels are set out in Annex 8 to CMM 03-2025.

From Members, the Secretariat receives species level bycatch counts or weights by gear type, covering bottom longline, trawl, purse seine, squid jigging and potting, together with condition (live or dead) and position where available. This comes from two channels: observer reports and Member annual reports.

Each year the Secretariat consolidates this into a paper for the Scientific Committee, most recently SC14-Doc10, which updates SC13-Doc10, to assess trends by species and gear and to inform review of the bycatch mitigation measures in our CMMs.

Our main known data gaps are species misidentification at sea, observer coverage that varies considerably by fleet and gear, and reconciling observer collected records against what Members self-report for the same events. Most of these are issues that can be addressed through putting systems in place and training which the Secretariat, through the DWG has included in their workplan.

(b)IOTC

Bycatch information is reported through retained catches (1RC), discards (1DI), cetacean and turtle interactions (1IN), and ROS observer data. The Secretariat cross-checks these sources. Observer records show contrasting gear patterns: silky shark interactions are prominent in purse seine records, while blue sharks and pelagic stingrays feature strongly in longline records. Loggerhead turtles account for the largest number of recorded turtle interactions in the overview.

The 2017–2024 discard reporting overview shows broader species coverage in recent submissions from Spain and France, alongside gaps for other fleets and years. These are reporting patterns, not estimates of total bycatch. Priorities are consistent species identification, complete reporting of retained and discarded bycatch, and reconciliation of interaction declarations with discard and observer records.

(c)GFCM

The GFCM has progressively strengthened work on fisheries interactions with vulnerable species through monitoring programmes, observer programmes, harmonized methodologies and data collection frameworks, and mitigation trials. Regional initiatives, including MedBycatch, have complemented this work and improved knowledge of incidental catches across Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries. Monitoring and mitigation activities cover different fisheries, including bottom trawlers, purse seiners, demersal longliners and small-scale fisheries.

The evidence base has been consolidated through regional reviews of incidental catches across species groups, fishing gear and GFCM subregions; dedicated work on marine mammal depredation; reviews of technical and management mitigation measures; and good practice guides for safe

handling and release. Where applicable, monitoring data are reported through the DCRF. Table III.5 addresses statistical data on incidental catches, while taxon-specific biological tables include information such as length, weight and sex.

Building on all this work, the 2026 Working Group on Vulnerable Species (WGVUL) combines quantitative and qualitative analyses from multiple sources, including Productivity Susceptibility Analysis (PSA), with expert knowledge to identify priority species–gear–area combinations. Regional interaction analyses, hotspot mapping and vulnerability assessments support a risk-based approach that accounts for the spatial and temporal distribution of interactions.

Building on this work, WGVUL developed a preliminary regional toolbox of technical and management measures, structured by high-risk areas, vulnerable species groups and gear types. The toolbox identifies potential mitigation measures and implementation pathways to support the conservation of vulnerable species, reduce bycatch and progressively inform management advice under the Regional Plan of Action for Vulnerable Species (RPOA-VUL). It provides a starting point for discussing management options and should be further refined and operationalized, taking into account local ecological and socio-economic conditions.

In 2026, the SAC encouraged CPCs to progressively consider measures identified in the toolbox, including their incorporation into multiannual management plans where appropriate, for example for elasmobranchs in the Strait of Sicily. It also encouraged fisher involvement in co-design, testing and uptake was emphasized as essential to practical applicability and effectiveness.

Priorities identified by the SAC included strengthening harmonized monitoring and reporting through observers, participatory approaches, tagging, stranding data and the GFCM multitaxa database; testing and evaluating mitigation measures, including post-release survival and operational feasibility; further developing spatially and temporally explicit analyses; and exploring a collaborative Adriatic research programme on spiny dogfishes and smooth-hounds. The SAC also encouraged coordination with relevant regional and international frameworks and knowledge exchange through the Regional Platform on Decarbonization, Selectivity and Vulnerable Species.

(d)ICES

The annual ICES WGBYC data call requests total fishing effort, monitoring or sampling effort, observed bycatch events, species or taxonomic identification, and fishing-gear and métier information. It also collects spatial and temporal information, vessel-size categories where available, monitoring methods and protocols, the taxonomic scope of monitoring, and information on mitigation measures.

(e)Discussion and Conclusions

Following the introduction by RCG Med&BS, different end-users presented their approaches to bycatch data collection and reporting.

A substantial part of the discussion focused on the additional reporting burden arising from ICES data requests for Mediterranean bycatch data and on the role of ICES in this process. RCG Med&BS representatives questioned the need for ICES requests in the Mediterranean, where GFCM is the relevant RFMO, and stressed the need for a solution that streamlines the work of Member States, taking into account that Mediterranean countries use RDBFIS rather than RDBES. They also stressed that the issue concerns not only data provision, but also the subsequent raising of these data.

Discussion with end-users (ToR 1A&1B)

Concerns were raised about the ability of ICES to raise Mediterranean data without sufficient knowledge of the specific characteristics of the fisheries and sampling schemes.

ICES clarified that requests covering the Mediterranean arise from special requests from DG ENV, and that Mediterranean bycatch data are collected by WGBYC in this context but are not used for ICES advice.

The discussion clarified that the data are required for different purposes. DG ENV relies on ICES in connection with EU-wide reporting requirements, including the MSFD and Habitats Directive, while GFCM requirements respond to its regional fisheries management role.

A comparison of the ICES and GFCM approaches showed that many of the information requirements are similar, although differences remain, notably regarding the number of bycatch events and the spatial scale at which species distributions and interactions are assessed.

The key issue identified was therefore how these different requirements could be streamlined to reduce duplication and the reporting burden for Member States while still meeting the needs of different end-users. It was highlighted that RDBES and RDBFIS are currently working on formats for reporting bycatch data and that further harmonisation could be explored.

Another issue raised concerned the lists of protected species of bycatch relevance. Different end-users use different lists of protected species of bycatch relevance, and further harmonisation or coordination in this area could also be explored.

As a main follow-up, RCG Med&BS will organise a workshop on bycatch in early 2027, bringing together the relevant end-users (ICES, GFCM, ICCAT, DG MARE, DG ENV) and interested RCGs, including RCG LP and RCG NANSEA and Baltic. Relevant people from RDBES and RDBFIS shall also be invited. The final dates and the ToRs of the workshop will be defined by the RCG Med&BS Chairs. DG MARE will facilitate the contact with end users. A key issue to be addressed will be how to streamline ICES requests for Mediterranean bycatch data in response to DG ENV needs, considering both the additional data-call burden for Mediterranean Member States and the raising and processing methods used.

3 DATA MANAGEMENT (TOR 2A&2B)

A. Highlights in progress achieved in 2023-2024 in the Regional Databases for RCGs and problems identified.
B. *Highlights in actions related to the future developments for Regional Databases (RCG chairs, RDBFIS, RDBES*

3. 1 RDBFIS II

An update on the Regional Database and Fisheries Information System (RDBFIS) was presented, covering the main developments of the platform and its evolution into an integrated regional system supporting data submission, validation, quality control, analysis, visualization and reporting. The presentation highlighted the main datasets, functionalities and tools currently supported by RDBFIS and summarised the key activities of the new RDBFIS-IV project, which started in September 2026. The eight project tasks were presented, covering the operation and maintenance of the platform, data population and support to future data calls, further functional and analytical developments, user support and training, stakeholder and expert engagement, and the preparation of the future evolution of the system. Particular emphasis was placed on Task 4, which focuses on the functional evolution of RDBFIS through the adaptation of data structures and domains (including the revision of the Detailed Biological Data model and the integration of Large Pelagics, PETS, Alien Species, Recreational Fisheries and Diadromous Species), further development of data quality and sampling tools, user-driven improvements and access control, harmonisation with other European and regional systems, enhancement of reporting and analytical tools, and performance optimisation. The ongoing transition of RDBFIS from HCMR to the European Commission's EU DIGIT infrastructure was also presented, with the objective of ensuring a secure, operational and sustainable platform for the long-term management and reporting of fisheries data in the Mediterranean and Black Sea.

Discussions and feedback

Regarding the format for ETP data, it will be incorporated into RDBFIS, although it has not yet been defined. The aim is to have this finalised before the 2027 RCG Technical Meeting.

3. 2 RDBES

Feedback from ICES WGRDBESGOV

The Regional Database and Estimation System (RDBES) is a fundamental tool for regional coordination. It is designed to store detailed data on catch, effort and sampling data from commercial and recreational fisheries with details on the applied sampling designs. Additionally, the database allows for storage of information on monitoring of bycatch of Endangered, Threatened and Protected Species (ETP) together with variables needed to assess the impact of fisheries on these species. The RDBES has replaced the previously used RDB FishFrame database and is planned to gradually replace the existing ICES InterCatch database and in future will provide exports to STECF Fisheries Dependent Information database. The governance function of the RDBES is provided by ICES WGRDBESGOV. This group is composed of representatives from ICES Member Countries, EU Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs) and ICES Data Centre. Also, the Commission and end-users are invited to the meetings. The group meets annually in November and intersessionally throughout the year.

The planned dataflow of the RDBES will enable full traceability and reproducibility starting from the raw samples collected in the field up until the raised stock estimates (Figure 3.2.1). For a successful

implementation of the dataflow, a series of RDBES related WGs and WKs were given to support national data submitters, national estimators and stock coordinators. The RDBES core group, who is responsible for the operational development of the RDBES also continued its work for specifying the data model and providing the support to data submitters. Two RDBES data calls were issued in 2026; (i) the 2026 joint ICES and RCG NANSEA and Baltic RDBES data call, and (ii) the 2026 RCG LDF RDBES data call.

To get prepared for the full implementation of the RDBES, which includes phasing out of the ICES InterCatch database, WGRDBESGOV planned to do a trial for nine selected stocks (i.e. her.27.25-2932, sol.27.8ab, sol.27.7fg, whg.27.7b-k, bll.27.3a47de, ple.27.420, tur.27.4, mac.27.nea, pil.27.8c9a). The trial shall include all steps of the workflow, from the upload of detailed data to RDBES, through the production of the national estimates, to the stock coordination (Figure 3.2.1). The stocks selected were intended to cover different ICES Working Groups, areas and countries, to involve as many countries as possible. The first stage of the trial was covered at the workshop WKRDBES-RaiseStock2, which took place in 2025. The objectives of the workshop were to produce national estimates required for selected stocks using the data extracted from the RDBES. Additionally, the WGRDBES-StockCoord worked on developing the national Catch Exchange Format (CEF), which will replace the national estimates data format used in the InterCatch, as well as the Stock Coordination Format intended for producing input for stock assessment. A guidance on CEF format was given at several meetings related to RDBES.

During WGRDBESGOV 2025 it was decided that, provided that all systems are up and running in time, the nine selected stocks will fully transition from InterCatch to RDBES in 2027. 2026 will be a testing year, where RDBES data and estimates of these stocks will be included in the RDBES Data call. In addition, a series of RDBES related WGs and WKs were planned for 2026 to support the national data submitters, national estimators and stock coordinators. WKRDBES-Flow will act as a general rehearsal covering the production of the national estimates and the stock coordination, using RDBES data within the Transparent Assessment Framework (TAF) environment.

Considering that all systems in ICES are up and running the transition process will continue beyond 2026. The second batch of stocks will be tested in 2027 and fully implemented in 2028. As the InterCatch will be phased out in the near future and the number of remaining stocks is relatively high, the transition process needs to be speeded up. Therefore, the second batch will contain around 40 stocks. WGRDBESGOV chairs are in contact with ICES Professional Officers asking for support in identifying stocks for the next batch.

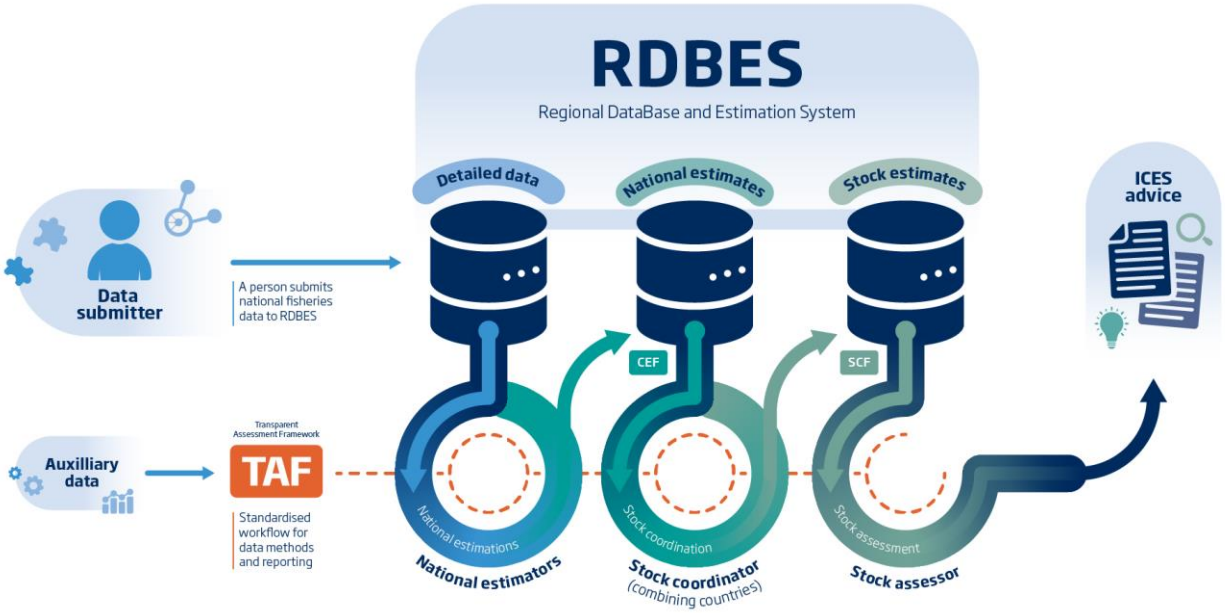


Figure 3.2.1: RDBES workflow

Data confidentiality in relation to RDBES

For several years, data confidentiality in relation to commercial fisheries data has been discussed in various fora, including the Liaison Meeting. In 2025, an EU survey on data confidentiality was launched to gather information from Member States on the agreements and legislation governing the sharing, use, and publication of data. Following the 2025 Decision Meeting, a questionnaire was also circulated to assess data sensitivity at different levels of aggregation. Both initiatives highlighted differences in the approaches and requirements applied by Member States.

In addition, the current RDBES Data Licence requires revision, as it contains several limitations that make it difficult to work with and disseminate outputs derived from RDBES data. RCG NANSEA and Baltic initiated work to identify a practical and workable solution. This work resulted in proposals for two decisions concerning the publication of aggregated commercial landings and effort data:

NANSEA BALTIC_2026_D05: A decision introducing a minimum threshold of three vessels in each aggregation of published data, except for where specific national restrictions apply.

NANSEA BALTIC_2026_D06: A complementary decision providing an exemption from NANSEA BALTIC_2026_D05 for a predefined set of standard outputs.

The adoption of these decisions is recognised as a first step towards establishing common rules for the publication of RDBES data. WGRDBESGOV will establish a subgroup of experts tasked with drafting an updated version of the RDBES Data Licence. The revised licence will take into account the principles for the publication of RDBES data developed by RCG NANSEA and Baltic.

WGRDBESGOV also plans to explore how these principles could be applied in relation to FDI data dissemination, including whether RDBES data can be exported to FDI while ensuring that the applicable confidentiality rules are maintained.

Update on Data Access

WGRDBESGOV has developed a document outlining alternative options for the governance of access to RDBES data, including an assessment of their implications for the workload of National Correspondents (NCs). The document was presented and discussed at the RCG NANSEA and Baltic Technical Meeting in June.

Based on the discussions, NCs expressed a preference for a hybrid model of RDBES data access. Under this approach, selected ICES Working Groups (WGs) would receive pre-authorised access to detailed RDBES data, while additional data requests would remain subject to country-level approval. The proposed model is based on the following principles:

- Selected ICES WGs would have pre-authorised access to detailed RDBES commercial landings (CL) and commercial effort (CE) data.
- A limited number of ICES WGs would have pre-authorised access to detailed CL, CE and commercial sampling (CS) data.
- Additional requests, including requests from WGs that are not included in the pre-authorised list, would require approval from the relevant countries.

To support the implementation of this approach, WGRDBESGOV prepared a proposed list of pre-authorised WGs. The list is based on the WGs currently identified in the RDBES data call, with the scope of data requested specified for each WG. The proposed list has been forwarded to the chairs of the ISSG NCs for review and will also be shared with the ACOM representatives of non-EU countries.

The proposed procedure would require one-time approval of the list of pre-authorised WGs and the corresponding data scope, thereby reducing the administrative workload associated with individual data requests. Re-approval would only be required if the list of WGs or the scope of data authorised for a particular WG is amended.

Discussions and feedback

Regarding confidentiality, the definition of the number of fishing vessels used for applying the confidentiality rules was discussed. It was noted that considering only vessels with positive landings may underestimate the actual number of vessels operating in a given area and consequently increase the number of aggregations involving fewer than five vessels. At present, effort data consider all vessels active in a region, while landings data only include vessels with positive landings. The possibility of combining effort and landings data to determine the number of active vessels will therefore be considered.

4 RCG ACTIVITIES (ToR 3)

A. Highlights in RCG activities
B. The 2026RCGs – recommendations and proposals for future intersessional work (Liaison Meeting and RCG chairs)
C. RCG data calls – overview of how MS responded and discussion on future use (RCG chairs)
D. Announcement of new chairs (where relevant), next meeting(s) and venues
E. Future steps in RCG pan-regional and intersessional work (i.e., regional work plans, country profiles): exchange of ideas and discussion (COM, Liaison Meeting, RCG Chairs)

4. 1 Highlights in RCG activities

(1)RCG Long Distance Fisheries

The group reviewed progress on regional coordination since 2025, the outcomes of the 2nd Liaison Meeting, and feedback from end users. The group also reviewed the Long Distance Fisheries activities of MS in the CECAF, SPRFMO, NAFO and other regions, using the data uploaded by the MS to the RDBES, which is hosted by ICES and supports the RCG's work.

Four recommendations were made at the 2026 Technical Meeting, held in Rome, Italy, from 7 to 10 July: improve the quality of the data provided; revise the countries assigned to the RCG LDF for data extraction from RDBES; organise a meeting to renew the multilateral agreements on sampling small pelagics in the CECAF, SPRFMO and NPFC areas from 2028 onwards; and organise the mandatory observer training workshop for SPRFMO observer accreditation.

Two decisions were made at the Technical Meeting: agree on the Regional Work Plan for Long Distance Fisheries 2028–2030 and temporarily suspend the joint EU programme for collecting fisheries data on small pelagics in the CECAF region.

(2)RCG Large Pelagics

The RCG LP 2026 Annual Technical Meeting was held on 23–25 June 2026 in Heraklion, Crete (Greece), in hybrid format, hosted by HCMR, with nine participating Member States, DG MARE and the ICCAT and IOTC Secretariats. Because the end users of RCG LP are the tuna RFMOs, much of its coordination concerns the provision of DCF data to ICCAT and IOTC science. The highlights of most relevance to other RCGs were:

Data prioritisation (LP_2026_D05): a three-criteria methodology (hierarchical thresholds, species override and regional-coordination remarks) to rebuild Table 2.1 of the RWP 2028–2030 from official ICCAT and IOTC nominal catches, implemented through a shared Excel template.

RDBES to ICCAT forms (LP_2026_D03): a case study converted a Mediterranean albacore drifting-longline dataset from the RDBES format into ICCAT forms ST04, ST05 and ST09, cross-checked against submissions already made to ICCAT.

Traplines (LP_2026_D02): an interim métier code was endorsed to report the emerging hook-and-trapline configuration within FDI, consistent with the approach taken by RCG NANSEA & Baltic, together with a separate process to examine an official gear code for trapline-only operations.

ICCAT Bycatch Estimator (LP_2026_R02): the RCG LP acknowledged the ICCAT R package for bycatch and discard estimation, which runs locally so that raw observer data never leave the user's computer. The tool may also be of interest to other RCGs for their bycatch and ETP work.

New and reactivated ISSGs: endorsement of the pan-regional ISSG on Genetics (LP_2026_D04) and reactivation of the ISSG Longlines outside the Mediterranean under a new chair.

Discussions and feedback

The compatibility of the decisions adopted by RCG LP and RCG NANSEA and Baltic regarding trapline codes was discussed. RCG NANSEA and Baltic explained its proposal to broaden the use of the last two placeholders of the métier codes from "selective device/mesh size" to "gear modification/device configuration", in order to better address end-user needs and Member States' requests. Following discussion, it was considered that the approaches proposed by the two RCGs were compatible, while noting that the code adopted by ICCAT should be followed.

DG MARE asked about the data received from the Commission, and RCG LP indicated that they are considered the most valid dataset currently available.

The RCG LP expressed interest in developing harmonized bycatch and ETP estimation methods. It informed the group about the development of an ICCAT Bycatch Estimator, including an R package and a shiny app, which would be interesting to present to other RCGs. RCG LP also reported that during 2027 it plans to assess different bycatch estimation methods, including the R-based tool. The objective is not to identify a single best tool, but rather to identify an appropriate common framework within which the different tools can be applied. The planned work on bycatch estimation was connected with the workshop being considered by RCG Med&BS. It was stressed that RCG LP should be involved in this work, particularly in discussions concerning raising procedures.

(3)RCG Med & BS

During the 2026 RCG Med&BS Annual Meeting (Varna, 31 August – 3 September 2026), the RCG adopted 4 Decisions and 1 Recommendation, covering Regional Database submission, DTMT follow-up, maturity-ogive harmonisation, the recreational fisheries roadmap, and the 2027 Data Call deadline approach.

The RCG also reviewed the follow-up of its 2025 Decisions and Recommendations: most actions were followed, though the removal of the 2026 operational deadline created a cross-cutting difficulty for MS in resubmitting corrected historical data, and the Black Sea acoustic-survey equipment recommendation (2025 R03) remains unresolved for Romania and Bulgaria.

(4)RCG ECON

As per request form the RCG Secretariat and advise coming from RCG NANSEA and Baltic during the RWP workshop organised in Ostend (2026), the RCG ECON discussed about internal working and organisation. RCG ECON would like the discussion held during the technical meeting (2026) to reflect that the group wishes to work on a need basis, where the group organises workshops for acute issues and organise an ISSG when topics need long term attention. The group prefers to keep this structure flexible and emphasises that careful planning in the future is necessary to avoid work overlapping with activities of other RCGs. The group plans on writing a short vision document and feedback from RCG MED&BS was well received in that this vision document could help us prioritize our role and where to put effort on content and topics of data collection and analyses.

Discussions and feedback

The development of one-page vision documents was discussed as a means to clarify the role and objectives of each RCG. Experiences from RCG Med&BS and RCG NANSEA and Baltic were shared, including approaches to identifying strategic priorities and challenges in finding chairs for ISSGs. It was suggested that the vision documents be shared among RCGs to promote exchange and alignment.

RCG ECON explained that it will collect historical recommendations in the D&R new platform, to keep historical track and avoid recurrent discussions. It was also noted the difficulties to find new chairs, it is difficult to communicate and find the expertise needed for the group

(5)RCG NANSEA and Baltic

The RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic Technical Meeting 2026 was held as a one-day online session on 2 June and a physical meeting in Nantes, France, on 9-12 June 2026, with the Decision Meeting taking place on 23 September 2026 in Brussels. ISSGs presented their progress and future work plans, and several key topics were discussed with ICES, the Commission, and other end-users.

The main highlights from 2025-2026 included:

- ISSG End Users: Strengthened dialogue with ICES, COM and other RCGs to better align data collection with stock assessment needs and improve follow-up of recommendations. Following up on Recommendation 2025_R01, the RCG and ICES developed and circulated a questionnaire to Assessment Working Groups to identify the data used in stock assessments. As few responses were received by the 2026 RCG TM, follow-up will continue in 2026–2027.

- ISSG RDBES Catch, Effort and Sampling Overviews: Developed regional RDBES-based sampling overviews, RWP Table 2.1 and improved data quality checks informative for improving data collection.

- ISSG Métier & Transversal Variables: Maintained métier codes and reference lists, advanced fishing effort methodologies, addressed gear modifications and confidentiality issues, and supported Control Regulation implementation.

- ISSG Electronic Monitoring Technologies (EMT): Further clarified its role as advisory and coordinating for other ISSGs, RCGs and expert groups. Provided guidance on data-sharing and future research applications.

- ISSG Diadromous species: Improved cooperation with assessment working groups and prepared coordinated approaches for eel, salmon, trout and other diadromous species data collection.

- ISSG Surveys: Coordinated cost-sharing while focusing on survey resilience, prioritisation frameworks and future planning under budget constraints.

- ISSGs for Regional Sampling Plan case studies: The three regional case studies (trawl fishery in Iberian waters, freezer trawler fleet exploiting pelagic fisheries in the NEA, fisheries for small pelagics in the Baltic) advanced harmonised sampling approaches and contributed directly to the implementation of Regional Sampling Plans within the RWP 2028–2030.

- ISSG Evaluation of the data collected for Small-Scale Fisheries at the EU level: Assessed challenges of implementing the revised Control Regulation and improving SSF data collection across Member States.

- ISSG Optimization of ETPs bycatch sampling: Focused on pathways for improving monitoring and integration of endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) species bycatch data into RDBES. Followed up on the implementation of the EU Control Regulation.

- ISSG Regionally Coordinated Stomach Sampling: Coordinated stomach sampling programmes, strengthened cooperation with end users and is preparing an intercalibration workshop for data quality improvement.

- ISSG Recreational fisheries: Focused on identifying the opportunities and impact of the revised Control Regulation and preparing coordinated sampling approaches for inclusion in the RWPs. Candidate species will be covered through coordinated sampling, while others will be addressed through test studies, with priorities differing between the NANSEA and Baltic regions. The ISSG also identified persistent gaps in data collection and usage and identified pathways to overcome them.

- ISSG National Correspondents worked throughout 2025-2026, inviting all NCs including from MS outside the NANSEA & Baltic, concentrated particularly on the future financing of fisheries data collection and on data confidentiality including the formulation of rules applicable across for member states for the publication of outputs, with some exceptions listed. The possibility of establishing a pan-regional National Correspondents group or RCG National Correspondents was also discussed. No decision was formulated, and the appropriate structure will be explored further in 2026–2027.

Discussions and feedback

The discussion also addressed the need to be prepared for potential reduction of scientific surveys due to budget constraints and the need to assess its impacts. RCG Med is interested on how RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic are dealing with this problem. Ongoing work within ICES WKUSER is initially considering spatial reductions, starting with a 10% reduction and exploring progressively larger reductions to identify where impacts would be greatest. The importance of appropriate statistical analysis and modelling was highlighted, including consideration of potential impacts on stock assessments. It was noted that future work could also consider other options, such as changes in survey frequency

Participants stressed the importance of anticipating possible reductions and developing guidance on how surveys could be prioritised or adapted, particularly in a context of increasing financial constraints, climate-driven changes and the introduction of new technologies.

The IMBUS project on bottom trawl surveys was mentioned as potentially relevant to this work, and it was suggested that a representative of the project could be invited to the next RCG meeting.

4. 2 Recommendations and Decisions (relevant to others RCGs)

(1)RCG Long Distance Fisheries

None.

(2)RCG Large Pelagics

The RCG LP agreed six decisions and four recommendations, presented for adoption at the Decision Meeting of 23 September 2026 (full text, justification, responsible parties and timelines in the Decision Meeting dossier). Those of most relevance to other RCGs are:

LP_2026_D01: revision of the 2019 RCG LP Rules of Procedure by written procedure, aligned with the common RCG template, after the RWP submission, to reflect hybrid meetings, online voting, the ISSG structure, the RCGs Secretariat, RDBES reporting and the current list of participating Member States.

LP_2026_D02: interim trapline métier code and initiation of a process towards an official EU gear code, coordinated with RCG NANSEA & Baltic and the ISSG Métiers and Transversal Variables.

LP_2026_D03: the committed Member States (Portugal, Ireland, Cyprus, France and Italy) to nominate experts to attend the ICES WKRDBES-INTRO workshop to progress the RDBES case study.

LP_2026_D04: participation in, the ISSG on Genetics, with a mandate focused on the coordination of data collection; the RCG LP will contribute specific ToRs where the RFMO context differs.

LP_2026_D05: adoption of the three-criteria methodology to populate Table 2.1 of the RWP 2028–2030, with Member States validating the data-derived species lists.

LP_2026_D06: development of a low-intensity but sustained biological sampling programme for tropical tunas under the DCF, updating key parameters such as growth and maturity on a regular cycle (e.g. every 3–5 years), to be integrated into the RWP 2028–2030.

Recommendations LP_2026_R01 to R04 are addressed mainly to the end users (see Section 2.3). Of these, R02 (ICCAT Bycatch Estimator) and R03 (participation of statistical correspondents in RCG sessions on RFMO data submissions) may also be relevant to other RCGs.

(3)RCG Med & BS

Bycatch of protected species – joint technical meeting (Med&BS_2025_R02): a 2025 Recommendation for a joint technical meeting between DG MARE, ICES, GFCM, ICCAT, RCG Med&BS and RCG LP, on the collection/reporting of incidental catch of protected species. A dedicated session is planned at this Liaison Meeting (22–24 Sept 2026) – this remains active.

STECF Fleet Balance indicators (EWG 25-12): the general consensus on the usefulness of a joint workshop/exchange with STECF on fleet-balance indicator methodologies is likely a shared concern across other RCGs' coastal Member States as well.

(4)RCG ECON

The recommendations of RCG ECON to other RCGs can be found in section 4.1.1.1.1. RCG ECON responded to a decision RCG NANSEA_2026_D02, that a workshop will be organised on fishing

activity variables as per recommendation ECON_2025_R09, and will coordinate with the ISSG chair of ISSG on Metier and Transversal variables to avoid overlapping activities. Further, RCG ECON responded to a recommendation RCG NANSEA_BALTIC_2026_R10 (ultimately not approved during the decision meeting) that RCG ECON recognised the importance of socio-economic data collection of recreational fisheries but a clear roadmap is necessary to clarify end-user needs, roles and accounting for the investments needed to cover the time and financial investments that should be made to cover this additional data collection (for example see section 4.1.1.1.4).

(5)RCG NANSEA and Baltic

RCG ECON is recommended to explore socioeconomic data collection on recreational fisheries that could be prioritized, considering end-user needs, if developing data collection for recreational fisheries (R_10); but this recommendation was not accepted at the Decision Meeting.

In addition, several recommendations were directed to MS, as follows:

It was recommended to Member States to continue national North Atlantic salmon monitoring programmes irrespective of ongoing discussions on future advisory arrangements between ICES and NASCO (R_06).

MS are also recommended to conduct their surveys on Recreational Fisheries with a multispecies sampling design, and ensuring continuity of data collection to identify species caught, fishing patterns (spatial/temporal), and relative catch levels, ensuring alignment with EU-MAP requirements and supporting regional harmonization across MS. This would also ensure that the expertise needed to conduct surveys is maintained at MS level (R_09). MS are also recommended to support the development of harmonised reporting procedures for recreational fisheries data within RDBES (R11).

One other recommendation to MS had been formulated but was considered unnecessary as its contents are included in agreements of RWP 2028-2030 which in turn will be reflected in NWPs. It recommended Member States participating in the North Sea International Bottom Trawl Survey (IBTS) to incorporate into their national work plans: stomach sampling, stomach content analysis, and upload of the resulting data to the ICES stomach database.

Also, several decisions have been put forward:

As proposed by ISSG Métier and transversal variables issues (Decision D1), métier codes, gear modifications can be included in the last two placeholders of the codes (although these are only for selective devices as currently defined in EU-MAP table 5), moving from using these two placeholders for "selective device/mesh size" to a broader definition of "gear modification/device configuration", to better answer end user needs and MS requests. The Decision was approved for the RCGs NANSEA & Baltic at the Decision Meeting.

Cost-sharing agreements for WHB survey 2027 (IBWSS) (Decision D03) and for IESNS survey (ASH) (Decision D04) were proposed and approved at the Decision Meeting.

Substantial work was done especially throughout the last two years by the RCG NANSEA & Baltic, the NCs, the Commission and also involving ICES concerning data confidentiality and data use, sharing and publication. In 2025/2026 two decisions were put forward and approved at the Decision Meeting. Namely: Decision D05 introducing a minimum threshold of three vessels in each aggregation of published data, except for where specific national restrictions apply (which is the case of France, Ireland and also Spain); and complementary Decision D06 providing an exemption from Decision D05 for a predefined set of standard outputs.

4. 3 Data Calls

(1)RCG Long Distance Fisheries

The data call was launched on 5 May, with a submission deadline of 8 June, and was addressed to all active Member States, including the EU's outermost regions. Data were requested in RDBES format (CL and CE), and all Member States responded to the call.

Member States are invited to improve the quality of their data submissions next year by strictly following the specifications outlined in the RCG LDF data call. Particular attention should be given to reporting at the requested métier level, avoiding the use of MIS_MIS, and correctly specifying the geographical scope by providing fishing ground names in the "Area of Jurisdiction" field. All information required by the data call should be provided, even where the corresponding fields are optional in the database format.

(2)RCG Large Pelagics

The RCG LP targeted data call on bluefin tuna biological data (LP_2025_D02), aimed at recovering maturity, age, sex and age-structure information collected under the DCF but never transmitted to ICCAT, could not be completed within the 2026 operational cycle. A three-step pathway was agreed: obtain the appropriate ICCAT/GBYP format, map the information already collected and reported through EU systems, and if needed issue a targeted call to Member States. DG MARE clarified, following contact with the ICCAT Secretariat, that the historical request is not a binding reporting obligation, so the work will be progressed in a later cycle. As a longer-term solution, LP_2026_R04 proposes an optional sheet in the ICCAT forms so that such data can be reported routinely, without the need for dedicated RCG data calls.

Other information requests in 2026 were made through questionnaires and templates circulated to the National Correspondents: the inventory of trapline trials and use, compiled by the ISSG Métiers and Transversal Variables with the RCG LP, and the Excel templates for Table 2.1, in which Member States verified landing quantities, completed quotas and provided input for the RWP.

Discussions and feedback

An update of the test using RDBES and RDBFIS was provided. The RCG LP has explored the compatibility of the RDBES format with ICCAT requirements. The experience from Cyprus, where an existing dataset was converted into RDBES format and subsequently transformed into the ICCAT reporting forms, indicates that the approach is feasible. In addition, RDBFIS is designed to host RDBES data, and it could be used to store the information. The test is planned to be finished in 2027, and by mid-2027 data structures and scripts for transformation into ICCAT formats, should be available for delivery to RDBFIS. In this regard, the importance of taking into account the timeline of the new RDBFIS project was highlighted to ensure that these developments can be incorporated within the project. It was also noted that Member States are currently at different stages of development.

(3)RCG Med & BS

Decision 01 (2026): MS to upload to RDBFIS the data submitted to JRC under the 2026 Med&BS Data Call (2025 and resubmitted historical data), by end of November 2026.

Recommendation 01 (2026): for the 2027 Data Call, maintain the legal deadline only for time-critical priority stocks, with an operational deadline for the rest, communicated sufficiently in advance (by the first NCs meeting in March).

(4)RCG ECON

RCG ECON does not issue a specific data call.

(5)RCG NANSEA and Baltic

The joint ICES/RCG RDBES data call for 2026 was launched on 5 February, requesting landings, effort, and sample data by 1st of April 2026. Upon request from MS, the deadline was extended to April 10. All Member States uploaded their data, but several submissions were late, creating uncertainty and pressure on data users.

4. 4 Proposals for future intersessional work and panregional work

(1)RCG Long Distance Fisheries

Future intersessional work is planned within four different ISSGs, each covering a specific topic:

- ISSG SPRFMO Observer Programme (chairs: Irek Wójcik and Sieto Verver)
- ISSG NAFO Harmonization protocols for on-board sampling (chair: Liivika Näks)
- ISSG CECAF Observer Programme of small pelagics (chair: Maksims Kovsars) – on hold
- ISSG SMEFF fisheries in the high seas, in particular FAO area 41 (chair: TBD) – on hold

(2)RCG Large Pelagics

ISSG Tropical Tuna: common at-sea coverage indicators; standardisation of CPUE and abundance indices; a practical session benchmarking bycatch raising methods (traditional ratio estimator, a model-based method and the ICCAT Bycatch Estimator); standardised observer training and a shared quality-control tool (AkadoR); and design of the low-intensity biological sampling programme (LP_2026_D06).

ISSG Bluefin Tuna (new chair, Tristan Rouyer): implement the agreed pathway for the bluefin tuna biological data call (obtain the ICCAT/GBYP format, map information already collected and reported through EU systems), support the optional ICCAT form sheet (LP_2026_R04) and remain aligned with the ICCAT GBYP/AZTI epigenetic ageing study. The ISSG will also review intersessionally the cross-RCG case study on bluefin tuna recreational fisheries, forwarded from RCG NANSEA & Baltic through the ISSG on recreational fisheries.

ISSG Mediterranean Sea Large Pelagics Fisheries: strengthen the Mediterranean part of RWP text and, once the new RWP is in place, coordinate regional biological and onboard sampling of albacore and swordfish, including documentation of trapline use.

ISSG Bait Boat / Pole and Line: finalise the combined CPUE index for tropical tunas across fleets, then move on to the coordination of length sampling.

ISSG Longlines outside the Mediterranean (reactivated, new chair José Carlos Báez): review the mandate and scope, convene the experts nominated by the National Correspondents and improve documentation of how and when the gear is used, considering EM, observer coverage and the possible future coverage of the IATTC and WCPFC areas.

Pan-regional work: continued cooperation with the ISSG Métiers and Transversal Variables (official gear code for trapline-only operations and an updated trapline inventory; feedback from other RCGs is welcome) and participation in the ISSG on Genetics (LP_2026_D04). The RCG LP will also map existing electronic monitoring systems and groups and explore a pilot with interested Member States.

Regional Work Plan and Regional Database: finalise and submit the RWP 2028–2030 and handle any revision following the STECF evaluation in 2027; progress the RDBES-to-ICCAT forms work through WKRDBES-INTRO (LP_2026_D03).

Discussions and feedback

The establishment of an ISSG on genetics was also discussed in relation to a similar subgroup proposed by RCG NANSEA and Baltic. RCG LP indicated that it envisaged the work as pan-regional, with the aim of coordinating scientists working in this field and developing common standards and best practices that could subsequently be adapted by each RCG to its specific needs. RCG NANSEA and Baltic had considered a model in which its ISSG would communicate and cooperate with the other RCGs as needed, but without designating it as pan-regional because of the implications in terms of increased workload. Both approaches were considered compatible, stressing the need to avoid overlapping or potentially conflicting Decisions. Finally, it was decided to keep the RCG NANSEA and Baltic ISSG, and to ensure the participation of LP experts, rather than to establish a separate structure. RCG Med also expressed interest in starting to work on genetics.

(3)RCG Med & BS

RCG Med&BS Intersessional Subgroups for 2026–2030: ISSG RWP (Alexandru Gheorghe, Angeliki Adamidou); ISSG Recreational Fisheries (Manos Koutrakis, Martina Scanu); ISSG PETs bycatch monitoring (Lidia Nedkova, Ivana Vukov); ISSG on fish stomach-contents collection and analysis (Cristina Follesa); ISSG scientific network for sampling optimization (Isabella Bitetto, Vanja Čikeš); ISSG Data Quality (Kostas Touloumis, Alessandro Mannini); Med&BS RDB Steering Committee (Charis Charilaou); ISSG End-Users (Enrico Arneri, Tina Blatnik); MEDITS SC (Beatriz Guijarro); MEDIAS SC (Zacharias Kapelonis).

Continued participation in pan-regional ISSGs: ISSG RWP, ISSG on Métier and Transversal Variables, ISSG Diadromous Fishes.

Intersessional work will focus on preparing the Regional Work Plan 2028–2030.

(4)RCG ECON

- RCG ECON will work on a vision document to outline its role and help prioritise topic and content focus related to harmonisation of data collection methods.
- RWP guidelines will be updated by the deadline of RWP uploads.

- RCG ECON will undertake a voluntary consultation on the evaluation criteria of Annex 1.2 of the NWP to gather feedback on this exercise from a wider range of experts. This information will be bundled and kept as a source for the end-user to consult when necessary.

- All historical recommendations of RCG ECON will be collected, organised and tagged to be correctly uploaded in the recommendations platform of the RCG Secretariat.

(5)RCG NANSEA and Baltic

The RCGs NANSEA and Baltic agreed to continue the existing ISSG structures for 2026-2027 and to establish a new ISSG on Genetics (Decision D07). Rather than creating a formal pan-regional group, the Genetics ISSG will operate through flexible and informal cooperation across regions, while maintaining close links with relevant expert groups and RCGs, including RCG LP and other RCGs as desired.

The work of the RCG and its ISSGs will be supported through a series of physical and online ISSG meetings. The ISSG Surveys will have a physical meeting in principle to be held in Marine Institute, Ireland in early 2027.

In addition, the ISSG on Regionally Coordinated Stomach Sampling will organise a workshop focused on intercalibration exercises aimed at improving data quality to be held in Boulogne-sur-Mer in late 2026.

Looking further ahead, the ISSG Métier and transversal variables will organize in 2027/2028 a physical workshop to discuss and develop best practice guidelines regarding cross-validation methods and methodological challenges to calculate fishing activity data estimates. All RCGs (NANSEA & Baltic, Med&BS, LP, LDF, and ECON), together with ICES WGRDBESGOV, and RDBFIS will be invited (Decision D02).

4. 5 Regional Work Plans

(1)RCG Long Distance Fisheries

The draft Regional Work Plan was finalised at the Technical Meeting using the most recent data submitted by MSs on the data call. The RCG LDF decide (LDF_2026_D01) to establish and agree on a Regional Work Plan for Long Distance Fisheries for the period 2028-2030. Before submitting the RWP to the IT Platform next year, Table 2.1 and Table 2.5 will be updated to include a more recent reference period using data from 2026.

(2)RCG Large Pelagics

The main new element of the RCG LP RWP 2028–2030 is the methodology for Table 2.1 (LP_2026_D05). In the current cycle Table 2.1 had been demoted to an annex because Member States applied the criteria without a shared reference period or species definitions. The new approach uses official ICCAT and IOTC nominal-catch data provided through DG MARE. On 19 September 2026 the ICCAT SC-STATS endorsed the 2025 submissions, providing a first screening of the 2025 data, although these are not yet fully validated; online data (ICCAT 2023–2024, IOTC 2022–2024) remain available as a fallback.

The time margins to delivery are very tight. As presented at the meeting, National Correspondents and ISSG RWP experts were to return the Table 2.1 landings, quotas and comments on the draft RWP by 25 September; ISSG RWP experts and ISSG chairs were to meet on 28–30 September (2–

3 hours) to finalise the proposal; the final draft was to go to the National Correspondents for approval on 1–3 October; and the RWP was to be submitted in mid-October 2026. Following the STECF evaluation in November 2026, any revision will be handled in 2027, with Member State commitments incorporated into national work plans by October 2027. A new chair for the ISSG RWP will be needed from 2027.

(3)RCG Med & BS

The RWP 2028–2030 is based on the 2025–2027 RWP, drafted with contributions from all Med&BS ISSGs and survey coordination groups; reviewed at an ISSG RWP online meeting (16 June 2026, 16 participants) and circulated to National Correspondents end of July 2026. Deadline for the first submission: 15 October 2026 (panregional timeline: STECF evaluation November 2026; possible resubmission June 2027; incorporation into National Work Plans October 2027).

Main contents: Table 2.1 (required species/stocks, reference period 2023–2025); Text Box 2.3 (diadromous species/eel); Text Box 2.4 (recreational fisheries); Text Box 2.5 (sampling-optimization plan); Text Box 2.6 (research surveys); Text Box 4.2 (PETs); Text Box 4.3/Table 4.1 (stomach contents).

Open items: Text Box 2.3 (diadromous species) needs a dedicated meeting of national eel experts (chaired by Argyrios Sapounidis, Greece), ideally including accession countries (Montenegro, Albania); Text Box 4.3/Table 4.1 (stomach contents) needs STECF advice on sampling prioritisation, with ISSG chairs to consolidate MS feedback.

(4)RCG ECON

RCG ECON as a group works panregional per definition and therefore every data collection variable affects all MS. Moreover, although data collection methods are difficult to standardize due to MS specific context, all data collection method harmonisation efforts happen in a panregional context. The effort, and time and financial investment of MS in socio-economic data collection is large, yet, the workload of socio-economic data collection experts is often (too) large. Therefore, RCG ECON as a group is not ready yet to use the RWP as a possible tool for regional analyses (e.g., sea basin regions) but keeps the possibility open for the future.

(5)RCG NANSEA and Baltic

There was a continuous process throughout the year on the development of the Regional Work Plans 2028-2030, coordinated by the ISSG RWP. This coordination was done through intersessional meetings with all ISSGs, targeted discussions with individual ISSGs and end users, a physical workshop in early 2026, and dedicated plenary sessions during the Technical Meeting. This approach enabled each ISSG to contribute relevant content in the RWP and supported the integration of regional sampling initiatives for Baltic small pelagic fishes, Northeast Atlantic freezer trawlers and Iberian trawl fisheries as well as for stomach contents in the North Sea and Baltic, as well as numerous other advances in the topics of the ISSGs which do not represent regionally coordinated sampling but rather regional coordination at different levels. The RWP included also the identification of strategic areas of importance, namely:

- RDBES centralization and data management developments
- The 3R principle (Reduce, Refine and Replace)

- Establishing stronger communication between RCGs, particularly between RCG ECON and other RCGs
- Communication with end users of data
- Pan- regional coordination and optimized sampling coverage
- Electronic Monitoring Technologies (EMT), Artificial Intelligence (AI) and genetic methods
- Data collection to support Ecosystem based management
- The RWPs will be further finalised in September and October, with the final submission deadline set for 15 October 2026.

4. 6 Other topics of joint interest

(1)RCG Long Distance Fisheries

None.

(2)RCG Large Pelagics

Traplines and gear codes: the RCG LP and RCG NANSEA & Baltic both adopted métier-code solutions for the emerging hook-and-trapline gear; coordination towards a common official EU gear code is proposed.

RDBES and RFMO reporting: the RCG LP RDBES-to-ICCAT forms case study parallels RDBES work in other RCGs. RDBFIS is expected to host and deploy the tools once developed, and collaboration on quality-check scripts relevant to large pelagics would be useful.

Bycatch and ETP estimation: a shared interest in harmonised estimation methods, including the ICCAT Bycatch Estimator and the benchmarking session planned by the ISSG Tropical Tuna.

Timing of the Liaison Meeting: late September is a particularly difficult period to secure participation from the large pelagics community. For roughly ten years, ICCAT has held its two most important scientific meetings, the species groups and the SCRS plenary, in the last two weeks of September; these are also the most demanding meetings for the ICCAT Secretariat after the Commission meeting. As a result, there was no ICCAT participation at the 2026 end-user session to present, inform or answer questions. The RCG LP proposes that the Liaison Meeting dates be coordinated early each year, once the calendars of all RFMOs and other organisations are endorsed, to find the most suitable days. Otherwise, the meeting risks offering little substance for the end users, with rushed preparation and participation on the RCG LP side.

Discussions and feedback

The RCG LP proposal to change the date of the LM was considered. The second week of September was proposed as an alternative. It was agreed that the Commission would contact the RCG LP Chair at the beginning of 2027, once the dates of the ICCAT meetings are known, in order to coordinate the meeting dates.

(3)RCG Med & BS

Collection and analysis of stable isotope samples from surveys: proposed by the MEDITS Coordination Group (Málaga, May 2026) as a cost-effective, non-lethal complement to stomach-content analysis. RCG Med&BS took note of this proposal but did not adopt it as a formal Recommendation; it will be reflected only as a comment in the meeting report, for interested Member States to consider including a pilot/non-binding study in their National Work Plan.

(4)RCG ECON

None.

(5)RCG NANSEA and Baltic

During the 2025/2026 cycle RCG ECON chairs were invited to the Technical Meeting (TM) and Regional Work Plan (RWP) workshops to strengthen collaboration between economic and biological data collection. Discussions focused on improving consistency between reporting frameworks, aligning methodologies and RWPs where possible, and enhancing communication between the different groups. The exchange contributed to a better mutual understanding of respective data collection processes and identified opportunities for closer cooperation in support of data quality and efficient reporting.

The RCGs NANSEA and Baltic also interacted with chairs of the WGRDBESGOV to discuss and support the format of approval of access to RDBES data and supported a hybrid model that combines a pre-defined list of WGs that are to have access, together with formal request to NCs for access to be given to other unlisted users.

The RCGs NANSEA & Baltic highlighted an inconsistent use of "recommendation" and "decision" across (and even within) RCGs and proposed harmonised terminology. Under the RCG NANSEA and Baltic, recommendations request action by another body, while decisions concern actions by the RCG or Member States requiring NC agreement; routine activities remain classified as tasks. Work would be needed to align terminologies.

Apart from that it was highlighted that the several RCGs, although having their own focus, share topics including Regional Work Plans, budget constraints, harmonised methods and emerging data needs. Regular exchanges between chairs and stronger cross-regional ISSG communication could improve consistency, coordination and knowledge-sharing. Furthermore, the role of National Correspondents is increasingly extending to these cross-regional topics. Throughout the year, the ISSG NCs of RCGs NANSEA and Baltic discussed (also involving NCs from other RCGs) possible changes in the way of functioning and of the formal definition of the ISSG towards a more pan-regional functioning, and the discussion is still ongoing.

4. 7 Announcement of new chairs, next meeting(s) and venues

RCG	Chairs	Dates 2026	Location
Long Distance Fisheries	Maksims Kovsars (LVA)	TBC 29 June – 2 of July or 6-9 July	Gdansk or Gdynia (Poland)
Large Pelagics	George Tserpes (GRC) Fabio Conte (ITA)	TBC (June)	Italy
Med&BS	Enrico Arneri (ITA) Tina Blatnik (SLO)	TBC 30 August – 3 September	Split (Croatia)
ECON	Hanna Swahnberg (SWE), Maria Valiente Viana (ESP), Joonas Valve (FIN)	TBC 26th-28th of May	Gothenburg (Sweden)
NANSEA & Baltic	*NANSEA* Laura Lemey (BEL) and Linda O'Hea (IRE) *Baltic* Vilda Griūnienė (LTU)	1 June (virtual day), 8 to 11 June	Tenerife (Spain)

4. 8 Other topics of joint interest

(1)Intersessional subgroup National Correspondents

Introduction

The session provided an update on the work of the ISSG NC and on the proposal to strengthen pan-regional coordination among National Correspondents. The challenges related to the current setup of the ISSG NC had previously been discussed at the RCG NANSEA and Baltic Technical Meeting in June 2026.

The ISSG NC currently operates within the RCG NANSEA and Baltic framework, while many of the issues addressed by National Correspondents are pan-regional and require coordination across all RCGs. Although NCs from other RCGs are invited, their involvement is unequal. In addition, NCs participate in the RCG structure while also being responsible for taking or endorsing RCG Decisions. The current arrangement therefore presents some practical and governance challenges, particularly when addressing matters that concern all regions.

The proposal presented was to move towards a pan-regional RCG NC, bringing NCs from all regions together in a common forum. Such a structure could facilitate the coordination of shared matters (including data access, confidentiality, RDBES and future DCF funding) and strengthen the voice of the NCs. It could also provide a common information hub for decisions and procedures, support pan-regional NC initiatives and contribute to jointly defining the mandate for the RCG Secretariat. Finally, it would reduce the need to repeat pan-regional NC discussions at individual RCG meetings, allowing regional RCGs to devote more time to region-specific work.

The proposed approach is expected to provide shorter communication pathways, faster responses and more consistent implementation of agreed procedures. However, a number of issues remain to be clarified, particularly regarding the legal and institutional framework. Article 9 links RCGs to marine regions, and the Commission has therefore expressed reservations about establishing an additional RCG based on NC functions rather than a marine region. Further work is needed to clarify the mandate, decision-making arrangements and relationship with the existing RCGs. The proposal will continue to be discussed with the Commission and among NCs.

Discussions and feedback

The discussion highlighted the importance of maintaining the involvement of NCs in the Technical Meetings of the regional RCGs, particularly to ensure that relevant issues are considered before Decisions and Recommendations are submitted for adoption.

The potential workload associated with the proposed arrangement was also discussed. It was noted that the main need for the NCs to join forces is expected to arise from discussions on future funding and potential reductions. This topic would in any case require coordination among all NCs, and bringing these discussions into a common forum was considered potentially more efficient than addressing them separately across different RCGs.

Regarding the reservations about establishing an additional RCG based on NC functions rather than a marine region, it was noted that the RCG ECON is also not based on regions but is instead panregional and organised around a common topic.

Regarding the next steps, it was explained that the Commission will ask for legal advice on the proposal. The issue will be revisited at the NC meeting. While the regulatory framework needs to be taken into account, it was considered important to continue exploring options for improved pan-regional coordination among NCs.

(2)Tools for Decisions & Recommendations

Introduction

The RCGs Secretariat presented the main outcomes of SecWeb 2.0, focusing on the tools developed to improve the RCGs online working environment. Particular attention was given to the new platform for recording, monitoring and following up RCG recommendations and decisions. A tutorial of the platform was provided, covering its main functionalities, including the introduction and editing of recommendations and decisions, status and deadline monitoring, comments, filtering and export options. The platform is designed to be flexible and can be adapted to the specific needs of each RCG.

Discussions and feedback

It was clarified that RCG Chairs will initially have editing rights, while other users may be granted different levels of access, including the possibility to comment. For the 2026 cycle, the Secretariat offered to support RCG Chairs with the upload of recommendations and decisions. Access may also be provided to end-users were considered appropriate by the respective RCG. Approved recommendations and decisions will continue to be publicly available through the RCG website.

The discussion addressed how STECF reviews of RCG recommendations should be incorporated into the platform. Participants stressed the importance of retaining not only an indication that a recommendation had been reviewed, but also the STECF feedback itself and any subsequent follow-up. It was confirmed that additional fields, tags or other elements can be incorporated for this purpose and, more generally, that the tool can be adapted through to the needs of each RCG.

Participants welcomed the platform as a means of improving the follow-up of recommendations and decisions and facilitating monitoring across years and RCGs.

(3)Use of Decisions and Recommendations

Introduction

The RCG NANSEA & Baltic highlighted an inconsistent use of "recommendation" and "decision" across (and even within) RCGs and proposed harmonised terminology. Under the RCG NANSEA and Baltic, recommendations request action by another body, while decisions concern actions by the RCG or Member States requiring NC agreement; routine activities remain classified as tasks. Work would be needed to align terminologies.

Discussions and feedback

The proposal to harmonise the definitions and use of Recommendations and Decisions across RCGs was discussed and supported by all RCGs.

The importance of making the agreed approach easily accessible, particularly for incoming Chairs and other newcomers, was highlighted. The RCG Secretariat noted that relevant guidance can be made available through the RCG website. In addition, given the amount of information already available on the website, the Secretariat offered dedicated support to newcomers to facilitate access to and understanding of the available information. It was noted that a short Teams meeting providing guidance may save a lot of time searching through the documents stored in the RCG website.

5 GOVERNANCE (TOR 4)

A. Follow-up on RCG Rules of Procedures (RoP) developments in each of the RCGs (Liaison Meeting, RCG Chairs)
B. Structure of RCGs and cooperation. Discuss needs for new pan-regional ISSGs (RCG chairs)
- *Status on Secretariat (current output available to RCGs)*
- *Diadromous ISSG (position and future participation to LM)*

5. 1 Follow-up on RCG Rules of Procedures (RoP) developments in each of the RCGs

(1)RCG Long Distance Fisheries

No changes were made.

(2)RCG Large Pelagics

RCG LP agreed to revise its 2019 Rules of Procedure to reflect developments in the functioning of the RCG. The RCG LP revision (LP_2026_D01) will follow the common RCG template and will also address the use of AI transcription and note-taking tools in meetings.

(3)RCG Med&BS

No changes were made.

(4)RCG ECON

No changes were made.

(5)RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic

No changes were made.

5. 2 Structure of RCGs and cooperation. Discuss needs for new pan-regional ISSGs, status on Secretariat, …

No new topics were raised during the meeting.

6 AOB

No new topics were raised during the meeting.

7 ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

The 23rd Liaison Meeting was chaired by Lucía Zarauz (Spain) and the group met with the following participants:

Name	Country	Role / Affiliation	Email	Presence
Lucía Zarauz	ES	Chair	lzarauz@azti.es	Physical
Paolo Carpentieri		End user - GFCM	paolo.carpentieri@gfcmonline.org	Online
Christoph Konrad		End user - IOTC	christoph.konrad@fao.org	Online
Cynthia Fernandez-Diaz		End user - IOTC	cynthia.fernandezdiaz@fao.org	Online
Cecilia Kvaavik		End user - ICES	cecilia.kvaavik@ices.dk	Physical
Jan De Haes		End user - ICES	jan.dehaes@ices.dk	Online
Bernard Vigga		End user - SPRFMO	bvigga@sprfmo.int	Online
Christoph Stransky	DE	End user - STECF	christoph.stransky@thuenen.de	Physical
Vilda Griūnienė	LT	RCG BAL chair	vilda.griuniene@zum.lt	Online
Rita Vasconcelos	PT	RCG NANSEA outgoing co-chair	rita.vasconcelos@ipma.pt	Online
Laura Lemey	BE	RCG NANSEA co-chair	laura.lemey@ilvo.vlaanderen.be	Physical
Linda O'Hea	IE	RCG NANSEA incoming co-chair	Linda.O'Hea@Marine.ie	Physical
Adelbert De Clercq	BE	RCG ECON outgoing co-chair	adelbert.declercq@ilvo.vlaanderen.be	Physical
Hanna Swahnberg	SE	RCG ECON co-chair	hanna.swahnberg@havochvatten.se	Online
María Valiente Viana	ES	RCG ECON incoming co-chair	mvaliente@mapa.es	Physical
Joonas Valve	FI	RCG ECON incoming co-chair	joonas.valve@luke.fi	Physical
Maksims Kovsars	LV	RCG LDF chair	maksims.kovsars@bior.lv	Physical
Ioannis Thasitis	CY	RCG LP outgoing chair	ioannis.thasitis@gfcmonline.org	Online
Alexandru Gheorghe	RO	RCG MED&BS outgoing chair	alexandru.gheorghe@anpa.ro	Physical
Enrico Arneri	IT	RCG MED&BS chair	enrico.arneri@cnr.it	Physical
Josefine Egekvist	DK	Expert	jsv@aqua.dtu.dk	Online
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ANNEX 2: LIAISON MEETING 2026 AGENDA

Venue : Borschette Conference Centre, Rue Froissart, 36, 1040 Brussels

Timetable 1st day:

Time (CET)	Duration	Topic	TOR	Presenter
Tuesday, September 22				
9:00	15 min	Meeting room open		
9:15	15 min	**Walk-in & getting ready**		
9:30	10 min	**Welcome by the Commission** Welcome, house rules, tour de table	**ToR 1A**	COM opening speech: Raluca Ivanescu
9:40	10 min	**Introduction by the Liaison Meeting Chair** Welcome, adoption of the agenda, format of the report, notification of AOB Follow up on main topics from last year, focus on cross cutting topics	**ToR 1A**	Liaison Meeting Chair (Lucia Zarauz)
9:50	10 min	**Introduction by the Commision (head of unit C3)**		
10:00	30 min	**End user needs and interaction (LDF): SPRFMO, NAFO, CECAF, SIOFA**	**ToR 1B**	Long Distance Fisheries Endusers (SPRFMO, NAFO, CECAF, SIOFA)
	5 min	Discussion and feedback from plenary		**coffee will be arriving 10:15**
10:35	10 min	**Highlights in RCG LDF activities**	**ToR 3**	RCG LDF chair (Maksims Kovsars)
	5 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		
10:50	10 min	**End user needs and interaction: STECF-JRC**	**ToR 1B**	STECF / JRC (Christoph Stransky) with JRC contribution
	5 min	Discussion and feedback from plenary		
11:05	10 min	**Highlights in RCG ECON activities**	ToR 3	RCG ECON chairs (Adelbert De Clercq, Hanna Swahnberg)
	5 min	Discussion and feed back from plenary		
11:20	5 min	Buffer time		
11:25	20 min	*Health break*		
11:45	15 min	**By-catch**		
	20 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		
12:20	20 min	**End user needs and interaction (LP): IOTC, ICCAT**	ToR 1B	IOTC, ICCAT
	5 min	Discussion and feedback from plenary		
12:45	10 min	**Highlights in RCG LP activities**	ToR 3	RCG Large Pelagics chair (Ioannis Thasitis)
	5 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		
13:00	10 min	Buffer time		
13:10	1.20 Hour	*LUNCH*		
14:30	10 min	**End user needs and interaction (MED): GFCM**	ToR 1B	GFCM (Paolo Carpentieri)
	5 min	Discussion and feedback from plenary		
14:45	15 min	**Highlights in RCG MED&BS activities**	ToR 3	RCG MED&BS chairs (Alexandru Gheorghe, Enrico Arneri)
	5 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		**coffee will be arriving 15:00**
15:05	10 min	**End user needs and interaction (NANSEA & BAL): ICES**	ToR 1B	ICES (Cecilia Kvaavik)
	5 min	Discussion and feedback from plenary		
15:20	15 min	**Highlights in RCG NANSEA & RCG BAL activities**	ToR 3	RCG NANSEA/BAL chairs (Rita Vasconcelos, Vilda Gruniene, Laura Lemey, Linda O´Hea)
	5 min	Discussion and feedback from plenary		
15:40	10 min	Buffer time		
15:50	20 min	*Coffee break*		
16:10	10 min	**Update on RDBES (general)**		WGRDBESGOV chairs (Harriet Van Overzee, Maciej Adamowicz)
	5 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		
16:25	10 min	**Update on RDBFIS (general)**	ToR 3	Stefanos Kavadas, HCMR, RDBFIS
	5 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		
16:40	15 min	**Summary of the day**		*Venetia Kostopoulou / plenary*
16:55	5 min	**Closure of the meeting**		Chair

Timetable 2nd day:

Time	Duration	Topic	TOR	Presenter
Wednesday, September 23				
8:30	30 min	Meeting room open		
9:00	5 min	**Start of the day**		Chair
9:05	15 min	**RCG Large Pelagics**	**ToR 3A**	RCG Large Pelagics chair
	10 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		
9:30	15 min	**RCG Long Distance Fisheries**	**ToR 3A**	RCG LDF chair (Maksims Kovsars)
	10 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		
9:55	15 min	**RCG MED&BS**	**ToR 3A**	RCG MED&BS chairs (Alexandru Gheorghe and Enrico Arneri)
	10 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		
10:20	15 min	**RCG NANSEA/BAL**	**ToR 3A**	RCG NANSEA/BAL chairs (Rita Vasconcelos, Vilda Griuniene, Laura Lemey, Linda O´Hea)
	10 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		
10:45	20 min	*Health break*		
11:05	15 min	**RCG ECON**	**ToR 3A**	RCG ECON chairs (Adelbert De Clercq, Hanna Swahnberg)
	10 min	Questions and discussion in plenary		
11:30	15 min	**Topics of joint interest:** RWP dates and calendar, Pan regional intersessional work, Use of Decisions and Recommendations, other relevant end users, invitation to 3rd countries	**ToR 3D**	LM chair & RCG chairs
	60 min	Discussion/General conclusions from this session		
12:45	10 min	**Summary of the day**		*Venetia Kostopoulou / plenary*
12:55	5 min	*Closure of the meeting by COM and chair.*		Chair, COM

ANNEX 3: OVERVIEW OF ALL RECOMMENDATIONS

The overview of all recommendations from the different RCGs can be found on the 2026 Decision Meeting report available on the RCGs website: https://fisheries-rcg.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/2026_RCGs_-Decision-Meeting_Report.pdf

Fisheries Data Collection

23rd Liaison Meeting

Meeting between the Chairs of RCGs, key end users, European Commission DG Mare and JRC