

The Data Collection Framework

Minutes of the 18th Liaison Meeting

**Meeting between the Chairs of RCGs, key end users, JRC and the
Commission**

Online meeting

23 - 24 September 2021

The Liaison Meeting (LM) is a subgroup of the European Commission (COM) expert group on data collection (E02750) and aims at coordinating the regional coordination groups (RCGs) among themselves and with the Commission in matters which affect several marine regions (Article 9(6) of Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 - the data collection framework regulation (DCF)). In 2020, a new RCG ECON was established, to continue the work of the planning group on economic issues (PGECON). As a result, five RCGs took part in the Liaison Meeting in 2021, together with representatives of the following end users: ICES, STECF, GFCM, ICCAT, CECAF and the JRC (in its role of handling the STECF data calls). SPFRMO, IOTC, SIOFA and NAFO were unable to participate. The LM report will be shared with these parties upon completion.

The first day of the LM 2021 focused on **coordinating and discussing with end users**. End users could exchange views with COM and RCG chairs as well as other end users on their specific data needs and gave feedback on the quality and relevance of the data provided by EU Member States under data calls.

ICES focused its presentation on communication and interaction with RCGs: the recommendations exchange between ICES and RCGs, an RCG-dedicated staff in ICES, the Stock Information Database (SID) under development, where the RCG feedback is needed.

ICES highlighted the need for quality checks on catch data, survey scrutinising, and a need to acknowledge non-EU countries, where ICES could serve as a bridge. They also proposed improved communication through enhancing secretariats collaboration, using the recommendation system, the SID and the benchmarks. ICES expressed great expectations for Secweb project.

DG MARE intervened on the data gaps in the bycatch data, welcoming the ICES follow-up on the issue. The Secweb leader announced a relevant project that deals with PETs sampling. The LM chair mentioned the emergent topic on animal welfare and the need to have licences, which needs to be taken into account when planning sampling of species.

The **RCG NANSEA and Baltic** issued a questionnaire on Covid-19 impact by stock and region. Information was collected from March 2020 onwards, and resulted in heat maps by stocks and region, showing severity of impact. The heat maps were provided to ICES. The RCG will continue these overviews on a quarterly basis.

ICCAT presented its structure, data requirements and reporting obligations, and highlighted the importance of the EU MS. They presented the GBYP, a biological sampling and analysis program, and mentioned good cooperation with the RCG LP. ICCAT updated on the database development and announced an international workshop on sampling and analyses.

There are some timeliness, coverage and non-submission issues from EU MS regarding data provision to ICCAT. The guidelines and recommendations aim to improve data validation before submission, have statistical correspondents who are experts in the field, adjust the domestic observer programme, and include the by-catch and discards data in total removals.

DG MARE underlined the importance of DCF for data collection and highlighted the lack of fisheries independent data. The EU already contributes through the survey in the Balearic Islands. The goal is to expand this survey in other areas, like Sicily (currently discussed), but also in other areas. The DCF is not enough for covering ICCAT needs.

The following **STECF** EWGs were presented: FDI, Med & BS, Fleet economics, Aquaculture, Processing industry. Overall, good cooperation with relevant RCG was noted. The fleet economics EWG needs a lower aggregation data for regional analyses. There have been improvements for some fisheries, like ICCAT, IOTC, NAFO, but CECAF and NEAFC data are still limited. JRC is looking into an integrated tool to standardise nowcasting and forecasting procedures. MS were urged to run data checks before submitting data for the Med & BS data call. Issues highlighted in EWG 21-02 will be addressed in the coming year. The inclusion of recreational fisheries data is foreseen. The quality of data for the FDI call improves, partly thanks to methodological meeting earlier this year. The FDI coverage has deteriorated

when the Med &BS biological data were removed from the FDI data call; a protocol is needed to repopulate the FDI database with the missing data to ensure the full coverage. Data checks are needed before the aquaculture EWG meeting. Social data was reported for the first time in this EWG.

A workshop on DTMT and guidance took place in STECF summer plenary. Changes were made to the DTMT, mainly to improve navigation, to make it more user-friendly. The guidance document has been updated, and it will be updated annually.

CECAF highlighted the lack of statistical and sampling systems as the main issue with the data. The scientific WGs issued recommendations for a national follow-up: initiate or intensify biological sampling; improve sampling for all fleet segments; improve otolith reading; age length keys needed; improve species identification and knowledge on species biology; conduct studies on discards.

CECAF mentioned ongoing developments: capacity building both internally in CECAF and in countries (Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Liberia, Ivory Coast); a series of virtual workshops recently carried out, to improve connection and communication with experts collecting the data.

The RCG LDF chair mentioned the problem to place observers on board, linked to the SFPAs that require captains of fishing vessels to take onboard a percentage of local crew and a local observer. This leaves little room for taking external (DCF) observers, so fishers are reluctant to accept them.

GFCM praised the interaction with RCGs, presented the new GFCM data submission calendar (a dynamic interactive tool with infographics), and the GFCM deadline reminder. They briefly explained the DCRF harmonisation process, and presented ongoing developments on GFCM regional databases. Other tools include the interactive SSF mapping tool, developed within GFCM, and the sensitive benthic habitats and species (data on VMEs). They also mentioned the STAR project, launched this year to streamline and automatize the information for stock assessments and their outcomes.

DG MARE gave a short presentation on the **EU-MAP revision**. The EU MAP was adopted and published on 16 July 2021 and will enter into force in January 2022. Main changes: pilot studies turn into regular data requirements (recreational, bycatch, stomach sampling, social variables). The collection from the freshwater aquaculture becomes mandatory; the processing industry remains voluntary. The regional aspect is more pronounced, to accommodate for regional work plans.

The work on the new WP and AR templates was completed in July 2021 and now two processes are ongoing: 1) the legal adoption of the templates (vote in Committee of Fisheries and Aquaculture and adoption foreseen by November); 2) MS WP submission by 15 October, followed by STECF evaluation and COM adoption by end 2021. The new elements of templates are the following: one single template for WP and AR, alignment of the numbering to the new EU MAP, introduction of text reports on Quality Assurance Framework (instead of Tables 5A and 5B), and dedicated columns for regional work plans.

Four regional grants were launched in January 2021 and aim to assist RCGs.

On the regional databases, **RDBES** and **RDBFIS**:

RDBES test data calls were launched and most EU MS had no issues submitting data, as they are involved in the process. Not all data is collected using 4S (statistically sound sampling schemes); there is a need to help countries migrating their current raising procedures into RDBES. According to the roadmap, the RDB and Intercatch are still to be in use in 2022, running in parallel to the RDBES. The RDBES will take over in 2023. The milestones are the following: an operational RDBES by 2022, the recreational data, bycatch and PETs to be incorporated by 2023. On data governance, the intention is to move away from data policy towards a data licence.

The RCG NANSEA & BAL uses the RDBES data in intersessional subgroups (ISSGs) and their case studies; the RCG is in close contact with ICES relevant WGs.

The data to be incorporated in the regional database for Med&BS (**RDBFIS**) includes: biological data, surveys, PETs, RF, alien species, spatial fishing footprints (to support need of FDI to have spatial effort data). RDBFIS leader thanked the WGOVRDBES chair for the support regarding the RDBES, and announced that within the next 4-5 months, the first version of the RDBFIS will be published.

The RCG chairs highlighted the most topical **RCG activities**.

RCG LP needs to strengthen interaction with national correspondents (NCs). They also call on the COM experience to draft proposals. Main goals are: to have common RoPs with other RCGs; to create an intersessional group on RDB development; to coordinate with other RCGs, as despite limited number of MS involved, the RCG LP is very important in terms of fishery and area covered. There is a need for a common agreement on decision process and consensus on next chairing term.

The RCG LP is very satisfied with communication with the secretariat, as well as with other RCGs.

RDG LDF in relation to CECAF reported no sampling activities in 2020 due to Covid-19; CECAF participated in the RCG meeting in 2021, which is very positive. The work groups and recommendation related to CECAF were revised, and feedback on SFPAs received; there is a need to continue communication and cooperation with CECAF.

There was no EU fishing operations and no sampling in SPRFMO in 2020. The SPRFMO webpage is very clear on needs and requirements (it was presented as a good example), but the new accreditation programme for observers is a challenge.

A new area of interest for EU fisheries lies in the North Pacific (the NPFC). The expected time of COM accession is 2022 Q1, and then MS will have to collect data as per NPFC requirements and the RCG LDF will coordinate activities.

ES and PT proposed jointly to move NAFO from RCG NANSEA to RCG LDF, which was received positively. Estonia will join RCG LDF, as it is active in NAFO area. France and Denmark are also active in NAFO, but as individual contracting parties, and will not join the RCG LDF. The EU MAP should be updated to reflect the allocation of NAFO surveys to RCG LDF.

RCG Med & BS main recommendations include an agreement on sharing DTMT information for end user meeting, and data requirements registry. The work on quality of data for non-assessed stocks will follow in December 2021. Recommendations for the GFCM relate to availability of DCRF templates, age reading workshops in Black Sea, and training workshop on PETs. The RCG issued also recommendations on recreational fisheries, environmental data, and the regional database. Other work interesting for other RCG include regional analysis on data issues (DTi), collaboration with GFCM on recreational fisheries species, a ranking table produced after an RCG data call, used by MS for their work plans.

RCG NANSEA & Baltic streamlines its recommendations; they explain the RCG role to end users; they have an annual communication cycle with ICES. Main recommendations, stored in a database, relate to RDBES data license, cost-sharing agreements, future of North mackerel survey, non-binding RWPs for 2022, regional cooperation on small pelagics in Baltic, analysing the historical misreporting of herring and sprat in national data, sampling stomachs in IBTS survey, and common RoPs for RCG NANSEA and Baltic.

The cooperation with other RCGs has improved, and the joint decision meeting is an example. There was good cooperation to populate Table 1.2 for WP. Main achievements include successful intersessional groups for ICES work and RWPs, RDBES progress that should lead to reducing the workload, good collaboration between RCGs and ICES, added value of the RCG secretariat.

RCG ECON presented first year recommendations as RCG, mainly linked to FishNCo project and to MS (on methodologies and guidelines, and on application of alternative segmentation approaches). The FishNCo project will send questionnaires to NCs and results will be presented in RCG ECON May 2022. Two workshops are planned: on effects of alternative segmentation and on aquaculture.

LM discussed the **ISSG diadromous and its position** as a pan-European group. The goals are to establish and strengthen communication with relevant end users, to establish what data they need, to improve data collection. The achievements include explored solutions for the MS to identify index rivers for eels; a questionnaire about electrofishing techniques sent out in 2021, organised ISSG work.

A regional approach is important, as the species span different sea basins. There has been progress on quality assurance (electrofishing). There are three options for the future status of ISSG Diadromous: to continue for another year; to transfer to a permanent RCG; to present diadromous issues by respective RCGs in future Liaison Meetings. The LM agreed to keep the ISSG as is and re-evaluate next year.

The second day of LM was dedicated to the **RCGs**, to discuss the **recommendations** and to identify which ones to address in the LM. The LM discussed future **RCG related developments**, including intersessional work, and MARE/2020/08 grants on regional work plans and RCG secretariat. Various RCGs indicated additional effort to contribute to the development of the regional databases and/or regional work plans. The LM was informed on **incoming RCG chairs** (or challenges to appoint new ones) and dates for future meeting and workshops (if already confirmed).

LM agreed to keep RCG recommendations in the LM report for now and to place them in the Secweb website in the future. On the combined 2020 decision meeting, all RCGs agreed that the meeting should be maintained. The RCG NANSEA & Baltic circulated an online feedback questionnaire regarding the structure of the RCG and received support.