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**MEDAC advice on the socio-economic data available
for the evaluation of multiannual plans (MAPs)**

Key outcomes of the STECF Summer Plenary Session 2025 (25-02)

- **6.7 Assessment of measures in the Compensation Mechanism, West Med MAP.** STECF notes that the available data and information currently collected within the Data Collection Framework do not allow to assess the social impact of the implementation of CMs. Closed areas, gear changes and days at sea changes are likely to have social impacts such as safety at sea, change in job satisfaction and changes to family and community life (Clay and Colburn, 2020). Identifying data needs and criteria for social impact assessment is essential for effectively responding to current and future requests for advice. STECF notes that this could be discussed in a dedicated ToR in future Expert Working Group on Social Data
- In the assessment of several conservation measures, there is now a reference stating that: "STECF notes that the concept of economic dependency is narrower in scope than socio-economic impacts, which encompass economic plus social effects (such as well-being, generational renewal, working conditions)" (e.g. page 79 of the document, 81 of the pdf file; page 89 document; 91 pdf; 103 document, 105 pdf)
- For the forthcoming EWG 25-14 on Implementation of Technical measures regulation. STECF notes that the EWG should identify meaningful economic and social indicators for assessing the impacts of the technical measure's regulation (page 168; 170 pdf).
- Achieving multiple objective: STECF has had extensive debate over the years on the economic and social objectives of the CFP, and the requests to assess socio-economic impacts has increased over the last years. These debates include discussions on the extent to which these are conflicting or not with the conservation objectives, for example, in the frame of the analyses of the management plans or of conservation measures (Article 11, Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems -VME-, exemptions to the LO, etc.). This includes also considerations on the time frame involved, where social and economic objectives and conservation objectives can be more conflicting in the short-term (e.g. pointing towards opposite decisions on fishing opportunities) than in the long term perspectives where they are better aligned. STECF has also discussed that social, economic and conservation objectives involve different layers of responsibility. There may be different understandings on the respective roles of the EU and of Member States. STECF takes note of the ruling of the European Court of Justice (C-330/22,2024) interprets Article 2 as a whole, which requires that "the CFP ensure that fishing and aquaculture activities are environmentally sustainable

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in the long term and are managed in a way that is consistent with the objectives of achieving economic, social and employment benefits, and of contributing to the availability of food supplies". STECF observes though that the only operational goal specified in Article 2 of the CFP is the MSY, and that social, economic, and ecosystem aspects are not addressed as operational goals, which hampers the ability to advise on their progress. Being a multidisciplinary scientific body supporting policy, STECF is an appropriate forum for holding these discussions and exchanging views. Nevertheless, ambiguities remain, which challenge the provision of scientific advice in the absence of clear guidelines establishing priorities among different objectives and time perspectives. (page 59; 61 pdf file).

MEDAC observations on the STECF Summer Plenary Session 2025 document (25-02)

With regard to the West Med management plan, while the economic data and indicators are available and already used in different contexts, the data and information on social aspects are still not adequate to allow for a proper assessment of the social impact.

Therefore, MEDAC:

- Notes that restrictions such as the fishing area reductions, change in fishing gears and management of the number of days at sea can have a negative impact on safety, professional satisfaction, and social and family life.
- Claims that reliable data and criteria are needed to assess the real social impact in order to effectively respond to current and future consultations on socio-economic impacts.
- Highlights that economic dependence is different from socio-economic impact, which must include elements such as personal well-being, generational turnover and fulfilling working conditions.
- Points out that in recent years there has been an increase in requests for analyses of socio-economic impacts in relation to possible conflicts with the objectives of resource conservation management plans.
- Acknowledges that STECF takes note of the ruling of the European Court of Justice (C-330/22,2024) interpreting Article 2 of the CFP.
- Recalls that the sole objective of Article 2 of the CFP remains maximum sustainable yield (MSY), neglecting social, economic and ecosystem aspects, which prevents proper advice on these issues. In this respect, the social and economic objectives to be pursued should be further elaborated and more clearly identified. At present, there is no precise definition of the economic and social objectives that the CFP may pursue, which could, for example, include maintaining current employment levels considering systems/incentives supporting it, ensuring revenues at a break-even point, or securing revenues that guarantee a positive gross profit. The economic and social objectives are therefore not explicitly identified and may depend on political choices. This objective can be pursued also considering the incentives by EC to support employment through funding for businesses or individual fishers.

- Deems appropriate that the next STECF meeting of experts (EWGs) should identify useful economic and social indicators for assessing the impact of regulations on the sector, without which the provision of scientific advice may be jeopardised.

MEDAC considers it is essential that, before introducing any biological or environmental protection measures, the relevant social and economic data be thoroughly analysed. Particular attention should be given to the fleet concerned, using disaggregated data to allow for a tailored approach to each fleet, stock, or Geographical Sub-area (GSA). On the basis of the EU DCF, consistent and reliable datasets should be available on capacity, catches, effort, revenues, operating costs, employment (crew wages, number of jobs, FTE), capital value and costs.

Additional information on imported and exported products (including quantities and species), the occurrence of fishing-related supply activities such as processing and tourism, and the operations of non-EU fleets could provide valuable insights to improve knowledge about a given fishery.

As for the social dimension of the sector, the EU MAP provides demographic information such as employment by gender, age classes, nationality, education level and employment status. However, as clearly described by STECF 24-05, additional social variables would be needed to calculate proper social indicators. STECF 24-05 identified top 5 political priorities (current situation of fishers, vulnerability of fishers, number of fishers that have dropped or discontinued, attractiveness of the profession for the younger generation, impact of EU conservation measures on fishing communities). STECF 24-05 also suggested specific indicators for each political priority but, even if likewise all of them can be included in the national and community fishing profiles, most of the suggested indicators cannot be calculated with the present level of knowledge.

MEDAC stresses that, particularly for fishing fleets subject to current and forthcoming management plans, it is imperative to establish a systematic comparison with the available socio-economic data collected prior to the implementation of such measures. This comparison should serve as the basis for a structured process of periodic evaluation, ensuring that management actions are continuously assessed against their socio-economic impacts.

Management plans should include a monitoring plan with well identified indicators and reference points. A provisional list of economic and social indicators is the following:

Economic dimension:

CR/Ber (Ratio of Current revenue to Break-even revenue, a key financial indicator showing a fishing fleet's short-term profitability and ability to cover daily operating costs (variable, fixed, capital). A CR/BER > 1 means profit, while < 1 suggests losses, potential over-capitalization, and unprofitability, guiding sustainable management under policies like the EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) to balance economic viability with ecological limits)

Rofta (Return on Fixed Tangible Assets, is a key economic indicator in fisheries, measuring a fishing operation's profitability by comparing net profit to its physical assets (vessels, gear),

helping assess investment viability, with trends often linked to fish stock health, management policies (like EU efforts for fleet balance), fuel costs, and overall industry performance, as seen in reports from FAO and JRC.

Gross profit margin is a measure of profitability that can be used to analyse how efficiently a sector is using its inputs to generate profit. Calculated as the ratio between gross profit and revenue.

Gross Value Added (GVA) represents the value generated by the fleet that can be distributed to labour and capital

GVA/employment is an indicator that measures labour productivity, showing the value (Gross Value Added) each worker contributes, revealing sector health, efficiency, and wage potential).

Social dimension:

Days at Sea per Fishing Trip (Time Away from Home): Measures the average trip length in days at sea, serving as an index of quality of life by indicating how long fishers spend away from home.

Total number of fishers.

Generational Renewal Index: An age-structure indicator to assess recruitment of young fishers.

Financial Position of Crew (Relative Income): average wage compared to national minimum wage.

Additional Income Sources (Diversification): The extent to which fishing households rely on income beyond fishing to sustain themselves. One way to quantify this is the additional income to support fishing continuity as a percentage of total income or share of time, e.g. income from other occupations or government aid explaining if this last support is addressed to the enterprise or to each fisher.

Impact on the EU markets of the Imported fishery products (quantity, quality and related revenues).

MEDAC deems necessary that social data should be collected every 12 to 18 months. Especially for fishing fleets affected by current and future management plans, a comparison with data prior to the implementation of the measures should be provided for to initiate a process of periodic comparison. MEDAC deems that the outcome of this discussion will serve to make any necessary adjustments to the multiannual management plans supporting the fisheries system, with the involvement of the Advisory Councils. Furthermore, in the event that the sector is in distress,

MEDAC proposes that the Member States concerned intervene to support the sector and that the EU amends the multiannual management plan accordingly to avoid further damage to the fleet and begins regional debates on these issues, involving the existing high-level groups (PESCAMED, ADRIATICA, SUDESTMED).

Furthermore, from a social perspective, MEDAC reiterates the urgency of:

- Organising training/information courses in cases where there is a shortage of young workers to increase skills in other activities, both related to the fishing sector (e.g., processing, aquaculture, etc.) and unrelated. For example, the training could be carried out during the temporary closures.
- Facilitating the entry of non-EU workers and launching the process for the recognition of professional qualifications from other countries that are not currently validated. In this regard, inviting countries to legislate to facilitate such processes.

