

MINUTES

Stakeholder Meeting on the revision of the Data Collection Framework Regulation

16 January, Brussels

On 16 January 2014, a stakeholder meeting was organised by DG MARE C3 to consult stakeholders on the intended modifications of the Data Collection Framework.

Participants

Members States (DCF National Correspondents + Permanent Representatives + Experts from: AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK, SL, UK);

Regional Fisheries Management Organisations: NAFO, GFCM, NEAFC, ICCAT;

Regional Advisory Councils: Baltic Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Long Distance, Pelagic Stocks, North-western Waters, North Sea;

Regional Sea Conventions: HELCOM, OSPAR, UNEP-MAP;

Non-Governmental Organisations: Birdlife International, Seas At Risk, Greenpeace, Client Earth, EBCD;

STECF, RCMs, MRAG, Devstat, ICES, EFARO representatives;

Commission: ENV, ESTAT, JRC, RTD, MARE.

Summary

The meeting discussed possible improvements for the revision of the fisheries Data Collection Regulation (Council Regulation (EC) No 199/2008) in the context of the revised Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Main outcomes can be summarised as follows:

- (1) The scope of the Data Collection Framework needs to be slightly adjusted to the new CFP reform such as the landing obligation and the ecosystem approach.
- (2) Impact of fisheries on ecosystems (e.g. by-catch of non-target species) should be assessed by improving the availability and harmonisation of data. This will contribute to the work on the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.
- (3) Quality of data should be improved by introducing procedures that follow best practice methods and increase transparency on methods used.

- (4) Simplification and rationalization are needed and will come from a variety of sources: reduce the complexity and workload of administrative and technical tasks, find the right balance for the frequency of collection, remove some obligations, and move some responsibilities from the EU level to Member States.
- (5) The gradual move from the current system of data provision by data transmission (data calls) to a system where data are made available to those who need to use them without jeopardizing the principles of personal data protection.
- (6) Regional cooperation should be strengthened by supporting Member States joint work with Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs) at sea-basin level.

I. WELCOME OF PARTICIPANTS

Mr Bernhard Friess, Director of the Directorate “Atlantic, Outermost Regions and Arctic”, opened the meeting. He presented the context for the proposed revision of the Data Collection Framework (DCF), namely the recently adopted new Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and in particular Article 25 on data collection, as well as other objectives of the CFP such as the landing obligation and regionalization. In a statement issued at the adoption of the CFP, Council and European Parliament requested the Commission to integrate the principles and objectives for data collection laid down in the CFP by amending Council Regulation (EC) No 199/2008 on the data collection framework for fisheries as soon as possible.

He stressed the importance of this initiative to ensure that the necessary data are available to manage EU fisheries sustainably. He highlighted that the revision of the DCF Regulation also comes at a time when the EU financial basis for fisheries is being reformed, through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

Mr Friess reminded participants that the meeting is the final step of a two year consultation process comprising an external evaluation and several consultations with experts, Member States, end-users of DCF data, civil society and other stakeholders. These consultations have shown that although the DCF has generally been considered a success, there are certain elements that can be improved, in particular the scope of the DCF for assessing impacts of fisheries on the ecosystem, data quality, simplification and rationalization, availability of data and regional cooperation.

II. PRESENTATION OF INTRODUCTORY ISSUES

Ms Amelie Knapp and Mr Bas Drukker from the Commission presented the above-mentioned topics in greater detail.

A list of topics and questions to be discussed in each subgroup was given to participants at the start of the meeting. These questions were based on the document "Revision of the Data Collection Framework Regulation (DCF) (Council Regulation (EC) 199/2008) - Proposed changes" sent also to participants in December 2013. All chairs received guidance.

During the subgroup discussions, an external consultant (Devstat) presented on behalf of the Commission the outcome of a Feasibility Study on Scientific data storage and transmission under the 2014-2020 Data Collection Multiannual Programme.

III. MAIN OUTCOMES OF THE DISCUSSIONS

Topic A - Scope of the Data Collection Framework

The scope of the DCF needs to be slightly adapted because of new requirements resulting from the reformed CFP, such as the landing obligation, data on the sustainability of aquaculture, socio-economic data on freshwater aquaculture and the ecosystem approach.

On the landing obligation, there was general agreement with the proposal to include a provision in the revised DCF according to which Member States should sample all catches, including those that are discarded, without specifying the method to do this (e.g. at sea or in harbours, using CCTV or observers). However, it was highlighted that sampling should be done according to statically sound sampling procedures.

Regarding collection of socio-economic data on aquaculture, participants generally agreed that pilot studies should first be developed to assess what additional data should be collected and its frequency. Some participants mentioned that new data collection on freshwater aquaculture is considered premature because some Member States would experience budget problems if this sampling is implemented. Cost should be checked before deciding on the adequacy of the three step approach proposed for determining how to gather data on sustainability of aquaculture. Other participants made the observation that the first step (i.e. the development of sustainable indicators) is outside the scope of the DCF and that subsequent steps relevant to DCF (i.e. determine what data are already collected and how best to collect what is missing) could only be taken by the time indicators have been defined. The Commission confirmed that only data to be collected falls in the scope of the DCF, not the indicators or descriptors.

Regarding data on the processing industry, there was consensus that certain data should continue to be collected by Member States under the Eurostat Structural Business Statistics (SBS) regulation. Additional data could be collected under the DCF but only if needed by end users. More generally, participants agreed that decisions on DCF data requirements must be end-user driven.

Participants agreed with the principle of avoiding duplication and overlaps of data requirements for different legal frameworks. In addition, Member States agreed that it should be up to them to decide on how best to organize data collection in their Member States to ensure the greatest efficiency and avoid double collection of data.

Topic B - Assessing impact on ecosystems

Subgroups mainly discussed the impact of fisheries on the ecosystem, the link with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and by-catch of non-target species.

There was a general agreement that there is a need for improved availability of ecosystem data to help the CFP to reach its objectives of an ecosystem approach. Harmonisation is crucial for efficient data collection without duplication. However, harmonizing data collection programmes may result in higher costs as current procedures have to be adapted. On the other hand, minor changes to current procedures could in some cases enable the provision of a lot of data for other purposes such as data on by-catch of non-target species for the MSFD, thereby saving a lot of resources. There is a need for clarity on scope and taxonomic priorities amongst all the by-caught species. Some participants believed that the revised DCF

Multiannual Programme should contain obligations for Member States to provide data on all species by-caught in fisheries which are protected or for which there are monitoring/reporting obligations under some other EU legislation. However, an impact assessment study/pilot project would be useful to evaluate the appropriate sampling design and the corresponding costs.

In case data are not needed on an annual basis, they could be obtained by a unique pilot study. However, it is necessary to harmonise information delivered by Member States. Indeed, the time period to collect these data could vary among Member States, areas and kind of species. Member States and end-users also need to agree on the level of quality required.

There was general agreement that there is a need to evaluate mitigation measures in fisheries. Pilot projects are likely to be best way to proceed to this evaluation.

A majority of participants agreed Member States should collect data to calculate some of the MSFD indicators when they are directly connected to fisheries. However, it is necessary to be more specific regarding which MSFD descriptors the DCF could help deliver data for, i.e. which descriptors are directly connected to fisheries, beyond Descriptor 3 (the descriptor concerning by-catch for which the DCF currently delivers the data:). Moreover, one subgroup stressed the importance to avoid duplication with other regulations that also provide data for the MSFD. There is a need for a more coordinated approach considering the reality of funding availability. Participants agreed that the DCF should focus on collection and availability of data and not on products of these data such as indicators e.g. ecosystem indicators.

Topic C - Improving data quality

There was general agreement that data quality should be improved by introducing procedures that follow best practice methods and increase transparency on methods used. Therefore, statistically sound sampling programmes should be implemented. Steps of the collection and estimation process should be well documented and information on the methodology followed should be available to end-users. Some participants highlighted that STECF might not be the appropriate body to review the procedures on best practice guidelines regarding methodologies. As an option, it was suggested that a quality assessment panel be formed and that this panel will review the procedures proposed by Member States.

Regarding the concept of minimum sampling levels, different views were expressed. Some participants were convinced that Member States should establish a minimum sampling effort, in accordance with a regional statistically sound sampling programme. For others, minimum sampling levels is not the way forward as it has not delivered the required results under the current DCF.

There should be further quality control assurances by Member States, and this should be coherent with requirements under other regulations.

An evaluation is needed on the quality of Member States' data. However, there were mixed opinions on which body should be in charge of such an evaluation. One subgroup mentioned that there are two elements to be checked: compliance and quality. One option could be that STECF verifies compliance and quality at Member States level. Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs) could check quality at the regional level. End-users could be involved in the quality check.

Overall, it was noted that appropriate IT tools need to be available on time to facilitate the evaluation of Member States' implementation and data quality and to support the work of RCGs in planning statistically sound sampling, allocating tasks and to assess quality as a regional level.

Topic D - Simplification and rationalization

There was consensus that simplification is needed. Simplification is fundamental and leads to transparency for all parties involved including the Commission and the stakeholders.

According to all subgroups, simplification can come from a variety of sources: reduce the complexity and workload of administrative and technical tasks (e.g. formats of national programs, annual reports and tables, data calls), find the right balance for the frequency of collection and move some responsibilities from the EU level to regional or Member States level. Some subgroups stressed the difficulty to collect data on recreational fisheries and artisanal/small scale fleet.

Subgroups agreed broadly on the principle that the frequency to be achieved for certain data sets can vary based on the needs of end users and priorities to be set by end users such as the Commission regarding the importance of the stocks/sectors (e.g. the conservation or economic importance of the stock).

It was proposed that the EU Multiannual Programme should have a fixed set of core variables to be included and that additional variables should be defined on a regional level. However a coherent and comparable set of variables needs to be defined at EU level to ensure coherence across Member States and to allow for an EU wide comparative overview.

Some data variables could be removed from EU regulations. However, before the Commission decides what to remove, it was proposed that STECF and RCGs should be consulted. This will take time and more reflection is needed on the process. It is important to look far ahead as these data may be necessary in a few years. Some participants felt that it is an important change to go from data specified at EU level to a voluntary basis and that this comprises risks. There was general agreement that criteria or principles for modifying the EU Multiannual programme should be specified in the revised DCF Regulation.

Topic E - Improving availability of data

There was a general agreement that there is need for better availability for scientific purposes of certain types of data covered by other regulations such as the Control Regulation (e.g. catches, efforts, landings, VMS, logbook data). However, the use of the term "scientific purposes" is too restrictive. A major objective of the Integrated Maritime Policy is that data need to be multi-purpose (for multidisciplinary scientific and various management purposes). Data from other legal frameworks (e.g. the Control Regulation) are not always easily accessible. According to some participants, the process to obtain these data is currently too complex. The importance of defining the level of detail of the data to be provided, especially when it concerns logbook data, was also noted.

There is a need to clarify whether data should be made publically available or only for scientific purposes. There was common understanding that data should be made available more broadly with the balance towards the interests and needs of the CFP. It was mentioned

that EUROSTAT Regulations define well how to manage confidential/individual data, and how to use these data based on anonymously processes. Other participants highlighted that the topic of data protection is sensitive and difficult and that confidentiality is only one aspect of it.

Different regulations are applicable to data availability, data protection and confidentiality. Currently, there is not enough clarity over what rules apply to scientists to access control data. It was mentioned that scientists should have access to data while respecting the rules on personal data protection. Rules on access to data should be clarified and it was recognized that it would be more efficient to set clear national or EU rules. Some participants suggested to distinguish between different types of end-users with different access rights might solve the problem.

There was general agreement that interoperability of IT systems could lead to multi-purpose use of data and avoiding duplications. On a regional level, it would be important to clarify and broaden rules on access. It was mentioned that the legal framework should be set at EU level, while the technical implementation and coordination should be done at the national level. However, concerns were also raised about the development and maintenance from a push to a pull IT system which will imply costs for Member States initially, even though in the long term they may lead to savings.

Most subgroups agreed with the principle that it is in the scope of the DCF to set the overarching rules on availability irrespective of what rules apply for the collection of data under other EU regulations. However, several concerns related to control data and confidentiality were raised. Moreover, one subgroup felt that other regulations might overrule the DCF and that alignment with other regulations is necessary.

Topic F - Strengthening regional cooperation

There was general agreement with strengthening of regional cooperation and coordination and the establishment of the Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs). Strengthening regional cooperation implies not only reinforcing the role of RCGs, but also strengthening the tools and resources to do this. The mandate should cover holding meetings, carrying out inter-sessional work, stakeholder involvement, being a discussion platform of what is needed, what is possible, and how to go forward.

To be able to do the work within RCGs, there is a need to have the right expertise, to change the objectives from a national to a regional scale, and to have on-going regional work all year (i.e. not only during one week). Further, it was mentioned that RCGs should plan, implement and evaluate the process of data collection. The role of STECF will be to evaluate the Member States compliance with their obligations. In that scenario, RCGs can be responsible for deciding on certain details of data collection e.g. how sampling should be carried out or what quality should be achieved. However, this latter proposition was not supported by some participants.

Some risks were identified: it may take years to achieve this; it should be ensured that data are needed (i.e. cost/benefit); tools need to be developed for management at a regional level (databases); databases should be consistent between regions; processes/powers need to be clearly described and delineated; correct people should be involved for good governance and decision making; it may imply important costs / burdens for Member States.

There was also a general agreement that data collection should be end-user driven and therefore end-users should be involved in RCGs. However, this end-user driven approach, might give rise to some risks, especially the ever-enlargement of the data collection programs given that end user needs are more likely to increase than decrease over time.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Concluding the meeting, Director-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Lowri Evans, stressed the importance of the revision. She committed to further reflect on the cost-benefit analysis of the proposed changes, in particular because Member States currently are confronted with staff and budget cuts. Ms Evans was optimistic about EMFF providing necessary funds and high rates of co-funding. She pointed out that although technological improvements will address some of the many challenges, sufficient financial and human resources are needed in the first place.

Before moving forward, a political feasibility discussion with national treasuries is needed. Indeed, there are new dimensions to the CFP leading to an expansion of the scope of the DCF such as the landing obligation, the promotion of aquaculture, as well as a shift to an ecosystem-based approach. For the latter, it is essential to ensure that the same data required under the MSFD are collected under the DCF. Ms Evans asked participants to give feedback on what aligning DCF with MSFD means in practice, in order to eliminate potential overlaps and ensure complete coherence between MARE, ESTAT and ENV.

The Director-General stressed the importance to be clearer on what we stop doing and what has lower priority. She encouraged participants to send more inputs and examples of real simplifications that are possible at national or EU level. For instance, how much money would be saved with lower frequency of sampling? Or is there anything we no longer need with regard to social and economic data?

Even though quality is a key issue in the revision of the DCF, there is a need to analyse costs and benefits. The Commission and ICES have agreed that not all stocks need data hungry models, so pragmatic alternatives are essential. In many cases pilot studies may replace obligations for regular and full-fledged data collection. Homework for the Commission is to develop general principles for data availability.

Mr Bernhard Friess added that a cost effective proposal is needed that not only asks for more data but at the same time deprioritizes some other things. Data should be reused for several purposes to save costs, balancing it with sufficient quality. There may be additional resources under EMFF to contribute to an expansion of the scope. Concrete examples are needed to convince legislators that simplification is not just an abstract concept but reality.

Ms Lowri Evans closed the meeting emphasizing that this is not the end of the road for consultations. She invited participants to continue sending inputs after the meeting and announced that the Commission will be pragmatic in what they propose. "We should use the momentum of CFP regionalization to consider whether there is scope for us to go further in political road mapping and pooling of resources. It is up to Member States to decide on these issues".