



# **Mediterranean Advisory Council**

## **Performance Review Report**

### **2020–2024**

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# Mediterranean Advisory Council Performance Review 2025

## Key Findings

**MEDAC is a functional and recognised actor in EU fisheries governance**

MEDAC is generally working well as a platform where different stakeholders come together to give advice on Mediterranean fisheries. It has clear procedures, active participation, and is increasingly valued across its contributions to the EU and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM).

**Structural tensions persist within the organisation**

While consensus has become more frequent, a positive indication of growing collaboration, it is often fragile or procedural rather than substantive. Persistent imbalances between sectors and organisation of varying sizes continue to shape deliberation and influence. The current model offers opportunities to advance towards more equitable participation, especially for smaller or less-resourced actors.

**Misalignment between MEDAC's role and institutional expectations constrains effectiveness**

Many MEDAC members see themselves as helping to shape fisheries policy, but the European Commission expects advice based on stakeholders' experience and views. This difference in expectations creates frustration, reduces utilisation of the advice, and puts a strain on trust.

**Reliance on the very effective Secretariat is both an asset and a vulnerability**

The Secretariat is central to MEDAC's credibility, coherence, and operational delivery. Its coordination, knowledge integration, and facilitation are widely praised. However, the system's heavy reliance on a few key individuals presents a long-term vulnerability. Ensuring institutional continuity and capacity distribution will be critical for sustaining performance and adaptability.



## Executive Summary

This report provides an evidence-based evaluation of MEDAC's performance between 2020 and 2024, assessing its effectiveness, efficiency, and alignment with the objectives of the EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). It considers whether MEDAC generates demonstrable value for its members, institutional partners, and the wider advisory system and how that value is shaped by its internal functioning, leadership, and institutional context.

MEDAC is a functional and maturing body that plays a recognised role in stakeholder engagement and regional advice. It has developed transparent procedures, supports wide participation, and has delivered increasingly solution-oriented advice. Members report high satisfaction with its operations, especially with the Secretariat. Notably, recent years show tangible contributions to the advancement of the CFP goals within and beyond the EU, particularly through its contributions to the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM).

However, the review also finds persistent structural tensions. These tensions, which stem from representational asymmetries between sectors and organisation size continue to shape outcomes. While consensus is more frequently achieved, it is not always underpinned by genuine mutual adjustment, with some voices more consistently heard than others.

A deeper challenge lies in the mismatch between what members believe they are doing (shaping fisheries policy) and what the Commission expects (providing stakeholder-grounded advice). This misalignment, which is rooted in different interpretations of the stakeholder role in the CFP governance, limits the uptake of MEDAC's advice, contributes to consultation fatigue, and strains trust across the system.

The Secretariat is widely seen as a cornerstone of MEDAC's effectiveness, but the heavy reliance on a few key individuals raises concerns about long-term resilience. In a more crowded and contested policy space, MEDAC must now adapt strengthening how it frames its advice, manages institutional expectations, and demonstrates its added value.

Moving forward, clarifying the operational meaning of consensus, tracking the use and influence of advice, and rethinking its strategic position within the CFP system will be essential if MEDAC is to fulfil its potential.

## Acknowledgements

We sincerely thank all those who participated in and contributed to this evaluation. The members of MEDAC demonstrated their commitment to the performance review by offering valuable input and insights through an online survey, interviews, and a focus group. We highly appreciate the Secretariat's ongoing support and openness to iterative dialogue and consultation throughout the process.

# 1. Introduction

The Mediterranean Advisory Council (MEDAC) is a stakeholder-driven body established under the EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) to provide advice on fisheries management and the marine environment in the Mediterranean Sea. It also contributes to the work of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM). Bringing together representatives from the fishing industry, NGOs, civil society, and other interest groups, MEDAC plays a consultative role through a regionalised governance model, contributing to the development and implementation of EU fisheries policy. It is recognised as a key platform for dialogue and consensus-building. MEDAC identifies challenges, proposes solutions, and supports data collection and analysis in collaboration with scientists.

This performance evaluation provides an independent assessment of MEDAC's internal functioning between 2020 and 2024. It examines operational effectiveness, efficiency, and alignment with EU provisions, focusing on core bodies such as the Executive Committee (ExCom), Working Groups (WGs), Focus Groups (FGs) and General Assembly (GA). The review assesses the quality and inclusiveness of participation, clarity of decision-making, balance of stakeholder representation, leadership, and impact of advice. It also considers transparency, perceived value of membership, and MEDAC's contribution to the CFP.

During the evaluation period, MEDAC issued 55 advisory opinions, alongside 22 formal letters, 23 technical contributions, and 10 joint submissions with other Advisory Councils. It convened 101 internal meetings and participated in 218 external events, most organised by the European Commission, GFCM, STECF, other ACs, and scientific networks. This level of activity reflects both the increasing scope of MEDAC's advisory role and its sustained engagement across institutional, inter-AC, and science-policy interfaces (see Tables 5 to 10).

The evaluation is structured in three sections organised to review decision-making in MEDAC, the performance of structures and leadership, and the influence and relationship of MEDAC with external organisations. It follows a structured performance framework and uses a mixed-method approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data gathered through desk research, 17 meetings observation, an online survey with 27 respondents, 13 semi-structured interviews and a focus group. It serves two aims: to generate actionable insights for MEDAC and to establish a baseline for future reviews<sup>1</sup>. Good practices are highlighted where observed and the evaluation culminates in a set of findings and potential

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<sup>1</sup> The Advisory Council shall subject itself at least once every five years to an independent performance review. Art. 7a. COMMISSION DELEGATED REGULATION (EU) 2022/204 of 8 December 2021 amending Delegated Regulation (EU) 2015/242 laying down detailed rules on the functioning of the Advisory Councils under the Common Fisheries Policy

recommendations for improvement. The following sections outline the methods applied to address the terms of reference for the evaluation (Annex 1).

## Reading guide

Section 2 sets out the institutional, geographical, and policy **context** within which MEDAC operates.

Section 3 examines the **internal functioning of MEDAC** through the lens of its decision-making processes, representational balance, and transparency.

Section 4 explores how **MEDAC's structures and leadership roles** operate in practice. It assesses the functioning of the ExCom, WGs, FGs, GAs as well as the roles played by the Chair, Vice-Chairs, coordinators, and the Secretariat.

Section 5 assesses **MEDAC's role in the broader EU and regional fisheries governance system**, focusing on its interactions with the European Commission, Member States, and the GFCM, as well as its alignment with the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

Section 6 focuses on shortcomings and **synthesises the key limitations** that affect MEDAC's operational resilience, adaptive capacity, and strategic positioning.

Sections 7 and 8 provide **recommendations and conclusions**. To support the rationale behind the recommendations, each is also referenced within the relevant sections of the report and identified using a code (e.g., R1, R2).

The evaluation methodology, evidence and further details are provided in section 9 and the annexes.

## 2. Key features of MEDAC

The Mediterranean Sea is bordered by eight EU and fifteen non-EU countries, creating a geopolitically diverse and complex management landscape. Its narrow breadth, coupled with unresolved maritime boundaries and overlapping jurisdictions, presents persistent challenges for effective fisheries governance. These factors underpin the so-called “Mediterranean specificity”<sup>2</sup>: an enclosed sea characterized by high biodiversity but relatively low productivity, where multi-species and mixed-gear small scale fisheries (SSF) and coastal fisheries dominate. These fisheries play a vital socioeconomic role, closely tied to cultural identity, tradition and social cohesion. Fragmented institutions, weak regulatory alignment, and limited enforcement capacity has hindered the effectiveness of the CFP in the Mediterranean.

Consequently, the implementation of the CFP in the Mediterranean follows a distinct trajectory. Unlike other EU sea basins where TACs and quotas are central, conservation measures in the Mediterranean have relied primarily on effort-based management. The development of stock assessments and advisory systems has followed a distinctive path, shaped by regional capacities and scientific networks<sup>3</sup>. The presence of two regional fisheries management organisations, GFCM and ICCAT, has contributed to a differentiated evolution in management practices, adding layers of coordination and variability within EU fisheries policy for the region.

The EU Advisory Councils were created by the 2002 reform of the CFP. With a legal foundation in 2004, MEDAC took longer to start operating than the other initial ACs<sup>4</sup>. It became fully operational in 2010. The likely causes of this situation can be attributed to strong local fishers' organizations, a lack of tradition for broader cooperation across the Mediterranean basin<sup>5</sup> and specific claims regarding the ACs functioning rules. MEDAC advocated for a deviation from the standard allocation intended for all ACs, aiming to have a lower representation for other interests' groups (Penas Lado, 2016).

Since its establishment, MEDAC has built its procedures and operations within the framework of EU legislation and its legal statute under Italian law. Over time, the organisation has navigated a steep learning curve. Today, it faces a growing

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<sup>2</sup> Symes, 1999. *Europe's Southern Waters: Management Issues and Practice*. Fishing News Books. Blackwell Science, Oxford.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., conservation policy started 30 years later. See Penas Lado (2016) for a full description of the process.

<sup>4</sup> After the CFP Reform (Council Regulation EC 2371/2002) and the Council Decision 2004/585/EC, seven ACs (named Regional Advisory Councils at that time) were set and declared operational by the Commission: NSAC (2004), NWWAC and PELAC (2005), BSAC (2006), LDAC and SWWAC (2007) and MEDAC (2008). The MEDAC was declared operational by Commission Decision of 29 August 2008 (OJ L232/12, 30.08.2008).

<sup>5</sup> Note, however, the association MEDISAMAK (2003): fishing organizations association, including 11 Med coastal countries (Albania, Algeria, Egypt, Spain, France, Greece, Italy, Libya, Malta, Morocco and Tunisia) and joined in 2006 by Cyprus, Slovenia and Croatia.

workload, shaped by an expanding set of policy domains, including the Common Fisheries Policy, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Nature Restoration Regulation, Maritime Spatial Planning, Ocean Pact and the Blue Economy Agenda. These overlapping demands have intensified the advisory role of MEDAC. At the same time, the fisheries sector continues to experience structural pressures with declining fish stocks, ecosystem degradation, invasive species, labour availability and the effects of climate change all contributing to economic uncertainty. Emerging societal priorities such as marine renewable energy further complicate the outlook, placing additional stress on the long-term viability of fisheries and testing the resilience of current advisory processes.

Despite facing structural constraints, MEDAC has positioned itself as a proactive actor in the EU's advisory framework, particularly in shaping region-specific management tools (e.g., discard plans, see Figure 1). MEDAC uses three approaches. First, advocating for timely involvement in the decision-making process –engaging neither too early nor too late– particularly for key instruments such as Multiannual Plans and Discards Management Plans <sup>6</sup>; second, it consistently positions itself as a hosting forum for designing conservation and management measures, employing participatory and consultative methods (e.g., Management Strategy Evaluations [MSEs] or Fisheries Restricted Areas [FRAs]<sup>7</sup>). Third, MEDAC works to keep vital issues on the fisheries policy agenda.

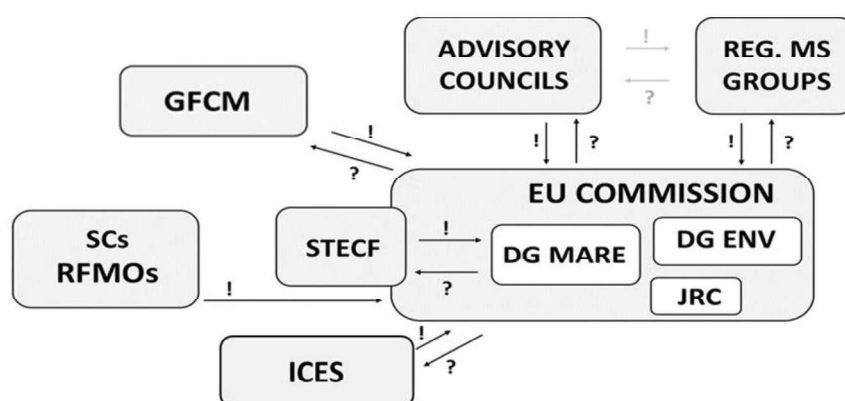


Figure 1. Main aspects of the advisory system of the CFP. “?” indicates request for advice. “!” indicates delivery of advice. SCs RFMOs are the scientific committees of the RFMO; Reg. MS Groups are the Regional Groups of the MS. Source: adapted from Ballesteros et al. 2018.

Two enduring tensions shape how MEDAC functions. These tensions are prevalent among advisory bodies, but especially pronounced in stakeholder platforms. First, striking a balance between internal democracy and external effectiveness, ensuring inclusive deliberation while still delivering timely, actionable advice.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, MEDAC presentation at the Public Hearing on *The Role of Advisory Councils in the New Regionalized CFP*, 12<sup>th</sup> July 2017. Available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/124123/BUONFIGLIO.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, MEDAC advice 103/2023 *Involvement of MEDAC on new Fishery Restricted Areas*

Second, the trade-off between representativeness and legitimacy, thereby maintaining broad stakeholder inclusion without diluting credibility or coherence of the advice provided.

On one hand, the need to deliver timely, relevant advice within tight policy deadlines often clashes with the slower processes of deliberation and consensus-building, especially in a multi-cultural setting. MEDAC operates at the centre of this tension. One of its most significant enablers is its multilingual capacity with interpretation services in six languages supporting inclusive communication, mutual understanding, and trust. This reduces the dominance of any single language group and helps level the playing field for effective participation.

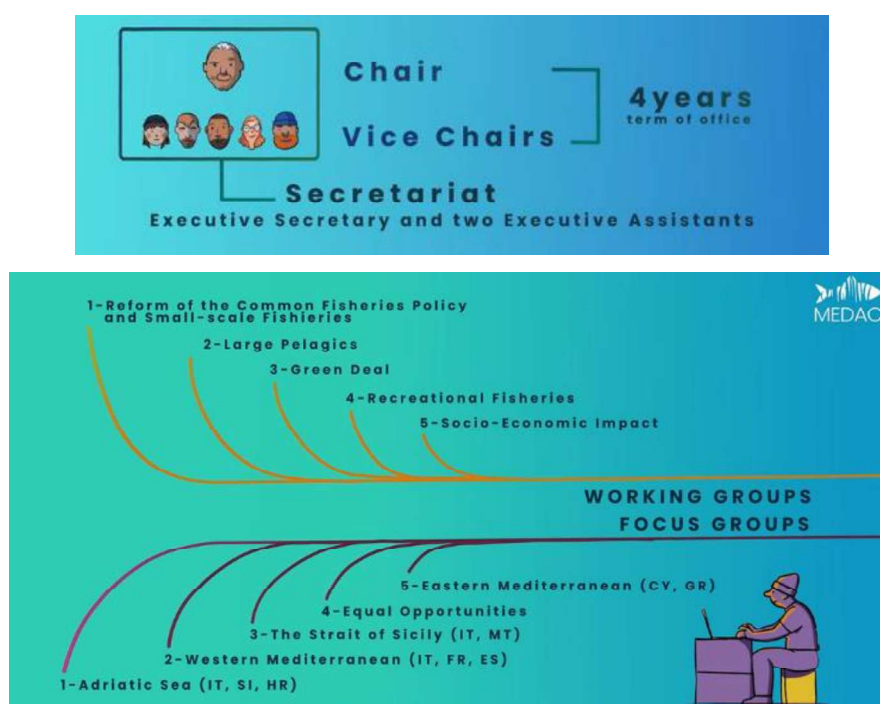


Figure 2. The internal structures of MEDAC. Source: taken from recent MEDAC promotional video <https://youtu.be/nOSaxguf27A?feature=shared>

On the other hand, the role of non-fisheries interest groups within the Advisory Councils has remained a point of contention since their establishment<sup>8</sup>. In particular, representatives from the fishing sector have expressed concerns about the legitimacy and influence of some environmental NGOs. These concerns focus on the unclear basis of representation, limited transparency regarding funding, and a perceived lack of accountability to those directly affected by fisheries management decisions. These issues were raised during the performance review, permeate the functioning and decision-making, and reflect broader tensions in balancing stakeholder diversity with perceived legitimacy and trust.

<sup>8</sup> See letter from several NGOs to the Commission in 2019 and the current situation in several ACs.



The MEDAC organization bodies (art. 4 Statute) are a GA, an ExCom, a *Chairpersonship* (Chair and Vicechairs) and a Chair. The ExCom develops recommendations to the Commission and MS and creates the Work Plans. The GA establishes how MEDAC operates, monitors the implementation of activities, and establishes the formal procedures. WGs and FGs provide the forums to address specific topics in depth (Figure 3). The chairing of the WGs and FGs is by individuals known as the “coordinators”. The structures and coordinators are supported by the Secretariat. The makeup of the ExCom must have 60% of its members from the fishing sector and 40% from other interest groups, and this proportion is also considered a goal for the GA.

### 3. Internal Functioning and Decision-Making

The MEDAC has matured into a credible and trusted forum for stakeholder dialogue yet continues to wrestle with persistent tensions inherent to consensus-based opinion forming.

Decision-making is broadly viewed as transparent, inclusive, and procedurally sound, underpinned by a well-understood structure and strong Secretariat support. Members express high levels of satisfaction with how decisions are formed, and advice is finalised. Nonetheless, the reliance on informal influence and time-constrained processes introduces variability in how different members engage and shape outcomes.

Consensus remains a core institutional value, increasingly achieved in practice, yet often at the cost of efficiency and clarity. Minority views are formally accommodated, but some interviewees suggest that consensus can be performative rather than reflective of genuine convergence. The role of the Secretariat in facilitating agreement is important, though it must be balanced with the formal authority of the ExCom.

Representation is both a formal design feature and an ongoing challenge. The statutory 60:40 split between sector and other interest groups structures participation but does not guarantee equity in influence. The majority accept the structural asymmetries, between sectors, and also between large and small organisations, language groups, and regional actors. Despite efforts to accommodate this diversity, mutual distrust and uneven capacity to participate continue to shape the deliberative environment. The presence of unresolved or latent tensions has been suggested.

Transparency, both procedural and informational, is strong. Documents are accessible, decision pathways are clear, and members are generally well-informed. However, transparency of access does not automatically translate into equity of voice or influence, particularly for less resourced groups.

Across these dimensions, MEDAC displays a functional and resilient model, capable of navigating complexity but still exposed to the structural imbalances and behavioural dynamics that shape multistakeholder platforms.

### 3.1 Decision-making process

The operational rules of MEDAC are set in a framework dictated by the Commission, its statute and internal regulation (see annex 2. Legal framework).

Consensus is the main guideline for ACs decision-making in EU regulations. Commission statements link this principle to likelihood of their advice being considered. As a result, the ExCom and GA aim to adopt their resolutions by consensus. If consensus is not possible, decisions are made by majority vote, and any opposing views are recorded as minority statements (Art. 11.2, MEDAC Statute). Similarly, WGs are expected to reach unanimous agreement when drafting reports for the ExCom. If unanimity cannot be achieved, reports are approved by a majority vote, including minority statements to reflect differing views (Art. 4.6, Internal Regulation).

These provisions specifically apply to formal resolutions and advice. Articles do not extend to other formal communications between MEDAC and the EU institutions or other institutions, which are agreed by the ExCom.

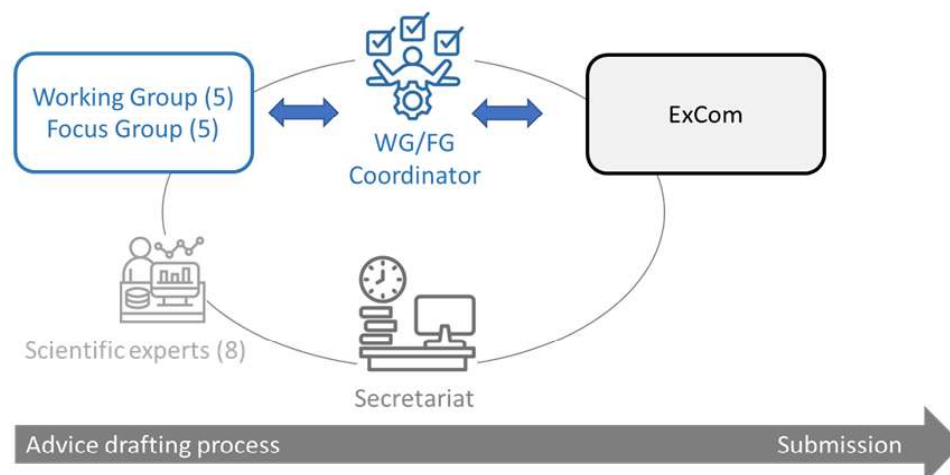


Figure 3. Advice drafting process in MEDAC. While the Secretariat facilitates and supports the overall process, it remains uninvolved in the substantive drafting of the advice.

### Openness of the process to members

The process is apparently open and allows each member to be involved in the decision through the established structure (WG, FG, GA and ExCOM). Members perceive the decision-making process as clear or very (89% of survey respondents) and are satisfied or extremely satisfied with the mechanism (85%). Those who reported some level of dissatisfaction came from NGOs or smaller countries.



In most organisations, those who have greater access, expertise, and time tend to dominate deliberative spaces, and MEDAC is no exception. Here, centrality is shaped by members' capacity to contribute, often determined by their familiarity with technical issues, proximity to the decision, and their availability. As a result, informal influence tends to concentrate among a small number of well-informed individuals, who play a pivotal role in shaping the advice produced. While this was observed in MEDAC, the members view the process as open and legitimate.

### Consensus views and minority statements in advice

Some interviewees believe that the consensus-driven approach contributes to inefficiency and procedural dysfunction. In certain cases, the legitimacy of certain members to participate in discussions was questioned, particularly when consensus efforts prolonged deliberations. While it is clear that consensus-building can slow decision-making, it remains a core principle of MEDAC's governance model<sup>9</sup>. The European Commission continues to regard consensus as a key *"measure of effectiveness and likely impact of the advice"*.

According to the EU regulatory framework, consensus in MEDAC practice is defined as the adoption of advice by the ExCom without dissenting votes or recorded minority statements. Although there were a few instances of votes against the advice in 2020 and 2022 (two cases each year), the percentage of advice that included minority statements has significantly decreased during the evaluation period, dropping from 30% to nearly zero. This suggests a strengthening of consensus-building processes.

Importantly, consensus has been achieved across a diverse range of topics, including cross-sectoral issues such as climate change and equal opportunities, process-related themes like energy transition, technical management measures such as MPAs and FRAs, and instrumental domains, including indicators for assessing the socioeconomic impacts of management plans. This trend reflects increasing cohesion among stakeholders and an improved capacity to navigate complex and sometimes contested topics.

The role of the Secretariat as a facilitator in resolving divergent opinions was mentioned by several individuals. In such cases, the Secretariat often plays a pivotal facilitative role as brokers to coordinate revisions and ensure procedural fairness. This facilitation is important, and care must be taken to ensure that the task of resolving non-consensus situations is maintained with the ExCom.

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<sup>9</sup> Art. 7.3 Functioning of the ACs (adopt recommendations by consensus; 2004/585/EC. Amendment of art. 5 (EU) 2015/242 by COMMISSION DELEGATED REGULATION (EU) 2022/204 Working methods: The Advisory Council shall ensure that the recommendations and suggestions issued: c) are adopted, where possible, by consensus. If no consensus can be reached, dissenting opinions expressed by members shall be recorded in the recommendations adopted by the majority of the members present and voting.

## Adequate time for discussion, consultation and adoption of drafts

The primary constraint on MEDAC's ability to deliberate and formulate advice is the short turnaround time imposed by external deadlines. MEDAC requires a minimum of six weeks to conduct internal discussion and respond to the Commission<sup>10</sup>, and at least eight weeks for joint AC letters. Members and the Secretariat describe the process as a "race against time," as compressed timelines have become the norm. The format and frequency of official correspondence can add to the administrative burden. However, some members report that short timelines can focus discussion.

Despite these pressures, MEDAC has adapted effectively. The quality of discussions has improved over time, underpinned by organisational learning, continuity among participants, and the growing integration of scientific input into debates. Yet, any further increase in advisory load may challenge the effectiveness of the current *modus-operandi*.

Meeting agendas are generally well-structured and support constructive debate and interaction. Nonetheless, time for discussion is occasionally constrained by extended speaking turns and the repeated raising of the same issues. While the diversity of communication styles is valued, there is a need to manage recurring behaviours, such as revisiting resolved topics or reiterating arguments (see section 4.1 Dynamics of meetings for details). This will ensure efficient use of meeting time.

Interpretation services during meetings play an essential role in enabling inclusive participation across languages. However, once discussions shift to drafting written texts, English becomes the default working language. This introduces challenges for full engagement and influence by non-native speakers.

The Secretariat plays a central facilitative role in MEDAC's operations by supporting the coordination of meetings, consultations, and the work of WGs and FGs coordinators. It routinely provides early signals on upcoming advisory processes, helping members prepare and engage effectively. For example, during an online meeting on 4 December 2024, participants were informed in advance of a forthcoming advisory process on Natura 2000 and fishing, along with an outline of expected contributions and timelines.

When consensus cannot be reached, additional time is typically required to facilitate compromise, produce and refine compromise text, or incorporate minority statements. MEDAC's procedures are generally flexible enough to accommodate this extended deliberation

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<sup>10</sup> 110/2020; Joint AC letter Advice consultations [https://www.en.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione\\_pareri\\_lettere/2022/03/64\\_jointac\\_letter\\_weight\\_of\\_acs\\_advice\\_consultations\\_signedfinal.pdf](https://www.en.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2022/03/64_jointac_letter_weight_of_acs_advice_consultations_signedfinal.pdf)

## Underpinning of advice with factual evidence, policy and/or science

Throughout the evaluation, no concerns were raised regarding the credibility of the scientific evidence used by MEDAC. This absence of critique suggests a broadly accepted level of trust in the sources and interpretation of scientific input within the advisory process.

MEDAC routinely integrates scientific input into its deliberations and advice, with examples throughout the evaluation period. WGs and FGs meetings frequently feature presentations on science, usually by natural scientists. Much of the advice, such as the 2021 opinion on climate change (Ref 70/2021), draws heavily on natural science evidence.

The Secretariat supports knowledge integration with an in-house scientist (Secretariat Executive Assistant) who helps interpret scientific findings and terminology for a policy audience. This consistent incorporation of science into the advisory process has been positively noted by external observers and contributes to the credibility of MEDAC's outputs.

The Scientific Programme was initiated in 2021, where 8 experts were selected to assist MEDAC with the work plans. The experts were selected in cooperation with members, and the experts and members selected prioritised the work being carried out. Strengthening the social and economic science base would improve MEDAC advice. MEDAC has made moves to increase access to data and expertise in social and economics science and these efforts should continue.

## Use of written consultations and of urgent consultations

Survey responses and interviews indicate varied experiences with the written consultation process: while some members find it straightforward, others reported difficulties. There is broad agreement that real-time interaction—via online meetings or phone calls—is more effective for resolving issues than email exchanges. Most respondents felt that timelines for responding to written consultations were adequate, although time constraints were also seen to help concentrate deliberations. Notably, 85% of respondents agreed that the written consultation process provides space to reflect minority or divergent views, contributing to the perceived inclusiveness of the procedure.

Written consultations represent a core mechanism through which MEDAC delivers its advice. A formal internal procedure guides the preparation of written responses, including a structured process for drafting, review, and sign-off. In some cases, urgent requests necessitate accelerated timelines. The overall workload involved is substantial: during the evaluation period, MEDAC produced 55 advisory opinions, 22 formal letters, 23 technical contributions, and 10 joint statements with other Advisory Councils.

Once the written consultation has been prepared there is an agreed internal procedure to ensure that the sign-off is representative of MEDAC members. At least 30% of the ExCom members must read the text. This step can prove laborious for the ExCom members and the secretariat and while the process may be time-consuming, it enhances the legitimacy of the advice and ensures broad stakeholder representation. For the remaining ExCom members, no response is interpreted as acceptance of the text. If an ExCom member disagrees with a draft text, they are required to provide an explanation. In such cases, the consultation process is re-opened to allow further consideration. Following this, members who still dissent may submit a formal minority statement.

A formal procedure for responding to urgent consultations was established in 2014. Under this mechanism, MEDAC aims to provide a response within 48 hours, with internal feedback requested within 8 hours. The Chair and Vice-Chairs act as a streamlined executive body during such consultations, and are expected to reach consensus when formulating a response. The urgent procedure has been utilized for interventions made by the chair during inter-AC meetings, as well as for external invitations and letters issued by the MEDAC chair. However, these interventions and letters consistently reflect the prior advice given by MEDAC. It is uncommon for the urgent procedure to be employed specifically for MEDAC advice.

### Working environment

The MEDAC does not have any formal code of conduct or reference to principles and rules of behaviour stated in its Statute or Internal regulation. During the observation period, member behaviour was generally respectful and professional, with only occasional departures from this norm. However, evidence from interviews and meeting observations indicates some minor but persistent concerns regarding the working environment, suggesting a potential need to clarify expectations around conduct and interpersonal engagement. When discussions involve high-stakes issues or contested solutions, particularly under tight deadlines, tensions may arise that strain the working environment.

Interviews, observations, and survey results indicate a level of mutual distrust between representatives from the fishing sector (the 60%) and other interest groups (the 40%). This dynamic suggests a latent conflict that may affect the quality of deliberation.

Promoting a welcoming debate environment is critical for MEDAC's performance. While 85% those surveyed said that they never or rarely experienced someone feeling excluded, 44% reported experiencing someone taking up most of the time available for a debate and 19% have experienced someone being excluded from the debate. Additionally, 11% have experienced someone using offensive behaviour and 19% the use of offensive words, also reported in interviews in the form of intimidation (gender and sector based).

Providing targeted training in facilitation and conflict management for coordinators and interested MEDAC members would help strengthen collaboration and foster a more productive and respectful environment. The training should focus on practical tools and skills that can be integrated into meeting agendas, such as interactive workshops using real-life scenarios and role-playing, as well as modules on active listening, de-escalation techniques, and constructive dialogue (R.1).

## 3.2 Representation of different interests

Representation involves not only the composition of the membership, but also the ability of diverse interests to participate meaningfully in an organisation's structures and decision-making processes. The number and composition of MEDAC's member organisations have evolved over time. Initially comprising 23 organisations from six countries, MEDAC now includes 46 members representing all EU Mediterranean coastal states (see Figure 4).



Figure 4 Comparison of the number of MEDAC members by Member State (including organizations at EU level) and profile (fisheries sector and OIG-NGOs, recreational fisheries and others) in 2009 and 2024. See annex 3 MEDAC members. Note: Croatia joined the EU in 2013.

## Common identity and sense of ownership and added value of membership and participation

Evidence gathered indicates a strong allegiance among the members of MEDAC, and willingness to invest in its activities and advice. Members share a notable sense of ownership. Notably, organizations that had previously left MEDAC—such as LIFE and OCEANA—have recently returned.

The reasons to engage with MEDAC are to influence and/or shape management policies, to make use of opportunities to see information, scientific evidence and management, to join forces with other organisations on shared interests, and to network with other MEDAC members.

The idea that MEDAC functions as the “voice of the fishing sector” remains prevalent in discourse and meeting interventions, though its use is contested and often reframed by the Secretariat as the “voice of MEDAC fisheries”. Interviewees expressed divergent views regarding this narrative; both in terms of its appropriateness and its implications for how MEDAC's role is understood. This phrase is used by some to affirm the central role of the fishing sector, while others perceive it as exclusionary and limiting to broader stakeholder participation.



According to the Commission, this phrase “voice of the fishing sector” does not reflect MEDAC’s formally recognised role in the CFP.

As outlined in the analysis of the decision-making process, a persistent mutual distrust between some representatives of the fishing sector and other stakeholder groups continues to shape internal dynamics. There is a fundamental disagreement about the nature of the problems, the possible solutions, and who has a more legitimate claim to define them. Deliberation can help address this, but only if the consensus approach is redefined (see R3).

While mutual trust was not always present, interviewees frequently observed that MEDAC was nonetheless able to engage constructively and deliver consensus-based advice.

### Balance between sector organisations and other interest groups

The statutory composition of the Advisory Councils provides a built-in majority for the fisheries sector, which may lead to their dominant influence in discussions and decision-making (Figure 5). The emphasis on producing consensus-based advice is intended to mitigate this imbalance. However, where voting or the inclusion of minority statements becomes necessary, underlying divisions, particularly between the fisheries sector and environmental NGOs may surface<sup>11</sup>. Fisheries sector organisations continue to outnumber those from other stakeholder groups.

Formal mechanisms are in place within MEDAC to promote balanced participation and safeguard inclusivity. These include the impartial role of the Chair, efforts to achieve unanimous positions, and the recording of dissenting views. However, stakeholder asymmetries remain evident in the pattern of outputs. Of the 78 minority statements issued during the evaluation period, 71% originated from OIGs, while only 6% were jointly submitted by both the fisheries sector and OIGs. These figures suggest that, despite procedural safeguards, consensus remains more difficult to achieve across stakeholder boundaries than within them.

This contrasts constructively with the increased recognition within MEDAC of the relevance of the environmental dimension and the beneficial role played by environmental NGOs. This shift is reflected in improved cross-sectoral understanding and more frequent alignment around shared positions. Two indicators support this trend: first, a notable increase in advice adopted by consensus, including nearly all outputs in 2024; and second, specific examples of advice initiated by OIGs and subsequently endorsed by the fisheries sector, e.g., the

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<sup>11</sup> In 2019 and 2020 several NGO representatives working in ACs met and wrote to the Commission stating substantive shortcomings in their operation: power imbalance in composition, role of the chair, etc. Several NGOs left the ACs and OIGs seats remain vacant. In response, the MEDAC opened a debate on the issues raised. According to the evidence available (Ref. 352/2020) the Performance review could help identify best practices and improvement areas on this issue.

Central Mediterranean advice<sup>12</sup>. Notably, the latter required 18 months of negotiation, underscoring both the challenges and the commitment to consensus-building.

Some suggest that the contributions of OIGs help to broaden MEDAC's scope, enhancing its preparedness to engage with emerging cross-sectoral issues such as marine spatial planning and renewable energy, topics not traditionally viewed as core to fisheries management. As the thematic range of MEDAC's work expands, attention has also turned to the procedures that underpin how advice is generated and endorsed. During the internal debate opened by MEDAC in 2020 to address the NGOs position, several representatives from other OIGs within MEDAC proposed a revision of the procedures for developing and presenting advice. The proposed change would require that each advice proposal be formally co-sponsored by at least one member from the fisheries sector and one from an OIG. This proposal has not, to date, been adopted.

Successive reforms of the ACs functioning by the Commission have not resolved the underlying tension between members representing the fishing sector and those from OIGs. This enduring issue reflects a deeper debate about the structure and legitimacy of fisheries governance. The formal stakeholder ratio is seen by some interviewees as outdated, especially given today's complex ocean governance challenges that require diverse knowledge, expertise and values. Both sides, the fisheries stakeholders and the environmental NGOs perceive the institutional design as disproportionately favouring the other, beyond what they consider reasonable. A more constructive path forward may lie in distinguishing between dependency on the fishery (entitlement to shape *what* is managed) and interest in the fishery (engagement in *how* it is managed). This discussion is part of the broader design of the EU fisheries governance system and should be addressed at that level.

Additional asymmetries influence MEDAC's internal dynamics. Many representatives from OIGs operate more comfortably in English than their counterparts from the fishing sector and often bring greater familiarity with participatory processes and policy debate, despite coming from smaller organisations. Recreational fisheries groups face the challenge of a fragmented constituency, while representatives of women's organisations frequently struggle to prioritise their topics on the general MEDAC agenda. Overall, there remains a tendency for agendas to be shaped by short-term policy demands, which can

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<sup>12</sup> MEDAC Advice on Resolution GFCM/47/2024/1: "A roadmap for a joint project to collect all required and identified scientific evidence to provide a basis for the discussion of potential additional measures for the long-term portion of the management plan for demersal fish in the Strait of Sicily, in response to Recommendation GFCM/45/2022/4"

marginalise longer-term or less prominent concerns when time and resources are constrained.

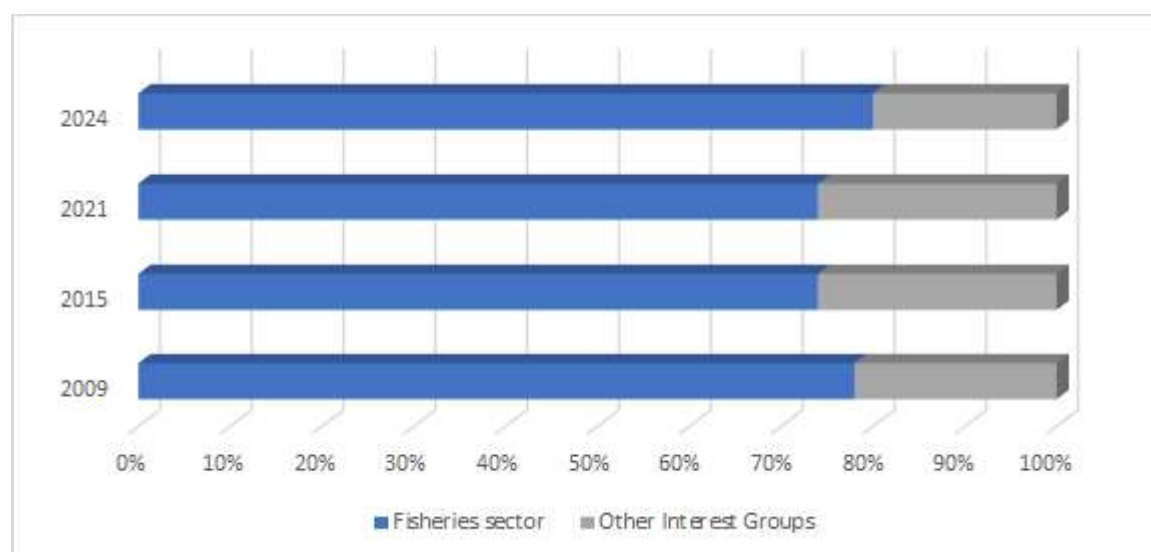


Figure 5. Proportion of MEDAC member organisations from the fishing sector and other interest groups.

Table 1. Representation Fishing sector-OIGs in the GA and the ExCom (2024)

|                           | GA       | ExCom    |
|---------------------------|----------|----------|
| 60% sector organisations  | 36 (80%) | 14 (59%) |
| 40% other interest groups | 9 (20%)  | 9 (41%)  |

## Balance between small and large organisations

As a model, MEDAC can be considered a financially effective platform for stakeholder consultation and engagement in EU Mediterranean fisheries. Its membership includes organisations representing the fishing industry, recreational fishers, environmental NGOs, transport workers, chambers of commerce, women's groups, and the wider maritime sector. The composition ranges from large, supranational cooperatives with multi-sectoral mandates to smaller national and regional federations, reflecting the diversity of stakeholder interests in the region. This spread across supranational and national exists in the OIGs as well.

Some representatives of smaller organisations indicated that MEDAC provides access to broader EU processes and enables more direct and timely access to relevant policy information. Furthermore, several noted that their affiliation with MEDAC has increased the visibility of their positions, leading to greater recognition by their national ministries. The diversity of stakeholder interests is accommodated through the open structure of WGs and FGs, which are accessible to all members. However, not all organisations have the financial or human resources to participate



fully across these multiple fora, potentially limiting the inclusiveness of deliberation in practice.

The financial burden has been pointed during the interviews. Of particular note is that the EU legal provision to ensure equitable membership fees<sup>13</sup> has not been implemented because the majority of the MEDAC members decided to pay all the same. However, associations willing to attend only online have the option to pay half, based on an ad hoc basis and approved by ExCom. The decision to keep a standard fee may operate as an entry barrier for organizations interested in joining or continuing in MEDAC and inadvertently exacerbate imbalances (see R4).

The representation of small-scale fisheries (SSF) within MEDAC receives attention but remains a source of institutional complexity<sup>14</sup>. SSF interests are formally represented through organisations such as Cofradías, Comités régionaux, and cooperatives<sup>15</sup>. However, these bodies often integrate both small-scale and coastal fisheries, which operate under distinct productive, economic, and social conditions. Coastal fisheries firms tend to be larger and more commercially oriented, although typically family-run and locally embedded. When a single representative is tasked with speaking for both, conflicts of interest can arise and, in such cases, it is often the voice of the coastal sector that prevails. For instance, critical topics such as quota allocation and crew well-being remain contentious between coastal and SSF. Despite the importance attached by some members to achieving equitable Bluefin tuna quota distribution between small-scale and coastal fisheries, MEDAC has yet to successfully facilitate structured deliberation on this issue.

## Geographical representation

All eight EU Member States bordering the Mediterranean have representation within MEDAC. Italy and Spain play a dominant role in its operations, reflecting the relative scale of their fisheries sectors. Nonetheless, MEDAC has made consistent efforts to ensure the inclusion of smaller Member States within its governance structures, offering a home for their issues. FGs, in particular, are seen as important platforms for smaller countries and associations to voice specific concerns. Evidence suggests that these members do not feel marginalised and view the current dynamic as inclusive and functional. The widespread use of interpretation services further supports the participation and confidence of representatives from smaller Member States.

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<sup>13</sup> Art. 4.5 of Delegated Regulation (EU) 2015/242 as amended by Delegated Regulation (EU) 2022/204.

<sup>14</sup> This assessment does not ignore MEDAC achievements in support of the SSF. In fact, the MEDAC received the award as best practice for SSF organizations during the High-Level Conference on Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black-Sea (Malta, 2018), organized by the GFCM and FAO.

<sup>15</sup> See Ref 160/2021 MEDAC contribution to the Commission draft delegated act amending delegated act 2015/242

## Capability to provide reality-checks

The facts, insights, and debates observed during MEDAC meetings reflect a commendable level of first-hand knowledge of on-the-ground realities among many members. However, evidence gathered through interviews points to a recurring concern: that some representatives though actively engaged in high-level discussions, may be becoming increasingly disconnected from field-level realities. This perceived detachment risks diminishing their effectiveness in genuinely representing the interests and needs of their constituencies. Strengthening links between high-level deliberation and field-level realities will help ensure that MEDAC representatives continue to effectively reflect and advocate for the interests of their constituencies.

## 3.3 Transparency

MEDAC integrates, shares, and draws upon a broad range of knowledge types, contributing to a more transparent and inclusive advisory process. This includes anecdotal evidence (e.g., photographs and videos of tuna carcasses), experiential insights (e.g., increased dolphin encounters in specific areas), scientific data (e.g., research on invasive species), and information from policy implementation (e.g., national measures adopted by Member States). Throughout the evaluation, no concerns were raised about the transparency of the evidence base, processes or decision-making. This suggests a broad acceptance that in overall terms MEDAC is considered transparent.

MEDAC joined the EC Transparency Register in 2015<sup>16</sup>, hence bounded to follow ethical and behavioural principles during their interest representation work with the European institutions. Details on the goals, interest represented, participation in other EU supported forums, Commission Expert groups and other similar entities, meetings with the European Commission and the European Parliament and financial data are publicly available.

### Publication and accessibility (to the members and to the general public) of documents on the website

The MEDAC Website provides access to a wide portfolio of documents: advice, letters, legal framework, projects, meetings documentation and news.

Access to the advice and letters is straightforward. Documents are organized by year, with titles that clearly indicate the subject matter. Acronyms are widely used and generally recognizable (e.g., CFP<sup>17</sup>). The language of each file is indicated by a flag icon, and documents are provided in PDF format, which is broadly accessible

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<sup>16</sup> REG Number: 283785319481-25. All details available at [https://transparency-register.europa.eu/searchregister-or-update/organisation-detail\\_en?id=283785319481-25](https://transparency-register.europa.eu/searchregister-or-update/organisation-detail_en?id=283785319481-25)

<sup>17</sup> A few acronyms may be less familiar to the general public (e.g., MFF for Multiannual Financial Framework)

and secure across most web browsers and devices. All advice and letters issued from 2010 to the present are available for consultation and download.

An Annual Book is published containing all advice and letters adopted by MEDAC. Since 2021, it has been distributed to members, observers, Member States, and DG MARE representatives to support wider circulation. In 2022, a summary volume was also released, covering the period from 2010 to 2021.

Traceability and transparency of meetings are ensured through the availability of comprehensive documentation, including the agenda, list of participants, presentations, and minutes. Agendas and minutes are translated into six languages. The archive on the Website includes records of all meetings dating back to the Constituent General Assembly in 2009. The legal and operational framework (EU regulation, MEDAC statute, Internal rules) is also available in six languages. Critical regulations (e.g., fishing opportunities, Control regulation, multiannual plans or provisions of the GFCM) is also compiled in a multi-language version.

Instead of a periodical newsletter, MEDAC opts for a selection of news released at the Website. This strategy minimizes resource-intensive activities while providing information in a flexible format, customizing content and its delivery to suit specific communication needs.

85% of survey respondents reported that it was easy to find documents on the MEDAC website. However, it is important to note that all respondents were MEDAC members, which means they had an internal understanding of the organization's operations. No members of the general public were surveyed.

During the performance review period, MEDAC initiated a process to redesign its website with the goal of improving usability. The existing site has an outdated interface and faces both technological limitations (e.g., limited compatibility with screen readers and poor mobile responsiveness) and design constraints (e.g., limited search functionality and lack of dynamic menus). While the website redesign falls outside the formal scope of this review, the Secretariat has nonetheless welcomed suggestions from the reviewers regarding potential features for the future platform.

### Information on membership composition

The MEDAC Website provides concise information about the organization, structure and membership. Information on members and leadership of groups is available on the website by country, sector and allocation to the 60% fishing sector and 40% OIGs. There are detailed data on membership and composition, including names of representatives and managers, contact details, languages spoken by the staff, and in which MEDAC decision-making bodies they participate (GA, ExCom).

The MEDAC video released this year is available in six languages and serves as a practical information resource. It is currently accessible on the MEDAC YouTube channel, and it may also be beneficial to include it on the website.

## 4. Performance of Structures and Leadership

The MEDAC has a well-structured system that is operationally effective, procedurally compliant, and supported by an exceptionally capable Secretariat, yet one that faces structural strain from variability in leadership capacity and overreliance on a few pivotal individuals.

The institutional machinery of MEDAC is active and generally effective, with strong meeting organisation, logistical delivery, and a steady increase in advisory outputs. The working structures facilitate inclusive participation but struggle to shift a pervasive dynamic: a core group of members often dominates discussion, suggesting that formal access does not always ensure deliberative equity. This raises questions about how inclusivity is empowered, not just enabled.

Leadership across MEDAC structures is variable, reflecting a pluralist model that values representation over professional facilitation. While this enhances legitimacy and ownership, it also introduces inconsistency in meeting dynamics, decision-making quality, and the ability to manage conflict or reach resolution. Observations of chairing and coordination reveal a spectrum of practices, from directive and enabling to symbolic and occasionally biased, highlighting the need for light-touch training and clarification of roles to support more consistent leadership performance.

The Secretariat is consistently identified as a critical enabler, not just for administrative functions but for strategic coordination, knowledge integration, and procedural coherence. Its performance is universally praised, but the system's reliance on a small number of highly capable individuals represents a clear risk to institutional resilience and continuity.

Several effective practices have emerged organically, such as rotating meeting venues, structured scientific input, and streamlined data collection methods.

Overall, MEDAC's structural and leadership systems function well and show signs of adaptive learning. Yet the performance is unevenly distributed across roles and risks being undermined by leadership inconsistency, process fatigue, and the absence of formal mechanisms for succession and skills development.

Women's representation in leadership positions is varied, with two of the five Vice-Chairs and one of the ten coordinators of Working and Focus Groups being female. In contrast, all Secretariat staff members are women.

## 4.1 Functioning of the Executive Committee, Working Groups, General Assembly and Focus Groups

The evaluators observed meetings of the GA, WGs, and FGs (see table 11 for the list of meetings observed). Due to the MEDAC schedule and the performance review planning, the ExCom was not directly observed. The meetings were conducted in hybrid format (physical and online) or held entirely online. Written contributions were not assessed by the evaluators.

### Relevance and coverage of the addressed topics

MEDAC has established a strong foundation in addressing relevant and timely topics through a structured, evidence-informed approach that draws on diverse knowledge sources and reflects the evolving Mediterranean policy landscape. Looking ahead, enhancing strategic foresight and strengthening capacity in socio-economic analysis could further improve the scope, inclusivity, and policy impact of MEDAC's advice.

The MEDAC addresses topics that are both relevant and salient, that is, useful in addressing policy questions for Mediterranean fisheries. Based on the evidence gathered, MEDAC adopts an approach that combines context-setting, topic exploration, perception sharing, insight gathering, scientific input, and evidence-based comparative analysis. Urgent issues (e.g., COVID-19, the WestMed MAP) are addressed alongside longer-term strategic topics such as marine spatial planning (MSP) and tuna bycatch.

The approach taken to address the plurality of knowledge sources is illustrated here using marine spatial planning (MSP) as an example. MSP was the focus of a dedicated WG<sup>18</sup> and the debate combined a broad spectrum of evidence inputs:

- science presentations on the state-of the art studies on climate-smart trends and technologies in MSP, and an assessment of ten years of MSP funded projects
- multi-stakeholder debates from the main findings of an MSP EU Conference
- updates of policy implementation at member state level, focusing on the Italian MSP Plan recently adopted.

Across most topics, WG and FG meetings regularly consider differences and similarities among Member States in terms of policy approaches, the design of measures, and their effectiveness (e.g., in recreational fisheries or the implementation of compensation measures under the WestMed MAP). On certain issues, the Secretariat proactively initiates information gathering and data analysis to support MEDAC's responses to external requests. MEDAC has demonstrated the

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<sup>18</sup> MEDAC WG 3 meeting, 4<sup>th</sup> December 2024 (online). Agenda, list of participants and minutes of the meeting available here <https://www.en.med-ac.eu/events.php?id=261&page=2>

ability to systematically compile evidence from a wide range of sources and complement it with detailed, fine-tuned information. For example, in response to an EFCA request regarding tuna carcasses found in catches, MEDAC provided videos, images of carcasses in fishing gear, and the geographic coordinates of the encounters.

The annual workplans are tactical documents focused on the activities, scheduling, and internal structure of MEDAC. They do not extend to scoping future needs or identifying strategic priorities. The topics covered in the workplans reflect the evolving policy landscape and issues in European fisheries that are relevant to the Mediterranean. In her departure speech, Valerie Lainé (formerly of DGMARE) acknowledged that the breadth and focus of MEDAC's work were appropriate and valuable for DGMARE, particularly in relation to issues such as safety at sea, climate insurance, gender representation, generational renewal in fisheries, quality of life, and training.

While consulted in joint recommendations, MEDAC is not currently engaged in the co-design of management measures; although it could be argued that the structure of the CFP limits such approaches. It also faces challenges in sourcing expertise and gathering robust evidence to support the social and economic dimensions of its advice.

## Organisation of the meetings

MEDAC's meetings are well-structured, logistically sound, and linguistically inclusive, with a strong record of planning and delivery that ensures high participation and accessibility across six languages. Looking ahead, broadening the formats for discussion and considering lighter, more flexible scheduling could help sustain engagement, particularly for smaller organisations and during debates on complex or contested topics.

Over 90% of survey respondents indicated a preference for in-person meetings whenever possible. Additionally, 55% reported that they found it difficult or very difficult to debate complex issues in an online setting.

Meetings are often organised back-to-back, for example, the December 2024 online session included WG1 and WG3, and the February 2025 hybrid meeting included the GA, WG1, WG3, WG4, and FGs WESTMED, EASTMED, and SOS, thus maximising time and participant availability. However, the policy of involving all members in all discussions, combined with a uniform two-day meeting structure, may place significant demands on participants' energy and engagement. This structure can also pose challenges for smaller organisations with limited resources.

The logistical planning of MEDAC meetings is strong and highly effective, closely aligned with the annual workplan. The meeting schedule is published annually on



the website<sup>19</sup>, and during the evaluation period, there was a 100% adherence to the published timetable. Even when unforeseen circumstances arose, meetings proceeded as planned and maintained high levels of participation; for example, a WG2 meeting on pelagic fisheries designed for a structured dialogue with DGMARE went ahead despite the short notice of absence of Commission's representatives, as EFCA were still able to participate to advance in the debate. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the ExCom prioritised work and ensured that procedures were followed, demonstrating organisational resilience even in times of crisis.

Language is central to MEDAC's performance, and the organisation addresses this challenge in a notably effective manner. The use of six official languages<sup>20</sup> places a significant organisational burden, requiring seamless coordination with interpretation services. Overall, this process is managed smoothly, with pre-meeting checks and ongoing communication monitoring by the Secretariat. This ensures that speaking a less widely used language does not become a barrier to participation and allows for interaction and the nuanced expression of ideas that mother-tongue communication provides. However, challenges may arise when consensus reached orally through interpretation is later translated for formal written communication, typically into English, occasionally leading to differences in perception or interpretation.

The agendas follow a conventional structure: opening, adoption of the agenda and minutes of previous meetings, followed by topic presentations and plenary debates. While this provides a systematic format with which participants appear comfortable, creating space for more structured debate through alternative formats (e.g., breakout groups or hands-on activities) could encourage broader participation (see R1).

## Dynamics of the meetings

MEDAC meetings showcase a rich integration of diverse knowledge sources, but participation dynamics reveal an imbalance, with a small group of frequent speakers dominating discussions. To strengthen inclusivity and efficiency, experimenting with alternative discussion formats, while remaining attentive to cultural and relational dynamics, could help broaden participation and support more equitable and effective decision-making.

During interventions, members drew on a wide range of knowledge types: experience-based insights (e.g., to explain patterns in tuna distribution or the spread of blue crab), anecdotal evidence (e.g., photos and videos of third-country vessels or dolphin interactions with fishing gear), official documents (such as

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<sup>19</sup> Meetings for the year 2025 were announced in December 2024.

<sup>20</sup> MEDAC has six official languages (Croatian, French, Greek, English, Italian, Spanish, Maltese and Slovenian) and four official working languages (French, English, Italian and Spanish). Art. 22 MEDAC Internal Regulation.

national legislation), perceptions and opinions, as well as scientific studies, either presented during meetings or shared by national research institutes.

There are well-established truths about how organisations function, and it is important that they regularly reflect on how to maintain equity in contributions and participation in decision-making. Within MEDAC, there appears to be an “inner circle” of frequent speakers<sup>21</sup>. In the 17 observed meetings, an average of 24% of attendees intervened. Excluding the Chair, Secretariat, and WG/FG coordinators, a core group of nine individuals spoke seven times or more. Among this group, intervention styles varied: some were brief and focused, while others were more extended and wide-ranging. A tendency to reiterate points when asking follow-up questions or seeking clarification was noted, which can reduce space for others to contribute, delay consensus, and contribute to participant fatigue. Indeed, 44% of survey respondents reported instances where one individual dominated the available time for discussion. In some cases, diluting debate in this way was perceived as a strategy to intentionally slow progress. Introducing alternative discussion formats may help to support broader and more balanced engagement—while remaining sensitive to the cultural and relational dynamics that shape participation.

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<sup>21</sup> Also found in other ACs (e.g. North Sea AC) Griffin, 2010.



## 4.2 Performance of MEDAC Chair, Vice-Chairs, Working Group and Focus Groups coordinators and Secretariat

The functioning of the groups is described in the Internal Rules of Procedure<sup>22</sup>. The performance of the Chair, the five WGs and the five FG coordinators was assessed across five key areas<sup>23</sup>:

- chairing
- facilitation
- regulation
- interaction
- thematic focus

This was done using 25 specific criteria (ranging from ensuring the achievement of a common aim to enabling a plurality of participant inputs; see Table 12).

### Fulfilment of duties and responsibilities

The evaluation concluded that all MEDAC bodies fulfil their duties and responsibilities. Members reported having a clear or very clear understanding of how these bodies operate and perceived them as effective in carrying out their roles. The MEDAC's structures: ExCom, GA, WGs and FGs demonstrate increasing activity and a strong commitment to their mandates, with a rising output of advice and adaptive use of formal procedures to refine internal organisation. Looking ahead, continued investment in inclusive yet efficient working methods, combined with the consistently high performance of the Secretariat, provides a strong foundation for MEDAC to meet growing policy demands and stakeholder expectations.

The ExCom is in charge of reviewing, approving or amending the advice developed, and identifies key issues through the elaboration of the Work Plans. The increase in the number of annual advice documents delivered by MEDAC from 4 in 2014 to 17 in 2024, reflects a rise in activity and can be interpreted as a proxy indicator of effectiveness.

The ExCom is highly active<sup>24</sup>. For example, the advice on the SoS<sup>25</sup> required four versions and lengthy discussions, sometimes focused on agreeing on a single

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<sup>22</sup> Available at [https://www.en.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione/2015/02/en\\_regolamento\\_interno\\_february\\_2025-1.pdf](https://www.en.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione/2015/02/en_regolamento_interno_february_2025-1.pdf)

<sup>23</sup>The areas and criteria build on the analysis matrix guide developed by Benoit Guerin for the performance review of the LDAC in 2019.

<sup>24</sup> As aforementioned, the activity of the ExCom was not directly observed during this evaluation, as it was conducted via email correspondence. However, ExCom members were interviewed, and the outputs and consequences of their decisions were assessed.

<sup>25</sup> MEDAC Advice on Resolution GFCM/47/2024/1: "A roadmap for a joint project to collect all required and identified scientific evidence to provide a basis for the discussion of potential additional measures for the long-term portion of the management plan for demersal fish in the Strait of Sicily, in response to Recommendation GFCM/45/2022/4". Available at [https://www.en.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione/2024/01/en\\_medac\\_advice\\_on\\_resolution\\_gfcm\\_47\\_2024\\_1.pdf](https://www.en.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione/2024/01/en_medac_advice_on_resolution_gfcm_47_2024_1.pdf)

word. While this prompted some frustration, it also reflected a thorough process that ultimately led to consensus and overall satisfaction with the outcome.

The GA oversees the functioning of MEDAC and monitors the implementation of its activities, adopting changes through established formal procedures, for example, amendments to the internal regulations or the reorganisation of the SSF topic within the WGs in February 2025.

The WGs and FGs provide a space to explore specific topics in depth. Notably, MEDAC maintains a policy of involving all members in all discussions, which entails significant trade-offs. On one hand, this inclusive approach can slow down processes, challenge the participation of smaller organisations, and contribute to participant fatigue. On the other hand, it enables contributions across a broad range of topics, creates synergies and draws on diverse knowledge and experience. In smaller group settings, progress tends to be faster, and recommendations can be developed more efficiently without the need to reconcile numerous perspectives. However, this also carries the risk of excluding valuable insights or lacking a critical mass of ideas at the table.

### Leadership, impartiality, and work environment

MEDAC's pluralist leadership model is a strength, fostering broad ownership and legitimacy across diverse interests. To build on this foundation, strengthening coordination capacity would further enhance the consistency, impartiality, and inclusiveness of MEDAC meetings. This would aid effective participation, conflict management, and outcome delivery. Encouraging the use of enabling practices and offering light support or training could help all coordinators lead more effectively (see R1).

Chairs, WGs and FGs coordinators play a central role in preparing and conducting meetings, as well as ensuring follow-up on actions. The Secretariat supports this function, tailoring its assistance to align with the coordinators' individual profiles and competencies.

Members' perceptions suggest that leadership has an impact on performance, affecting who feels able to participate (37% of respondents), the ease of reaching solutions (78%), the delivery of results (74%), and the management of potential conflicts (67%). Observations confirm considerable variability in the skills, styles, processes, and outputs of different chairs and coordinators.

Four types of chairing/coordinating were observed:

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[ac.eu/files/documentazione\\_pareri\\_lettere/2025/04/107\\_2025\\_medac\\_advice\\_long-term\\_portion\\_of\\_mgmt\\_plan\\_for\\_demersal\\_fish\\_strait\\_of\\_sicily.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2025/04/107_2025_medac_advice_long-term_portion_of_mgmt_plan_for_demersal_fish_strait_of_sicily.pdf)

- Directive: centralized control, agenda handled as a succession of topics and interventions.
- Engaging: moderation, emphasis on active listening and consensus building, responsive to the feedback provided.
- Symbolic: limited control over proceedings with actual coordination assumed by the Secretariat.
- Biased: unequal allocation of time and favour of specific viewpoints or outcomes

Coordinators are not professional facilitators and come from diverse backgrounds, which is considered an asset. MEDAC deliberately promotes plurality in coordinator selection, aiming to enhance legitimacy and foster broad-based ownership of the groups' work. This diversity introduces a learning curve, particularly in areas such as language use, advice drafting, and relational dynamics but the time required to build these capacities is viewed as a worthwhile trade-off.

Interviewees reported that extended interventions or deliberate repetition could be used tactically to slow consensus or delay finalisation of advice. Such behaviours contribute to a broader perception, held by some institutional actors, that MEDAC may at times act as a brake on progress rather than a source of constructive solutions. While this perception is not universally held, it underscores the importance of effective facilitation and balanced leadership.

While observing meetings, a number enabling and constraining practices across the coordinators were observed (Table 2). It would benefit MEDAC to highlight to coordinators the strengths of using the enabling practices and refrain from the constraining practices.

*Table 2. Enabling and constraining practices of coordinators observed during meetings*

| Enabling practices observed   | Constraining practices observed   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Supports respectful and inclusive dialogue</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emphasises MEDAC mandate</li> <li>- Tempers forceful expression of opinions</li> <li>- Provides space for “venting” with empathy</li> <li>- Calls for respect, especially in response to dissent</li> </ul> <p><b>Facilitates structured and efficient participation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Encourages brevity and sets time limits (e.g., 3 minutes per intervention)</li> <li>- Offers the floor to online participants and allows follow-up replies</li> </ul> | <p><b>Dominating the discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Takes the floor regularly as coordinator and intervenes first after each presentation</li> <li>- Consumes a disproportionate share of the available time</li> <li>- Steps back from coordination role without noting that they are speaking as a member</li> </ul> <p><b>Weak Facilitation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fails to foster interaction or guide dialogue</li> </ul> |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Asks for clarifying questions before comments or responses</li> <li>- Seeks confirmation of shared understanding</li> </ul> <p><b>Promotes continuity and action-oriented discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Synthesises presentations and builds on previous MEDAC work</li> <li>- Summarises and lists action points</li> <li>- Invites additional contributions under Any Other Business (AOB)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does not link the debate to actionable outcomes</li> <li>- Omits synthesis of key session findings</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

Delivery of work programme, optimisation of budgetary resources, timely transmission of documents and information,

Assessment of the Work Programmes (2020–2024) indicates a high deliverance ratio, based on process (internal and external meetings and actions), output (advice delivered) and outcome (MEDAC’s visibility and legitimacy as stakeholder platform in the Mediterranean Sea). Several mechanisms have been progressively introduced to enhance it, including the involvement of the scientists’ experts in its elaboration. Looking ahead, the work programmes may benefit from enhancing its strategic component (R2).

The MEDAC financial resources (art. 14 Statute) consist of: the membership fund (fixed quota); the annual membership fees; the European Commission contribution; contribution from Member States (ES, IT, FR, SL, HR, CY, ML) and regional governments (3 Spanish regions contributed financially to MEDAC during the performance review period); and donations. The membership fund or common fund, created in 2010 is a financial asset, enabling risk management and resource availability to respond to unforeseen needs.

This evaluation did not have the evidence to consider the optimisation of budgetary resources. The Secretariat facilitated access to the budget contributions and the report of the Financial Audit of MEDAC (2019). The reviewers observed the GA in February, during which the 2024 Final accounts and the 2025 draft budget were presented and approved without any comment or issue related to them. The evidence collected did not indicate that budgetary resources are a concern or a potential area for improvement. One aspect, however, was referred as a potential weakness during the interviews: the lack of a surplus and the uncertainty of expenditures may hamper the capability to optimize the budget.

Crisis serve as a powerful test of resilience. In 2021 the confluence of several factors (transition of the structural fund from the EMFF to the EMFAF and changes in the

Commission's civil servant staff) put the financial contribution from the Commission on hold for six months. This meant MEDAC had only 1/5 of their total eligible budget to operate and implement its work plan<sup>26</sup>. In response, contingency measures were activated, including the use of the "common fund" and the temporary suspension of Secretariat staff salaries, demonstrating MEDAC's capability to maintain core functions under financial stress.

In spite of an intensive workload and the multiple formal (meetings, processes, written procedures) and informal mechanisms used (emails, WhatsApp groups, phone calls, coffee and lunch break conversations) documents and information are delivered in a timely manner, both for the members and for the external receivers (Commission, MSs, Joint ACs letters and advice, etc.)

### Compliance with rules of procedure

Compliance with the rules of procedure appears strong, with no reported instances of non-compliance and no anecdotal concerns raised during the evaluation.

The rules have been adapted and improved to cope with specific needs: introduction of the urgent procedure (2015), a clear process for the election of the offices (2018) and updating the reimbursement rule (2025).

### The Secretariat performance

The Secretariat performance is outstanding.

All survey respondents stated that the Secretariat performs at or above expected standards. All also agreed that the Secretariat provides information and responds to questions in a timely manner. Additionally, 96% of respondents indicated that the Secretariat gives adequate answers and offers support for their initiatives.

Observations of meetings and interviews suggest that flexibility and adaptability are defining strengths of the Secretariat. Both MEDAC members and the European Commission recognise the Secretariat's central role in ensuring the effective operation of the organisation. Also, the secretariat operates as a key axis to the organisation and ensure that both operational matters and longer-term strategic matters are addressed. The evaluators note that the Secretariat's contribution is pivotal to the smooth functioning of MEDAC. However, the organisation's strong reliance on a few key individuals may pose a risk to its resilience in the face of future changes.

Ongoing measures, such as staff capacity building and diversification of roles across the Secretariat, were noted in the interviews and by evaluators during the meetings observation. Furthermore, the robustness of MEDAC protocols and documented processes provides a strong foundation for institutional continuity, ensuring the organization's operations are secure. However, informal and critical

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<sup>26</sup> See Ref. 108/2021 MEDAC Operating Grant-Specific Agreement 2021

functions such as bridging, bounding, and networking, remain vulnerable in the event of staff turnover or absence. These relational roles are often person-dependent and less easily institutionalized. To address this operational risk, it is recommended to identify and mentor potential leaders within the Secretariat and across the different bodies (ExCOM, GA) (R5).

#### 4.3 Observed practices contributing to effectiveness

Throughout the evaluation, a range of practices were identified that contribute positively to the functioning and performance of MEDAC. These examples illustrate approaches that enhance the advisory process, improve knowledge exchange, and support member engagement across a diverse constituency.



Table 3. Practices the contribute to effective operation of MEDAC

| Practice                                     | Purpose  | Why 'best practice'  |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Quick data gathering</b>                  | To gather information on specific topics, e.g. impact of COVID-19 or input to GFCM Strategy 2021–2025.   | Allows rapid and cost-effective mobilisation of member knowledge, offering timely input to policy processes.   |
| <b>Scientific experts</b>                    | Nine experts proposed by members in line with Work Plan priorities.  | Strengthens evidence base through regular updates on stock status, methodological advances & cross-cutting topics (e.g. MSP). Supports knowledge sharing & integration of science into advice. |
| <b>Scientific Input</b>                      | Presentation of data and findings during WG and FG meetings.   | Ensures that discussions are grounded in up-to-date evidence, enhancing credibility and transparency.  |
| <b>Legislative Corner (introduced 2020)*</b> | To update members on legislative steps of new regulations, including EU and GFCM measures.   | Provides early notice of developments and anticipated implications, supporting informed engagement and reducing the learning curve.  |
| <b>Participation in research projects</b>    | Participation is governed by a standardised procedure with evaluation committee & public criteria (technical, administrative, financial).  | Demonstrates procedural rigour and ensures transparency in engagement with external initiatives.   |
| <b>MEDAC Prize</b>                           | Recognition of contributions by individuals or institutions.   | Reinforces MEDAC's values, supports visibility and outreach, and contributes to building a shared culture.   |
| <b>Rotating venues for hybrid meetings</b>   | Organised in different countries and regions.  | Enhances understanding of local contexts & sub-regional dynamics, while improving accessibility and visibility for members.  |
| <b>Advice design</b>                         | Short and focus (3–4 pages)<br>Systematic summary of scientific evidence<br>Cross-reference to related MEDAC advice  | Enhances clarity and increases the likelihood of advice being read, retained and acted upon.<br>Ensures consistency  |
| <b>Strategic advisory leverage</b>           | Active involvement in STECF and GFCM as observers<br>Input used to inform MEDAC debates and deliver outputs<br>Proactive position: suggesting ToR** and ways of provide input to be included in the assessments*** | Reinforces the advisory system and the use of available evidence<br>Enhances communication flows and inform broader MEDAC activities.<br>Creates two-way processes                             |

\* Due to the topic (legislation) and overwhelming normative activity, the legislative corner would benefit from a more synthetic approach.

\*\* Ref. 234/2024 ToR of the STECF EWG 24-16 on Technical measures.

\*\*\* STECF– Stakeholder meeting with MEDAC with a first discussion how to take information from the stakeholders into account for next years assessments, 28 September 2023.

## 5. Institutional Influence and External

The MEDAC is an advisory body with demonstrable added value, navigating a fragmented governance landscape with increasing maturity but constrained by structural mismatches and limited formal recognition of its unique role.

MEDAC's relationship with the European Commission is functional but marked by asymmetry. While the Commission values consensus-based advice and increasingly accommodates procedural flexibility, there is ambiguity over MEDAC's status in public consultations and letter exchanges. The MEDAC's formal identity is as an advisory, not a lobbying body. Tensions surface particularly around tone, channels of communication, and the visibility of MEDAC's inputs relative to its effort and legitimacy.

Member State engagement is uneven, with strong ties to some administrations (e.g., Italy) but limited structured interaction at the regional grouping level (e.g., ADRIATICA, SUDESTMED, PESCAMED). This fragmentation weakens MEDAC's ability to anchor its advice within national and regional implementation pathways, an issue especially acute in a multi-country sea basin like the Mediterranean. However, its inputs into GFCM processes are valued.

Influence on policy is real, but diffuse. MEDAC's advice has helped shape technical measures, contributed to GFCM proposals, and influenced amendments to CFP implementation. However, formal responses from DG MARE are often non-committal, and the impact is more often traced through informal uptake and alignment than direct incorporation. This reflects the complexity of EU fisheries policymaking, where influence is often indirect and cumulative rather than linear.

MEDAC is well-aligned with CFP objectives, acting as a platform for evidence-informed advice, early warning on emerging issues (e.g., invasive species), and the integration of science and stakeholder perspectives. It supports EU participation in regional and international fora, providing a bridge between science, policy, and practice at the Mediterranean scale.

Ultimately, MEDAC plays a critical yet potentially still under-recognised role in the EU's multi-level fisheries governance. Its impact depends not only on the quality of its advice, but also on the receptiveness of institutional counterparts and the space it is afforded within an increasingly crowded consultative ecosystem. Strengthening the visibility, constructive and strategic framing, and interinstitutional positioning of its outputs will be key to enhancing its influence.

While Sections 3 and 4 examine MEDAC's performance by theme and function, this section takes a broader view, highlighting shared strengths, recurring patterns, and opportunities for enhancing coherence and resilience across the institution.

## 5.1 Relationship with the institutions (European Commission and Member States)

MEDAC advice operates within a complex and multi-layered decision-making landscape that includes the European Commission, Member States, the GFCM, and other bodies acting at local, regional, national, and international levels. Its internal rules explicitly state that MEDAC's activities must remain within the boundaries set by Article 44 of EU Regulation No. 1380/2013. As such, MEDAC is not permitted to respond to unsolicited requests or engage with European institutions on matters that fall outside the scope of its defined advisory role. In particular, this restriction limits interaction with the European Parliament on fisheries legislative files during ongoing co-decision processes (Article 7.2). This limitation reinforces MEDAC's identity as an advisory body, rather than a lobbying entity.

### Cooperation, including attendance in meetings.

Recent improvements in formal cooperation between the Commission and MEDAC, particularly around consensus-based advice and deadline flexibility, demonstrate the potential for a more responsive and integrated dialogue. Tensions remain, particularly regarding the tone of exchanged letters. There is scope to further clarify roles, enhance the visibility of consensus input in public consultations, and strengthen regional and Member State-level linkages to ensure MEDAC's advice continues to inform EU fisheries governance effectively.

The Commission has commented on increased efforts in the last ten years of "enhancing and streamlining the cooperation between the Commission and the ACs and ensure a better framing of recommendations within the CFP scope" (SWD 2021 122 final). The leaving speech of Valerie Laine further supports the increased good relation between MEDAC and the Commission. The Commission commented to the evaluators that they found the advice and recommendations from MEDAC appropriate and useful, especially when they were consensus statements.

The Commission has increased its flexibility to accommodate and extend deadlines. Such as recently for the public consultations with online questionnaires on the CFP and on the CMO, where deadlines were extended with two weeks to satisfy request of the ACs<sup>27</sup>. This request highlights the effectiveness of increased inter-AC collaboration. MEDAC has collaborated on shared topics with LDAC, CCRUP and SWWAC. The Commission has also found this inter-AC useful, especially by briefing ACs of upcoming new files in advance.

Some challenges have been noted in the communication between MEDAC and the European Commission, particularly in relation to informal correspondence and letters. The Commission has occasionally raised concerns about the tone of certain

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<sup>27</sup> Subject: Joint-AC letter on contributions from Advisory Councils to Commission public consultations. Ref: your letter 2122PAC22 dated 4 March 2022. DG-MARE

letters, suggesting that they may not always align with MEDAC's role as a consensus-based stakeholder forum. Also, when participating in meetings, the Commission has noted inappropriate tone being used during verbal exchanges. In addition, there have been instances where it was not entirely clear whether the views expressed reflected the collective position of MEDAC or those of individual members.

Interviews with Commission and others revealed a recurring concern that MEDAC advice, while procedurally robust, can be framed in a way that appears overly cautious and aimed at maintaining the status quo. This has contributed to a perception that MEDAC sometimes slows policy momentum or resists change rather than enabling pragmatic progress. Such perceptions, whether accurate or not, influence how MEDAC's advice is received and weighted in the policy process.

The Commission's public consultation process remains a source of tension. These consultations are open and wide-ranging, and when MEDAC submits a response, it is perceived as carrying no more weight than that of an individual citizen. This appears to overlook the unique and formalised role of the Advisory Councils as established stakeholder bodies mandated to deliver consensus advice. While the Commission has no formal mechanism to weight submissions and also account for the deliberative nature of AC input, the Commission said that the Advisory Council input, when consensus, is the first inputs to be considered. This was also mentioned at a DGMARE-inter AC meeting. There is no formal weighting mechanism for submissions. Furthermore, the structure of the consultation process does not consistently accommodate or capture the value of consensus-based advice, particularly where consensus includes nuanced positions or minority statements developed through extensive deliberation (see R6).

Tensions also arise when MEDAC proactively engage with other DGs within the Commission as highlighted when MEDAC asked DGMARE to enable them to engage with DGEMPL on understanding social and economic impacts of measures that effect the fishing sector. For instance, MEDAC requested data and information to aid their advice and the Commission replied that *DG MARE remains the focal point for the social dimension of the Common Fisheries Policy*. MEDAC has since requested data on social and economic issues from DGMARE and received a procedural response<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Reference 21/2022: "Considering that much of the information requested is already publicly available, for instance from the EU fleet register ([https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fleet-europa/search\\_en](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fleet-europa/search_en)), through the various reports produced by the STECFI and on the EUMOFA website (<https://www.eumofa.eu/>), I would suggest the working group first compiles the already publicly available information. Once that information is collected, my Unit remains at your disposal to examine whether additional information can be provided".

In terms of regionalisation, if requested by the MS, WG1 is able to evaluate modifications to the technical measures, within the limits established by the same EC Reg. 2019/1241 (Report 2022).

The evidence for the strongest link with a member state was the national meetings in Italy where MEDAC was invited to briefings over a number of years. No evidence was available for similar mechanisms in other member states. Some members reported that by being in MEDAC they would receive information directly from the Commission rather than second hand through their respective ministries. This improves the speed of delivery and also allows them to understand the nuances of the information, rather than a national interpretation.

During the performance review period there is limited evidence of interaction of the High-level Groups of MSs<sup>29</sup> with MEDAC, namely ADRIATICA (Croatia, Italy and Slovenia), PESCAMED (Italy, France, Spain), and SUDESTMED (Italy, Greece, Cyprus and Malta). Although during the preparation of discard plans for the Adriatic after 2023, ADRIATICA administrations asked MEDAC to collaborate, develop discard plans in the Adriatic Sea for demersal and small pelagic fisheries (2023 Stevilka).

### Influence of advice in EU policy making

MEDAC's advice continues to influence EU and regional fisheries policy, not only through formal uptake but also via sustained, less visible pathways of influence. Building on these contributions, particularly in areas such as technical measures, invasive species, compensation mechanisms, and GFCM collaboration, there is clear potential to enhance MEDAC's strategic influence, constructive impact and further align its input with evolving policy priorities.

The complexity of EU policy, marked by a multiplicity of actors, organisations, institutions, interventions, and contextual factors, makes it difficult to directly trace the influence of MEDAC's advice. To assess its impact, three proxies are used: (1) formal responses from DG MARE to MEDAC recommendations (via written letters); (2) explicit references to MEDAC advice in the annual Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the *Sustainable Fishing in the EU: State of Play and Orientations for Fishing Opportunities communication*; and (3) MEDAC's own tracking of its influence on GFCM processes. The incorporation of MEDAC advice serves as an indicator of its quality and relevance, the standing of MEDAC, and its alignment with the Commission's policy objectives and priorities. The Commission has also noted that ACs influence EU policy through softer, less visible mechanisms, which are more difficult to track and may unfold over longer timeframes.

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<sup>29</sup> In March 2023 the MEDAC was invited to a meeting with PESCAMED. According to the evidence available in the Annual Report 2023 "MEDAC has been invited to a small part of the meeting related to the in-depth discussion on STECF assessment on delegated regulation establishing a discard plans. MEDAC underlined and gave its continuous availability referring to the contribution of the affected members to the LO and the related discards plans"

The formal responses from DG MARE to MEDAC advice during the evaluation period (32 in total) were predominantly noncommittal, with 74% lacking a clear indication of subsequent action or decision (see Table 8). However, this pattern should not be interpreted as an absence of influence. Rather, it reflects the limited visibility of direct policy uptake. Notably, this response pattern has remained consistent over the years, despite an increase in the consensus-based nature of MEDAC's advice.

Approximately 13% of MEDAC advice was positively accepted and mentioned, covering operational issues such as budget flexibility, relationships and interactions with third-country fleets<sup>30</sup>, as well as socioeconomic aspects of red coral management and invasive species in the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

For invasive species, the Commission remarked MEDAC's enrichment of the pilot project with important elements such as: (a) a solid stakeholders' consultation with the aim of contributing to future management in a quick and adaptive manner, (b) the full involvement of fishermen and relevant stakeholders in addressing the issue of the exploitation and commercialization of NIS, (c) the commercialisation potential of NIS and markets, (d) sharing experience and best practices<sup>31</sup>.

Beyond direct formal responses, the Commission has reported the use of MEDAC advice in several key areas:

- Amendments to existing discard plans and exemptions under the landing obligation, including changes related to the derogation for the minimum conservation reference size (MCRS)<sup>32</sup> of Venus shells in specific Italian territorial waters (SWD, 2021, 122 final).
- EU proposals for GFCM recommendations, where elements of all MEDAC advice were reflected in proposals concerning new multiannual plans, the establishment of new fisheries restricted areas in the Mediterranean Sea, and measures addressing red coral and non-indigenous species (SWD, 2024, 139 final).
- Implementation of the compensation mechanism under the Western Mediterranean Multiannual Plan, specifically in proposals to increase compensation levels and include additional technical criteria (ibid.).
- Development of a joint recommendation (by NWWAC, SWWAC, CCRUP and MEDAC—supported by NSAC) on energy-efficient technologies for new engines, which contributed to a modification of the final act, including the

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<sup>30</sup> 73/2022\_MEDAC Advice on Egyptian fleet and 75/2022\_MEDAC advice to avoid Libyan transshipments

<sup>31</sup> 119\_2023. DG-MARE response to the MEDAC advice 69/2023 on invasive species (NIS) in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Ref. Ares(2023)4803964 - 11/07/2023. Available at the MEDAC Website.

<sup>32</sup> Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/3 as regards the derogation for the minimum conservation reference size (MCRS) of Venus shells in certain Italian territorial waters



addition of a reference to internal combustion and fuel cell hybrid systems in the implementing act<sup>33</sup>.

Furthermore, the Commission promoted in all the GFCM proposals the need for a regional level-playing field, as requested by MEDAC (SWD, 2024 139 final).

MEDAC advice has had a tangible impact within the GFCM framework. Through its active participation in the Sub-Regional Committees (SRCs), MEDAC has contributed to discussions on current management measures, with its input reflected in Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries (SAC) reports. These have included topics such as European eel, red coral, fisheries restricted areas (FRAs), the Strait of Sicily, management strategy evaluation (MSE) processes for small pelagic, recreational fisheries, insurance systems, and the establishment of an alien species observatory (see Table 9). The Commission has acknowledged the pivotal role MEDAC is playing in informing GFCM processes<sup>34</sup>.

Several interviewees suggested that MEDAC's influence could be strengthened by ensuring its responses are framed in a more constructive and solution-oriented manner, rather than being perceived as obstructive or delaying.

## 5.2 Contribution to the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy

The MEDAC demonstrably aligns with and advances the objectives of the CFP through its structure, outputs, and proactive engagement across EU and international fora. Strengthening its role as an early warning mechanism, a reality check on policy feasibility, and a hub for science–stakeholder dialogue will further consolidate its contribution to evidence-based, regionally tailored, and socially legitimate fisheries governance.

Metrics from the Performance assessment framework show the MEDAC's foundational documents, including its statute (Article 2), explicitly reflect the goals of the CFP (Article 44). In practice, MEDAC's structure and outputs (advice, opinions, recommendations) also fully support and mirror CFP objectives. Furthermore, the EU is mandated to support and contribute to the activities of international organizations dealing with fisheries, including RFMOs (art.29.1 CFP). In this context,

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<sup>33</sup> See Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/46 of 13 January 2022 implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 as regards the identification of energy-efficient technologies and the specification of methodology elements to determine the normal fishing effort of fishing vessels (OJ L 9, 14.1.2022, p.9)

<sup>34</sup> Recognition of MEDAC contribution to the GFCM work by DG-MARE [https://www.en.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione\\_pareri\\_lettere/2023/07/119\\_dg\\_mare\\_reply\\_medac\\_advice\\_nis\\_eastmed.pdf](https://www.en.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2023/07/119_dg_mare_reply_medac_advice_nis_eastmed.pdf)  
Recognition of MEDAC contribution to projects and DG-MARE initiatives [https://www.en.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione\\_pareri\\_lettere/2024/05/96\\_dgmare\\_reply\\_to\\_medac\\_advice\\_59\\_2024\\_on\\_new\\_generation\\_of\\_fishers.pdf](https://www.en.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2024/05/96_dgmare_reply_to_medac_advice_59_2024_on_new_generation_of_fishers.pdf)  
Recognition of MEDAC valuable presentations [https://www.en.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione\\_pareri\\_lettere/2024/06/125\\_dgmare\\_reply\\_medac\\_pagellus\\_bogaraveo\\_gsa\\_1\\_2\\_3.pdf](https://www.en.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2024/06/125_dgmare_reply_medac_pagellus_bogaraveo_gsa_1_2_3.pdf)

MEDAC plays a pivotal role by facilitating dialogue and providing expert stakeholder input on CFP-related topics within the GFCM. This role is widely recognized by the European Commission as instrumental in aligning regional and international fisheries governance with EU policy objectives.

The MEDAC has made both substantive tangible and intangible contributions to the objectives of the CFP (see Figure 6). It proactively contributes to EU fisheries governance, functioning as an early warning system (e.g. on invasive species), a reality check on the feasibility, implementation, and impacts of management and conservation measures (e.g. multiannual plans, discard plans), and a compass for emerging priorities (e.g. generational renewal in fisheries). It serves as a focus point for science–stakeholder interaction, embedding scientific input into its operations and setting transparent criteria for project participation. It also helps shape the EU agenda by initiating discussion on underrepresented topics, such as recreational fisheries. Through the exchange of knowledge and experience, MEDAC aims to provide a socially robust and legitimate evidence base for the CFP. Its added value extends to international fora, where it contributes perspectives and proposals to support a level playing field <sup>35</sup>.

In its role, MEDAC actively contributed to the consultations launched by the Commission (15) in a wide array of topics, adding to the above the structural fund evaluation or the survey on Marine Spatial Planning.

The content analysis of advice, letters, contributions and joint letters highlights a constructive criticism, the growing use of scientific evidence and the search for scoping and tailoring some debates to the sea basin needs (e.g., MEDAC discussion paper on MSY in the Mediterranean fisheries management. Some food for thought, Ref. 115/2021)

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<sup>35</sup> For instance, Letter 66/2020 on the Egyptian fleet in the Strait of Sicily.

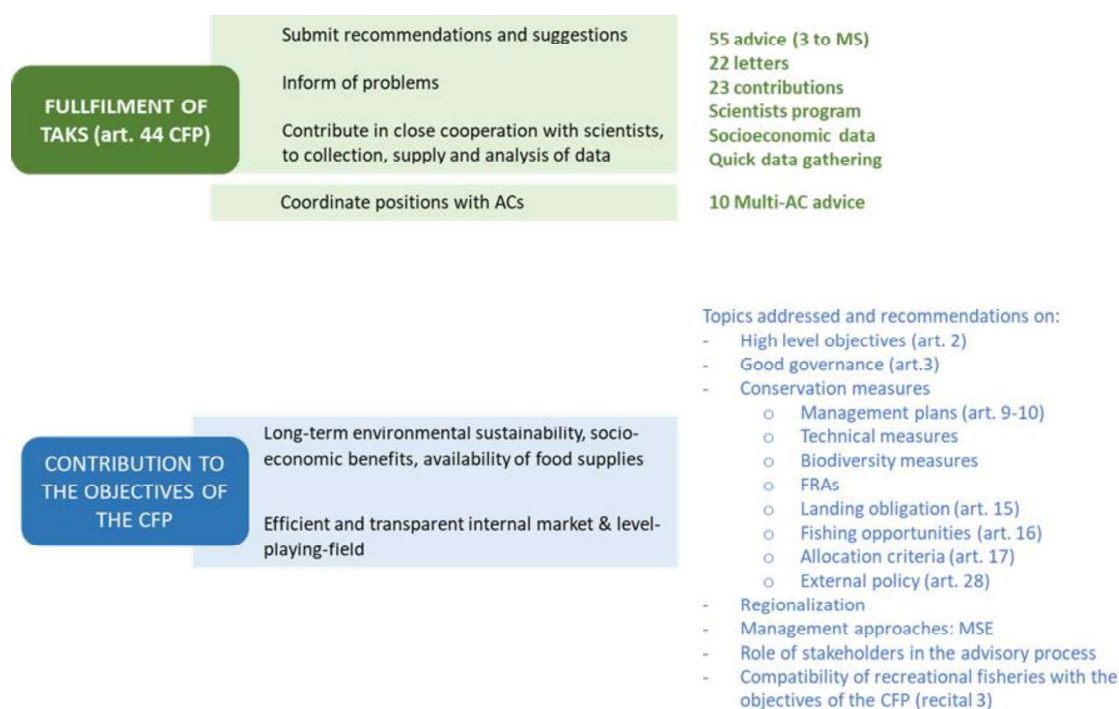


Figure 6 Contribution of MEDAC to the CFP during the evaluation period (2020-2024)

## 6. Shortcomings

The preceding section identified several cross-cutting dynamics that shape MEDAC's functioning. To support a targeted and actionable response, the following summary consolidates the review's main findings into key strengths and areas for improvement.

### Key pivotal individuals

Certain roles within MEDAC are filled by influential and highly effective individuals. These people demonstrate a strong understanding of the broader context of MEDAC's work, are well-connected across networks, and enable coordinated action across the advisory system. The smooth functioning of MEDAC depends heavily on their continued engagement; they are central figures within both the Secretariat and the ExCom.

However, there are currently no formal mechanisms in place for succession planning or managing the sudden loss of such individuals. As some may reduce their involvement due to retirement or career transitions, MEDAC would benefit from strengthening its institutional resilience. This includes developing processes that promote continuity, support knowledge transfer, and safeguard the organisation against key-person dependency.

## Resilience to upcoming challenges

MEDAC has demonstrated an ability to respond to new challenges, particularly through a pragmatic, iterative approach of 'learning by doing'. At its inception, there was significant effort to establish a functioning institution, and many operating practices took shape during this formative period. However, the challenges faced at that time (both in MEDAC's internal dynamics and in the broader Mediterranean governance landscape) are likely to differ greatly from those now coming over the horizon.

There is evidence of strong path dependency in MEDAC's structures and procedures, shaped by earlier successes. While this has helped to consolidate its legitimacy and operational stability, it may also constrain innovation by narrowing the range of solutions considered. The tendency to revert to familiar, lower-risk approaches could limit MEDAC's capacity to explore and adopt new strategies required to address emerging and increasingly complex challenges.

## Institutional shortcomings: Consultation Fatigue

**Note:** This shortcoming falls outside MEDAC's scope and mandate, and thus cannot be effectively addressed through isolate efforts. Tackling this issue requires coordinated action among ACs and the EU institutions. The Ocean Pact along with the potential review of the CFP offer a significant opportunity. Absent a collective commitment to improve the EU fisheries governance system, this shortcoming is unlikely to be resolved.

The Advisory Councils (ACs) were established to play a central consultative role in implementing the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and shaping regional fisheries measures. MEDAC has been particularly effective in positioning itself within this framework, engaging proactively with EU institutions, member states, and GFCM bodies. It has developed a strong reputation for being responsive and well-coordinated, ensuring that its views are regularly solicited.

However, the EU marine policy arena has grown increasingly crowded. Consultation is now a feature of multiple governance instruments, including the CFP, Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), marine spatial planning, the Nature Restoration Law, and the forthcoming Ocean Pact. This has drawn in a wide array of well-resourced and highly vocal stakeholders. As a result, MEDAC, despite its formal legitimacy, transparent processes, and commitment to consensus, has become just one voice among many.

There is growing concern that the effort and resources invested in producing high-quality, consensus-based advice are not adequately recognised or used by decision-makers. This can lead to tension, as seen in the tone of exchanged letters. This disconnect is contributing to a sense of consultation fatigue among participants. To remain influential in this increasingly complex environment, MEDAC

must reconsider how it presents and communicates its advice to ensure it remains visible, relevant, and impactful.

Compounding this, some institutional actors view MEDAC as risk-averse or even obstructionist, being more focused on safeguarding sectoral positions than generating feasible, future-facing solutions. Whether justified or not, this perception diminishes the weight given to its advice, and risks reinforcing a cycle where constructive contributions are undervalued, further disincentivising innovation within MEDAC.

Underneath is the mismatch between the participation purpose and the governance stage at which ACs are formally positioned<sup>36</sup>. While MEDAC has actively sought entry points in the early phases of the policy process (agenda setting, scoping, solution framing) its success has been rather limited.

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<sup>36</sup> Pointed by Linke et al. 2011 Linke, S., Dreyer, M. & Sellke, P. The Regional Advisory Councils: What is Their Potential to Incorporate Stakeholder Knowledge into Fisheries Governance? *AMBIO* **40**, 133–143 (2011). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-010-0125-1>

## 7. Recommendations

### R1. Establish practical measures to strengthen inclusive participation and deliberative quality

While MEDAC's structures enable broad participation, adjustments to facilitation, meeting formats, and follow-up practices could further enhance inclusiveness and the quality of deliberation.

R1.1. Provide tailored induction, training, and light-touch support for chairs and coordinators on core interpersonal competencies, such as active listening, conflict resolution, and understanding diverse perspectives and values. These sessions could be integrated into hybrid meetings as short, interactive components (e.g., role-plays, facilitated exercises) to develop essential skills while offering a break from conventional meeting formats.

R1.2. Diversify meeting formats by incorporating breakout groups, small-group exercises, and participatory methods that facilitate deeper discussion. While such formats may present logistical challenges (e.g., interpretation, room coordination), their gradual introduction could enhance engagement, promote equitable participation, and shift discussion dynamics in constructive ways.

R1.3 Systematically summarise key action points at the end of each agenda item and ensure their inclusion in the meeting minutes. This practice will improve follow-up, accountability, and continuity between sessions.

Linked to sections 3.1 and 4.2.

### R2. Strengthen the strategic orientation of the work programme

The format of the MEDAC work programme is prescribed by DGMARE and is tactical in nature. MEDAC needs to build resilience to future challenges and an increased portfolio in the fisheries and maritime domain, thus requires a consideration of strategic direction and prioritisation of focus. MEDAC should better balance immediate policy demands with longer-term strategic direction. While a full strategic plan may not be feasible given resource constraints, low-effort measures can still improve foresight and coherence:

R2.1 Introduce a strategic framing layer to the annual workplan, using brief bullet points to link each priority to longer-term goals. For example, a priority like "Selectivity, vulnerable species and sensitive habitats" could include a strategic aim such as "enhance cross-policy advice relevant to both the CFP and EU Biodiversity Strategy."

R2.2 Use these strategic links to guide meeting discussions, helping to prioritise actions and frame debates around relevance and long-term impact. Prompting questions like "how does this issue align with our strategic priorities?" can focus deliberations and improve clarity.



R2.3 Building on the more participatory formats proposed in R1.2, pilot simple reflective tools such as ‘stop-start-continue’ exercises in Working or Focus Groups. These can identify activities that drain capacity, highlight new opportunities aligned with MEDAC’s mission, and reinforce high-impact practices worth sustaining.

Linked to sections 4.1 and 5.2.

### R3. Redefine the operational meaning of consensus

MEDAC’s commitment to consensus is a core strength. Clarifying its operational interpretation could support more transparent deliberation, improve impact and ensure space for constructive differences of view.

R3.1 Under current EU regulation, consensus is often interpreted as “unanimity.” However, in many governance settings, consensus is understood more pragmatically, as broad agreement that allows a group to move forward, even if not all participants are fully aligned. While MEDAC fosters deliberation and shared understanding, its strong emphasis on unanimity can unintentionally enable dominance by certain voices, limit space for dissent, and exacerbate existing power imbalances (Griffin, 2007). When consensus is built in a way that discourages disagreement, it often marginalises those with different perspectives

To operationalise a more inclusive approach to consensus, MEDAC could pilot an alternative method. For a selected advice topic, the standard procedure would be followed, but with one key addition: if a minority statement arises, it would be openly discussed by the group. This would include examining the rationale behind the statement and weighing its potential benefits and drawbacks for the overall coherence of the advice. The outcomes of the pilot should be documented and shared with the Commission to jointly reflect on its implications. Recognising the value of the deliberative process, and accepting constructive disagreement, may ultimately strengthen both the legitimacy and utility of MEDAC’s contributions to CFP governance.

Linked to sections 3.1, 3.2 and 4.2.

### R4. Reassess membership fee structure to support inclusiveness.

The current flat fee system provides a stable foundation, yet exploring flexible options could make participation more accessible for smaller or resource-constrained organisations.

R4.1 Introduce a tiered or needs-based fee system, allowing smaller or low-resource organisations to participate more fully.

Linked to section 3.2.

## R5. Strengthen succession planning, institutional resilience, and onboarding processes

To strengthen MEDAC's institutional resilience and reduce dependence on a small number of individuals, this recommendation focuses on succession planning, informal knowledge transfer, and onboarding, (not on facilitation training as addressed in R1). It is aimed at ensuring continuity across governance functions and Secretariat operations.

R5.1 Develop a light-touch succession strategy within the Secretariat and EXCOM by mapping critical functions and progressively distributing roles such as external liaison, coordination, and procedural oversight. Encourage experienced staff to share responsibilities gradually, allowing others to gain familiarity through observation and supported participation.

R5.2 Facilitate informal mentoring arrangements across MEDAC structures—not for leadership training (as covered in R1), but for institutional continuity. Pair long-standing members with newer participants to transfer contextual knowledge, internal culture, and lessons learned that are not easily captured in documents.

R5.3 Create a concise onboarding package for newcomers from member organisations. This should include an orientation to MEDAC's role, rules of procedure, structure, and how to engage meaningfully in meetings and advice processes. It should be accessible in multiple languages and available online.

Linked to Sections 4.2 and 4.3

## R6. Clarify institutional role and foster MEDAC position in the fisheries governance system

To strengthen MEDAC's external credibility and adapt to an increasingly crowded governance space, two interlinked actions are recommended:

R6.1 Develop a short, shared narrative, co-created with members and discussed with the Commission that clearly articulates MEDAC's advisory mandate, its value within the CFP system, and how its stakeholder-driven model complements institutional decision-making. This could help address tensions around its perceived role (e.g. advocacy vs consultation) and improve the alignment of expectations.

R6.2 Monitor the implementation of recommendations about ACs role in the governance system, and systematically include evidence of progress in the annual work plan submitted to the Commission. Examples of ongoing efforts include.

- Encouraging Member States' fisheries regional group to better involve Advisory Councils in the regional organisations<sup>37</sup>.
- Recognizing the added weight given to the ACs responses during public consultation<sup>38</sup>.
- Increasing the ACs visibility by consistently referencing their discussions and recommendations in new measures adopted.
- Inviting the Advisory Councils to defining the award criteria and selection criteria for an independent jury for the annual award for sustainable innovation in fisheries.

Linked to sections 3.1, 4.2, 5.1 and 5.2.

## 8. Conclusions

MEDAC is a functional and maturing body that plays a recognised role in stakeholder engagement and regional advice. It has developed transparent procedures, supports wide participation, and has delivered increasingly solution-oriented advice. Members report high satisfaction with its operations, especially with the Secretariat. Notably, recent years show tangible contributions to the advancement of the CFP goals within and beyond the EU, particularly through its contributions to the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM).

However, the review also finds persistent structural tensions. These tensions, which stem from representational asymmetries between sectors, organisation size, language groups and regions, continue to shape outcomes. While consensus is more frequently achieved, it is not always underpinned by genuine mutual adjustment, with some voices more consistently heard than others.

A deeper challenge lies in the mismatch between what members believe they are doing (shaping fisheries policy) and what the Commission expects (providing stakeholder-grounded advice). This misalignment, which is rooted in different interpretations of the stakeholder role in the CFP governance, limits the uptake of MEDAC's advice, contributes to consultation fatigue, and strains trust across the system.

The Secretariat is widely seen as a cornerstone of MEDAC's effectiveness, but the heavy reliance on a few key individuals raises concerns about long-term resilience. In a more crowded and contested policy space, MEDAC must now adapt

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<sup>37</sup> Stated in the following documents: 1. COM (2023) 103 final Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council The Common fisheries policy today and tomorrow: a Fisheries Ocean Pact towards sustainable, science-based, innovative and inclusive fisheries management. 2. European Commission, European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency, Van Bogaert, N., Lemey, L., De Peuter, S., et al., CFP regionalisation: final report, Hintzen, N.(editor), Wakeford, R.(editor), Publications Office of the European Union, 2022.

<sup>38</sup> Ref 2022\_71 Commission response to the Joint-AC letter on contributions from Advisory Councils to Commission public consultations

strengthening how it frames its advice, manages institutional expectations, and demonstrates its added value.

Moving forward, clarifying the operational meaning of consensus, tracking the use and influence of advice, and rethinking its strategic position within the CFP system will be essential if MEDAC is to fulfil its potential.

## 9. Methods

The performance review covers the period 2020-2024 (5 years). A performance review framework was designed to ensure consistency and objectivity through the evaluation process. It follows a mixed-method approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data gathered through desk research, an online survey with 27 respondents, 13 semi-structured interviews and a focus group through a structured performance framework. This section describes the methodological approach followed to generate the evidence that informs the assessment.

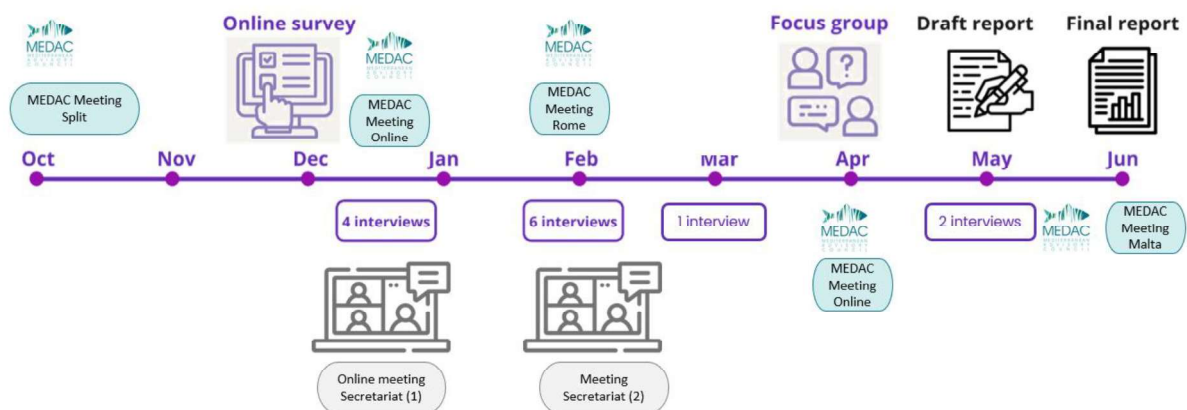


Figure 7. Timeline for the Performance Review.

### 9.1 Performance assessment framework

The performance review framework was tailored to the features of the Advisory Council and the specifications of the Terms of Reference (ToRs). The framework includes a set of criteria and measurable indicators, allowing to understand the basis of the assessment and engaging with the results constructively. It also provides a baseline for assessing progress in future evaluations.

The framework combines the evidence gathered through desk research, meetings observation, a survey, interview and a focus group.

Table 4. Performance assessment framework. Criteria and metrics

| Criteria                      | Description  | Assessment  | Metrics   | ToR           |
|-------------------------------|--|---|---|---------------|
| Effectiveness<br>What is done | Supports maintenance of MEDAC integrity and functioning    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fulfilment of objectives (art. 2 Statutes and 44 CFP)</li> <li>- Members' perception</li> <li>- Members' retention</li> <li>- Transparency</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nr. of recommendations on target topics/total recommendations</li> <li>- Nr. of proposed solutions/total recommendations</li> <li>- Nr. of responses/total consultations on Join recommendations</li> <li>- Nr. of data contributions</li> <li>- Nr. of interactions with third countries per year.</li> <li>- Nr. of join letters with other ACs</li> <li>- Publication and accessibility (to the members and to the general public) of documents on the website</li> <li>- Members perception of MEDAC</li> <li>- Members plurality (nr. and profile of organizations)</li> <li>- Members entry and exit</li> <li>- Members rationale to join MEDAC, sense of belonging</li> <li>- Access to documents</li> <li>- Process traceability</li> </ul>        | a, b, g       |
| Efficiency<br>How it is done  | Achieves the desired results optimizing time and resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Delivery: implementation of working principles (art. 11 statutes).</li> <li>- Addressing critical issues in a timely and effective manner (meetings and special procedures)</li> <li>- Decisions (people involved participate and commit to the decision)</li> <li>- Steering (people involved facilitate timely decisions aligned with goals)</li> <li>- Work plans performance</li> <li>- Balance in representativeness (measures adopted and mechanisms to facilitate consensus)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Timeliness Adherence rate (% meetings organized according to the timeline)</li> <li>- Time to decision rates (routine, tactical and strategic decisions)</li> <li>- Number of touchpoints for decisions (input, feedback and discussion).</li> <li>- Work plan implementation rate (nr. tasks, actions and milestones completed)</li> <li>- Consensus rate (% decisions made in full agreement)</li> <li>- Minority rate (% decisions with a minority vote).</li> <li>- Existence of dispute resolution mechanisms (formal or informal).</li> <li>- Members perception on the clarity of the process</li> <li>- Members satisfaction with the mechanisms for decision-making</li> <li>- Professional interactions</li> <li>- Members assessment</li> </ul> | a, b, c, d, i |

|           |  |  |   |         |
|-----------|--|--|---|---------|
| Coherence | Ensuring correspondence of objectives with the CFP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Alignment of objectives (art. 44 CFP and art. 2 Statutes)</li> <li>- Contribution to the CFP (policy impact, to the extent possible)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Alignment score (formal): objectives set in the statutes</li> <li>- Alignment score (implemented): objectives pursued in the actual work.</li> <li>- Evidence of implemented recommendations: proxy 1. DG-MARE formal responses to recommendations. proxy 2. MEDAC track of impact on the GFCM.</li> </ul> | e, f, h |
|-----------|--|--|---|---------|

Table 5. MEDAC efficiency and effectiveness. Topics and output

| TOPICS IN THE WORK PLANS  | MEDAC WORK PLANS |      |      |      |      | ADVICE |  | LETTERS |                  | CONTRIBUTIONS |      | MULTIAC ADVICE             |      |
|---|------------------|------|------|------|------|--------|--|---------|------------------|---------------|------|----------------------------|------|
|   | 2020             | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | Nr.    | MEDAC Ref.                                       | Nr.     | MEDAC Ref.       | Nr.           | Ref. | Nr.                        | Ref. |
| Action Plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems |                  |      |      |      |      | 2      | 18/2022; 32/2023                                 | 2       | n*; 151/2023     |               |      |                            |      |
| Biodiversity  |                  |      |      |      |      |        |  |         |                  |               |      |                            |      |
| Climate change  |                  |      |      |      |      | 1      | 70/2021  |         |                  |               |      |                            |      |
| Discard Management Plans/Landing obligation                               |                  |      |      |      |      | 2      | 108/2022; 123/2024                               | 2       | 21/2020; 54/2023 | 1             |      |                            |      |
| Ecosystem approach  |                  |      |      |      |      | 1      | 66/2023  |         |                  |               |      |                            |      |
| EMFAF   |                  |      |      |      |      |        |  | 1       | 143/2020         | 3             |      |                            |      |
| Farm to Fork  |                  |      |      |      |      |        |  | 1       | 110/2020         |               |      |                            |      |
| Fishing opportunities   |                  |      |      |      |      | 5      | 200/2020; 186/2022; 338/2022; 122/2023; 147/2024 | 1       | 109/2023         |               |      |                            |      |
| Fuel crisis   |                  |      |      |      |      |        |  |         |                  |               |      |                            |      |
| Future CFP  |                  |      |      |      |      | 3      | 142/2021; 69/2022; 148/2024                      | 1       | 115/2021         | 1             |      |                            |      |
| Green deal  |                  |      |      |      |      | 2      | 336/2022; 111/2024                               |         |                  |               |      | 351/2020; 4 3 nc**         |      |
| Highly Migratory species & ICCAT related issues                           |                  |      |      |      |      | 2      | 105/2022; 321/2022                               | 1       | 238/2024         |               |      | 145/2021; 150/2021; 3 nc** |      |



|  | MEDAC WORK PLANS |  |  |  |  |  | ADVICE  |  | LETTERS |                                 | CONTRIBUTIONS | MULTIAC ADVICE |
|--|------------------|--|--|--|--|--|---|--|---------|---------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
|  |                  |  |  |  |  |  |   |  | 1       | 113/2024                        | 1             |                |
| Marine Spatial Planning                          |                  |  |  |  |  |  |   |  |         |                                 |               |                |
| Migratory movements of job seekers               |                  |  |  |  |  |  |   |  |         |                                 |               |                |
| MSEs   |                  |  |  |  |  |  | 2   | 321/2022; 73/2023                                | 1       | 29/2024                         | 1             | 1 nc**         |
| MultiAnnual Management Plans and regionalization |                  |  |  |  |  |  | 117/2020; 204/2020;<br>207/2020; 74/2022;<br>103/2022; 318/2022;<br>13/2023; 48/2023;<br>267/2023; 74/2024;<br>12 97/2024; 108/2024 | 203/2020;<br>268/2020;<br>249/2023;<br>4 29/2024 |         |                                 |               |                |
|  |                  |  |  |  |  |  | 3 99/2024   | 238/2020; 69/2023;                               |         |                                 |               |                |
| Non indigenous species                           |                  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 49/2023   |  | 1       | 103/2023                        |               |                |
| OECM   |                  |  |  |  |  |  |   |  |         |                                 |               |                |
| Pollution  |                  |  |  |  |  |  |   |  |         |                                 |               |                |
| Recreational fisheries                           |                  |  |  |  |  |  | 3 65/2024   | 62/2020; 39/2022;                                |         |                                 |               |                |
| Regulation on technical measures                 |                  |  |  |  |  |  | 2 60/2020; 251/2024   |  | 1       | 234/2024                        | 2             | 1 nc**         |
| Revision of the control regulation               |                  |  |  |  |  |  |   |  | 1       | nr*                             |               |                |
| Safety on board                                  |                  |  |  |  |  |  |   |  | 1       | 110/2021                        |               |                |
| Selectivity                                      |                  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 318/2022  |  |         |                                 |               |                |
| Sensitive habitat                                |                  |  |  |  |  |  |   |  |         |                                 |               |                |
| Socioeconomic indicators/aspects                 |                  |  |  |  |  |  | 3 59/2024   | 13/2023; 78/2023;                                |         | 116/2021;<br>294/2021;<br>3 nr* | 2             | 1 nc**         |
|  |                  |  |  |  |  |  |   |  |         |                                 |               |                |
| Vulnerable species                               |                  |  |  |  |  |  |   |  |         |                                 |               |                |
| Women  |                  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 262/2023  |  |         |                                 |               |                |

\* Collaboration with DG Employment; Invitation for detailed exchange on the Control Regulation with the NWWAC and PelAC; Multi AC letter fishers of the future

**\*\* NWWAC MEDAC SWWAC CCRUP feedback on public initiative "CO2 emissions of engines – methodology for their reduction; NWWAC MEDAC SWWAC CCRUP feedback on public initiative "CO2 emissions of engines – methodology for their reduction"; Joint letter MEDAC and SWWAC On Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for Atlantic Bluefin Tuna; Invitation letter to DG MARE for detailed exchange on the Control Regulation with the some ACs; Multi-AC letter "Fishers of the Future" EU-wide participatory foresight project; Joint LDAC-MAC-AAC request for clarification on role and involvement of Advisory Councils in Energy Transition Partnership (ETP) Support Group**

Table 6. MEDAC efficiency and effectiveness. Meetings during the performance review period (2020–2024)

| MEDAC MEETINGS |     |     |     |     |     |      |         |              |     |          |       |      |       |      |                            |        |          | EXTERNAL MEETINGS |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|---------|--------------|-----|----------|-------|------|-------|------|----------------------------|--------|----------|-------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| WORKING GROUPS |     |     |     |     |     |      |         | FOCUS GROUPS |     |          |       |      |       |      |                            |        |          |                   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Year           | WG1 | WG2 | WG3 | WG4 | WG5 | FGEO | WESTMED | EASTMED      | SoS | ADRIATIC | ICCAT | EFCA | STECF | GFCM | Joint & other<br>AC events | Others | Projects |                   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2020           | 5   | 1   |     | 2   | 2   | 1    | 2       |              | 1   | 4        | 3     | 2    | 4     | 1    |                            | 3      | 1        |                   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2021           | 5   | 1   | 1   | 3   | 2   | 2    | 2       |              | 1   | 3        | 2     |      | 9     | 13   | 5                          | 20     | 6        |                   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2022           | 6   | 2   | 2   |     | 2   | 1    | 3       |              | 1   | 2        | 3     |      | 5     | 25   | 2                          | 14     | 7        |                   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2023           | 5   | 2   | 3   | 1   | 2   | 2    | 1       |              | 1   | 2        |       |      | 7     | 20   | 5                          | 7      | 1        |                   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2024           | 8   | 2   | 4   | 1   | 2   | 1    | 1       |              | 1   | 1        | 2     | 2    | 8     | 11   | 3                          | 24     | 2        |                   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Source: MEDAC Annual reports. MEDAC often organises joint WG meetings (e.g. WG1-WG5). In those cases, the meetings are recorded twice, one if each of them.

Table 7. Performance assessment framework. Coherence: alignment score CFP and MEDAC objectives

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Ensuring correspondence of objectives with the CFP   |  |
| <b>Alignment score (formal): CFP and MEDAC objectives</b>  |  |
| CFP (art. 44 R. 1380/2013)   | MEDAC Statutes (art.2)   |
| 2. Advisory Councils may   | 2.1 MEDAC may:   |
| a) submit recommendations and suggestions on matters relating to the management of fisheries and the socio-economic and conservation aspects of fisheries and aquaculture to the Commission and to the Member State concerned, and, in particular, recommendations on how to simplify rules on fisheries management; | a) submit recommendations and suggestions on matters concerning the management of fisheries and the socioeconomic and conservation aspects of fisheries and aquaculture to the Commission and to the Member State concerned, and, in particular, recommendations on how to simplify rules on fisheries management; |
| (b) inform the Commission and Member States of problems relating to the management and the socio-economic and conservation aspects of fisheries and,   | b) inform the Commission and Member States of problems relating to the management and the socioeconomic and conservation aspects of fisheries and, as  |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| where appropriate, of aquaculture in their geographical area or field of competence and propose solutions to overcome those problems;<br><br>(c) contribute, in close cooperation with scientists, to the collection, supply and analysis of data necessary for the development of conservation measures.  | necessary, of aquaculture in their geographical areas or fields of competence, and propose solutions to overcome those problems;<br><br>c) contribute, in close cooperation with scientists, to the collection, supply, and analysis of the data necessary for supporting decisions on conservation measures and drafting management plans.   |
| If an issue is of common interest to two or more Advisory Councils, they shall coordinate their positions with a view to adopting joint recommendations on that issue.   | 2.5 When issues are of common interest to other Advisory Councils, MEDAC and the other Advisory Councils involved may coordinate their positions for the purpose of drafting joint recommendations  |
| 3. Advisory Councils shall be consulted on joint recommendations pursuant to Article 18. They may also be consulted by the Commission and by Member States in respect of other measures. Their advice shall be taken into account. Those consultations shall be without prejudice to the consultation of STECF or other scientific bodies. The opinions of the Advisory Councils may be submitted to all Member States concerned and to the Commission.  | 2.2 When consulted on joint recommendations, under Article 18 ("regionalization") of Basic Regulation No.1380/2013, MEDAC may draft recommendations and suggestions aimed at improving the implementation of the European legislation in the Mediterranean for the relevant fishery undertakings and any other activity necessary for carrying out and achieving their objectives   |
|  | 2.4 MEDAC also has the authority to discuss the sustainable management of species shared with third countries, including the highly migratory species present in the Mediterranean Sea.   |
| <b>Alignment score (implemented): objectives pursued in the actual work</b>  |   |
| CFP objectives   | MEDAC process and output  |
| Art. 2.<br><br>1. The CFP shall ensure that fishing and aquaculture activities are environmentally sustainable 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.<br><br>2. The CFP shall apply the precautionary approach to fisheries management, and shall aim to ensure that exploitation of living marine biological resources restores and maintains populations of harvested species above levels which can produce the maximum sustainable yield.<br><br>In order to reach the objective of progressively restoring and maintaining populations of fish stocks above biomass levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield, the maximum sustainable yield exploitation rate shall be achieved | Advice on:<br><br>1. Fisheries Management and conservation: Multi-Annual Plans (West Med, Small pelagic in the Adriatic); discard plans and selectivity; highly migratory stocks (BFT); recreational fisheries.; technical measures. WG1, 2, 4. FGs with geographical remit (4)<br><br>2. Sustainability and EAFM: yearly contribution to the Commission Communication to the EP and the Council on State of play and orientations for fisheries; recommendations for the implementation of EAFM, particularly in the Adriatic; guidance and suggestion in the implementation of MPAs and FRAs. WG1, WG4, FGs.<br><br>3. Climate, energy transition and environmental challenges: consideration of causes, effects and climate-related risks, recommendations on decarbonization.WG3, FGs |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>by 2015 where possible and, on a progressive, incremental basis at the latest by 2020 for all stocks.</p> <p>3. The CFP shall implement the ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management so as to ensure that negative impacts of fishing activities on the marine ecosystem are minimised, and shall endeavour to ensure that aquaculture and fisheries activities avoid the degradation of the marine environment.</p> <p>4. The CFP shall contribute to the collection of scientific data.</p> <p>5. The CFP shall, in particular:</p> <p>(a) gradually eliminate discards, on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the best available scientific advice, by avoiding and reducing, as far as possible, unwanted catches, and by gradually ensuring that catches are landed;</p> <p>(b) where necessary, make the best use of unwanted catches, without creating a market for such of those catches that are below the minimum conservation reference size;</p> <p>(c) provide conditions for economically viable and competitive fishing capture and processing industry and land-based fishing related activity;</p> <p>(d) provide for measures to adjust the fishing capacity of the fleets to levels of fishing opportunities consistent with paragraph 2, with a view to having economically viable fleets without overexploiting marine biological resources;</p> <p>(e) promote the development of sustainable Union aquaculture activities to contribute to food supplies and security and employment;</p> <p>(f) contribute to a fair standard of living for those who depend on fishing activities, bearing in mind coastal fisheries and socio-economic aspects;</p> <p>(g) contribute to an efficient and transparent internal market for fisheries and aquaculture products and contribute to ensuring a level-playing field for fisheries and aquaculture products marketed in the Union;</p> <p>(h) take into account the interests of both consumers and producers;</p> <p>(i) promote coastal fishing activities, taking into account socio-economic aspects;</p> <p>(j) be coherent with the Union environmental legislation, in particular with the objective of achieving a good environmental status by 2020 as set out in Article 1(i) of Directive 2008/56/EC, as well as with other Union policies.</p> | <p>4. Biodiversity: invasive species occurrence, implications and solutions (mitigation and utilization) particularly for algae, and blue crab, FGAdriatic and FGEast Mediterranean</p> <p>5. Socioeconomic aspects and gender issues: socioeconomic impacts of management plans and conservation measures, data for evidence-informed decision-making, generational renewal. WG5, FG Equal opportunities.</p> <p>See also table 5.</p> |
|---|---|

Table 8. *Performance assessment framework. Impact: DG-MARE formal responses to recommendations*

Analysis of the DG-MARE letters responding to MEDAC advice (responses to contributions, letters and other correspondence is excluded).

| YEAR | REFERENCE                            | TOPIC   | MEDAC ADVICE         | ACCEPT | REJECT | NON COMMITAL |
|------|--------------------------------------|---|----------------------|--------|--------|--------------|
| 2020 | Ref. Ares (2020)394841 - 22/01/2020  | ACs request for flexibility in our budget management – receipt of instalments   |                      | 1      | 0      | 0            |
| 2020 | Ref. Ares (2020)2078371 - 16/04/2020 | Reply to MEDAC's opinion on the list of relevant species issued by the Recreational Fisheries (WG4) <sup>1</sup>  | 62/2020              | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2020 | Ref. Ares (2020)2253685 - 27/04/2020 | MEDAC opinion for a Joint recommendation on the definition of "direct fishing"  |                      | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2020 |                                      | Limitations to the height of purse seines   |                      | 0      | 1      | 0            |
| 2020 | Ref. Ares(2020)5409681 - 12/10/2020  | Your opinion on the MAP for Small Pelagic resources in the Adriatic Sea   | Global effort regime | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2020 | Ref. Ares (2020)7072611 - 25/11/2020 | Your Ref.:238/2020 _MEDAC opinion on invasive species and algae   | 238/2020             | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2020 | Ref. Ares (2020)7870145 - 22/12/2020 | Multi-AC advice on the "Maritime sector – a green post-COVID future"  |                      | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2021 | Ref. Ares (2021)3449001 - 25/05/2021 | Your Ref.:70/2021 _MEDAC opinion on climate change  | 70/2021              | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2021 | Ref. Ares (2021)5306906 - 27/08/2021 | Reply to MEDAC advice on MSY, Fishing opportunities 2022 and GFCM decisions   | 142/2021             | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2022 | Ref. Ares (2022)2129891 - 23/03/2022 | 39/2022 _MEDAC Advice on Draft EU Recommendation on the sustainable management of recreational fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea   |                      | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2022 | Ref. Ares (2022)3292089 - 28/04/2022 | 73/2022 _MEDAC Advice on Egyptian fleet and 75/2022 _MEDAC advice to avoid Libyan transshipments  | 73/2022              | 1      | 0      | 0            |
| 2022 | Ref. Ares (2022)4342597 - 13/06/2022 | my letter of 10 December 2021 to receive your respective Advisory Council's recommendation about how to best implement the advice published by ICES on 4 November 2021 on European eel ( <i>Anguilla anguilla</i> ) |                      | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2022 | Ref. Ares (2022)5989661 - 29/08/2022 | MEDAC recommendation on the COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL "Towards more sustainable fishing in the EU: state of play and orientations for 2023"                      | 182/2022             | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2023 | Ref. Ares (2023)261605 - 13/01/2023  | advice Westmed 2023 (West Med MAP).   |                      | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2023 | Ref. Ares (2023)1212823 - 20/02/2023 | opinion on management measures and socioeconomic aspects in the Mediterranean Sea   |                      | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2023 | Ref. Ares (2023)3795700 - 01/06/2023 | EU Action Plan "Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries"   |                      | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2023 | Ref. Ares (2023)4595580 - 03/07/2023 | MEDAC advice on the enforcement of the new GFCM MAPs in the Strait of Sicily  | 48/2023              | 0      | 0      | 1            |

| YEAR  | REFERENCE                            | TOPIC  | MEDAC ADVICE | ACCEPT | REJECT | NON COMMITAL |
|-------|--------------------------------------|--|--------------|--------|--------|--------------|
| 2023  | Ref. Ares (2023)4596122 - 03/07/2023 | socioeconomic aspects related to the management of Red Coral   | 78/2023      | 1      | 0      | 0            |
| 2023  | Ref. Ares (2023)4803964 - 11/07/2023 | Invasive species (NIS) in the eastern Mediterranean Sea.   | 69/2023      | 1      | 0      | 0            |
| 2023  | Ref. Ares (2023)4998852 - 18/07/2023 | Landing Obligation and the western Mediterranean multi-annual management plan (West Med MAP)   | 109/2023     | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2023  | Ref. Ares (2023)5360712 - 02/08/2023 | GFCM Working Group on Management Strategy Evaluation (WGMSE) on Adriatic small pelagics  | 73/2023      | 0      | 1      | 0            |
| 2023  | Ref. Ares (2023)5957954 - 01/09/2023 | Mediterranean Advisory Council's opinion on the need for an ecosystem approach implementation with regard to Adriatic small pelagics.  | 66/2023      | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2024  | Ref. Ares (2024)1129415 - 14/02/2024 | advice on preparations of the decisions on the fishing opportunities for 2024 for fish stocks in the EU Mediterranean Waters.  | 267/2023     | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2024  | Ref. Ares (2024)1077350 - 13/02/2024 | equal opportunities in the fishery sector  | 262/2023     | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2024  | Ref. Ares (2024)3471481 - 14/05/2024 | New generation of fishers  | 59/2024      | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2024  | Ref. Ares (2024)4574932 - 25/06/2024 | Next steps of the multiannual management plan for demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean Sea (the MAP  | 108/2024     | 0      | 1      | 0            |
| 2024  | Ref. Ares (2024)4575196 - 25/06/2024 | State of the art – Pagellus bogaraveo in the GSAs 1, 2 and 3   | 94/2024      | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2024  | Ref. Ares (2024)4818342 - 04/07/2024 | Marine Recreational Fisheries  | 65/2024      | 0      | 1      | 0            |
| 2024  | Ref. Ares (2024)8080655 - 14/11/2024 | Long-Distance Advisory Council's (LDAC) recommendations in relation to the on-going 24th special meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). |              | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2024  | Ref. Ares (2024)9178427 - 20/12/2024 | STECF Expert Working Group (EWG) 24-16 on technical measures   |              | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| 2024  | Ref. Ares (2024)9182061 - 20/12/2024 | Fishing opportunities 2025   |              | 0      | 0      | 1            |
| TOTAL |                                      |  |              | 4      | 4      | 23           |

Table 9. Performance assessment framework. Impact: tracking of MEDAC impact in the GFCM advice  
Elaborated and facilitated by MEDAC Secretariat.



| Date<br>transposition of<br>MEDAC advice | TOPIC   | MEDAC ADVICE   | MANAGEMENT RESULTS   |
|--|---|--|--|
| 2023                                     | MEDAC<br>Stakeholders<br>involvement in the<br>GFCM Sub-<br>Regional Groups | At each GFCM Sub-Regional Committees (SRCs) MEDAC contribution in 2023 was included at the beginning of the day, as follows:<br><br>"4. Status of central Mediterranean fisheries<br><br>• Status of central Mediterranean stocks, including assessments emanating from plenary and relevant benchmark sessions of the Working Groups on Stock Assessment (GFCM Secretariat)<br><br>• MEDAC contribution on the current management measures in the area (MEDAC)"   |  |
| 21 June 2023<br>(SAC)                    | European eel  | MEDAC advice on the European eel Ref. 40/2022: "The MEDAC recalls that any additional management measure on fishing, in addition to being inefficient in the absence of other measures on the other mortality factors, would have significant socio-economic implications for the European fishing and aquaculture sector."  | SAC: the current management measures will be in place one more year before the long term management plan to better understand the impact of the current management measures before to take new decisions and to have a truly pragmatic research, also improving the socioeconomic information.   |
| 21 June 2023<br>(SAC)                    | Red Coral   | MEDAC advice on Red coral Ref. 78/2023: Special attention was paid to the need of data collection and traceability in the entire value chain.; MEDAC members raised up the need to collect harmonized data in the whole GFCM competence Area; - this common legislative framework will become the tool for the data collection, the programmes of the observers and the needed traceability of the Red coral in the market; [...]The MEDAC deems appropriate that the Regional Research Programme of the GFCM should be devoted to a real stakeholders' involvement in the management decisions, considering the socioeconomic aspects and the related consequences. | SAC: [...] - Ensure the regular and systematic presence of observers on board (or at landing sites) as the only source of trusted information on the size structure composition of catches and weight of red coral stocks → comprising fundamental data also for the update of stock assessments [...] - Pending the conclusions or the research programme, extend the current transitional management measures for an extra year (to 2024); - Ensure stakeholder engagement in every step of the management process including through the GFCM Research programme on red coral. |
| 21 June 2023<br>(SAC)                    | West MED  | MEDAC Advice Ref. 318/2022 – [...] MEDAC suggests a wider use of Fisheries Restricted Areas (FRA) as a complementary measure to improve selectivity. This management measure has been already suggested in the previous MEDAC advice and FRAs can effectively support fish stock recovery, when well designed and implemented, as the Jabuka/Pomo FRA shows. [...] Therefore, the conclusion of the study carried out by the IEO was that the losses generated by the use of 52 mm square mesh codend are unsustainable, making its use unviable, unless economic aid were available to compensate for the significant losses that are generated.                    | SAC: - Despite the poor status of most demersal stocks, some signs of recovery were evident in particular for some stocks of European hake and blue and red shrimp.<br><br>The SAC is invited to: Agree to continue working towards the improvement of selectivity through the implementation of pilot projects in conjunction with the concurrent exploration of other measures such as MCRS and spatial closures (FRAs), also including the exploration of future compensation schemes triggered by fisher good-practice and an analysis of socioeconomic repercussions        |

|                       |   |  |  |
|-----------------------|---|--|--|
| 21 June 2023<br>(SAC) | New establishment of FRA - Marti and Sète FRA | MEDAC Advice Ref.49/2023 - In the EU Western Mediterranean, the current multiannual plan (MAP) is already reducing the fishing days, improving selectivity, closing additional areas and the red shrimp catches are already limited.   | <p>SAC: - A revised proposal for a FRA to protect assemblages of VME indicator species in the Marti and Sète canyons of the Gulf of Lion (GSA 7), also according to the newly adopted GFCM minimum standards for FRAs (proposal available in GFCM:SAC24/2023/5), was presented at the WGVME-EFH 2023 and the SRC-WM 2023: [...]</p> <p>- Nevertheless, several contrasting arguments were raised by the WGVME-EFH and the SRC-WM:</p> <p>- the need for additional stakeholder consultations in 2023 including Spanish fisheries, the need for a reflection on the social acceptability and the implementability of an additional closure in the Gulf of Lion given the existing spatial measures already in place and under definition, towards a more rational and holistic technical appraisal of all measures foreseen for the Gulf of Lion area,</p> <p>- the fact that the Gulf of Lion was part of a regionalization process of the protection of biodiversity and vulnerable species, including social and economic analyses</p> |
| 21 June 2023<br>(SAC) | SRC-Central-eastern Med                       | Ref. 49/2023 - The enforcement of many management measures does not allow to understand what the most effective management measure is to achieve the desired objectives. - Ref. 48/2023 - The following concepts and conclusive suggestions to improve fishery management in the SoS have been shared by MEDAC members as valuable ways to be taken into consideration for the improvement of the stock status based on the available scientific knowledge: [...] 2) Protect areas where critical phases of the life cycles of fishery resources (recruitment and reproduction) and protected and/or species indicator of sensitive habitats are concentrated. | <p>SAC: The SAC agreed to perform a socio-economic analysis of the fleet, towards addressing the needs of the existing multiannual management plans and their socioeconomic impacts. SAC: Agree to continue the work for the identification of areas of priority for spatial management, towards the establishment of new FRAs, as well as towards defining fishing grounds and adequate temporal closures.</p>  |
| 21 June 2023<br>(SAC) | EAF approach                                  | Ref. 66/2023 - It is MEDAC's view that: [...] 4. henceforth, the implementation of the ecosystem approach is indispensable and urgent, introducing information into the modelling that takes into account the impact of climate change and changes in nutrient availability;   | <p>SAC agreed to carry out a review of existing good practices in the application of holistic and participatory management approaches for SSF (i.e. the ecosystem approach to fisheries management, co-management, etc.), with a view to identifying select fisheries in the eastern Mediterranean subregion that could be candidates for dedicated EAF case studies.</p>  |

|  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| 29 May 2023 and<br>21 June 2023<br>(SAC) | MSE process for<br>small pelagics and<br>SRC-AS small<br>pelagics | <p>Ref. 73/2023 – It is important that the process will be based on a continuous consultation in collaboration regularly throughout the process and by organizing as soon as possible informal webinars to collect the opinions from a heterogeneous platform of stakeholders with particular attention to the working languages and the simplification of the scientific information to collect informed feedback. Ref.66/2023 – It is MEDAC's view that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. any decision regarding resource management in the Adriatic should be taken after a socioeconomic impact study has been carried out with reference to the foreseen measures;</li> <li>2. where the management measures adopted to date have led to positive results, these should be maintained so as not to create further disruption to the sector and to the balance achieved with difficulty;</li> <li>3. the different predictive models used for the assessments should provide stable, consistent results;</li> </ol> | <p>SAC: the timeframe of the stakeholders consultation for the MSE process will be from July to October 2023 (first consultation) and then from November to February. (Source: workplan for MSE) – SAC: Agree on the extension of the transitional period foreseen by Recommendation GFCM/44/2021/20 by one year with the objective of adopting long-term management measures in 2024 (for implementation in 2025), under the same conditions (i.e. further decrease in the catch limits in accordance with existing reductions) and prolong the whole package required for the transition towards the implementation of the long-term measures (i.e. the finalization of the sardine benchmark, the MSE and the determination of an allocation key) by one year: Endorse the implementation of the roadmap for the finalization of the benchmark of sardine and quantitative MSE, including a data call for disaggregated acoustic survey data in June 2023, and performing stakeholder consultations.</p> <p>SAC Discussed and agreed to carry out pilot projects in selected areas of the western, eastern and central Mediterranean and the Adriatic Sea to specifically assess the extension of the 1000 m trawling ban to 800 m in terms of the impacts on stock status, of the potential displacement of fishing effort and on socioeconomic indicators → including the way forward towards identifying specific areas and the methodologies to be used (terms of reference) then the GFCM pilot study was modified excluding the possible closure of the area between 600 and 800 m.</p> |
| 29 March 2023                            | FRA 1000 m  | <p>Advice Ref.49/2023 – First of all, the average depth of the catches of red shrimp in the Mediterranean Sea is between 640 and 780 m, therefore the extension of the FRA would cause the closure of this fishing activity and would concentrate the fishing effort on smaller and shallower areas, with a considerably higher and more intense exploitation. With the related socioeconomic consequences on the whole EU Mediterranean fleet</p>   | <p>The GFCM Rec.45/2022/12 considered the main indications provided by MEDAC advice Ref. 62/2020 including the list of the relevant species.</p>   |
| 11 November 2022                         | Recreational fishery  | MEDAC advice Ref. 62/2020 provided the list of the relevant species for Recreational Fishery   | <p>The GFCM Rec.45/2022/12 considered the main indications provided by MEDAC advice Ref. 62/2020 including the list of the relevant species.</p>   |
| 7 July 2021                              | EMFAF – Insurance System  | MEDAC advice on climate change – Ref.:70/2021 MEDAC Invites: "The Commission and the Member States to provide for appropriate support measures, such as insurance regimes and social protection systems for the groups that are the most exposed to climate change."   | <p>REGULATION (EU) 2021/1139 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 7 July 2021 establishing the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 – Consideranda 32</p>  |

|               |                           |  |  |
|---------------|---------------------------|--|--|
| 30 March 2021 | Alien Species Observatory | MEDAC Ref.238/2020 "1. Constituting and developing an international coordination centre and a Mediterranean warning network to detect, monitor and manage invasions. The centre should be based or have monitoring centres close to the entry points of invasive species, such as Strait of Gibraltar or the Suez Canal" and Ref.70/2021 | <p>GFCM SAC Report 2022 "Monitoring programmes [...]"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue supporting key regional activities including: [...]</li> <li>- monitoring NIS across the Mediterranean, including through the establishment of the Observatory.</li> </ul> |
|---------------|---------------------------|--|--|

Table 10. Performance assessment framework. Impact. . MEDAC contributions on the socioeconomic aspects/impact/avaluation from 2022 onwards

Compiled and facilitated by MEDAC Secretariat

|  |  |
|--|--|
| MEDAC contribution EC Consultation of stakeholders on social data in fisheries:<br><a href="https://www.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2024/04/80_medac_contribution_annex_i_social_data_in_fisheries.pdf">https://www.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2024/04/80_medac_contribution_annex_i_social_data_in_fisheries.pdf</a>   |  |
| - MEDAC advice on the socioeconomic aspects related to the management of Red Coral:<br><a href="https://www.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2023/05/78_medac_advice_red_coral.pdf">https://www.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2023/05/78_medac_advice_red_coral.pdf</a>   |  |
| Advice on the indicators available for the purpose of assessing the socioeconomic impact of the Mediterranean management plans:<br><a href="https://www.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2023/01/13_advice_indicators_available_assessing_socioeconomic_impact_med_maps.pdf">https://www.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2023/01/13_advice_indicators_available_assessing_socioeconomic_impact_med_maps.pdf</a>   |  |
| -Annex to the advice on the indicators available for the purpose of assessing the socioeconomic impact of the Mediterranean management plans:<br><a href="https://www.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2023/01/13_annex_to_medac_advice_indicators_available_assessing_socioeconomic_impact_med_maps.pdf">https://www.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2023/01/13_annex_to_medac_advice_indicators_available_assessing_socioeconomic_impact_med_maps.pdf</a> |  |
| DG MARE reply letter to MEDAC advice on the indicators available for the purpose of assessing the socioeconomic impact of the Med management plans:<br><a href="https://www.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2023/02/25_dg_mare_reply_letter_dg_medc_advice_socioeconomic_impact_maps_med.pdf">https://www.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2023/02/25_dg_mare_reply_letter_dg_medc_advice_socioeconomic_impact_maps_med.pdf</a>                             |  |
| MEDAC advice on the selectivity improvement and compensation mechanism in the West Med<br><a href="https://www.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2022/11/318_medac_advice_compensation_selectivity_wmed.pdf">https://www.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2022/11/318_medac_advice_compensation_selectivity_wmed.pdf</a>  |  |
| MEDAC letter to DG MARE on request for collaboration with DG EMPL<br><a href="https://www.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2021/12/294_medac_letter_request_socioeconomic_data.pdf">https://www.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2021/12/294_medac_letter_request_socioeconomic_data.pdf</a>   |  |
| DG MARE reply letter to MEDAC request<br><a href="https://www.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2022/02/21_dg_mare_reply_medac_letter_socioeconomic_data.pdf">https://www.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2022/02/21_dg_mare_reply_medac_letter_socioeconomic_data.pdf</a>   |  |
| - MEDAC recommendation on the COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL "Towards more sustainable fishing in the EU: state of play and orientations for 2023":<br><a href="https://www.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2022/08/182_medac_recom_fishing_opportunities_2023.pdf">https://www.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2022/08/182_medac_recom_fishing_opportunities_2023.pdf</a>                                   |  |

## 9.2. Desk research

Desk research and content analysis of documentation were conducted to gather and systematically examine existing information. This involved reviewing MEDAC Work Plans and Annual Reports (10), regulation (10), advice (55), letters (22), contributions (23), multi-ac advice and letters (10), DG Mare replies (53), meeting minutes, presentations, and other relevant documents to identify key themes, patterns, and insights. Content analysis allowed for the extraction of data by categorizing and interpreting textual information, providing a comprehensive understanding and supporting the triangulation of findings from other research methods.

## 9.3. Observing meetings

The reviewers observed 17 meetings. While the performance review period covers the years 2020–2024, they observed also meetings held in the first half of 2025 to have the opportunity to assesses different bodies (GA, WG, FGs), reduce the impact of contextual factors in the observations and provide a balanced view of typical behaviours, dynamics and decision-making patterns over time.

The scheduling of the performance review did not allow to observe any ExCom meeting.

Reviewers attended all 11 hybrid meetings in person and used the following tools:

- a standardized template to assess chairing and interactions
- a participation tracker to record number, duration and type of interventions by Medac Members.
- an agenda tracker to record the topics addressed and their alignment with the work programme and MEDAC goals
- observation notes to document informal interactions and group dynamics, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the meeting environment.

Table 11. List of MEDAC meetings observed for the performance review.

| Format | Date       | Type | Topics  | Evidence   |
|--------|------------|------|---|--|
| Hybrid | 16/10/2024 | WG1  | DG MARE proposals–GFCM<br>Legislative corner<br>Draft advice IMO<br>Risk Analysis approach to stock status<br>Stock assessment in Catalonia | Agenda<br>List of participants<br>Presentations (3)<br>Minutes of the Meeting<br>Observation tools (4) |
| Hybrid | 16/10/2024 | WG2  | Preliminary results JDP blue fin tuna<br>Results SCRS annual meeting<br>Mediterranean SWO State of the Art                                  | Agenda<br>List of participants<br>Presentations (2)<br>Minutes of the Meeting<br>Observation tools (4) |

| Format | Date       | Type        | Topics   | Evidence   |
|--------|------------|-------------|--|--|
| Hybrid | 16/10/2024 | WG5-WG1     | CFP evaluation<br>EMFF implementation data<br>AER<br>SSF perspectives and opportunities  | Agenda<br>List of participants<br>Presentations (2)<br>Observation tools (4)                           |
| Online | 04/12/2025 | WG3-WG1     | MSP<br>Projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BEYOND: Offshore wind farms and interactions between ecosystem, fisheries, aquaculture and offshore wind farms.</li> <li>Decarbonyt project</li> <li>LIFE EU sharks</li> </ul> MSFD: descriptor 7<br>Insurance and climate change | Agenda<br>List of participants<br>Presentations (7)<br>Minutes of the meeting<br>Observation tools (3) |
| Online | 05/12/2025 | WG1         | Legislative corner<br>Decisions adopted by the GFCM<br>Decisions adopted by ICCAT<br>Proposed topics to be included in letter to new Commissioner  | Agenda<br>List of participants<br>Minutes of the meeting<br>Observation tools (3)                      |
| Hybrid | 24/02/2025 | WK          | Seawise Project Regional Review Workshop with MEDAC  | Agenda<br>List of participants<br>Presentations (3)<br>Observation tools (4)                           |
| Hybrid | 25/02/2025 | FG WEST-MED | Biological and socioeconomic impacts of selectivity measures for demersal fisheries<br>Compensation mechanism in the West Med MAP by MS  | Agenda<br>List of participants<br>Presentations (1)<br>Minutes of the meeting<br>Observation tools (4) |
| Hybrid | 25/02/2025 | WG1         | Legislative corner<br>Fisheries communities profiles<br>Ocean Pact<br>Public Consultation on the CFP evaluation  | Agenda<br>List of participants<br>Presentations (4)<br>Minutes of the meeting<br>Observation tools (4) |
| Hybrid | 25/02/2025 | GA          | Reporting: accounts and activity reports<br>Functioning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>election of WG/FG coordinators</li> <li>Amendment of internal rules</li> <li>Member status and fees payment</li> </ul>   | Agenda<br>List of participants<br>Observation tools (3)  |



| Format | Date       | Type                | Topics  | Evidence   |
|--------|------------|---------------------|---|--|
| Hybrid | 25/02/2025 | WG4                 | GFCM Research program on MRF<br>Regulations on MRF adopted by regional governments  | Agenda<br>List of participants<br>Presentations (2)<br>Observation tools (4)                           |
| Hybrid | 26/02/2025 | WG3                 | MEDAC contribution to Medigreen Conference and MPAs Seminar<br>EU fisheries external action<br>MSP stakeholder involvement in France<br>Seminars on SSCF and LSF                                  | Agenda<br>List of participants<br>Presentations (4)<br>Minutes of the meeting<br>Observation tools (4) |
| Hybrid | 26/02/2025 | FG Strait of Sicily | Stock status<br>Mitigation measures for elasmobranchs<br>GFCM decisions<br>ICCAT recommendation in the Gulf of Lion<br>Topics for the ICCAT Seminar   | Agenda<br>List of participants<br>Presentations (4)<br>Observation tools (4)                           |
| Hybrid | 26/02/2025 | FG EastMed          | Indigenous species: concept note for a pilot and GFM observatory<br>Deep-water shrimp fisheries   | Agenda<br>List of participants<br>Presentations (2)<br>Observation tools (4)                           |
| Online | 14/04/2025 | WG2                 | E-BFT Carcasses caught by trawlers  | Agenda<br>List of participants<br>Observation tools (3)  |
| Online | 15/04/2025 | WG1                 | Legislative corner<br>Advice on technical measures Regulation<br>New Control regulation<br>Public Consultation on next MFF  | Agenda<br>List of participants<br>Presentations (1)<br>Observation tools (3)                           |
| Online | 15/04/2025 | FG West-Med         | GFCM WG Hake<br>Climate Change and white shrimp expansion<br>Spatial management: integration of fisheries and ecological data<br>Update on West Med MAP implementation                            | Agenda<br>List of participants<br>Presentations (3)<br>Observation tools (3)                           |
| Online | 16/04/2025 | FG Adriatic         | Small-pelagic: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>landings and GFCM MAP annual quotas</li> <li>possible causes on the decline</li> <li>status and effects of environmental changes</li> </ul> | Agenda<br>List of participants<br>Presentations (6)<br>Observation tools (3)                           |



| Format | Date | Type | Topics  | Evidence |
|--------|------|------|---|----------|
|        |      |      | Demersal fisheries: GFCM MAP impact<br>Blue crab: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>economical and financial damages in shellfish farms</li> <li>expansion dynamics in Adriatic lagoons and management hypothesis</li> </ul> |          |

Table 12. Template for meetings observation

|   | Acceptable | Needs improvement | Comments | Improvement ideas |
|---|------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|
| <b>CHAIRING</b>   |            |                   |          |                   |
| 1. Ensuring a common aim is achieved  |            |                   |          |                   |
| 2. Maintaining a good work environment  |            |                   |          |                   |
| 3. Arousing interest in participants and keeping it up                                |            |                   |          |                   |
| 4. Promoting the participation of everyone  |            |                   |          |                   |
| 5. Managing contrasting views   |            |                   |          |                   |
| 6. Preventing and managing complicated situations                                     |            |                   |          |                   |
| 7. Willingly and constructively engages difficult matters when necessary              |            |                   |          |                   |
| 8. Ensuring independence and impartiality   |            |                   |          |                   |
| <b>FACILITATION</b>   |            |                   |          |                   |
| 9. Facilitating interaction / giving the floor  |            |                   |          |                   |
| 10. Reorienting discussions   |            |                   |          |                   |
| 11. Summarising what has been said  |            |                   |          |                   |
| 12. Supporting of and flexibility in accommodating committee members' needs/interests |            |                   |          |                   |
| <b>REGULATION</b>   |            |                   |          |                   |
| 13. Development of work   |            |                   |          |                   |
| 14. Encouragement   |            |                   |          |                   |
| 15. Accepting proposals   |            |                   |          |                   |
| 16. Moderating heated discussions   |            |                   |          |                   |
| 17. Sticking to the agenda  |            |                   |          |                   |
| 18. Time management   |            |                   |          |                   |
| <b>INTERACTION</b>  |            |                   |          |                   |
| 19. Participants address each other with respect and frankness                        |            |                   |          |                   |
| 20. Quality of participation/discussion   |            |                   |          |                   |
| 21. Plurality of the participants profiles providing input                            |            |                   |          |                   |
| 22. Plurality of the participants providing input                                     |            |                   |          |                   |
| <b>TOPICS</b>   |            |                   |          |                   |
| 23. Quality of the presentations  |            |                   |          |                   |
| 24. Availability of support material  |            |                   |          |                   |
| 25. Explanations and additional clarifications  |            |                   |          |                   |

## 9.4 Survey

The survey was designed to gather members' perceptions of MEDAC's functioning and role. It included closed qualitative questions to assess specific aspects, along with opportunities for open-ended feedback. To avoid overburdening participants and account for stakeholder fatigue, the survey was intentionally kept short and focused—comprising 17 core questions plus 4 on the respondent's profile.

The survey was set-up in the 6 MEDAC working languages thanks to the support of the Secretariat and it was carried out between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 22<sup>th</sup> December 2024.

The response ratio (59% of the total members) is considered strong for online surveys targeting specialized groups, especially given the high volume of consultations that MEDAC members regularly participate in.

The background of the respondents reflects MEDAC membership in terms of Member States, geographical scope, membership tenure and organizations.

Figure 8. Profile of the survey respondents: Member states

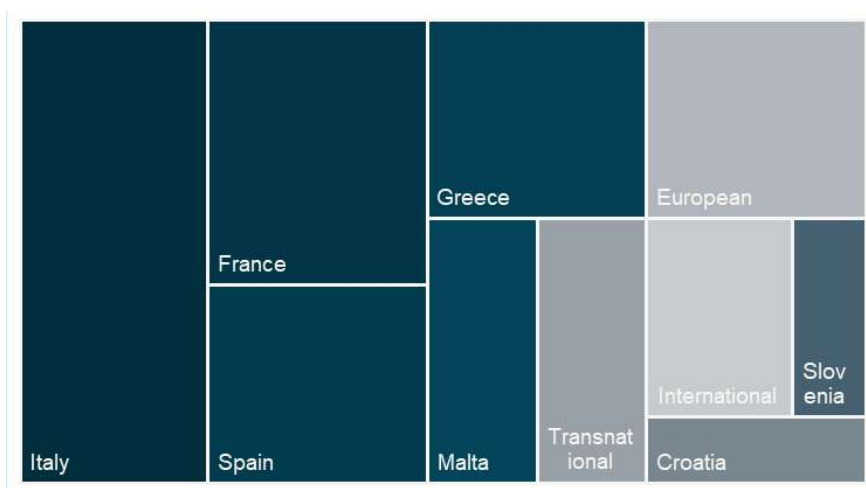


Figure 9. Profile of the survey respondents: geographical scope

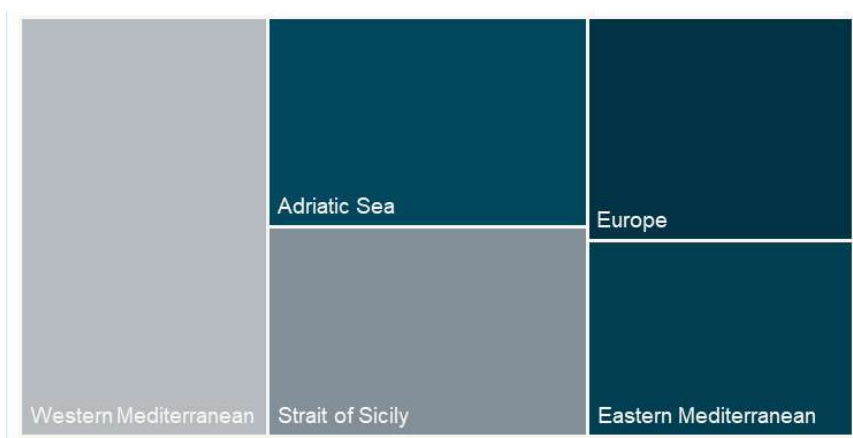


Figure 10. Profile of the survey respondents: membership tenure

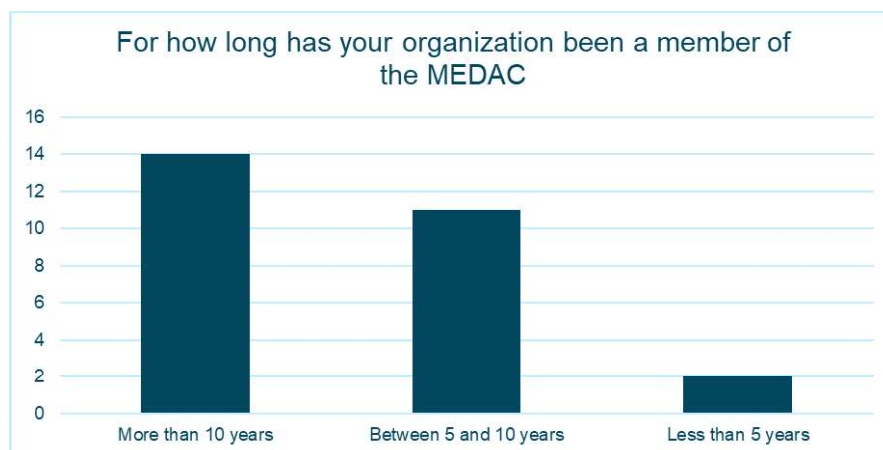


Figure 11. Profile of the survey respondents: organizations



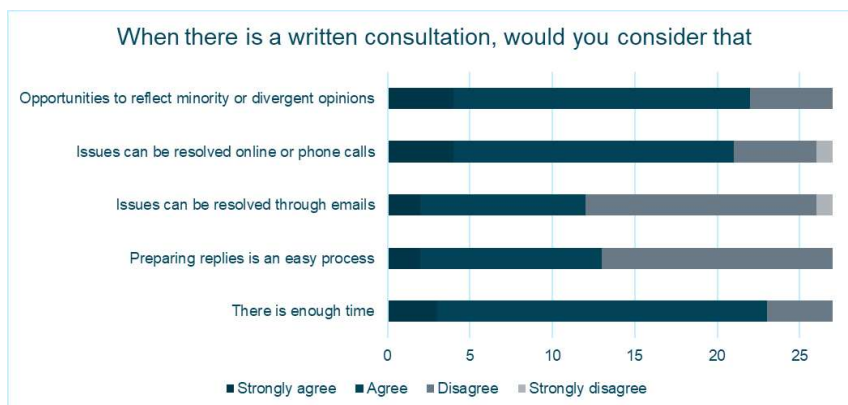
Overall, members who responded the survey joined MEDAC to influence and/or shape management policies, to increase opportunities to see facts, scientific evidence and management, to join forces with other organisations, and to network with other MEDAC members. They perceive MEDAC as a meeting place that provides an entry point for shaping fisheries management priorities and as a source of information and feedback, and have a clear preference to attend meetings in person (>90%) when possible.

This preference is consistent with the difficulty to debate tough issues online and resolve issues through emails being highlighted in the ease of participation.

Figure 12. MEDAC's members ease of performing key activities



Figure 13. MEDAC's members ease of performing key activities: written consultation



The MEDAC decision-making process is considered clear or very clear (89%) and they are satisfied or extremely satisfied with the mechanism for decision making. Remarkably, smaller countries and NGOs point to some level of dissatisfaction.

The functioning of MEDAC bodies is generally perceived as clear or very clear, though there are some indications of slight ambiguity regarding the ExCom. In terms of effectiveness, they are seen as capable of performing their roles:

- to determine MEDAC strategy and establish how it operates (GA);
- to develop recommendations and suggestions to the Commission and MSs and determine important issues for MEDAC (ExCom).
- to help MEDAC work more efficiently and deliver content that strengthens the recommendations and suggestions (WGs and FGs)
- to examine the issues thoroughly (FGs)

The performance of those bodies is shaped by the effectiveness of leadership in meetings.

Figure 14. Members perception about the impact of leadership in performance



Remarkably, 85% of the respondents report that MEDAC Secretariat's work is above or far above expected standards, particularly in providing timely information, responding adequately to questions, and supporting and following up on member's initiatives. There are differing views regarding the ability to ensure full traceability of recommendations and suggestions.

#### **SURVEY. Understanding what MEDAC means to you and how it performs.**

This survey is designed to understand what MEDAC means to you and how you perceive its functioning and operation. We've kept the questions to a minimum, so it should take about 10 minutes to complete.

Your feedback will inform how MEDAC is assessed and help develop recommendations to improve its performance. We are aware of the many surveys you receive and the limited time available, so please note that this information has direct practical application from which you will benefit as a MEDAC member.

We will process the results, and the answers according to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (EU) 2016/679 ensuring the privacy and security of your data. For additional information on the MEDAC performance review, you have a summary available [here](#) and can contact us any time at [marta.ballesteros@ieo.csic.es](mailto:marta.ballesteros@ieo.csic.es) and [mark.dickeycollas@gmail.com](mailto:mark.dickeycollas@gmail.com)

1. What made your organization join MEDAC. Please, select all that apply
  - To increase opportunities to see facts, scientific evidence and management
  - To influence and/or shape management policies
  - To network with other MEDAC members
  - To give a voice to my organisation
  - To increase the impact of my own organisation
  - To join forces with other organisations
  - To defend my organization's interest
  - To increase environmental protection
  - Other
  - If other, please, detail what made your organization join MEDAC
- . What does MEDAC mean to you? Please, select all that apply
  - A meeting point for different stakeholders

- An entry point to help set the agenda/priorities for fisheries management
- One of many different forums in which my organization participates
- A place to obtain important information and feedback
- A place in which I feel I belong
- Other

3. What feature(s), in your opinion, best define(s) MEDAC? Please choose your top three options. It's okay to select only one or two if that's all that applies to you.

- What best defines MEDAC is
- The second thing that defines MEDAC is
- The third thing that defines MEDAC is
  - o The diversity of stakeholders
  - o The geographical diversity
  - o The diversity of ways of thinking
  - o The diversity of interests represented
  - o Other

You chose other. Please, explain what feature, in your opinion, best defines MEDAC

#### **Participating in MEDAC**

4. Do you prefer to

- Attend the meetings in person when possible
- Attend the meetings online
- Attend the meetings only when the items in the agenda are relevant
- Not attend the meetings and read the minutes and documentation

#### **Decision-making in MEDAC**

5. The decision-making process in MEDAC is:

- Very clear
- Clear
- Slightly unclear
- Not clear at all

6. How easy is for you to do the following. Please, for each row select the one that applies (from very easy to very difficult)

- Intervene in a MEDAC meeting
- Understand the topics on the agenda
- Present an alternative viewpoint in a discussion during a meeting
- Debate tough issues in MEDAC meetings when in person
- Debate tough issues in MEDAC meetings when online
- Provide feedback to an external consultation into MEDAC
- Find documentation on the Website
  - o Very easy
  - o Easy
  - o Difficult
  - o Very difficult

7. How satisfied do you feel with how decisions are made in MEDAC?

In general, I feel:

- o Extremely satisfied

- Satisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Extremely dissatisfied

8. When there is a written consultation, would you consider that:

- There is enough time for the consultation
- Preparing MEDAC replies to consultations is an easy process
- Issues can be resolved through emails
- Issues can be resolved through online or phone calls
- There are opportunities for replies to reflect minority or divergent opinions
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree

9. How often have you experienced someone:

- Using words that can be considered offensive
- Behaving in a manner that can be considered offensive
- Acting in a way that excludes others from the debate
- Acting in a way that takes most of the time available for debate
- Commenting about feeling excluded
  - Often
  - Sometimes
  - Rarely
  - Never

### **How MEDAC works**

10. In your mind, is it clear how the following bodies of MEDAC operate?

- General Assembly (GA)
- Working Groups (WGs)
- Executive Committee (ExCom)
- Focus Groups (FGs)
- Secretariat
  - Very clear
  - Clear
  - Slightly unclear
  - Not clear at all

10.1 Does the General Assembly have the capacity to:

- Establish how MEDAC operates?
- Determine MEDAC future strategy?
  - To a great extent
  - Somewhat
  - Not at all

10.2 Is the Executive Committee able to

- Determine the important issues for MEDAC?
- Develop recommendations and suggestions to the Commission and Member States?

10.3 Do the Working Groups



- Help MEDAC work more efficiently?
- Deliver content that strengthens the recommendations and suggestions?

#### 10.4 Do the Focus Groups

- Help MEDAC to work more efficiently?
- Deliver content that strengthens the recommendations and suggestions?
- Examine the issues thoroughly?

#### 11. Do you feel that:

- Who chairs a meeting affects how a potential conflict is managed in MEDAC
- Who moderates a discussion affects who is able to participate?
- Who facilitates the debate affects how easy is to reach solutions?
- Who chairs a WG affects the delivery of results?
  - o To a great extent
  - o Somewhat
  - o Very little
  - o No at all

#### **The MEDAC Secretariat**

#### 12. How would you assess the current work of the Secretariat?

- The Secretariat's work is:
  - o Far below standards
  - o Below standards
  - o Meet standards
  - o Above standards
  - o Far above standards

#### 13. In particular, do you consider that you:

- Receive information in a timely manner
- Get timely answers to your questions
- Get adequate answers to your questions
- Get support and follow up to your initiatives
- Have traceability of recommendations/suggestions of MEDAC from the starting point to the final document

#### **Opinion**

Please, if you wish feel free to share any thoughts, ideas or comments you may have which would help to understand your responses, as well as any feedback on MEDAC's performance

#### **Profiles**

#### 14.1 In which countries does your organisation operate?

- France
- Italy
- Spain
- Croatia
- Greece
- Cyprus
- Malta
- Slovenia
- Transnational (various countries)

- European
- International

14.2. What is the geographical scope of your organization

- Adriatic Sea
- Western Mediterranean
- Strait of Sicily
- Eastern Mediterranean
- Europe

15.1. For how long has your organization been a member of MEDAC?

- Less than 5 years
- Between 5 and 10 years
- More than 10 years

15.2 Do you consider yourself mainly as:

- A fisher
- A fisher representing a fishers' organization
- A fishers' organization representative
- A manager of fisheries organizations
- An environmental NGO representative
- An International Governmental Organization
- A Member State representative
- A scientist
- Other

Thank you for your time and input. We will share the findings soon and are available for any comments or questions!

## 9.5 Interviews

The review combined exploratory (3) and semi-structured interviews (10). Exploratory interviews are used at the early stage to understand the context and gain a border overview through open-ended conversations. In addition, a semi-structured interview questionnaire to gather deeper insights on members' perceptions about MEDAC's functioning and role.

The interviews were conducted online—except for two—and lasted an average of 60 to 90 minutes. They were held in English, Spanish, Greek, and Croatian, with interpretation provided when needed by MEDAC as well as by one of its members.

They were performed ensuring anonymity, with all information treated confidentially and presented in aggregated form to prevent it from being traced back to individuals or organizations.

Interviewees (13) were selected based a combination of nine criteria to ensure diversity, relevance, and balanced representation across roles, organizations, and geographic areas. Each interviewee met one or several of the criteria.

Table 13. Selection criteria for the performance review interviews.

| Criteria   | Interviewees meeting the criteria |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Type of organization (60/40)   | 2 (1 from the 60%– 1 from the 40) |
| Geographical representation  | 5 (EE, ES, EU, FR, HR, IT)        |
| Organization   | 2 (MEDAC, DG-MARE)                |
| Withdrawn member   | 1                                 |
| Chair  | 1                                 |
| Coordinators (WGs)   | 1                                 |
| Coordinators (FGs)   | 1                                 |
| Executive Secretariat  | 1                                 |
| Exploratory interviews: profiles with long-term understanding of the ACs functioning and of the advisory process | 3                                 |

The interview questionnaire included 7 questions. However, as the interviews were semi-structured, the specific questions varied slightly across interviews to allow flexibility in exploring relevant topics based on each participant's experience and perspective.

1. What is your background, and how long have you engaged with MEDAC?
2. This review is designed to assess the functioning of the internal bodies of MEDAC, which focuses on MEDAC's operational effectiveness (what is done), and efficiency (how is it done).
  - Ignore the obligation, in terms of effectiveness and efficiency, do you think that it is time for an assessment of the functioning of MEDAC, and can you explain your answer?
  - Are there examples being able to change and solve issues?
3. What are the strengths and weakness of MEDAC's of:
  - decision-making?
  - consensus building of advice?
  - of those you have listed, what would be your key strength or weakness?
4. Has the work of MEDAC (through advice and responding to consultations) made a difference to the management of fisheries and to the lives of those fishing and the state of in the Mediterranean?
  - If it has, how has it made a difference, if not, why not?

5. What in your mind, is the purpose of the 60:40% ratio between fisheries organisations and other societal organisations?
  - What about this regular narrative that MEDAC is the voice of the fishing/ fisheries in the Mediterranean?
6. What have you gained, benefited from engagement with MEDAC?
  - Relationship between MEDAC and MSs.
7. Is there anything else that you would like to share with us?

## 9.6 Focus Group

A Focus Group discussion was set up to explore the preliminary findings of the performance review and the evidence gathered through the online survey, the interviews and the document analysis. The meeting was organized online using the Zoom platform and technical support from MEDAC and recorded for note taking.

The Focus Group was held the 14<sup>th</sup> April from 14:30 to 17:00. Participants (5) were selected based on criteria of plurality and representativeness –organizational profile, roles in MEDAC and geographical area– to ensure diverse perspectives and a well-rounded understanding of the issues discussed. Members who had already been interviewed were excluded from the selection. Interpretation was provided in English, Italian, and Spanish to accommodate the languages of the selected participants.

Table 14. MEDAC Focus group: participants profile

| <b>Profile</b>         | <b>60–40%</b> | <b>Role in MEDAC</b> | <b>Geographical area</b> | <b>MSs</b> |
|------------------------|---------------|----------------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Recreational Fisheries | 40%           | Vice-chair<br>ExCOM  | All                      | EU         |
| SSF                    | 60%           | GA                   | EastMED                  | CY         |
| NGO                    | 40%           | Coord. WG<br>ExCOM   | ALL                      | EU         |
| Fishing                | 60%           | GA                   | WestMED                  | ES         |
| Staff                  | –             | Secretariat          | ALL                      | EU         |

The Focus Group follow a guideline to structure the dialogue, including the following questions:

1. Can you walk us through what you recall as an example of successful impact of a MEDAC advice on the CFP?

2. *Besides advice, MEDAC contributes to a growing number of consultations (11 last year). "Is there any way to address MEDAC overload?"*
3. For productive debates it helps if:
  - a) everyone is involved in all MEDAC topics.
  - b) people specialize in topics.
  - c) Both options are valid
  - d) Other
4. Often it is challenging to find a balance between allowing people to express their ideas and structuring the conversation. Too much of the first: meetings risk lacking clear direction and engagement. Too much of the second: participants feel excluded and unheard. What ideas do you think could help MEDAC meetings?
5. Consensus is at the core of the ACs functioning. What have MEDAC done in the past when navigating a tricky situation? What would you like to see happen?
6. Do you have further thoughts or comments?

## 9.7 Background and positionality of reviewers

Mark Dickey-Collas is an independent marine natural scientist with expertise in fisheries science, science informed advice and ecosystem-based fisheries management and 30 years of experience in scientific and advisory roles. Marta Ballesteros is a marine social scientist working at the Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO-CSIC) with expertise in fisheries governance, stakeholder engagement and science-policy interfaces with 20 years of experience. Both have engaged with several Advisory Councils through research projects, workshops, panel discussions, and meetings. Their familiarity with the ACs and the EU advisory and policy system provided valuable context.

Explicitly acknowledging the influence of their own positions on the interpretation and analysis of findings, the reviewers implemented measures to remain reflective and neutral throughout the process. Triangulation of sources and adherence to evidence-based methods were employed to mitigate potential biases and ensure the credibility of the conclusions drawn. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, the risk of error or misinterpretation cannot be entirely eliminated.

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## 11. Glossary and acronyms

| Acronym   | Meaning  |
|-----------|--|
| AC        | Advisory Council   |
| ADRIATICA | Adriatic Sea Regional Fisheries Group (Italy, Slovenia, Croatia) |
| CCRUP     | Advisory Council for the Outermost Regions                       |
| CFP       | Common Fisheries Policy  |
| CMO       | Common Market Organisation                                       |
| COVID     | Coronavirus Disease 2019   |
| DG        | Directorate-General  |
| DGEMPL    | Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion |
| DGMARE    | Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries           |



|          |  |
|----------|--|
| EASTMED  | Eastern Mediterranean Regional Group   |
| EC       | European Commission  |
| EFCA     | European Fisheries Control Agency  |
| EU       | European Union   |
| EXCOM    | Executive Committee  |
| FG       | Focus Group  |
| GA       | General Assembly   |
| 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   |
| LDAC     | Long Distance Advisory Council   |
| MAP      | Multiannual Plan   |
| MCRS     | Minimum Conservation Reference Size  |
| MEDAC    | Mediterranean Advisory Council   |
| MS       | Member States  |
| MSE      | Management Strategy Evaluation   |
| MSFD     | Marine Strategy Framework Directive  |
| MSP      | Marine Spatial Planning  |
| MSY      | Maximum Sustainable Yield  |
| NIS      | Non-Indigenous Species   |
| NSAC     | North Sea Advisory Council   |
| NWWAC    | North Western Waters Advisory Council  |
| OIG      | Other Interest Group   |
| PESCAMED | Western Mediterranean Regional Fisheries Group (Italy, France, Spain)  |
| RFMO     | Regional Fisheries Management Organisation   |
| SAC      | Scientific Advisory Committee (of GFCM)  |
| SOS      | Strait of Sicily   |
| SSF      | Small Scale Fisheries  |
| STECF    | Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries   |
| SWD      | Staff Working Document (European Commission)   |
| SWWAC    | South Western Waters Advisory Council  |
| WESTMED  | Western Mediterranean Initiative (Algeria, France, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia) |
| WG       | Working Group  |
| WTO      | World Trade organisation   |

## Glossary

| Word or phrase | Meaning   |
|----------------|---|
| adjacency      | Geographical or thematic closeness  |
| baseline       | A reference point used for comparison over time, often referring to the original state before changes or interventions. |
| co-decision    | An EU legislative process where both the European Parliament and the Council of the EU must agree on a legal proposal.  |

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| coherence          | The degree to which MEDAC actions and objectives align with the overarching goals and legal framework of the EUs Common Fisheries Policy. |
| constituency       | The group or community represented by MEDAC members, including fishers, NGOs, and other stakeholders in Mediterranean fisheries.          |
| consultative       | A role or process that involves giving advice or recommendations, without having final decision-making power.                             |
| cross-sectoral     | Involving multiple sectors (e.g. fisheries, energy, environment) in policy discussions.   |
| deliberation       | Structured and thoughtful discussion aimed at reaching a considered decision or consensus.  |
| externalities      | Impacts (positive or negative) of an activity that affect others not directly involved.   |
| facilitative       | Helping to make a process easier, particularly in the context of coordination or mediation.   |
| governance         | The systems, rules, and processes used to make and implement collective decisions.  |
| impartiality       | equal treatment of all rivals or disputants, fairness   |
| institutional      | Related to formal structures or organisations, often in governance or policy contexts.  |
| inter-AC           | Referring to cooperation or activities between different Advisory Councils.   |
| interoperability   | The ability of systems, processes, or organisations to work together effectively.   |
| iteration          | A process that repeats steps to refine or improve outcomes over time.   |
| legitimacy         | The perceived validity or acceptance of MEDAC authority or actions by its stakeholders.   |
| modus-operandi     | The usual way an organisation functions or operates.  |
| multiannual        | Spanning several years; often refers to management plans that cover multiple years.   |
| narrative          | A coherent story or explanation that helps frame issues or justify actions.   |
| participatory      | Involving stakeholders directly in discussions, decisions, or advisory processes.   |
| path dependency    | A tendency for past decisions or practices to limit the range of future choices.  |
| plurality          | The inclusion or existence of a diversity of opinions, groups, or knowledge systems.  |
| procedural         | Related to the formal steps or processes used in decision-making.   |
| regionalisation    | Delegating decision-making powers from the EU level to regional bodies or Member States.  |
| representativeness | How accurately the members or decisions of MEDAC reflect the wider fisheries community.   |
| resilience         | The capacity of MEDAC or its members to recover from challenges or adapt to changes.  |
| salient            | Highly relevant or noticeable; often refers to priority issues or concerns.   |
| scoping            | Determining the boundaries and key questions of an issue or consultation at an early stage.   |
| socioeconomic      | Relating to both social and economic aspects or consequences.   |
| stakeholder        | Any person, group, or organisation with an interest in the outcome of a policy or decision.   |
| statutory          | Legally required or established by formal law or statute.   |
| subsidiarity       | A principle that decisions should be made at the most local level capable of addressing the issue.  |

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| synergies | Benefits that result from collaboration, where the combined outcome is greater than individual efforts. |
|-----------|---|

## Annex 1. Terms of Reference of the Review

### GOALS

- Perform an external and objective assessment of the functioning of the internal bodies of MEDAC, by focusing on MEDAC's operational effectiveness (what is done?), efficiency (how is it done?) and coherence (does it align with the EU provisions?) of MEDAC
- Identify issues to improve (or change) and examples of good practices (what works well) and receive possible recommendations by the appointed Auditor.

### TOPICS

#### a) Functioning of the Executive Committee, Working Groups, General Assembly and Focus Groups

- Relevance and coverage of the addressed topics
- Organisation of the meetings
- Participation and evidence-based input from members (both orally at the meetings and in writing through consultations)

#### b) Decision-making process

- Openness of the process to members
- Adequate time for discussion, consultation and adoption of drafts
- Reflection of the consensus views of the members in advice
- Reflection of minority and diverging views in advice
- Underpinning of advice with factual evidence, policy and/or science
- Use of written consultations and of urgent consultations
- Working environment (e.g., respect and professional behaviour)

#### c) Representation of different interests

- Balance between sector organisations and other interest groups (professionals fishers, trade unions, NGOs, recreational fisheries etc.)
- Balance between small and large organisations
- Geographical representation
- Common identity and sense of ownership
- Added value of membership and participation

#### d) Performance of MEDAC Chair, Vice-Chairs, Working Group and Focus Groups coordinators and Secretariat

- Fulfilment of duties and responsibilities
- Leadership, impartiality, and work environment
- Deliverance of work programme, optimisation of budgetary resources, timely transmission of documents and information,
- Compliance with rules of procedure

#### e) Relationship with the Institutions (European Commission and Member States)

- Satisfaction with the official replies and reaction to advice,

- Cooperation, including attendance in meetings,
- Influence of advice on EU policy-making

f) Transparency

- Publication and accessibility (to the members and to the general public) of documents on the website
- Information on membership composition

g) Contribution to the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy

- Long-term environmental sustainability, socio-economic benefits, availability of food supplies
- Efficient and transparent internal market & level-playing-field

## WORKING METHODOLOGY & SCHEDULE

- External consultant to attend the following meetings: online or in person ( Travel Expenses will be covered by MEDAC in Split ( Slovenia, October 2024 - December online - Rome, Italy February 2025 - April online - June 2025)
- Analysis of applicable legislation, including the Common Fisheries Policy and the Commission Delegated Regulation on the functioning of the Advisory Councils.
- Analysis of existing documentation, including statutes, rules of procedure, guidelines, work programmes, adopted advice, replies to advice, and minutes of meetings.
- Inclusion on the mailing list, in order to consider official communications from the Secretariat to members and observers.
- Structured interviews with MEDAC Chair, Vice-Chairs, Executive Secretary, members, European Commission representatives that coordinate or participate in MEDAC work, active observers and Member States representatives.

## METHODOLOGY

- Kick-off meeting (presentation)
- Interviews and Document Studies and meeting participation of the Auditor
- Survey
- Analysis, Reporting and Presentation

WORKING LANGUAGE: English (for the report), English, Spanish, French for the interviews

SCHEDULE: From October 1st 2024- 30th June 2025

## Annex 2. Legal summary

### EU Regulation:

- REGULATION (EU) No 1380/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1954/2003 and (EC) No 1224/2009 and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 2371/2002 and (EC) No 639/2004 and Council Decision 2004/585/EC
- Commission delegated Regulation (EU) 2022/204 of 8 December 2021 amending Delegated Regulation (EU) 2015/242 laying down detailed rules on the functioning of the Advisory Councils under the Common Fisheries Policy
- Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 2015/242 – Detailed Rules on the Functioning of Advisory Councils.
- Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 2017/1575 – Amending Regulation (EU) No 2015/242
- Council Decision 2004/585/EC – Establishing Regional Advisory Councils

### Italian Law:

- Constitution of the Italian Republic (1947). Articles 18, 39 and 49;
- Italian Civil Cod. Royal Decree of 16 March 1942, articles 14, 16, 18, 36, 37, 38, 1332, 1393 and 1398.
- Related regulations on the functioning of association

### MEDAC rules

- Statute of the Mediterranean Advisory Council
- MEDAC Internal Regulation

## Annex 3. MEDAC Members (2024)

| Organisation Name   | Country | 60% or 40% |
|---|---------|------------|
| AGCI Agrital  | Italy   | 60         |
| AKTEA Réseau européen des organisations de femmes de la pêche et de l'aquaculture | France  | 60         |
| AMOP  | France  | 60         |
| ANDMUPES- Asociacion Andaluza de Mujeres del Sector Pesquero                      | Spain   | 60         |
| CEPESCA   | Spain   | 60         |
| CIPS  | EU      | 40         |
| CNPMEM  | France  | 60         |
| COLDIRETTI- Impresa Pesca   | Italy   | 60         |
| CRPMEM Occitanie  | France  | 60         |
| CRPMEM PACA   | France  | 60         |
| EAA   | UE      | 40         |
| EMPA  | Spain   | 60         |
| ETF   | EU      | 60         |
| FACOPE  | Spain   | 60         |
| FAI CISL - Federazione Agricole Alimentare Ambientale Industriale Italiana        | Italy   | 60         |
| FBCP  | Spain   | 60         |
| Fedagripesca Confcooperative  | Italy   | 60         |

|   |          |    |
|---|----------|----|
| FEDCOPESCA/COINCOPESCA  | Spain    | 60 |
| Federpesca  | Italy    | 60 |
| FIPSAS  | Italy    | 40 |
| FNCCP   | Spain    | 60 |
| FNCP  | Spain    | 60 |
| FTCPG - Federacio Territorial de Confrariers de Pescadors Girona        | Spain    | 60 |
| FTCPT - Federacio Territorial de Confrariers de Pescadors Tarragona     | Spain    | 60 |
| HGK - Croatian Chamber of Economy                                       | Croatia  | 60 |
| HOK - Croatian Chamber of Trader and Crafts                             | Croatia  | 60 |
| HSSRM- Croatian Federation of Sport Fishing on Sea                      | Croatia  | 40 |
| IFSUA   | EU       | 40 |
| IVEAEMPA  | Spain    | 40 |
| koperattivi Nazzjonali Tas-Sajd (KNS)                                   | Malta    | 60 |
| Legacoop Agroalimentare Dip. Pesca                                      | Italy    | 60 |
| Legambiente   | Italy    | 40 |
| LIFE  | EU       | 60 |
| MEDREACT  | Italy    | 40 |
| OP DU SUD   | France   | 60 |
| PAPF - Pan Cypriot Associat of Professional Fishermen                   | Cyprus   | 60 |
| PEPMA   | Greece   | 60 |
| Prud'homie Marseille  | France   | 60 |
| Trawlers coordination   | Croatia  | 60 |
| UGL AGROALIMENTARE  | Italy    | 60 |
| UILA PESCA - Unione Italiana Lavoratori della Pesca e dell'Acquacoltura | Italy    | 60 |
| UNACOMAR  | Spain    | 60 |
| UNCI Agroalimentare - Dip. Pesca  | Italy    | 60 |
| WWF   | EU       | 40 |
| ZZRS/FRI - Fisheries Research Institute                                 | Slovenia | 60 |