

RCG LP 2021
Annual report

Regional Coordination Group on Large Pelagics

28-30 June 2021
Virtual MS Teams meeting

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Executive summary

The Regional Coordination Group on Large Pelagics (RCG LP) met online between the 28 and 30 June 2021 to review the progress of inter-sessional work since 2020, discuss around the key areas of regional coordination in fisheries data collection: structure and organisation, state of play, regional sampling plans, identifying end-user needs and data quality.

Participants included scientists, experts and/or National Correspondents (NCs) from Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain and one non-European country (Seychelles, acting as an observer), DG MARE (European Commission), ICCAT and IOTC Secretariats representatives, as end user permanent observers, and partners of DCF projects as well.

During the meeting subjects such as the EU MAP (multiannual Union programme for the collection and management of data in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors), global structure of the RCG LP, groups decision process, subgroups state of play, SECWEB project, large pelagic (LP) recreational fisheries and regional database were presented and discussed.

By the end of the meeting the group agreed by consensus on a total of six recommendations to be made:

- to manage involvement in the RCG LP (reference large_pelagic_2021_r01),
- to develop common rules of procedure (RoP) between RCGs (reference large_pelagic_2021_r02),
- to increase number of participants in RCG LP InterSessional SubGroups – ISSGs (reference large_pelagic_2021_r03),
- to use standard measure (straight lower jaw fork length -LJFL) for swordfish in all Member States (reference large_pelagic_2021_r04),
- to create an ISSG focused on regional database development (reference large_pelagic_2021_r05),
- to create a list that specifies required data for the recreational fisheries (reference large_pelagic_2021_r06).

How to cite this report:

RCG LP. Report of the Regional Coordination Group on Large Pelagics (RCG LP) 2021 Annual Meeting, 28-30 June 2021, Online. 33p.

1. Introduction

1.1. General

Like the 2020 RCG LP annual meeting, principally due to the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the fourth annual meeting of the Regional Coordination Group on Large Pelagics (RCG LP) was held virtually, through Microsoft Teams platform from the 28th to the 30th of June 2021. The participants involved were:

- 9 European countries experts, National Correspondents and/or their substitutes (Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain). Among these countries, National Correspondents were present for Greece, Ireland, Malta and Portugal and National Correspondent substitutes were present for Cyprus, France, Greece, Malta and Portugal.
- 1 non-European country, Seychelles, as an observer,
- Representatives of the European Commission DG MARE,
- Regional fisheries management organisation's representatives of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) as end user permanent observers,
- Several partners of DCF projects, like the project SecWeb, FishNCo or the one in charge of the RDBFIS development.

The complete list of confirmed attendants to the RCG LP meeting is available in the Annex 1.

The meeting was chaired by Mathieu Depetris (France, IRD) and Josip Maleš (Croatia, IZOR). All sessional work was carried out by the whole group. The meeting agenda is available in the Annex 2.

1.2. Terms of Reference

4 major Terms of Reference (ToRs) were identified:

- RCG LP structure, organisation and links. The aims of this section were to present and discuss the current structure approval of the RCG LP and of each subgroup, make a status check on each subgroup and promote the possibility of the group to express suggestions improvement or modifications in the structure/organisation.
- Available data, data transmissions and gaps. The section deals with regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs) feedback and summaries of possible issues, like data transmission failures or potential collaboration in data calls.
- Regional database. This point is related to the development of a regional database for the RCG LP.
- Sampling and regional working plans. This year, a one-day working day was dedicated to the exchange focus on the development of Regional Work Plan(s) (RWP) for the large pelagics. This topic occurs due to the FishnCo project and its aim to support RCGs in the development of RWP.

2. Brief review of progress since 2020 RCG LP annual meeting

Roadmap on global RCG LP structure was presented to the RCG LP along with the RCG LP InterSessional Sub-Group 2021 composition. Temporary diffusion lists were created both for the whole RCG LP list of participants and for each subgroup members. Before the meeting, participating NCs were requested to have an updated list of national representatives and active members for each Member State (MS).

RCG LP chairs, Mathieu Depetris (France, IRD) and Josip Maleš (Croatia, IZOR), participated in work and meetings for Secweb project related to the RCG secretariat development and in project Fishn'Co to design Regional Work Plan (RWP) for the large pelagics.

3. Last update of the European Union Multi-Annual Programme (EU MAP)

The European Commission (COM) adopted the new EU MAP decisions on 27 April 2021 and submitted them to the European Parliament and the Council for scrutiny for two months, May and June. The publication will follow in July, to the entry into force from 1 January 2022.

There is no big change in data requirements, compared to the current EU MAP and the final draft produced by STECF plenary in November 2019. The most visible relative novelties include:

- More pronounced regional coordination. Already the 2017-2019 EU MAP provided for regional coordination of sampling frequencies and selection of methodologies. The new EU MAP will be extended to:
 - o species, regions and methods of data collection on recreational fishing
 - o methodologies and sampling schemes of data collection on diadromous species
 - o methodologies in collecting data on the impact of the fisheries on marine biological resources and marine ecosystems such as impact on food webs and occurrences of incidental catches of protected species.
- Some structural pilot projects are integrated into regular data collection. MS will still have an option to include testing new methods in the work plans (WP).
- Other optional activities: economic and social data on fish processing.

Regional coordination groups prepare regional work plans that will amend or replace part of national work plans. Like national work plans, the regional work plans will be approved by a COM decision but in a longer process including an opinion of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Committee.

On 20 April, the national correspondents and RCG chairs received the revised draft WP and AR (annual report) templates, and the guidelines, prepared by the COM based on the STECF work. The input from MS and RCG was examined by the COM and STECF EWG 21-09 in 21-25 June, in parallel with the inter-services consultation. Once the STECF plenary in July will endorse the final version of the templates, the COM will distribute it by mid-July for the submission of WP on 15 October. The adoption of the legal text depends directly on the adoption of the EMFAF legal text and it is not expected until the fourth quarter of 2021. Nevertheless, MS should send their WP for 2022 and beyond on the new templates, to meet the submission, assessment and adoption deadlines in 2021. The novelties include:

- A single document for both WP and AR templates, instead of two different legal texts currently used. The tables and text boxes are explained as in previous legal acts. The table and text box templates will be accessible on the DCF website, together with a guidance document with further explanations.
- The COM aims at having an automated system to report and check the WP/AR and STECF provided already some basis for this automation. First tab of the excel file includes a Master Code List, redefining values to put in WP/AR tables.
- Similar order of sections in the EU MAP and the WP/AR templates
- MS should fill in only text boxes and tables that apply to their activities, avoiding the empty pages. This is of special relevance for landlocked countries.

- The templates give some flexibility to interlink national and regional work plans.

The COM launched MARE/2020/08 grants at the beginning of 2021, with a duration of 24 months. Those are:

- Streamline, on regional work plans for the Mediterranean and Black Sea region <https://www.streamlineproject.eu/>
- Fishn'Co, on regional work plans for the NANSEA and Baltic, including RCG ECON and large pelagic fisheries <https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/fishnco/>
- SecWeb, on setting up a secretariat for the RCGs work <https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/secweb/>
- RDBFIS on the Mediterranean and Black Sea database <https://medbsrdb.eu/>

The reports on the pilot studies carried out under the EU MAP 2017-2019 and the extension of 2020-2021 were submitted to the COM in spring 2021. STECF evaluates them and after a STECF plenary session, the evaluation will be published in the DCF website.

STECF EWG 21-09 on the evaluation of annual reports and data transmission issues provided an overview on the first two pilot studies, by mid-July. PS1 - Relative share of catches of recreational fisheries compared to commercial fisheries and PS2 - Level of fishing and impact of fisheries on biological resources and marine ecosystems.

STECF EWG 21-17 on the evaluation of work plans will do the same for the other two by the end of November. PS3 - Data on employment by education levels and nationality and PS4 - Environmental data on aquaculture.

Furthermore, some links below of interest:

- [Report to the EP and the Council on the DCF Regulation \(EU\) 2017/1004](#)
- [Tables and diagrams \(related to the report above\)](#)
- [The DCF website](#)

After the presentation, several issues were raised by the participants.

The first one concerning the stomach sampling and a clarification whether this sampling is mandatory and what are the required species and temporary resolution. This sampling is obligatory, but the species selection and frequency of sampling should follow end user need. Furthermore, RCGs and Member States (MS) should agree among them what is needed and plan for the data collection associated.

The second question focuses on the recreational fisheries and more precisely about the requirements associated. The answer is similar to the previous one and promote RCGs and MSs to work together for catches estimation and in a further stage, on sampling for biological data. So far, there is a list of species in the EU MAP as a minimum requirement, but it can be amended by RCGs or MSs according to end-user needs.

4. RCG LP structure, organisation and links (ToR 1)

4.1. Update of the global RCG LP structure

The figure below presents the last update of the global RCG LP structure (figure 1). A draft version of this figure has been shared with the RCG LP members at the beginning of the year and the last update has been validated by the RCG members during the meeting.

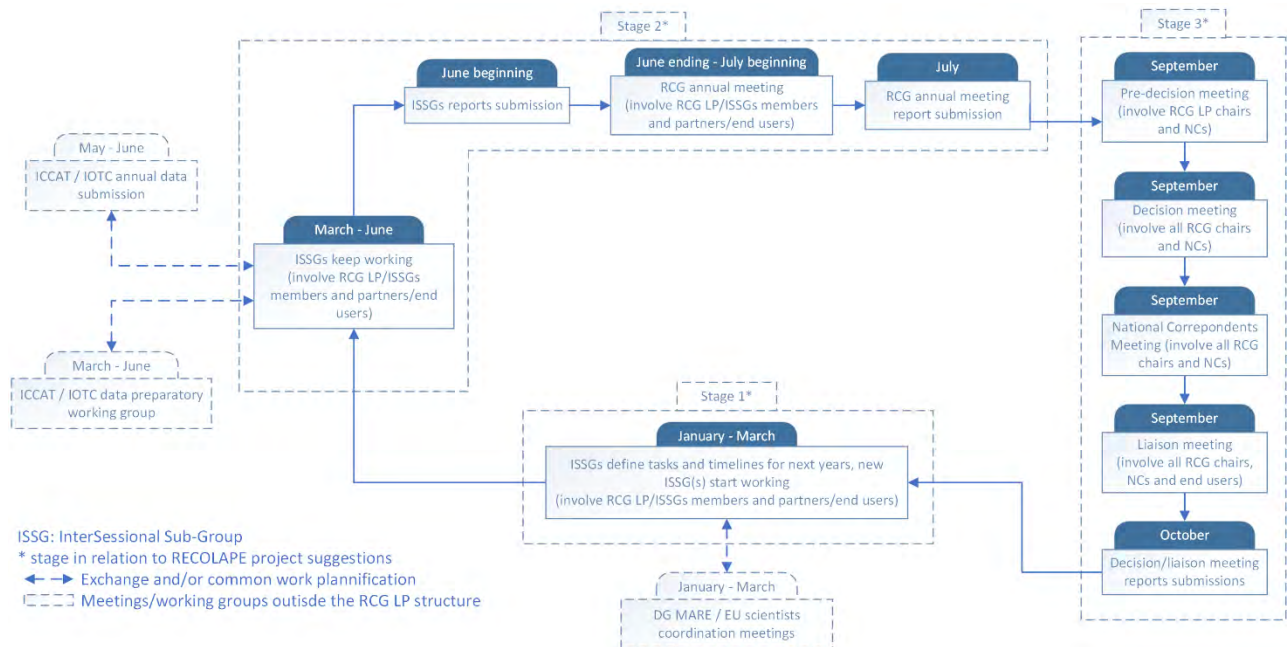


Figure 1: Roadmap proposal for the Regional Coordination Group on Large Pelagics (last update with feedbacks integrated)

To briefly describe, this process has to be seen as a never-ending loop. There is no “starting point” and each element of this figure evolves in relation to the knowledge and decisions between previous elements. Furthermore, there are some particularities in this process.

The first one is that it is based on the outputs from the RECOLAPE project (Strengthening REgional COoperation in LARge PELagic fisheries data collection, MARE/2016/22), especially following the recommendations of splitting different meetings and working groups of the RCG LP into 3 stages:

- The stage 1 with the aims of defining gaps, tasks and the yearly roadmap in relation to the different ISSGs (InterSessional Sub-Groups),
- The stage 2 which includes all the work of the ISSGs and ends with the RCG LP annual meeting where all the major information is raised to all the RCG LP members,
- The stage 3 with all the validation processes, for example validation of recommendations issued from the RCG annual meeting by the National Correspondents (NCs).

The second major characteristic is regarding the structure of the process, which is split in two sub-processes. The first one is the real core of the RCG LP (represented by solid dark blue box in the figure) with all the meetings and working groups under the umbrella of the RCG LP and unquestionably a part of it. At the same time, a second sub-process (materialised by the dotted boxes), represents all other meetings which are not under the direct umbrella of the RCG LP but have strong relations and connections. For example, the meeting of the RCG LP stage 1 uses all the output and the discussion of

the DG MARE / EU scientist coordination meeting to evolve its year's roadmap and aims, if it is possible, to find a common way to work together.

Regarding that second characteristic, the group noted that the boxes associated to meeting outside the core RCG LP process (ICCAT/IOTC preparatory working groups, data submission and DG MARE coordination meeting) should be in a more distinguishable pattern and colour since they are not a part of the RCG LP work and just interactions. However, group needs to be aware on timing of these RFMO meetings and their recommendations since they are interacting with many current issues of RCG LP.

In addition, the group asked about the case of issues regarding different provisions provided by ICCAT (for example Mako sharks) and their place in the RCG LP process. It was explained that, once the specific requests are clearly identified they should be associated with the roadmap like the others to improve the global overview and the link behind between all the different elements (inside and outside the RCG LP structure). Furthermore, the current RCG LP process should evolve in relation to the other fisheries specificity and under the leadership of the RCG LP members associated.

Likewise, the updated structure aims to integrate the activities regularly carried out by the RLP LP experts. Main feedback and feeling of RCG LP members is of difficulty to integrate the RCG LP process in addition of their activities (mainly due to time constraint). It was noted that the different elements of this process, like these one related to ISSGs work, don't have the obligation to be physical meetings and sometimes maybe just need coordination between members to raise then information to a higher level. In addition, under the SecWeb project (presentation and discussion summarise in the report section 4.11) there is a development of a RCGs secretariat. This new structure should bring support also to the RCG LP and facilitate coordination among us.

Another question about the usefulness of the pre-decision meeting has been raised. Regarding that, the group agreed of the necessity to keep this meeting. This item is a privileged moment between the RCG chairs and the NCs to explain exactly what the outputs or recommendations of the RCG annual meeting are and what is the purpose behind. This meeting is designed to go along with the annual meeting and the decision meeting to create a three-item process that facilitate informed decisions and validation by NCs at the end.

4.2. Global ISSGs organisation

The figure below represents the latest update of the proposed composition of the current RCG LP ISSGs. It should be considered that the ISSGs composition is based on volunteering and can mix EU countries and, where advisable, non-EU countries, for example regarding the sub-ISSG Tropical Tuna Treatment or the sub-ISSG Observers.

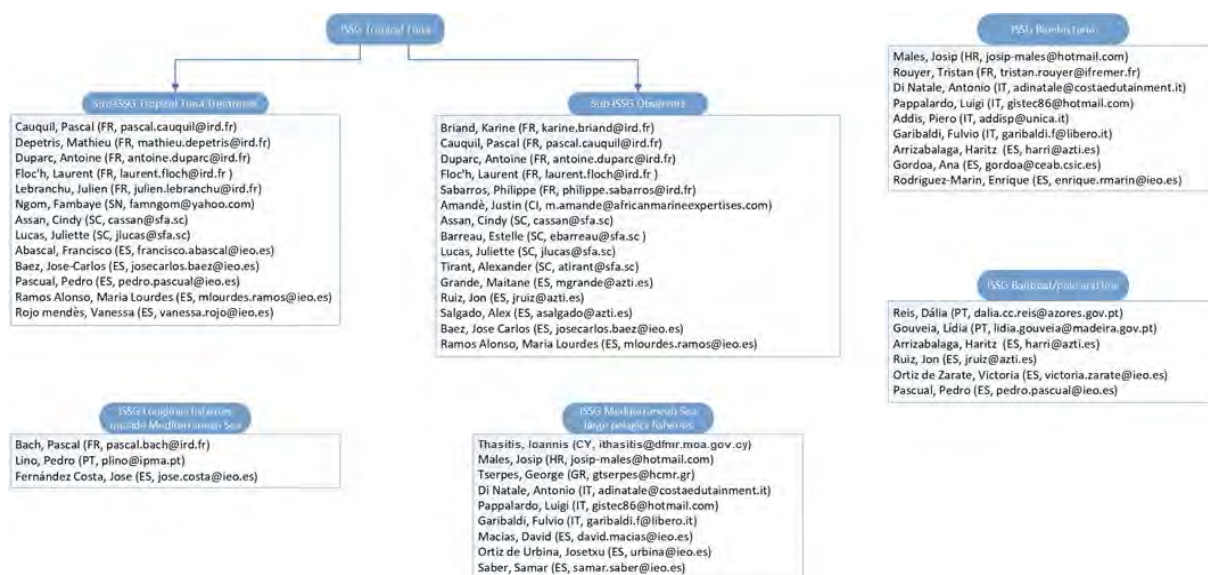


Figure 2: Regional Coordination Group on Large Pelagics InterSessional Sub-Group 2021 proposal composition

The major discussion related to this section has mainly concerned the operability of the ISSGs, especially regarding the ISSG members satisfaction of the current RCG LP fisheries specificities into 5 ISSGs. So far, only the ISSG Tropical Tuna and its two sub-ISSGs associated, are fully operational. Some points have been raised:

- Same people are identified in several groups and this could be complicated in terms of logistics associated.
- Could it be that some ISSG needs more coordination (to raise the information) between member associated than a “physical” group?
- Perhaps we have to think about our ISSGs in a short-term aim with a specific goal. This aim could be associated to a roadmap and bring more concrete outputs (move step by step).
- If we look at the other RCGs, they have ISSG focused on subjects like the data quality or the regional database development.
- Through several ISSGs we have the implication of non-EU partners that can participate as observers. Their expertise could be useful on common subjects. But do we want more integration of them in our RCG for example through a procedure to identify the non-EU experts to be invited on a regular basis?

Regarding the proposed current ISSG structure, a certain degree of consent was achieved albeit reference to an approach by fishery/metiers, as originally thought, was highlighted. Furthermore, they coordinate between Member States and aren't based on species. As an example, the ISSG Tropical Tuna is mainly a coordination between France and Spain that focuses on purse seiner fleets that fish in tropical waters and their main target is large tuna (such as yellowfin, skipjack and bigeye). This discussion comes from a question about the place for topics that deal with other large pelagic species like billfish, albacore, small tunas or sharks. This has been added to the discussion as the main problem that the group is facing. As a small RCG (compared to the other like RCG NANSEA & Baltic), its area of coverage is large, on a worldwide scale (three oceans and Mediterranean and Black Sea) and modification of subgroups is complicated as they are hard to differentiate simply by gear, targeted

species or geographic location since all of these factors intertwine. They are not ideal but there is no insight on how to make them better with obstacles such as topics too large to encompass fully.

4.3. Annual meeting coordination

The main question related to this section is “How do we select, propose and accept, or not, people in the annual meeting?”. This issue has been raised in relation to troubles encountered by the chairs for the meeting organisation this year.

First, this year all the participants have been split into 3 categories: NCs, national experts and observers (RFMOs-end users; non-EU experts).

To solve the issue, this year the NCs were identified as the focal point for the identification of meeting participants. In practice, anyone can ask to join the RCG LP but only the NC of the country associated can accept or reject this application. Furthermore, the Commission is also entitled to nominate experts with a view to help the functioning of the RCG LP. This process also allows us to take advantage of the coordination power of the NCs and Commission if we need to involve expert on specific subjects or thematic. Like the test made this year, we propose to send one mail to each NC at the beginning of the year with 3 questions:

- Do you plan to join the annual meeting?
- Related to the country’s list of participants from the year before, do you want to make any modifications?
- In case of impossibility to reach the annual meeting, could you please specify one NC substitute with the right to vote where required?

It is important to understand that the NC substitute role is to bring more information in the discussion and reflection of the NC expertise and knowledge. The group should only make recommendations, and these must be validated by the normal decision process involving the RCG LP annual meeting, the pre-decision meeting and the decision meeting. Nomination of a NC substitute doesn’t break this process, on the contrary, it ensures continuity in the decision-making.

Furthermore, along the year every new participant has to be validated by the NC associated with the applicant.

In the specific case of the ISSGs composition and especially regarding ISSGs with integration of the non-EU countries, the ISSG associated keeps the ability to decide on its own composition. And by extension, all these rules are valid for RCG LP members (NCs and experts).

Regarding this section, the group agreed to keep this management process and proposed a recommendation (look at reference “large_pelagic_2021_r01” in the report section 10).

4.4. Decision process

As stated before, the RCG LP can express recommendations in relation to its expertise on the subject associated. These recommendations can be raised at a different scale, such as through an ISSG or during the annual meeting. However, what do we do if we don’t have unanimous approval by the group on a topic and, in fact, what is exactly our RCG LP decision process?

After discussion two proposals were made:

- Everyone can participate in the discussion but at the end only the NCs, NCs substitutes (see report section 4.3) or the Commission can vote. Furthermore, all the recommendations will be voted to avoid any kind of misunderstanding regarding the “level of significance and implication” associated.
- Everyone can participate in the discussion and we always try to find a consensus between EU member state experts, National Correspondents, their substitutes and representatives of connected interest groups (such as EU Commission, ICCAT, IOTC). If no consensus is found, we can rule on the need of further discussions to move forward on this subject. In this process, it is very important that all countries and working groups involved in the meeting have an opportunity to express themselves, no matter how many representatives are present for each party.

Regarding these two proposals, the group agreed on the second one and prefers to find a common consensus for each recommendation or decision.

4.5. Other matters discussed related to the RCG LP organisation

The group discussed the possibility to have a common Rules of Procedures (RoP) between RCGs. This process was under study by the RCG NANSEA and Baltic and could be an opportunity to simplify our procedures and provide an easier way to evolve them. Furthermore, some questions were raised by the ISSGs regarding points in the administration and work of our RCG. This new specification and evolution of our RoP could address this. On that matter, the group agreed to join this initiative and express their position in a recommendation (reference large_pelagic_2021_r02 in the report section 10).

The new logo for the RCG LP, shared at the beginning of the year with the RCG LP members has been validated.

A last discussion occurred regarding the communication between the different levels of the RCG LP (chairs, ISSGs, NCs, ...). Until the advent of the official RCG secretariat, temporary diffusion lists were created:

- rcglp-global@listes.ird.fr for the RCG-LP global diffusion list
- rcglp-issg-baitboat-pole-line@listes.ird.fr for the ISSG Baitboat/pole and line
- rcglp-issg-bluefin-tuna@listes.ird.fr for the ISSG bluefin tuna
- rcglp-issg-longlines-outside-med@listes.ird.fr for the ISSG longlines fisheries outside Mediterranean Sea
- rcglp-issg-med-lp-fisheries@listes.ird.fr for the ISSG Mediterranean Sea large pelagics fisheries
- rcglp-issg-observers@listes.ird.fr for the sub-ISSG observers
- rcglp-issg-t3-technical@listes.ird.fr for the sub-ISSG t3 technical

These diffusion lists are the first step to an easier communication between us but need to be improved and tested in the future. For example, these lists are temporary because these links are under the administration of the French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development and not the RCG LP. They also need more flexibility in their utilisation so that they exactly show which people are included. This tool should be discussed under the future RCG secretariat development.

4.6. ISSG Tropical Tunas state of play

The tropical tuna ISSG is divided in two subgroups: sub-ISSG Tropical tuna treatment (T3) and sub-ISSG Observers (figure 2 of report section 4.2).

4.6.1. Sub-ISSG Tropical Tuna Treatment (T3)

The Tropical Tuna Treatment (T3) subgroup is a historical working group that existed before the RCG LP creation for about 15 years. The purpose of this group is to provide a common framework in terms of data collection to meet the European and Regional needs related to the major tropical tuna purse seine fishery. This group is composed of scientists from EU Member States (EU-FRA and EU-ESP) and non-EU members (Senegal and Seychelles). A shared framework is applied to the catch of the purse seine fishery in ICCAT and IOTC regions from the data collection to the data processing. The scientific sampling scheme applied on each of the main landing ports (Victoria or Abidjan for example) is based on the specificities of the purse seine fishery; in particular the mix of the same well as the catch coming from different sets, and the multi-specific nature of the catches. Thus, well selection for sampling (size measurements and counts by species) is based on logbooks and well's plan, where wells without a mixture of different fishing operations are prioritised. These data are later processed, after quality checks, according to T3 method. The procedure has undergone changes over time, and now it is being developed in R, in order to have a more transparent process. The same method is used by all purse seine fisheries (EU and non-EU CPCs) both in ICCAT and IOTC. Current works from the group deal with improvement of the sampling design and the recording of T3 processing. Finally, some questions were raised about the group's reflection regarding the participation of the non-EU countries in the RCG LP, the internal functioning and rules of procedure, or the long-term purpose of the subgroup.

The first question arises as to whether the changes that the T3 is undergoing will mean the need for a complete or partial revision of the historical series of purse-seine catch data. Antoine Duparc (IRD, France), as a French referent in the ISSG, explains that a revision of the entire time series should be necessary for several reasons as for instance, late minor corrections on the dataset or change in species parameters (length weight relation enhancement). The bigger changes could affect the catch data for years before 2000, where a number of samples was lower. However, before any changes are made this should be better explored and explained.

The current name of the subgroup was also questioned, as it is not related specifically to all tropical tunas, but only to the major species targeted by the purse seine fleet. In addition, data collection is also under the scope of the group, not only the treatment of the data. The ISSG subgroup should think of changing the name, in order not to create confusion among people not familiar with it.

Regarding the participation of non-EU countries, there is a consensus on the suitability of their participation even if they are not official members of the RCG-LP. The only restriction is the non-participation of these countries to the EU decisions. The exact frame on this topic has to be written in the rule of procedure of the RCG-LP.

Members of the RCG LP also asked the ISSG about the existence of other approaches or sampling methodologies in similar fisheries in other oceans, and if having one single approach could be a long-term objective. Antoine Duparc explained that the same approach is used by all CPCs (Contracting Parties) in ICCAT and IOTC, where each country runs the model with the same approach. However slight differences could exist such as different versions of the model or changes in historical data. On the other hand, in the Pacific (IATTC and WCPFC) sampling is conducted onboard (spill and grab sampling) in the framework of the Regional Observer Program. As explained by the ISSG, the main reason is that landing ports are numerous and remote, making a port sampling design impossible. Thus,

onboard sampling is presented as the most cost-effective solution in the Pacific. Moreover, it is also recognized that this method (spill and grab sampling) results in highly bias catch composition estimates. In addition, the ISSG explains that the EU observers' duties and priorities are already agreed among MSs, which are related to bycatch and discards. Thus, there is not enough time for other objectives. Finally, it is recognized that both approaches, onboard and onshore sampling schemes, are subject to possible sources of bias.

Knowing that whatever the sampling method is (onshore/onboard), it is aimed to obtain the best global estimates for the stock assessment. The group acknowledges that it could be interesting to develop catch estimates in that line - global instead of estimates by flag or trip. This is a kind of scientific estimates (non-official) as it happens in other areas (ICES).

ICCAT representatives asked if the ISSG subgroup considers dealing with the "faux poisson". Antoine Duparc clarified that this task is not currently included among the group's objectives, and that "faux poisson" is estimated separately. However, this issue is something to deal with in the future.

4.6.2. ISSG observer's coordination

Philippe Sabarros (IRD, France), as a representative of the ISSG observer's subgroup explained that it is a parallel group to T3 and has many years of experience. It coordinates the collection of observers' data on board the purse-seine fleets. The last time the group meeting occurred was in 2019, and due to the pandemic, the group did not meet in 2020 and 2021. It is expected to resume work and meetings in 2022, where the following topics will be discussed: achieved observer coverage, ObServe software and database, data collected through electronic monitoring systems, data preparation for RFMOs and development of new bycatch raising method. In 2022 it would be Spain's turn (IEO) to organize the meeting.

DG MARE asked about the participation in the subgroup. Philippe Sabarros clarified that the two main EU MSs actively participate (ESP and FRA) together with other non-EU members (Seychelles and Senegal). Italy, who only has one purse seiner in the Indian Ocean, does not participate.

Some members of the RCG LP asked about the coordination of the observers in the rest of the fisheries outside the purse seine. As the observer ISSG focuses on the purse seine fishery, each other ISSG (ISSG Med fisheries, ISSG Atlantic Longline) should include the observer coordination among their ToRs. In addition, in case that more transversal observers' issues must be discussed, there is always the possibility to create a new specific ISSG. However, this does not appear to be necessary for now.

The importance of Electronic Monitoring (EM) is increasing in tuna RFMOs, especially in the case of the purse seine fishery. Both Spain and France have EM systems installed on board several boats since some years ago. Spain even stated that it will include EM data in 2022 year's data delivery to ICCAT. EM is already included in the ISSG observers' ToRs, but the possibility of creating a specific EM ISSG in the future is being considered, if the tasks related to this topic increase considerably, or if other metiers (i.e. longline) are to be involved.

Common rules of procedure among the Observer's ISSG include the rotation of the country (or institute) organising the meeting every year, with the designated national correspondent(s) of the organising country chairing the session. All participating countries are expected to designate one or two national correspondent(s) for this sub-ISSG group.

4.7. ISSG Longlines fisheries outside Mediterranean Sea state of play

A brief and general presentation was made about countries, areas and species involved in EU longline fisheries outside the Mediterranean Sea. ISSG consists of EU longline fleets in Atlantic Ocean (Portugal and Spain), Indian Ocean (France, Portugal and Spain) and Pacific Ocean (Portugal and Spain) and the group noted that the structure is fine. Nevertheless, the ISSG is not operational yet, few people have been signed up to participate and it was pointed out that it would be important that more people of each EU country involved in this fishery participate in the ISSG.

Question was raised to the group on what our point of view is in regard to the collecting of data for longline fisheries in 10 degrees squares as spatial reference. The ICCAT's representatives noted that the current data required for Task I and Task II is monthly catch and effort statistics by 5x5 geographical. It is noteworthy to point out that this year only one contracting party (CPC) put this matter on the table during the ICCAT's Working Group and the reason for this was due to confidentiality issues in its domestic observer program.

During the meeting there was a comment on the lack of discard data reported by CPCs. It is suggested that RCG LP should identify the problem and find the solutions. The group reminded that the ISSGs are not yet operational. The ICCAT's representatives noted that discards (dead discards and live releases) are more and more important for assessing stock status and discard report is inside of many RFMO's recommendations. The CPCs are required to provide this information to ICCAT and IOTC and point out that they have difficulties in estimating it.

According to the discussion in this section, a recommendation was made by the group (reference large_pelagic_2021_r03 in the report section 10). It is noted that this recommendation is also valid for almost all the other ISSG's and transversal topics like the development of the RCG LP database (section 6 in the report).

4.8. ISSG Mediterranean Sea large pelagics fisheries state of play

The ISSG is dealing with the various metiers targeting large pelagics in the Mediterranean, especially swordfish, bluefin tuna and albacore longlines. All these species are evaluated and managed by ICCAT, so all the data collected by MSs converge into the ICCAT database. There are currently some active projects under the umbrella of ICCAT (i.e. GBYP for Bluefin tuna and SWOYP for swordfish) which are managed by ICCAT; these projects are carried out both in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, but RCG experts is actively involved in both of them. About swordfish project, after the extensive biological sampling carried out in the last three years, partially limited by the COVID related issues, some relevant progress was made about stock structure, reproduction and growth. The results can be found in the report of the latest ICCAT Swordfish Intersessional Meeting held online in June 2021.

The main issues currently concerning the Mediterranean ISSG are linked to:

- Observers on board: for many years and even from the last sessions of stock assessment of Mediterranean swordfish and albacore (this latter was held partially overlapping the RCG LP meeting) it was highlighted as an extreme need, especially for swordfish, to collect data on discards directly on board (i.e. undersized fish), both for dead and alive fish. The lack of this data was one of the main components of uncertainty during the last swordfish stock assessment session due to the great influence on the recruitment and total catches.
- Swordfish measurements: during the last ICCAT swordfish intersessional meeting a paper was presented highlighting the discrepancies in the measurement protocols applied for swordfish

(and billfish in general) between the use of Straight Lower Jaw Fork Length (SLJFL) and Curved Lower Jaw Fork Length (CLJFL). This problem was raised not only for the Mediterranean, although it seems that almost all the countries around the Mediterranean have always taken measurements as SLJFL, with rare exceptions, but also for the Atlantic countries. Immediately after the Meeting, ICCAT Secretariat sent an email to all CPCs to clarify how the measures have been taken in the past. Two experts of this ISSG (Antonio Di Natale and Fulvio Garibaldi) were commissioned by ICCAT to coordinate research to find new conversion factors, to make the switch between the two measures possible and further remedying this problem.

During the discussion, ISSG clearly highlighted how these differences have a high potential impact not only on the size composition of the fished stock, on the determination of some biological parameters and finally on the entire process of stock evaluation, but also on compliance with the minimum landing/catching size of swordfish, which could have serious legal implications.

It was clearly stated by this ISSG that the main measure for swordfish size is the SLJFL and that only in particular circumstances CLJFL should be taken. It was also suggested by the ISSG to support the process of definition of the new conversion factors. According to that a recommendation was made (reference large_pelagic_2021_r04 in the report section 10).

Starting from this issue, a more general discussion was introduced on optimisation and harmonization of regional sampling activities in the Mediterranean Sea. It was recalled that a methodology was already in place up until 2016 and processed further in the outputs of the RECOLAPE project, for the implementation of a clear Regional Sampling Plan, suitable for DCF needs and for better coordination with regional database. The group was open to the possibility of organizing a workshop in order to finalise and document a regional sampling process (a larger discussion about the possibility to create a regional database and estimation system or RDBES, able to integrate the RDBES Mediterranean & BS with ICCAT data was initiated during the meeting, summary in the report section 6).

4.9. ISSG Bluefin tuna state of play

The ISSG bluefin tuna did not advance compared to the previous year. Main reason mentioned was the lack of time for experts to participate in all the meetings and working groups, specifically as within the Bluefin tuna ICCAT WG the current workload is overwhelming. As in other subgroups, a lack of human resources has been identified and the group should recommend the EU MS to address this problem. It was generally noted that the participation of experts in the RCG was low and it was explained that, on top of currently having a very busy schedule, it is also not a very valued task within research institutes since it is not recognized as a scientific activity, but more as a data reporting task.

The Group also discussed the need to get a complete view of the bluefin tuna biological data sampled by the different EU Member States, as they can be of a high value to the ICCAT bluefin tuna working group. ICCAT research program (GBYP) has been coordinating bluefin tuna biological sampling activities for years and they need a clear view of what is sampled by DCF to avoid double funding of similar sampling activities as well as to plan future activities. Current and past representatives of ICCAT attending the meeting noted that this has been requested by ICCAT for a long time and that no formal answer has been provided so far.

Discussions followed on where to find the information on the sampling achieved by the different EU MS, which is stored in the National workplan, programs and reports (<https://datacollection.jrc.ec.europa.eu/wp-np-ar>). It was noted that the sampling carried out was not always as useful as it could be and it was proposed to focus on the future sampling rather than

addressing an account of the past, but the Group found it important to make sure that a clear account of what is already available was made. It was proposed that a specific data call targeting such biological sampling could be prepared by ICCAT for this data to be provided by EU Member States.

Regarding future sampling activities, GBYP proposed to help fund and organize a workshop on sampling aspects, an activity that has already been planned but cancelled due to the present sanitary context (Covid-19). Another point mentioned was related to the general poor quality of data on bycatch from LL operating on bluefin tuna.

4.10. ISSG Baitboat/pole and line state of play

A brief and general presentation was made on the current state of this subgroup. This presentation was made jointly by national researchers from Spain and Portugal. Presentation states that ISSG Baitboat/pole and line targets three species of tropical tuna (BET, SKJ, YFT) and two species of temperate tuna (BFT, ALB) in its traditional fishing areas. It is mentioned that there are several very important issues that affect this whole subgroup in a very similar way. Data on catches and effort of the fleets of the Canary Islands, Madeira and Azores are presented.

There are social problems in some segment of the fleet that are generating conflicts among the fishermen with this type of bait boat gear. It is recognized that there should be better coordination on effort sampling and analysis protocols performed by this subgroup. It is mentioned that there is a very urgent need to receive expert support for the elaboration of standardised CPUEs for each fleet or for all the joint baitboat fisheries in the area. On the other hand, it was noted that this subgroup could participate in joint research projects to better understand the fishery as a whole (by target species).

A clarification on coordination in data gathering regarding either the age reading or biological sampling between metiers or countries was requested.

The reply was that there is a coordination between the laboratories from different islands on age reading on albacore and tropical tuna and on stomach content. That coordination will be continued between the members of the subgroup.

4.11. Secweb project presentation

The objective of this presentation is to introduce the participants of the RCG LP meeting with the main features of the SecWeb project and with the progress achieved so far for its first semester of activity implementation. It also explains how this project responds to the commitments set in the ToR for ISSG “Implementation of generic tools for the RCGs: Web, secretariat” chaired by Els Torreele (EV ILVO). This project was launched in 2021 under the umbrella of the MARE/2020/08 grant.

The presentation was made by Rosa Fernández (CETMAR) who will act on behalf of the project coordinator, in association with Els Torreele who is leading and co-leading some of the project activities (the Secretariat setup and the Communication WPs).

The project is being implemented by a partnership made of EV-ILVO, CETMAR, AZTI, EAFA and WMR and it is keeping fluent and systematic communication and interaction with all the RCG Chairs.

In this first semester, the main activities have developed around the following:

- The setup of an efficient communication structure and a consistent workflow (with regular meetings shared repositories and standardised templates/image)
- The engagement with all the relevant stakeholder groups.

- The development of the project website (www.fisheries-rcg.eu) as a main entry point to give visibility to the work, organisation, objectives and participants of the RCGs, the ISSGs and their collaborative past and present projects.
- The development of other communication items such as a leaflet, a newsletter, etc.
- And finally, a pilot experience for testing the Secretariat Support in the context of the RCGs NANSEA and Baltic, which will inform on needs, procedures, room for improvement and scope of action and effort needed. This is to be added to the work planned for the design of future scenarios for the long-term funding and implementation of the Secretariat

The presentation also includes some points for debate and/or consultation to feed into some of the SecWeb activities and products from the RCG LP perspective. Examples of this are the shared on-line questionnaire and an exchange on how best to represent the RCG LP scope in an interactive map (to be made accessible through the RCG specific website section).

4.12. Focus on large pelagics recreational fisheries

The RCG NANS&EA and RCG Baltic proposed creating an ISSG on Marine Recreational Fishery in 2020.

During the RCG LP 2021, the progress of intersessional work of this ISSG on Recreational Fisheries (RF) was presented. The aim of the Intersessional Subgroup on Recreational Fisheries fits in preparatory work for decision-making, including input for regional work plans.

For this subgroup to work properly, we need to ensure that the right people are involved, including experts from ICES WGRFS (and other relevant Working Groups), DCF, RCG LP, RCG Med & BS, and RCG ECON. National Correspondents (NC) need to be approached to ensure that relevant bodies are contacted to ensure expert participation.

The terms of reference of this working group are listed below:

- Define a species list at a regional level.
- Work on regional sampling plans for shared stocks.
- MRF data incorporation in the RDBES but also MRF and the data model.

RF ISSG work in coordination with the relevant ICES WGRFS and the FishN'Co¹ consortium². Some of the initial work plan objectives proved to be very ambitious for this newly formed Subgroup, and adjustments were made, including the proposal for some subgroup work during the RCG NA NS&EA and RCG Baltic 2021 technical meeting.

As a result of the work done during the technical meeting, several outputs can be settled regarding the tasks for this Subgroup.

Regarding Regional species list, the outcome should be a species list proposal for each region based on end-user needs. It was asked to the RF ISSG members to identify priority species for each Member State and Region, based on the RCG Med & BS approach (with the criteria defined by GFCM). The different opinions expressed clarified that there were diverse concepts and expectations concerning this issue, probably due to some divergences in the interpretation of the legislation. A suggestion to

¹ <https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/fishnco/> : Strengthening EU-MAP data collection by developing Regional Work Plans for the Regional Coordination Groups (RCG) NA NS & EA, Baltic and Large Pelagics and Economics Issues.

² Ifremer, CETMAR, EV-ILVO, Marine Institute, Stichting Wageningen Research, IRD, AZTI, IPMA, IEO, EAFA, NISEA sociedadá cooperativa, Technical University of Denmark and Luonnonvarakeskus.

build a list of mandatory species came after plenary discussions at the RCG NA NS&EA and RCG Baltic 2021 meeting:

Separate data collection on the core-group list of stocks (already required by end-users – where we know recreational catches and in some cases length and other biological data); and on the prospective data collection on catches of species that we are still not sure if they are essential or not (coarse catch data on a broader range of stocks). Assessment groups are asked for what stocks they might need data in recreational fisheries – based on expert judgement, a sort of risk-based analysis. Relevant Working Groups should screen that list of stocks and establish a dialogue on deleted cases and a final version set forward.

Regarding Regional Sampling Plans, four candidate species should be included in the RSP: cod, seabass, eel and salmon.

Concerning main end-user needs, it was agreed that WGRFS should prepare a questionnaire to be sent to relevant Assessment Working Groups (Are they using the data? How are they using it? Which difficulties are encountered? etc.).

Key WG members should be invited to relevant WG meetings to promote better communication between data collectors and stock assessors.

Also, the Regional WP will serve as an essential roadmap for MS action on Recreational Fisheries data collection.

Considering what was discussed during the WGRDBESGOV meeting, the incorporation of Recreational data in the RDBES should be done by 2023. It was agreed that the best way forward would be to arrange a test data call using CSV/Excel file submission based on the proposed recreational data format. It was also deliberated that progress can be made on recreational data without waiting for the commercial data developments to be completed.

This work will be carried out with tight collaboration between the RCG ISSG on Recreational Fisheries, the ICES WGRFS, and the FishN'Co Project.

In addition, we need to ensure that this work is done in communication with the RDBES Core Group to guarantee that the transition to the RDBES will be as easy as possible.

It was also deliberated in the RCG NA NS&EA and RCG Baltic plenary that the list of species to incorporate at the regional level should also be decided by analysing the results of the pilot studies (PS1 - Relative share of catches of recreational fisheries compared to commercial fisheries). COM will provide access to PS1 reports to this ISSG. Another deliberation was that this Subgroup should be pan-regional, and so, a close collaboration with the other (relevant) RCGs will be promoted – RCG LP & RCG Med & BS. It is also foreseen liaising with these RCGs to harmonise the methodologies used. The collaboration with RCG ECON is also considered essential to define the social and economic perspective of the recreational fisheries.

The following workplan was proposed for 2021-2022:

- Work on the RSP: cod, seabass, eel, and salmon.
- In liaison with WGRFS (and other relevant WG), analyse the end-user needs regarding regional data collection and the results of the pilot studies.

- In collaboration with WGRFS (and other relevant WG), selection criteria and thresholds (always based on end-user needs) should also be decided. Discuss the suggestions to build a list of required species.
- As this Subgroup is pan-regional, a close collaboration with the other (relevant) RCGs will be promoted – RCG LP & RCG Med & BS. It is also foreseen liaising with these RCGs to harmonise the methodologies used.
- Also, a close collaboration with RCG ECON to define the social and economic perspective.

Pedro Lino started the discussion with a question for the end users – what are the species that need to be collected in recreational fisheries for the Large pelagic group? Emilia Batista added that collection of recreational fisheries data will be compulsory by new EU MAP and by the new Control Regulation. This work, under DCF, already started by pilot projects but the EU MAP say that highly migratory ICCAT species have to be collected, so we need to ask ICCAT what are those exact species and what are the species to collect data on catches?

Furthermore, points have been raised by Dalia and Pedro that in addition to the list of species to be collected, information on what biological variables to collect is also needed, that most of the recreational fishery catches do not have landings and are released alive, bringing a need to collect data for catch and release which makes the job more difficult.

Carlos Palma responded that right now, the ICCAT list has 200+ species so there is a need to take the ICCAT recommendations and focus on bluefin tuna, majority of billfishes, albacore, sharks and similar species that require collection of catches and samples, and those 20 to 30 species is a good starting point. As for the list of biological variables, at least the size and weight should be taken.

Antonio added that the ICCAT is applying the regulations and Task 1 has to be reported for every species, and this goes for recreational fishery as well. Countries need to see what they fish and then according to the ICCAT list identify the species targeted and should give those results.

In addition to these exchanges, the group made a recommendation for the creation of list that specifies required data for the recreational fisheries (reference large_pelagic_2021_r06 in the report section 10).

5. Available data, data transmissions and gaps (ToR 2)

Presentation for the data transmissions and gaps was brief, with a mention of current active issues:

For Data Transmission Monitoring Tool with issues related to ICCAT and IOTC there was one issue with ICCAT Task I for France regarding fleet characteristics - an aggregation problem that is being resolved through the implementation of a new procedure to generate the revised file. As for IOTC data call, Italy didn't report number of forms for years 2016 to 2019. These issues are assessed by the STECF EWG 21-09 meeting and no discussion occurred.

For EU MS reporting status - all the EU MS fully or partially accomplished their statistics reporting obligations. The majority of the problems in the document are due to forms and shapes (e.g. incomplete header sections). These issues are usually corrected by the ICCAT and evaluated as satisfactory by STECF.

6. Regional database (ToR 3)

Discussion regarding the development of a regional database for the RCG LP dates back to 2016 before the transitioning from RCM to RCG format. Before going into an overview and the state of play of the different systems being deployed in the other RCG, a short summary of our RCG work is provided:

- During the RCG LP 2019 annual meeting, there was no clear consensus on our regional database development and there were still pending questions on the ICES Regional Database and Estimation System (RDBES).
- During 2020, we had a partial answer from several countries to the RDBES data call, focusing on the yellowfin tuna (as a test stock) and Albacore Mediterranean. Furthermore, during the RCG LP 2020 annual meeting, two recommendations related to the RDBES were proposed with one of them recommending the utilisation of the RDBES as the RCG LP regional database. At that time questions were raised regarding the finance and the confidentiality of data. Finally, after recommendations submission to the NCs for adoption, decision for RDBES did not achieve the required consensus. The main hesitation for this decision was related to the hosting of the database by the ICES.

Furthermore, a presentation of the French biological data collection on tropical tuna and bycatch has been done. The database covers IRD's historical data (from 1974) and data collected under DCF/EUMAP (2003 to today). The species and features collected have been presented as well as the upcoming project, the determination of prey at the lowest taxonomic group.

A discussion on the FAD (Fish Aggregating Device) data issue started with a presentation of the background and the purpose of FAD data collection. This data is essential for the RFMO compliance and scientific studies like the estimation of tuna abundance or even to reduce the impact of FADs on the marine pollution. Many collaborative works between scientist and the industry have been realised during the last decade. For example, to define minimum standards and improve the data collection mechanism. Some of these projects have been funded by the EU:

- The Specific Contract 8 and n°9 "Catch, Effort, and Ecosystem impacts of tropical tuna fisheries" (CECOFAD 1 and CECOFA2)
- Specific Contract No 7 (FRAMEWORK CONTRACT EASME/EMFF/2016/008) Testing designs and identify options to mitigate impacts of drifting FADs on the ecosystem (BIOFAD)
 - Strengthening Regional COoperation in the area of LArge PELagic fisheries data collection (RECOLAPE, MARE/2016/22)

The focus was aimed at the collaboration's next steps with the objective to strengthen the coordination of FAD data. The RCG LP members agreed to coordinate this issue under the sub-ISSG Tropical Tuna Treatment with the perspective of discussing the improvement of the data collection, standardisation of reporting formats/categories across RFMOs, sharing the buoys data among all EU members and creation of a data exchange standard.

Related to the difficulty of moving forward on development topic of the regional database, the group made the recommendation to create a dedicated ISSG to deal with Regional database development (reference large_pelagic_2021_r05 in the report section 10).

Regarding the development of the regional database for the Mediterranean and Black Seas (Med&BSRDBFIS, <https://medbsrdb.eu/>), the last state of play was presented during the meeting. This project was launched in 2021 under the umbrella of the MARE/2020/08 proposals and aims to the development of a web-based integrated Fisheries Information System driven by a friendly graphical

user interface to support the management, analysis and elaboration of alphanumeric and spatial data from the fisheries sector. In brief, the objectives are to provide scientific advice and support the work of the RCG Mediterranean and Black Seas. The project is organised into 6 inter-correlated work packages (Figure 3) and has the following objectives:

- Mapping and analysis of the current situation (WP1, AS-IS analysis, started).
- The range of options on the different conditions and requirements (WP2, TO-BE analysis, already started).
- RDB specifications & final requirements (WP3, Gap analysis, already started).
- WP4-RDBFIS: Database construction (T4.1), graphical user interface, access and security subsystem (T4.2), data validation and quality checking tools (T4.3), data processing tools (T4.4), input-output facilities & automatic reporting (T4.5).
- Testing the application (WP 5, workshop).
- The entire scope of products, production testing, manuals (WP 6).

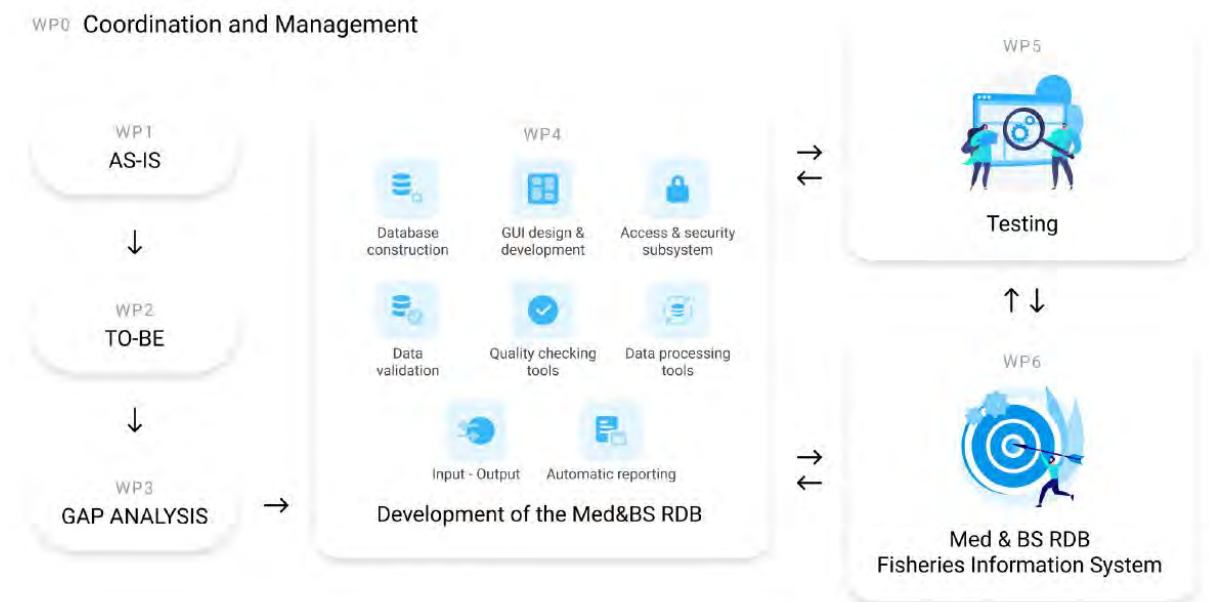


Figure 3: Project work packages overview

It is important to note that the source code of the database used for the development will be a full open source (database, graphical interface and programming). Furthermore, the Med & BS RDBFIS will be first implemented in the headquarters of the Hellenic Centre for Marine Research. In addition, the database is planned to contain detailed biological data of demersal, small pelagic species and aggregated transversal data. Other data like bycatch, PETS or large pelagics may also be considered for their integration in the database.

After the presentation, several questions were raised that stimulated discussions.

The first one related to the compatibility and linkage with the ICES RDBES system. Regarding that, it was stated that the RDBFIS will employ a different structure. However, it is planned to find some synergies to ensure compatibility with the data analysis procedures.

A second question was related to the future host of the database, which is not defined yet, but two options have been considered – either the Joint Research Centre (JRC) or the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM).

The group proposed to further explore if this system could be of interest for the RCG LP. Even if in the future the use of this system is not found to be feasible, it is important to follow its development to find the best way for potential data exchange with it in the future. In this context, it was proposed to follow the next Steering Committee Meeting of the Med&BS Regional Database project, planned for 12-13 July 2021. So far, four people have been identified as potential participants to this event which could provide feedback to the RCG LP in due time: Ioannis Thasitis (DFMR, Cyprus), Tserpes George (HCMR, Greece), Julien Lebranchu (IRD, France) and Mathieu Depetris (IRD, France).

Regarding the state of play for the RDBES functionality, a brief overview of the global process is provided in the figure 4 below.

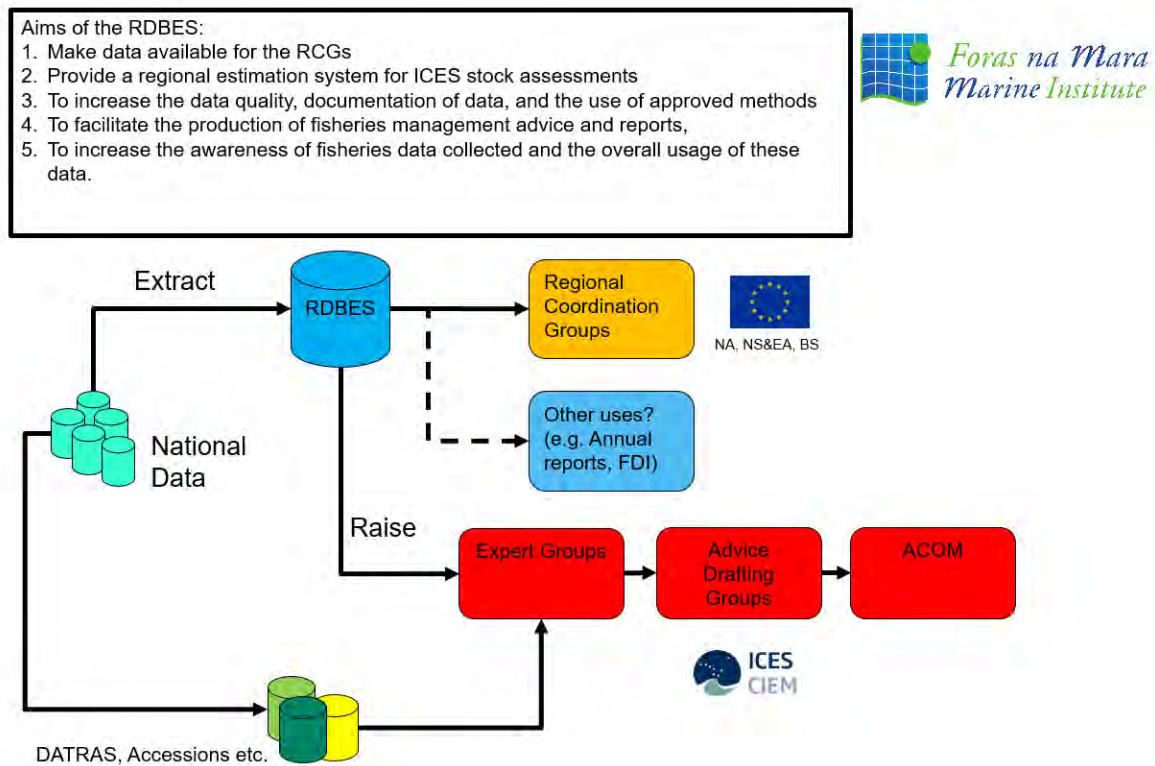


Figure 4: Overview of the RDBES process that was used to explain the RDBES functionality to the Irish data collection team (with the logo of Marine Institute - Foras na Mara, in Irish). Since the RDBES is in principle being developed to support the MS providing data to ICES, the RCG North Atlantic, North Sea and Eastern Arctic, and Baltic are included in the scheme.

Furthermore, the current RDBES development roadmap was presented (Figure 5).

Year	RDB	InterCatch	RDBES	Data calls	Core Group
2021	Production Data in/out	Production Data in/out	Development Test data in/out	Test all stocks CL and CE; Test selected stocks CS 2018-2020; Test bycatch	WGRDB-EST continue design-based estimation package WKRDB-POP3 target all stocks of data- call. WKRDB-RAISE&TAF to help countries with migrating estimation routines
2022	Production Data in/out	Production Data in/out	Production Data in/out	All stocks 2021 data. Bycatch/PETS data and/or recreational data	WGRDB-EST to accommodate ratio estimators in the design based estimation package. Specify any further RDBES changes required.
2023	Stay alive Data out	Stay alive Data out	Production Data in/out	All stocks 2022 data, and historic data if possible. Bycatch/PETS data and/or recreational data	WGRDB-EST to finalize design based estimation package. Specify any further RDBES changes required.

Figure 5: RDBES development roadmap

Additionally in June 2021, several countries (such as France, Spain and Cyprus) participated in the Workshop on Populating the RDBES data model (WKRDB-POP3). Among other objectives, this working group prepared for the RDBES 2021 data call that was launched with a deadline of 30th of September 2021. Data from 2018 to 2020 was included with 19 test stocks of commercial species in addition to two sensitive species as incidental by-catch.

It has been confirmed that the financing of the RDBES was secured for 3 more years by ICES.

Following the presentation of ICES RDBES questions were raised regarding the costs and data confidentiality. RDBES core group representative replied that ICES implements transparent rules and procedures for data handling for which all ICES members feel comfortable to respond to Data Calls. Cost-wise it was stated that any minor development in-line with current RDBES ongoing work will not impose any additional funds. However, if RCG LP data accommodation into RDBES Hierarchies is found to need major developments, such cost will need to be addressed by the RCG LP members.

7. Sampling and Regional Working Plans (ToR 4)

The third day of the annual meeting focused on discussion about the design of our Regional Work Plan (RWP) for the large pelagics. This topic occurred under the umbrella of the project FishnCo (<https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/fishnco/>)³.

This project addresses the need to develop RWPs for the RCGs North Atlantic, North Sea and Eastern Arctic, Baltic, Large Pelagics for solving economic issues and delivering support to these RCGs and their ISSGs. The expected outputs will be of direct relevance to strengthen regional and EU-wide cooperation on fisheries data collection and enhance data quality.

The work on the project will be carried out transparently and in direct consultation with stakeholders involved in fisheries data collection (including National Correspondents, Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), RCGs and the EU Commission, among others) to facilitate a smooth adoption of the RWPs to be developed.

The project consists of 5 different work packages:

- WP1 - Compiling, identifying and filling information gaps. The levels of ambitions of the RWP will be defined around the Thematic Focus Areas. The information available and the gaps in existing knowledge will then be analysed - the aim will then be to fill in those knowledge gaps and inform the design of the RWP Structures and decision processes.
- WP2 - Establishing decision-making structures and processes. RWPs are completely new structures so there is a need to develop and describe the required processes to design and implement them - this needs to be addressed in discussions between Member States using the RCGs as a forum. Such discussions will be about sharing responsibilities, expected contributions, decision-making and adoption processes, and how to implement and manage RWPs in a harmonised, cooperative and transparent way. The Rules of Procedure for the RCGs will need to be revised and templates supporting the agreed decision-making processes will need to be drafted.
- WP3 - Drafting the RWPs. The RWPs and the different elements they will need to contain will be co-created to fit the new EU-MAP Regulation to come into force in 2022. The content and the structure of the RWPs will be produced and this will need to happen in consistency with the National Work Plans. New requirements for coordination will also be included and all acknowledging different realities and levels of ambition.
- WP4 - Communication and dissemination. Communication will be integrated into the RCGs strategy. Fishn'co will implement communication and dissemination actions around the RWPs and about the activity of the RCGs to promote visibility and facilitate engagement towards the RWP stakeholders.
- WP5 - Coordination and management. Activities will be devoted to support and facilitate fluent and efficient administrative procedures and adequate follow-up of work progress and achievements.

Design of a RWP is an important goal for our RCG. This process could provide an inventory for each survey in the managed stocks with all our work being documented in one single document. There is no better way to identify the gaps and find common solutions to solve them. In addition, this process

³ Strengthening EU-MAP data collection by developing Regional Work Plans for the Regional Coordination Groups (RCG) NA NS & EA, Baltic and Large Pelagics and Economics Issues

develops our coordination in several aspects (recommendations, bi and multilateral agreements) and facilitates our work with optimisation of human and financial resources. Basically, RWP is a translation of our National Work Plan (NWP) at a higher level (regional level, at the scale of several countries) with the integration of all our specifications and collaborations. Furthermore, a Regional Sampling Plan (RSP) is a part of an RWP. This is very useful in order to move from a national to a regional dynamic.

Template to define our focal areas and levels of ambition associated was presented during the meeting, with a draft example for the tropical tuna purse seiner fishery. Furthermore, a RWP draft was presented in relation to the work done by the RCG NANSEA & Baltic. We have been very ambitious with the agenda and how we want to move forward regarding this topic, but the main goal of the day, in addition to the presentation and introduction of the RWP concepts to participants, is to define our focal areas, people associated and what is the next step in coordination of this.

After discussions, the group agreed to define our focus areas according to our ISSGs structure and composition. Julien Lebranchu (IRD, France) and Mathieu Depetris (IRD, France), which are already involved in the project, proposed to initiate coordination of the next steps to move forward and make the link between the project and the RCG LP. It is important to understand that all of the above should be considered while keeping in mind the need for human resources as was already mentioned in several other topics (link to the recommendation reference [large_pelagic_2021_r01](#) in the report section 10).

8. Next venue and chairs

As the year before, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and sanitary conditions associated, proposals were made regarding hosting and dates of the next year annual meeting. These proposals will be reviewed at the beginning of the next year and according to the current context. If the conditions allow, Croatia proposed to host the meeting during the last two weeks of June 2022. Nevertheless, if the situation does not favour a physical meeting, virtual meeting like this one is a solution.

Unfortunately, the group did not find any consensus regarding the next chairing of the RCG LP. Josip Males (IZOR, Croatia) has confirmed availability at the present to be the co-chair of the RCG LP for the next year (last year of his mandate), but the mandate of Mathieu Depetris (IRD, France) finishes at the end of the year. Without any consensus made, the RCG LP rules of procedures designate the MSs to be in charge of naming the next chair. This topic should be discussed as soon as possible and ideally before the pre-decision meeting, to have the best possible handover between the outgoing chair and the incoming chair. In this regard, the informal practice is that the end of the year meetings regroups the three RCG LP chairs - the incoming chair replaces one of the two chairs under the mandate.

Furthermore, below you can find the historical summary of the previous RCG LP annual meetings and associated chairs:

- In 2010 the RCM on Long Distance Fisheries and the subgroup on Large Pelagic were held in Madrid, Spain. The subgroup Large Pelagic was led by Jaime Mejuto (IEO, Spain).
- In 2011 the RCM on Long Distance Fisheries and the subgroup on Large Pelagic were held in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The subgroup Large Pelagic was led by Victoria Ortiz de Zárate (IEO, Spain).
- In 2013 the RCM Mediterranean and Black Sea (Med and BS) and RCM Long Distance Fisheries (LDF) were held simultaneously in Constanza, Romania. The participants of RCM LDF and of RCM Med and BS dealing with Large Pelagics as a subgroup and discussed the question of positioning of Large Pelagics coordination. The Sub-Group was informally led by Pierre Chavance (IRD, France).
- In 2014 the RCM Med and BS and the subgroup on Large Pelagics were held in Zagreb, Croatia. The subgroup Large Pelagics was led by Pierre Chavance (IRD, France).
- In 2015 the RCM Med and BS and their subgroup Large Pelagics was held in Roma, Italia. The subgroup Large Pelagics was led by Pierre Chavance (IRD, France).
- In 2016 the RCM Med and BS and the subgroup Large Pelagics was held in Spain. The subgroup Large Pelagics was led by Jon Ruiz (AZTI, Spain).
- In 2017 the RCM Med and BS and the subgroup Large Pelagics was held in Olhão, Portugal. The subgroup Large Pelagics was led by Jon Ruiz (AZTI, Spain).
- In 2018 the RCG Large Pelagics was held in Heraklion, Greece. The RCG Large Pelagics was co-chaired by Jon Ruiz (AZTI, Spain) and Pedro Lino (IPMA, Portugal).
- In 2019 the RCG Large Pelagics was held in Madrid, Spain. The RCG Large Pelagics was co-chaired by Jon Ruiz (AZTI, Spain) and Pedro Lino (IPMA, Portugal).
- In 2020 the RCG Large Pelagics was held online (hosted by AZTI). The RCG Large Pelagics was co-chaired by Pedro Lino (IPMA, Portugal) and Mathieu Depetris (IRD, France), with support of Jon Ruiz (AZTI, Spain).

9. Any other issues

Due to several issues with the utilisation of Microsoft Teams that occurred during the meeting (connection problems, impossibility to reach the sharepoint, administrative blocking in Teams configuration while modifying the participant's name, etc.), feedback from the participants was requested on the other platforms available. After discussion Zoom seemed to be the best compromise in terms of efficiency for hosting the meeting next year and two platforms should be investigated regarding the sharepoint hosting, ownCloud (<https://owncloud.com/>) and Nextcloud (<https://nextcloud.com/>).

No further items were discussed in this section.

10. Recommendations

ISSG or meeting associated	Section report associated	Identification	Short title	Short description	Action to be taken	Responsible for the action	Deadline	Background	Decision to be taken by NC?
RCG annual meeting	4.3	large_pelagic_2021_r01	Manage involvement in the RCG LP	The group recommends to "use" NCs as a focal point for RCG LP participation. Where it is possible an NC substitute should be named to participate in the meeting if the NC is not available. It's also important to allow EU Commission to make some proposal regarding RCG LP expert involvement.	Send one mail at the beginning of the year to ask the NCs: - of their potential participation in the annual meeting, - feedback on expert list who can attend the RCG LP annual meeting, - to design a potential NC substitute. Each update of expert list should be validated by the NC associated. EU Commission will provide a list of experts too.	Chairs and NCs	Beginning of 2022		Yes
RCG annual meeting	4.5	large_pelagic_2021_r02	Common RoP	The group recommends joining the dynamic initiative from the RCG NANSEA & Baltic to develop a common RoP between RCG.	Sending mail to the other RCG chairs to start a dialogue on how to promote and develop this initiative.	Chairs	Before stage 3 meetings (in september 2021)		No
RCG annual meeting	4.7	large_pelagic_2021_r03	Increase number of participants in RCG LP ISSGs	The group identified a need for additional human resources in each ISSGs.	Bring this need to the attention of NCs and explain the structure of the ISSGs associated and try to integrate this need in the NC's participants feedback at the begging of the year.	Chairs and NCs	For stage 3 meetings (in september 2021)		Yes
RCG annual meeting	4.8	large_pelagic_2021_r04	Use the standard measure (SLJFL) instead of CLJFL for swordfish, amending accordingly the current observers manuals.	The group identifies the need to be very clear on this important issue, fixing the problem as soon as possible to ensure that all measures for LP are taken in the straight length and use the proper code for the curved measurement when this is not possible.	Bring this need to the attention of the NC correspondents to move this recommendation urgently at the MS level (for example with contacting sampling observer programs coordinators of his associated country) to recognize where this problem is occurring.	Chairs and NCs	Before stage 3 meetings (in september 2021)	ICCAT document SCRS/2021/017	Yes
RCG annual meeting	6	large_pelagic_2021_r05	Creation of a ISSG focused on Regional database development	The group recommends creating an ISSG to work on the development of a Regional database for the RCG LP or any other process with a common data format for our RCG. Furthermore, this topic has to be included through the different ISSGs by any transversal process (to bring the specificity of each LP fishery).	Bring this subject to the attention of NCs and explain the need of participations and the structure of the ISSGs associated to try to integrate it in the NC's participants feedback at the begging of the year. Furthermore the group recommends including reflexions related to the development of a regional database in the ToR of the different ISSGs .	Chairs and NCs	For stage 3 meetings (in september 2021)		Yes
RCG annual meeting	4.12	large_pelagic_2021_r06	Creation of list that specifies required data for the recreational fisheries	In continuity of the work done in the RCG NANSEA & Baltic 2020-2021 ISSG on Recreational Fisheries, the group recommends having a clearer identification from ICCAT on: - stocks for which statistically robust sampling scheme should be implemented to enable catch quantity estimation; - obligatory species and biological variables to be collected in tasks for the assessment and management of the recreational fisheries (where recreational catches affect the development of fish stocks).	Send the request to ICCAT and find a way to work in collaboration on this subject	Chairs, ICCAT and RCG NANSEA & Baltic ISSG on Recreational Fisheries	Beginning of 2022		No

Annexes

Annex 1- Participants list

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* e (expert), c (chair), ncs (national correspondent substitute), nc (national correspondent) and o (observer)

Annex 2 – Meeting agenda



ToR	Description
1	RCG LP structure, organisation and links
2	Available data, data transmissions and gaps
3	Regional database
4	Sampling and Regional Working Plans

	Break
	Discussion
	Presentation
	Subgroup work

Agenda RCG LP, virtual MS Teams meeting 28-30 June 2021 (Brussels Time)

Date	Time (CET, Brussels Time)	Duration	ToR	Item	Subject	Details	Presenter(s)	Rapporteur(s)
First day 28/06/2021	09:30	30min			Testing			
	10:00	30min	0.1		Welcome and introduction	Welcome, house rules, adoption of the agenda, report format, brief round table	RCG chairs	
	10:30	15min	1	1.1	Feedback from Commission/STECF	Update on revision of EU-MAP, content and timing	Monika S.	EU COM
		15min			Discussion in plenary			
	11:00	15min			Coffee break			
	11:15	15min	1	1.2	RCG LP structure evolution	New structure presentation (global and ISSGs), feedbacks summary, referent people for each country/ISSG, global ISSG organisation, implication of non-EU partners and relation with other RCG (for example RCG Med&BS), discussion about common Rules of Procedures between RCG	Mathieu D.	Josip M.
		45min			Discussion in plenary			
	12:15	60min			Lunch time			
	13:15	30min	1	1.3	ISSG Tropical Tunas	State of play sub-ISSG Tropical Tuna Treatment (feedback form T3R testing, planning of the evolution of the methodology, ...) and sub-ISSG Observers	Antoine D. & Philippe S.	Jon R.
		30min			Discussion in plenary			
	14:15	15min	1	1.4	ISSG Longlines fisheries outside Mediterranean Sea	State of play	Jose C.	Jose C.
		15min			Discussion in plenary			
	14:45	15min	1	1.5	ISSG Mediterranean Sea large pelagics fisheries	State of play, feedback from the Swordfish biology workshop, problem with SWO fish body length measurements	George T. & Antonio D.N.	Fulvio G.
		15min			Discussion in plenary			
	15:15	15min			Coffee break			
	15:30	15min	1	1.6	ISSG Bluefin tuna	State of play	Tristan R.	Josip M.
		15min			Discussion in plenary			
	16:00	15min	1	1.7	ISSG Baitboat/pole and line	State of play	Pedro P.	Josip M.
		15min			Discussion in plenary			
16:30	15min	1	1.9	Secweb project	Presentation of the project, its aims and link, support to our RCG	Rosa F.	Maria P. & Susana R.R.	
	15min			Discussion in plenary				
17:00				End of the day				
	09:30	30min			Discussion regarding our RCG decision process			
	10:00	15min	2	2.1	ICCAT feedback	Summarise of data needs and gaps regarding LP data	Carlos & Fransico	To define
	15min			Discussion in plenary				
	10:30	15min	2	2.2	IOTC feedback	Summarise of data needs and gaps regarding LP data	Cynthia F., Emmanuel C. & Fab	To define
	15min			Discussion in plenary				
	11:00	15min			Coffee break			
	11:15	15min	2	2.3	Other RFMOs feedback		To define	To define
	15min			Discussion in plenary				
	11:45	15min	2	2.4	Data transmission failures		Josip M.	Mathieu D.
	30min			Discussion in plenary				

Second day 29/06/2021	12:30	60min	Lunch time				
	13:30	15min	3	3.1	RCG LP regional database	Development state of play, link with recommendations of the year before, integration of FAD data (relation with working group on FAD held in April 2021) and biological data	Mathieu D. & Aurelie G. Julien L.
		15min	Discussion in plenary				
	14:00	15min	3	3.2	Med&BS Regional Database	Development state of play	Stefanos K. George T.
		30min	Discussion in plenary				
	14:45	15min	Coffee break				
	15:00	15min	3	3.3	ICES RDBES	Project presentation, potential link with the LP data, questions regarding database hosting	David C. Ioannis T.
		30min	Discussion in plenary				
15:45	15min	1	1.8	Recreational Fisheries	Link to work done in the RCG NANSEA & Baltic 2020-2021 ISSG on Recreational Fisheries	Dália CC. R. Josip M.	
	15min	Discussion in plenary					
	16:15	End of the day					
Third day 30/06/2021	09:30	30min	Testing and discussion				
	10:00	15min	4	4.1	FishnCo project	Presentation of the project, aims and links with the RCG LP	Joël V. & Leonie O. Mathieu D.
		15min	Discussion in plenary				
	10:30	30min	Definiton of our levels of ambition		Presentation of the template, definition of our focus area, link to our levels of ambition for the LP, potential links with the ISSGs	All	
	11:00	60min	Subgroups working		According to focus area defined above	All	
	12:00	60min	Lunch time				
	13:00	60min	Subgroups feedback		Brief summaries of subgroups feedback, difficulties encountered or updated proposals	All	
	14:00	30min	Next step definition			All	
	14:30	30min	Open discussion to other matters			All	
	15:00	30min	RCG LP 2022, venue and chairs			RCG chairs	
	15:30	End of the meeting					