



RCG's Secretariat



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DISCOVER

Regional Coordination Groups for Fisheries Data Collection

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I. Understanding the context

I.1. Data Collection Framework

The provision of scientific advice to support the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) relies on the collection and availability of high-quality fishery data. These data are collected by the EU Member States (MS) under the EU Data Collection Framework (DCF), established through Regulation (EU) 2017/1004.

The DCF outlines the MS obligations to collect, manage and make available a wide range of fisheries and aquaculture data needed for scientific advice. This includes biological, environmental, technical, and socio-economic data on the fisheries, aquaculture and processing sectors. The MS collect the data following the national work plans and report annually on the implementation.

According to Article 8 of the DCF Regulation, MS must cooperate and coordinate their data collection activities to improve the reliability of methods and enhance the quality, timeliness and coverage of data. Further, Article 9 specifies that MS must establish Regional Coordination Groups (RCG) for each marine region and make efforts to coordinate their actions with third countries having sovereignty or jurisdiction over waters in the same marine region.

The DCF underlines the end-user driven approach and the regionalization of data collection, creating Regional Coordination Groups.

I.2. Regional Coordination Groups

The Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs) are established by relevant Member States to facilitate cooperation on data collection in each marine region or specific fisheries. They consist of experts appointed by MS, including National Correspondents (NCs), and the European Commission (EC). End users of data, other stakeholders and relevant non-EU countries may participate in RCG meetings as observers, where necessary.

RCGs may submit regional work plans that improve coordination in the corresponding sea basins, to further underpin reliable scientific advice.

2. What is the role of the RCGs?

The Regional Coordination Groups are the main fora for regional coordination and cooperation within the different marine regions or specific type of fisheries contributing to the EU fisheries Data Collection Framework. They coordinate with each other and with the EC, where issues affect several marine regions.

Support the implementation of the DCF

The RCGs support the implementation of the DCF and can submit regional work plans to improve coordination and further underpin reliable scientific advice. The RCGs are tasked, together with the EC and end users, to set up and manage compatible databases at regional level.

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Enhance consistency in data collection

The RCGs enhance consistency in data collection in a sea basin through agreed methodologies and approaches to respond to data calls, cooperation on scientific surveys run by the MS (e.g. task sharing), coordination of sampling activities, addressing data issues (e.g. quality checks before data uploads, follow-up of issues reported in the Data Transmission Monitoring Tool) and coordination of work related to regional databases. The RCGs, together with end users, can define the frequency of data collection and further expand on the data requirements that are set in the EU MAP.

Ensure coordination between the MS

The RCGs ensure coordination between the MS on national sampling programmes, design and implement regional sampling programmes. The RCGs engage the MS through their NCs, recommend and agree changes in the national and regional sampling programmes respectively.

Dialogue with end users

The RCGs are the fora for dialogue with end users about the user data needs, data gaps, data quality and standardization, with a regional approach. The RCGs are also the place to discuss, validate and recommend implementation of new methodologies and best practices guidelines in the relevant national or regional sampling programmes. The RCGs can reach agreements about the MS participation in surveys at sea.

3. How are the RCGs organized?

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The RCGs elaborate and agree on rules of procedures for their activities. Each RCG has their own rules of procedures establishing the scope, the role and responsibilities of the chairperson(s), the frequency of meetings, and the decision-making process among others.

The RCGs have a flexible structure, appointing the lead or co-chairperson(s) and any other role(s) or adopting working practices, and providing terms of reference (ToR).

To perform their duties, the RCGs hold at least one meeting annually. An annual meeting may take several days, consist of plenary sessions and subgroup work.

To work on specific ToRs the RCG may establish permanent or temporary subgroups or hold workshops and joint meetings. This work is carried out during and between the RCG annual meetings.

3.1. Actors

3.1.1. Member States and National Correspondents

The MS are responsible for the regional coordination of data collection activities. Each MS designates a National Correspondent for DCF. The NCs are focal points for exchanges between the EC and the MS regarding the DCF.

They are responsible for the coordination at national level, especially regarding the preparation and implementation of national work plans, preparation of annual reports, preparation and submission of data for

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the end users. The NCs distribute DCF-related information within the Member State, and coordinate attendance of relevant experts in expert group meetings organised by the EC and in the relevant RCGs.

3.1.2. RCG chair(s)

The chairperson(s) facilitate the effective and productive work of the RCG.

Mandate period and chairs' rotating system

One term for a chairperson covers, normally, the period of two years. An RCG may decide to have co-chairperson(s).

Most RCGs have adopted a co-chairing system, in a way that mandates of each co-chair starts in consecutive years ensuring a smooth transition and adequate handover. The outgoing co-chair leaves room for incoming co-chair while the co-chair from a previous year becomes the principal co-chair for the following season.

Some RCGs have established a rotating system to select the chairs meaning that MS belonging to a RCG take turns in nominating chairs. NCs, the EC or participants of the RCG meeting may suggest nominees for a chairperson. RCG members can also volunteer to chair the RCG.

RCG chair responsibilities

The chair's responsibilities are established in the Rules of Procedure for each RCG. Usually they include:

- (a) Facilitating effective and productive work of the RCG. The chairpersons are responsible for making the documents and information available on time.
- (b) Coordinating tasks related to the planning and organization of meetings, such as: drafting of meeting agenda, designing written consultations, arranging for meeting venue, etc.
- (c) Drawing up a report from a RCG annual meeting and presenting the outcome at the Liaison Meeting. The final report contains decisions and recommendations of the RCG, a summary of the RCG intersessional progress and of the RCG discussions, future work directions, the intended work to be carried out before the next meeting, the list of foreseeable RCG meetings and list of participants, their contact information, status and affiliation.
- (d) Follow up and monitoring of intersessional work. The chairpersons, in collaboration with intersessional subgroups chairs, follow up on intersessional work progress; in particular the issues that need to be addressed in plenary at the annual technical meeting.

The administrative burden of some of these tasks has been substantially reduced with the setup of the RCGs Secretariat. Thus, RCG chairs rely on the RCGs Secretariat support and focus on more technical aspects of their responsibilities.

3.1.3. National experts

National experts are appointed by their NCs to participate in relevant RCGs according to their area of expertise and the RCG/ISSG need for experts.

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3.1.4. End users

End users of the DCF data are bodies with a research or management interest in the scientific analysis of data in the fisheries sector.

Key end users are: the European Commission, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF), the scientific committees of Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs), under sustainable fisheries partnership agreement, and other international organizations.

End users may inform RCGs about their data needs that may imply changes to data collection planning, effort and design. They may provide feedback on quality issues with submitted data. Some end users convey this type of information as recommendations to RCGs, and they have a system in place to follow up on recommendations. Similarly, RCGs address their recommendations to end users.

3.1.5. European Commission

The EC ensures the implementation of the DCF, including the RCG establishment.

As a member of RCGs, the EC participates in RCG activities and facilitates communication among different stakeholders and end users.

3.1.6. RCGs Secretariat

The RCGs Secretariat provides administrative/clerical support to RCGs and their chairpersons, establishes supporting structures and facilitates workflows.

RCGs Secretariat functions and working protocols

For further information please check [RCGs Secretariat functions and working protocols](#).

The main administrative support tasks carried out by the RCG's Secretariat include:

1. Support the RCG chairs to prepare, set up and run the RCG Technical Meeting.
2. Support the RCG chairs to report from RCG meetings.
3. Support the RCG chairs to organize and monitor intersessional work.
4. Maintenance of work/docs. repositories.

In addition, the RCGs Secretariat is responsible for supporting structures and workflows:

5. Web and social network maintenance as well as stakeholders' focal point.
6. Describing basic operational protocols and organization procedures.

More information on RCG secretariat tools:

RCGs templates and common document formats

For a compilation of the templates most frequently used by the RCGs and other master files used by the RCGs, visit [RCGs templates and common document formats](#).

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RCGs Virtual repositories and working spaces

The document [RCGs virtual repositories and working areas](#) provides an overview of the information repositories and virtual working spaces available for the RCGs, including a description on its main structure and type of content, and the main use and users foreseen for of each of them.

RCGs Stakeholder database

The stakeholder database is a tool designed to streamline communications and enhance regional coordination. This database aims to include all the stakeholders relevant in the context of the Data Collection Framework Regional Coordination Groups: National Correspondents, national experts, chairs, EC, end users and other observers.

For more information, visit [RCGs Stakeholder database](#).

3.1.7. Other stakeholders

Other stakeholders may be invited to attend the RCG meetings as observers.

3.2. The RCGs annual work cycle

Each RCG has its own structure and dynamics. However, they all follow an annual work cycle with similar features. The annual RCGs work cycle is summarized in the diagram below (Figure 3.2.1).

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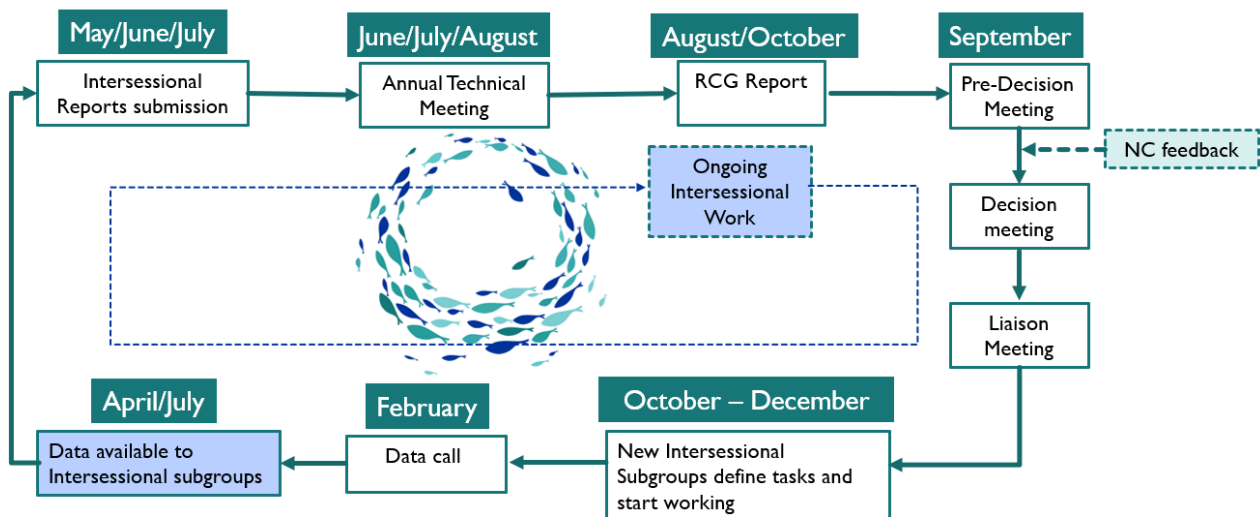


Figure 3.2.1. Overview of the RCGs annual work cycle (based on a graph by RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic).

The core of RCG work is accomplished through the year-round **intersessional work**. The **annual Technical Meeting**, which may take up to 3 or 5 days depending on the RCG, is the main forum for discussion and validation of intersessional work.

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One of the main outcomes of the Technical Meetings is a comprehensive list of **decisions and recommendations** relating to data collection activities. The decisions and recommendations from each RCG are taken to the **Decision Meeting** for NC representing MS to approve them.

The working cycle is closed by the **Liaison Meeting** which brings together main data end users, the RCGs, and the EC.

3.3. Meetings

3.3.1 Intersessional work meetings

The RCGs provide terms of reference (ToR) and appoint the chair(s) and any other role(s) for the intersessional subgroups or other working arrangements.

Intersessional subgroups (ISSGs)

Some RCGs have established intersessional sub-groups (*ISSGs*), working throughout the year on topics, such as: data quality, dialogue between data providers and end-users, diadromous fish, regional overviews of fisheries, and surveys, among others.

These ISSGs carry out their duties during and between the RCG annual meetings within the scope of activities determined by the ToR. The ISSG chair(s) keep the RCG informed of the progress of the work and any issues arising at intervals agreed at the RCG. ISSGs produce annual reports, discussed during the technical meeting, and included in the technical meeting report. ISSGs may have dedicated sessions to work in subgroups during the technical meeting. The ISSG chair(s) coordinate with RCG chair(s) in advance to identify the discussion needs and draft the technical meeting agenda accordingly.

Some ISSGs have a long-standing history because they address issues that require permanent regional coordination. In other cases, the RCG might decide to put an ISSG on hold, and/or agree on the creation of a new or *ad hoc* ISSG in response to a knowledge gap/implementation of new legislation.

The list of active ISSGs for each season is presented and any updates agreed at the TM. The ToRs of regional ISSGs are reviewed during the Liaison meeting to identify and agree on panregional coordination.

Thematic workshops/meetings

Some RCGs organise thematic workshops/meetings instead of ISSGs to address the thematic issues of competence under the RCGs.

The RCG may provide terms of references for the meeting and appoint the chairperson(s), coordinator(s), rapporteur(s), secretary, or any other role(s) or working practices necessary for these workshops/meetings.

The thematic workshops/meetings reports are presented and discussed at the annual technical meetings.

Similarly, to ISSGs, the list of annual thematic workshops/meetings for each RCG is decided and agreed at the RCG TM.

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3.3.2 Annual technical meetings

The annual technical meeting is the main RCG event where intersessional progress is presented and discussed, and decisions and recommendations about future RCG work are drafted.

Only nominated persons may participate in the RCG meetings.

Each MS and the EC nominate their participants to an RCG meeting. MS chooses the number of participants considering the items on the agenda at the relevant RCG meeting. The nominated participants should be communicated to the chairperson(s) of the RCG and the RCGs Secretariat.

Key end-users have a standing invitation to the annual technical meetings.

Any other stakeholder and third countries might participate as observers; observers may indicate their interest in participating in the RCG meeting sending a justification of their interest. The RCG decide if and which observers shall be invited to the RCG meetings.

3.3.3 Decision meetings

Decision meetings are special meetings involving NCs and RCG chairs; ISSG or subgroup chairs might also be invited when additional information is needed for the decision process.

The decision meeting is organised once the annual technical meetings have taken place, with the objective to formally approve decisions and recommendations formulated during the RCGs annual technical meetings by relevant NCs. Decisions are taken by consensus of the NCs. The approved decisions and recommendations are later presented to end users during the Liaison Meeting.

3.3.4 Liaison Meeting

The Liaison Meeting is a forum to discuss issues affecting several marine regions or RCGs. It is also a forum for discussion and interaction among main end users. It is formally a subgroup of the EC expert group for data collection issues. The [Liaison Meeting](#) is organised every year after the RCG technical meetings.

The participants are the chairs of RCGs (incoming and outgoing) and the European Commission. One day of the Liaison meeting is dedicated to end user interaction and representatives of DCF data end users (e.g., STECF, ICES, ICCAT, GFCM, CECAF), are invited. Other stakeholders, like JRC, project consortia or steering groups for regional databases may be invited depending on the LM agenda.

Liaison Meeting chair

The LM chair is appointed by the EC among senior experts with extensive knowledge on the DCF implementation and solid experience within the RCGs. The LM chair, in collaboration with the EC, is responsible for preparing the meeting agenda and sending it to participants, chairing the meeting, coordinating and preparing the LM report.

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The RCGs Secretariat, with the agreement of the EC, provides administrative support to the LM. The RCGs Secretariat supports the compilation of report contributions, and the edition and final publication of the of the LM report.

3.4. Products

3.4.1. Recommendations

RCGs formulate their recommendations for data collection improvement, addressed to the end users or other parties. The recommendations are drafted during the technical meetings, approved by NCs during the decision meeting, and presented in the Liaison Meeting for further dissemination.

The recommendations provide guidance on the recommended work to be carried out, its justification, a foreseen time frame for fulfilment, and to the extent possible, person(s) or institution(s) responsible for the follow-up.

Recommendations are decided unanimously by consensus of participating members of the RCGs or by written procedure. The RCG chair(s) report on recommendations to the relevant subjects. The follow-up of recommendations may be reviewed in the annual meeting.

3.4.2. Decisions

Contrary to recommendations, decisions concern the RCGs themselves and the MS involved. They may relate for example, to cost sharing of surveys, the regional work plans, regional databases, selecting the chairs, etc.

Decisions are taken unanimously by consensus during the RCG technical meeting, a dedicated decision meeting, or by written procedure. When drafting the decisions it is important to provide a justification, a foreseen time frame for fulfilment, and MSs or institution(s) responsible for the action and follow-up.

3.4.3. Regional Work Plans

RCGs have a mandate to produce Regional Work Plans (RWP). The RWP may contain procedures, methods, quality assurance and quality control for collecting and processing data, regionally coordinated sampling strategies and conditions for delivery of data in regional databases. They may also contain cost-sharing arrangements for participation in research surveys at sea.

The first RWP preparatory cycle started in 2017 with a series of regional grants that in 2020 led to [FISHN'CO](#) and [STREAMLINE](#) projects, drafting RWPs for the RCGs North Atlantic, North Sea and Eastern Arctic; Baltic; Large Pelagics and Economics Issues, and for the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions, respectively.

After a series of STECF reviews in 2021 and 2022, the RCGs: [Baltic](#), [ECON](#), [LP](#), [Med&BS](#), and [NANSEA](#) submitted their RWPs to the EC for implementation in 2025-2027. The evaluation of RWPs was done in October 2023, by [STECF-23-16](#). The RCG addressed STECF comments and prepared final RWPs for approval in spring 2024. RCG LDF will join with their RWP in July 2024. The approved RWP will be incorporated into NWP 2025-2027, to be submitted by MS in October 2024.



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There is a pan regional ISSG RWP dealing with the development of RWPs and their implementation. The ISSG RWP was mandated to develop Draft Regional Work Plan for the period 2025-2027 taking over the FISHN'CO and STREAMLINE projects, and to follow up on the RWP development from 2023 onwards.



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4. How many RCGs are there?

Currently, there are six Regional Coordination Groups operating in the DCF:

4.1. Regional Coordination Group for North Atlantic, North Sea & Eastern Arctic (RCG NANSEA)

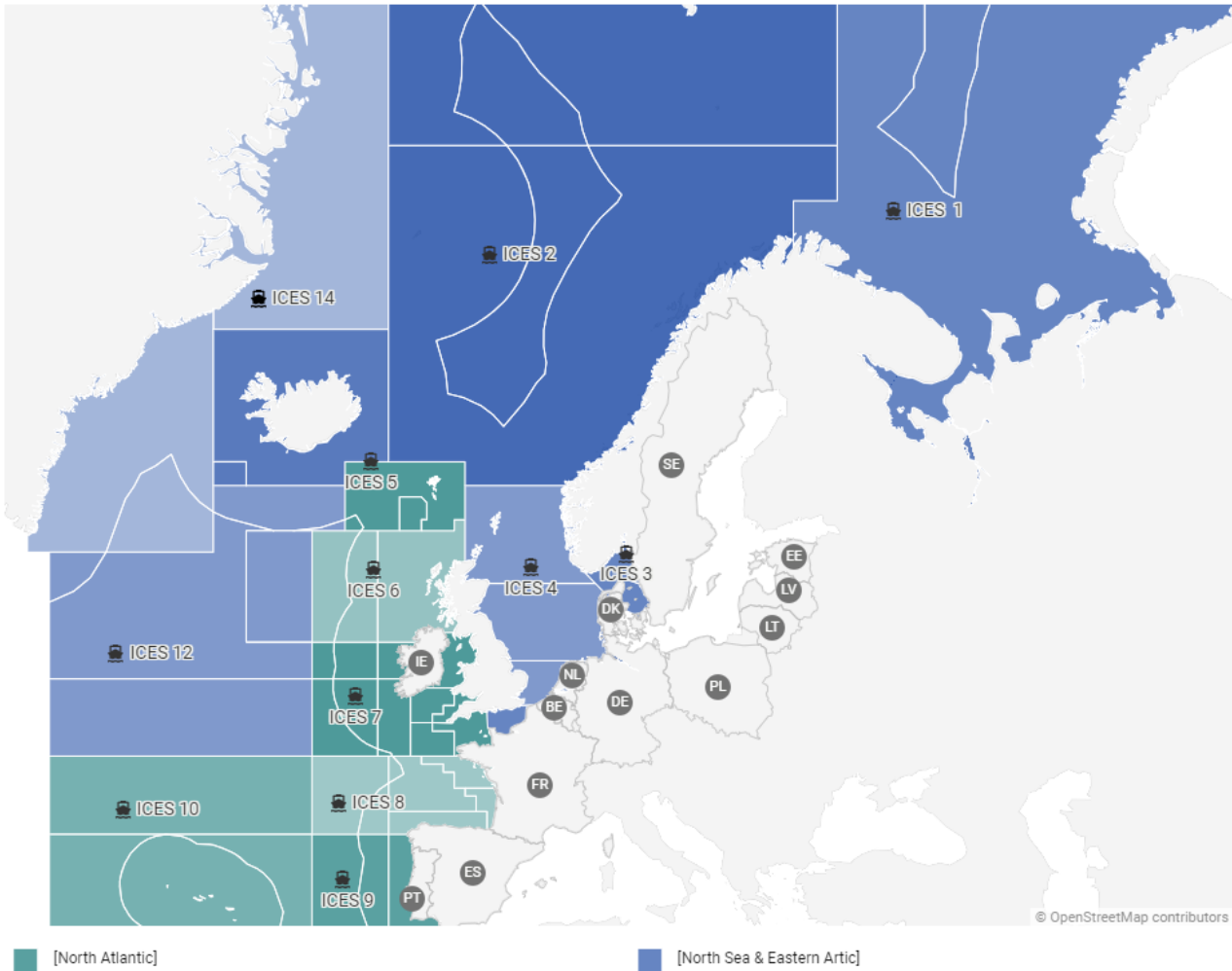


Figure 4.1.1. Scope map of the RCG NANSEA

Regional Coordination Group for North Atlantic, North Sea & Eastern Arctic, is a merging of the former RCG North Atlantic and RCG North Sea and Eastern Arctic. Participating Member States: Sweden, Estonia, Belgium, Spain, Germany, Denmark, France, Ireland, Lithuania, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal.

For more detailed info visit [RCG NANSEA](#)

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4.2. Regional Coordination Group for the Baltic

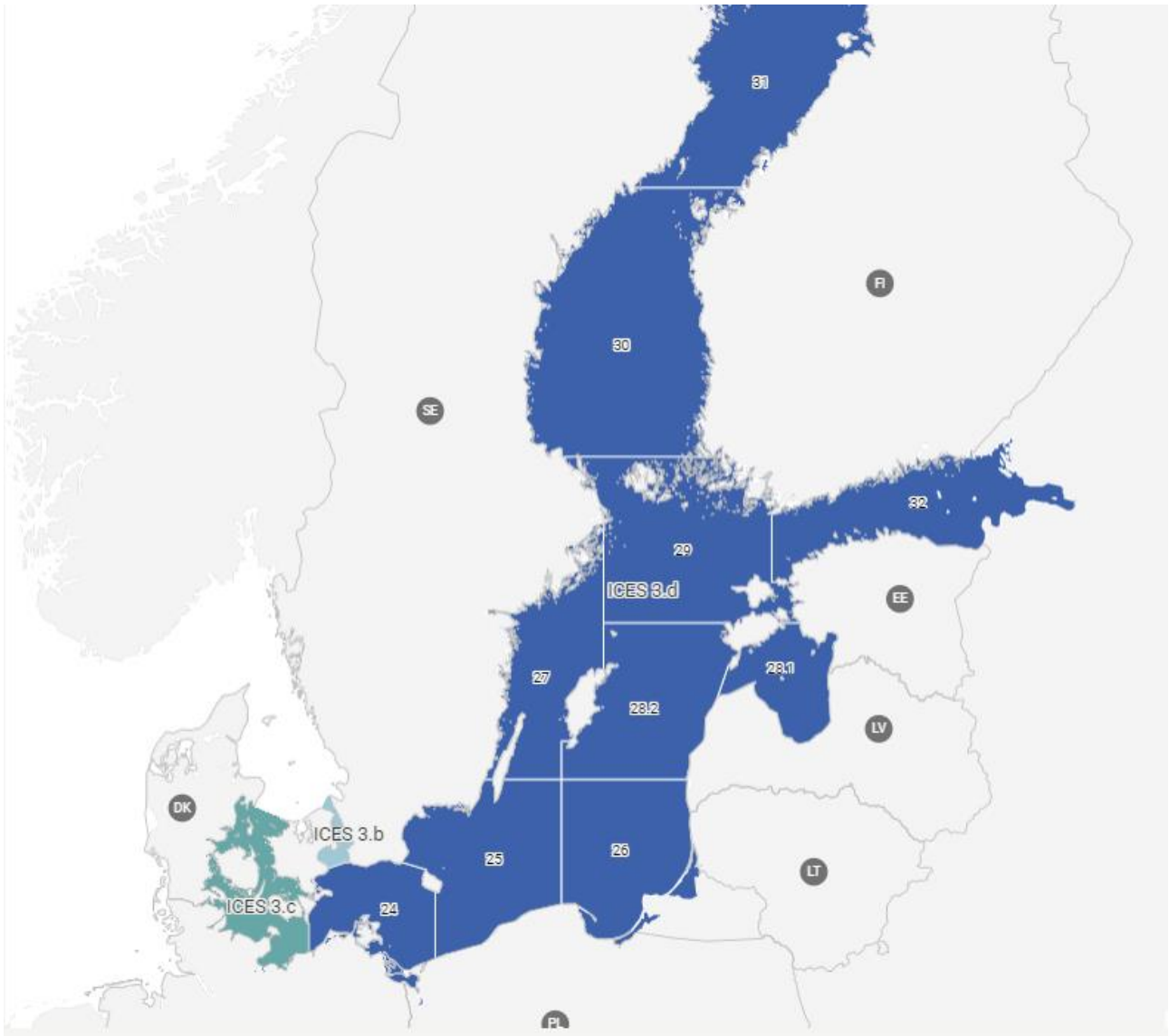


Figure 4.2.1. Scope map of the RCG Baltic.

Regional Coordination Group for the Baltic. Participating Member States: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden

For more detailed info visit [RCG Baltic](#)

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4.3. Regional Coordination Group for Mediterranean and Black Sea.

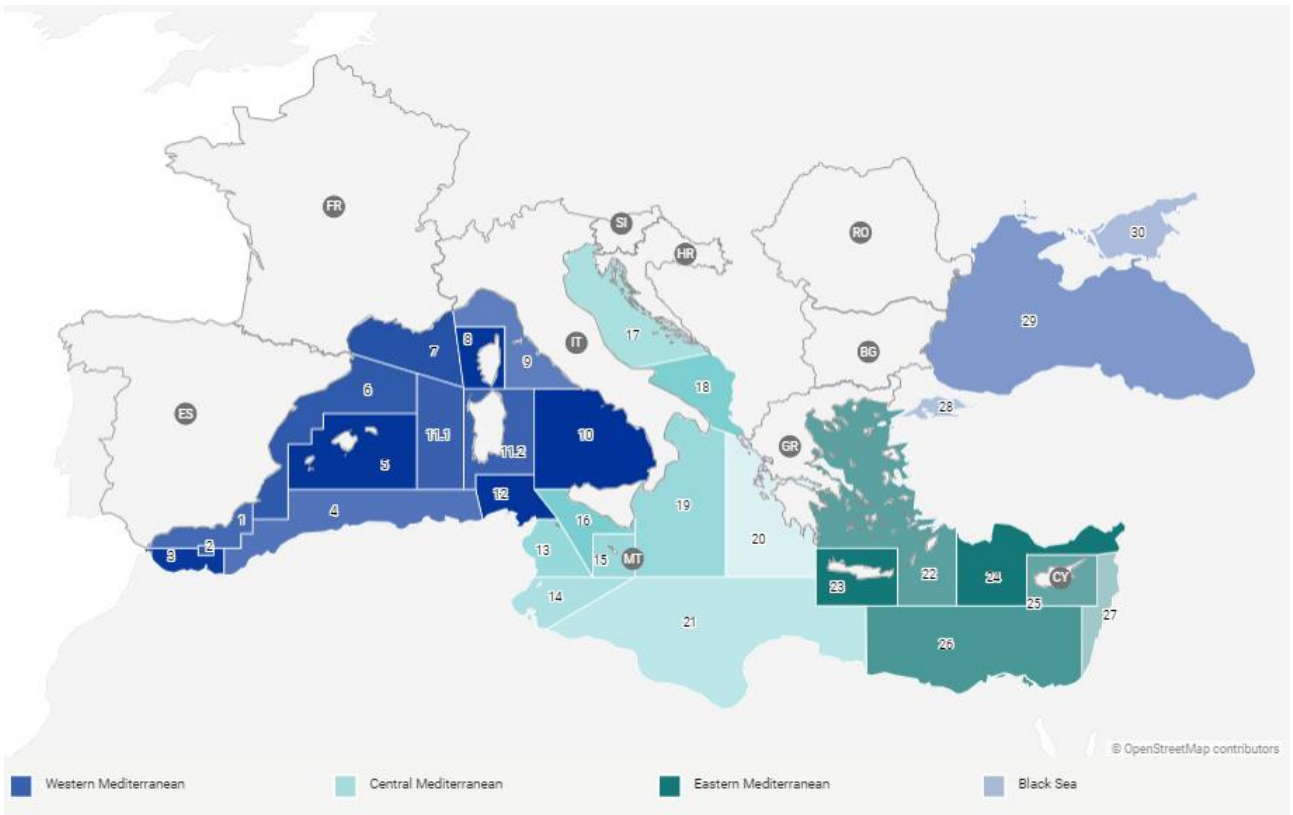


Figure 4.3.1. Scope map of the RCG Med&BS.

Regional Coordination Group for Mediterranean and Black Sea. Participating Member States: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Romania, Slovenia, Spain.

For more detailed info visit [RCG Med&BS](#)

4.4. Regional Coordination Group on Economics Issues



Figure 4.4.1. Scope map of the RCG ECON.

Regional Coordination Group on Economics Issues, pan-regional group that deals with collection of socioeconomic data. Participating Member States: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands, Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia.

For more detailed info visit [RCG ECON](#)

4.5. Regional Coordination Group for Large Pelagics

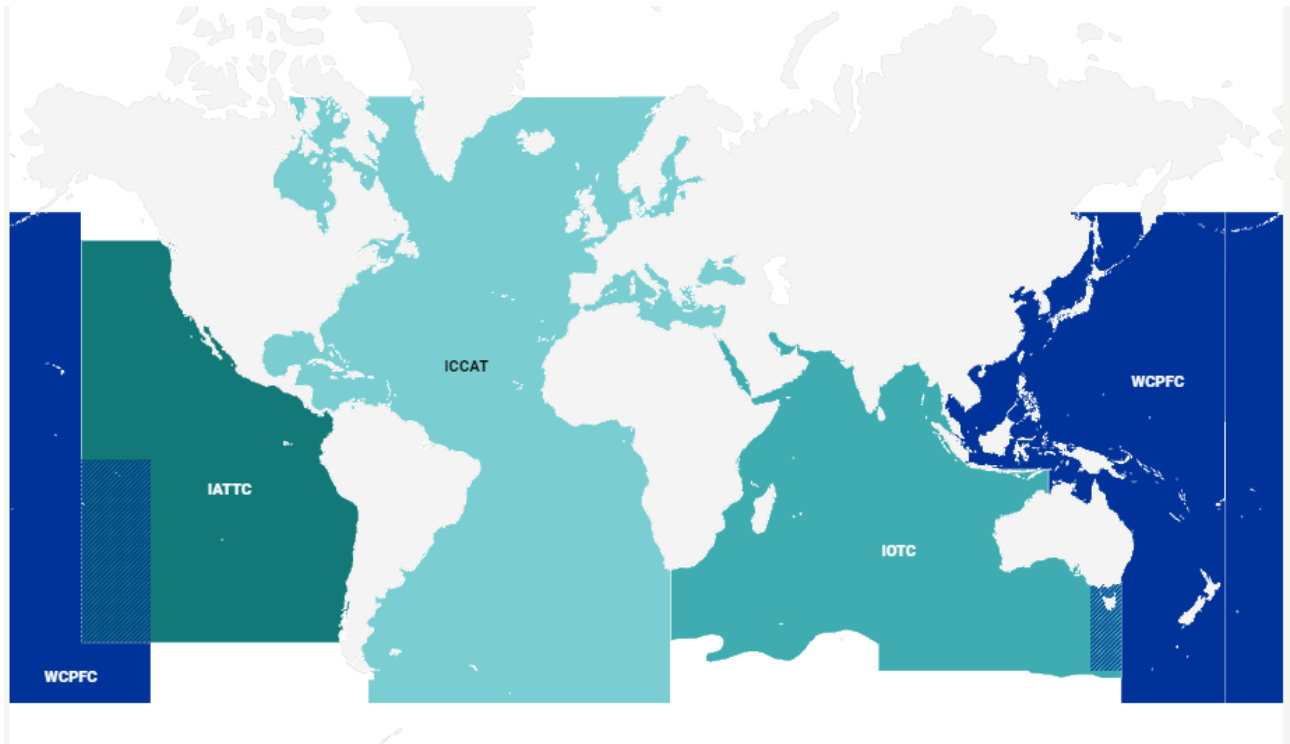


Figure 4.5.1. Scope map of the RCG LP.

Regional Coordination Group for Large Pelagics. Participating Member States: Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain.

For more detailed info visit [RCG LP](#)

4.6. Regional Coordination Group for Long Distance Fisheries

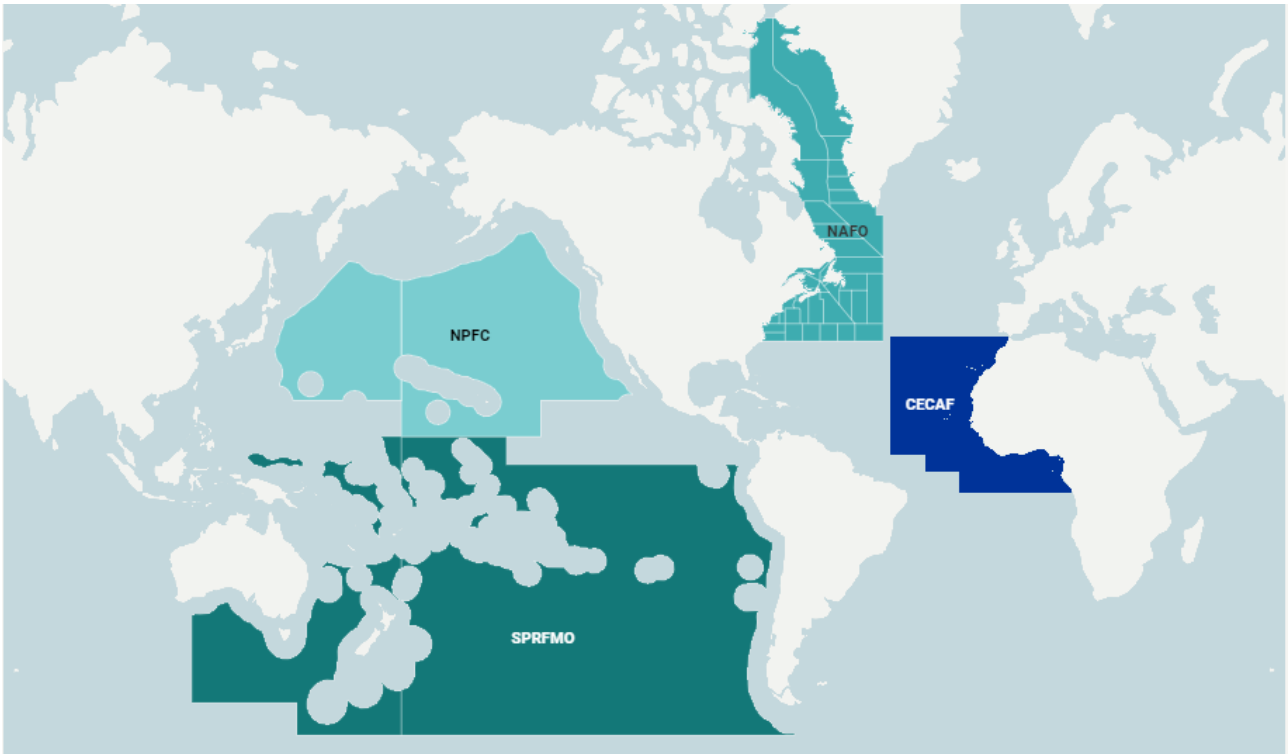


Figure 4.6.1. Scope map of the RCG LDF.

Regional Coordination Group for Long Distance Fisheries. Participating Member States: Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Spain, The Netherlands, Estonia.

For more detailed info visit [RCG LDF](#)

5. Frequently Asked Questions

Who can participate as an expert?

RCGs are open to fisheries data collection experts from 26 EU Member States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden.

Participants must be appointed by their national correspondent (NC). Then, the nomination is communicated to RCG chairs and the RCGs Secretariat so the expert can be included in the appropriate communications and receive information needed to attend meetings and take part in the different subgroups.

What is expected from a participant?

RCG participants are engaged in the work of the different subgroups according to their field of expertise or interest. RCG experts are expected to actively participate in the subgroup's meetings and work towards the agreed tasks or ToRs.

Experts are expected to inform national correspondents (NCs) on issues related to the development of regional work plans and/or any other issue that might require a decision from NCs.

To facilitate communication and the exchange of relevant information, RCGs experts are encouraged to register in the RCGs stakeholder's database <https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/stakeholders-dbb/>

How can one become a RCG chair?

Depending on the RCG there are different systems to elect their chairperson.

The RCGs Med&BS and LP have an agreed chairing rotation system among the MS. The chairperson may be agreed by the MS present at the RCG annual meeting or elected by a simple majority. One chairperson term covers two years.

In other RCGs (NANSEA, Baltic, LDF, ECON) the chairperson is appointed on a voluntary basis. National correspondents, EC, or participants of the RCG meeting may suggest nominees for a chairperson. Unless agreed without a vote by the RCG, the election of a nominated chairperson(s) shall take place by voting in a form suggested by the resigning Chairperson after consulting the national correspondents and EC present at the RCG meeting.

How do ISSGs work?

The ISSGs meet according to the needs, either in person or online, during the year and/or as subgroups to the annual technical meeting. The frequency and formula of meetings is decided in consultation with ISSG members, by its chair. The RCG secretariat may assist the ISSG chair(s) in meeting preparation and reporting.

At the RCG annual technical meeting, the ISSGs/subgroups present their results to be discussed in plenary. They also might propose updates to their Terms of Reference and defined new tasks and targets for the new intersessional period for approval. The work carried out by ISSGs/subgroups represents the core of RCGs work and it is essential for technical meeting preparation and meeting discussions.

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How are workshops/thematic meetings organised?

The workshops/thematic meetings are organised according to the needs, following the decisions/recommendations made during annual technical meetings. Every RCG member may propose organising a workshop/meeting; the decision is taken by consensus.

How are decisions taken?

Decisions concerning all MS participating in the RCG are voted by all national correspondents or their representatives. A decision concerning part of the MS are taken by the national correspondents or their nominated representative of the relevant MS.

A national correspondent may mandate another national correspondent or a national expert present at the meeting where the decision is to be taken, to vote on his/her behalf on a decision regarding a draft regional work plan, or another decision. The detailed mandate shall be given by the national correspondent in written and communicated to the chairperson(s) no later than one day before the voting.

Decisions are taken by consensus. Decisions may be taken during the annual meeting or a dedicated decision meeting with due regard to the decision content.

In the case of a dedicated decision meeting, NCs must receive the documents and information for the decision-making at least one month in advance of the meeting. The chairperson(s) or a person indicated by the chairperson(s) shall be responsible for the availability of the documents to all relevant national correspondents in due time.

The RCG chair(s) may request, if necessary, observers at the annual meeting to be absent during the decision-making procedure.

What is the basis for the Rules of Procedure (RoPs)?

The RCGs Rules of Procedure are established based on Article 9(5) of the Regulation (EU) 2017/1004. The Rules of Procedure are established by the members of the given RCG (EU Member States (MS), EC) coordinating their data collection activities in the respective marine region or specific type of fisheries.

The RoPs establish the methods and the mechanisms for the RCGs to carry out their mandate. The RoPs cover aspects such as: RCG meetings, subgroups, chairperson responsibilities, recommendations, preparation and endorsements of a regional work plan, and decision making among others.

Some RCGs like NANSEA and Baltic have developed and adopted common RoPs. Having common RoPs is an advantage for MS that participate in more than one RCG, because it facilitates the adhesion to the procedures.

The RoPs can be consulted on the RCGs website under each RCGs section or microsite <https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/>.

6. Relevant contact and information points

Where can I find more information on the network of the RCGs?

The RCGs website with all the relevant information about the network is at <https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/>.

Among other important information sections, there you can find an RCGs stakeholder's database where you can consult information (organization, email, expertise, role, etc) about the members of the RCGs' network. <https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/stakeholders-ddbb/>

National correspondents

The list of national correspondents, which is regularly updated, can be consulted [here](#).

General information on the DCF

[Home - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

RCGs Secretariat

The RCGs Secretariat can assist with specific issues and consultations regarding the RCG network, just drop them an email specifying your request at secretariat@fisheries-rcg.eu.

Newsletter

Subscribe to our newsletter if you want to get an updated insight on the work of the RCGs of the fisheries Data Collection Framework <https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/newsletter/>

The newsletter is issued twice a year.

You can also check our news section <https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/news/>

Social media

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