



**Regional Coordination Group**  
Large Pelagics

# Regional Coordination Group on Large Pelagics

## RCG LP 2023 REPORT

**26 – 28 June 2023**  
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## Acronyms

AR	Annual Report
BFT	Atlantic Bluefin Tuna
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy
CKMR	Close-Kin-Mark-Recapture
COM	Commission
DCF	Data Collection Framework
DG MARE	Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
DM	Decision Meeting
EC	European Commission
EM	Electronic Monitoring
EU	European Union
FDI	Fisheries Dependent Information
GBYP	Grand Bluefin Tuna Year Programme
HCR	Harvest Control Rules
ICCAT	International Commission for the Conservation of the Atlantic Tunas
ICES	International Council for the Exploration of the Sea
IOTC	Indian Ocean Tuna Commission
ISSG	Intersessional Subgroup
LL	Longliners
LP	Large Pelagics
MS	Member State
MSE	Management Strategy Evaluation
NANSEA	North Atlantic, North Sea and Eastern Arctic
NE	National Expert
NC	National Correspondent
NWP	National Work Plan
PS	Purse seiners
RCG	Regional Coordination Group
RDB	Regional Database
RDBES	Regional Database & Estimation System
RFMO	Regional Fisheries Management Organisation
RWP	Regional Work Plan
SNP	Single Nucleotide Polymorphism
STECF	Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries
SWO	Swordfish
TAF	Transparent Assessment Framework
TM	Technical Meeting

I



## Executive summary

The RCG LP met in St Julian's Bay, Malta between the 26-28<sup>th</sup> of June 2023 to review the progress of intersessional work since 2022, discuss and agree on outcomes and plan the work for 2023/2024 around the key areas of regional coordination in fisheries data collection: governance; regional sampling plans, identifying end-user needs and data quality.

Participants included scientist, experts and/or National Correspondents from Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain as well as DG MARE (Commission) and ICCAT representatives.

The meeting dealt with topics such as; data transmission failures to tuna RFMOs, regional data base, priorities in terms of data needs, feasibility for the collection of biological variables and future structure of the RCG LP. The Group approved the Rules of Procedure.

Further discussion was carried out on possibilities for a common database with some MSs raising questions about data use policies and management.

The group agreed by consensus on a total of 1 decision and 9 recommendations;

- Decision to selection a single RDB format to feed into a RDB as a partial solution to advance and progress the requirement for a common database for the RCG LP (LP\_2023\_D01).
- Recommendation to revive former recommendation on the issues surrounding transport of biological samples of species listed under CITES for the purpose of genetic analysis (LP\_2023\_R01).
- Recommendation to develop a joint sampling approach/protocol for the Electronic monitoring programmes (LP\_2023\_R02)
- Recommendation to highlight possible bottleneck in DCF sampling scheme should Close-Kin Mark Recapture be approved for Eastern bluefin tuna stock assessment (LP\_2023\_R03).
- Recommendation for improved harmonization on the denomination of variables and coordination on metadata between DCF and ICCAT for the transfer of biological data (LP\_2023\_R04).
- Recommendation to establish a pan-regional procedure to manage the reference list of metier codes, as these are now requested in data calls (LP\_2023\_R05).
- Recommendation for increased communication and coordination between RCGs which have recreational fisheries and ISSG Recreational Fisheries (LP\_2023\_R06).
- Recommendation for the creation of pan-regional ISSG Mediterranean Sea Large Pelagics fisheries among the RCG Mediterranean and Black Sea and RCG Large Pelagics (LP\_2023\_R07).
- Recommendation for attendance of National Correspondents or appointed experts/delegates on the final day of RCG LP's technical meeting in order to have an overview of the meeting's main foci (LP\_2023\_R08)
- Recommendation for drafting a roadmap of RWP adoption from all RCG LP member states (LP\_2023\_R09).

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## I. Introduction

The Regional Coordination Group on Large Pelagics (RCG LP) held its sixth annual technical meeting in the Radisson Blue in St Julian's Bay, Malta hosted by the Maltese Department of Fisheries between the 26 and 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2023. The meeting was conducted as a hybrid meeting to allow participation in person and remotely. Participants involved were as follows:

Participants included scientist, experts and/or National Correspondents from Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Ireland, Malta and Spain as well as DG MARE (Commission) and ICCAT representatives.

8 European union countries scientist, experts and or their substitutes (Malta, Cyprus, Italy, Portugal, Ireland, France, Croatia and Spain).

1 European union country's national correspondent (France),

A Representative of the European Commission's Directorate General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE).

Regional fisheries management organisation's representatives of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and ICCAT GBYP coordinator (Atlantic-Wide Research Programme for Bluefin Tuna) as end user permanent observers.

- Several partners of DCF projects, namely the Regional Coordination Group's Secretariat as well as the SecWeb project, Fishn'Co and coordinators leading the development RDBES.

The complete list of confirmed attendants of the RCG LP's technical meeting can be found in ANNEX I. The meeting was chaired by Hugo Maxwell (Ireland) and Jurgen Misfud (Malta) as per the randomised draw agreed upon during the 2022 technical meeting.

The detailed agenda is reported in ANNEX II.



## 2. Terms of Reference

This year, 4 major Terms of Reference (ToRs) were identified:

### 1. 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.

### 2. Available data, data transmissions and gaps.

The section deals with RFMOs feedback and summaries of possible issues, like data transmission failures or potential collaboration in data calls.

### 3. Regional database.

This point is related to the development of a regional database for the RCG LP. Discussions and presentation were mainly focused on the presentation of the current status of the ICES Regional Database and Estimation System (already discussed during the previous two RCG LP annual meetings).

### 4. Sampling and regional working plans.

This last matter continues the work initiated during the last 2020 EU-ICCAT coordination meeting and aims to provide a global overview of observer coverage by country and métier. Furthermore, discussions about the consequences and the effect of the Covid-19 epidemic (for example in our survey and consequences on the assessment associated).



### 3. Progress report on ToRs and work plan

#### 3.1. Feedback from Commission on DCF

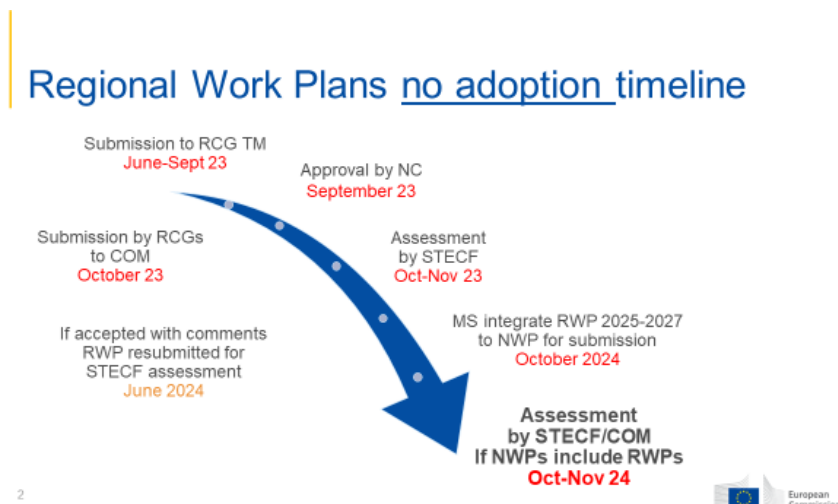
The Commission gave a presentation on DCF topics relating to the RCGs, including the submission timelines for the Regional Work plans and updates of NWPs; the DCF Platform; Commission support for SECWEB; the Marine Action Plan; SAF grants for scientific advice and published outcomes of previously funded studies. Separate presentations were provided on Fish Genomics, the draft political agreement of the revised Control Regulation and the integrated web system developed by the EC for marine recreational fisheries.

The timelines of the **Regional work plan (RWP) submission** were presented on the basis that the RWP will not be adopted in a COM decision but agreed at RCG level by the NCs. There will be two documents to testify this adoption: the RCG report, which could include the agreed RWP and the STECF EWG report, which could include the RWP. It is expected that RWPs will be submitted by the RCGs to the Commission in October 2023 for STECF evaluation in November. If there is a need for modification arising from the STECF evaluation, it can be re-evaluated by the following Expert Working Group on Annual Reports in June 2024. These timelines allow MS to incorporate the relevant parts of the RWP into their NWP (as STECF EWG 21-17 proposed) or to link their NWP with a relevant RWP for submission in October 2024. In November 2024, STECF and COM will assess the NWP including their regional part, which should mirror the RWP (already submitted and known by COM and STECF at that point in time). COM could reject an NWP which does not include the agreed RWP. This already happened in the 2021 exercise, when COM sent back to MS comments on the inclusion of agreed RWP parts, which were not included in their NWP.

The RWP submitted in October 2023 will be for 2025-2027. The Commission expects a major overhaul of NWPs 2025-2027 in October 2024 to incorporate the RWP and respond to the Marine Action Plan, even if initial WPs were adopted until 2027. Amendments to national WP in October 2023 are possible, but any WP submitted in 2023 can be analyzed for the needs of the Marine Action Plan.

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Diagrams for possible inclusion:

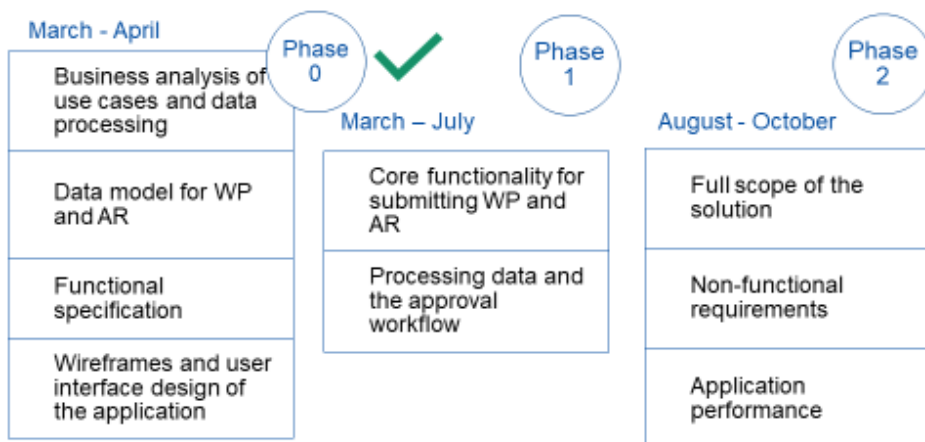




The **DCF platform** is currently under development and progressing according to schedule. The online platform is dedicated to a user interface for WPs and ARs coupled with a dedicated database, where MS can upload their NWP/AR and other DCF-related documents. The platform comprises modules and functionalities to enable online submission, STECF evaluation and follow up, user control, as well as quality analyses and retrieval of DCF related information and metadata. Phase 0, which includes the business analysis of use cases and data processing; the data model for WP and AR; the functional specification and the user interface design of the application, was completed at the end of April. In May, the Commission consulted on main deliverables with the IT and data expert subgroup, which is composed of NCs and DCF experts who volunteered for this task. The developer now works on the minimum viable product and has received examples of the 2022 annual reports to obtain a realistic picture of the documents and their structure and content to be ingested into the database through the platform. A first demonstration to MARE took place in mid-June and further user testing within the expert group is planned once a stable prototype is received. Phase I, which is currently in progress and will be completed by July includes the development of the core functionality for submitting WP and AR as well as the processing data and the approval workflow. The concluding phase from August to October (Phase 2) entails the full scope of the solution, the non-functional requirements and the application performance.

Diagram for possible inclusion:

## DCF IT platform - Timeline



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The **SecWeb project** under the regional coordination grant was completed in February 2023 and MS are now working towards finding a long-term solution for the provision of secretarial services to support the RCGs. In 2023, MS are working bilaterally with the service provider, while the Commission is initiating a low value contract for secretarial support for the RCG Liaison meeting. The announcement of a low value contract was published on 2 June with an expression of interest requested for mid-June after which invitations will be sent for the negotiated procedure. Other MARE/2020/08 regional coordination projects completed were Streamline end December 2022 and Fishn'Co and RDBFIS end February 2023. The maintenance and further



development of RDBFIS continues under the framework contract for the provision of scientific advice for the Med & Black Sea.

The **EU Action Plan for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems** for sustainable and resilient fisheries was adopted on 21 February 2023 in the ‘Fisheries and Ocean package together with the CFP functioning report, relevant for DCF e.g. recreational fisheries; the Energy transition in EU fisheries and aquaculture, relevant for possible socioeconomic data collection and the implementation report of the Common market organisation. The EU Action Plan aims to connect the environmental and fisheries policies as a means to provide a strong contribution to the delivery on the objectives of the Biodiversity Strategy, as well as current obligations under both fisheries and environmental legislations. Its objectives are to contribute to getting and keeping fish stocks to sustainable levels; reduce the impact of fishing on the seabed and minimise fisheries impacts on sensitive species. It contains actions for MS and the Commission to improve gear selectivity & address bycatch of sensitive species; protect the seabed; support the fisheries sector in the transition by maximising the use of available funds and provide the required knowledge base and governance for implementation, while ensuring stakeholder involvement and outreach. COM’s presentation focussed on the **DCF relevant aspects covered in the knowledge chapter**. A sound knowledge base through systematic data collection and scientific monitoring is required to assess the impact of fishing on marine habitats and species as well as to design and develop initiatives to manage fisheries and protect the marine environment. The action plan stipulates that *“this work should include designing targeted monitoring programmes to improve observations and reporting of incidentally by-caught species. The programmes should cover high-risk fisheries and the potential impacts of all relevant fleet segments, including smaller vessels. They should also look at data on recreational fisheries, including recreational fishing boats, and their impact on the stocks and the marine environment. The updated and modernised Control Regulation, once adopted by the co-legislators, will play an important role in making these improvements.”*<sup>1</sup>

The **main actions relevant to the DCF** are:

- By the end of 2023, under EU environmental and fisheries law, define objectives and specific data needs for each sea basin to monitor the impact of fishing on ecosystems and carbon sequestration, involving authorities at regional level as appropriate, and then allocating sufficient funds for these activities.
- By the end of 2024, submit updated national DCF work plans to improve data collection planning and efforts, including in relation to by-catch of sensitive species and impact of fishing on the seabed.

Information on the **SAF grant to improve scientific knowledge to strengthen scientific advice** for fisheries was provided. The grant’s overall aim is to promote the development and the strengthening of the scientific knowledge needed for fisheries conservation and management measures in support of the CFP. The priorities related to this call are the reinforcement of policy-oriented fisheries science, a better use of the collected scientific data and improved cooperation between scientists and the fisheries sector. The call also focuses on the support to the EU scientific community to develop and maintain the relevant expertise to provide high quality scientific advice on fisheries matters. The Commission gave examples of areas for funding but emphasised that this was not an exhaustive list. Timelines were presented with an application deadline of the 19 September 2023, 17:00 and links to further information provided.

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2023) 102 final - EU Action Plan: Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries see [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52023DC0102](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52023DC0102)

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Progress report on ToRs and work plan

CINEA Call site: [https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/funding-opportunities/calls-proposals/emfaf-call-proposals-scientific-advice-fisheries\\_en](https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/funding-opportunities/calls-proposals/emfaf-call-proposals-scientific-advice-fisheries_en)

Funding and Tenders Portal: [Funding and Tenders Portal - Scientific knowledge fisheries Grant](#)

Info Day recording [EMFAF 2023 Info Day - Call for proposals for Scientific Advice for Fisheries](#)

Follow up discussions within the group focussed on the of the regional work plan in relation to the national work plans, in response to the Action Plan and how some elements could support the actions therein, including the joint sampling protocols on sensitive species and bycatch sampling.

### 3.2. ISSG Tropical Tunas – State of play

#### 3.2.1. Sub-ISSG Tropical Tuna – Observers Coordination

##### Summary of the Observers' Coordination ISSG Meeting

The purse seine observer coordination ISSG meeting was held in AZTI (Spain) from the 27th to the 28th of April in a hybrid format, with the participation of 37 people. Among the participants, there were representatives from the Spanish institutes IEO and AZTI, the French institute IRD, DG MARE, ICCAT (end-user), Electronic Monitoring System (EMS) providers, and third countries involved in the sampling, such as Seychelles and Senegal. In addition, this year, industry representatives (Orthongel) attended for the first time. The meeting was co-chaired by Jon Ruiz (AZTI) and Philippe Sabarros (IRD).

The group's main objective is the coordination of the onboard data collection and monitoring of the tropical purse seine fleet operating in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, as well as the preparation of the EU data provision to ICCAT and IOTC.

Among other topics, an update of the achieved observer coverage was presented by Member State. French coverage under the DCF has been around 15-20% during the last few years, while it has been around 10% in the Spanish case. In addition, the industry has been making an effort to increase the observation coverage to values close to 100% through their own monitoring programs, complementing the DCF sampling with both human observers' and Electronic Monitoring (EM) programs. A new version of the common observer database (ObServe V9) was presented, and several quality indicators and R tools for data cleaning were proposed. Finally, the need to implement an action plan for observers' safety was considered. All meeting details are available in the report at the following link (will be available soon).

Regarding the future tasks of this ISSG, it is foreseen to continue working on the following topics:

- Possible deviations from planned and achieved observation coverage.
- Update the observers' common tools (Observe software and sampling protocol)
- Development of a common sampling approach for the EMS programs
- Update length-weight relation for most of the bycatch species
- Continue developing common data quality indicators.
- Establish a common bycatch-raising procedure.
- Search for opportunities for future joint analysis/papers

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At the **annual technical meeting**, Jon Ruiz Gondra (AZTI, Spain) presented an overview of the purse seine observer coordination ISSG.

During the discussion, several topics were highlighted and discussed.

Alexis Paumier (DPMA, France) asked for clarification between differences in DCF and private observers' programs, especially if a comparison was already done. The presenter clarified that possible indicators for comparing programs were discussed during the meeting, without going into detail about specific programs. Furthermore, it was highlighted that observers' manual and protocols between the countries involved are the same, both for private and DCF programs.

In addition, Hugo Maxwell (Marine Institute, Ireland) asked about differences in the ownership and rules for data use between DCF and private observers' programs. Regarding that, the data flow is the same among programs, but while the usage of the data collected under the DCF is subject to the DFF legislation, for the use of industry-funded data, prior permission is required as they are the owners of the data. In this regard, the presenter clarified that to date there has practically always been permission for its use, and data is even delivered to the RFMOs as raw data together with the DCF data.

A clarification was requested regarding the database Observe version 9 and the data uploaded by LP countries in this system. For France, the database contains purse seiners (PS) and longliners (LL) data, while only PS data is uploaded by Spain.

On the same database topic, Leonie O'Dowd (DG MARE, EU) asked what the aim of the Observer database is. The question behind this is to know if this kind of database could be used as a regional large pelagics database. Mathieu Depetris (IRD, France) explained that this database was initially developed with a global purpose of support regarding data integration. The model and structure, have yet to be developed for use as a Regional DataBase (RDB). Furthermore, it would only be possible to use this database as a RDB with many more evolutions. However, it is probable that the cost and resources needed are very high and not a relevant solution. Additionally, creating a system from scratch is not of relevance to the RCG. From France's perspective, Observe version 9 aims to replace several "old" databases (like the AVDTH database) and bring almost all the data of LP in one and unique place.

Following on from the subject of databases was a discussion on the topic of Electronic Monitoring (EM) subject. Leonie pointed out that several fisheries are moving towards integration of EM technology in the observer data collection. Furthermore, a general question regarding whether this strategy aims to replace traditional data collection methods such as the human observers or self-sampling. The answer to this was that it's important to maintain a balance between human observers and EM systems. Both are complementary methods which allow for higher observation coverage; however, it was noted that EM technology could not be a replacement. It was also highlighted that the cost is something to consider as EM systems can reduce costs compared to human observers. In addition, the group noted there is another active ISSG focusing on EM (under the umbrella of the RCG NANSEA). Leonie highlighted that this NANSEA ISSG is less advanced than the RCG LP PS observers' ISSG on the EM issues (they are currently at the first stage of studies, namely regarding the interest in using EM over human observers). Luigi Pappalardo (observer programs, Italy) raised the problems that the LL fisheries in the Mediterranean must reach the minimum required observation coverage. The issues are common among neighbouring countries of Italy, such as the case of Malta and Cyprus for the longliner fishery. It could be interesting to integrate these countries into the sub-ISSG discussions.

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However, Jon answered that maybe the best solution is more to use the RCG LP ISSGs associated to each LP fisheries as an entry point rather than the ISSG PS Observer which is specific to the tropical purse seine fishery.

In addition to this section, Antoine Duparc (IRD, France) presented the last state of play regarding the sub-ISSG Tropical Tunas Treatment.

After the presentation, Leonie asked for a confirmation regarding the utilisation of the new process for the following year's data submission to the RFMOs. It was highlighted that the process has already been tested over the last 2 years on all the data of the countries involved in this group (France, Spain, Seychelles and Senegal) with the aim to use the new process in 2024 (on the 2023 data).

Furthermore, Leonie questioned the possible double financing between the biological sampling network project presented and the funding that is already covered by the DCF program (for example regarding the stomach content). Regarding biological sampling, the current data collection supported by the DCF only support very limited measures of the IRD data collection. The network project goes further in terms of purposes, sampling types or analyses and includes a close EU collaboration with other institutes such as AZTI, IEO and IRD. Furthermore, the genetic component of this project is very interesting, particularly with regards to the aforementioned link with the Fish Genome project.

In addition, Hugo asked for clarification regarding the local market flow and especially differences between bycatch and local market flows. It was clarified that bycatch only represents non-target species of a given fishery whereas local market includes bycatch, but also major tropical tunas rejected from industrial process (cannery) due to quality issues. In Abidjan the local market is bigger than in Seychelles.

Alexis asked for a clarification regarding the first results presented for the conversion factor and especially how they differed regarding the expected hypothesis. No answer was provided because further analysis is required

The last question was raised by Jon, in relation to the species included in the biological data sampling. Behind this question, the concern is in regards to the sensitive species of the bycatch (e.g. sharks) and the impediments that can occur owing to CITES protocol when attempting to bring samples back. Pedro Lino (IPMA, Portugal) echoed this having had the same kind of issues with ICCAT samples. It seems that ICCAT tried to negotiate a solution, but no solutions have been found at this stage therefore the problem remains unresolved. It was suggested that EU can maybe support the RCG group on this subject. Leonie suggests that the RCG LP could propose a formal recommendation to highlight this problem, but Jon added that this kind of recommendation was done several years ago. It was agreed by the group that the issue needed to be raised again in order to highlight the issue and find a solution to CITES blocking sample shipping and transport.

### 3.3. ISSG Large Pelagics Regional Database development

#### 3.3.1. RDBES – State of play

The aims of the Regional Database & Estimation System (RDBES) are as follows:

1. Make data available for the RCGs
2. Provide a regional estimation system for ICES stock assessments
3. To increase the data quality, documentation of data, and the use of approved methods
4. To facilitate the production of fisheries management advice and reports,
5. To increase the awareness of fisheries data collected and the overall usage of these data.

The RDBES Documentation is on GitHub (<https://github.com/ices-tools-dev/RDBES/tree/master/Documents>) It is in the process of being updated. The following files are the most important:

- “RDBES Documentation of the Data Model” – a description of the RDBES data model and important concepts
- “RDBES Data Model” a spreadsheet which specifies the main tables
- “RDBES Data Model VD SL” specifies the Vessel Details, and Species List Details tables
- “RDBES Data Model CL CE” specifies the Effort and Landings tables

The RDBES will eventually replace both the existing Regional Database (RDB) and ICES InterCatch systems – this will be phased over a number of years. In particular, the use of InterCatch will be progressively phased out on a stock-by-stock basis.

	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
<b>RDB</b>	Data upload & download	Download only	Download only	Download only	Download only
<b>InterCatch</b>	Data upload & download	Data upload & download	Data upload & download	Data upload & download	Download only
<b>RDBES</b>	Data upload & download	Data upload & download	Data upload & download	Data upload & download	Data upload & download

#### RDBES 2023 Data call

The deadline for the 2023 RDBES data call is the 29th September. In the future this deadline will need to be moved earlier in the year so that the data is available to answer the needs of the RCGs and the ICES assessment working groups.

#### RDBES workshops in 2023

A number of RDBES workshops and meetings were planned for 2023.

- WKRaise&TAF-Flow (22,24,26 May)

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- This tested the full commercial catch Transparent Assessment Framework (TAF) workflow from national estimates to international stock coordination for two stocks, wit.27.3a47d and pok.27.3a47d.
- WKRDBES-INTRO2 (13-15 June)
  - This workshop described and explained the Regional Database and Estimation System (RDBES) data model to users.
- WKRDBES-RAISE&TAF2 (2-6 October)
  - This workshop aims to reproduce the 2023 upload (2022 data) to InterCatch by producing R-scripts that raise national data extracted from the RDBES format to national level estimates. It will set up national TAF repositories and produce R-scripts for generic, standard approaches.
  - It also aims to reproduce the 2023 stock coordination (2022 data) previously done in InterCatch.
- WGRDBES-EST (16-20 October)
  - This working groups considers design based estimation methods. It will finalize code and generalize outputs and incorporate functions into the RDBEScore package.

### Funding further developments

During the RDBES Governance group (WGRDBESGOV) 2022 meeting it was agreed that the following tasks were the highest priority:

- Incorporation of recreational data in the RDBES
- “Upload Log” import
- Data quality check improvements
- Improvement of data viewing tools
- EU Fisheries Dependent Information (FDI) data call export module

One of the main discussions at the WGRDBESGOV meeting was about how to provide funding for the essential functionalities that will not be developed under the current funding. Options that could be considered include:

- Request European Commission (EC) funding for a non-recurrent technical request to ICES. The chance of funding is thought to be higher if countries outside EU are also included in the cost-sharing of the project.
- Develop a scenario where all countries contribute to the needed budget based on agreed criteria.

### 3.3.2. Large Pelagics Regional Database development

Mathieu Depetris (France, IRD) presented several slides regarding the state of play in the development of the future Large Pelagics Regional DataBase (LP RDB). The ISSG associated was created in 2021 in direct recommendation of the RCG LP 2021 annual meeting. Its structure being established to consider about all the diversity of the RCG LP. So far it was composed of the 9 European countries involved in the RCG LP (Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain), the RFMOs associated (ICCAT and IOTC so far), European Commission staff for support and representative of end users and other regional database systems (FDI, RDBES and RDBFIS).

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In 2022, several discussions raised among two dedicate meetings (11<sup>th</sup> of March and 30<sup>th</sup> of April) and during the 2022 RCG LP annual meeting. Since no forward “move” was made regarding this subject.

Nevertheless, these exchanges precisely the specificities of each stakeholder in terms of large pelagics fisheries and LP RDB preferences (figure 3.3.2.1 below).

	Preference for the RDBES	Preference for the RDBFIS	No preference so far	Preference unknown
Croatia		X		
Cyprus	X			
France	X			
Greece		X		
Ireland	X			
Italy				X
Malta			X	
Portugal			X	
Spain	X			

Figure 3.3.2.1: Regional database system preferences by MS.

The report associated with these outcomes was available on the SharePoint and should be uploaded on the RCG LP website soon. Even if no consensus was found for the future LP RBD (in terms of development and ways to choose), all the group clearly understand the aims and benefices of this system and agreed not to create a new system from scratch but integration, if it’s possible, an existing system. Furthermore, it was highlighted that even if preferences were clear, we only discussed in the past regarding what kinds of strategies each RCG LP members want to reach. To find consensus on this subject, we must identify what is really the needs behind that, especially for rise news strategies which answering all our needs. In addition, it was noted that several RCG LP countries have launched national “actions” and these examples could bring support in our discussion. For example, it’s the case of Cyprus who already submitted data of several fisheries in the RDBES, or France how selected the RDBES format as an exchange format between national databases.

The following discussion was displayed during the three days of the annual meeting.

Globally, the major outcomes were:

- These questions of LP RDB are a subject discussed since a long time ago in our RCG, and maybe a good solution to move forward is to reduce our level of ambition, keep in our mind all the global aspect of the topic but move step by step and begin with the “low hanging fruits”. Furthermore, and especially regarding the steps forward of the other RCGs on RDBs development, we must propose something (even if at the end the final decision or action will be different than what we propose now).
- It was highlighted several times by the lack of human resources for bringing operational action on this subject. Furthermore, it was also noted that the development of an LP RDB is one aim of our RCG. This goal was directly in relation to the transition that we expected from a national dynamic, to a regional dynamic. In fact, we can see that as a relocation of a national effort to a regional effort, even if some intermediate states will need more resources at the begging (but less at the end and for a long-term process).
- In addition, the group raised the lack of knowledge that we have on the technical structure of the RDBES and the RDBFIS system. The idea has always been to select the way that we want to follow before going deeper into the technical aspect associated. In any case further development will be



necessary in all the different scenarios to fit with all the LP fisheries specificities. However, it was noted that the RDBES format is included (at least several hierarchies) in the RDBFIS database.

After several discussions, the group decided to find a compromise, according to the actual knowledge. The global schema associated was available below in figure 3.3.2.2.

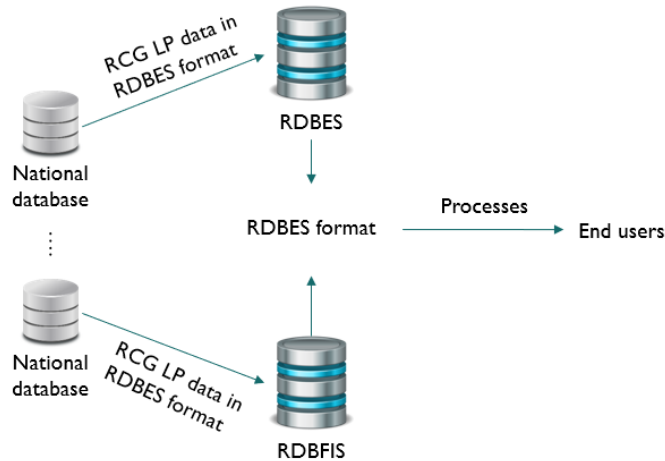


Figure 3.3.2.2: Global consensus regarding the LP RDB subject

For the first time in our reflexions, the group did not talk about the selection of a unique database, but we talk about the selection of a single database format. Like mentioned before, the idea is to move step by step, keep in our mind and discussions all point to consider (like the hosting of the data, the human resources associated with the development) but not to collapse our progression of the subject by raised all in one. Today and according to the knowledge that we have on the topic, the RDBES format seems to be best common choose. A recommendation was made regarding that and available in the annexe of the report. It will be discussed during next meetings, especially with the national correspondents.

In addition, the group decided to send an email to RDBES and RDBFIS teams to bring their opinion of this recommendation. So far, we received only RDBES feedback. From their point of view, this solution could be very similar to the way that recreational data is currently being approached. The working group associated have proposed a format for recreational data which was like the RDBES commercial catch and effort data format. Then through a data call, submission of excel files in the proposed format was sending to the RBDES system. This allows them to maintain progress on incorporating recreational data in the RDBES without needing to wait for ICES developers to adapt the database, upload webpage or data validation functions.

### 3.4. ISSG Bluefin tuna (BFT)

#### 3.4.1. State of play

2022 has been an important year for BFT, with many meetings to be attended by experts. Notably, the MSE has been completed and the HCR adopted. The 2023 workplan contains the setting-up of the Exceptional circumstances for the MSE, which are the set of conditions under which the HCR may not be operational anymore and the consequential actions to be taken. The BFT working group also focuses on more scientific aspects, specifically the possibility to set-up a Close-Kin-Mark-Recapture (CKMR) approach for Eastern Bluefin, as such an approach is already advanced for the western stock. CKMR could provide an absolute abundance index, which would reduce importantly the uncertainty in the current MSE.

In this context, the ISSG for BFT has not been moving on very much for the same reasons as the previous years (mostly experts taken by other tasks), but CKMR is initiating new dynamics. CKMR rests on parents/siblings relationships, which require an extensive genetic sampling scheme on juveniles and adult fish to be set-up. As the preliminary steps and studies are taken in this direction, it is expected that a sampling strategy will emerge from it. Along this, several discussions on the current biological sampling under DCF have established that it should be re-initialized to be more in line with the needs of the BFT working group. In this context, BFT biological sampling will likely evolve in the coming years, to include new requirements on genetic sampling and more appropriate sampling effort with respect to the current fishery. This will likely be associated to a more active BFT ISSG.

### 3.5. ICCAT Feedback

The presenter remembered the GBYP BFT sampling activities, already detailed in previous RCG LP meetings, and presented the results of a review of the Large Pelagics sampling activities carried out under the EU DCF BFT/ activities, based on information extracted from the DCF annual reports (AR) downloaded from the DCF portal. From this review, some problems affecting the current DCF development and reporting in relation to Large Pelagics, were pointed out, as the lack of a database integrating the information contained in the AR, the lack of precise information on the location of the samples collected under DCF and of links to relate these samples with the results obtained from its analyses. It was also mentioned that according to the number, type and distribution of the samples and data recorded in the AR, apparently the current DCF large pelagics biological sampling do not cover properly the stock assessment needs. Consequently, some recommendations to improve the current DCF LP reporting were proposed, as to complete as soon as possible the implementation of a functional information management system, include in the AR more precise information on the location of the samples and to develop a system to update the information on the use and availability of these samples.

Finally, it was concluded that it should be considered the possibility of launching a data call to get more precise info on existing DCF samples of interest for ICCAT, that the DCF sampling scheme in relation to large pelagics should be updated and optimized, and that the new information system on DCF currently under development, should include more detailed metadata on the storage of DCF samples and its analyses, and be linked to the database containing the data obtained from these samples. It was also mentioned that if ICCAT decides to implement the Close Kin Mark Recapture approach to improve the management of some stocks, this will require the design and implementation of new sampling schemes that should be carried out by the ICCAT

contracting Parties, particularly the EU, given that ICCAT special research programs cannot assume the massive genetic sampling required by this methodology.

### 3.6. ISSG Regional Work Plan

#### 3.6.1. LP Regional Work Plan & feedback from Fishn'Co

During the meeting, Mathieu Depetris (France, IRD) presented the last state of play regarding the future Large Pelagics Regional Work Plan (LP RWP). In addition, a summary of the project Fishn'Co was made. This project, which ended at the begging of the year, was aimed at strengthening EU-MAP data collection by developing Regional Work Plans (RWP) for the RCGs: NANSEA, Baltic, Large Pelagics and Economics Issues. Main deliverables of this project were composed of 4 RWP proposal for the period 2025-2027 and one of them is dedicated to the large pelagics. All the work done under the umbrella of this project was done in close cooperation with RCGs, several ISSGs, the STECF (Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries) and National Correspondents. These outputs are the "first seeds" of something which aims to be bigger, and the work of this project continues through a pan-ISSG focusing on the RWP development.

Regarding the next steps roadmap, a first draft of our LP RWP should be discussed and validated during this meeting. The draft will be shared in a second time to all national correspondents and final validation should occur during the September decision meeting (DM). In the end, LP RWP should be ready between November 2023 and June 2024 and used for the preparation of the national work plan 2025-2027 by October 2024.

In addition, work among the Fishn'Co taught us about several lessons, or ticks, for our future work. First, put all our "work" into a single document and deal with a variety of coordination types (depending on thematic and related needs) is not an easy task. This is not an issue (in fact it's normal), but complexifies the readability of the proposals. Some infographic tool was developed under the project to support but need to be improved and maintained in time. Other structures like the RCG secretariat can help us and bring support by helping the experts in each ISSG in delivering workable agreed products in the future.

Furthermore, it's very important to have a maximum of country feedback regarding this LP RWP. The more we have and more the construction and validation process will be easier. It's important to discuss our next move forward and what we want to do regarding the evolution of the LP RWP. So far, we integrate inside a small part of the RCG LP dealing "activities", with a specific focus on the purse seiner tropical tunas' fishery. For example, do we want to review our levels of ambitions next year? Extend this process on other LP fisheries? In any case, it's important to understand that all the work done for the RWP is not "wasting" time, because it's work already done for the national work plan creation process.

After the presentation, several discussions appear, and the first review of the LP RWP draft was done among the group members. Some corrections were suggested, and the group agreed to give a maximum of feedback as soon as possible (in the following week). After integration of all the modifications, chairs of the RCG LP will make available the drafted LP RWP to the NC for discussion among the summertime and begging the process of validation.

### 3.7. Pan regional coordination

#### 3.7.1. ISSG Metiers and Transversal Issues

##### Introduction

The group has been ongoing since 2018, starting with a workshop discussing the methods used to assign métier codes to transversal data, issues and best practices, and the following years as an RCG ISSG intersessional subgroup.

The group has first worked on a suggestion of a new standardized and harmonized list of metier codes which was approved by RCG's in 2020 and in the September 2020 Liaison meeting. It was also agreed by the NCs (*National Correspondents*) that the new codes for métiers and reference lists can be used and implemented by the MS (*Member States*). The group work also on methods to apply the metier codes to transversal data. Now the work is on maintaining the codes and following the implementation in STECF/FDI and ICES data calls.

A repository for storing metier codes, reference lists for species/area/gears, script, manual (*explaining the background, script, input format and reference lists*) and reports can be found on the following GitHub: <https://github.com/ices-eg/RCGs/tree/master/Metiers>. The script can assign métier codes using a specified data input format. It also has functionalities 1) to propose an estimate of métiers where all needed information is not available and 2) to refine the “rare” métiers firstly assigned by the general algorithm focusing on the year\*vessel main métiers, in order to limit the multiplication of métiers calculated.

In 2021, the group changed name to ‘ISSG on Métier and transversal variable issues’, also including a task to look at effort calculations for the small-scale fisheries and more generally to look at methods to calculate fishing activity data (transversal variables) with the aim to harmonize/homogenise the methods between MS.

The ISSG is chaired by Sébastien Demanéche, Ifremer, France and Josefine Egekvist, DTU Aqua, Denmark. The main outputs of the work completed by the group in 2023 have been presented during the 2023 RCG LP.

##### Introduction of a Metier level 7 for large pelagics fisheries

Following a request from Spain, the group has worked to the introduction, for FDI data call, of a metier level 7 including information about target species in large pelagic fisheries. These new codes are incorporating in the hierarchy level 1 to level 6 with a new step after the level 6 corresponding to the target species or group of species. The following codes have been suggested: BFT (*Bluefin tuna*), SMT (*Small tuna*), ALB (*Albacore tuna*), MSP (*mix Skipjack tuna / Bigeye tuna / Yellowfin tuna / Albacore tuna and Bluefin tuna*), SWO (*Swordfish*) and TRO (*mix Skipjack tuna / Yellowfin tuna and Bigeye tuna*).

The proposed list of Metier level 7 for large pelagic fisheries was presented to the RCG LP, and can be found on the GitHub:

[https://github.com/ices-eg/RCGs/blob/master/Metiers/Reference\\_lists/RDB\\_ISSG\\_Metier\\_level\\_7\\_list.csv](https://github.com/ices-eg/RCGs/blob/master/Metiers/Reference_lists/RDB_ISSG_Metier_level_7_list.csv).

**The group asked RCG LP to approve it<sup>2</sup>.**

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<sup>2</sup> Also, to decide on a new code requested by Malta about “set longlines targeting swordfish”: proposal Metier level 6: LLS\_LPF\_0\_0\_0 & Metier level 7: LLS\_LPF\_0\_0\_0\_SWO.

### **Suggestion on a pan-regional procedure for managing the reference list of métier codes**

As the métier codes listed by RCG in the métier codes reference lists are being requested in data calls, there is a need to agree on and establish procedures for working pan-regionally, and agree on the roles between RCGs, the ISSG and end-users.

The group suggest the following procedure for managing the reference list of métier codes:

1. The ISSG on métier and transversal variables issues manages the reference list of métier codes, coordinates and advice regarding the new métier codes requested to ensure that it follows agreed principles.<sup>3</sup>
2. The agreed reference list of métier codes is used as input for ICES and STECF FDI data calls.
3. The RCGs have the final responsibility of the reference list of métier codes for their region.
4. Requests for new métier codes should be sent to the ISSG, who will be in contact with relevant RCG chairs before final approval.

**The suggested principles on which the ISSG will relied on to manage the métier codes reference list (in order to establish a métier codes reference list harmonized and standardized on DCF level6) are described in the ISSG reports and were sent to RCG chairs for endorsement (cf. hereunder). The approval from RCG LP of the principles and managing procedure of the metier codes reference list is expected.**

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### **Annex I: Suggested principles for defining métier codes:**

- Gear-target species assemblage combinations (*métier level 5*) follow table 5 from EU-MAP commission delegated decision (EU 2021/1167).
- Métier level 5 codes are defined/identified by RCG region.
- Mesh size ranges are suggested by RCG region ensuring:
  - No overlapping mesh size ranges.
  - Standardized mesh size ranges for active and passive gears by RCG region.
  - All significant mesh size “limits” regarding regulations or fishing practices considered (*splitting up into smaller mesh size ranges*).
- “\_0\_0\_0” for gears with no mesh size (e.g. *longlines, hand lines, trolling lines*), “\_>0\_0\_0” for unknown mesh size also for the following gears: traps, pots, beach seines and dredges (*gears for which no mesh size ranges have been defined*).
- Possibility of including relevant selection devices.
- Unknown gear “MIS\_MIS\_0\_0\_0”, also allow e.g., “MIS\_DEF\_0\_0\_0”, “MIS\_CRU\_0\_0\_0” etc. in case the catch composition is known from e.g., sales notes, but the gear is unknown.

<sup>3</sup> The ISSG agreed that the DCF level6 métier codes are used for harmonization, and the purposes of the data calls when possibility is given nationally/regionally to keep more precise métier at a national/regional level (i.e. DCF level 7).

- Avoid using FIF (*Finfish group*) (not calculated from the R-script developed by the ISSG) but métiers codes are available with FIF for hooks and longlines, pots and beach seine fisheries for national needs.

### 3.7.2. ISSG Recreational Fisheries

#### **Commission Update on the web platform for catch reporting of recreational fisheries - RecFishing:**

To implement the electronic catch reporting of marine recreational fisheries, MS have to put systems in place, either nationally or they can use the system developed by COM. COM has been working on a catch reporting system since 2019 with significant input from scientific experts such as ICES WGMRF (e.g. new list of species). In the presentation to RCG LP, COM provided an overview of the main outcomes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of developments of RecFishing. The project started as a pilot project requested by the EP (2017) with a Phase 2 to further develop the system. The second contract ended on 4/April/2023. RecFishing is a EU web platform for catch reporting of marine recreational fisheries to better monitor and control recreational fisheries activity and is open to all marine recreational fishers that register in the platform. The reporting of catches is on a voluntary basis and recreational fishers can report their catches from multiple apps, allowing direct online registration of data. The data is anonymised and can be aggregated in reports. It is hosted in the “Europa.eu” domain and the platform is available in the 24 EU official languages. At this point in time, it can collect catch data for more than 80 priority species. Further information about the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of developments can be found in the [final report](#) and the platform can be accessed here: <https://recreational-fishing.ec.europa.eu/> .

Currently, there are two certified apps collecting recreational fisheries data and uploading the information in RecFishing: FishFriender (FR) and FangstJournalen (DK). More are welcome and they just need to follow the certification process that ensures that the data requirements are met and the IT specifications are aligned with COM’s standards. The integrated data dashboard can visualise variables on different spatial and temporal scales and outputs can be exported. Biological data outputs include size and weight distributions by species, fishing method, etc. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Phase is to be launched soon with the call for tenders planned to be open in Q4 2023. This will entail a 3-year contract for services with the aim of further developments, boarding of more apps, scale up and dissemination. The presentation generated discussion with participants asking whether the data can be collected via phone apps, whether national systems can be integrated with the COM system and how the data can be disseminated. This was confirmed and it was explained that the access to data depend on access right levels, e.g., national authorities can access national data, while specific entities (e.g angling clubs) can visualize their own data.

### 3.7.3. RCGs Secretariat – Status and future

#### **Objectives:**

The Secretariat service of the RCGs has its most recent background in the progress made and results of the SecWeb project. Through it, the operating bases of this service were established from a practical perspective and as an outcome of the direct work with all the RCGs. Yet, it has not been possible to serve every network at the same level up to now because SecWeb could only embrace a pilot experience.

Despite this, with Secweb's activity it has been possible to understand the dynamics and context of the different RCGs and thereby, determine the effort required to attend to the essential processes of the service, and also to explore financing scenarios which could allow maintaining this service in the future.

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The objective of establishing a long-term stable structure revealed more complex than expected, from a legal and administrative, perspective and it was determined that more time would be needed to find the mechanisms that make it viable for all the Member States. This matter was decided to be dealt within ISSG NCs.

### Achievements

In the Decision Meeting of September 2022, the Member States through the National Correspondents, agreed to incorporate into the National Work Plans a common text that commits them to support the maintenance of the service with a long-term perspective. This text also allows the states to take on their contribution to pay for the service with the DCF assigned EMFAF funds.

In addition, the short-term / low value subcontracting of the service by each state was launched, adapting the procedure to the legal requirements for service procurement that each state raised (financing limit, need for a contract or not, need to open the procedure to offers from other providers...)

At present, 19 states have committed their acceptance of the service offer received and the process remains open to try to confirm all of them and explore possibilities through some of the financing and contracting mechanisms with EMFAF funds announced by DGMARE and CINEA.

### RCG LP Workplan for 2023 – 2024:

The activity of the RCGs Secretariat during the year 2023 has not yet reached the full scale for which it was foreseen due to the situation with the financing, and it is necessary to prioritize some activities:

It has been given priority to supporting the 6 RCGs in their Annual Technical Meetings and the celebration of the Liaison Meeting in September.

Progress is expected with the development of some new services through [the RCG website](#). Its maintenance is the second priority for the Secretariat:

- Repository of bilateral and multilateral agreements
- Space with content about each of the ISSGs
- A new section with information about the Secretariat
- Newsletter
- [RCGs stakeholders database](#)

The RCGs Stakeholders database deserves special mention. It has been launched by ILVO also as a result of SecWeb. It is expected to be a tool that greatly facilitates internal communication processes throughout the RCGs networks, as well as the visibility of the experts that make it up. All participants are strongly encouraged to [enter their details into the system](#) which ideally should be totally fed and operational by the end of 2023.

### Questions and comments

Leonie O'Dowd (DGMARE): Asks if apart from the repository if the Secretariat is thinking about a tool for the follow up of decisions and recommendations?

Rosa Fernández from the RCGs' Secretariat comments that follow up on recommendations and set up and follow up of consultation processes with a dedicated tool, is something the Secretariat would be planning for the future and may be something to integrate in the work around new proposal planned for submission under CINEA/EMFAF call.

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Hugo Maxwell (RCG LP Chair) asks about the Stakeholder database: how it works, you go there and put your data?

Rosa Fernández confirms that the experts and NCs and all the people in the network can sign in and insert their data into the system. The data inserted will need to go through validation before it goes public. The users can decide about the amount of information they put into the system and also about the public or restricted availability of the data inserted. The important thing is that the groups where each expert is involved are well identified and also that the information about the role the expert plays is indicated.

It is also noted that with this tool it can be systematised the process of checking the experts which are contributing to the network in each Member State, or for example, extract the historical information about when and who has been chair for every RCG and ISSG.

Ideally, if by the end of the year 2023 we have this fully operational, this will make an important difference to the communication processes in the context of the RCGs beyond 2024.

Jurgen Mifsud (RCG LP Chair) poses a question about the agreed text for Text box “Other Data Collection Activities” He would like to confirm if the EC is aware of the text? Also, how shall we report on progress towards what is said in that text box, the MS should also be consistent in reporting to what is committed in that text box.

Rosa Fernández confirms that the text box was known by the EC as it was agreed at the NCs meeting 2022, and also informs that in the TMs this year it has been recommended to keep the text as it is for the RWP in order to add guarantees to the continuity of the service.

### Recommendation:

Keep using the Text provided for the text box 1.6

Rapporteurs: Rosa M. Fernández Otero and Susana Rivero Rodríguez (RCG Secretariat, CETMAR Foundation)

## 3.8. Commission update on Control regulation

A provisional political agreement on the **revision** of the [Control Regulation](#) was reached between the co-legislators the Council and the European Parliament on the 31 May this year, five years after the publication of the [Commission proposal](#). COM emphasized in the presentation that there was no formal adoption by the Council or Parliament yet. Envisaged timelines are formal adoption by Council and Parliament before the end of 2023, publication/entry into force in early 2024 with some provisions applied immediately, others after 2Y, 4Y and 2029/2030. The revision entails the full digitalisation of catch reporting for all commercial fisheries. Within 2 years, all vessels above 12m must have tracking and electronic catch reporting with no more derogations allowed; while within 4 years, electronic recording of catches and tracking is required for vessels below 12m and electronic catch reporting is also required for operators “fishing without a vessel”. However, for vessels below 9m, MS may derogate tracking of vessels until 2030.

These new rules for commercial fisheries cover all SSF to progress to full digitalisation of the commercial fleet for increased accuracy in catch reporting. For a level playing field and a more complete understanding of the impact of recreational fisheries on stocks, accurate catch reporting is also needed for recreational fisheries.



New rules requiring the electronic recording of catches of certain species are applicable within 2 years under the proposed Article 55. This applies to species subject to Union conservation measures (e.g. seabass in the Atlantic, cod and salmon in the Baltic, BFT, SWO) whereby recreational fishers have to register and report their catches through an electronic system daily. Under Art 55, it is also required that Coastal Member States collect data on recreational catches according to their own methodology and report to the Commission once a year for species covered by fishing opportunities, multiannual plans or subject to the landing obligation. Catch data can be collected as defined by MS through the DCF or other methodologies. From 2030, electronic recording of recreational catches by fishers will be mandatory for these species **if recreational fisheries are having significant impacts** on the mortality of these species (FO, MAPs and LO), as indicated by scientific advice from STECF, ICES or equivalent scientific bodies. The list of those species and the frequency of reporting will be set by implementing act.

### 3.9. Genomics for stock assessment

#### 3.9.1. Fish Genome

The **Fish Genome** project "Improving cost-efficiency of fisheries research surveys and fish stocks assessments using next-generation genetic sequencing methods" [Contract – EASME/EMFF/2017/1.3.2.10/ SI2.790889] was completed this year. It aimed to assess the suitability of novel genomic tools to deliver essential parameters for fisheries stock assessment of commercially exploited species, which could underpin scientific advice and fisheries management. The project included the assessment of the feasibility and the value of the implementation of such tools and applied methodologies such as environmental DNA; epigenetic age determination; RAD-seq for connectivity; genotyping for stock substructure; genotyping for sex assignment and C-Kin Mark-Recapture.

The final report can be accessed via: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4cdb3dc7-f080-11ed-a05c-01aa75ed71a1>

The project included a **Roadmap**, which contains key information on whether and how the analyzed genomic-based approaches could become part of the regular research surveys and data collection activities with short/mid/long-term actions. The RCGs are included in the roadmap and were asked to consider it and its way forward, with the roadmap made available as an internal document during the meeting.

#### 3.9.2. Making use of genetic samples to inform stock assessment

The presentation consisted in two parts.

##### **Part I: Presentation of the different genetic approaches that can be applied to fisheries/ecosystems assessment and monitoring.**

Here, three main blocks are identified concerning the application of genetics to fisheries assessment and which are distinguished by the aim they pursue and by the sample type they require.

- The first one is the genetic analyses of collected stomachs contents. This discussion is now included as part of the work of the Stomach sampling ISSG, where several presentations have been made. AZTI has also an EU MAP funded test study, whose aim is to "Set the basics of a routine food-web monitoring program through genetic analyses of stomach contents".

- The second one is the analysis of environmental DNA, that is, that DNA collected by filtering water samples, and which contain traces of the organisms inhabiting the water column, including large ones such as fish and elasmobranchs. This approach, being considered a biodiversity monitoring approach, could be included as part of the Electronic Monitoring Technologies ISSG, but this is still under discussion.
- The last one is the analysis of fish tissue samples with the purpose of doing stock delimitation and identification studies, close-kin mark-recapture (CKMR) projects for biomass estimation or epigenetic analyses for age determination. It was discussed that this tissue sampling for genetic analyses could be integrated into the Surveys ISSG. The second part of the presentation focused on this block.

## Part 2: Presentation of the utility of tissue samples for stock assessment.

The presentation focused on the importance of collecting tissue samples, in particular for stock delimitation and identification, but which are also critical for upcoming CKMR studies, which might also require age estimation through epigenetics. Two species, the Atlantic Bluefin tuna and the bigeye tuna were used as examples.

Bluefin tuna: Early genetic information-based population connectivity analyses supported natal homing behaviour in the ABFT and allowed for the development of a 96 SNP based stock identification tool (Rodriguez-Ezpeleta et al., 2019). Yet, additional analyses based on more samples, including larvae from the Slope Sea, revealed existence of mixing between individuals from the two main spawning grounds, resulting in individuals with admixed genetic profiles, mostly concentrated in the Slope Sea. It is still not clear how genetic differentiation is maintained in the presence of gene flow, and two hypotheses are possible: 1) a recent expansion (either mediated by an increase of population size or by an improvement of conditions in the Slope Sea for reproduction) of the Mediterranean population into the West after which there has not been enough time for homogenization, and 2) a selection against admixed individuals. For testing these hypotheses, genetic monitoring is needed for which an additional monitoring tool has been developed, that is, a SNP array including 8,000 SNP markers, which was designed and validated to obtain population structure relevant information (such as complete genetic profile and potentially adaptive markers), kin finding, sex determination and mitochondrial variant analysis. More than 1000 individuals have been genotyped using this tool, including individuals from the Mediterranean Sea, the Gulf of Mexico and feeding aggregations in the Atlantic, whose genetic profiles were obtained. Kinship analysis performed on these individuals revealed the suitability of this tool for kin detection and was able to detect several half and full sibling pairs among the analysed samples; Thus, suitable for Close-kin Mark Recapture analyses.

Bigeye tuna: The bigeye (*Thunnus obesus*) is assessed as a single stock even though studies based on fisheries catch data, parasite composition and tagging suggest potential sub structuring. Here, we have studied inter and intra-oceanic population structure and connectivity assembling a dataset of about ten thousand genome-wide Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms (SNPs) from more than five hundred individuals of different age classes across the Indian and adjacent oceans. Our results support presence of structural genomic variants distributed at different frequencies across the Indian Ocean, suggesting the presence of partially isolated groups, and which also suggest genomic permeability between the Pacific and Indian oceans. The observed connectivity patterns challenge the current single stock-based assessment while demanding additional analyses to better understand the role of these genomic structural variants on the



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adaptive potential of this species to a changing environment. Altogether, these results highlight the benefits of genomics-informed management and conservation strategies in tropical tunas.

Rapporteur: Naiara Rodriguez-Ezpeleta



## 4. RCG LP moving forward

Following the 2023 technical meeting in St Julian's, Malta, the two main intersessional objectives for the group are as follows:

- 1) Selection of a regional database format to feed into a Regional DataBase. This has been an ongoing issue since 2021 for this coordination group, when the ISSG RDB LP was created in order to consider the diversity of the group's data inputs. As a means to progress this requirement for a regional database, a reduction of the level of ambition has been proposed whereby it's no longer a question of database selection but rather finding consensus on a common database format. Further development is required intersessionally to elect this single/unique database format among the 9 M.S. of the RCG LP. This is a particularly complex issue for this RCG given the division amongst member states with regards to their data being affiliated with one of two European regional databases.
- 2) Ongoing work on the regional work plan for the RCG LP will be necessary during the intersessional period between 2023 and 2024 to inform national work plans for the 2025-2027 period. This is of particular importance as the RWP should reflect the exact mandate of this RCG. Moreover, there has been historical confusion with regards to the overlapping geographical areas of the large pelagics within quasi all RCGs owing to the number of zones spanned by countries belonging to this RCG. Additionally, the issue of fixed/frozen delegated decisions needs to be addressed, given the evolving nature in terms of stock areas and or new stocks of interest.

## 5. AOB

Owing to credential issues arising during the first part of the meeting in 2023, any national experts (NE), or appointed acting national representatives should be nominated to the RCG Large Pelagics group prior to the meeting by their country's national correspondent (NC) in advance of the technical meeting. This should be done well ahead of time to avoid any issues during the technical meetings.

Additionally, should a country need to remove an NC or NE from the participants list of the RCG, please do so in a timely way prior to the TM to avoid any unnecessary complications for the Secretariat and chairs at the start of the meeting.

No further items were discussed.



## 6. Next meeting

RCG LP will meet 24<sup>th</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2024 in Olhão, Portugal.

The RCG LP 2024 meeting will be followed up with a RCG Decision meeting, a one-day meeting for the National Correspondents in Brussels, Belgium (last week of September 2024, dates to be decided).

For the RCG LP 2024 the chairs are Jurgen Misfud (Malta) and Dalia Reis (Portugal) (replaced by interim chair Hugo Maxwell (Ireland) for the period of January to August 2024).



## 7. List of Recommendations

Decision 01. Selection of regional database format to feed into a RDB	
LP_2023_D01	Selection of a single regional database <u>format</u> which can feed RCG LP data into either RDBES or RDBFIS.
TOR 3	Development of a regional database for the RCG LP.
Justification	<p>During the RCG LP 2023 TM, the ISSG Large Pelagics Regional Database Development presented the ongoing issues surrounding selection of a regional data base.</p> <p>As a reminder, this ISSG was created in 2021 as a direct recommendation of the RCG LP 2021 annual meeting. The structure of this sub group was established to consider the diversity of the RCG LP's data input.</p> <p>In 2022, despite two dedicated meetings as well as the annual RCG LP T.M. no solution with regards to the selection of a regional data base was found. This is due to the lack of consensus among M.S. on their preference for either RDBES or RDBFIS database.</p> <p>In order to move forward and propose a partial solution, a reduction in the level of ambition was suggested by the ISSG. Instead of trying to select a unique database, the group focused on selecting a single database <u>format</u>.</p> <p>During the 2023 RCG LP T.M., with the available information and knowledge on the subject, the RDBES format was put forward as the most accepted format for data entry to regional databases, be it RDBFIS or RDBES.</p> <p>In any case further development will be necessary in all the different scenarios to fit with all the LP fisheries specificities. However, it was noted that the RDBES format is included (at least several hierarchies) in the RDBFIS database.</p> <p>During the meeting feedback from ISSG RDBES on the matter was received. According to this ISSG, this proposed solution would be very similar to the way that recreational data is currently being approached. The working group associated have proposed a format for recreational data which similar to the RDBES commercial catch and effort data format (data call with a submission of excel file sin the proposed format sent to the RDBES system).</p> <p>RDBFIS did not provide feedback on this solution during the RCG LP TM 2023.</p> <p>The proposal is a partial solution, in order to progress the requirement for a regional database for RCG LP</p>
Follow-up actions needed	Decision on a single regional format for RCG LP data input into an RDB.
Responsible persons for follow-up actions	NC / Member States.

**Decision 01. Selection of regional database format to feed into a RDB**

Time frame (Deadline)	Decision Meeting 2023
Comments	

**Recommendation 01. Transport/Movement of samples listed under CITES**

LP_2023_R01	Revive former recommendation to address issues arising when transporting samples from one country to another for the purpose of genetic analysis of tissues, particularly during import the European Union. Issue is related to species listed under CITES and has remained unresolved since it was last put forward as a recommendation in 2019.
TOR 4	Sampling and regional working plans. Provide a global overview of observer coverage by country and gears.
Justification	<p>Tissue sample movements for analysis have been hindered and or stopped by CITES on occasion, in particular when these samples are being shipped to a Member State in the European Union. ICCAT have had similar issue and so far this has not been resolved. CITES has not, to date, responded to a request for an exception. This has been an ongoing issue since 2019.</p> <p>This mainly concerns sensitive species caught as bycatch (e.g. sharks) and the impediments that can occur when shipping samples owing to the CITES protocol. ICCAT has attempted to negotiate a solution, however the issue remains unresolved. There is a need for EU support on this matter and therefore the RCG LP proposes this as a formal recommendation in order to highlight the issue at hand and reactivate the former recommendation made in 2019.</p>
Follow-up actions needed	Investigate possibility of an exception on sample movement from CITES, coordinated with ICCAT.
Responsible persons for follow-up actions	European Commission
Time frame (Deadline)	Before next RCG LP
Comments	

**Recommendation 02. Common Sampling Approach for EMS**

LP_2023_R02	Development of a joint sampling approach for the Electronic Monitoring (EM) programmes necessary as EM implementation is becoming more and more common in EU fisheries.
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Recommendation 02. Common Sampling Approach for EMS	
TOR 4	Sampling and regional working plans. Provide a global overview of observer coverage by country and gears.
Justification	Electric Monitoring is becoming a common tool for observer data collection and catch monitoring for all fisheries, in particular in purse seine fisheries. Development of joint sampling approach is necessary in order to have agreement on a common protocol going forward.
Follow-up actions needed	Avenue needed for participation in pan-regional EM subgroup organised by RCG NANSEA in order to promote this discussion.
Responsible persons for follow-up actions	ISSG EMT (Electronic Monitoring Technologies)
Time frame (Deadline)	End of 2024
Comments	

Recommendation 03. Close-Kin Mark Recapture impact on Sampling design	
LP_2023_R03	CKMR sampling requirements may have an impact on sampling designs. A proper implementation plan is needed in order to correctly respond to the need of ICCAT's CKMR methodology.
TOR 4	Sampling and regional working plans. Provide a global overview of observer coverage by country and gears.
Justification	<p>ICCAT's bluefin tuna species group's most recent developments are related to the implementation of genomics, namely of CKMR methodology for the eastern bluefin tuna stock assessment.</p> <p>Several aspects of CKMR are being considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• capacity to provide an abundance index;</li> <li>• estimation of absolute abundance;</li> <li>• reduce uncertainty in the context of management strategy evaluation (MSE).</li> </ul> <p>If this method is approved for Eastern bluefin tuna stock assessment, this will have important implications for the GBYP biological sampling programme. One of the major limitations of this stock assessment method is that it requires a very large sampling scheme. DCF will need to move from a proportional sampling to a targeted sampling programme to respond the requirements of this genetics analysis method.</p> <p>Sampling schemes for LP should be updated considering genetics and a possible future implementation of a CKMR approach in bluefin tuna or other species. Most of the assessment for BFT currently use data made available by GBYP and</p>

Recommendation 03. Close-Kin Mark Recapture impact on Sampling design	
	<p>not from national efforts for the DCF. There is a need for coordination between sampling at national level through the DCF.</p> <p>Should this method be implemented by ICCAT, the DCF there will be need to amend and adapt the sampling for CKMR sampling requirements as the current sampling level under DCF will not be sufficient. An implementation plan is therefore required in order to attain a suitable level of sampling for CMKR coordinated with ICCAT, particularly on standardized procedure.</p>
Follow-up actions needed	Presentation to be made on the RCG LP and ISSG Bluefin tuna during the SCRS group on bluefin tuna meeting at ICCAT.
Responsible persons for follow-up actions	EU delegation scientists – bluefin specialist attending the SCRS species group.
Time frame (Deadline)	September 2024 at the ICCAT SCRS bluefin tuna species group meeting
Comments	Possibly addressed at the ICCAT 2023 SCRS.

Recommendation 04. Data requirements and data transmission issues	
LP_2023_R04	Following up on the process of transferring biological data from DCF to ICCAT; a need for improved harmonization on denomination of variables and coordination on metadata for traceability of biological samples between databases.
TOR 2	RFMOs feedback and summaries of possible issues, like data transmission failures or potential collaboration in data calls.
Justification	<p>ICCAT representatives from statistics and GBYP have been participating in LMs and RCG LP meetings since 2019 in order to improve coordination. The status of coordination efforts is not yet satisfactory according to the RFMO (e.g. request of information to DCG RCGLP have not been answered satisfactorily). Continued and improved coordination is recommended.</p> <p>Possibility of a new data call to be launched on the availability of relevant samples for ICCAT (to be discussed within the bluefin tuna SCRS group). ICCAT need to look at launching a dedicated data call for its specific needs; namely biological sampling data not just length data for example. ICCAT do not want to have to create a data call.</p> <p>Further/continued harmonization work on the denomination of variables has been request by ICCAT as there are currently many discrepancies in the denomination and interpretation of certain variables which creates issues when it comes to accessing the correct data.</p> <p>Traceability metadata on biological sampling is not available. Existing RDBFIS/RDBS data bases do not contain enough metadata to trace the data to the sample storage location. These two aforementioned databases do not</p>

Recommendation 04. Data requirements and data transmission issues	
	contain fields to register this information. Improved metadata is needed to link the database containing A.R. extracted data with the ICCAT database containing biological samples, which would enable further consistency/coherence (Q.A/Q.C. checks).
Follow-up actions needed	Include RFMO in the process of improving data transmission but also data requirements after database has been chosen for RCG LP.
Responsible persons for follow-up actions	EU scientists attending the SCRS species group, RCG LP chairs, ISSG bluefin tuna, DG MARE ,Bluefin tuna in CPS advice group (ICES assessment)
Time frame (Deadline)	After selection of regional data base and before next RCG LP T.M. and ICCAT SCRS species group meeting
Comments	

Recommendation 05. ISSG Métiers and transversal variable issues	
LP_2023_R05	As métier codes listed in the reference list by RCG LP (amongst other RCGs) are being requested in data calls, there is a need to establish a pan regional procedure to manage the reference list. Furthermore, responsibilities need to be assigned to the RCGs, end users managing the data calls and the ISSG on Métier and Transversal Variable issues.
TOR I	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.
Justification	<p>Continue collaboration with the ISSG on métier and transversal variables issues to update the reference list of métier codes for RCG LP (requirement to maintain information on target species in the code- Level 7 for FDI data call). RCG LP will coordinate and advise on the new métier codes requested to ensure that it follows agreed principles.</p> <p>The agreed reference list of métier codes is used as input for ICES and STECF FDI data calls. Codification developed by ISSG Métiers should take into account all the end users (RFMOs) and the need for the conversion of codes.</p> <p>The group will revise the table with new métier codes and transversal variables, if necessary, once a year and communicated to the ISSG Métiers and Transversal Issues</p>
Follow-up actions needed	RCG LP chairs should organise a meeting with ISSG on Métier and Transversal variable issues and MS national experts.
Responsible persons for follow-up actions	RCGS NANSEA, BALTIC, MED&BS, LDF, LP, ISSG Métiers, STECF, ISSGs LP.
Time frame (Deadline)	Prior to next RCG LP TM.

**Recommendation 05. ISSG Métiers and transversal variable issues**

Comments

**Recommendation 06. ISSG Recreational Fisheries**

LP\_2023\_R06

Recreational fisheries and associated data is relevant for different groups (RCGs). Need for increased communication and coordination and interaction between RCGs which have recreational fisheries and ISSG Recreational Fisheries.

TOR I

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.

Justification

This is an area of pan regional interest. When recreational fisheries affect the stocks, the national authority should ask for a biological sampling programme to assess/monitor the situation. If there is a significant catch effect this should be monitored. Additionally, this is where the RCG can play an important role in coordinating these efforts.

There is need for increased communication and coordination, however it is not clear how to take this forward.

Follow-up actions needed

ISSG Recreational fisheries chairs to take up this task with assistance from RCG LP Chairs

Responsible persons for follow-up actions

ISSG Recreational fisheries chair and RCG LP chairs

Time frame (Deadline)

Before RCG LP TM 2024

Comments

**Recommendation 07. Pan-regional ISSG Mediterranean Sea Large Pelagics**

LP\_2023\_R07

Progress in forming pan-regional ISSG Mediterranean Sea large pelagics fisheries between the RCG Mediterranean and Black Sea and RCG LP.

TOR I

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.

Justification

At the RCG LP technical meeting in 2023, a request was placed for updates on progress on the forming of the ISSG on Mediterranean Sea Large Pelagics. Currently there has been no progress on the creation of this ISSG. This ISSG will be pan-regional and will therefore require nominations from the member states

Recommendation 07. Pan-regional ISSG Mediterranean Sea Large Pelagics	
	involved in the two parent regional coordination groups. RCG LP needs guidance on what additional needs this ISSG requires.
Follow-up actions needed	MS (NC) to nominate experts to the ISSG RCG LP and RCG Med & BS to coordinate on pan-regional ISSG logistics.
Responsible persons for follow-up actions	MS , RCG LP chairs, RCG Med & BS chairs
Time frame (Deadline)	Prior to RCG Med BS TM in 2024.
Comments	

Recommendation 08. Attendance of National Correspondents at RCG LP	
LP_2023_R08	<p>Absence of National Correspondents at the regional coordination group on large pelagics is a concerning and ongoing issue. RCG LP recommend that national correspondents be present at the RCG's technical meeting, particularly for the last day. Alternatively, present on for the final two hours of the technical meeting where an overview can be provided.</p> <p>Additionally, should a national correspondent not be available to participate in the technical meeting, an acting national representative should be present. This national representative will need to be nominated to the technical meeting.</p>
TOR I	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.
Justification	<p>It is desirable that NCs attend the RCG technical meetings, however acknowledging the difficulties to attend them all, they should at least guarantee that all the countries in a given RCG are represented by the appointed experts as well as a national representative.</p> <p>The group recommends the presence of national correspondents, or appointed acting national representatives in lieu of national correspondents who cannot attend the hybrid T.M., on the last day of the technical meeting at minimum.</p> <p>There is an additional suggestion whereby a 2-hour timeslot on the agenda of the final day of the technical meeting could be used to update the NCs at to the proceedings, recommendations and decisions the RCG LP will put forward.</p> <p>In addition, N.C.s are recommended to nominate a country representative in advance of the meeting if they cannot be present.</p>
Follow-up actions needed	NC to appoint national representative prior to TM if unable to be present prior to TM and communicate this nomination to the chairs of the RCG LP.
Responsible persons for follow-up actions	NC and MS.
Time frame (Deadline)	Prior to the RCG LP TM 2024

## RCG LP 2023 REPORT

### Recommendation 08. Attendance of National Correspondents at RCG LP

Comments

### Recommendation 09. RWP – Roadmap

LP_2023_R09	Roadmap for adopting the agreed draft RWP from all RCG LP MS
TOR 4	Sampling and regional working plans. Provide a global overview of observer coverage by country and gears.
Justification	Updated draft RWP will be circulated to all RCG LP M.S. before Decision Meeting in 2023.
Follow-up actions needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circulate RWP by the RCG LP chairs</li> <li>• Reviewed by MS</li> <li>• Submission to COM</li> </ul>
Responsible persons for follow-up actions	RCG LP chairs, NC/ MS
Time frame (Deadline)	End of October 2023.
Comments	

## Annex I: List of Participants

Country	Name	Email	Role
IE	Hugo Maxwell	Hugo.Maxwell@Marine.ie	RCG chair
MT	Jurgen Mifsud	jurgen.a.mifsud@gov.mt	RCG co-chair; NC Malta
MT	Abela Claire	claire.b.abela@gov.mt	RCG expert;
FR	Alexis Paumier	alexis.paumier@agriculture.gouv.fr	NC France
FR	Antoine Duparc	antoine.duparc@ird.fr	RCG expert;
EU	Cristina Ribeiro	Cristina-RIBEIRO@ec.europa.eu	DG MARE
IE	David Currie	David.Currie@Marine.ie	RCG expert;
ES	Enrique Rodríguez Marin	enrique.rmarin@ieo.csic.es	RCG expert;
ES	Francisco Alemany	francisco.alemany@iccat.int	ICCAT, end user
IT	Fulvio Garibaldi	Fulvio.Garibaldi@unige.it	RCG expert;
DE	Harry Strehlow	harry.strehlow@thuenen.de	ISSG Recreational Fisheries
CY	Ioannis Thasitis	IThasitis@dfmr.moa.gov.cy	RCG expert;
FR	Joël Vigneau	Joel.Vigneau@ifremer.fr	ISSG RWP
ES	Jon Ruiz Gondra	jruiz@azti.es	RCG expert;
ES	Jose Carlos Baez	josecarlos.baez@ieo.csic.es	RCG expert;
DK	Josefine Egekvist	jsv@aqua.dtu.dk	ISSG Transversal
HR	Josip Males	males@izor.hr	RCG expert;
MT	Kelly Camilleri	kelly.camilleri.l@gov.mt	RCG expert;
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	Luka Žuvić		
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ES	Naiara Rodríguez-Ezpeleta	nrodriguez@azti.es	
PT	Pedro Lino	plino@ipma.pt	RCG expert;

Country	Name	Email	Role
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ES	Rosa Fernández	rfernandez@cetmar.org	RCGs Secretariat
FR	Sebastien Demaneche	sdemanec@ifremer.fr	ISSG Transversal
HR	Tanja Segvic Bubic	tsegvic@izor.hr	RCG expert;
FR	Tristan Rouyer	tristan.rouyer@ifremer.fr	RCG expert;
ES	Vanessa Rojo	vanessa.rojo@ieo.csic.es	RCG expert;



## Annex II: Agenda

Date	First day 26/06/2023		
Time	Duration	Subject	Presenter(s)
9:30	30min	Testing	N/A
10:00	30min	Welcome and introduction	RCG chairs
10:30	15min	Feedback from Commission on DCF	Leonie O'Dowd
	30min	Discussion in plenary	
11:15	30min	ISSG Tropical Tunas	Jon Ruiz-Gondra and Antoine Duparc
	30min	Discussion in plenary	
12:15	60min	Lunch	
13:15	30 min	Status and Future of the RCGs Secretariat	Rosa Fernandez Otero
	30min	Discussion in plenary	
14:15	15min	ISSG Metiers and Transversal Issues	Sébastien Demaneche and Josefine Egekvist
	15min	Discussion in plenary	
14:45	15min	Coffee break	
15:00	15min	Approval of new metier codes	Jurgen Misfud
	15min	Discussion in plenary	
15:30	30min	ISSG Large Pelagics Regional Database development	Mathieu Depetris
	30min	Discussion in plenary	
16:30		End of the day	

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Date	Second day 27/06/2023		
Time	Duration	Subject	Presenter(s)
9:30	30min	Testing and organisation arrangements	
10:00	15min	ISSG bluefin tuna	Tristan Rouyer
	15min	Discussion in plenary	
10:30	15min	ICCAT feedback	Francisco Alemany
	30min	Discussion in plenary	
11:15	15min	Commission update on control regulations	Leonie O'Dowd
	30min	Discussion in plenary	
12:00	60min	Lunch	
13:00	15min	ISSG Recreational Fisheries	Harry Strehlow
	15min	Discussion in plenary	
13:30	15min	Fishn'Co feedback	Mathieu Depetris
	30min	Discussion in plenary	
14:15	15min	RDBES	David Currie
	30min	Discussion in plenary	
15:00	15min	Coffee break	
15:15	15min	Fish Genome	Naiara Rodríguez-Ezpeleta



## RCG LP 2023 REPORT

### Annex II: Agenda

15:30	15min	Roadmap of Fish genome	Melissa Dufлот
	30min	Discussion in plenary	
16:15		End of the day	

Date	Third day 28/06/2023		
Time	Duration	Subject	Presenter(s)
9:30	30min	Testing and organisation arrangements	
10:00	60min	RCG LP moving forward Discussion in plenary	
11:00	15min	Coffee break	
11:15	15min	ISSG RWP	Joel Vigneau
	30min	Discussion in plenary	
12:00	60min	Lunch time	
13:00	60min	Continuation of discussion and Next step definition	
14:00	15min	Coffee break	
14:15	60min	Open discussion to other matters	
15:15	15min	RCG LP 2023, venue and chairs	
15:30		End of the meeting	

