

# Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) – Outermost Regions (STECF-25-18)

Grati, F., Winter, A.M. (eds.)

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## **Authors**

### **STECF advice:**

Ballesteros, Marta; Bastardie, François; Casey, John; Colaço, Maria Ana; Cuende de Francisco, Elsa; Döring, Ralf; Drouineau, Hilaire; Grati, Fabio; Griffiths, Christopher; Hidalgo, Manuel; Ibaibarriaga, Leire; Jackson, Emmet; Jardim, Ernesto; Jung, Armelle; Ligas, Alessandro; Lucchetti, Alessandro; Mannini, Alessandro; Moore, Claire; Motova-Surmava, Arina; Nimmegeers, Sofie; Nord, Jenny; Pinto, Cecilia; PELLEZO, Raúl; Raid, Tiit; Russo, Tommaso; Sabatella, Evelina Carmen; Savina-Rolland, Marie; Spedicato, Maria Teresa; Steins, Nathalie; Stransky, Christoph; Tserpes, George; Ulrich, Clara; Uriarte, Andrés; Uusitalo, Laura; Valentinsson, Daniel

### **EWG-25-18 report:**

EWG chair: Grati, Fabio

Experts: Canal Pérez, Gema María; Fernández Martínez, Francisco Manuel; Gras, Michael; Guitton, Jerome; Ioannou, Myrto; Le Grand, Christelle; Perales-Raya, Catalina; Perretta, Francesca; Ramos Do Ó, Joao; Scarcella, Giuseppe; Winter, Anna-Marie

## **Abstract**

Commission Decision of 25 February 2016 setting up a Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries, C(2016) 1084, OJ C 74, 26.2.2016, p. 4–10. The Commission may consult the group on any matter relating to marine and fisheries biology, fishing gear technology, fisheries economics, fisheries governance, ecosystem effects of fisheries, aquaculture or similar disciplines.

The European Union (EU) includes nine outermost regions (ORs or OMRs): Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Martinique, Mayotte, Réunion, and Saint Martin (France); the Canary Islands (Spain); and the Azores and Madeira (Portugal). These ORs are characterised by their geographical remoteness from mainland Europe, insularity (except French Guiana), small size, complex topography and climate, and economic reliance on a limited number of products. Fisheries in these regions tend to feature a diverse range of species and fishing gears, small-scale vessels, and numerous landing sites.

The EWG 25-18 was tasked to i) describe the level of use of the alternative methods offered in COM(2024)223 final by the outermost regions Member States (MS) concerned, in their national reports submitted in 2024; ii) describe the level of compliance with the guidelines (COM(2024)223 final and COM(2014) 545 final), as relevant, by the outermost regions Member States concerned; iii) reviewing section by section of the COM(2024)223 final guidelines, identify any research questions that are required to be addressed, and an indication as to the feasibility of such research; and finally iv) building on STECF's work in recent years, provide further advice on the indicators employed for the fleet-balance calculation and their appropriate thresholds.

Under TOR 1 and TOR 2, the group assessed how the biological, economic, and technical indicators were calculated across the ORs and reviewed each MS's use of alternative methods offered in COM(2024)223 final. The assessment also included an analysis of compliance with both the 2024 and 2014 Commission guidelines.

For TOR 3, the EWG carried out a detailed, section-by-section examination of the COM(2024)223 final guidelines. This process focused on identifying key research questions linked to each biological, economic, and technical indicator included in the document. The feasibility of addressing these research needs was also assessed. Special consideration was given to previous STECF recommendations, as well as additional background materials made available during the meeting. To consolidate the findings, the group compiled a summary table outlining the main outcomes and insights for each indicator.

Under TOR 4, the EWG provided further advice on all relevant indicators, including discussion on appropriate thresholds, referencing previous STECF guidance. As with TOR 3, a comprehensive summary table was produced to encapsulate the main conclusions.

## **STECF Report on EWG 25-18 Outermost Regions**

### **Request to STECF**

STECF is requested to evaluate the findings of the STECF Expert Working Group meeting and make any appropriate comments and recommendations.

### **Information provided to STECF**

STECF was provided with EWG 25-18 report and the executive summary of it. A note from Ifremer's expert inputs to ToRs 3 and 4 of the EWG was also provided to STECF.

STECF notes that a note by the French authorities was provided to the EWG 25-18.

### **STECF comments**

The STECF Expert Working Group (EWG) 25-18 met in hybrid format, from 16 to 20 June 2025 in Ispra (Italy). The following ToRs were asked to the EWG:

ToR 1: Describe the level of use of the alternative methods offered in COM(2024)223 final by the outermost regions Member States concerned, in their national reports submitted in 2024;

ToR 2: Describe the level of compliance with the guidelines (COM(2024)223 final and COM(2014) 545 final), as relevant, by the outermost regions Member States concerned;

ToR 3: Reviewing section by section of the COM(2024)223 final guidelines, identify any research questions that are required to be addressed, and an indication as to the feasibility of such research;

ToR 4: Building on STECF's work in recent years, provide further advice on the indicators employed for the fleet-balance calculation and their appropriate thresholds.

STECF reviewed the report of the EWG 25-18 and notes that all the ToRs were addressed. A summary of the work undertaken in relation to each of the ToRs specified in the request to the EWG is listed below:

#### **ToR 1. Describe the level of use of the alternative methods offered in COM(2024)223 final by the outermost regions Member States concerned, in their national reports submitted in 2024.**

STECF notes that "alternative methods" in the request to the EWG refers to the options for calculating the indicators as described in the specific guidelines for the ORs (COM(2024)223 final), as alternative to those outlined in the general guidelines (COM/2014/0545 final).

STECF observes that the EWG assessed how the biological, economic, and technical indicators were calculated across the ORs and reviewed each Member State's use of alternative methods offered in COM(2024)223 final in their 2024 reports.

STECF notes that the extent of utilisation and implementation of the ORs guidelines differed among the three Member States. France made the most extensive use of alternative methods in indicator calculations. These included introducing additional sub-segmentations for fleet segments, employing VUR90 as a technical indicator, applying the 20% SAR threshold, and integrating national assessment results for biological indicators. In contrast, Portugal and Spain made more limited use of such alternative approaches. Specifically, Portugal implemented the SHI alternative method for the Azores and Madeira and incorporated national assessment results for SHI calculations for 2024 and 2025. For Spain, the sole alternative method applied was the use of the 20% threshold in the computation of the SAR indicator.

STECF observes that the challenges identified in the 2024 national fleet reports included the application of the VUR for small-scale, multi-activity fleets, as well as under-reporting of complementary indicators such as the Number of Overexploited Stocks (NOS) and the Economic Dependency Indicator (EDI). The national fleet reports submitted in 2024 indicate ongoing efforts to tailor the assessment of fleet balance to the specific circumstances of each EU outermost region. The EWG noted that the variation among reports is attributed to differences in data availability and regional structural characteristics.

**ToR 2. Describe the level of compliance with the guidelines (COM(2024)223 final and COM(2014)545 final), as relevant, by the outermost regions Member States concerned.**

The EWG observed that the 2024 national fleet reports submitted by France, Portugal, and Spain for their respective outermost regions reveal varying levels of compliance with the requirements set out in COM(2014)545 and the more flexible COM(2024)223.

Based on the 2024 National Reports reviewed by EWG 25-18, the reports from the three Member States indicate ongoing efforts to improve data collection and compliance. The reports also identify areas for further development, including methodological adaptation, data transparency, and the inclusion of complementary balance indicators.

STECF notes that France has implemented several adaptation measures but faces challenges related to data documentation as for example the selection of the 20% threshold (stock makes up >20% of fleet catch) of the SAR indicator or the methodology to estimate the fishing mortality in La Réunion. Portugal's approach remains conservative and consistent, however, although Madeira introduced some alternative approaches allowed by the COM(2024)223 in calculating the SHI, concerns persist regarding the timeliness and reliability of the locally assessed data used for its computation. Finally, Spain largely aligns with COM(2014)545 guidelines and STECF can only observe the use of SHI threshold adjustment as allowed by COM(2024)223.

STECF acknowledges the efforts undertaken by Member States, although notes that closer alignment with COM(2024)223's methodologies and more comprehensive documentation of national methods and data sources will contribute to more robust and relevant future assessments of balance in the EU outermost regions.

**ToR 3: Reviewing section by section of the COM(2024)223 final guidelines, identify any research questions that are required to be addressed, and an indication as to the feasibility of such research.**

STECF notes that the EWG 25-18 report provides several proposals for additional research concerning the specification of the current guidelines (COM(2024) 223 final). Table 5.5.1 summarises comments on each EWG proposal along with STECF's observations. STECF notes that the EWG identified specific research questions that still need to be addressed in order to enhance understanding, improve applicability, or fill existing data gaps. The primary source from which the proposal originated was also identified. Additionally, the EWG also identified the fleet segment potentially affected and evaluated the feasibility of carrying out the identified research, categorizing it as low, medium, or high depending on factors such as data availability, technical complexity, and resource requirements.

**ToR 4: Building on STECF's work in recent years, provide further advice on the indicators employed for the fleet-balance calculation and their appropriate thresholds.**

STECF notes that the EWG 25-18 report provides several proposals for indicators and thresholds potentially to be employed for assessing the fleet balance calculation. Table 5.5.2 summarises comments on each EWG proposal along with STECF's observations.

**Table 1.** EWG 25-18 proposals and STECF comments for additional research concerning the specification of the current guidelines (COM(2024) 223 final) (ToR 3).

Proposals from EWG 25-18							STECF comments
Indicator	EWG 25-18	Expected effect	Fleet Segments	Ref.	EWG comment	Feasibility (low , medium, high)	
VUR	Research on the fishing activity profiles for the various small-scale fleet segments is necessary to establish clear methods for determining the theoretical base thresholds.	Establish activity thresholds based on standard methods.	All fleet segments with length less than 12 m.	EWG 25-18	Analyse historical data to find evidence-based threshold values.	low , medium	STECF acknowledges that the 70% of the potential, workable activity of comparable vessels used as threshold to identify technical inefficiency, is somehow arbitrary. Therefore, and in keeping with PLEN 24-01, STECF agrees that research on fishing activity profile in OMR territories is of importance to understand what the vessel utilisation ratio for individual fleet segments might imply.
SAR	It is considered that SAR should be only calculated as 10-20% of fleet catches and not as catches from the stock due to the fleet.	Retain this threshold changes.	All fleet segments with length less than 12 m.	EWG 24-06	Revision in next EWG.	high	STECF has previously expressed reservations with regard to the threshold values used to compute the SAR indicator (EWG 24-06 and PLEN 24-03). The sensitivity analyses carried out by EWG 24-06 did not provide any evidence that would support an increase in the threshold from 10% to 20% of the catches of a fleet segment for a stock at risk to be included when computing the SAR indicator. Furthermore, any level of threshold chosen is arbitrary and the higher the threshold, the less likely it is that a fleet segment would be identified as exploiting stocks at risk.
SAR	An effort from the competent authorities/organisations to get the foreign catches in OR stocks shared with other countries. When not feasible, a case-by-case threshold could be established supported by the OR with the proper data and explanations. A clear example applies in highly distributed stocks where the total catches are unknown as they are targeted by third countries.	To avoid this indicator penalises OR fleets with shared stocks.	Fleet segments with shared stocks.	EWG 24-06. All ORs national fleet reports submitted in 2025.	Collecting catch data from other countries (through the involved RFMOs).	medium, high (depending on the concerned RFMOs, Institutions, etc.).	The issue referred to has been recognised by STECF for many years and may result in an upwardly-biased value of the SAR for fleet segments. In principle there is a need to take account of total international catches from stocks at risk when computing the SAR indicator, although, whether a stock at risk is included in the computation of the SAR indicator value for a fleet segment, will be dependent both on the catches by the segment and the threshold applied.  STECF also notes that the total international catches (when available from reliable sources) should be used to compute the SAR indicator for all fleet segments, not only those operating in the outermost regions.

**Table 1. (cont).** EWG 25-18 proposals and STECF comments for additional research concerning the specification of the current guidelines (COM(2024) 223 final) (ToR 3).

Proposals from EWG 25-18							STECF comments
Indicator	EWG 25-18	Expected effect	Fleet Segments	Ref.	EWG comment	Feasibility (low, medium, high)	
SAR	To consider National regulations together with National expert knowledge for the identification of stocks at risk (SAR), especially regarding localized areas and stocks.	More accurate regional lists of SAR stocks.	All fleet segments with length less than 12 m.	Guyader et al., 2025	Research/knowledge from the current DCF monitoring programs.	medium	STECF highlights that national regulations may be of interest to look for some supporting documents to increase SAR list in OMR; however inclusion of protected species at national level is not currently taken into account in the SAR definition implemented for the all EU fleet in the 2014 guidelines. This is also the case of regional or temporal closure for some species/area that are not feasible to be distinguished in the actual AER Data call then are not including in the calculation (FDI may offer some room to do so).
SHI	Roadmap to facilitate national stocks assessment in ORs.	Increase the SHI coverage and the representativeness of the indicator	ALL	EWG 25-18	Reinforcement of data collection and stock assessment trainings	medium	STECF agrees with this proposal that was a conclusion of the EWG 24-16 including the number of species sampled and the inclusion of recreational and IUU data in the assessments.
SHI	Roadmap for (faster) review or inclusion of national assessments that are not peer-reviewed.	Better agreement on a list of common F/Fmsy. Extension to all the fisheries (OMRs>12m) and European fleets (example scallops in the English Channel).	ALL	EWG 25-18		medium	STECF notes that the decision on whether non-peer-reviewed national stock assessment results should be included to compute the SHI is a decision for the Commission and STECF should note any implications arising. Ideally, all data being used to compute the SHI should be independently peer reviewed by an appropriate scientific body other than the STECF.

**Table 1. (cont).** EWG 25-18 proposals and STECF comments for additional research concerning the specification of the current guidelines (COM(2024) 223 final) (ToR 3).

Proposals from EWG 25-18							STECF comments
Indicator	EWG 25-18	Expected effect	Fleet Segments	Ref.	EWG comment	Feasibility (low, medium, high)	
SHI	How to include IUU fishing in indicator (e.g. in assessment model or external)?	More accurate estimation of fishing mortality and catch levels	ALL	EWG 25-18	Research on tracking systems to monitor illegal fisheries	low	The issues surrounding IUU fishing are widely known and affect many aspects of fisheries assessment and management. STECF notes that while not including them can bias SHI (and SAR) estimations, it remains difficult to have robust estimates of them.
SHI	Develop Sensitivity analysis for indicator.	Better understanding of indicator and its robustness.	ALL	PLEN-13-01		medium	A sensitivity analysis of SHI was reviewed in PLEN 24-01 which concluded: 1. Changing the 40% threshold value will impact the historical perception of regional trends in the SHI values. 2. SHI alone as an indicator of the balance between capacity and fishing opportunities is not appropriate. 3. To contextualise the SHI values, the values computed for all fleet segments could be displayed in the Balance EWG report together with the coverage in terms of the number/proportion of stocks exploited by the fleet that contribute to the resulting SHI values and the proportion of the landings' value represented by such stocks.
ECO	RoI, RoFTA, CR/BER - Integration of operating subsidies in current economic indicators	Harmonization of the indicators for all segments and all Countries. Avoid distortion with segments for which operating subsidies are included in the right DCF variable	ALL	Guyader et al., 2025; EWG 24-06; EWG 24-07	Recommendation to be addressed by the next Balance EWG ToRs for its application	high	STECF highlights that this proposal may improve the overview in terms of current financial situation for fleet segments but not in terms of the economic sustainability.  STECF notes that the fleet economic data call requests operating subsidies as a separate variable from gross value of landings, other income and income from leasing out quota or other fishing rights (all sources of income). Therefore, there is no limitation on computing the total income without subsidies if they are correctly reported. Additionally, integration of subsidies in some fleet segments will create discrepancies in the EU economical overview for Balance capacity.

**Table 1. (cont).** EWG 25-18 proposals and STECF comments for additional research concerning the specification of the current guidelines (COM(2024) 223 final) (ToR 3).

Proposals from EWG 25-18							STECF comments
Indicator	EWG 25-18	Expected effect	Fleet Segments	Ref.	EWG comment	Feasibility (low, medium, high)	
ECO	RoI, RoFTA, CR/BER - The utilization of the 3.5% rate as the reference for calculating the opportunity as used in STECF-24-07 and in line with STECF-PLN-23-02	The improvement in the interpretability of the results and the fact that the results are less dependent on interest rate fluctuations and are therefore easier to compare over time.	ALL	Guyader et al., 2025; PLEN 23-02	Since there is a robust scientific literature*, no additional research is needed .	high	STECF agrees with the EWG, although for consistency, it would appear to be appropriate for such an approach to be adopted for all EU fleet segments and not only those <12m in the outermost regions.
ECO	RoI, RoFTA, CR/BER - Harmonisation of the definition of net profit between the AER ECO guidelines and the (COM 2014) 545 final 11.1. The difference arises from the inclusion or not of the opportunity costs.	The utilization of harmonised indicators.	ALL	Guyader et al., 2025 (COM 2014) 545; EWG 24-07 (pag.514/Glossary/Net profit)		high	STECF agrees with the EWG, although for consistency, it would appear to be appropriate for such an approach to be adopted for all EU fleet segments and not only those <12m in the outermost regions.
ECO	RoI, RoFTA, CR/BER - The French authorities propose to use CR/BER and RoFTA indicators only for the main segment of the clusters.	Partial information on economic indicators assessment.	ALL	Note from the French Authorities to the European Commission, 2025	The issue cannot be addressed by research	N/A	STECF observes in accordance with PLEN 24-01 that the clustering of fleets for the economic indicators is not specific to the outermost regions, but is a standard issue for many Member States.

**Table 1. (cont).** EWG 25-18 proposals and STECF comments for additional research concerning the specification of the current guidelines (COM(2024) 223 final) (ToR 3).

Proposals from EWG 25-18							STECF comments
Indicator	EWG 25-18	Expected effect	Fleet Segments	Ref.	EWG comment	Feasibility (low, medium, high)	
ECO	RoI, RoFTA, CR/BER - Given the difficulties in assessing the variables 'value of capital' and 'depreciation of capital' for the Small-scale fisheries vessels, the French authorities propose to explore the possibility of using complementary economic and social indicators.	Alignment with the real SSF socio-economic context.	All fleet segments with length less than 12 m.	Note from the French Authorities to the European Commission, 2025; (COM 2024) 223 FINAL; EWG 24-06	Some indicators have been already suggested (e.g. NP/CR and NVA/FTE); The proposal has to be discussed in the RCG Econ and the AER EWG.	medium	STECF observes in accordance with PLEN 24-01 that economic indicators measure the economic performance and viability of the fishing fleets. In some cases where the economic added value is limited but the social importance of fishery is proven (for food safety or other reason) additional social or economic indicators can be provided.
ECO	NP/CR (Net Profit/Current Revenues) - Their utilization is suggested to refine the assessment of the economic balance.	Consideration of the resource productivity.	ALL	EWG 24-06		high	STECF acknowledges that alternative approach to refine the perception of the fishery situation is allowed as long as they are considered as complementary approach rather than replacement of regular indicators.
ECO	NVA/FTE; (Net Value Added/Full) - Their utilization is suggested to refine the assessment of the economic balance.	Consideration of the labour productivity.	ALL	EWG 24-06		high	STECF acknowledges that alternative approach to refine the perception of the fishery situation is allowed as long as they are considered as complementary approach rather than replacement of regular indicators.

Source: EWG 25-18 and own elaborations.

**Table 2.** EWG 25-18 proposals and STECF comments for further advice on the indicators employed for the fleet-balance calculation and their appropriate thresholds (ToR 4).

Indicator	Recommendation	Expected effect	Fleet segments	Ref.	EWG 25-18 comment	STECF PLEN 25-02 Comment
VUR	Vessels under 12 meters are generally less active than those over 12 meters, they exhibit greater variability in their days at sea, contributing to lower VUR values. This variability should be taken into account when defining appropriate VUR thresholds for these segments.	Find a threshold more appropriated than the fixed 70% for VUR.	Fleet segments with great variability in fishing activity	Guyader et al., 2025	Establishing a relationship between the variability of days at sea and the threshold appears to be challenging to implement in practice.	STECF reminds in line with PLEN 24-01 that fleets with part-time fishers or fishers active in seasonal fisheries are more likely to display an unfavorable VUR, without this being necessarily a true sign of imbalance. STECF reminds in accordance with PLEN 24-01 that research on social community profile can lead in better estimating the fishing activity profile especially in the context of OMR territories. However, STECF highlights the fact that review of the threshold is not expected to change the perception of the Balance situation.
VUR	For segments with 10 vessels or fewer, the top 10 average is inadequate. In such cases, the top 10 average is essentially the average of the entire segment, resulting in a Vessel Utilization Rate (VUR) of 1, which does not provide meaningful insights.	For fleet segments with low number of vessels the use of top 10 average to establish the maximum number of days at sea will produce VUR values not relevant	Fleet segments with low number of vessels	Guyader et al., 2025	EWG agrees that this approach should not be specifically applied to fleet segments with a low number of vessels.	STECF agrees with this remark.
VUR	The 90th percentile (P90) method is less sensitive to outliers and provides results that are more coherent. P90 offers a better balance between capturing the typical behaviour of the fleet and minimizing the impact of outliers. In any case, outliers should be carefully examined, especially when the size of the segments decreases.	Reduce outliers' effects	All fleet segments	Guyader et al., 2025	EWG states that this method minimizes the impact of outlier activities and lowers the risk of unreal VUR values.	STECF notes that research on fishing activity profile in OMR territories is of importance to understand what the vessel utilisation ratio for individual fleet segments might imply.

**Table 2. (cont.)** EWG 25-18 proposals and STECF comments for further advice on the indicators employed for the fleet-balance calculation and their appropriate thresholds (ToR 4).

Indicator	Recommendation	Expected effect	Fleet segments	Ref.	EWG 25-18 comment	STECF PLEN 25-02 Comment
VUR	The VUR or VUR90 vessel use indicator is not taken into account for the final validation of the balance of ultramarine fleet segments of less than 12 metres if the biological and economic indicators are in equilibrium.	Improve the use of VUR Indicator	All fleet segments with length less than 12 m	Note from the French Authorities	EWG acknowledges the importance of this technical indicator and believe it should be combined with economic and biological indicators to determine that fleet segment is out balance.	STECF agrees with EWG 25-18 remark considering that indicators in all are evaluated to estimate the balance of the fleets.
VUR	Maintain VUR90 as a methodology explicitly authorised in particular for vessels of 12 metres and above, and, secondly, to confirm that the variable of the 90th percentile can be entered in the column of the optional variable 'maxseadays' in the context of the FleetEco call for data.	Reduce outliers' effects	All fleet segments	Note from the French Authorities*	Using the 90% method minimizes the impact of outlier activities and can address some issues related to this indicator. To compare the calculation of the VUR indicator submitted by MS, it is necessary to include the Maxsea days using the 90% method in the data collection.	STECF highlights that the exclusion of the outliers can affect the VUR value. STECF reminds that the use of VUR90 is a possibility offered by the guidelines, however STECF highlights that this would request that the same cluster composition is applied throughout the entire time series of indicators.

**Table 2. (cont.)** EWG 25-18 proposals and STECF comments for further advice on the indicators employed for the fleet-balance calculation and their appropriate thresholds (ToR 4).

Indicator	Recommendation	Expected effect	Fleet segments	Ref.	EWG 25-18 comment	STECF PLEN 25-02 Comment
VUR	A draw back of using alternative thresholds is that they may change from year to year, especially, if thresholds are based on the data (i.e. the maximum observed number of days at sea, or a percentile). In such cases, it may be difficult to identify trends in the VUR indicator. Therefore, it would be recommended to base thresholds on multiple data years to make it less prone to eventual extreme values, and in case MS change the threshold, they should provide appropriate argumentation for such a decision.	Utilizing a fixed theoretical activity, equivalent to 220 days at sea, for small-scale vessels to identify trends in the VUR indicator over the years.	All fleet segments with length less than 12 m	EWG 24-06	EWG agrees that this approach is the most appropriate method for the calculation of the VUR indicators in small scale fleets. Research on the fishing activity profiles for the various small scale fleet segments is necessary to establish clear methods for determining the theoretical base thresholds.	STECF agrees with EWG 25-18 remarks. STECF notes comments from PLEN 24-01 that fleets with part-time fishers or fishers active in seasonal fisheries are more likely to display an unfavorable VUR, without this being necessarily a true sign of imbalance.
SAR	Flexibilization with case-by-case rationale for thresholds when necessary (in particular for shared stocks with unavailable total catch data).	To avoid this indicator penalises OR fleets with shared stocks	ALL	EWG 24-06; All ORs national fleet reports submitted in 2025	PLEN 25-02	STECF has previously expressed reservations with regard to the threshold values used to compute the SAR indicator (EWG 24-06 and PLEN 24-03). The sensitivity analyses carried out by EWG 24-06 did not provide any evidence that would support an increase in the threshold from 10% to 20% of the catches of a fleet segment for a stock at risk to be included when computing the SAR indicator. Furthermore, any level of threshold chosen is arbitrary and the higher the threshold, the less likely it is that a fleet segment would be identified as exploiting stocks at risk.

**Table 2. (cont.)** EWG 25-18 proposals and STECF comments for further advice on the indicators employed for the fleet-balance calculation and their appropriate thresholds (ToR 4).

Indicator	Recommendation	Expected effect	Fleet segments	Ref.	EWG 25-18 comment	STECF PLEN 25-02 Comment
SAR	To consider National/local regulations and know ledge for the identification of stocks at risk (SAR), in localized areas and stocks	More accurate regional lists of SAR stocks	ALL	Guyader et al., 2025.	Discussion in STECF PLEN	STECF highlights that national regulations may be of interest to look for some supporting documents to increase SAR list in OMR; how ever inclusion of protected species at national level is not currently taken into account in the SAR definition implemented for the all EU fleet in the 2014 guidelines. This is also the case of regional or temporal closure for some species/area that are not feasible to be distinguished in the actual AER Data call then are not including in the calculation (FDI may offer some room to do so). STECF further notes that, w hile the identification of additional species/stock as SARs w ill de facto be informative, it w ill potentially increase the SAR indicator value for some fleet segments. How ever, because fleet segments w ith a SAR indicator value of 1 or greater are all deemed to be out of balance, the only added value (in terms of assessing balance) of adding more stocks to the list of stocks at risk w ould be to potentially increase the number of fleet segments w ith a SAR indicator value greater than zero.
SHI	Flexible SHI calculation w ith partial F.	SHI more representative for small scale fleets	All fleet segments w ith length less than 12 m.	EWG 24-06	It is not comparable w ith other SHI estimated w ithout partial F and models providing partial F are limited (only integrated models as SS3). Require information on the total catches (or landings) in order to calculate the partial fishing mortality, and that this may be difficult for shared stocks.	STECF remarks and reminds in accordance w ith PLEN 24-01 that that any use of partial F could be added as a complementary indicator but not as a replacement of SHI unless the current guidelines are changed. How ever, such an approach is data-hungry and currently there is a shortage of appropriate data to compute the SHI as currently specified. Furthermore, to understand the potential utility and interpretation of the proposed "partial F SHI" appropriate simulations and sensitivity testing needs to be undertaken.

**Table 2. (cont.)** EWG 25-18 proposals and STECF comments for further advice on the indicators employed for the fleet-balance calculation and their appropriate thresholds (ToR 4).

Indicator	Recommendation	Expected effect	Fleet segments	Ref.	EWG 25-18 comment	STECF PLEN 25-02 Comment
SHI	Using national assessment.	Can increase the number of SHI	All	EWG 24-06	May introduce unverified SHI calculations. The estimate of SHI needs strict validation protocols/template (i.e., validation of stock assessments process and dissemination). Stocks assessment included should not be older than 3-5 years before the reference year (depending of the life history of the stocks).	STECF notes that the decision on whether non-peer-reviewed national stock assessment results should be included to compute the SHI is a decision for the Commission and STECF should note any implications arising. Ideally, all data being used to compute the SHI should be independently peer reviewed by an appropriate scientific body other than the STECF.
SHI	Complementary indicators (EDI and NOS).	Complement of SHI outcomes highlighting the economic dependency of a fleet on stock in not health conditions.	All	EWG 24-06	Could be useful only in combination with SHI.	STECF agrees with EWG 25-18 that EDI and NOS are useful and complement the mandatory indicators included in the guidelines.
SHI	Complementary indicators (LPUE).	Complement of SHI outcomes.	All	EWG 24-06	Could be not accurate in term of ratio $F/F_{MSY}$ . To be used always in combination with SHI.	STECF agrees that an additional index to complement the SHI that specifically takes into account the relative impact of fishing mortality by different fleet segments to permit the relative impacts of different fleet segments.
SHI	Using Fupper.	More flexibility to obtain $F/F_{MSY}$	All	Guyader et al., 2025	Meta-analysis used for the recommendation might not suitable for all stocks. $F/F_{MSY}$ is more accurate.	STECF agrees with the EWG that is unclear if robust estimations of this indicator could be obtained for the OR stocks. Therefore as suggested in PLEN 24-02 until further evaluations can be completed $F_{MSY}$ should be considered as Fupper.

**Table 2. (cont.)** EWG 25-18 proposals and STECF comments for further advice on the indicators employed for the fleet-balance calculation and their appropriate thresholds (ToR 4).

Indicator	Recommendation	Expected effect	Fleet segments	Ref.	EWG 25-18 comment	STECF PLEN 25-02 Comment
SHI	Illegal fisheries.	More accurate catch levels	Fleets segment targeting Acupa rouge	Guyader et al., 2025	Considered a good approach, but in combination with studies on selectivity showing the homogeneity of the way the fleet segment harvest the stock (national/illegal).	The issues surrounding IUU fishing are widely known and affect many aspects of fisheries assessment and management and not ORs. STECF notes that while not including them can bias SHI (and SAR) estimations, it remains difficult to have robust estimates of them.
SHI	The indicator may be presented together with the actual coverage percentage and the number of stocks used to compute the value.	Number of relevant SHI increase	All fleet segments with length less than 12 m.	COM(2024)223 final guidelines	The effectiveness of SHI is lower if the coverage is lower.	In accordance with STECF conclusions in PLEN 23-02 and 24-01, STECF agrees with this proposal of presenting quality coverage and number of stocks used for the SHI computation.
SHI	Using stocks assessment of one species as a proxy on another (in the same species group).	Number of relevant SHI increase.	All fleet segments with length less than 12 m.	EWG 24-06	May introduce unverified SHI calculations. The estimate of SHI needs strict validation protocols/template. In this case, the proportion of each species in the group and homogeneity in life history traits, in spatial extent ... should be documented.	STECF notes in accordance with what already said in PLEN 24-01, that in the case of species that are landed and reported together as a genus spp, they will also be assessed together and then may be available for proxy. However STECF underlines though that group assessments may be misleading if covering species with different dynamics and life history traits. STECF warns also that allowing this should not create an incentive to not provide data at the species level. As for overall indicator calculation in OMR, STECF encourages improving data collection in parallel of any exploratory proxy. Therefore, STECF cannot support this recommendation.

**Table 2. (cont.)** EWG 25-18 proposals and STECF comments for further advice on the indicators employed for the fleet-balance calculation and their appropriate thresholds (ToR 4).

Indicator	Recommendation	Expected effect	Fleet segments	Ref.	EWG 25-18 comment	STECF PLEN 25-02 Comment
ECO	RoI, RoFTA, CR/BER - Integration of operating subsidies in current economic indicators.	Harmonization of the indicators for all segments and all Countries. Avoid distortion with segments for which operating subsidies are included in the right DCF variable.	ALL	EWG 24- 06; Guyader et al., 2025; EWG-24-07	Recommendation to be addressed by the next Balance EWG ToRs for its application.	STECF highlights that this proposal may improve the overview in terms of current financial situation for fleet segments but not in terms of the economic sustainability. STECF notes that the fleet economic data call requests operating subsidies as a separate variable from gross value of landings, other income and income from leasing out quota or other fishing rights (all sources of income). Therefore, there is no limitation on computing the total income without subsidies if they are correctly reported. Additionally, integration of subsidies in some fleet segments will create discrepancies in the EU economical overview for Balance capacity. Therefore, STECF suggest that calculations of RoI, RoFTA, CR/BER integrating operating subsidies could be added as a complementary indicators but not as a replacement.
ECO	RoI, RoFTA, CR/BER - The utilization of the 3.5% rate as the reference for calculating the opportunity as used in the STECF AER EWG 2024 24-07 and in line with the PLEN 23-02.	The improvement in the interpretability of the results and the fact that the results are less dependent on interest rate fluctuations and are therefore easier to compare over time.	ALL	EWG 24- 07; Guyader et al., 2025; PLEN-23-02	Recommendation to be addressed by the next Balance EWG ToRs for its application.	STECF agrees with the proposal. STECF observes that this procedure will harmonise the interpretation of these indicators between the Balance assessment and the economic assessments derived from the AER.

**Table 2. (cont.)** EWG 25-18 proposals and STECF comments for further advice on the indicators employed for the fleet-balance calculation and their appropriate thresholds (ToR 4).

Indicator	Recommendation	Expected effect	Fleet segments	Ref.	EWG 25-18 comment	STECF PLEN 25-02 Comment
ECO	RoI, RoFTA, CR/BER - Harmonisation of the definition of net profit between the AER guidelines and the (COM 2014) 545 final 11.1. The difference arises from the inclusion or not of the opportunity costs.	The utilization of harmonised indicators.	ALL	Guyader et al., 2025; COM (2014) 545 final;	The EWG recommends using the definition of the net profit applied in the AER guidelines.	STECF agrees with the proposal. STECF considers that this procedure will harmonise the guidelines with the AER methodology to define indicators.
ECO	NP/CR (Net Profit/Current Revenues) - Their utilization is suggested to refine the assessment of the economic balance.	Consideration of the resource productivity.	ALL	EWG 24- 06	The EWG recommends including in the ToR in the next EWG the way to use the indicator into the balance assessment.	STECF agrees with the proposal and acknowledges that alternative approach to refine the perception of the fishery situation is allowed as long as they are considered as complementary approach rather than replacement of regular indicators.
ECO	NVA/FTE - Their utilization is suggested to refine the assessment of the economic balance.	Consideration of the labour productivity.	ALL	EWG 24- 06	The EWG recommends including in the ToR in the next EWG the way to use the indicator into the balance assessment.	STECF agrees with the proposal and acknowledges that alternative approach to refine the perception of the fishery situation is allowed as long as they are considered as complementary approach rather than replacement of regular indicators.

Source: EWG 25-18 and own elaborations.

## STECF conclusions

STECF concludes that the Terms of Reference of the EWG 25-18 were adequately addressed and based on its review of the EWG 25-18 report, concludes as follows:

STECF concludes that in their national fleet reports submitted in 2024, the uptake of alternative methods to compute balance indicators provided for by the OR guidelines (COM(2024)223 final) varied by Member States. In making use of such methods, Member States have demonstrated some progress in attempting to provide a more representative overview of the fleet balance in their ORs. Nevertheless, some notable gaps and challenges persist, especially concerning data availability and quality, indicator coverage, and data transparency.

STECF concludes that for fleet segments for which the alternative indicator computation methods were used, it is not possible to determine whether their use has resulted in a more cogent assessment of the balance between capacity and fishing opportunities for the fleet segments concerned.

STECF concludes that the 2024 national fleet reports reveal varying levels of compliance with the requirements set out by guidelines COM(2014)545 and COM(2024)223.

STECF acknowledges the efforts made by Member States to comply with the ORs guidelines. However, it concludes that more comprehensive documentation of national methods and data sources is needed to ensure future assessments of balance in the EU outermost regions are both robust and relevant.

STECF concludes that some of the proposals made by the EWG 25-18, as reflected in Table 5.5.1, may be more pertinent to the assessment of the balance between capacity and fishing opportunities in the outermost regions and some other can only be considered as providing complementary information. However, unless the current guidelines are revised, any additional or modified indicator would necessarily be regarded as complementary to those specified in the current guidelines.

STECF concludes that from its review of the EWG 25-18 and earlier STECF reports, the following points are worthy of further consideration:

- The provision in the 2024 guidelines to permit sub-segmentation of the fleet segments specified in the fleet economic report should be retained. In principle, sub-segmentation will help to ensure that the indicator values for sub-segments are more representative than at a more aggregated segmentation. This is particularly true, although not limited to the Vessel Utilization Ratio (VUR) indicator.
- The provision to permit the results from national assessments to be used as input to the computation of the Sustainable harvest indicator (SHI) is a decision for the Commission. However, if the number of stock assessments increase, inclusion of such results will increase the number of stocks on which the SHI values are based and potentially increase the number of fleet segments for which a SHI value can be computed.

- With regard to the Stocks at Risk (SAR) indicator, in line with its PLEN 24-03 remarks, both thresholds (10% of total international catches and/or 10% or 20% of the catches of the fleet segment) should be retained to determine whether a stock at risk should be included in the SAR indicator. Furthermore, the total international catches should include catches by EU and third country vessels and if possible, catches through IUU and recreational fishing should also be accounted for.
- With regard to economic indicators, STECF concludes that the economic indicators used for the assessment of balance between capacity and fishing opportunities should be aligned with those used in the Annual Economic Report of the EU Fishing Fleet (AER).

### Contact details of STECF members

<sup>1</sup> - Information on STECF members' affiliations is displayed for information only. In any case, Members of the STECF shall act independently. In the context of the STECF work, the committee members do not represent the institutions/bodies they are affiliated to in their daily jobs.

Name	Affiliation <sup>1</sup>	Email
Ballesteros, Marta	Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO-CSIC), Center of Vigo, Subida a Radio Faro 50-55, Vigo, Spain.	<a href="mailto:marta.ballesteros@ieo.csic.es">marta.ballesteros@ieo.csic.es</a>
Bastardie, François	Technical University of Denmark, National Institute of Aquatic Resources (DTU-AQUA), Kemitorvet, 2800 Kgs. Lyngby, Denmark	<a href="mailto:fba@aqua.dtu.dk">fba@aqua.dtu.dk</a>
Casey, John	Independent consultant	<a href="mailto:blindlemoncasey@gmail.com">blindlemoncasey@gmail.com</a>
Colaço, Ana	University of the Azores, Institute of Marine Sciences - OKEANOS. Rua Professor Doutor Frederico Machado 4, 9900-140 Horta, Portugal	<a href="mailto:maria.aa.colaco@uac.pt">maria.aa.colaco@uac.pt</a>
Cuende de Francisco, Elsa	AZTI (Member of the Basque Research and Technology Alliance). Marine Research Unit. Center of Sukarrieta, Bizkaia, Spain.	<a href="mailto:ecuende@azti.es">ecuende@azti.es</a>

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Email</b>
Döring, Ralf	Thünen Institute [TI-SF] Federal Research Institute for Rural Areas, Forestry and Fisheries, Institute of Sea Fisheries, Economic analyses unit Herwigstrasse 31, D- 27572 Bremerhaven, Germany	<a href="mailto:ralf.doering@thuenen.de">ralf.doering@thuenen.de</a>
Drouineau, Hilaire	INRAE, UR EABX, 50 avenue de Verdun, 33612 Cestas Cedex, France	<a href="mailto:hilaire.drouineau@inrae.fr">hilaire.drouineau@inrae.fr</a>
Grati, Fabio	National Research Council (CNR) – Institute for Biological Resources and Marine Biotechnologies (IRBIM), L.go Fiera della Pesca, 2, 60125, Ancona, Italy	<a href="mailto:fabio.grati@cnr.it">fabio.grati@cnr.it</a>
Griffiths, Christopher	Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), Department of Aquatic Resources, Turistgatan 5, SE- 45330, Lysekil, Sweden	<a href="mailto:christopher.griffiths@slu.se">christopher.griffiths@slu.se</a>
Hidalgo, Manuel	Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO, CSIC), Balearic Oceanographic Center (COB), Palma, 07015, Spain	<a href="mailto:jm.hidalgo@ieo.csic.es">jm.hidalgo@ieo.csic.es</a>
Ibaibarriaga, Leire	AZTI. Marine Research Unit. Txatxarramendi Ugarteia z/g. E-48395 Sukarrieta, Bizkaia. Spain.	<a href="mailto:libaibarriaga@azti.es">libaibarriaga@azti.es</a>
Jackson, Emmet	Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM), Ireland's Seafood Development Agency.	<a href="mailto:Emmet.jackson@bim.ie">Emmet.jackson@bim.ie</a>
Jardim, Ernesto	Independent expert	<a href="mailto:ernesto.jardim@gmail.com">ernesto.jardim@gmail.com</a>
Jung, Armelle	DRDH, Techonopôle Brest- Iroise, BLP 15 rue Dumont d'Urville, Plouzane, France	<a href="mailto:armelle.jung@desrequinsetdeshomm&lt;br/&gt;es.org">armelle.jung@desrequinsetdeshomm es.org</a>

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Email</b>
Ligas, Alessandro (vice-chair)	CIBM Consorzio per il Centro Interuniversitario di Biologia Marina ed Ecologia Applicata "G. Bacci", Viale N. Sauro 4, 57128 Livorno, Italy	<a href="mailto:ligas@cibm.it">ligas@cibm.it</a> ; <a href="mailto:ale.ligas76@gmail.com">ale.ligas76@gmail.com</a>
Lucchetti, Alessandro	National Research Council (CNR) – Institute for Biological Resources and Marine Biotechnologies (IRBIM), Largo Fiera della Pesca, 2, 60125, Ancona, Italy	<a href="mailto:alessandro.lucchetti@cnr.it">alessandro.lucchetti@cnr.it</a>
Mannini, Alessandro	CNR IRBIM Ancona, Largo Fiera della Pesca, 260125 Ancona ITALY	<a href="mailto:alessandro.mannini@irbim.cnr.it">alessandro.mannini@irbim.cnr.it</a>
Moore, Claire	Marine Institute, Renville, Galway, Ireland	<a href="mailto:claire.moore@marine.ie">claire.moore@marine.ie</a>
Motova Arina - Surmava, Arina	Sea Fish Industry Authority, 18 Logie Mill, Logie Green Road, Edinburgh EH7 4HS, UK	<a href="mailto:arina.motova@seafish.co.uk">arina.motova@seafish.co.uk</a>
Nimmegeers, Sofie	Flanders research institute for agriculture, fisheries and food, Belgium	<a href="mailto:Sofie.Nimmegeers@ilvo.vlaanderen.be">Sofie.Nimmegeers@ilvo.vlaanderen.be</a>
Nord, Jenny (vice-chair)	Swedish Agency for Marine and Water management	<a href="mailto:jenny.nord@havochvatten.se">jenny.nord@havochvatten.se</a>
Pinto, Cecilia	Università di Genova, DISTAV - Dipartimento di Scienze della Terra, dell'Ambiente e della Vita, Corso Europa 26, 16132 Genova, Italy	<a href="mailto:cecilia.pinto@edu.unige.it">cecilia.pinto@edu.unige.it</a>
Prelezo, Raúl (chair)	AZTI -Unidad de Investigación Marina, Txatxarramendi Ugarteaga z/g 48395 Sukarrieta (Bizkaia), Spain	<a href="mailto:rprelezo@azti.es">rprelezo@azti.es</a>
Raid, Tiit	Estonian Marine Institute, University of Tartu. Mäealuse 14, Tallinn, EE-126, Estonia	<a href="mailto:tiit.raid@gmail.com">tiit.raid@gmail.com</a>
Russo, Tommaso	University of Rome Tor Vergata, via della Ricerca Scientifica snc, 00133 Rome, Italy	<a href="mailto:Tommaso.Russo@Uniroma2.it">Tommaso.Russo@Uniroma2.it</a>

Name	Affiliation <sup>1</sup>	Email
Sabatella, Evelina Carmen	National Research Council (CNR) – Institute for Research on Population and Social Policies (IRPPS), Corso S. Vincenzo Ferreri, 12, 84084 Fisciano, Salerno, Italy	<a href="mailto:evelinacarmen.sabatella@cnr.it">evelinacarmen.sabatella@cnr.it</a>
Savina-Rolland, Marie	Ifremer, 8 rue François Toullec 56100 Lorient	<a href="mailto:Marie.Savina.Rolland@ifremer.fr">Marie.Savina.Rolland@ifremer.fr</a>
Spedicato, Maria Teresa	Fondazione COISPA Via dei trulli 18-20 70126 Bari, Italy	<a href="mailto:spedicato@fondazionecoispa.org">spedicato@fondazionecoispa.org</a>
Steins, Nathalie	Wageningen Marine Research Korringaweg 7 4401 NT Yerseke The Netherlands	<a href="mailto:nathalie.steins@wur.nl">nathalie.steins@wur.nl</a>
Stransky, Christoph	Thünen Institute [TI-SF] Federal Research Institute for Rural Areas, Forestry and Fisheries, Institute of Sea Fisheries, Herwigstrasse 31, D-27572 Bremerhaven, Germany	<a href="mailto:christoph.stransky@thuenen.de">christoph.stransky@thuenen.de</a>
Tserpes, George	Hellenic Center for Marine Research (HCMR), Thalassokosmos, 71500 Gournes Pediados, Crete, Greece	<a href="mailto:gtserpes@hcmr.gr">gtserpes@hcmr.gr</a>
Ulrich, Clara	IFREMER, Rue de l'Île d'Yeu, 44311 Nantes, France	<a href="mailto:Clara.Ulrich@ifremer.fr">Clara.Ulrich@ifremer.fr</a>
Uriarte, Andres	Independent expert	<a href="mailto:auriartes@hotmail.com">auriartes@hotmail.com</a>
Uusitalo, Laura	Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke), Finland	<a href="mailto:laura.uusitalo@luke.fi">laura.uusitalo@luke.fi</a> (secondary: <a href="mailto:laura.uusitalo@iki.fi">laura.uusitalo@iki.fi</a> )

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Email</b>
Valentinsson, Daniel	Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), Department of Aquatic Resources, Turistgatan 5, SE- 45330, Lysekil, Sweden	daniel.valentinsson@slu.se

# **REPORT TO THE STECF**

## **Outermost Regions (EWG-25-18)**

**Hybrid meeting, 16-20 June 2025**

This report does not necessarily reflect the view of the STECF and the European Commission and in no way anticipates the Commission's future policy in this area

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) has nine 'outermost regions' (ORs): Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Martinique, Mayotte, Réunion and Saint Martin (France), the Canary Islands (Spain) and the Azores and Madeira (Portugal). The ORs are distinguished by their remoteness from mainland Europe, insularity, small-sized islands (except for French Guiana's continental region which is the size of Portugal), difficult topography and climate and economic dependence on a few products. These regions are an integral part of the EU despite their distant locations and hence EU law and all the rights and duties associated with EU membership apply to them. However, in accordance with Article 349 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), specific measures and derogations in EU legislation have been implemented to help these regions address the challenges they face. As a common issue, fisheries in the ORs are characterised by a wide variety of species and gears, small size vessels and numerous landing places.

The STECF Expert Working Group (EWG) 25-18 met in hybrid modality, from 16 to 20 June 2025 in Ispra (Italy). The meeting opened at 10:00 on 16 June 2025 and was adjourned at 16:00 on 20 June 2025. The STECF EWG 25-18 convened to:

- i) describe the level of use of the alternative methods offered in COM(2024)223 final by the outermost regions Member States concerned, in their national reports submitted in 2024;
- ii) describe the level of compliance with the guidelines (COM(2024)223 final and COM(2014) 545 final), as relevant, by the outermost regions Member States concerned;
- iii) review section by section of the COM(2024)223 final guidelines, identify any research questions that are required to be addressed, and an indication as to the feasibility of such research;
- iv) building on STECF's work in recent years, provide further advice on the indicators employed for the fleet-balance calculation and their appropriate thresholds.

The work was conducted by 10 independent experts (see the list of participants) following the Terms of Reference (TOR).

The meeting started with a comprehensive review and clarification of the TORs, supported by contextual insights and supplementary information provided by DG MARE. This initial session helped ensure a common understanding of the objectives and scope of the work to be undertaken. Starting from Monday afternoon, the agenda was structured around the individual TORs. For each TOR, targeted analyses were performed based on the available data. Discussions were conducted both in full plenary to gather broad input and in parallel subgroups to allow for more detailed and focused examination of specific issues.

### 1.1 Terms of Reference for EWG-25-18

The Commission's guidelines, specific to the Outermost Regions' fleet segments consisting of vessels of less than 12m in length, COM(2024)223 final, are set to expire in 2025. They are pending the provision of further advice by the STECF on the indicators employed in the balance/capacity calculation and their applicable thresholds.

The EWG OR was asked to:

1. Describe the level of use of the alternative methods offered in COM(2024)223 final by the outermost regions Member States concerned, in their national reports submitted in 2024;

2. Describe the level of compliance with the guidelines (COM(2024)223 final and COM(2014) 545 final), as relevant, by the outermost regions Member States concerned;
3. Reviewing section by section of the COM(2024)223 final guidelines, identify any research questions that are required to be addressed, and an indication as to the feasibility of such research;
4. Building on STECF's work in recent years, provide further advice on the indicators employed for the fleet-balance calculation and their appropriate thresholds.

## **1.2 Background documents**

Numerous background documents have been made available to the EWG 25-18 to support and inform its work. These include the Annual Fleet Reports for 2024 and 2025 from France, Portugal, and Spain, which provide updated national data and assessments. Additionally, the two key guidelines have been shared: COM(2014) 545 final and the more recent COM(2024) 223 final, outlining the European Commission's framework for evaluating balance between fleet capacity and fishing opportunities. The EWG also had access to previous STECF reports on capacity and balance covering the period 2009–2024, as well as reports specifically addressing the outermost regions from 2019 and 2024. Furthermore, the group has received a collective scientific contribution from Ifremer researchers (Guyader et al., 2025) focusing on the outermost regions, and a note from the French Authorities to the European Commission proposing a revision of the guidelines used for assessing the balance between fishing capacity and available opportunities.

## **2. TOR1. LEVEL OF USE OF THE ALTERNATIVE METHODS OFFERED IN THE GUIDELINES COM(2024)223 FINAL IN THE NATIONAL FLEET REPORTS SUBMITTED BY FRANCE, PORTUGAL AND SPAIN IN 2024**

### **General observations**

The 2024 and 2025 national reports from France, Portugal, and Spain demonstrate varying degrees of the level of use of the guidelines in implementing the COM(2024)223 final guidelines for fleet assessment in their outermost regions (ORs), highlighting persisting challenges. The national reports 2025 were not included in the TOR, but the group agreed to consider them if time permitted.

Across the three MSs, a shared effort to align with the guidelines COM(2024)223 is evident, albeit with distinct strategies and levels of implementation. France used a wider array of indicators. Portugal shows early steps toward integration, particularly in Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI) application, while Spain's approach remains conservative, focused on baseline compliance with selected adjustments. Common challenges include the difficulties in applying the Vessel Use Indicator (also Vessel Utilization Ratio (VUR) indicator) for small-scale, multi-activity fleets and the under-reporting of complementary indicators such as Number of Overexploited Stocks (NOS) and the Economic Dependency Indicator (EDI). Overall, even though progress varies, the in 2024 submitted national reports show a general move toward making the assessment of fleet balance more suited to the specific needs of each EU outermost region.

### **2.1 France**

The French national fleet capacity report reveals both progress and persistent challenges in applying the balance indicators across 47 active fleet segments, 44 of which were assessed. Of these, 27 were considered balanced and 17 imbalanced.

In La Réunion, the lack of sub-segmentation for vessels under 12 meters limited the accuracy of the assessment of balance. The SHI was only partially calculated due to insufficient biological reference points. The Stocks at Risk (SAR) indicator was calculated in full, making use of IUCN and CITES data to determine risk levels for species such as yellow fin tuna and blue marlin. France applied the VUR90 (90th percentile) method to calculate this technical indicator. Instead, France supported its fleet assessments with the Number of Overexploited Stocks (NOS) and Economic Dependency Indicator (EDI).

In Mayotte, fleet segmentation remains undeveloped. Data constraints severely limited the application of SHI and SAR. France applied the VUR90 (90th percentile) method to calculate this technical indicator. Nonetheless, France provided qualitative assessments using NOS and EDI, referring to the limited economic and biological pressure exerted by local fisheries.

French Guiana stands out for having implemented sub-segmentation, increasing the number of segments from three to five. While SHI was still limited in terms of stock coverage, SAR was computed for all segments. VUR90 was calculated.

In Guadeloupe, fleet segmentation was significantly refined by increasing the number of segments to reflect regional specificity. SHI and SAR indicators were calculated across most segments, with omissions only in marginal cases of low vessel activity. Like in other regions, VUR90 was calculated. NOS and EDI were calculated.

Martinique followed a similar pattern, with SHI calculated for most fleet segments. NOS and EDI were calculated. France applied the VUR90 (90th percentile) method to calculate this technical indicator.

In Saint Martin, segmentation was introduced for the first time in 2024. As a result, none of the biological or economic indicators (SHI, SAR, NOS, or EDI) were calculated. The VUR90 was calculated.

France frequently used NOS and EDI indicators to compensate for incomplete SHI coverage, particularly in small-scale or data-poor segments. While the national report interpreted these supplementary indicators as valid alternative for SHI, this approach is not aligned with the EU guidelines, which recognize them as complementary but not alternative indicators.

### 2.1.1 La Réunion

#### **Fleet sub-segmentation (VL<12m)**

France did not apply fleet sub-segmentation in La Réunion for vessels under 12 metres by distinguishing between more active, economically dependent fishers and less active or subsistence-oriented operators. The sub-segmentation aimed to improve the accuracy of the balance assessment and was implemented in Guadeloupe and French Guiana only.

#### **Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)**

A full SHI was not computed for all fleet segments under 12 meters operating in La Réunion due to a lack of available F and FMSY values for relevant stocks. France, made use of the simplifications permitted under COM(2024)223 by reporting coverage percentages and the number of assessed stocks, and by including references to national assessments through relevant hyperlinks.

#### **Stocks at Risk Indicator (SAR)**

France used the alternative thresholds under COM(2024)223 for SAR in La Réunion: a stock is considered at risk if it makes up more than 20% of the fleet segment's catches or if the segment takes more than 10% of the stock's catches. Species such as yellowfin tuna and blue marlin were evaluated using IUCN and CITES listings. Justifications and stock-level data were included in annexes, ensuring full procedural compliance.

#### **The Vessel Use Indicator**

France applied the alternative method provided under COM(2024)223, adopting the VUR90 approach, based on the 90th percentile of days at sea, for vessels under 12 meters. This approach helps mitigate the influence of outliers and better reflects the local operational constraints and artisanal characteristics of the fleet.

#### **Additional indicators (NOS and EDI)**

Both the Number of Overexploited Stocks (NOS) and Economic Dependency Indicator (EDI) were used for almost all fleet segments below 12 metres. EDI helped justifying fleet balance where SHI data were insufficient, particularly due to low economic reliance on overexploited stocks. NOS provided complementary information on stock reliance. These indicators, used as contextual tools, comply with COM (2024)223 Article 2.4 provisions.

## 2.1.2 Mayotte

### **Fleet sub-segmentation (VL<12m)**

Sub-segmentation was not implemented in Mayotte to the same extent as in Guadeloupe and French Guiana, though it was recommended by Ifremer.

### **Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)**

France followed COM (2024)223 procedures by reporting the lack of data and providing the number of considered stocks and coverage percentage. No national proxies or group-based assessments were used. Use of the method was minimal but compliant with reporting requirements. France, made use of the simplifications permitted under COM(2024)223 by reporting coverage percentages and the number of assessed stocks, and by including references to national assessments through relevant hyperlinks.

### **Stocks at Risk Indicator (SAR)**

France applied the 20% threshold criterion from COM (2024)223 for Mayotte, due to missing total catch data needed for the 10% threshold. SAR species included blue marlin and yellowfin tuna, justified with IUCN evaluations. The approach acknowledged regional constraints and included methodological explanations in annexes, demonstrating appropriate adaptation.

### **The Vessel Utilization Ratio Indicator**

France applied the alternative method provided under COM(2024)223, adopting the VUR90 approach, based on the 90th percentile of days at sea, for vessels under 12 meters. This approach helps mitigate the influence of outliers and better reflects the local operational constraints and artisanal characteristics of the fleet.

### **Additional indicators (NOS and EDI)**

NOS and EDI were used to support fleet balance assessments in Mayotte where SHI and SAR data were weak. NOS provided contextual biological insight, while EDI helped confirm economic balance in small-scale segments. Both were applied in compliance with COM(2024)223 and aided in forming qualitative assessments of sustainability.

## 2.1.3 French Guiana

### **Fleet sub-segmentation (VL<12m)**

Segmentation used in the national report 2024 is in line with DCF regions for the maritime zones, although a more specific sub-segmentation was performed by reference region, which identified French Guiana. The specific fishing activity was considered for the establishment of a sub-segmentation in French Guiana which increased the number of segments in the region from 3 to 5 segments in 2022

### **Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)**

The SHI as 40% coverage was not able to calculate in the segments of French Guiana. As alternative approach, the report used lower percentages of coverage (31-33% for active vessels, and 29-31% for low activity vessels). This is in line with the use of alternative methods indicated in the COM(2024)223 guidelines.

### **Stocks at Risk Indicator (SAR)**

The three segments in French Guiana have a green value for the SAR. Not all stocks considered at risk by STECF were used in the report because of low landing volumes of tarpon and the issue of IUU fishing

### **The Vessel Use Indicator**

France applied the alternative method provided under COM(2024)223, adopting the VUR90 approach, based on the 90th percentile of days at sea, for vessels under 12 meters. This approach helps mitigate the influence of outliers and better reflects the local operational constraints and artisanal characteristics of the fleet.

### **Additional indicators (NOS and EDI)**

All segments were provided with NOS and EDI indicator in French Guiana. Both indicators were effectively used as additional indicators as envisaged in COM(2024)223. For the two segments of <12m, the report 2024 indicates that despite worrying NOS, closer inspection shows that species fished which are in deteriorated condition account for a very limited share of landings.

#### 2.1.4 Guadeloupe

### **Fleet sub-segmentation (VL<12m)**

The segmentation used in the French national report 2024 is in line with DCF regions for the maritime zones, although a more specific sub-segmentation is performed by reference region, which identified Guadeloupe. The specific fishing activity was considered for the establishment of a sub-segmentation in Guadeloupe which increased the number of segments in this region from 10 to 17 segments in 2022.

### **Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)**

This biological indicator was calculated for all the segments in Guadeloupe, with the exception of two segments where the fleet activity or the number of active vessels was very low. France, made use of the simplifications permitted under COM(2024)223 by reporting coverage percentages and the number of assessed stocks, and by including references to national assessments through relevant hyperlinks.

### **Stocks at Risk Indicator (SAR)**

All segments are provided with SAR indicator in Guadeloupe, excepting for one segment which has a low number of vessels and a limited activity (no alternative methods are provided).

## **The Vessel Use Indicator**

France applied the alternative method provided under COM(2024)223, adopting the VUR90 approach, based on the 90th percentile of days at sea, for vessels under 12 meters. This approach helps mitigate the influence of outliers and better reflects the local operational constraints and artisanal characteristics of the fleet.

## **Additional indicators (NOS and EDI)**

All segments are provided with NOS and EDI indicator in Guadeloupe, excepting for one segment which has a low number of vessels and a limited activity (no alternative methods are provided). Both were effectively used as the additional indicators as envisaged in COM(2024)223.

### 2.1.5 Martinique

## **Fleet sub-segmentation (VL<12m)**

Segmentation used in the French national report 2024 is in line with DCF regions for the maritime zones, although a more specific sub segmentation is performed by reference region, which identified Martinique.

## **Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)**

The SHI was provided in all segments of <12m with the exception of one, considered as imbalanced, where no alternative indicator was applied. France, made use of the simplifications permitted under COM(2024)223 by reporting coverage percentages and the number of assessed stocks, and by including references to national assessments through relevant hyperlinks.

## **Stocks at Risk Indicator (SAR)**

This indicator was provided in the report for all segments of Martinique, showing a green value for the entire group of fleet segments.

## **The Vessel Use Indicator**

France applied the alternative method provided under COM(2024)223, adopting the VUR90 approach, based on the 90th percentile of days at sea, for vessels under 12 meters. This approach helps mitigate the influence of outliers and better reflects the local operational constraints and artisanal characteristics of the fleet.

## **Additional indicators (NOS and EDI)**

All segments are provided with NOS and EDI indicator in Martinique. There are some segments (>12m) where no SHI is calculated but the report considered as balanced because all other indicators were green.

## 2.1.6 Saint Martin

### **Fleet sub-segmentation (VL<12m)**

Segmentation used in the French national report 2024 is in line with DCF regions for the maritime zones, although a more specific sub segmentation is performed by reference region, which identified Saint Martin. The segments were provided for the very first time in the report 2024

### **Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)**

This indicator was not used in any of the segments from Saint Martin, because the report 2024 recorded for the first time the segmentation in the region. Consequently, no biological or economic indicators were applied, and the segments information was recorded only for information purposes.

### **Stocks at Risk Indicator (SAR)**

Same status than SHI, not applied since the segment's information was recorded only for information purposes.

### **The Vessel Use Indicator**

France applied the alternative method provided under COM(2024)223, adopting the VUR90 approach, based on the 90th percentile of days at sea, for vessels under 12 meters. This approach helps mitigate the influence of outliers and better reflects the local operational constraints and artisanal characteristics of the fleet.

### **Additional indicators (NOS and EDI)**

Not calculated in any of the segments for Saint Martin (first time recording segments in this region).

## **2.2 Portugal**

Portugal's implementation of the COM(2024)223 guidelines in its outermost regions, the Azores and Madeira, shows a mixed level of adoption of the alternative methods provided for fleet assessment. In both regions, the alternative approaches for fleet sub-segmentation of vessels under 12 meters, based on activity, gear, and fishery, were not applied in either the 2024 or 2025 Annual Fleet Reports. For the SHI, the Azores did not apply the alternative methods in 2024 but did so in 2025. In contrast, Madeira applied these alternative methods consistently in both 2024 and 2025, using national stock assessments. Regarding the SAR and the VUR, neither region applied the alternative calculation methods in 2024. In 2025, the Azores continued to not use the alternative approach for the VUR, while no updated information is provided for Madeira on these indicators for that year. Finally, no data were reported for either the Azores or Madeira concerning the additional indicators, specifically the Number of Overexploited Stocks (NOS) and the Economic Dependency Indicator (EDI), in both 2024 and 2025.

## 2.2.1 Azores

### **Fleet sub-segmentation (VL<12m)**

The Guidelines for vessels of less than 12 meters in length in the Outermost Regions COM (2024)223 provide the possibility to use alternative methods of fleet sub-segmentation based on activity, gear and fishery.

According to the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2024, these alternative methods have not been used in the segmentation of the fleet in the Outermost Region of the Azores.

According to the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2025, these alternative methods have not been used in the segmentation of the fleet in the Outermost Region of the Azores.

### **Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)**

The Guidelines COM (2024)223 provide the possibility to use alternative methods to calculate the SHI indicator.

According to the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2024, these alternative methods have not been used in the calculation of the SHI indicator.

According to the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2025, these alternative methods have been used in the calculation of the SHI indicator.

### **Stocks at Risk Indicator (SAR)**

The Guidelines COM (2024)223 provide alternative methods to calculate the SAR indicator.

According to the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2024, these alternative methods have not been used in the calculation of the SAR indicator.

### **The Vessel Use Indicator**

The Guidelines COM (2024)223 provide alternative method to calculate the VUR indicator.

According to the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2024, these alternative methods have not been used in the calculation of the VUR indicator.

According to the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2025, these alternative methods have not been used in the calculation of the VUR indicator.

### **Additional indicators (NOS and EDI)**

The Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2024 does not include information on additional indicators related to the number of Overexploited Stocks (NOS) indicator and the Economic Dependency Indicator (EDI).

The Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2025 does not include information on additional indicators related to the number of Overexploited Stocks (NOS) indicator and the Economic Dependency Indicator (EDI).

## 2.2.2 Madeira

### **Fleet sub-segmentation (VL<12m)**

The Guidelines for vessels of less than 12 meters in length in the Outermost Regions COM(2024)223 provide the possibility to use alternative methods of fleet sub-segmentation based on activity, gear and fishery.

According to the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2024, these alternative methods have not been used in the segmentation of the fleet in the Outermost Region of the Madeira.

According to the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2025, these alternative methods have not been used in the segmentation of the fleet in the Outermost Region of the Madeira.

### **Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)**

The Guidelines COM(2024)223 provide the possibility to use alternative methods to calculate the SHI indicator.

According to the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2024, these alternative methods have been used in the calculation of the SHI indicator.

According to the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2025, these alternative methods have been used in the calculation of the SHI indicator.

### **Stocks at Risk Indicator (SAR)**

The Guidelines COM (2024)223 provide alternative methods to calculate the SAR indicator.

According to the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2024, these alternative methods have not been used in the calculation of the SAR indicator.

### **The Vessel Use Indicator**

The Guidelines COM (2024)223 provide alternative method to calculate the VUR indicator.

According to the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2024, these alternative methods have not been used in the calculation of the VUR indicator.

According to the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2025, these alternative methods have not been used in the calculation of the VUR indicator.

### **Additional indicators (NOS and EDI)**

The Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2024 does not include information on additional indicators related to the number of Overexploited Stocks (NOS) indicator and the Economic Dependency Indicator (EDI).

The Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2025 does not include information on additional indicators related to the number of Overexploited Stocks (NOS) indicator and the Economic Dependency Indicator (EDI).

## 2.3 Spain

Spain's implementation of the COM(2024)223 guidelines in the Canary Islands, shows limited adoption of the alternative methods available for fleet assessment. No sub-segmentation based on activity, gear, or fishery was applied to vessels under 12 meters in either the 2024 or 2025 submitted Annual Fleet Reports, with segmentation instead following the standard Data Collection Framework for Outermost Regions.

Regarding the SHI, Spain did not apply national stock assessment parameters in 2024 or 2025, despite this being permitted under the alternative methodology. However, in 2025, the SHI coverage threshold was adjusted to 30% in accordance with the updated guidance. That same year, the report included a CPUE trend analysis for three key coastal species, *Sparisoma cretense*, *Pagrus pagrus*, and *Dentex gibbosus*, though this did not constitute a formal stock assessment.

For the SAR indicator, Spain applied the alternative method outlined in point 2.2.2 of the COM(2024)223 guidelines, using the 20% threshold for determining balance in fleet segments, as opposed to the 10% threshold established in COM(2014)545.

Concerning the VUR, the alternative VUR<sub>nn</sub> indicator was not used in either 2024 or 2025.

Finally, no data were provided for the additional indicators, the Number of Overexploited Stocks (NOS) and the Economic Dependency Indicator (EDI), in either reporting year.

### 2.3.1 Canary Islands

#### **Fleet sub-segmentation (VL<12m)**

Segmentation used in the Spanish national report 2024 is in line with DCF OMR. No fleet sub-segmentation were used for Spanish 2024 and 2025 fleet reports (based on specific GEAR or Activity).

#### **Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)**

Spain do not use national stock assessment outputs/parameters (F/F<sub>msy</sub>) as permitted by the new flexible framework of COM(2024)223 final.

In 2025, for SHI coverage threshold, it was considered appropriate to lower the above threshold to 30 % considering 2024 guidelines.

Remarks: for the 2025 the national fleet report mention work done on the three main species catches by coastal fleets (*Sparisoma cretense* - PRR, *Pagrus pagrus* - RPG and *Dentex gibbosus* - DEP). It's not a formal stock assessment but a CPUE trends analysis, as additional information in line with the suggestion of previous EWG (see Table 2 of report STECF EWG 24-06).

#### **Stocks at Risk Indicator (SAR)**

In 2024 national fleet report the 20% threshold was used for two fleet segments under 12 m, HOKVL0010 and HOKVL1012 with SAR values of 16.8% and 12.7% respectively (Big Eye Tuna). The contribution of these fleet segments to the total catches of the stock are 0.03% and 0.29% respectively. The indicator for these two fleet segments were considered as in balance.

Remarks: Like in 2024 fleet report, in 2025 report 20% threshold was used for the HOKVL0010 and HOKVL1012 fleet segments, but, even so, they were considered out of

balance. The contribution of these fleet segments to the total catches of the stock are 0.04% and 0.92%.

### **The Vessel Use Indicator**

For the vessel utilisation indicator, Canary Islands didn't present in 2024 and 2025 fleet reports the alternative indicator  $VUR_{nn}$ , obtained based on the MS judgement considered social, technical or environmental constraints.

### **Additional indicators (NOS and EDI)**

EDI and NOS complementary indicators were not provided in the 2024 and 2025 Spanish fleet national report.

## **3. TOR 2. LEVEL OF COMPLIANCE WITH THE GUIDELINES COM(2024)223 FINAL AND COM(2014)545 FINAL IN THE NATIONAL FLEET REPORTS SUBMITTED BY FRANCE, PORTUGAL AND SPAIN IN 2024**

### **General observations**

The 2024 national fleet reports submitted by France, Portugal, and Spain for their respective outermost regions reveal varying levels of compliance with the requirements set out in COM(2014)545 and the more flexible COM(2024)223. Each MS demonstrates progress in adapting methodologies to their regional realities, though notable gaps and challenges persist, especially concerning data quality, indicator coverage, and transparency.

Together, the three reports show a shared commitment to improving data collection and compliance, but they also highlight significant room for progress in methodological adaptation, data transparency, and inclusion of complementary sustainability indicators. France shows the most adaptation effort despite critical data documentation issues, Portugal remains largely conservative but consistent, and Spain demonstrates reliable core compliance with COM(2014)545 guidelines. EWG 25-18 believes that further alignment with COM(2024)223's alternative methodologies, along with clearer documentation of national methodologies and data sources will be essential to enhance the robustness and relevance of future assessments of balance in the EU outermost regions.

### **3.1 France**

France's 2024 national fleet report for the outermost regions demonstrates partial compliance with the guidelines outlined in COM(2024)223 final and COM(2014)545 final. While certain elements of the report reflect efforts to adapt the methodology to the structural and data limitations typical of these regions, such as sub-segmentation of fleet segments under 12 m and the use of alternative methods for the SHI calculation, one critical shortcoming undermines the overall compliance. Specifically, the report does not provide clear estimates of fishing mortality relative to maximum sustainable yield (F/FMSY) derived from national or peer-reviewed assessments as annex but only hyperlink which are not directly providing the information needed. This omission makes it difficult to assess the balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities, as required under both sets of guidelines.

COM(2014)545 final sets a threshold of at least 40% coverage for SHI estimates to be considered meaningful, a criterion not met in several outermost regions, including French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Saint Martin. Although COM(2024)223 final allows for

greater methodological flexibility in light of the unique challenges in outermost regions, it still requires MSs to justify any simplification through transparent documentation and annexed data. The French report does not sufficiently provide these justifications or make accessible the supporting data necessary for scientific scrutiny. Consequently, the lack of clear and documented F/FMSY estimates from national assessments hampers the ability to assess compliance with the core biological indicators and undermines the credibility and utility of the report in guiding sustainable fisheries management in the outermost regions.

It is important to note that the France's 2024 national fleet report evidences in the outermost regions, the implementation of several projects currently underway, aiming at improving biological data collection on key species, developing socio-economic surveys and programmes to strengthen monitoring systems. Such initiatives are expected to contribute significantly to refining the estimation of biological and economic indicators in the coming years.

However, the 2025 French national report includes all stock assessment documentation as annexes, marking a notable improvement in process traceability. This includes detailed information on the methods used, their limitations, and the R scripts to ensure reproducibility.

In the 2024 national fleet report submitted by France, the application of vessel use indicators for the ORs demonstrates a partial level of compliance with the provisions of both COM(2014)545 final and COM(2024)223 final. Specifically, France applied the alternative VURnn methodology (VUR90 percentile) justified by external operational constraints typical of ORs' artisanal fleet, aligning with the flexibility offered under COM(2024)223 for vessels under 12 metres in the outermost regions. However, in the 2024 report, the indicator was deemed not representative for vessels under 12 meters and was therefore excluded from the cumulative criteria used to assess balanced fleet segments.

### 3.1.1 La Réunion

#### **Fleet sub-segmentation (VL<12m)**

In the case of La Réunion, France's 2024 national fleet report demonstrates a certain degree of compliance with the guidelines set out in both COM(2014)545 final and COM(2024)223 final by implementing fleet sub-segmentation for vessels  $\leq 12$  metres, thereby ensuring more accurate indicator calculations aligned with the specific structural and operational characteristics of the region's small-scale artisanal fisheries.

#### **Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)**

In relation to La Réunion and the Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI), the national fleet report submitted by France in 2024 demonstrates a substantial level of compliance with both COM(2014)545 final and the alternative provisions set out in COM(2024)223 final, by applying also the simplified SHI calculation methods allowed under the new guidelines without providing clear estimates of fishing mortality relative to maximum sustainable yield (F/FMSY) derived from national or peer-reviewed assessments as annex but only hyperlink which are not directly providing the information needed.

#### **Stocks at Risk Indicator (SAR)**

In its 2024 national fleet report, France demonstrates partial compliance with the COM(2024)223 and COM(2014)545 guidelines for La Réunion, particularly concerning the Stocks at Risk (SAR) indicator: while the SAR was reported, France applied a modified threshold as allowed under COM(2024)223 for small-scale outermost region fleets, but

without providing a fully detailed annex justifying the calculation methodology or scientific rationale, thus only partially meeting the reporting and transparency requirements.

### **Return on Investment (ROI) or Return on Fixed Tangible Assets (ROFTA)**

In the case of La Réunion, the national fleet report submitted by France in 2024 demonstrates a high level of compliance with both COM(2014)545 final and COM(2024)223 final, particularly regarding the economic indicators: Return on Investment (ROI) and Return on Fixed Tangible Assets (ROFTA). The report applies the recommended methodology, presents detailed ROI/ROFTA values, and interprets them consistently with the thresholds and guidance provided in both sets of guidelines.

### **Ration between Current Revenue (CR) and Break-Even Revenue (BER)**

In the case of La Réunion, the French national fleet report for 2024 demonstrates a high level of compliance with the guidelines set out in both COM(2014)545 final and COM(2024)223 final, particularly regarding the application of the Ratio between Current Revenue (CR) and Break-Even Revenue (BER), which was appropriately used as a short-term economic indicator to assess fleet segment balance for vessels under 12 metres in the outermost region.

### **The Vessel Use Indicators**

In the 2024 national fleet report submitted by France, the application of vessel use indicators for La Réunion demonstrates a partial level of compliance with the provisions of both COM(2014)545 final and COM(2024)223 final. Specifically, France applied the alternative VURnn methodology (VUR90 percentile) justified by external operational constraints typical of La Réunion's artisanal fleet, aligning with the flexibility offered under COM(2024)223 for vessels under 12 metres in the outermost regions. However, in the 2024 report, the indicator was deemed not representative for vessels under 12 meters and was therefore excluded from the cumulative criteria used to assess balanced fleet segments. This is not in accordance with the guidelines COM(2024)223.

### **Additional indicators (NOS and EDI)**

In its 2024 national fleet report, France demonstrated a high level of compliance with the guidelines of both COM(2024)223 final and COM(2014)545 final for La Réunion, particularly through the documented use of the additional indicators, Number of Overexploited Stocks (NOS) and Economic Dependency Indicator (EDI), in accordance with STECF recommendations for assessing small-scale fleets in the outermost regions.

#### **3.1.2 Mayotte**

### **Fleet sub-segmentation (VL<12m)**

The national fleet report submitted by France in 2024 demonstrates a certain degree of compliance with the guidelines COM(2024)223 final and COM(2014)545 final in relation to Mayotte, particularly through the use of additional sub-segmentation of fleet segments with vessels  $\leq 12$  metres, in line with the flexibility provided to address the specific constraints of the outermost region.

### **Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)**

In relation to Mayotte and the Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI), the national fleet report submitted by France in 2024 demonstrates a substantial level of compliance with both COM(2014)545 final and the alternative provisions set out in COM(2024)223 final, by applying also the simplified SHI calculation methods allowed under the new guidelines without providing clear estimates of fishing mortality relative to maximum sustainable yield (F/FMSY) derived from national or peer-reviewed assessments as annex but only hyperlink which are not directly providing the information needed.

### **Stocks at Risk Indicator (SAR)**

In the national fleet report submitted by France in 2024, the treatment of Mayotte shows a high level of compliance with the guidelines in COM(2024)223 final and a contextually adapted application of COM(2014)545 final regarding the Stocks at Risk (SAR) indicator. France applied the alternative SAR threshold (stock makes up >20% of fleet catch or fleet takes >10% of stock catch), as allowed under COM(2024)223 for vessels under 12 metres in outermost regions, and provided supporting data in annex, thereby meeting both the flexibility and justification requirements set by the Commission.

### **Return on Investment (ROI) or Return on Fixed Tangible Assets (ROFTA)**

The national fleet report submitted by France in 2024 demonstrates a high level of compliance with the guidelines of COM(2024)223 final and COM(2014)545 final for Mayotte, particularly regarding the use of the Return on Investment (ROI) and Return on Fixed Tangible Assets (ROFTA) indicators, which were calculated and interpreted in accordance with the thresholds and conditions laid out in both frameworks.

### **Ration between Current Revenue (CR) and Break-Even Revenue (BER)**

In its 2024 national fleet report, France demonstrated a high level of compliance with the guidelines set out in both COM(2014)545 final and COM(2024)223 final regarding the outermost region of Mayotte, particularly in its application and interpretation of the Current Revenue to Break-Even Revenue (CR/BER) indicator. The report calculated CR/BER for Mayotte fleet segments in accordance with COM(2014)545, and, aligned with COM(2024)223, justified any data limitations and provided necessary supporting information, indicating a proper and transparent use of this economic indicator within the framework tailored for small-scale, data-limited fisheries.

### **The Vessel Use Indicators**

In the 2024 national fleet report submitted by France, the application of vessel use indicators for Mayotte demonstrates a partial level of compliance with the provisions of both COM(2014)545 final and COM(2024)223 final. Specifically, France applied the alternative VURnn methodology (VUR90 percentile) justified by external operational constraints typical of Mayotte's artisanal fleet, aligning with the flexibility offered under COM(2024)223 for vessels under 12 metres in the outermost regions. However, in the 2024 report, the indicator was deemed not representative for vessels under 12 meters and was therefore excluded from the cumulative criteria used to assess balanced fleet segments. This is not in accordance with the guidelines COM(2024)223.

### **Additional indicators (NOS and EDI)**

The national fleet report submitted by France in 2024 demonstrates a high level of compliance with both COM(2024)223 final and COM(2014)545 final in relation to Mayotte, notably through the justified use of the additional indicators, Number of Overexploited Stocks (NOS) and Economic Dependency Indicator (EDI), in line with the specific guidance for outermost regions and small-scale fleets.

#### 3.1.3 French Guiana

### **Fleet sub-segmentation (VL<12m)**

Segmentation used in the national report 2024 accumplices with the guidelines COM(2024)223, since France segmentation used DCF regions for the maritime zones, with a more specific regional segmentation by reference region, which identified French Guiana. Additionally, France considered the specific fishing activity for a sub-segmentation in French Guiana which increased the number of segments in the region.

### **Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)**

The SHI was estimated for a lower percentage of coverage in the segments with VL<12m. The SHI estimations in French Guiana, their rationale and the used coverage are provided in the report, which accumplices with COM(2024)223, even though the hyperlink is not directly providing the information needed to evaluate the assessment.

### **Stocks at Risk Indicator (SAR)**

The SAR calculation is provided for the three segments in French Guiana, accomplishing with both guidelines.

### **Return on Investment (ROI) or Return on Fixed Tangible Assets (ROFTA)**

Both indicators are provided for French Guiana in the report 2024, accomplishing with the COM(2014)545.

### **Ration between Current Revenue (CR) and Break-Even Revenue (BER)**

Both indicators are provided for French Guiana in the report 2024, accomplishing with the COM(2014)545.

### **The Vessel Use Indicators**

The VUR90 was calculated in all segments. However, in the 2024 report, the indicator was deemed not representative for vessels under 12 meters and was therefore excluded from the cumulative criteria used to assess balanced fleet segments. This is not in accordance with the guidelines COM(2024)223.

### **Additional indicators (NOS and EDI)**

All segments are provided with NOS and EDI indicator in French Guiana. Both indicators were effectively used as additional indicators as envisaged in COM(2024)223.

### 3.1.4 Guadeloupe

#### **Fleet sub-segmentation (VL<12m)**

Segmentation used in the national report 2024 complies with the guidelines COM(2024)223, since France segmentation used DCF regions for the maritime zones, with a more specific regional segmentation by reference region, which identified Guadeloupe. Additionally, France considered the specific fishing activity for a sub-segmentation in Guadeloupe which increased the number of segments in the region.

#### **Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)**

The estimation of this indicator in Guadeloupe largely aligns with both sets of guidelines. However, the provided hyperlink does not directly lead to the information required to evaluate the assessment.

#### **Stocks at Risk Indicator (SAR)**

The SAR calculation is provided for most of the segments in Guadeloupe, accomplishing with both guidelines.

#### **Return on Investment (ROI) or Return on Fixed Tangible Assets (ROFTA)**

Both indicators are provided for Guadeloupe in the report 2024, accomplishing with the COM(2014)545. However, it is stated in the report that most of the segments in this region are part of an economic cluster meaning that both indicators should be viewed with caution as they are not representative of the segment.

#### **Ration between Current Revenue (CR) and Break-Even Revenue (BER)**

Both indicators are provided for Guadeloupe in the report 2024, accomplishing with the COM(2014)545. However, it is stated in the report that most of the segments in this region are part of an economic cluster meaning that both indicators should be viewed with caution as they are not representative of the segment.

#### **The Vessel Use Indicators**

The VUR90 (90th percentile) was calculated in all segments. However, in the 2024 report, the indicator was deemed not representative for vessels under 12 meters and was therefore excluded from the cumulative criteria used to assess balanced fleet segments. This is not in accordance with the guidelines COM(2024)223.

#### **Additional indicators (NOS and EDI)**

All segments are provided with NOS and EDI indicator in Guadeloupe. Both indicators were effectively used as additional indicators as envisaged in COM(2024)223.

### 3.1.5 Martinique

#### **Fleet sub-segmentation (VL<12m)**

Segmentation used in the national report 2024 complies with the guidelines COM(2024)223, since France segmentation used DCF regions for the maritime zones, with a more specific regional segmentation by reference region, which identified Martinique. No additional sub-segmentation was performed.

#### **Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)**

For those segments with this indicator estimation in Martinique, they comply with both guidelines. However, the provided hyperlink does not directly lead to the information required to evaluate the assessment.

#### **Stocks at Risk Indicator (SAR)**

The SAR calculation is provided for all the segments in Martinique, complying with both guidelines.

#### **Return on Investment (ROI) or Return on Fixed Tangible Assets (ROFTA)**

Both indicators are provided for Martinique in the report 2024, complying with the COM(2014)545. However, it is stated in the report that most of the segments in this region are part of an economic cluster meaning that both indicators should be viewed with caution as they are not representative of the segment.

#### **Ration between Current Revenue (CR) and Break-Even Revenue (BER)**

Both indicators are provided for Martinique in the report 2024, complying with the COM(2014)545. However, it is stated in the report that most of the segments in this region are part of an economic cluster meaning that both indicators should be viewed with caution as they are not representative of the segment.

#### **The Vessel Use Indicators**

The VUR90 was calculated in all segments. However, in the 2024 report, the indicator was deemed not representative for vessels under 12 meters and was therefore excluded from the cumulative criteria used to assess balanced fleet segments. This is not in accordance with the guidelines COM(2024)223.

#### **Additional indicators (NOS and EDI)**

All segments are provided with NOS and EDI indicator in Martinique. Both indicators were effectively used as additional indicators as envisaged in COM (2024)223.

### 3.1.6 Saint Martin

#### **Fleet sub-segmentation (VL<12m)**

Segmentation used in the national report 2024 complies with the guidelines COM(2024)223, since France segmentation used DCF regions for the maritime zones, with a

more specific regional segmentation by reference region, which identified Saint Martin. No additional sub-segmentation was performed.

### **Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)**

At present no indicators are provided for any of the segments identified in Saint Martin in the report 2024.

### **Stocks at Risk Indicator (SAR)**

At present no indicators are provided for any of the segments identified in Saint Martin in the report 2024.

### **Return on Investment (ROI) or Return on Fixed Tangible Assets (ROFTA)**

At present no indicators are provided for any of the segments identified in Saint Martin in the report 2024.

### **Ration between Current Revenue (CR) and Break-Even Revenue (BER)**

At present no indicators are provided for any of the segments identified in Saint Martin in the report 2024.

### **The Vessel Use Indicators**

The VUR90 was calculated in all segments. However, in the 2024 report, the indicator was deemed not representative for vessels under 12 meters and was therefore excluded from the cumulative criteria used to assess balanced fleet segments. This is not in accordance with the guidelines COM(2024)223.

### **Additional indicators (NOS and EDI)**

At present no indicators are provided for any of the segments identified in Saint Martin in the report 2024.

## **3.2 Portugal**

In the 2024 Portuguese Annual Fleet Report, the assessment of the Azores and Madeira outermost regions follows the segmentation and indicator methodologies primarily in line with COM(2014)545, with limited use of the flexibility introduced by COM(2024)223.

Overall, Portugal's approach reflects a conservative but compliant methodology under the earlier COM(2014)545 standards, with limited adoption of the alternative methods introduced by COM(2024)223. Although Madeira introduced some alternative approaches in calculating the SHI, concerns persist regarding the timeliness and reliability of the locally assessed data used for its computation.

### 3.2.1 Azores

#### **Fleet sub-segmentation (VL<12m)**

The Azores used the DCF fleet segmentation based on supra region, fishing technique, vessel length, and geographical indicator, accomplishing with COM(2014)545 guidelines. However, the additional sub-segmentation options provided in COM(2024)223 final were not applied.

#### **Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)**

According to the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2024, the calculation of the SHI indicator is not fully in compliance with the COM(2014)545 guidelines and does not benefit of the alternative methods offered by the COM(2024)223 guidelines.

#### **Stocks at Risk Indicator (SAR)**

The fleet report indicates that the calculation of the SAR was fully in compliance with COM(2014)545 final guidelines.

#### **Return on Investment (ROI) or Return on Fixed Tangible Assets (ROFTA)**

The calculation of ROI and ROFTA in the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2024 is fully in compliance with COM(2014)545 final guidelines.

#### **Ration between Current Revenue (CR) and Break-Even Revenue (BER)**

The calculation of CR and BER in the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2024 is fully in compliance with COM(2014)545 final guidelines.

#### **The Vessel Use Indicators**

According to the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2024, the VUR indicator is full in compliance with COM(2014)545 guidelines.

#### **Additional indicators (NOS and EDI)**

According to the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2024, the NOS and EDI were not calculated.

### 3.2.2 Madeira

#### **Fleet sub-segmentation (VL<12m)**

Madeira used the DCF fleet segmentation, accomplishing with COM(2014)545 guidelines. However, the additional sub-segmentation options provided in COM(2024)223 final were not applied.

#### **Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)**

For the calculation of the SHI indicator for Madeira, in the Annual Fleet Report 2024 Portugal used biological and statistical data collected under the national fisheries data collection

programme (PNRD), in line with the COM(2024)223 guidelines (section 2.2.1, first bullet point, letter b). This data pertains to several key species: *Scomber colias*, *Caranx crysos*, *Aphanopus carbo* and *Patella* spp. These species have not been formally assessed by international scientific bodies, but locally to derive the necessary parameters for SHI calculations. In some cases, the data were supported by published scientific studies, while in others, the findings are currently being prepared for publication. Notably, the references show that the data used for *Patella* spp. originate from 2010 and 2011. The EWG discussed this issue and considered the data too outdated to be appropriate for use in the calculation of the SHI indicator.

### **Stocks at Risk Indicator (SAR)**

The fleet report indicates that the calculation of the SAR was fully in compliance with COM(2014)545 final guidelines.

### **Return on Investment (ROI) or Return on Fixed Tangible Assets (ROFTA)**

The calculation of ROI and ROFTA in the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2024 is fully in compliance with COM(2014)545 final guidelines.

### **Ration between Current Revenue (CR) and Break-Even Revenue (BER)**

The calculation of CR and BER in the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2024 is fully in compliance with COM(2014)545 final guidelines.

### **The Vessel Use Indicators**

According to the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2024, the VUR indicator is full in compliance with COM(2014)545 guidelines.

### **Additional indicators (NOS and EDI)**

According to the Portuguese Annual Fleet Report 2024, the NOS and EDI were not calculated.

## **3.3 Spain**

Spain's 2024 national fleet reports for the Canary Islands maintain alignment with the standard DCF requirements, without incorporating additional fleet sub-segmentation based on gear type or activity for vessels under 12 meters.

Overall, Spain's reporting for the Canary Islands reflects compliance with core methodological standards under COM(2014)545, with partial adaptation to the newer flexibility under COM(2024)223, particularly in the SHI threshold adjustment. Nonetheless, the absence of NOS and EDI limits the broader socio-environmental context of the fleet assessments.

### 3.3.1 Canary Islands

#### **Fleet sub-segmentation (VL<12m)**

Segmentation used in the Spanish national report 2024 is in line with DCF OMR. No fleet sub-segmentation was used in the fleet reports (based on specific Gear or Activity) regions.

#### **Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)**

The SHI indicators calculation seems to be compliant with the guidelines describing stocks used and F/Fmsy ratio collected. Data on F/Fmsy was collected from the STECF data gathering process (available on the yearly online atlas).

#### **Stocks at Risk Indicator (SAR)**

SAR calculation is in compliance with the guidelines. For fleets with vessels above 12m in length the 20% threshold criteria was used.

#### **Return on Investment (ROI) or Return on Fixed Tangible Assets (ROFTA)**

The national report of Spain for Canary Islands estimates the RoFTA indicator in accordance to the 2014 guidelines COM(2014)545. The RoFTA indicator measures the long-term profitability. Spain estimates it for each fleet segment based on the methodology of the relevant 2014 guidelines.

#### **Ratio between Current Revenue (CR) and Break-Even Revenue (BER)**

The Ratio between Current Revenue (CR) and Break-Even Revenue (BER), measures the short-term profitability of the fleet segments. The indicator seems to be in compliance with the 2014 guidelines. The methodology applied by Spain for estimating the CR/BER economic indicator is based on the COM(2014)545 guidelines, presenting values for each fleet segment.

#### **The Vessel Use Indicators**

In the 2024 national fleet report submitted, Spain provided, for all Canary fleet segments, two Vessel Utilisation Indicators (VUR and VUR220) in compliance with the provisions of COM(2014)545 final guidelines.

Some issues may be observed for the VUR indicator with values higher than one. According to the guidelines the VUR is calculated by “the ratio between average days at sea per vessel and the maximum days at sea observed in a fleet segment”.

#### **Additional indicators (NOS and EDI)**

EDI and NOS complementary indicators were not provided in the 2024 Spanish fleet national report.

#### 4. TOR 3. REVIEW OF THE COM(2024)223 FINAL GUIDELINES

Under TOR3, the EWG 25-18 undertook a detailed and systematic review of the COM(2024)223 final guidelines, examining each section in depth. The group conducted thorough discussions on every indicator included in the guidelines (biological, economic, and technical), evaluating their methodological implications. For each indicator, the EWG identified specific research questions that still need to be addressed in order to enhance understanding, improve applicability, or fill existing data gaps. Additionally, the group evaluated the feasibility of carrying out the identified research, categorizing it as low, medium, or high depending on factors such as data availability, technical complexity, and resource requirements. This exercise aims to inform future methodological developments and support the effective implementation of the guidelines, particularly in the context of outermost regions.

The findings of the EWG have been consolidated and presented in summary tables.

#### Vessel Use Indicator (VUR)

EWG 25-18 agreed that further research is needed to better understand the fishing activity profiles of various small-scale fleet segments, particularly those under 12 meters in length. This research should aim to define clear and standardized methods for determining the theoretical base thresholds that are used to calculate the VUR. The development of standardized activity thresholds is expected to enhance the consistency and comparability of the VUR indicator across different regions and fleet segments, ultimately improving its reliability as a measure of vessel utilization.

The EWG suggests analysing historical activity data to identify consistent and evidence-based threshold values that can serve as a benchmark for VUR calculations. The feasibility of conducting this research is considered to range from low to medium, depending on the availability and quality of historical data, as well as the diversity and complexity of small-scale fleet operations in the various OMRs.

**Table 4.1.** Expert recommendations for further research regarding the Vessel Use Indicator.

Recommendation	Expected effect	Fleet segments	Relevant ORs	Ref.	EWG comment (type of research needed)	Feasibility (low, medium, high)
Research on the fishing activity profiles for the various small-scale fleet segments is necessary to establish clear methods for determining the theoretical base thresholds.	Establish activity thresholds based on standard methods.	All fleet segments with length less than 12 m	All ORs		Analyse historical data to find concise threshold values.	low, medium

Source: own elaborations.

## **Stocks At Risk (SAR)**

The EWG reviewed multiple aspects of the SAR indicator and proposed several key recommendations aimed at improving its accuracy and relevance, particularly in the context of ORs.

The EWG recommends that the SAR indicator be calculated based on the share of fleet catches, specifically using a threshold of 10–20%, rather than linking it directly to fishing mortality on the stock attributable to the fleet. This adjustment aims to maintain clarity and comparability across assessments while simplifying the calculation methodology. The EWG considers this change feasible and proposes its formal revision in the next expert meeting, with a high likelihood of implementation.

For stocks that are shared with other countries, particularly in cases where highly migratory or widely distributed species are targeted by third-country fleets, the EWG highlights the need for competent authorities to make efforts to gather non-EU catch data. This may require collaboration with Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) and other relevant institutions. Where such data cannot be obtained, the use of case-by-case thresholds, supported by OR-specific data and justification, is recommended to ensure local fleets are not unfairly penalized. This applies to all ORs and to fleet segments exploiting shared stocks. The expected feasibility of this recommendation is medium to high, depending on the complexity of international cooperation.

The EWG also encourages incorporating national regulations and local expert knowledge into the identification of SAR stocks, especially in geographically or biologically localized contexts. This would allow for more accurate and regionally appropriate stock lists to be developed. Implementation would rely on existing monitoring under the DCF, and the feasibility is considered medium.

Overall, these recommendations aim to enhance the applicability, fairness, and precision of the SAR indicator across diverse fleet segments and regional contexts, while recognizing practical limitations in data availability and institutional cooperation.

**Table 4.2.** Expert recommendations for further research regarding Stocks At Risk (SAR) indicator.

Recommendation	Expected effect	Fleet segments	Relevant ORs	Ref.	EWG comment (type of research needed)	Feasibility (low, medium, high)
It is considered that SAR should be only calculated as 10-20% of fleet catches	Retain this threshold changes	All fleet segments with length less than 12 m	All ORs	STEC F-24-06	Revision in next EWG	high
An effort from the competent authorities/organisms to get the foreign catches in OR stocks shared with other countries. When not feasible, a case-by-case threshold could be established supported by the OR with the proper data and explanations.  A clear example applies in highly distributed stocks where the total catches are unknown as they are targeted by third countries.	To avoid this indicator penalises OR fleets with shared stocks	Fleet segments with shared stocks	All ORs	STEC F-24-06  All ORs national fleet reports submitted in 2025	Collecting catch data from other countries (through the involved RFMOs)	medium, high (depending on the concerned RFMOs, Institutions, etc.)
To consider National regulations together with National expert knowledge for the identification of stocks at risk (SAR), especially regarding localized areas and stocks.	More accurate regional lists of SAR stocks	All fleet segments with length less than 12 m	ALL ORs	Guyader et al., 2025	Research/knowledge from the current DCF monitoring programs	medium

Source: Compiled during EWG from stated references.

### Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)

The EWG identified several key actions to improve the accuracy, applicability, and coverage of the SHI across all ORs. One major recommendation is the development of a roadmap to support national peer-reviewed stock assessments in the ORs. This would include enhancing data collection systems and providing specialized training in stock assessment methodologies. The expected outcome would be a significant increase in SHI coverage and its representativeness, particularly for small-scale and regionally specific fisheries. The

feasibility of this action is rated as medium, given the institutional and technical efforts required.

Another important recommendation calls for the establishment of a roadmap for the timely review or inclusion of national stock assessments that have not been peer-reviewed. This would facilitate broader agreement on commonly accepted F/FMSY reference points and allow expansion of the SHI indicator to more fisheries. This step is essential for ensuring consistency and inclusiveness in the indicator's application across diverse fleet types and regions. It is also considered medium in terms of feasibility.

The EWG also addressed the challenge of accounting for illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing within SHI calculations. Incorporating IUU data, either within assessment models or through external adjustments, would improve the precision of estimated fishing mortality and total catch levels. However, due to limited monitoring infrastructure and enforcement capacities in some ORs, this research area is considered to have low feasibility. Progress would require the development of advanced tracking systems and improved regional cooperation.

Finally, the group recommended conducting sensitivity analyses on the SHI indicator itself. This would provide a clearer understanding of the indicator's robustness and how it responds to different assumptions or input variations. Such analysis was previously suggested in STECF PLEN 13-01 and remains relevant. The feasibility of this research is considered medium, as it relies on technical modelling capacities already available within many national institutes.

Collectively, these recommendations aim to enhance the scientific credibility, policy relevance, and regional adaptability of the SHI indicator, supporting its continued use as a keystone of sustainable fisheries assessment.

**Table 4.3.** Expert recommendations for further research regarding the Sustainable Harvest Indicator.

Recommendation	Expected effect	Fleet segments	Relevant ORs	Ref.	EWG comment (type of research needed)	Feasibility (low, medium, high)
Roadmap to facilitate national stocks assessment in ORs	Increase the SHI coverage and the representativeness of the indicator	ALL	ALL	Own deliberations*	Reinforcement of data collection and stock assessment trainings	medium
Roadmap for (faster) review or inclusion of national assessments that are not peer-reviewed	Better agreement on a list of common F/Fmsy. Extension to all the fisheries (OMRs>12m ) and European fleets (example scallops in the English Channel)	ALL	ALL	Own deliberations*		medium
How to include IUU fishing in indicator (e.g. in assessment model or external)?	More accurate estimation of fishing mortality and catch levels	ALL	ALL	Own deliberations*	Research on tracking systems to monitor illegal fisheries	low
Develop Sensitivity analysis for indicator	Better understanding of indicator and its robustness	ALL	ALL	Suggested in STECF- PLEN-13-01		medium

Source: Compiled during EWG from stated references or own elaborations (\*).

### Economic Indicators

The EWG reviewed and discussed several improvements to the application of economic indicators used to assess the financial performance and balance of fishing fleets, particularly in ORs. These included the Return on Investment (RoI), Return on Fixed Tangible Assets

(RoFTA), and the ratio between Current Revenue and Break-Even Revenue (CR/BER), along with proposals for complementary indicators.

One key recommendation is the integration of operating subsidies into the calculation of existing economic indicators. This aims to harmonize methodologies across fleet segments and MS and prevent inconsistencies when subsidies are embedded in different DCF variables. This recommendation, supported by multiple STECF groups and national contributions (e.g., Ifremer), is considered highly feasible and should be addressed in future Balance EWG Terms of Reference.

Another proposal supports the continued use of a fixed 3.5% rate as the reference opportunity cost for calculating RoFTA, in line with the STECF AER EWG 2024 and Plenary 23-02. This method offers improved interpretability and avoids distortions due to fluctuating market interest rates. Since it is grounded in existing scientific literature, no additional research is needed, and its feasibility is rated as high.

To promote consistency, the EWG also recommends the harmonization of net profit definitions between the AER guidelines and COM(2014)545. The primary discrepancy lies in whether opportunity costs are included in the calculation. Standardizing this definition would lead to more coherent economic analysis across reports, and the recommendation is deemed highly feasible.

The French authorities provided two specific suggestions. First, they propose using RoFTA and CR/BER only for the main segments within fleet clusters, acknowledging that this would provide only partial insight into the broader economic balance. As this is a policy-level stance, the EWG notes it cannot be resolved through technical research. Second, recognizing the challenges in accurately assessing capital value and depreciation for small-scale fisheries (SSF), France suggests introducing complementary economic and social indicators that better reflect the socio-economic realities of SSF. Indicators such as Net Profit/Current Revenues (NP/CR) and Net Value Added per Full-Time Equivalent (NVA/FTE) have already been recommended and should be further discussed within the RCG Econ and AER EWG fora. The feasibility of implementing these alternatives is rated medium.

Finally, the adoption of NP/CR and NVA/FTE as complementary indicators is strongly encouraged to enhance the interpretation of economic performance, particularly in terms of resource and labour productivity. These metrics provide a more nuanced picture of economic sustainability, and their use is considered highly feasible.

In conclusion, the EWG supports both the refinement of current economic indicators and the introduction of complementary metrics to better reflect the diverse conditions of OR fleets. These adjustments would enhance the accuracy, comparability, and policy relevance of economic assessments across the EU's outermost fisheries.

**Table 4.4.** Expert recommendations for further research regarding economic indicators.

Recommendation	Expected effect	Fleet segments	Relevant ORs	Ref.	EWG comment (type of research needed)	Feasibility (low, medium, high)
RoI, RoFTA, CR/BER - Integration of operating subsidies in current economic indicators	Harmonization of the indicators for all segments and all Countries Avoid distortion with segments for which operating subsidies are included in the right DCF variable	ALL	ALL	Guyader et al., 2025 STECF-24-06 STECF -24-07	Recommendation to be addressed by the next Balance EWG ToRs for its application	high
RoI, RoFTA, CR/BER - The utilization of the 3.5% rate as the reference for calculating the opportunity as used in STECF-24-07 and in line with STECF-PLN-23-02	The improvement in the interpretability of the results and the fact that the results are less dependent on interest rate fluctuations and are therefore easier to compare over time	ALL	ALL	Guyader et al., 2025 STECF-PLN-23-02	Since there is a robust scientific literature*, no additional research is needed	high
RoI, RoFTA, CR/BER - Harmonisation of the definition of net profit between the AER guidelines and the (COM 2014) 545 final 11.1. The difference arises from the inclusion or not of the opportunity costs**	The utilization of harmonised indicators	ALL	ALL	Guyader et al., 2025(COM 2014) 545 STECF-24-07 (pag.514/Gloss ary/Net profit)		high
RoI, RoFTA, CR/BER - The French authorities propose to use CR/BER and RoFTA indicators only for the main segment of the clusters	Partial information on economic indicators assessment	ALL	ALL	Note from the French Authorities to the European Commission, 2025***	The issue cannot be addressed by research	N/A

RoI, RoFTA, CR/BER - Given the difficulties in assessing the variables 'value of capital' and 'depreciation of capital' for the Small-scale fisheries vessels, the French authorities propose to explore the possibility of using complementary economic and social indicators	Alignment with the real SSF socio-economic context	SSF SEGMENT	French ORs	Note from the French Authorities to the European Commission, 2025*** (COM 2024) 223 FINAL STECF-24-06	Some indicators have been already suggested (e.g. NP/CR and NVA/FTE)  The proposal has to be discussed in the RCG Econ and the AER EWG	medium
NP/CR (Net Profit/Current Revenues) - Their utilization is suggested to refine the assessment of the economic balance	Consideration of the resource productivity	ALL	ALL	STECF-24- 06		high
NVA/FTE (Net Value Added/Full) - Their utilization is suggested to refine the assessment of the economic balance	Consideration of the labour productivity	ALL	ALL	STECF-24-06		high

\* Hepburn, C., Koundouri, P., Panopoulou, E., & Pantelidis, T. (2009); Kempf, A., Mumford, J., Levontin, P., Leach, A., Hoff, A., Hamon, K. G., ... & Rindorf, A. (2016); Carvalho, N., Casey, J., Guillen, J., & Martinsohn, J. T. (2021); Liese, C., & Crosson, S. (2023)

\*\* Net profit = (Income from landings + other income) - (crew costs + unpaid labour + energy costs + repair and maintenance costs + other variable costs + non variable costs+ depreciation + opportunity cost of capital)

\*\*\* Note from the French Authorities to the European Commission, 2025- Annexe\_9\_B\_0305-25 - NAF chantier lignes directrices VF\_EN

Source: Compiled during EWG from stated references.

## **5. TOR 4. REVIEW OF FLEET-BALANCE INDICATORS AND THRESHOLDS**

Under ToR 4, the EWG 25-18 conducted a comprehensive and structured analysis of the recommendations on a number of indicators outlined in the background documents prepared for the meeting. In particular, this review focused on the indicators currently used in the calculation of fleet balance and assessed the suitability of their associated thresholds. By examining each indicator in depth, the EWG aimed to build a clear and coherent overview of the guidance already available on these metrics and to identify areas where further refinement may be necessary.

Particular attention was given to ensuring that the indicators and their thresholds are appropriately calibrated for the unique conditions of the OMRs, where data limitations, operational differences, and regional variability pose specific challenges. The group also considered how the existing recommendations could support the development or revision of future methodological frameworks and help guide consistent implementation across MS.

The EWG 25-18 noted that the thresholds set in the current guidelines for indicators such as VUR, SAR, and SHI were established arbitrarily, and therefore, the group cannot make a definitive recommendation either supporting or opposing their revision.

The conclusions and insights from this exercise have been compiled into structured summary tables.

### **Vessel Use Indicator (VUR)**

In relation to the VUR, the EWG 25-18 considers that a comprehensive impact assessment would be necessary to ensure the applicability and robustness of the indicator, particularly if any modifications to its calculation or interpretation are to be considered.

The VUR, as a technical indicator, can offer useful insights into the level of activity and operational behaviour of specific fleet segments. It is particularly relevant for identifying potential fleet overcapacity, by revealing whether all vessels within a segment are used efficiently or if some remain underutilised. However, a key challenge lies in its interpretation. The indicator may reflect actual overcapacity, but it may also simply capture a high degree of heterogeneity in fishing activity within the fleet segment, making straightforward assessments difficult.

One of the key concerns identified by the EWG 25-18 is the inherent variability in fishing activity among small-scale vessels (under 12 meters), which often results in lower and less stable VUR values. The EWG emphasized that a fixed threshold, such as the standard 70%, may not be appropriate for these segments and advocated for tailored thresholds that account for this variability. However, they acknowledged the practical challenges of implementing thresholds based on such variability.

Furthermore, for fleet segments composed of fewer than 10 vessels, the current methodology using the top-10 average to determine maximum days at sea renders the VUR calculation ineffective, as it equates to the segment's overall average. The EWG recommends that this approach not be applied to small segments, as it fails to provide meaningful insights.

Instead, the use of the 90th percentile (VUR90) method applied by France could effectively reduce the influence of outliers while better reflecting typical fleet behaviour. This method is particularly useful for ensuring coherence in VUR values, even when segment sizes decrease. Currently, the VUR90 percentile calculated by France excludes vessels with the highest number of fishing days, treating them as outliers. While this removes extreme values, it may also omit relevant behavioural patterns. Therefore, the EWG suggests exploring

alternative methodologies, including the identification of potential outliers represented by vessels with very high and very low activity, in order to more accurately calculate a “theoretical” average day at sea which might represent the core operational profile of the fleet segment. However, the current structure of the economic data call only permits MS to report the total days at sea.

Acknowledging the potential lack of homogeneity of activity levels amongst fleet segments <12m in the ORs, the group discussed the use of VUR<sub>nn</sub> along with sub-segmentation (in terms of activity levels, low and high) of fleet segments <12m. EWG 25-18 acknowledges that further research is needed to investigate different values of nn in the VUR and the sub-segmentation effect, taking into account that SHI and SAR should be calculated for the same fleet sub-segments.

**Table 5.1.** Review of the Vessel Use Indicator.

Recommendation	Expected effect	Fleet segments	Relevant ORs	Reference	EWG comment
Vessels under 12 meters are generally less active than those over 12 meters, they exhibit greater variability in their days at sea, contributing to lower VUR values. This variability should be taken into account when defining appropriate VUR thresholds for these segments	Find a threshold more appropriated than the fixed 70% for VUR	Fleet segments with great variability in fishing activity	All OMRs	Guyader et al., 2025	Establishing a relationship between the variability of days at sea and the threshold appears to be challenging to implement in practice.
For segments with 10 vessels or fewer, the top 10 average is inadequate. In such cases, the top 10 average is essentially the average of the entire segment, resulting in a Vessel Utilization Rate (VUR) of 1, which does not provide meaningful insights	For fleet segments with low number of vessels the use of top 10 average to stablish the maximum number of days at sea will produce VUR values not relevant	Fleet segments with low number of vessels	All OMRs	Guyader et al., 2025	EWG agrees that this approach should not be specifically applied to fleet segments with a low number of vessels.
The 90th percentile (P90) method is less sensitive to outliers and provides results that are more coherent. P90 offers a better balance between capturing the typical behaviour of the fleet and minimizing the impact of outliers. In any case, outliers should be carefully examined, especially when the size of the segments decreases.	Reduce outliers' effects	All fleet segments	All OMRs	Guyader et al., 2025	EWG states that this method minimizes the impact of outlier activities and lowers the risk of unreal VUR values.
The VUR or VUR90 vessel use indicator is not taken into account for the final validation of the balance of ultramarine fleet	Improve the use of VUR Indicator	All fleet segments with length less than 12 m	All OMRs	Note from the French Authorities*	EWG acknowledges the importance of this technical indicator and believe it should be combined with economic and

segments of less than 12 metres if the biological and economic indicators are in equilibrium					biological indicators to determine that fleet segment is out balance.
maintain VUR90 as a methodology explicitly authorised in particular for vessels <u>of 12 metres and above</u> , and, secondly, to confirm that the variable of the 90th percentile can be entered in the column of the optional variable 'maxseadays' in the context of the FleetEco call for data	Reduce outliers' effects	All fleet segments	All OMRs	Note from the French Authorities*	Using the 90% method minimizes the impact of outlier activities and can address some issues related to this indicator.  To compare the calculation of the VUR indicator submitted by MS, it is necessary to include the Maxsea days using the 90% method in the data collection.
A drawback of using alternative thresholds is that they may change from year to year, especially, if thresholds are based on the data (i.e. the maximum observed number of days at sea, or a percentile). In such cases, it may be difficult to identify trends in the VUR indicator. Therefore, it would be recommended to base thresholds on multiple data years to make it less prone to eventual extreme values, and in case MS change the threshold, they should provide appropriate argumentation for such a decision.	Utilizing a fixed theoretical activity, equivalent to 220 days at sea, for small-scale vessels to identify trends in the VUR indicator over the years.	All fleet segments with length less than 12 m	All OMRs	STECF-24-06	EWG agrees that this approach is the more appropriated method for the calculation of the VUR indicators in small scale fleets  Research on the fishing activity profiles for the various small scale fleet segments is necessary to establish clear methods for determining the theoretical base thresholds.

\*Note from the French Authorities to the European Commission, 2025- Annexe\_9\_B\_0305-25 - NAF chantier lignes directrices VF\_EN

Source: Compiled during EWG from stated references.

## Stocks At Risk (SAR)

The SAR indicator, as discussed by EWG 25-18, was the subject of several recommendations aimed at improving its applicability and fairness, particularly in the context of the ORs. A key point raised was the need for flexibility in applying SAR thresholds, especially in cases involving shared stocks for which total catch data may be unavailable. In such cases, the group recommended allowing for case-by-case adjustments to the threshold, supported by appropriate data and justification. This approach aims to prevent OR fleets from being unfairly penalised due to data limitations that are beyond their control. The proposal is referenced in STECF 24-06 and aligns with discussions expected in upcoming STECF plenary sessions and reflected in the national fleet reports for 2025.

Additionally, the EWG advocated for a more localized and context-sensitive approach in identifying stocks at risk. Specifically, the group recommends integrating national or regional regulations and expert knowledge into SAR calculations, particularly for stocks that are geographically limited or managed under distinct frameworks. This is expected to result in more accurate and regionally appropriate lists of SAR-designated stocks and was put forward in Guyader et al. (2025) as part of the EWG 25-18 contributions.

Moreover, in a broader reflection on biological indicators, the group noted that national stock assessments, if considered robust enough to inform the SHI, should also be eligible to contribute to SAR determinations. This would ensure consistency across biological indicators and improve the utility of national data sources, especially where international or peer-reviewed data is unavailable or delayed.

Overall, these recommendations aim to increase the relevance, accuracy, and fairness of the SAR indicator, particularly in the data-limited and often unique contexts of the ORs, while supporting a more integrated use of available biological assessments.

**Table 5.2.** Review of the Stocks at Risk indicator.

Recommendation	Expected effect	Fleet segments	Relevant ORs	Reference	EWG comment
Flexibilization with case-by-case rationale for thresholds when necessary (in particular for shared stocks with unavailable total catch data)	To avoid this indicator penalises OR fleets with shared stocks	ALL	ALL	STECF_24-06 All ORs national fleet reports submitted in 2025	Discussion in STECF PLEN
To consider National/local regulations and knowledge for the identification of stocks at risk (SAR), in localized areas and stocks.	More accurate regional lists of SAR stocks	ALL	ALL	Guyader et al., 2025	Discussion in STECF PLEN

Source: Compiled during EWG from stated references.

## **Sustainable Harvest Indicator (SHI)**

Based on recent STECF assessments and supporting literature, no alternative formula for calculating the SHI is currently considered necessary or particularly meaningful by this EWG. The existing formulation remains a valid tool for assessing fleet balance in biological terms, including within the context of small-scale vessels operating in the ORs. However, the indicator's effectiveness strongly depends on the availability, quality, and scope of underlying stock assessments.

To improve both the representativeness and geographic coverage of the SHI, the inclusion of national stock assessments is strongly encouraged, particularly for coastal and data-limited stocks that are not regularly assessed at the EU or international level. Such inclusion could significantly enhance SHI coverage, but it must be accompanied by a structured and transparent validation process. This could include peer review mechanisms or evaluations by recognized scientific committees to ensure scientific consistency across Member States. If such a validation system were formally established and endorsed, national assessments could be systematically integrated across relevant fleets.

While the SHI remains central to the assessment of biological fleet balance, complementary indicators like the Economic Dependency Indicator (EDI) and the Number of Overfished Stocks (NOS) can provide useful contextual insights. These, however, should not replace the SHI but rather be used alongside it to help prioritize management interventions in segments already identified as imbalanced.

Regarding thresholds, the use of  $F_{upper}$  is not recommended. This value originates from a meta-analysis focused on demersal stocks in the North and Baltic Seas and does not provide a clear or consistent benchmark for broader applications in fleet balance assessments. Similarly, the use of aggregate stock assessments, such as for groups of species or stock complexes, should only be accepted if accompanied by clear documentation and thorough justification, as such approaches can introduce ambiguity in interpreting exploitation levels.

Finally, ongoing improvement in data quality is fundamental. The integration of more complete data on total removals, including illegal, unreported, or misreported catches, would significantly support the reliability of stock assessments and, consequently, the robustness of the SHI. Such data must be well documented to ensure traceability and scientific rigor in their use.

**Table 5.3.** Review of the Sustainable Harvest Indicator.

Recommendation	Expected effect	Fleet segments	Relevant ORs	Reference	EWG comment
Flexible SHI calculation with partial F	SHI more representative for small scale fleets	Smaller than 12 m	All	STECF-24-06	It is not comparable with other SHI estimated without partial F and models providing partial F are limited (only integrated models as SS3). Require information on the total catches (or landings) in order to calculate the partial fishing mortality, and that this may be difficult for shared stocks
Alternative SHI using binary index (1=in overfishing; 0=not in overfishing)	Can be more effective in mixed fishery.	All	All	STECF-24-06	Same as above and can reduce the sensitivity of the indicator.
Using national assessment	Can increase the number of SHI	All	All	STECF-4-06	May introduce unverified SHI calculations. The estimate of SHI needs strict validation protocols/template (i.e., validation of stock assessments process and dissemination).  Stocks assessment included should not be older than 3-5 years before the reference year (depending of the life history of the stocks)
Complementary indicators (EDI and NOS)	Complement of SHI outcomes highlighting the economic dependency of a fleet on stock in not health conditions.	All	All	STECF-24-06	Could be useful only in combination with SHI.

Complementary indicators (LPUE)	Complement of SHI outcomes.	All	All	STECF-24-06	Could be not accurate in term of ratio F/FMSY. To be used always in combination with SHI.
Using Fupper	More flexibility to obtain F/Fmsy	All	All	Guyader et al., 2025	Meta-analysis used for the recommendation might not suitable for all stocks. F/Fmsy is more accurate.
Illegal fisheries	More accurate catch levels	Fleets segment targeting Acupa rouge	French Guyana	Guyader et al., 2025	Considered a good approach, but in combination with studies on selectivity showing the homogeneity of the way the fleet segment harvest the stock (national/illegal)
The indicator may be presented together with the actual coverage percentage and the number of stocks used to compute the value	Number of relevant SHI increase	Vessels less than 12m	All	COM(2024)223 final guidelines	The effectiveness of SHI is lower if the coverage is lower
Using stocks assessment of one species as a proxy on another (in the same species group)	Number of relevant SHI increase	Vessels less than 12m	Using stocks assessment of one species as a proxy on another (in the same species group)	STECF-24-06	May introduce unverified SHI calculations. The estimate of SHI needs strict validation protocols/template. In this case, the proportion of each species in the group and homogeneity in life history traits, in spatial extent ... should be documented.

Source: Compiled during EWG from stated references.

## **Economic Indicators**

The EWG 25-18 reviewed key economic indicators used in assessing fleet balance, focusing primarily on Return on Investment (RoI), Return on Fixed Tangible Assets (RoFTA), and the Ratio of Current Revenue to Break-Even Revenue (CR/BER). A central recommendation is the integration of operating subsidies into these indicators to ensure harmonisation across all fleet segments and Member States. This adjustment aims to avoid distortions that may arise when subsidies are inconsistently treated in national data collection frameworks, particularly in the DCF variables.

Additionally, the group supports the use of a 3.5% opportunity cost rate as a standard reference for calculating economic indicators, aligning with practices adopted by the STECF AER EWG 2024 and consistent with the guidance from STECF Plenary 23-02. This approach improves the comparability of results over time by reducing sensitivity to interest rate fluctuations. Furthermore, the harmonisation of net profit definitions between the AER guidelines and the COM(2014)545 final was stressed. The main divergence lies in the treatment of opportunity costs, and the EWG recommends adopting the AER's definition for consistency.

To further refine economic balance assessments, the EWG highlighted the value of introducing complementary indicators such as Net Profit over Current Revenues (NP/CR), which reflects resource productivity, and Net Value Added per Full-Time Equivalent (NVA/FTE), which indicates labour productivity. Both indicators were deemed beneficial additions to future assessment frameworks, and the group proposed that the methodology for their integration be explicitly addressed in the Terms of Reference for upcoming Balance EWGs. These efforts collectively aim to strengthen the accuracy, comparability, and interpretability of economic indicators used in fleet balance evaluations.

**Table 5.4.** Review of economic indicators.

Recommendation	Expected effect	Fleet segments	Relevant ORs	Reference	EWG comment
RoI, RoFTA, CR/BER - Integration of operating subsidies in current economic indicators	Harmonization of the indicators for all segments and all Countries. Avoid distortion with segments for which operating subsidies are included in the right DCF variable	ALL	ALL	STECF-24- 06 Guyader et al., 2025 STECF-24-07	Recommendation to be addressed by the next Balance EWG ToRs for its application
RoI, RoFTA, CR/BER - The utilization of the 3.5% rate as the reference for calculating the opportunity as used in the STECF AER EWG 2024 24-07 and in line with the STECF Plenary 23- 02	The improvement in the interpretability of the results and the fact that the results are less dependent on interest rate fluctuations and are therefore easier to compare over time	ALL	ALL	STECF-24-07 Guyader et al., 2025 STECF Plenary 23-02	Recommendation to be addressed by the next Balance EWG ToRs for its application
RoI, RoFTA, CR/BER - Harmonisation of the definition of net profit between the AER guidelines and the (COM 2014) 545 final 11.1. The difference arises from the inclusion or not of the opportunity costs*	The utilization of harmonised indicators	ALL	ALL	Guyader et al., 2025 COM (2014) 545 final STECF-24-07	The EWG recommends using the definition of the net profit applied in the AER guidelines

NP/CR (Net Profit/Current Revenues) - Their utilization is suggested to refine the assessment of the economic balance	Consideration of the resource productivity	ALL	ALL	STECF-24- 06	The EWG recommends including in the ToR in the next EWG the way to use the indicator into the balance assessment
NVA/FTE - Their utilization is suggested to refine the assessment of the economic balance	Consideration of the labour productivity	ALL	ALL	STECF-24- 06	The EWG recommends including in the ToR in the next EWG the way to use the indicator into the balance assessment

Source: Compiled during EWG from stated references.

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## 6. CONTACT DETAILS OF EWG-25-18 PARTICIPANTS

<sup>1</sup> - Information on EWG participant's affiliations is displayed for information only. In any case, Members of the STECF, invited experts, and JRC experts shall act independently. In the context of the STECF work, the committee members and other experts do not represent the institutions/bodies they are affiliated to in their daily jobs.

<b>STECF member</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b><u>Affiliation1</u></b>	<b><u>Email</u></b>
Fabio GRATI (EWG chair)	Italian National Research Council (CNR) - Institute for Research on Marine Biological Resources (IRBIM)	fabio.grati@cnr.it

<b>Invited experts</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b><u>Affiliation<sup>1</sup></u></b>	<b><u>Email</u></b>
Gema Maria CANAL PEREZ	Spanish Institute of Oceanography	gema.canal@ieo.csic.es
Francisco Manuel FERNÁNDEZ MARTÍNEZ	MINISTRY AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FISH OF SPAIN	fmfernandez@mapa.es

Jerome GUITTON	Institut Agro	jerome.guitton@institut-agro.fr
Myrto IOANNOU	Department of Fisheries and Marine Research	mioannou@dfmr.moa.gov.cy
Christelle LE GRAND	IFREMER	christelle.le.grand@ifremer.fr
Catalina PERALES-RAYA	Centro Oceanografico de Canarias (COC-IEO), CSIC	catalina.perales@ieo.csic.es
Francesca PERRETTA	Marche Regional Authority	francesca.perretta@regione.marche.it
João RAMOS DO Ó	AG MAR2030	jramos.do.o@gmail.com
Giuseppe SCARCELLA	Italian National Research Council (CNR) - Institute for Research on Marine Biological Resources (IRBIM)	giuseppe.scarcella@cnr.it

<b>JRC experts</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation<sup>1</sup></b>	<b><u>Email</u></b>
Anna-Marie Winter	European Commission, Joint Research Centre (JRC), Ispra, Italy	Anna-Marie.Winter@ec.europa.eu
Michael Gras	European Commission, Joint Research Centre (JRC), Ispra, Italy	Michael.GRAS@ec.europa.eu

<b>European Commission</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation<sup>1</sup></b>	<b><u>Email</u></b>
Anna-Marie Winter	JRC STECF secretariat	<u>Jrc-stecf-secretariat@ec.europa.eu</u>

Antonios Stamoulis	DG MARE	Antonios.STAMOULIS@ec.europa.eu
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### List of Background Documents

Background documents are published on:

<https://stecf.ec.europa.eu/document/36bbf208-3a68-45b8-8270-4537d9145597>

List of background documents:

EWG-25-18– Doc 1 - Declarations of invited and JRC experts (see also the section of this report 'Contact details of EWG-25-18 participants')

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