

Report of the NAFO Joint Commission–Scientific Council Working Group on Ecosystem Approach Framework to Fisheries Management (WG-EAFFM) Meeting

14–16 July 2025

Tallinn, Estonia

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1. Opening by the co-Chairs, Diana González-Troncoso (European Union) and Elizabethann Mencher (United States of America)

The meeting was opened by the co-Chairs, Diana González-Troncoso (European Union) and Elizabethann Mencher (United States of America), at 09:32 hours (UTC +3 hours) on Monday, 14 July 2025. The Scientific Council Chair acted as co-Chair for this meeting. The co-Chairs welcomed participants attending in-person and virtually. This included representatives from Canada, Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), European Union, Iceland, Japan, Norway, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, and the United States of America, and the Chair of the Scientific Council (Annex 1).

2. Appointment of Rapporteur

The NAFO Secretariat was appointed as rapporteur of this meeting.

3. Adoption of Agenda

The working group agreed to add two agenda items under “Other Business”, progress on addressing the Scientific Council’s workload and planning of the upcoming Performance Review. The working group further agreed that the BDS Action Plan discussions under agenda item 9 were no longer necessary since the WG-BDS has been reinstated, and the item was removed from the agenda.

The agenda was adopted following the revisions above and is outlined in Annex 2.

4. Presentation of Scientific Council Responses to Commission Requests for Advice (COM Doc. 24-18) Relevant to WG-EAFFM

The Chair of the Scientific Council, Diana González-Troncoso (European Union), presented a summary of the Scientific Council advice relevant to the WG-EAFFM ([SCS Doc. 25/13](#)), noting that the specific items would be explored in greater depth in subsequent agenda items.

The Scientific Council Chair presented an update on the work relating to Commission Request 10 ([COM Doc. 24-18](#)) regarding the consultancy for including climate variables into NAFO’s stock assessment processes. The Scientific Council reviewed the report and case studies from the consultant and noted that the short duration of the contract limited the scope of the analysis. The Scientific Council noted the need for a multi-disciplinary approach to address the impacts of climate change and reiterated the 2024 recommendation to organize a dedicated in-person meeting to evaluate the options and design an approach for integrating climate variables throughout Scientific Council operations ([SCS Doc. 25/13](#)). The working group noted it required more information on resource implications for such a meeting for Commission consideration. Accordingly, the WG-EAFFM recommended that the Commission task the Scientific Council, as capacity allows, to draft a document scoping the details of what the dedicated meeting would entail, including information on the scope of the meeting, the scientific and workload capacity requirements, and potential financial implications, noting that, if it is to be held, such a meeting should be scheduled at a time that best fits the Scientific Council schedule. Decisions on next steps, including whether or not to hold such a meeting, will be informed by this document.

A WG-EAFFM member asked how other RFMOs are addressing the impacts of climate change. The NAFO Secretariat noted that the FAO [Regional Fishery Body Secretariats' Network \(RSN\)](#) is organizing a workshop in October 2025 titled *Mainstreaming climate change into international fisheries governance: The case of Regional Fisheries Bodies in the Atlantic Region* and that the information will be shared with participants.

The working group thanked the Scientific Council for their work and the SC Chair for the presentation.

5. VME and SAI Assessments

a. Update on the Centralized Data Repository (COM Request 6.a)

Andrew Kenny (United Kingdom) provided an update on the Scientific Council response to Commission request 6.a on the ArcGIS Data Repository. It was noted that a trial version of the data repository website, along with administrative tools and an interactive mapping application, was successfully demonstrated at the WG-ESA meeting in 2024. It was highlighted that a number of topics were the focus of discussion at the June meeting, including i) financial planning, ii) licensing, iii) privacy, iv) data storage, v) metadata and vi) accessibility ([SCS Doc. 25/13](#)). The WG-EAFFM thanked the Scientific Council for the update.

The working group discussed the Scientific Council recommendation for the NAFO Secretariat, Scientific Council, and each of the relevant Contracting Parties' data-providing institutes to develop a comprehensive data-sharing agreement for VME and SAI assessments, on a five-year rolling basis. The working group thanked the Scientific Council for the presentation and asked for additional information including whether there was a specific need for the Commission to be involved in the process, and if a five-year arrangement was necessary or if the current system of requesting data on a yearly basis was sufficient. It was clarified that the main driver for the request was motivated by the potential increase in efficiency of needing to request data once every five years instead of on a yearly basis. The working group encouraged further conversations between the parties involved in the agreement (i.e. NAFO Secretariat, Scientific Council and the data-providing Contracting Parties), noting there was no need for the Commission to be involved in these discussions, at this time.

b. Update on Reassessment of VMEs and Impact of Bottom Fisheries on VMEs for 2027 (COM Request 6.b)

Andrew Kenny (United Kingdom) provided an update on the Scientific Council response to Commission request 6.b regarding the progress on the reassessment of VMEs, including updates on the impacts of bottom fisheries on VMEs scheduled to be completed in 2027 ([SCS Doc. 25/13](#)). It was noted that work is progressing on the revised schedule. At its November 2025 meeting, WG-ESA will review the VME polygons, with further review by the Scientific Council in June 2026. The Scientific Council will present its conclusions and recommendations at the 2026 WG-EAFFM meeting. Subsequently, WG-ESA will finalize the SAI analysis and the management options at its 2026 meeting and present those findings to the Scientific Council and WG-EAFFM in 2027.

In relation to the work on SAIs, a working group member questioned if information other than fishing activities will be included in the review, and the Scientific Council reported that the analysis is only considering fisheries impacts, reflecting the FAO Deep Sea Fisheries Guidelines and the information that been made available to the Scientific Council. The working group encouraged relevant Contracting Parties to provide technical expertise and information on fishery and non-fishery-based information to the Scientific Council to inform the SAI review and the development of potential management options. The working group discussed that engaging managers early in the process would be useful to inform any potential management options. Delegations were encouraged to share relevant information and to have managers potentially participate in upcoming WG-ESA meetings.

6. Ecosystem Roadmap

a. Ecosystem Roadmap Document (COM Request 5)

Mariano Koen-Alonso (Canada) provided an update on the Scientific Council response to Commission request 5 on the development of a reference document detailing the ecosystem roadmap. The Scientific Council expedited the production of a draft of the detailed document given recent challenges in communicating the roadmap outside of NAFO. The Scientific Council requested feedback from managers on the content and structure of the document, specifically whether the document delivers on managers' expectations, contains an appropriate level of detail, and otherwise flag any major issues. Contracting Parties agreed to submit additional

comments to the draft document outlined in COM-SC EAFFM-WP 25-01 to the NAFO Secretariat by 29 August 2025. The NAFO Secretariat will compile the comments received and forward them to the Scientific Council for continued discussion at the September 2025 Scientific Council meeting.

b. Ecosystem Sustainability of Catches (COM Request 1)

Mariano Koen-Alonso (Canada) provided an update on the Scientific Council response to Commission request 1 on providing annually the catch information in relation to 2TCI, including recent cumulative catch levels and a scoping of expected cumulative catch levels. The Scientific Council reported that scoped catch levels for 2025-2026 remain below the 2TCI Ecosystem Reference Point for the Grand Bank. However, piscivore guild catches in the Flemish Cap (3M) are scoped to exceed the 2TCI boundary in 2026, indicating a high risk of ecosystem overfishing. This is the first time that scoped catches are above the 2TCI. The working group, while noting that discussions would take place at the Annual Meeting, discussed some of the factors that could be contributing to the potential 2TCI and some of the assumptions in the modeling process. The working group also noted that 2TCI is a signal that both informs and reflects management decisions. The working group discussed whether the scoped catch levels warranted the development of advice or other information to the Commission but agreed that this was not necessary.

The Chair of the Scientific Council, Diana González-Troncoso (European Union) additionally raised that the Scientific Council considered that the updates on the Ecosystem Summary Sheets (ESS) were best reported along with the 2TCI information, as part of Commission Request 1, Annex A (Guidance for providing advice on Stocks Assessed). The WG-EAFFM supported the Scientific Council request that the ESS be included in Annex A of Commission Request 1, monitored annually and to be updated on a five-year cycle. Additionally, the WG-EAFFM recommends the Commission support the Scientific Council request to delay the next update of the ESS, currently scheduled for 2027, to 2028.

7. Development of Operational Objectives for the Protection of VMEs and Biodiversity in the NRA

As agreed at the 2024 WG-EAFFM meeting, the co-Chairs provided an update on the continued work towards the development of operational objectives for the protection of VMEs and biodiversity. The working group noted that NAFO has adopted and implemented several new or updated initiatives since the original request for operational objectives, such as the adoption of the revised Precautionary Approach, and the work on the document outlining the Ecosystem Roadmap. The working group discussed that these efforts may be duplicative, or may in the future, achieve the original goal of the operational objectives process. As such, the working group agreed that work on the operational objectives should be paused. The working group may revisit this work in future, if deemed necessary and appropriate by the Commission. If so, such work should take account of the implications of these other relevant efforts in NAFO.

8. Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) (COM Request 6.c)

Andrew Kenny (United Kingdom) provided an update on the Scientific Council response to Commission request 6.c on the development of materials for the potential submission of NAFO coral bottom fishing closed areas as OECMs. It was noted that the Scientific Council recommended to include the VME fisheries closures 7, 7a, 8-11, 11a, 12, 13, 14a and 14b in the next submission to the CBD Secretariat and to the UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre for inclusion in the World Database on OECMs. The working group supported the Scientific Council, with assistance from the NAFO Secretariat, in continuing its efforts to develop the materials for the OECM submission for review at the 2026 WG-EAFFM meeting.

9. Greenland Shark Bycatch

The NAFO Secretariat provided a summary of the observer data related to Greenland sharks, noting that various changes have been made to the observer reporting templates since 2019. The Scientific Council noted that it would be useful for Contracting Parties and WG-EAFFM to review [SCR Doc. 19/037](#), which provides an overview of sources of uncertainty in reported catches of Greenland shark within the NAFO Convention Area. The Scientific Council thanked the NAFO Secretariat for the presentation and work completed to date. The WG-

EAFFM reviewed and continued to support its work plan on Greenland Sharks, as approved in 2024 ([COM-SC Doc. 24-02](#)), including continuing relevant discussions at its 2026 meeting.

In line with the timeline adopted in 2024, the WG-EAFFM recommends that the Commission request Contracting Parties to provide updates on their efforts to implement the relevant provisions of the NAFO CEM, including any independent relevant research or data, in time for consideration by the Scientific Council at its June 2027 meeting and WG-EAFFM at its 2027 meeting.

10. Other Business

a. Scientific Council Workload

The Chair of the Scientific Council, Diana González-Troncoso (European Union), presented a review of the Scientific Council workplan and surrounding discussions that took place at the June 2025 Scientific Council meeting. It was flagged that Scientific Council identified a continued increase in requests from the Commission, coupled with an increase in the number of Scientific Council and working group meetings in recent years, despite a decrease in actively participating Scientific Council members, and a lack of Designated Experts and Scientific Council Chairs. It was noted that the workplan has shown a limited capacity to solve repeated concerns about the Scientific Council workload. It was also highlighted that an additional day was added to the June 2025 meeting to have dedicated discussions about the structure and function of Scientific Council. After these discussions, Scientific Council concluded that the structure of SC works well when properly resourced, however decreased capacity has prevented the Scientific Council from functioning as intended. It was also flagged that Scientific Council is deeply concerned about unfilled Chair positions for working groups and standing committees and noted that starting in September 2025 there will be three committees without Chairs (STACFEN, STACFIS and STACREC), four working groups without Chairs (WG-RBMS, WG-CESAG, PA-WG and climate change subgroup) and four Designated Expert positions vacant (3NOPs white hake, 3LNOs thorny skate, squid in Subareas 3+4 and 3LNO EPU).

The WG-EAFFM noted the dire situation with the lack of Chairs and Designated Experts, expressed the WG's strong concern, and recommended the Commission encourage Contracting Parties to find ways to ensure the positions are filled by the close of the September 2025 Annual Meeting.

b. Establishment of an ad hoc Virtual Working Group to Discuss a Potential Third NAFO Performance Review

The Chair of STACFAD, Robert Fagan (Canada), provided an update on the virtual working group that will be established to discuss the scope and timelines for the next NAFO Performance Review ([COM Doc. 24-20](#)). The virtual working group will work intersessionally to develop draft Terms of Reference and criteria for the review. The working group will present the results of its work to the Commission at the 2026 Annual Meeting with a recommendation on whether to launch the next Performance Review of NAFO, if deemed appropriate.

In preparation for the establishment of this working group, Contracting Parties will be invited to submit representatives to participate in the working group as well as any matters that should be included in the scope. The WG-EAFFM thanked the STACFAD Chair for the update.

11. Recommendations

The WG-EAFFM agreed to forward the following recommendations to the Scientific Council and the Commission for consideration and adoption at the 2025 Annual Meeting of NAFO:

- 1. In relation to discussions on the results of the climate change consultancy, the WG-EAFFM recommends that the Commission request the Scientific Council, as its workload allows, and in collaboration with the Secretariat, to draft a scoping document for a potential in-person meeting to explore approaches for further integrating information related to these issues throughout Scientific Council operations. This scoping document should identify the scientific expertise needed both within and outside Scientific Council and potential financial and workload implications.**

2. In relation to the updates of the Ecosystem Summary Sheets (ESS), the WG-EAFFM recommends the Commission support the Scientific Council request to delay the next update of the ESS, currently scheduled for 2027, to 2028.
3. In relation to the management of bycatch of Greenland sharks, the WG-EAFFM recommends that the Commission request Contracting Parties to provide updates on their efforts to implement the relevant provisions of the NAFO CEM, including any independent relevant research or data, in time for consideration by the Scientific Council at its 2027 June meeting and the WG-EAFFM at its 2027 meeting.
4. In relation to the Scientific Council's workload, WG-EAFFM notes the dire situation with the lack of Chairs and Designated Experts, expresses the WG's strong concern, and recommends the Commission encourage Contracting Parties to find ways to ensure the positions are filled by the close of the September 2025 Annual Meeting.

12. Adoption of the Report

The report was adopted via correspondence following the end of the meeting.

13. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 17:01 hours (UTC +3 hours) on Tuesday, 15 July 2025.

Annex 1. List of Participants

CO-CHAIR	Mencher, Elizabethann (United States of America)
SC CHAIR and ACTING CO-CHAIR	González Troncoso, Diana (European Union)
CANADA	In-person Byrne, Vanessa Fagan, Robert Kenchington, Ellen Koen-Alonso, Mariano Marsden, Dale Rayner, Gemma Simpson, Mark Virtual Burridge, Angela Fuller, Susanna Zegarmistrz, Justyna
DENMARK (IN RESPECT OF FAROE ISLANDS AND GREENLAND)	Virtual Wang, Ulla S.
EUROPEAN UNION	In-person Alpoim, Ricardo Blazkiewicz, Bernard Demblon, Jessica Garrido Fernández, Irene Gonçalves, Patricia Märtn, Kaire Teixeira, Isabel Tuvi, Aare Vielmini, Ilaria Virtual Belmonte, Luis Mancebo, C. Margarita
ICELAND	In-person Bragi Bragason, Agnar
JAPAN	Virtual Butterworth, Doug Morishita, Joji Taki, Kenji
NORWAY	Virtual Bakke, Gunnstein Hallfreðsson, Elvar H.
RUSSIAN FEDERATION	Virtual Fomin, Konstantin
UNITED KINGDOM	In-person Gawlyk, Joe Gibbins, Imogen Sharples, James Virtual Kenny, Andy

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	In-person Kelly, Moira Warner-Kramer, Deirdre Virtual Jaburek, Shannah
NAFO SECRETARIAT	In-person Benediktsdóttir, Brynhildur Aker, Jana LeFort, Lisa Perreault, Andrea

Annex 2. Agenda

1. Opening by the co-Chairs, Diana González-Troncoso (European Union) and Elizabethann Mencher (United States of America)
2. Appointment of Rapporteur
3. Adoption of Agenda
4. Presentation of Scientific Council responses to Commission requests for advice (COM Doc. 24-18) relevant to WG-EAFFM
5. VME and SAI Assessments
 - a. Update on the centralized data repository (COM Request 6.a)
 - b. Update on reassessment of VMEs and impact of bottom fisheries on VMEs for 2027 (COM Request 6.b)
6. Ecosystem Roadmap
 - a. Ecosystem Roadmap document (COM Request 5)
 - b. Ecosystem sustainability of catches (COM Request 1)
7. Development of operational objectives for the protection of VMEs and biodiversity in the NRA
8. Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) (COM Request 6.c)
9. Greenland shark bycatch
10. Other Business
 - a. Scientific Council workload
 - b. Establishment of an ad hoc Virtual Working Group to discuss a potential third NAFO Performance Review
11. Recommendations
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