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In all correspondence
please refer to:

NAFO/26-232

16 October 2026

TO: Scientific Council Representatives

Dear Colleagues,

Subject: Provisional Agenda – *Meeting of the Scientific Council Working Group on Ecosystem Science and Assessment (WG-ESA),* 9 – 20 November 2026

Please find enclosed the Provisional Agenda for the NAFO Scientific Council Working Group on Ecosystem Science and Assessment (WG-ESA) meeting, 9 – 20 November 2026.

The meeting will take place in a fully virtual format, with the meeting hours of 8:00 am to 12:00 pm (Halifax time) daily, to accommodate a variety of time zones. Due to the virtual format, it is important to note that the meeting dates have been expanded from the originally circulated dates of 10-19 November and will now include the 9th and 20th of November 2026. The working group will not meet during the weekend of 14-15 November 2026.

All relevant meeting documentation will be accessible on the NAFO Meetings SharePoint as it becomes available. We kindly ask for your assistance in sending delegation lists to the NAFO Secretariat to ensure SharePoint access, and the virtual meeting invitation, in advance of the meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Brynhildur Benediktsdóttir
Executive Secretary

BB:dbm
(enclosed 2 pages)

NAFO SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL (SC) WORKING GROUP ON ECOSYSTEM SCIENCE AND ASSESSMENT (WG-ESA) PROVISIONAL AGENDA

Virtual, 9-20 November 2026

Details of the meeting ToRs are given in **ANNEX 1**.

Provisional Agenda and Terms of Reference (ToRs)

1. **Opening by the Chairs, Mar Sacau (EU) and Javier Murillo (Canada)**

2. **Appointment of Rapporteur**

3. **Adoption of Agenda**

4. **Review of Annual Meeting 2026 outcomes**

5. **Commission requests for advice on management in 2027 and beyond, requiring input from WG-ESA in 2026 to be presented at the June 2027 Scientific Council meeting.**

   a) **COM Request #1 (ANNEX A: Guidance for providing advice on Stocks Assessed).**

   In relation to Tier 1 of the Roadmap Scientific Council should provide annually catch information in relation to 2TCI, including recent cumulative catch levels and a scoping of expected cumulative catch levels. Ecosystem summary sheets should be monitored annually and updated on a five-year cycle.

   b) **COM Request #5.**

   The Commission requests the Scientific Council to complete the significant adverse impact (SAI) component of the reassessment of vulnerable marine ecosystem (VME) areas in 2027. This analysis will be done in parallel to the development of objectives for VME management measures, following which it is expected that work will continue towards the development of management options. Where fishery closure options are identified as part of this reassessment, the Commission requests the Scientific Council in 2028 (after objectives are confirmed by the Commission) to provide multiple boundary options for each VME area that could inform the consideration of trade-offs between fishing activities and conservation objectives.

6. **Other Business**

7. **Date and place of next meeting**

8. **Adjournment**

ANNEX 1. WG-ESA TERMS OF REFERENCE

Please note that this schedule is provisional and subject to changes.

THEME 1: SPATIAL CONSIDERATIONS

ToR 1. Update on identification and mapping of sensitive species and habitats (VMEs) in the NAFO area*.

* *Considering that the 2026 WG-ESA meeting will be held virtually, the agenda has been designed to focus on the highest-priority topics in order to make the best use of the available meeting time. As a result, the usual update on VME indicator species data and their distribution from the EU, EU-Spain and Canadian Surveys is not included in the proposed agenda this year.*

THEME 2: STATUS, FUNCTIONING AND DYNAMICS OF NAFO MARINE ECOSYSTEMS

ToR 2. Update on recent and relevant research related to status, functioning and dynamics of ecosystems in the NAFO area.

1. Assessment of SAI [*COM. Request #5*]:

   a) SAI workplan – Introduction, Key Changes and Reporting Approach *(Andy, all)*
   b) VME species biomass layers update *(Cam & Ellen)*
   c) VME connectivity update *(Ellen)*
   d) VME climate change refugia *(Ellen)*
   e) Probability of VME occurrence *(Ellen)*
   f) Description of fisheries in the NRA *(Mar & Irene)*
   g) VMS filtered data (2010 – 2024) *(Anna & NAFO Secretariat)*
   h) Integrating VMS and logbook (haul by haul) data (2016 – 2024) *(Mar & Irene)*
   i) Demersal fisheries (update maps and tables) *(Mar & Irene)*
   j) Overlap of demersal fisheries with VMEs *(Mar & Irene)*
   k) VME impacts, resilience and recovery *(Bárbara)*
   l) VME SAI impact assessment categories (cut-off values) with maps and tables using 95% thresholds and new thresholds *(James & Andy)*
   m) SAI assessment metrics: overlapping VME polygons *(Ellen, Cam)*
   n) SAI assessment metrics: overlapping VME functional polygons *(Ellen, Cam)*
   o) SAI assessment metrics : VME fragmentation index *(Ellen)*
   p) VME closure adequacy 'consistency' index *(Mariano)*
   q) Overall assessment of SAI *(James & Andy)*
   r) Summary of SAI metrics at VME functional group and individual polygon levels *(Ellen, James, Cam, Andy)*

THEME 3: PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF ECOSYSTEM KNOWLEDGE TO FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

ToR 3. Update on recent and relevant research related to the application of ecosystem knowledge for fisheries management in the NAFO area.

1. Regular Monitoring of Ecosystem Summary Sheets (ESSs) for Divisions 3LNO and 3M [*COM. Request#1*] and development of a workplan for the 2028 ESSs update *(Mariano, Diana, Irene, etc.)*
2. Updates on the Ecosystem Production Potential (EPP)-Total Catch Index (TCI) framework [*COM. Request#1*]
3. Preliminary discussion of prioritisation frameworks as part of the reassessment of bottom fishing, in preparation for the full assessment at WG-ESA 2027 [*COM. Request #5*] *(Mariano, Javier, all)*

THEME 4: OTHER BUSINESS

1. Upcoming WG-ESA meetings: format and location