

Multilateral cooperation on fisheries management in the North-East Atlantic Ocean

The North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) is an intergovernmental fisheries management organisation responsible for fishery resources in the North-East Atlantic, particularly in international waters. As a member, the EU incorporates NEAFC decisions into Union law. In January 2024, the European Parliament's Committee on Fisheries is due to vote on a proposal to integrate the NEAFC rules into a new regulation.

Background

Fisheries in areas beyond national jurisdiction (the 'high seas') are mostly regulated by regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs) on the basis of multilateral agreements between countries with fishing interests in these waters. One such organisation is the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), whose [convention text](#) entered into force in 1982 (replacing an earlier 1959 convention). The convention area covers both international and national waters in the North-East Atlantic. The part of the area beyond national jurisdiction is called the 'regulatory area' (RA) and consists of three distinct zones (see map): RA 1 in the mid-Atlantic, RA 2 in the Norwegian Sea and RA 3 in the Barents Sea.

The contracting parties are Denmark (with respect to the Faroe Islands and Greenland), Iceland, Norway, Russia, the United Kingdom (UK) and the EU. The NEAFC does not cover Atlantic salmon, tuna or tuna-like species, as these are the responsibility of other RFMOs operating in the area: the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation ([NASCO](#)) and the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas ([ICCAT](#)).

During annual meetings, the NEAFC adopts [recommendations](#) that become binding measures once formally adopted (i.e. after the objection period). These mainly concern the NEAFC scheme, currently implemented by [EU Regulation 1236/2010](#), which determines

control and enforcement measures, including inspection and surveillance at sea, infringement procedures and port state control. Other NEAFC measures are integrated into the EU's fisheries policy through horizontal regulations: the [Control Regulation 1224/2009](#) (via Articles 54b and 54c) and the [Technical Measures Regulation 2019/1241](#) (via Chapter VI and Annex XII on technical measures in the NEAFC RA). One technical measure is still implemented under an old regulation: [Regulation 1899/85](#).

In 2022, the EU had 301 vessels authorised to operate in the NEAFC RA. Most of them are flagged to Ireland (131) or Spain (83). However, not all of these vessels are active in the area. As explained in the [Commission's 2023 Annual Economic Report on the EU Fishing Fleet](#), the granularity of the spatial data collected is not detailed enough to distinguish catches made exclusively within the RA of the convention area.

Map – NEAFC regulatory area (RA)



Source: [Published by NEAFC](#) on [Google Earth](#).



EPRS Multilateral cooperation on fisheries management in the North-East Atlantic Ocean

European Commission proposal

On 30 June 2023, the European Commission published a [proposal](#) to transpose all NEAFC measures adopted in recent years (the last transposition took place in 2019 through the Technical Measures Regulation; Regulation 1236/2010 was last amended in [2016](#)). At the same time, the Commission proposed to bring together all NEAFC measures currently covered by different regulations in a single legal act. The proposed regulation therefore repeals both Regulations 1899/85 and 1236/2010 and deletes the NEAFC provisions in the Control and Technical Measures Regulations.

The measures in force since February or March 2023 were adopted by NEAFC at its [41st annual meeting](#) in November 2022. Some of these new measures relate to the NEAFC scheme, such as the addition of deep-sea chimaera species ([Recommendation 9 2023](#)), new requirements for commercial research vessels ([Recommendation 12 2023](#)) and changes to improve the control of transshipment operations at sea ([Recommendation 11 2023](#)). Other new NEAFC measures concern fisheries management, supporting conservation. For example, the NEAFC extended the ban on bottom fishing in certain areas for a further five years, until the end of 2027, to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs), such as deep-sea corals and sponges ([Recommendation 6 2023](#)). It also added 22 species to the list of species for which discarding catches back into the sea is prohibited, repealing the previous list from 2010 ([Recommendation 10 2023](#)).

As with other RFMO transpositions, the proposal delegates powers to the Commission in order to speed up the implementation of future NEAFC measures, when they are of a technical nature.

Along with the NEAFC measures, the proposal also transposes control measures for four pelagic fisheries in the North-East Atlantic (mackerel, horse mackerel, blue whiting and herring) that were agreed through consultations outside the framework of the NEAFC (between Norway, the EU, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland and the UK). These consultations were concluded in [November 2022](#) and the measures are to be implemented by 1 January 2026. One of these measures requires the use of camera and sensor technology to monitor landing and processing facilities where more than 3 000 tonnes of these pelagic stocks are weighed each year.

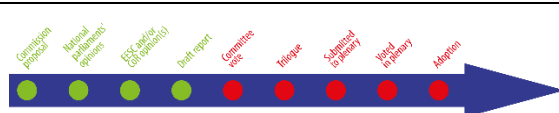
European Parliament position

The rapporteur, Francisco Guerreiro, presented his [draft report](#) to Parliament's Committee on Fisheries (PECH) on 29 November 2023. In the explanatory statement, he notes that although the Union has 301 vessels authorised to fish in the NEAFC RA, actual EU fishing activity in this area is rather limited. According to the rapporteur, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia currently conduct the most significant fishing activities in the international waters of the Barents Sea (i.e. RA 3, see map), while EU vessels from Portugal, Spain, France and the Netherlands operate to a lesser extent in the other areas of the RA. However, the vast majority of EU fishing activity in the NEAFC Convention area is concentrated in waters under national jurisdiction. The rapporteur nevertheless welcomes the proposed regulation as this transposition 'facilitates cooperation between EU Member States and international partners, reinforcing our common dedication to combat overfishing, protect vulnerable species as well as ecosystems, and maintain the long-term viability of fisheries in the North East Atlantic'.

The draft report contains five amendments, aimed at clarifying language and ensuring strict transposition. For example, with regard to the requirement to use surveillance technology in facilities where more than 3 000 tonnes of the four pelagic stocks are weighed each year, the rapporteur adds the provision that this requirement would apply only to landings of these species exceeding 10 tonnes, as provided for in the coastal states' agreement of November 2022. In addition to the amendments in the draft report, PECH members tabled [81 amendments](#).

The vote on the amendments and the adoption of the report, as well as on the decision to enter into interinstitutional negotiations, is scheduled to take place during the PECH meeting on 23 January 2024.

First-reading report: [2023/0206\(COD\)](#); Committee responsible: PECH; Rapporteur: Francisco Guerreiro (Greens/EFA, Portugal). For further information, see our ['legislative train' carriage](#) on the topic.



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