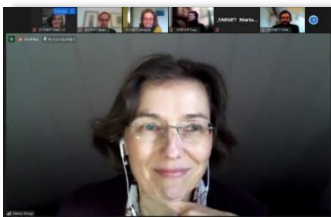


Fit for the future: Atlantic and North Sea FLAG seminar

*Report of the FARNET online seminar
for the Atlantic and North Sea FLAGs, 25-28 May 2021*

The FARNET seminar for FLAGs around the North Sea and Atlantic Sea basins was held online from 25-28 May 2021. It focused on **improving the quality and effectiveness of the activities that FLAGs undertake**, such as animation; stakeholder engagement; project development support; and transparent project selection. It was also an opportunity to exchange practices and encourage FLAG motivation for the 2021-2027 programming period. Around **80 participants from 7 Member States** took part in the seminar over the course of the four days.

Setting the scene: opening plenary



Opening the event, DG MARE Head of Unit C2 Alenka Kampl gave seminar participants information on the [priorities of the European Maritime Aquaculture and Fisheries Fund 2021-2027 \(EMFAF\)](#), which include: a sustainable blue economy for fisheries and aquaculture communities; safe, secure and clean seas and oceans; and the restoration and conservation of the marine environment. She urged FLAGs to think strategically and to reach out to their managing authorities that are preparing the programme.

The seminar theme was introduced with a [presentation from the FSU](#), followed by a video from the Brest FLAG showing an example of [FLAG work on the ground](#). Luce Demangeon, the [Brest FLAG](#) manager, stressed that, for her, the FLAG manager must above all be open-minded and available to listen; dynamism, optimism and courage are important to encourage new ideas.



Working groups: FLAGs fit for the future

(1) Planning project selection

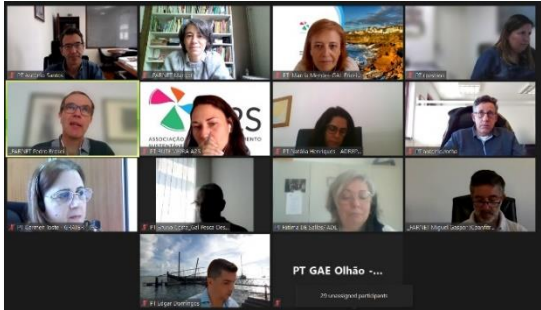
Working group discussions on project selection started with two presentations, one by the [Opale Coast FLAG](#) in France which has an [“open call” system for the whole programming period](#), allowing candidates to present projects at any time. The FLAG calls 2-3 selection committees per year, to which candidates are invited to present their projects in person to the FLAG board. [Eastern Cantabria FLAG](#), Spain, operates a [“competitive tendering” process](#), preparing and publishing a call for projects at the beginning of each year. Once the call is closed, the FLAG scores the projects against its selection criteria before organising a selection committee meeting.

Participants discussed these and other selection procedures as well as reflecting on criteria that had proven effective to prioritise projects for support. Examples of effective criteria that were highlighted included: the implication of fishers in the project; involvement of young people and women; the project’s potential to create employment (however, some participants stressed that this criterion may not be appropriate when focusing on artisanal fisheries); and the collaboration of different stakeholders in the project. Messages coming out of the discussions included the importance that selection criteria (e.g. ‘innovation’ or ‘sustainability’ of the project) were sufficiently defined to ensure that board members shared the same understanding of what these criteria were seeking to prioritise. While some FLAGs used “yes/no” criteria, others gave a score depending on the degree to which the project met the specific criteria. In certain cases,

the final score also determines the level of funding allocated to the project. It is important to ensure a flexibility for the FLAG to modify and adapt the selection criteria and procedures where needed.

FSU reminded participants that the draft Common Provisions Regulation for 2021-2027 states that it is the exclusive role of FLAGs to prepare project selection criteria and procedures, select projects and fix the amount of support granted to each project (including cooperation projects).

(2) Animation and stakeholder engagement



The aim of the second round of working groups was to develop new ideas of how FLAGs can **mobilise and animate different stakeholder groups**. After an introductory presentation by the FSU and the [example of the Ria de Pontevedra FLAG](#) from Spain, three working groups discussed which audience they want to mobilise in their areas (focusing on groups they have found difficult to reach) and how. Using these identified groups as examples, participants then discussed the different types of animation activities they can use to mobilise these groups at two

levels: at the strategy development phase, and during the project submission process. A number of actions were identified:

- For animating **small businesses**, a useful method could be finding **local ambassadors** who can act as both brokers for developing innovation and as a central point for supporting and communicating FLAG activities within the community.
- For animating groups that are harder to reach such as **fishers** or the **youth, women, or the elderly**, one proposed action was the **better incorporation** of these groups in the FLAGs decision-making board. Research has shown that increased representation of such groups at decision-making level increases participation and project proposals from these groups. Other ideas for animating youth, who can often find CLLD funding difficult, included the setting up of a special funding scheme of small grants for the preparation of projects ahead of the formal submission process.
- Animating the wider **general public** and unrelated sectors was also discussed. Ideas to improve this included FLAGs establishing contact with employment agencies and consultancy businesses in their areas, using them as ambassadors of FLAG grants and in the submitting of projects.

(3) Result orientation and monitoring of FLAG work

The theme of this session was introduced with [an example](#) from the [North East FLAG](#) from Ireland and by a FSU's presentation. During discussions, most participants agreed that their principal reasons for monitoring and evaluating not only the results of projects supported by the FLAG, but also the work of the FLAG, was the need to improve and perform better in the future. Such monitoring and evaluation should cover all the key areas of FLAG activity, from capacity building of local actors to project selection process and visibility and communication to key stakeholders and the wider public.

Key stakeholder groups that the FLAG should **ask for feedback** on their work include:

- fishers and fishing organisations,
- potential applicants (with particular attention to those contacted for the first time),
- FLAG partners/members,
- project promoters and potential (but not financed) promoters,
- other key actors (municipalities, businesses, local development agencies, environmental NGOs, etc.),
- wider community.

The participants stressed the need to get qualitative as well as quantitative feedback from these stakeholders.

Ideas for monitoring and evaluating FLAG work that came up during the discussion included:

- **surveys** (e.g. a questionnaire on FLAG visibility or quality of work)

- **interviews** and **focus groups** with different types of stakeholders
- informal **direct communication** with project promoters and other stakeholders (possibly using FLAG members as contact points)
- dedicated **meetings** (e.g. monitoring days with specific groups, “discussion dinners”)
- **peer reviews** or **peer audits** by other FLAGs (including the French system of “fresh-eye report”, exchange between neighbouring FLAG managers on specific aspects of FLAG work; however, it can be very time-consuming)
- using **external evaluators**, possibly a few FLAGs could jointly hire a consultant
- It was also pointed out that **National Networks** can be of help to FLAGs to organise evaluation and monitoring of FLAG work.

Engaging with different stakeholders

This was a session where four different stakeholders provided examples on their engagement with FLAGs.

[Lone Reppien Thomsen](#) from the Offshore Centre Bornholm (OCB) in Denmark described the cooperation with [the local FLAG](#) in making Bornholm an “energy hub island”. Since the number of active SSCF vessels in Bornholm has decreased over the past decade, services for the renewable energy sector provide many new opportunities for the area. Lone highlighted the role of the FLAG in bringing together different local businesses to service the offshore industry. The FLAG has also supported the OCB in engaging with the local stakeholders, communications and storytelling on renewable energy and wind farms.

[Sergio Miguel Leandro](#) from MARE-Polytechnic Institute of Leiria (PT) provided examples of their successful relationship with [Oeste FLAG](#) in bridging the science and innovation with sustainable development and diversification of coastal communities. The institute is a member of the FLAG, and this symbiotic and successful partnership has enabled the MARE Polytechnic to establish close linkages with the community, making research and innovation an integral part of the local strategy.

[Jorge Saez Jimenez](#) from the Spanish association for coastal communities development Soldecocos, presented a project this organisation implements jointly with WWF Spain on biodiversity and ecosystem preservation and involving fishing communities in co-management of Natura 2000 sites. Collaboration with the [Cadiz Estrecho FLAG](#) was essential to coordinate and engage the various stakeholders in the area and no other NGO could do this work so efficiently.

Finally, [Yann Louboutin](#) from the Fil & Fab start-up company (FR) explained the development of the first French recycling network for old fishing nets. With a grant from the [Brest FLAG](#) and support to find a work space, Fil & Fab was able to invest in the equipment required for these processes and create a successful company. The FLAG has also put it in touch with other FLAGs around France, allowing the start-up to scale-up its activities beyond its local area.

Atlantic and North Sea initiatives and networking session

The seminar offered FLAGs an opportunity to get acquainted with two initiatives focusing mainly on the EU Atlantic coast:



[BlueBio Alliance](#), a network for marine bioresources & blue biotechnology based in Portugal, presented by Raquel Gaião Silva. The network provides support to SMEs and startups using bioresources for food, feed, fuel, fertiliser, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, or textiles in an innovative way.



[INTERREG Atlantic Area Programme](#), presented by Morgane Lesage, Director at the Joint Technical Secretariat in Porto. The programme supports cooperation among EU regions located along the European Atlantic coast. Nearly half of these projects are linked with fisheries, aquaculture, or maritime policy.

These presentations were followed by a one-hour session to promote good practice **exchange and networking** between participant FLAGs, as well as encouraging cooperation among Atlantic and North Sea basins. Themes were selected based on participant interest and included promoting coastal villages/routes; recycling fishing nets; promoting local fisheries products; generational renewal; adapting to Brexit; new developments in aquaculture; and managing waste (shells) from shellfish activities. Discussion in breakout rooms was led by FLAG representatives.

Concluding session



In her concluding comments, FSU Team Leader [Monica Veronesi](#) encouraged FLAGs to get started with their preparation of the next period. In addition to reflecting on new challenges and objectives, they should discuss with the MAs on common indicators most appropriate for their strategies and design selection criteria and support activities to obtain

maximum impact. She also pointed out the importance of building partnerships within the FLAG area, as well as cooperation with other FLAGs and exploiting the potential of digital solutions.

Thematic Focus Groups

The seminar agenda included four focus groups on themes selected by participants at registration

Renewable energies in the marine space

Adopted in November 2020, the EU's strategy for offshore renewable energy lays out plans that would make offshore wind the leading source of energy in Europe by 2040. This focus group was introduced by [Xavier Guillou](#), from DG MARE, who pointed to a **five-fold increase in offshore wind capacity, foreseen by 2030** (up to 60 GW), increasing to 300 GW by 2050. FLAGs and other stakeholders explored how to ensure their local communities are equipped to face such a dramatic transition.

On the island of Bornholm (Denmark), for example, the [FLAG](#) has supported the launch of a network of **small businesses that are servicing the offshore sector** and hope that, in the future, the wind farms in their area might also be combined with the breeding of fish. Other FLAGs indicated that they could play a role in raising awareness about this growing sector and **bringing together different stakeholders to encourage collaboration** and minimise conflicts.

Participants also discussed the potential of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors to transition to renewables themselves. A number of FLAGs have supported projects in this area including the development and installation of [tidal turbines in oyster farms](#), the electricity of which is also being trialled for powering an oyster barge ([Auray and Vannes FLAG](#), France). Other projects mentioned included: a **solar powered fishing boat**; methane production from mussel waste; and the use of renewables to power the land operations of different fishing organisations. Other FLAGs were supporting local tourist operators to move to renewables and/or reduce their energy consumption.

Algae opportunities

Seaweed are a resource relatively unexploited in EU. With their positive carbon and environmental impact, algae and derived products are potential help for transitioning to a greener economy. FLAGs have supported projects on algae harvesting, production and processing for food, cosmetics, feed, fertilizers, etc., especially in the Atlantic and North Sea areas (see the [FSU survey on FLAG Support to Algae Production, 2020](#)).

Initiatives linked with the algae sector in the Atlantic and North Sea basins were presented by [Franck Hennequart](#), Director for Research & Innovation at [ALGAIA](#) and Associate Director [SEANEO](#). The presentation

highlighted a strong research and development potential of this sector in the EU, with a noticeable shift in algae production from very small companies to strong SMEs as consumers are willing to eat more environmentally friendly food. Nevertheless, the strong competition for space in coastal areas limits the development of the algae sector. The discussion covered a number of technical and organisational issues of algae-related activities, with stakeholder identification and networking mentioned among the key challenges. FLAGs can play a role in addressing those challenges, and also in raising awareness about the health and environmental benefits of algae cultivation.

Tackling Marine Litter



Although relatively few FLAG projects linked to marine litter have been identified so far, this theme is common to many fisheries areas and covers a wide range of activities, from involving fishermen in the fishing for litter to its collection and recycling, as well as raising awareness to prevent abandoned fishing nets and other pollution.

Catherine Barrett from the Irish Seafood Development Agency BIM shared a [video of an EMFF-supported initiative](#) involving fishermen in taking ashore waste found in the sea. [Nils Möllmann](#) from the German Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU) told the story of 10 years of their fishing for litter initiative, from providing fishermen with bags for litter and organising containers for waste collection, to analysis of the items collected and finding ways to dispose or recycle. Communication and awareness-raising were of key importance to involve fishers in this action. This [initiative was supported](#) by the Lower Saxon North Sea Coast FLAG. Contributors included also Marisa Fernandez from the technology centre CETMAR (ES) running the [CLEANATLANTIC](#) Interreg project, and Mike Manaart from [KIMO International](#), a network of local governments and other actors working together for cleaner seas since the 1990s.

Challenges identified in the discussion:

- finding funding for such activities, from both public and private sources (in the German example some funding came from special postage stamps),
- making sure fishers stay motivated in the long term (also between projects),
- avoiding additional workload for fishers (e.g., sorting the waste on-board), ensuring that containers in the harbours are located as close as possible etc.,
- ensuring an integrated waste management approach.

Artisanal fishers in future FLAGs



The session focused on the challenges of the small-scale coastal fisheries (SSCF) in the Atlantic and North Sea basins. Brian O'Riordan from the [Low Impact Fishers Europe](#) opened the session by providing an overview of new EU policy initiatives (Green Deal, Farm to Fork, Biodiversity Strategy, Control Regulation) and

highlighting several issues related to the viability of the SSCF sector, including challenges in access to markets and quota species. He also stressed that SSCFs continue to provide the majority of fishing livelihoods in the EU and FLAGs can support e.g., direct sales to help fishers to connect with the consumers, or promote electronic logbooks and other electronic systems of data gathering.

Arantza Murillas from [AZTI](#) presented the [CabFishman](#) project aimed at improving the protection of the marine environment and marine resources in the Northeast Atlantic. By engaging SSCF and facilitating a collaborative approach, the project seeks to establish an ecosystem-sensitive approach to management of small-scale fisheries in the area. Veronica Diaz from [Mariña-Ortegal FLAG](#) and Rita Pestana from [Sotavento-Algarve FLAG](#), provided examples on their support towards SSCF sector in Spain and Portugal. The discussion

concluded that the blue economy and new EMFAF 2021-2027 programming period will provide many opportunities for the SSCF sector and FLAGs could play an important role in many areas, especially in value chain creation and digitalisation.