

## ICES Request form

Request from	<b>European Commission, DG MARE, Unit C1</b>
Contact within organisation	
Content contact person	
Request announced	
Request received	<b>4<sup>th</sup> November 2025</b>
Answer deadline client	<b>Date for ICES to make an offer; usually 4-6 weeks after announcement</b>
Request code (client)	<b>25_05 – VMEs</b>
Request code (ICES)	
Request	<b>Special request to ICES in relation to Deliverable 1.1.6 (VMEs)</b>
<p><b>Request to ICES:</b></p> <p>In the context of DG MARE-ICES Specific Grant Agreement and its deliverable 1.1.6 (VMEs), DG MARE would like to request ICES for a state of play with regard to “<i>new and updated science and data reported to ICES</i>” as well as “<i>methodological developments</i>” in recent scientific work such as -but not limited to - the following, if relevant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Quantitative estimates of contact with seafloor habitats by longline trap and hook fishing gear” by Doherty et al., published in February 2025 in the ICES Journal of Marine Science, Vol. 82, Issue 3, March 2025, fsaf026, <a href="https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fsaf026">https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fsaf026</a></li> <li>- “Assessing the effects of the static gears, gillnets and longlines, on benthic habitats” by Fernández-Arcaya et al., presented to the ICES Working Group on Deep-water ecology (WGDEC) in March 2025, and undergoing publication in the ICES Journal of Marine Science.</li> </ul> <p>In doing so, it should examine whether there are new elements in the the above documents and in other recent scientific work which would help establish a specific methodology to calculate a metrics for static gears’ impact(s), including – but not limited to – “Piedra-bola” longline gear on the seabed in general and on VMEs in particular.</p> <p>In light of previous ICES advice on VMEs (2021, 2023, 2024), ICES should establish whether it is possible to determine a Swept Area Ratio, the proportion of the area of the seabed which is contacted by the fishing gear in relation to the total surface area of the C-square, or an equivalent alternative metrics relevant for static gears at the level of C-square, to estimate the fishing intensity or pressure exerted on VMEs by static gears including – but not limited to – “Piedra-bola”.</p> <p>This undertaking should be made in light of the objective of the Deep-sea Access Regulation (EU)2016/2336 to avoid “significant adverse impacts” on VMEs within the framework of deep-sea fishing operated by bottom gears, deployed in the normal course of action.</p> <p>It is recalled that according to the relevant EU Regulations ((EC) No 734/2008 and (EU)2016/2336):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-“Significant adverse impacts” means impacts (evaluated individually, in combination or cumulatively) which compromise ecosystem integrity in a manner that impairs the ability of affected populations to replace themselves and that degrades the long-term natural productivity of habitats, or causes on more than a temporary basis significant loss of species richness, habitat or community types. Those SAI are determined according to the criteria of the FAO International Guidelines for the management of Deep-sea fisheries (2009), points 17 to 20.</li> <li>- “Bottom gears” means gears deployed in the normal course of fishing operations in contact with the seabed, including bottom trawls, dredges, bottom-set gill nets, bottom-set longlines, pots and traps.</li> <li>- “VMEs” indicators are listed in Annex III of the Deep-sea Access Regulation (EU)2016/2336.</li> </ul> <p>While ICES has decided to hold workshops in 2025, 2026 and a benchmark in 2027, the Commission would welcome a swift reply on this special request.</p>	

Planning ICES	<p>In answering the request ICES will develop a methodological approach that is informed by the recent work in this area.</p> <p>The steps will include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A review of recent literature.</li> <li>2. An outline of methodological options to i) define a SAR equivalent for static gears. 3. Distillation of data requirements for options outlined in step 2</li> <li>4. Review workshop for steps 1 – 3 (including external peer review of outputs)</li> <li>5. Advice drafting group and Web Conference.</li> <li>6. Advice release</li> </ol> <p>Other relevant info</p> <p>This proposal is for developing a methodology and not for calculating any metric itself. The review and method presented in this advice will also contribute to a wider process leading to the 2027 VME benchmark. It is expected to involve a data call for data required to test and/or apply the method, opening in spring 2026, along with a workshop provisionally planned for late 2026. We would very much welcome the support of the EC to encourage national engagement in the data call and in the subsequent workshop.</p>
Request (budget) accepted	
ICES contact person	
WG(s) involved	WGSFD, WGDEC, WGFTFB, WGFBIT. In addition, a 1.5-day workshop (split into three half days) to be held online in early May 2026.
Preparation timing	We note that one of the 2 scientific publications mentioned in the request are still undergoing review and if not in the public domain it will not be feasible for us to review.
Review group	Late May 2026
Advice drafting group	22-26 June 2026
ACOM Webex	1 September 2026
Release date	10 September 2026