Interreg
Atlantic Area

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Smart4Sea

WP2 – Guidelines for Focus Groups

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1. Purpose and role of focus groups in WP2

1.1 Why are we doing focus groups?

Focus groups are the core action in the project Work Package 2 (WP2), together with the pilot tests. This action will allow partners to gather information regarding the project's topics, such as traceability, transparency, value chain, and supply chain from stakeholders.

This activity can also be seen as a dissemination action where we introduce the project and share the objectives/results expected to be achieved.

The information gathered through the focus groups should not only be used for the purpose of the WP2 actions, but also in the rest of the project's Work Packages (see 1.3).

1.2 What type of information will be gathered?

Below is a list of topics to be addressed through the focus groups to gather relevant information for the rest of the project. Depending on the chosen format, several topics could be addressed during one focus group.

1. Awareness and perception of environmental traceability
2. Barriers and conditions for adoption of digital traceability
3. Expectations and influence on purchasing decisions

A common list of questions will be suggested to harmonize the answers throughout the consortium once the topic is chosen. The chosen topic must be the same for every focus group.

The list below is non-exhaustive.

1.3 Link with the rest of the project

Focus Group Topic	WP1 – Environmental traceability of fish and seafood products	WP2 – Consumer Perception of environmental traceability tools through pilot cases	WP3 – Main challenges of the Atlantic seafood sector	WP4 – From research to plate: connecting science with sustainable seafood
1. Awareness and perception of environmental traceability	- Assess understanding of environmental indicators - Identify gaps in comprehension of traceability concepts - Evaluate perceived credibility of environmental data	- Establish baseline of awareness and perception - Identify key misunderstandings to address - Measure level of trust in environmental information	- Highlight differences in awareness across stakeholder groups - Identify structural knowledge gaps in the sector	- Define key messages to improve understanding - Adapt communication to target audiences' knowledge level
2. Barriers and conditions for adoption of digital traceability	- Identify technical and operational constraints - Assess willingness to share and manage data - Define usability requirements for digital tools	- Evaluate acceptance of digital solutions - Identify perceived complexity or resistance factors - Define conditions for user engagement	- Identify economic, regulatory and organisational barriers - Highlight sector-specific constraints and needs	- Anticipate resistance to adoption - Define communication strategies to support uptake - Support recommendations for scaling up
3. Expectations and influence on purchasing decisions	- Assess relevance of integrating environmental indicators into products - Identify which data should be prioritised in the system	- Evaluate impact of environmental information on consumer behaviour - Identify preferred formats (labels, scores, digital tools) - Measure influence on purchasing decisions	- Identify market opportunities linked to environmental traceability - Assess potential for product differentiation	- Support value proposition and market positioning - Define communication strategies targeting consumers - Strengthen arguments for wider adoption

2. Target stakeholders and rationale

Which stakeholders will be engaged?

For these focus groups, 3 types of stakeholders would be interesting to engage: direct actors (companies, cooperatives, professionals), consumers, and eventually institutional actors (public authorities, professional chambers…).

- Direct actors:
  - Fishing companies/fishermen
  - Primary producers
  - Processors
  - Fish wholesalers
  - Industrial companies
  - Retailers/resellers
  - Distributors
  - Restaurants

How many people will participate in focus groups?

Between 12 and 18 participants. More participants would be complicated to moderate/engage and would complicate the discussion. The ideal number of participants would be 15. Keep in mind that the nature of stakeholders must be diversified to have different points of view/opinions.

How do stakeholders should be engaged/selected?

To efficiently engage stakeholders to participate in focus groups, specific channels will be used:

1. Direct contact – Contacting directly stakeholders known by partners that could be interested in attending this event is a first way of engaging people. Sending an invitation by email can also be a solution to invite people directly, even though it might be less attractive if the mail sent is the same for everyone.
2. Survey – Launching a survey is another way of engaging stakeholders. The survey offers two opportunities: 1) to gather more information that can be used during the focus groups. The data will be more quantitative, but it is a way to introduce the project to a larger audience and gather some opinions; 2) to start engaging stakeholders into focus groups. At the end of the survey, asking if the person answering the survey is interested in being contacted to attend focus groups is a second way of attracting people.
3. Smart4Sea LinkedIn account – Even though the LinkedIn account of Smart4Sea is not followed by a lot of people now, it is a must to communicate through the social media about the focus groups. First, the LinkedIn account could be used to disseminate the survey, and then the invitation to attend the different regional focus groups.
4. Partners' network – Each partner should also communicate through their own network, either via emailing a specific database, but also through their own communication channels: LinkedIn account (or any other social network), newsletters, website articles, agenda…
5. As part of other events – Organizing focus groups in parallel to other events linked to the Smart4Sea thematic is a way of engaging easily stakeholders and reaching a large audience by communicating via the event's communication (if possible).

Engaging stakeholders for a 2-3h session may be difficult if the session is done alone, unless it is very interesting for stakeholders to attend the focus groups.

How many focus groups will be conducted?

Two rounds of focus groups will be organized throughout the project. The first one will be in 2026, and the second will be in 2027.

At least one focus group must be organized in each country in 2026. In each country, the consortium partners must decide who is responsible for organizing the focus group.

If some partners want to organize more focus groups, they are more than welcome to do it. But pay attention to the time it takes to organize such a session.

3. Common methodological framework

Format of the focus groups

"World café"

The "World café" method could be used as it is designed to create a safe, welcoming environment which intentionally connects multiple ideas and perspectives on a topic by engaging participants in several rounds of small-group conversations. The methodology used is the following:

- Divide the participants into tables with max. 7p, the ideal number is 5p per table, with 1 animator who will follow continuously & moderate the discussion,
- Prepare in advance questions (from indicative list below) according to the number of tables),
- For every question, you need 5 minutes at least,
- The host of each table/question will take 5-10 min to conclude the discussion,
- Final wrap-up & Q/A session.

Common list of questions

Table 1: Awareness and perception of environmental traceability

1. Opening question – how would you define environmental traceability of marine products?
   Expected answer: 2 – 3 words per participant + explanations (not written)
2. What environmental traceability information do you currently look for (e.g., origin, fishing method, carbon footprint)? Where do you find it?
   Expected answer: 2 – 3 information
3. What tools (labels, apps, certifications) do you use to access this information? What do you think of them?
   Expected answer: up to 3 labels per participant + opinions
4. What additional information would help you better assess the environmental impact of seafood?
   Expected answer: max. 10 information + explanations (not written)

Table 2: Barriers and conditions for adoption of digital traceability

5. What is your experience with digital tools for seafood traceability (e.g., QR codes, apps, or online platforms)? Do you use them? Why or why not? Overall, do you consider these tools useful for ensuring the traceability of seafood products? Please explain.
   Expected answer: Current use (Yes/No + examples + reasons) and perceived usefulness (Yes/No + reasons).
6. What are the main barriers to the adoption of digital traceability tools by consumers, and what would motivate them to use these tools more?
   Expected answer: list and rank up to 10 barriers and 10 motivations
7. Who should promote or facilitate access to these tools? (e.g., governments, retailers, producers)
   Expected answer: 2 – 3 information + explanations (not written)
8. How willing would you be to share data about your activities (production, sales, consumption) to support a shared traceability platform?
   Expected answer: ranking on a scale of 1 to 5

Table 3: Expectations and influence on purchasing decisions

9. Do environmental factors (e.g., origin, fishing method) influence your purchasing decisions?
   Expected answer: yes / no, share examples
10. What environmental criteria are most important to you when buying seafood?"
    a. species specification
    b. carbon footprint
    c. water footprint
    d. country of origin
    e. production method (fisheries or aquaculture)
    f. detailed information on the production methods (type of fishing gear or aquaculture system intensity)
    g. sustainability certification
    h. sustainability rating

    Expected answer: chose max. 5 + rank them
11. Do you easily find this information when purchasing seafood? If not, how would you like to access it?
    Expected answer: on a scale of 1 to 5 (taking into account the opinions of each participant) + examples
12. Would you pay more for a product with guaranteed environmental traceability? If yes, up to what % premium?
    Expected answer: yes – no, give a percentage of price

Length

The focus group should last around 2h to 2h30. A longer session would be less efficient.

The length of the session is up to each partner. As long as enough information is gathered during the focus groups, partners are free regarding the length.

The reason partners are free is because the session may not be arranged at the same time/place or in the same context. If partners decide to organize this event as part of a bigger event, the session may be shorter regarding the time given.

Standard structure/organization

Depending on the format chosen, the standard structure may vary.

Standard structure:

1. Welcome participants – prepare coffee, catering…
2. Presentation of the project
3. Ice-breaker to engage participants
   (division of the participants into small groups depending on the format)
4. Beginning of the focus group
   a. 3 tables would be set up, each one focusing on one of the three thematic blocks listed above.
   b. Each table would last around 20 minutes.
   c. Participants would then rotate with other tables to contribute to all topics.
5. Wrap up of the work done
6. The animateur sums up/concludes the focus groups.

This structure is non-exhaustive.

Speakers/Moderator

Subcontracting a speaker/moderator is recommended (but not mandatory) for the animation of the focus groups. Having an expert or experienced speaker in such an activity is a plus. Since the objective is to get insights/opinions from participants, it is important to make them feel comfortable talking, and the session must proceed as smoothly as possible.

The moderator can also be from the consortium/structure organizing the focus groups.

It is also recommended that the partners include note takers in each group, to facilitate the reporting after the session.

Specific equipment/logistics to prepare

Some specific equipment may be used for the proceeding of the session/the reporting.

1. Room rental is important if the partners prefer to use a specific place. Keep in mind that the more welcoming the place is, the better the result will be and the more comfortable participants will feel. A calm and quiet room is a plus.
2. Catering is a plus. Preparing coffee breaks with drinks and food would create a nicer atmosphere.
3. TV screen should be available as well for the presentation of the Smart4Sea project.