

Understand the EU's decision-making process. Part 2

The concepts of public participation in decision-making, and consultation of interested and affected stakeholders, have an important place in EU governance. Consultation is a process through which the Commission collects opinions and views from citizens and stakeholders about its policies in line with Treaty obligations.

The Commission consults interested parties such as non-governmental organizations, local authorities and representatives of industry and civil society. Groups of experts give advice on technical issues. In this way, the Commission ensures that legislative proposals correspond to the needs of those most concerned.

Stakeholder consultation can take various forms and can be implemented through different consultation methods (open public, targeted etc.) and tools (documents, questionnaires, surveys, hearings etc.) The type of stakeholder consultation required and the consultation intensity will thereby differ depending on the proposal under consideration.

The running of stakeholder consultation is decentralised to the Commission service responsible for respective initiative. In some cases, external consultants can support or even conduct the consultation work, but the lead service remains responsible for the scope and objectives of the consultation, its process, outcome, and the fulfilment of the minimum standard requirements, where these apply.

Because the EU's decisions affect the lives of millions, it is vital that the decision-making process is transparent and that citizens can have their say on legislation or policy being considered by the EU institutions. To ensure transparency:

- The official website for the EU, Europa, provides an open portal through which everyone can access information about the EU, including the EU's official documentation, summaries of EU legislation, and the Commission's Work Programme.
- The Council broadcasts live press conferences, public meetings and debates, and the European Parliament broadcasts its meetings live via its own video service.

The EC is divided into departments called Directorates-General (DG). DG MARE (Maritime Affairs and Fisheries) delivers the EC's political priorities in the areas of fisheries and maritime law and affairs. The mission of DG MARE is "To steer, in close relationship with stakeholders at regional and European level, the development and implementation of the Integrated Maritime Policy and to manage the Common Fisheries Policy with a view to promote the sustainable development of maritime activities as well as the sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources within and beyond Community waters"

Consultation of Advisory Councils

Advisory Councils consist of representatives from fishing and aquaculture organisations, plus interest groups such as environmental and consumer NGOs, covering a number of geographical areas and fields of competence. Under the previous CFP, Member States and the European Commission were

able to consult Regional Advisory Councils in order to seek the input of their members on a variety of matters. However, there was no obligation to do so. The new Common Fisheries Policy strengthens their role, making it a duty for Member States and the Commission to consult Advisory Councils under certain circumstances, and elaborating on the process to be followed for this consultation expressly requiring, for example, that their advice must be taken into account.