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From: Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine DEPREZ, Director

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To: Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union

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Delegations will find attached document COM(2026) 271 final.

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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN  
PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL**

**Sustainable fishing in the EU: state of play and orientations for 2027**

{SWD(2026) 145 final}

# 1. Introduction

The goal of the common fisheries policy (CFP) is to ensure that fishing activities are managed through an ecosystem-based approach to be environmentally sustainable in the long-term and are managed in a way that is consistent with the objectives of achieving economic, social and employment benefits, and of contributing to the availability of food supplies<sup>1</sup>.

The number of fish stocks being fished at maximum sustainable yield levels has been increasing<sup>2</sup>. This shows that the efforts of the EU fisheries sector are contributing to the policy's long-term goals, as short term benefits risk deteriorating the state of the stocks and with that the prospects of the future generation of fishers. At the same time, while factors other than fisheries continue to affect fish stocks<sup>3456</sup>, fishing is still a major factor affecting fishing mortality and must be limited if all stocks are to recover to the benefit of current and future generation of fishers.

The Commission's comprehensive evaluation of the CFP Regulation<sup>7</sup> highlights the fact that generally speaking, fishing mortality is falling. However, the conservation status of the stocks in terms of biomass has not improved as expected overall, despite some positive signals at regional level. Insufficient adjustment of fishing capacity to fish stocks in certain fleet segments combined with reduced landings in several sea basins, continues to weigh on incomes and undermines long-term profitability. This is being further aggravated by volatile fuel prices, with the decarbonisation ambitions of fleet business models still lagging behind. Additionally, the slower recovery of fish stocks is hampering the medium- and long-term profitability of the fishing sector.

Minimising negative impacts of fishing on the marine environment, its habitats and species must continue in order to safeguard the very basis of fisheries prosperity. The Marine Action Plan<sup>8</sup>, of February 2023, while non-binding, continues to be relevant in that regard, including through exploiting synergies between the common fisheries policy and the environmental legislation.

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<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1954/2003 and (EC) No 1224/2009 and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 2371/2002 and (EC) No 639/2004 and Council Decision 2004/585/EC (OJ L 354, 28.12.2013, p. 22, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2013/1380/oj>).

<sup>2</sup> [Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries \(STECF\) - Monitoring the Performance of the Common Fisheries Policy \(STECF-Adhoc-26-01\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Changes in Phytoplankton Biomass and Zooplankton Abundance](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Concentrations of Dissolved Oxygen Near the Seafloor](#)

<sup>5</sup> [State of the Baltic Sea 2023](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Mediterranean Quality Status Report - The state of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast from 2018-2023](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Commission evaluation shows slow progress in fishing sustainability and ongoing challenges](#)

<sup>8</sup> [COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS EU Action Plan: Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries \(COM/2023/102 final\)](#)

The evaluation also points out that there have been fewer job losses than expected in the fishing sector since the 2013 CFP reform. At the same time, the average wage in the sector has not increased at the rate expected, although some fleet segments have seen significant wage increases thanks to an improvement in the state of stocks and optimised business models.

These are some of the key findings that will form the basis for developing the upcoming Vision 2040 for the fisheries and aquaculture sector.<sup>9</sup> Overall, we need to improve the socio-economic situation of fishers, including small scale fishers, by making the sector more profitable, capable of investing in fleet modernisation and energy transition. This, in turn, will support the attractiveness of the sector with new generations. It is also important to render the landing obligation more effective.

This communication reports on progress in achieving maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and on the state of the EU fishing fleet, and provides information on the socio-economic performance of EU fisheries, as well as on the implementation of the landing obligation. In doing so, the communication describes the path towards achieving fishing opportunities in line with MSY objectives to ensure a competitive, resilient and sustainable fishing sector in the context of discussions on the EU legal framework.

## 2. Progress in achieving maximum sustainable yield

In its annual report, the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) updated the information available on fish stocks<sup>10</sup>. The report shows that EU fisheries continue to progress towards compliance with MSY targets. The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission must continue to build on the strong scientific basis and governance already established.

While progress is being made through quota and effort management decisions, these alone cannot ensure the sustainability of fish stocks and relevant stakeholders must do their part to tackle the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution increasingly affecting all our sea basins. The health of the marine ecosystem, also highlighted in the European Ocean Pact<sup>11</sup>, and rising sea temperatures are also having an impact. Member States must also provide data to ensure that scientific advice builds on the best possible foundation.

In 2024, the ecoregions of the **Baltic Sea**, **Celtic Sea** and **Greater North Sea** continued the trend towards reducing average fishing pressure to sustainable levels (from 49%, 48% and 73% above the target levels for fishing mortality consistent with achieving MSY ( $F_{MSY}$ ) respectively in 2003, to 39%, 40% and 5% below  $F_{MSY}$  target in 2023)<sup>12</sup>. For the Bay of Biscay, fishers have made significant efforts to manage fish stocks sustainably. Their efforts have led to fisheries

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<sup>9</sup> [Fisheries and aquaculture – Vision 2040](#)

<sup>10</sup> [STECF Monitoring the Performance of the Common Fisheries Policy \(STECF-Adhoc-26-01\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> [COM/2025/281 final](#)

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed analysis of  $F_{MSY}$  and the biomass state of fish stocks in all sea basins, see Section 1 of the accompanying staff working document.

being managed in line with MSY for several years now, as shown by the 2022 STECF report<sup>13</sup>. However, despite decreasing fishing pressure and efforts made by the fishers, more stocks seem unable to achieve an increase in biomass, which may be linked to other issues such as misreporting. This reinforces the need for a stock rebuilding trajectory to increase fishers' income and to limit the yearly fluctuations in fishing quotas.

After a number of years of progress, 2024 saw a slight increase in  $F_{MSY}$  in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian waters and for widely distributed stocks. While on average there have been improvements in fishing mortality in the North-East Atlantic, Baltic Sea and Celtic Sea, different stocks are trending in different directions with some improvements in stocks masking deteriorating stocks. Additionally, both recruitment and biomass are showing signs of decreasing. In the North-East Atlantic all indicators except  $F_{MSY}$  are trending downwards, giving cause for concern.

The **Mediterranean and Black Seas** are home to multispecies fisheries with many stocks shared with non-EU countries. The fishing mortality rate is approaching sustainable levels for some stocks, with 35 (53% of stocks assessed) having reached  $F_{MSY}$  in 2022. However, many stocks are still being fished above sustainable levels. Action must continue to reduce fishing mortality and reach the MSY objective, in particular through the Western Mediterranean multiannual management plan<sup>14</sup> ('West Med MAP') and the 2030 strategy of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM).

## 2.1 Fishing opportunities in 2026

Fishing opportunities are an important instrument in sustainable fisheries management. In the **Atlantic Ocean, Baltic Sea and Skagerrak/Kattegat**, fishing opportunities are mainly set as catch limits, also known as total allowable catches (TACs). In the **Western Mediterranean**, due to mixed fisheries management, fishing opportunities are set mainly in terms of fishing effort through number of days at sea and are supplemented by catch limits for certain stocks and gear. In the **other Mediterranean subregions and the Black Sea**, fishing opportunities - consisting of effort and catch limits - rely on binding decisions taken at regional level in the GFCM.

The stocks in the **Baltic Sea** also remain under pressure from sources other than fisheries, which have led to ecosystem failure and degraded biodiversity. While there have been positive developments for a number of stocks in the **North-East Atlantic**, the Baltic Sea fisheries need to set a trajectory for rebuilding stocks in order to improve the socio-economic situation of fishers and reduce the year-to-year fluctuations.

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<sup>13</sup> [Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries \(STECF\) - Monitoring of the performance of the Common Fisheries Policy \(STECF-Adhoc-22-01\)](#)

<sup>14</sup> Regulation (EU) 2019/1022 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 establishing a multiannual plan for the fisheries exploiting demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean Sea and amending Regulation (EU) No 508/2014 (OJ L 172, 26.6.2019, p. 1, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2019/1022/oj>).

The Commission and eight Baltic Sea Member States issued a joint statement<sup>15</sup> on the urgent need to rebuild fisheries in the Baltic Sea at the time when the Council reached a political agreement on fishing opportunities for 2026. They agreed on the need to request the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) to provide in its annual stock-specific catch advice, scenarios to rebuild the fish stocks concerned to the required biomass levels within different timeframes<sup>16</sup>. Such advice should take into account the biological characteristics of the stocks and show different catch levels for the respective rebuilding phase<sup>17</sup>. A similar approach should be taken in the North-East Atlantic for those fisheries that would benefit from setting a trajectory for rebuilding stocks so that fishers can enjoy an improved socio-economic situation and derive a better income from their fishing activities.

Regarding the **Western Mediterranean Sea**, the rules of the permanent phase of the West Med MAP for demersal stocks have applied since 1 January 2025, with the objective of reaching and maintaining MSY. Based on the best available scientific advice, the Commission also proposed for 2026 further reductions in effort for trawlers and longliners, as well as catch limits for deep-water shrimps and hake caught by netters. To promote sustainable good practices and help stock recovery, the Commission proposed to further enhance in 2026 the compensation mechanism established in the Western Mediterranean since 2022 to encourage further voluntary measures, such as increased selectivity and closure areas, entitling vessels to recover fishing days within the limit of the overall fishing effort set out for 2025. However, the Commission objected to the political agreement reached at the AGRIFISH Council in December 2025, as the political agreement did not follow the Commission's proposal, which was based on the scientific advice. The Commission is concerned about the impact implementing measures will have on the trajectories of stock recovery in this sea basin. EU funding remains available to support the sector's transition to more sustainable practices prescribed under the compensation scheme, in particular in the context of volatile fuel prices, which threaten further the fleets' business model.

Through the fishing opportunities set for 2026, the EU has continued to implement related measures stemming from the GFCM multiannual plans (MAPs), as well as the newly agreed GFCM decisions for small pelagic and demersal stocks in the Adriatic, and for turbot and sprat in the Black Sea.

## 2.2 Agreements with Norway, the United Kingdom and other coastal States

For around 120 TACs managed bilaterally with the UK or Norway, and trilaterally with these two countries, timely agreements were reached between the EU and those countries for 2026 based on the best available scientific advice, while taking into account socio-economic

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<sup>15</sup> [Statements to the proposal for a Council Regulation fixing the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks applicable in the Baltic Sea for 2026 and amending Regulation \(EU\) 2025/202 as regards certain fishing opportunities](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Agreement reached on 2026 fishing opportunities for the Baltic Sea](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Commission leads efforts to tackle Baltic Sea fisheries and environmental challenges](#)

considerations. Most TACs were set in line with MSY where advice was available. ICES issued zero-catch advice for eight stocks. For these stocks, the parties agreed low bycatch TACs to avoid choking situations in mixed fisheries. For Celtic Sea herring, the EU and the UK agreed to set a scientific monitoring TAC for 2026 in line with ICES advice.

In the EU-UK bilateral consultations, scientific advice for the Celtic Sea, Irish Sea and English Channel indicated that several key stocks – including cod, haddock, whiting, sole and plaice – had fallen below safe biological limits, affecting their recovery and leading to reductions in fishing opportunities. In response, the EU and the UK agreed on a range of remedial measures aimed at improving stock conditions, including enhanced gear selectivity, larger mesh sizes and mandatory selective devices in Nephrops fisheries. Work under the EU-UK Specialised Committee on Fisheries played an important role in supporting these outcomes.

For trilaterally managed stocks in the North Sea, most stocks shared between the EU, Norway and the UK are showing a positive trend. For 2026, the parties agreed TACs for all stocks in line with MSY advice or agreed long-term management strategies. They also adopted measures to support the recovery of Northern Shelf cod, including revised seasonal closures and adjustments to the realtime closure (RTC) scheme from 2026. The parties also agreed on a new management model and long-term management strategy for North Sea herring, providing greater predictability for the sector and strengthening the sustainable management of the stock.

In bilateral consultations with Norway, a revision of the RTC system for Northern shrimp in Divisions 3.a and 4.a East aims to support the rebuilding of the stock biomass, which remains below safe biological limits.

For blue whiting and Atlanto-Scandian herring, which are widely distributed across the North-East Atlantic, the coastal States and fishing parties (EU, UK, Norway, Iceland, Faroe Islands, Greenland and in the case of Atlanto-Scandian herring, the Russian Federation) agreed to set overall TACs for 2026 in line with the ICES advice. However, agreement on a TAC for 2026 for mackerel proved challenging. In December the UK, Norway, Iceland and the Faroe Islands agreed on a TAC which exceeds the ICES advice by 71%. The EU set a provisional TAC in line with the ICES advice in December 2025. In order to restore level playing field and taking into account that these coastal States did not intend changing their decision on the level of the TAC, in March 2026<sup>18</sup> the EU aligned with the TAC level decided by these other coastal States. The EU has also worked intensively to agree on comprehensive sharing arrangements for mackerel and blue whiting, but a successful outcome could not be reached.

In the absence of comprehensive sharing arrangements and due to unilateral actions by some coastal States, including excessive interannual transfers, the sum of the unilateral quotas of coastal States and fishing parties still exceeds the overall TACs. This continues to undermine the sustainability of the stocks in question. The Commission will continue to actively engage

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<sup>18</sup> Council Regulation (EU) 2026/786 of 30 March 2026 amending Regulation (EU) 2026/249 fixing for 2026, 2027 and 2028 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks, applicable in Union waters and, for Union fishing vessels, in certain non-Union waters (OJ L, 2026/786, 31.3.2026, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2026/786/oj>)

on behalf of the EU, in discussions with other coastal States with the aim of concluding comprehensive sharing arrangements for the sustainable management of these stocks.

### 3. Balance between the fishing capacity of Member States' fleets and their fishing opportunities

Member States must keep fleets under the national ceilings set for vessel fishing capacity (in terms of gross tonnage (GT) and engine power (kW)). Member States that have fleet segments with a demonstrated imbalance<sup>19</sup> must present action plans that set adjustment targets and tools to achieve balance with a clear timeframe for implementation.

However, compliance with capacity ceilings alone does not ensure that Member States' fishing fleets are in balance with the available fishing opportunities or are operating sustainably.

Different parameters are used to assess whether a fleet is in balance. Member States are invited to calculate a set of biological, economic and technical parameters each year and compare the results against standard values.

The size of Member States' fishing fleets continues to decrease. The number of vessels, their gross tonnage and engine power fell by approximately 0.95%, 1.8% and 1.06% respectively in 2025<sup>20</sup> and comprised 68 910 vessels of 1 223 500 GT and 5 008 627 kW. The continued reduction of the EU fishing fleet reflects a combination of policy-driven structural adjustment and economic alignment aimed at improving efficiency, profitability and competitiveness.

Any capacity withdrawn with public aid may not be replaced<sup>21</sup>.

Of the 525 fleet segments which comprised the EU mainland fleet, 209 had at least one biological indicator out of balance (red) and 165 fleet segments had at least one economic indicator out of balance (red), meaning those segments were therefore not in balance, with some seeing continuing negative trends<sup>22</sup>. The Commission thus reminds Member States of the requirement to *'adjust fishing capacity of their fleet to their fishing opportunities over time, taking into account trends and based on best scientific advice, with the objective of achieving a stable and enduring balance between them.'*<sup>23</sup> Achieving a balance between the fishing capacity of the EU fleets and the available fishing opportunities is a continuous process. A fleet in balance will not only perform better in the short term by optimising the number of vessels competing for limited fish stocks, but will also help fleets become more profitable in the long term once stocks are more abundant. Balanced and more profitable fleets will also pave the

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<sup>19</sup> [COM \(2014\) 545: COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL Guidelines for the analysis of the balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities according to Art 22 of Regulation \(EU\) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and the Council on the Common Fisheries Policy](#)

<sup>20</sup> Including the fleet fishing in outermost regions.

<sup>21</sup> Article 22 of the CFP Regulation.

<sup>22</sup> See the accompanying staff working document for a more detailed overview.

<sup>23</sup> Article 22(1) of the CFP Regulation.

way for modernisation and improve the attractiveness of the sector, preparing for future generations of fishers<sup>24</sup>.

Additionally, some fleets continue to lack biological data. The Commission reminds Member States that a comprehensive assessment of fleet balance can be made only if the data are complete.

The Commission published a study on the EU fishing fleet on 28 April 2026<sup>25</sup>. This study pointed out that the overarching challenge of the fishing sector is to make optimal use of the fishing capacity available or substitute it with modernised tools. It is important for Member States to consider how to best **utilise available capacity to help the energy transition** and modernisation of the fleet.

## 4. Socio-economic outlook

According to the 2025 report from the STECF on the economic performance of the EU fishing fleet, the EU fishing fleet was expected to end 2025 with significant operating profits, surpassing its performance in 2023 and 2024 and employing more than 155 200 people.

However, this positive trend, mainly driven by progress towards achieving MSY and affordable fuel prices, is projected to be reversed in 2026 due to the spike in marine fuel prices caused by the situation in the Middle East. Fuel prices have increased sharply since early March 2026, reaching almost double the average price in 2025. The EU fishing fleet was paying around EUR 1-1.10 per litre of fuel at the end of March 2026.

Pending the 2026 report from the STECF on the economic performance of the EU fishing fleet (expected in September 2026), early estimates show that if these high fuel prices persist over time, the profitability of the EU fishing fleet will decrease significantly in 2026, putting a significant number of jobs at risk within fishing fleets and communities. It is also estimated that for the entire EU fishing fleet, a **EUR 0.10 increase in the price of fuel reduces annual gross profit by EUR 156 million.**

The impact of high fuel prices is uneven across fleet segments. For several segments using fuel-intensive gear, energy costs may represent up to half of the total value of landings, potentially leading to a loss-making position under current price levels. Broadly speaking, fleet segments that depend on stocks exploited sustainably and that have increased their energy efficiency (or reduced their fuel intensity) tend to remain more resilient despite the current adverse economic conditions. **These trends highlight the importance of stock conservation and of accelerating the energy transition in the EU fishing fleets.** This is key for two reasons: to reduce the sector's vulnerability to volatile energy prices, in particular for fossil fuels, and to improve environmental performance. Advancing the transition to sustainable

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<sup>24</sup> [New study on fishing fleet capacity and sustainability](#)

<sup>25</sup> [New study on fishing fleet capacity and sustainability](#)

energy sources will protect the fishing fleet from ongoing volatility and promote sustainable and economically resilient practices for the long term.

The Commission recognises the significant economic repercussions which may result from prolonged disruption to the oil and gas supply. The Commission is therefore vigilantly tracking market developments. The potential disruption to fisheries and aquaculture and consequently to the market - including imports and exports of fisheries and aquaculture products - due to energy price increases is being closely monitored. The business models established to serve the seafood market are heavily reliant on energy.

In response to the current situation, the Commission has been exploring and working on solutions within the framework of the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)<sup>26</sup>. The objective is to enable Member States to provide the operators affected with prompt support. The EMFAF Regulation provides for a crisis mechanism to compensate operators in the sectors affected for exceptional events causing significant market disruption. It has been triggered once, when Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine started.

The Commission notes that the requirement to establish a demonstrated and substantiated causality link between the exceptional event and a significant market disruption has been established. On this basis the Commission has triggered compensation in line with the EMFAF Regulation (Article 26 (2)) and adopted by a Commission Implementing Decision 16 April 2026<sup>27</sup>. The Commission invites Member States to proceed with the relevant processes to make the support available to the sectors under their national EMFAF programmes in line with the established rules of EMFAF and the Common Provisions Regulations<sup>28</sup>. However, this remains a short-term alleviation measure, which cannot replace structured and coherent policy and effort towards energy transition.

## 4.1 Social dimension

Following a 2024 baseline study<sup>29</sup> the Commission launched an initiative<sup>30</sup> that will assess the best way of incorporating into EU law existing international standards for the training and certification of fishers, namely the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel Personnel<sup>31</sup>. The initiative seeks to address

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<sup>26</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 (OJ L 247, 13.7.2021, pp. 1–49, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1139/oj>)

<sup>27</sup> Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2026/889 of 16 April 2026 establishing the situation in the Middle East as of 28 February 2026 as the occurrence of an exceptional event causing a significant disruption of markets (OJ L, 2026/889, 16.4.2026, ELI: [http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec\\_impl/2026/889/oj](http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2026/889/oj))

<sup>28</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy (OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, pp. 159–706, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1060/oj>)

<sup>29</sup> [Baseline study on the training and certification requirements for fishers in EU Member States](#)

<sup>30</sup> [EU fishers – training and certification standards](#)

<sup>31</sup> [International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel Personnel \(STCW-F\), 1995](#)

the issue that the fishing sector ranks among the most dangerous professions<sup>32</sup>. Training and certification are one of the determining factors for generational renewal which is needed to ensure that fishing continues so that, in turn, a healthy food supply to markets across the EU is preserved and coastal communities are maintained.

Generational renewal remains challenging and is projected to face even more challenges as the ageing (EU and fisher) population grows, with limited new entrants into the fisheries sector. This is due, among other things, to low wages, uncertainty around the abundance of fish stocks, a perception that there is 'no future' for the profession, a demanding workload, ageing fleet and technologies, and administrative challenges and burdens. These challenges were highlighted in the **first Annual Social Report (ASOR)**<sup>33</sup>.

The CFP identifies the social sustainability of fisheries and aquaculture as one of its core objectives. Over the past five years, STECF expert working groups (EWGs), notably EWG 24-05, 23-17, 22-14, 20-14 and 19-03, have developed a range of tools and data frameworks under the EU fisheries social dimension toolbox, including:

- national fisheries profiles (NFPs);
- community fisheries profiles;
- social indicators and associated datasets.

These tools support the operationalisation of the CFP's social dimension and the delivery of integrated advice. The ASOR offers a consolidated overview of the CFP's social dimension across fisheries, aquaculture, and processing.

## 5. Landing obligation

Illegal and undocumented discarding are the main risks associated with the landing obligation during fishing activities at sea. To address this risk, Member States are required to put in place proper monitoring and control measures. The failure by Member States to adopt the necessary control measures for the landing obligation was highlighted in audits conducted by the European Commission in 2017, 2020 and 2022. The shortcomings highlighted in the audit reports and the extent of the ongoing problem concerning the illegal and undocumented discarding of significant quantities of catches are also supported by other sources such as studies and compliance evaluation reports<sup>34</sup> conducted by the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA). The most recent EFCA report highlights the latest indications of non-compliance by various fleet segments and the difficulty for Member States to control the landing obligation by conventional means such as inspections at sea.

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<sup>32</sup> [Eurostat: Accidents at work statistics](#)

<sup>33</sup> European Commission, *Scientific Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) – Social Data in EU Fisheries: methodology, dissemination, analysis and evaluation (STECF 25-02 & 25-13)*, Ballesteros, M., Kraan, M., Virtanen, J. and Guillen, J. (editors), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2026, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/6411168>

<sup>34</sup> [Compliance Evaluation | European Fisheries Control Agency](#)

In addition to the restrictions on discarding, the landing obligation also requires catches to be ‘recorded’ and ‘counted against the quotas where applicable’<sup>35</sup>. In this context, the accurate weighing and post-weighing registration of catches are essential. The Commission has conducted numerous verification missions in the Member States to evaluate how landed fishery products are weighed and registered in accordance with EU rules. The findings of many of these evaluations reveal non-compliance issues with respect to the accurate registration of landed quantities and the monitoring of quota uptake. The findings of the landing obligation audits and the verification missions on weighing and catch registration reveal issues concerning the accurate documentation of catches – including quantities discarded and quantities landed.

The revision of the fisheries control system<sup>36</sup> introduced a requirement into the Control Regulation for fishing vessels over 18 metres in length that present a high risk of non-compliance with the landing obligation to be equipped with remote electronic monitoring systems from 10 January 2028. While it is anticipated that this will amount to a relatively small share of the total EU fleet, the proportion of landings covered by the requirement is expected to be much larger. The Commission is currently working on the secondary legislation to be adopted before these provisions enter into force in 2028.

An independent study to support the evaluation of the landing obligation in the context of the broader evaluation of the CFP regulation was launched by the Commission and published in June 2025<sup>37</sup>. This study also emphasised control difficulties due to the difficulty in at-sea monitoring and concluded that, overall, the landing obligation had not contributed to the objective of gradually eliminating discards and states that *‘To date, discarding within EU fisheries has not been reduced, and continues to be a common practice across all sea basins.’* The study identified several factors behind why the implementation of the landing obligation had been unsuccessful, highlighting insufficient data available to measure the discards occurring under existing exemptions, ineffective monitoring and enforcement tools, lack of control, and low buy-in at industry level with reported difficulties in implementing the rule on the ground.

## 6. Orientations for 2027 fishing opportunities

### 6.1 Key stages in setting the next fishing opportunities

The Commission proposals will be based on the best available scientific advice from ICES and STECF. The proposals will also draw on decisions taken during consultations with the UK,

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<sup>35</sup> Article 15(1) of the CFP Regulation.

<sup>36</sup> Article 13 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009 of 20 November 2009 establishing a Community control system for ensuring compliance with the rules of the common fisheries policy, as amended by Regulation (EU) 2023/2842 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 November 2023 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009, and amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1967/2006 and (EC) No 1005/2008 and Regulations (EU) 2016/1139, (EU) 2017/2403 and (EU) 2019/473 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards fisheries control (OJ L, 2023/2842, 20.12.2023, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2023/2842/oj>)

<sup>37</sup> [Study supporting the evaluation of the landing obligation](#)

Norway and other coastal States<sup>38</sup>, decisions taken by regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs), and a socio-economic analysis.

The Commission invites Member States and stakeholders to also assess the advice from ICES and STECF as soon as it becomes publicly available, highlighting the important work done to optimise the STECF timeline for the Western Mediterranean. Stakeholders can provide feedback or recommendations through advisory councils, national authorities and individually to the Commission.

Moreover, the Commission is working to achieve progress on sharing arrangements for widely distributed stocks with non-EU countries that have no such arrangements, to ensure that shared stocks are fished in a sustainable manner.

## 6.2 Fishing opportunities for the different sea basins

For stocks managed only by the EU in the **Baltic Sea, Skagerrak/Kattegat and Atlantic Ocean**, in addition to setting fishing opportunities in line with MSY and the precautionary approach, the Commission will continue on the path of setting a trajectory for rebuilding fisheries and will seek to obtain relevant scientific advice from ICES.

For shared stocks managed with the UK, Norway and other coastal States, the objective remains to set fishing opportunities based on the best available scientific advice, while taking into account socio-economic considerations, and to negotiate long-term conservation measures, including long-term management strategies where relevant.

The Commission will continue to cooperate closely with the UK to implement joint bilateral commitments under the Specialised Committee on Fisheries established by the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, with particular focus on the rebuilding of stocks in critical condition. Work will also continue bilaterally with Norway and trilaterally with the UK and Norway to ensure sustainable fisheries and the sound management of shared stocks, including ongoing work on the RTC regime and additional measures as part of a longer-term approach to Northern Shelf cod recovery.

The EU remains committed to finding sustainable, balanced, and comprehensive sharing arrangements for widely distributed stocks that are jointly managed with other coastal States.

For the **Mediterranean and Black Seas**, it is essential that Member States implement management decisions faithfully to pursue the objectives of the West Med MAP and the GFCM MAPs<sup>3940</sup>. To this end, Member States should also step up the implementation of ambitious

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<sup>38</sup> The Commission will conduct several consultations with the UK, Norway and other coastal States starting in October 2026. The aim is to conclude them in time so as to include their outcomes in the deliberations of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council in December 2026.

<sup>39</sup> Regulation (EU) 2019/1022 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 establishing a multiannual plan for the fisheries exploiting demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean Sea and amending Regulation (EU) No 508/2014 (OJ L 172, 26.6.2019, pp. 1–17, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2019/1022/oj>)

<sup>40</sup> [Management plans | General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean](#)

accompanying measures under their national EMFAF programmes, with support from the Commission where needed.

With the permanent phase of the West Med MAP in place, the Commission proposal will aim to achieve and maintain MSY for all stocks. The Commission will also take into account the results of the work by relevant scientific bodies to update of best available scientific advice for hake.

Shared stock management is also necessary to ensure sustainability in international waters and to secure a **level playing field** in the Mediterranean and Black Seas. To this end, the proposal for 2027 fishing opportunities will cover measures implementing existing GFCM decisions and additional measures to be adopted by the GFCM at its 2026 annual session. For Black Sea species, the Commission will propose TACs and quotas for turbot in line with the GFCM MAP, and for sprat.

## 7. Conclusion

While the sustainability of EU fisheries continues to improve, some stocks and sea basins still face severe challenges. Even if factors other than fishing are affecting fish stocks, fishing is a major contributor to the state of fish stocks. Efforts must therefore continue - and even accelerate - to improve the sustainability of stocks not yet fished within MSY target levels. Declining biomass and recruitment for fish stocks can be seen more clearly and must be taken into account when considering the long-term state of stocks. Ecosystem health also conditions fisheries health. Member States should therefore step up efforts under the regionalisation process and propose measures to decrease the adverse impact on the marine environment (bycatch of target and non-target species, bycatch of sensitive species and adverse impact on the seabed). This may be achieved through Member States' joint recommendations under Article 11 of the CFP recommending the deployment of market-ready selective gears and of modern gear technology, as well as measures to limit fishing pressure on sensitive habitats and species and in marine protected areas. In addition, the Marine Action Plan, while non-binding, promotes the use of less damaging fishing techniques and protecting sensitive species and habitats, with a focus on balancing environmental conservation within the socio-economic reality, while promoting a fair and just transition.

Fisheries are an important part of the economy of the EU's coastal communities but that can only continue if there are enough fish to be caught and a new generation sees a future in joining the profession. There must be a balance between fishing effort and fishing opportunities and energy transition should be accelerated to ensure a profitable, competitive and resilient EU fishing sector that is capable of withstanding the challenges of volatile fuel prices. Weak economic performance may already be undermining job security and wages and preventing the industry's investment in EU fishing fleet modernisation. We are now facing the second fuel crisis in four years following Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine and the fuel crisis linked to the Middle East conflict, highlighting the need for the fishing sector to improve its competitiveness to better weather these crises, through investments and reforms aimed at strengthening its resilience, innovation and energy transition.

Member States must also look beyond fisheries to ensure the recovery of fish stocks by fully implementing the relevant EU legislation<sup>41</sup>. Without a healthy marine environment and healthy fish stocks, there can be no fisheries for future generations. At the same time, it is important to take into account the socio-economic aspect of sustainability, including rendering working conditions more attractive to new generations.

In this vein, the Commission invites Member States to continue implementing their national EMFAF programmes, which act as enablers of the CFP and address the collective needs of the fisheries sector to adapt and become more resilient.

The overarching objective of ensuring environmentally sustainable fishing in the long-term, while achieving economic, social and employment benefits, remains at the core of the Commission's proposal for fishing opportunities. The proposals for 2027 will therefore continue to help fish stocks recover, including through rebuilding trajectories, and maintain the progress already made. To achieve this, the Commission relies on the continued engagement and support of all stakeholders, including through their efforts to fish more selectively, as only through joint effort can we ensure the sustainability of EU fisheries for generations to come.

The Commission invites Member States, advisory councils, stakeholders and the public to provide feedback on this communication by 31 August 2026.

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<sup>41</sup> In particular, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Birds and Habitats Directives, the Water framework Directive and the Nature Restoration Regulation.

**PLANNED WORK SCHEDULE<sup>42</sup>**

<b>When</b>	<b>What</b>
May - November 2026	ICES scientific advice
June - end August 2026	Public consultation on the communication
End August 2026	Commission adopts its proposal for fishing opportunities in the Baltic Sea
Mid-September 2026	Commission adopts its proposal for fishing opportunities in the Mediterranean and Black Seas
October - December 2026	Annual consultations on fishing opportunities with parties in the North-East Atlantic
October 2026	Council meeting on fishing opportunities for the Baltic Sea Coastal State consultations on widely distributed stocks in the North-East Atlantic
End October 2026	Commission adopts its proposal for fishing opportunities in the Atlantic/North Sea
November 2026	GFCM annual session
November 2026	NEAFC annual meeting
December 2026	STECF stock assessment and management advice
December 2026	Council meeting on fishing opportunities in the Atlantic/North Sea Council meeting on fishing opportunities in the Mediterranean and Black Seas

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<sup>42</sup> For RFMO-managed stocks in EU waters and certain non-EU waters, fishing opportunities are adopted after the annual meeting of the RFMOs by revising the Council regulation setting the fishing opportunities.