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From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

Subject: Council Conclusions on the fisheries policy package – for a sustainable, resilient and competitive fisheries and aquaculture sector

DRAFT COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON THE FISHERIES POLICY PACKAGE

for a sustainable, resilient and competitive fisheries and aquaculture sector

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING:

- the Council conclusions of 19 October 2020 on the Farm to Fork Strategy¹;
- the Council conclusions of 23 October 2020 on Biodiversity – the need for urgent action²;
- the Council conclusions of 18 July 2022 on the EU’s new aquaculture strategic guidelines³;
- the Council conclusions of 13 December 2022 on International Ocean Governance for safe, secure, clean, healthy and sustainably managed oceans and seas⁴;

HAVING REGARD TO:

- the European Commission Communication of 21 February 2023 entitled ‘The common fisheries policy today and tomorrow: a Fisheries and Oceans Pact towards sustainable, science-based, innovative and inclusive fisheries management’ (COM(2023) 103 final)⁵ and its accompanying Commission staff working document entitled ‘Common Fisheries Policy - State of play’ (SWD(2023) 103 final)⁶;

¹ ST 12099/20.

² ST 12210/20.

³ ST 11496/22.

⁴ ST 15973/22.

⁵ ST 6716/23 + COR 1.

⁶ ST 6716/23 ADD 1 REV 1 + COR 1.

- the European Commission Communication of 21 February 2023 entitled ‘EU Action Plan: Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries’ (COM(2023) 102 final)⁷;
 - the European Commission Communication of 21 February 2023 entitled ‘On the Energy Transition of the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture sector’ (COM(2023) 100 final)⁸;
 - the European Commission Report of 21 February 2023 entitled ‘Implementation of Regulation (EU) No 1379/2013 on the common organisation of the markets in fishery and aquaculture products’ (COM(2023) 101 final)⁹;
 - the European Commission Communication of 15 November 2022 entitled ‘Towards a Strong and Sustainable EU Algae Sector’ (COM(2022) 592 final)¹⁰;
1. EMPHASISES the important role of fisheries and aquaculture products as a source of healthy food and their contribution to food security;
 2. HIGHLIGHTS the importance of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) as a common policy reconciling environmental goals with economic activity and social aspects, with many achievements such as the exploitation of a growing number of EU fish stocks at maximum sustainable yield (MSY) level;

⁷ ST 6690/23 + COR 1.
⁸ ST 6689/23 + COR 1.
⁹ ST 6691/23 + COR 1.
¹⁰ ST 14784/22 + ADD 1.

3. RECALLS the three pillars of sustainability in the CFP that contribute to the sustainable use of fish stocks and the sustainable development of EU aquaculture, ensure the competitiveness of the sector and guarantee a fair standard of living for coastal and rural communities;
4. ACKNOWLEDGES the targets set out by the Commission in the European Biodiversity Strategy and the need to protect marine ecosystems as established in the CFP, which ensures sustainable fisheries and preserves fishers' livelihoods;
5. AGREES with the objective of long-term sustainability, resilience and competitiveness for the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, where innovation and intensive cooperation between all relevant stakeholders should play a central role; EMPHASISES the need for a collaborative approach, securing buy-in and commitment from stakeholders;
6. NOTES that the European Commission's Fisheries Policy Package sets out a significant number of non legally binding ambitious objectives for Member States and operators in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors without the necessary underpinning of a scientific or socio-economic impact analysis; EMPHASISES that this requires an overall evaluation of the adequacy of the legal framework, policy instruments and financial means within the CFP to assess these objectives from a perspective of an economically viable and modern European fisheries and aquaculture sector that guarantees a stable supply of healthy proteins for the European market for years to come;

7. RECALLS that factors other than fisheries, such as climate change, eutrophication, invasive alien species, predators and other economic activities are important factors in addition to fish mortality and ecosystem deterioration. All these anthropogenic and natural factors need to be addressed in a holistic manner through proper environmental measures that will, amongst others, allow for the safeguard of fish stocks and enable species in poor status to return to healthy and sustainable levels, taking into account scientific advice, mixed fisheries interactions, and the social and economic impact;
8. EMPHASISES the complexity of the sector given the differences within the EU's fisheries sector, the number and characteristics of small-scale fisheries, the particularities of each sea basin and its sub-regions as well as the specificities of fish farming in each Member State, including in the outermost regions (as foreseen in article 349 of the TFEU); FURTHER EMPHASISES the need to establish conservation measures that can be adapted to regional, sub-regional and local specificities and UNDERLINES that these measures should be justified, proportionate to the benefits sought and based on the best available scientific knowledge and a comprehensive assessment that also considers socio-economic aspects;

I. SHIFTING FISHERIES' INTERESTS BEYOND EU WATERS

9. NOTES that the geopolitical context has changed substantially since the last reform of the Common Fisheries Policy in 2013 and POINTS OUT the challenges this presents to fishers, aquaculture producers, coastal communities and all stakeholders concerned; CALLS on the Commission to fully analyse and report on the impact that the UK's withdrawal from the EU has had on the functioning of the CFP, particularly with regard to how the EU and Member States fishing opportunities have been affected as a result of quota transfers under the Trade and Co-operation Agreement, as well as on the challenges arising from the new post-Brexit reality where a large number of EU fishing opportunities are being determined by annual consultations with third countries; in this regard, STRESSES the need to defend EU's fisheries interests through the external dimension of the CFP, in particular in the post-Brexit context and the new framework of EU fisheries relation with the United Kingdom as of 2026, taking into account relevant legal instruments and frameworks and relevant global, regional, subregional and sectorial bodies; ENCOURAGES the Commission to engage when new unilateral measures are proposed and to take action early in the process;

10. EMPHASISES the need for close cooperation within Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) and with third countries on shared stocks at all levels in order to achieve the EU's sustainability objectives, improve global ocean governance, increase food and nutrition security and improve social viability and the ecologic sustainability of international fish value chains;
11. DEEMS IT NECESSARY, therefore, to develop a comprehensive and integrated strategy for relations with third countries and future external fishery agreements that protects the interests of the Union's coastal communities as well as quotas and access to waters on which they depend; HIGHLIGHTS the need for this strategy to take into account, where appropriate, access to the EU single market or other adequate negotiation leverages;
12. NOTES with great satisfaction and fully SUPPORTS the recent conclusion of the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, which aims to abolish harmful fisheries subsidies, and in this context ENCOURAGES the Commission to undertake all necessary efforts to conclude the ongoing second phase of the negotiations within the WTO to complement this agreement on the outstanding issues by the 13th WTO Ministerial conference, while upholding the Union's interests and position in the context of the WTO negotiations on fisheries subsidies including fuel subsidies to ensure ecologically, economically and socially sustainable fisheries;

13. EMPHASISES the need to work towards a level playing field and responsible and sustainable value chains at international level in all sea basins in both fisheries and trade in fishery and aquaculture products, in order to strengthen the competitiveness of the industry, including the small-scale coastal fisheries sector, and ensure the EU's food sovereignty becomes an EU priority in line with the new EU policy on an open, sustainable and assertive trade policy as well as with the European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy;
14. INSISTS on the fact that the EU's food sovereignty must improve, while working towards a level playing field with imported products from third countries and taking into account that external dependency exceeds 70 % for fisheries and aquaculture products; ENCOURAGES the Commission to examine how seafood products imported from third countries can be subjected to EU environmental standards and to promote measures to establish a level playing field in this segment;
15. HIGHLIGHTS the key role of the external dimension of the CFP and of the EU in international ocean governance, leading by example in the protection and sustainable management of marine ecosystems;
16. LOOKS FORWARD to the forthcoming update of the European maritime security strategy and its action plan and the forthcoming Joint Communication on Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and on Security and Defence to address the nexus between climate change, environmental degradation of coastal and maritime areas and maritime security;

II. EMPOWERING PEOPLE IN FISHING AND AQUACULTURE COMMUNITIES

17. HIGHLIGHTS the fact that generational renewal is key to ensuring that the EU fishing, aquaculture and seafood processing sectors and coastal communities have a viable future and can continue to ensure food security; UNDERLINES, therefore, the importance of making these activities more attractive by providing an economic perspective, improving social and working conditions, including through innovation, continuing to protect the biodiversity of the marine environment and promoting the role of fishers and marine aquaculture farmers as ‘guardians of the sea’ and providers of services of public interest; POINTS OUT the opportunities for innovative arrangements that these professions offer, such as linking production to direct sales or tourism, in particular for small-scale coastal fisheries and aquaculture, while recognising that such opportunities still need to be precisely assessed; CALLS FOR concrete proposals to increase the attractiveness of the EU fisheries and aquaculture sector;

18. WELCOMES the launching of the EU-wide participatory foresight project ‘Fishers of the Future’ aimed at forecasting the crucial role of fishers in society beyond the provision of high-quality seafood with a low carbon footprint; EMPHASISES the need to better identify the trends, opportunities and threats that determine the attractiveness of the fishing sector;

19. RECOGNISES the importance of ensuring an appropriate level of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors and the need for legal certainty in the long term in order to ensure their attractiveness, as well as carry-on fishing traditions, since a well-functioning and lasting fisheries sector requires that the EU's fisheries legislation is simple, manageable, up-to-date and adapted to the sector, society and technological development;
20. AGREES to enhance and increase the importance and the presence of women throughout the EU fishery, aquaculture and processing sector, contributing both to the generation of wealth and employment and to the sustainable use and conservation of aquatic resources;
21. RECALLS that EU fishing fleets have to make efforts to find alternative solutions with the aim of reducing their operational energy costs so as to ensure the sector's long-term profitability and resilience, thus becoming more efficient while maintaining long-term sustainability objectives;
22. ENCOURAGES measures to improve the aquaculture sector's competitiveness and its social acceptability by further diversifying and increasing sustainable production, ensuring a healthy business environment and ensuring added value for its products as well as reducing its reliance on fossil fuels and energy consumption;

23. RECOGNISES the importance of up-to-date education and vocational training systems to improve employment opportunities for workers and the sector's attractiveness to newcomers in order to address skills shortages, in particular in relation to the transition to renewable and low-carbon alternative energy sources and low-impact fishing gears and techniques; ENCOURAGES, in this regard, the setting-up of large-scale skills partnerships;
24. SUPPORTS the work of the Commission to ensure high standards for fishers' safety and working conditions, notably on the international stage through the ratification and implementation of the revised international Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel Personnel (STCW-F) and of International Labour Organization (ILO) and International Maritime Organization (IMO) conventions; LOOKS FORWARD TO a proposal for a Directive to ensure the correct implementation of STCW-F in the EU legal order; STRONGLY ENCOURAGES the accelerated ratification of the ILO and IMO conventions;
25. UNDERLINES the roles of producer organisations and inter-branch organisations to better structure the value chain and improve market conditions through the collective management of their members' activities and the mutualisation of resources;

26. DEEMS IT NECESSARY to strengthen socio-economic resilience in the context of fossil fuel dependency, increased and volatile energy prices, the need for greater energy efficiency and sustainability of the sector and the goal of reaching climate neutrality in the EU by 2050; RECALLS the Union's position on fuel detaxation in the context of the WTO negotiations on fisheries subsidies and UNDERLINES the significant importance which the taxation regime for marine fuel has on the fisheries sector, including vulnerable small-scale fisheries; WELCOMES the actions proposed by the Commission regarding stakeholder cooperation, knowledge and innovation, as well as the strengthening of workforce skills;
27. CALLS ON the Commission to provide better guidance on financing options, feasibility studies and impact assessments, as well as an evaluation of fleet capacity management and of complementary capacity needs to support and ensure a successful and incentivised energy transition in the EU fisheries and aquaculture sector;
28. SUPPORTS the use of a bottom-up approach, as of 2023, enabling local fishing and aquaculture communities to address socio-economic challenges and needs through community-led local development under the 2021-2027 EMFAF programmes;
29. URGES the Commission and scientific bodies to accelerate the ongoing work to further develop social indicators for the analysis of socio-economic reports; RECOGNISES that management measures already take into account socio-economic impacts, but CALLS FOR further development in this regard to reinforce informed management decisions, taking also into account the territorial impacts on the most vulnerable regions and the outermost regions;

III. CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROTECTION OF THE PLANET

30. CONFIRMS the importance of sustainability principles in fisheries management and REITERATES the need to take into account all three pillars of the CFP, i.e. economic, environmental and social sustainability;
31. REMAINS FULLY COMMITTED to safeguarding biodiversity and conserving, restoring and sustainably using marine ecosystems upon which healthy fish stocks that contribute to food security and a viable fishing sector within the EU depend;
32. EXPRESSES its willingness to protect biodiversity, specifically sensitive species and habitats affected by fishing activity among others, including, where possible, through the use of existing sustainable fishing gears and the implementation of modified or improved fishing gears, fishing practices and new innovative gears designed for this purpose, based on the best scientific information available; NOTES the importance of up-to-date data collection to provide the basis for scientific advice and measures based on such advice; RECALLS the need to ensure the European funding of data collection to reach those very ambitious objectives;

33. RECALLS that the objective of the CFP is to ensure that fishing and aquaculture activities are 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 and that the precautionary approach is applied to fisheries management; EMPHASISES the importance of strengthening the ecosystem-based approach in order to achieve the good environmental status established through the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, so as to ensure that the impacts of fishing activities on the marine ecosystem are minimised and that the degradation of the marine environment is reduced and, IN THIS REGARD, REITERATES the importance of consistency and better alignment of implementation between EU environmental legislation and the CFP as far as possible, each within the scope of their respective competences and objectives;
34. RECOGNISES the positive role that fishers have in the context of dealing with litter while acknowledging the threat to marine wildlife from Abandoned, Lost and Otherwise Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG);
35. NOTES the ongoing work on threshold values for the maximum allowable mortality rate from incidental catches of sensitive species, and for the maximum allowable extent of seabed that can be lost or adversely affected by human pressure, as part of the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive; STRESSES that measures to reduce bycatch of sensitive species should be balanced, considering the traditional way of life of coastal fishing communities; EMPHASISES the need to have a robust scientific knowledge of the marine ecosystem with a common methodology between member states to build those threshold values;

36. RECALLS the forthcoming adoption of the legally binding Agreement for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ), which recognises that marine protected areas (MPAs) are designated and managed in such a way as to achieve specific long-term biodiversity conservation objectives and may allow, where appropriate, sustainable use provided it is consistent with the conservation objectives;
37. UNDERLINES that the use of gears such as mobile bottom-contacting fishing in MPAs should therefore be in line with the best available science and the conservation objectives of each MPA, and take into account the actual environmental impact of the different fishing gears and methods on the various habitats and species depending on the particular conservation objectives of each MPA;
38. UNDERLINES the fact that a general ban on mobile bottom-contacting gears in MPAs by 2030 would be in contradiction with the existing Commission guidance in relation to the designation of MPAs; HIGHLIGHTS the fact that sustainable fisheries can be compatible with the existence of MPAs depending on the particular conservation objectives of each MPA; RECALLS that political initiatives with a potentially major impact on the fishing sector and on coastal communities as well as specific restrictions for fishers should only be undertaken on the basis of a legislative proposal; DECLARES its readiness to enter into a dialogue with the Commission and all relevant stakeholders on how to minimise the impact of fishing activities on the seabed within the framework of the CFP, also taking into consideration the possibility to provide adequate compensation mechanisms;

39. REGRETS that no impact study has been carried out to support the Commission's communications and calls for action, although the socio-economic impact of the proposed measures is very important, especially as regards mobile bottom-contacting fishing fleets; in this regard, CALLS FOR a comprehensive impact assessment of the proposed action plan based on the best available science as a basis for the operational and proportional applicability of the proposed actions and their implementation periods, with regard to their benefits for healthy marine ecosystems in relation to the conservation objectives and taking into account regional, sub-regional and local specificities, including the most vulnerable regions and the outermost regions, as well as financial, socio-economic and socio-cultural implications;
40. NOTES the need for further contributions to implement the EU 2030 biodiversity strategy and measures to this end; HIGHLIGHTS the need to boost the effective implementation of EU nature legislation and to better align the CFP with the objectives of the relevant nature and environmental legislation;
41. IS COMMITTED to contributing to the objective of creating a coherent network of well-managed MPAs and to jointly protecting, as a Union target, a minimum 30 % of the Member States' marine areas, one third of which is strictly protected, in line with the EU biodiversity strategy; therefore RECOGNISES the necessity of introducing fisheries measures among other measures that are necessary in order to comply with these objectives; NOTES that the CFP and Technical Measures Regulations empower Member States, via regionalisation, to propose joint recommendations for necessary conservation measures based on scientific evidence and that such work is ongoing;

42. AGREES that there is an urgent need to improve the status of the critically endangered eel population taking into account the effect of climate change and the anthropogenic impact; STRESSES that effective measures for the recovery of the stock of European eel are pan-European with a long-term approach and ENCOURAGES reflection on a revision of the existing Regulation on eel; ENCOURAGES the sharing of best practices between Member States and discussions at expert level to help find the most appropriate measures to take immediate and effective action at EU level; HIGHLIGHTS the need to take into account the whole panel of anthropogenic pressures beyond the fishing sector and the conclusions of the evaluation of eel management plans scheduled for 2024;
43. ACKNOWLEDGES that achieving maximum sustainable yield levels for commercially exploited fish stocks is a key principle of the Common Fisheries Policy; UNDERLINES the point that fish stocks are also affected by other human activities as well as environmental factors such as climate change and predators and therefore SUPPORTS the development of ecosystem-based and multi-species scientific advice, for instance taking into account the impact of climate change, natural alternation of species and species such as, but not limited to, cetaceans, seals and cormorants on the achievement of maximum sustainable yield for affected stocks and RECALLS the need to find a balanced approach taking into account the pressure from such species as well as the impact of other economic activities on marine ecosystems and the seabed;

44. STRESSES that piscivorous predators can have a negative impact on the competitiveness and long-term sustainability of European aquaculture and fisheries; CALLS ON the Commission to timely identify effective and efficient EU-wide management measures and to help develop these measures and innovative solutions to prevent or reduce the damage caused by predators that have a negative impact on aquaculture without impacting the ecosystem or endangering protected species;
45. REMAINS COMMITTED to the objectives of reducing food waste, avoiding unnecessary fish mortality and stimulating innovation to reduce bycatch; EMPHASISES the importance of keeping fishing activities at the levels of maximum sustainable yield, and the need for an effective estimation of overall declared catches and proportionate associated control tools;
46. WELCOMES the Commission's intention to conduct an evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of current EU legislation on the landing obligation pertaining to the conservation of commercial fish stocks; in view of the difficulties in the implementation of the landing obligation, despite extensive work by Member States, CALLS ON the Commission to start this evaluation as soon as possible, making use of the extensive research information and data made available by Member States and stakeholders;

47. EMPHASISES that an increased use of an ecosystem approach in scientific assessments is needed in fisheries management to factor in environmental, climate change and human activity impacts as well as predators that affect fish stocks. Such an approach will result in a holistic and integrated fisheries governance framework that tackles the trade-offs between ecological, social (including cultural and institutional) and economic sustainability criteria;
48. REAFFIRMS the need for the EU and its Member States to continue to apply zero tolerance towards illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, including by third countries, and promote sustainable fisheries combatting overfishing and reducing by-catch and incidental catches of threatened and unwanted species at regional and international level; RECALLS the need to adopt the new implementing acts under the Technical Measures Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2019/1241) in consultation with Member States and involving the relevant Advisory Council and to include the specifications of the turtle excluder device; UNDERLINES thereafter the importance of a level playing field at the international level and the objective of similar measures for seafood imports;

49. HIGHLIGHTS the importance of innovative solutions in fishing techniques as well as fishing techniques already in practice to minimise the environmental impact and carbon footprint, increase selectivity and ensure that fishers minimise unwanted bycatch and incidental catches of sensitive marine species as much as possible and comply with the landing obligation;
50. REITERATES the importance of encouraging the use of innovative techniques in compliance with CFP objectives; AGREES that innovation should be supported financially and through specific incentives; and RECALLS that this is even more relevant for small-scale coastal fisheries and aquaculture operators with low profit margins;
51. EMPHASISES the need to ensure coherence and mutual supportiveness with all initiatives under the European Green Deal and with EU and Member States' objectives related to, inter alia, food security, health, climate change, environment and the sustainable use of terrestrial and marine natural resources;
52. RECOGNISES the importance of the existing financial instruments such as the EMFAF and LIFE programmes in achieving the objectives of the CFP, the Habitats Directive, the Water Framework Directive and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, but UNDERLINES the fact that decisive efforts are needed in order to clearly identify alternative funding opportunities as soon as possible;

53. REITERATES the importance of regionalisation, through the adoption of joint recommendations at regional level, as well as joint measures with third countries exploiting the same fish stocks, in order to contribute to the implementation of EU fisheries and environmental legislation with respect to fisheries management measures and its promotion at an international level to encourage third countries to follow the EU's ambition;
54. IS AWARE of the importance of the sustainable development of the aquaculture sector in the EU and of the current and outstanding challenges to the growth of this sector, including existing barriers that hinder investment in the EU's aquaculture sector; LOOKS FORWARD to the guidance documents that the Commission intends to issue to support the implementation of its 'Strategic guidelines adopted by the Commission in 2021 for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030'; SUPPORTS the clear vision of the objectives and challenges to be taken into account and of the specific actions needed for this sector to achieve its potential in terms of sustainable food supply, economic development and the creation of employment, especially in rural and coastal areas across the EU;
55. WELCOMES the Commission's document 'Towards a Strong and Sustainable EU Algae Sector' and the Commission's efforts to support sustainable EU algae sector developments; RECOGNISES that regenerative algae farming has the potential to become a significant part of the EU's blue bioeconomy and can provide EU fishers and other actors in coastal and rural areas with opportunities to diversify their economic activities; WELCOMES the Commission's initiative to establish a cross-cutting European algae stakeholder platform (EU4Algae);

56. NOTES that animal welfare improvements are necessary to strengthen the sustainability of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors; ENCOURAGES the Commission to provide guidance on improving aquatic animal welfare, taking into account the practical feasibility in the fisheries and aquaculture management, and CALLS ON the Commission to further increase science-based knowledge on animal welfare of aquatic animals and to take this research into consideration in policy development; WELCOMES the fact that the Commission has launched a call for the selection and designation of a European Union reference centre for the welfare of aquatic animals and ENCOURAGES the Commission to include provisions to improve the welfare of farmed fish in its announced proposals to revise EU animal welfare legislation;

IV. IMPROVING CFP GOVERNANCE

57. REAFFIRMS the crucial role of producer organisations in implementing CFP objectives for both fisheries and aquaculture, and HIGHLIGHTS their important role in balancing the conservation of marine resources and fleet competitiveness and therefore their contribution to food security; IS CONVINCED that enhancing these structures and promoting the creation of inter-branch organisations and transnational professional organisations where necessary will further strengthen the proper functioning of the value chain and contribute to achieving CFP objectives, in particular by considering the scope of measures that can be implemented by inter-branch organisations;

58. TAKES NOTE of the Commission's work on marketing standards; AGREES ON the need to ensure consistency between the rules of horizontal EU regulation on the provision of food information to consumers and the rules on consumer information in the Common Markets Organisation Regulation and AGREES that information on fishery and aquaculture product labels helps consumers to make informed choices;

59. UNDERLINES the importance of the work of regional groups within the Member States and HIGHLIGHTS the positive contribution of such groups to the implementation of the objectives of the CFP; RECOGNISES, nonetheless, that there is a significant, additional workload for Member States associated with regionalisation; ENCOURAGES, therefore, the Commission to work with Member States in order to streamline and simplify procedures and minimise the yearly administrative burden, thereby allowing all parties concerned to participate actively in this work; STRESSES that more guidance should be given; REAFFIRMS the important role of advisory councils in this context and within the CFP more generally; CALLS on the Commission to evaluate the processes of STECF in terms of consistency in evaluations and in order to ensure transparency and clarity for Member States;
60. AGREES that transparency on the allocation criteria used for fishing quota is important; STRESSES that the definition of the criteria for allocation of fishing opportunities at national level lies in the competence of Member States within the framework set by Article 17 of the CFP;
61. RECALLS that the last three years have been a period of unprecedented upheaval for the fisheries and aquaculture sectors; CALLS ON the Commission, therefore, to promote stability by undertaking thorough impact assessments for all future legislative proposals which are expected to have significant economic, environmental or social impacts, in line with the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law Making, including an assessment of the subsidiarity and proportionality of the proposed measures and assessing the economic, environmental and social impacts in an integrated and balanced way;

62. HIGHLIGHTS the role of Maritime Spatial Planning, built on an ecosystem-based management approach, in supporting the achievement of conservation and restoration targets and in mitigating and minimising the harmful impact of all human activities in coastal areas and offshore, as well as its contribution to a competitive and sustainable blue economy and the need for a more coordinated approach promoting synergies between policy areas and legislation within the Union;
63. NOTES in this context the agreed long-term goals for the deployment of offshore renewable energy in Member States' waters to reach climate goals and the constraints this entails for the operation of fishing fleets, EU self-sufficiency in fish products and marine conservation and EMPHASISES the need in this regard to preserve important fisheries grounds and explore the possible potential of the co-existence of windfarms, fisheries and aquaculture as a common European issue that are in line with offshore wind energy development plans, while minimising its consequences for the fishing sector and for the protection of marine habitats;

V. THE CFP TAPPING THE POTENTIAL OF SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION AND INVESTMENT

64. WELCOMES the proposed set-up of an Energy Transition Partnership (ETP) for EU Fisheries and Aquaculture; SUGGESTS that the framework and structure of the ETP should better define its mandate in order to fulfil its objectives;

65. HIGHLIGHTS the shortage of viable options of renewable energy sources for fishing and aquaculture vessels currently available and the technical, regulatory and financial barriers to developing and rolling out such energy sources; EMPHASISES that fisheries and aquaculture operators should be supported in the process of energy transition;
66. AGREES that appropriate investment frameworks and funding opportunities across the value chain are key for enabling the energy transition; NOTES in this regard that the EMFAF is too limited to bridge the gap towards sustainable innovation for a sector that is highly diverse, largely dependent on fossil fuels and characterised by mostly small-scale businesses; ENCOURAGES hence the Commission to review the current EMFAF so that it can help to boost the energy transition; CALLS ON the Commission to provide guidance on and further develop financing options and financial assistance for measures targeting specifically zero emissions or low-carbon technology and investment in the EU fisheries and aquaculture sector;
67. SUPPORTS the development and use of digital technology as an opportunity to improve the operation of the fleet and monitor and collect a broader range of data to inform the scientific and decision-making processes, while ensuring the respect of data protection rules and avoiding an excessive increase in administrative burden;
68. HIGHLIGHTS the importance of EMFAF in supporting innovation, digitalisation and the energy transition as well as other EU funds such as Horizon, the LIFE programme and the Recovery and Resilience Facility; ACKNOWLEDGES that enhancing Member States' cooperation in research projects is also important; CALLS ON the Commission to carry out evaluation of the current situation at regional level with a view to proposing a strategy to address it and to deliver a reasonable review of financing options to support the energy transition of the EU's fishing fleet and STRESSES the need to simplify the EMFAF concerning investment aid to improve the energy efficiency of vessels, including when the segment is not in equilibrium;

69. EMPHASISES the need to re-consider the eligibility for funding of new fishing vessels in line with the CFP Regulation, the WTO agreement on Fisheries Subsidies and the UN sustainable development goals in order to promote decarbonisation and the energy transition of the fleet, enable and accelerate the use of innovative and more selective fishing gear, increase safety and enhance attractiveness for young fishers and of fisheries associated ‘blue’-careers, while avoiding overcapacity and overfishing;
70. SUPPORTS therefore the Commission’s initiative to develop a specific guide and comprehensive database on EU financing instruments for the energy transition in the fisheries and aquaculture sector;
71. AGREES that innovation should be rewarded and SUPPORTS the creation of an annual award for sustainable innovation in fisheries, with the support of the advisory councils;
72. NOTES the Commission’s initiative to increase the flexibility of their fishing capacity management in cooperation with the sector and with EU and national financial support where eligible; POINTS OUT that fishing capacity ceilings are an obstacle to structural change towards decarbonisation of the fishing fleet and are redundant in fish stocks management systems where sustainable management of fish stocks is ensured by setting annual TACs and quotas or in the case of small-scale coastal fisheries where passive fishing gear is used for targeting local stocks, which are not managed at EU level and where national management measures are in place, thereby INVITING the Commission to reform the calculation of the fleet capacity of Member States, while also excluding the additional tonnage dedicated solely to decarbonisation;
73. CALLS ON the Commission to propose the establishment of a transparent EU system to recognise and reward producers for sustainable aquaculture management that is environmentally friendly and/or enables additional ecosystem services, in order to motivate producers to achieve a higher environmental and socio-economic performance of aquaculture;

VI. A 'FISHERIES AND OCEANS PACT' TO PAVE THE WAY FOR THE FUTURE

74. TAKES NOTE of the Commission's 'Fisheries and Oceans Pact' to reconfirm the joint commitment to fully implementing current policy and contributing to the necessary reflections and assessments of certain elements of the CFP;
75. DEEMS IT NECESSARY TO continue work on the environmental, economic and social sustainability of fisheries at international level also, as a contribution to the protection of the oceans and to ensuring food supply and employment within the EU.
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