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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	AOB for the meeting of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council of 28 and 29 September 2026 Strengthening the external dimension of EU fisheries in the context of the 2040 Vision for fisheries and aquaculture - Information from Spain, on behalf of France, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal and Spain

AGRIFISH COUNCIL

28 - 29 September 2026

AOB

**STRENGTHENING THE EXTERNAL DIMENSION OF EU FISHERIES IN THE CONTEXT
OF THE 2040 VISION FOR FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE**

(information from Spain, France, Latvia, Lithuania and Portugal)

The European distant-water fleet constitutes one of the world's most diverse fleets, operating across numerous oceans and seas and representing a wide range of fisheries and fleet segments.

The activity of this fleet is of strategic importance not only economically, but also from diplomatic and international governance perspective. Over many years, fisheries activities have contributed to strengthening relationships between the European Union and countries

across the world through the participation in Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs), sustainable fisheries partnership agreements (SFPAs) and agreements on exchange or joint management, with third countries and operations conducted under private authorisations.

The international activity of the distant-water fleet also makes a significant contribution to scientific knowledge and the sustainable management of marine resources. Biological data collected through commercial fishing activities provide valuable information on the status of marine resources and ecosystems. This contribution is complemented by scientific campaigns conducted by EU Member State oceanographic vessels, and by the participation of European experts in international scientific and fisheries management forums.

This scientific contribution goes hand in hand with high standards of fisheries control, environmental protection and social responsibility. These elements are essential to strengthening effective, science-based and sustainable ocean governance and should remain at the core of the European Union's approach to international fisheries.

The distant-water fleet also contributes to the economic and social development of third countries through responsible investment, supporting local fish-processing industries, creating quality employment and promoting high standards in food safety, occupational health and safety, and environmental protection. Countries such as Mauritania and Seychelles provide clear examples of the positive role that long-term investment in fisheries-related activities can play in local economies and value chains.

For years, this fleet has been steadily declining, both in terms of the number of vessels and catches. This is creating a growing gap increasingly occupied by third-country fleets that operate under lower standards regarding sustainability, labour rights, transparency and fisheries control. This creates unfair competition and undermines the level playing field for European operators, a situation further aggravated by the access of catches from these fleets to the European market.

The EU also plays a leading role in the RFMOs, where it actively contributes to advancing regulatory frameworks towards better fisheries management, strengthened monitoring and control of fishing activities, and the adoption of ambitious social and environmental standards, while also contributing to the fight against IUU fishing. Besides, with the entry into force of the BBNJ Agreement, the 2040 Strategy should also seek to foster cooperation

between RFMOs and the BBNJ framework, with a view to ensuring effective governance of the high seas.

EU's fisheries international relations should also be considered alongside trade negotiations, with a view to ensuring that the interests and specific concerns of its fisheries sectors are appropriately reflected in Free Trade Agreement negotiations.

In line of the above, Spain, France, Latvia, Lithuania and Portugal, underline the need for the European Union to preserve and strengthen the role of fisheries in its strategic vision for international ocean governance, in line with the objectives and priorities of the European Ocean Pact.

Supporting the responsible and sustainable activity of the European distant-water fleet should form an integral part of the Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture.
