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Subject:	Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL establishing the conditions for the implementation of the Union support to the Common Fisheries Policy, to the European Ocean Pact and of the Union's maritime and aquaculture policy as part of the National and Regional Partnership Fund set out in Regulation (EU) [...] [NRP Fund] for the period from 2028 to 2034 - <i>Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee</i>

Delegations will find attached a copy of the above-mentioned opinion.

This opinion is available in all language versions on the following website:

[Revision of the Common Fisheries Policy | EESC](#)



OPINION

European Economic and Social Committee

Revision of the Common Fisheries Policy

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the conditions for the implementation of the Union support to the Common Fisheries Policy, to the European Ocean Pact and of the Union's maritime and aquaculture policy as part of the National and Regional Partnership Fund set out in Regulation (EU) [...] [NRP Fund] for the period from 2028 to 2034
(COM(2025) 559 final – 2025/0235(COD))

NAT/967

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Advisor	Daniel VOCES DE ONAÍNDI
Legislative procedure Referral	EU Law Tracker European Parliament, 6/11/2025 Council, 18/9/2025
Legal basis	Articles 43(2), 91(1), 100(2), 173(3), 175, 188, 192(1), 194(2) and 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
European Commission documents	COM(2025) 559 final
Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	SDG 14 - Life below water
Section responsible	Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment
Adopted in section	15/12/2025
Adopted at plenary session	21/1/2026
Plenary session No	602
Outcome of vote (for/against/abstentions)	240/2/8

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

- 1.1 calls for the mandatory and guaranteed allocation of EUR 6.1 billion for the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), in line with the current 2021-2027 budget, in order to preserve one of the EU's few exclusive competences and avoid competition with other sectors and interests. As an exclusive EU policy, fisheries should be addressed in a dedicated chapter that ensures adequate public investment and provides legal certainty for operators. This support is key to enabling fishers to invest in new technologies, improve safety and working conditions, attract new generations to the profession, drive the transition to a low-carbon future and maintain competitiveness on international markets;
- 1.2 is concerned about the apparent prioritisation of achieving the objectives of the European Ocean Pact, which is a non-binding strategy of the European Commission, instead of prioritising contributing to the achievement of the objectives of the CFP, which is the objective defined under the TFEU and the CFP Regulation;
- 1.3 welcomes the proposal to strengthen coherence and synergies with related initiatives and funds, such as the LIFE, Global Europe and Competitiveness programmes, in order to avoid duplication of efforts and maximise the impact of public investments. However, it urges the Commission, as guardian of the Treaties, to ensure that governments make the necessary investments to meet the objectives of the CFP, such as data collection, control, fisheries management and fleet-related measures;
- 1.4 stresses the need to make the definition of small-scale coastal fishing more flexible, basing it on the criteria established by the FAO and the regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs). Given the diversity of Member States' social, economic and geographical contexts, it is essential to maintain an adaptable approach that recognises the specificities of each fleet and coastal region;
- 1.5 points out that, as the EU's fishing fleet has an average age of 31.5 years and a declining and ageing workforce, it is imperative that Member States develop plans and measures to modernise and renew their vessels, with the aim of improving energy efficiency, on-board safety and working conditions, without increasing fishing capacity. This will help not only to ensure generational renewal, but also to achieve climate goals;
- 1.6 welcomes the European Commission's intention to establish a simple architecture without predefining measures and detailed eligibility rules at Union level in an overly prescriptive manner. The Committee urges the Member States to maintain this spirit of flexibility and simplification when developing their national and regional partnership plans (NRCPs), with fast-track processes for low-value grants, while ensuring consistency with the objectives of the CFP and a level playing field between different sectors and regions. It also calls for the establishment of guidelines on the 'do no significant harm' principle applicable across all sectors, which should be simple, homogeneous and facilitate fleet modernisation;

- 1.7 agrees with the need to maintain a certain degree of flexibility in the determination of aid intensity rates, in order to allow Member States to adapt their NRCPs to the specific characteristics of their sectors and regions. However, it considers it essential to establish a common minimum at European level to ensure a fair framework and avoid distortions in competition between fleets and operators. The Commission should assess and accept the maximum aid intensity rates proposed by Member States as exceptions to the general rule, provided that they are duly justified, using the provisions of the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) 2021-2027 as a reference;
- 1.8 fully supports the fact that an application for aid submitted by an applicant within the time frame established by law, or by the competent authority, may be rejected, in proportion to the infringement committed by the operator. However, the EESC regards as double punishment the requirement to repay a subsidy already received, after up to five years have passed since its receipt, in the case of a serious violation. This not only creates legal uncertainty and discriminatory treatment of fishers within national plans compared to other sectors, but also contributes to the under-utilisation of funds;
- 1.9 welcomes the new simplification and wording relating to operations eligible for State aid, which includes a binding reference to the provisions of the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies. However, the EESC considers it necessary to strengthen legal certainty for both Member States and beneficiaries, while maintaining the spirit of the current EMFAF. It therefore recommends that express reference be made to the principle that aid which is not expressly prohibited is permitted.

2. EXPLANATORY NOTES

Arguments in support of recommendation 1.2

- 2.1 According to Article 1, ‘the Union support shall contribute to the activities as set out in the European Ocean Pact and to the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy’. However, in the EESC’s view, the European Ocean Pact cannot be placed on an equal footing with the Common Fisheries Policy, either hierarchically or institutionally. Therefore, the reference to this strategy should be in a subordinate position.

3. PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Amendment 1 – Title and Recitals 2 and 3

linked to recommendations 1.2 and 1.3

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the conditions for the implementation of the Union support to the Common Fisheries Policy, <i>to the European Ocean Pact</i> and of the Union’s	Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the conditions for the implementation of the Union support to the Common Fisheries Policy and of the Union’s maritime and aquaculture policy as

<p>maritime and aquaculture policy as part of the National and Regional Partnership Fund set out in Regulation (EU) [...] [NRP Fund] for the period from 2028 to 2034</p> <p>(2) The Union support shall also contribute <i>to the activities as set out in the European Ocean Pact and contribute</i> to the Union’s objective of the sustainability of our ocean, and climate neutrality target, the sustainability, competitiveness and resilience of the European Union fisheries and aquaculture sector, the sustainability, resilience and competitiveness of the European blue economy, the resilience of coastal and island communities, as well as outermost regions, and the enhancement of ocean governance and ocean observation, including through Copernicus, the Union’s Earth Observation programme and its marine-related services.</p> <p>(3) The National and Regional Partnership Fund should contribute to achieving the environmental, economic, social and employment objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), as set out in Article 2 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council. Such support should ensure that fishing activities are sustainable in the long term and are managed in a way that is consistent with the objectives as set out in Article 2 of the CFP Regulation.</p>	<p>part of the National and Regional Partnership Fund set out in Regulation (EU) [...] [NRP Fund] for the period from 2028 to 2034</p> <p>(2) The National and Regional Partnership Fund should contribute to achieving the environmental, economic, social and employment objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), as set out in Article 2 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council. Such support should ensure that fishing activities are sustainable in the long term and are managed in a way that is consistent with the objectives as set out in Article 2 of the CFP Regulation.</p> <p>(3) The Union support shall also contribute to the Union’s objective of the sustainability of our ocean, and climate neutrality target, the sustainability, competitiveness and resilience of the European Union fisheries and aquaculture sector, the sustainability, resilience and competitiveness of the European blue economy, the resilience of coastal and island communities, as well as outermost regions, and the enhancement of ocean governance and ocean observation, including through Copernicus, the Union’s Earth Observation programme and its marine-related services. <i>Without prejudice to the existence of more adequate and specialised funds for other maritime sectors and interests, the support may also contribute to the activities set out in the European Ocean Pact.</i></p>
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Reason
<p>The rapporteur proposes changing the title of the Regulation and reversing the order of recitals 2 and 3. This fund should prioritise contributing to the achievement of the objectives of the CFP, which is the objective under the TFEU and the CFP Regulation. The limited resources of this fund should not be used to finance sectors or priorities that are already covered by other Union policies or financial instruments. This could lead to duplication, overlaps and the inefficient use of public funds. A non-binding Commission strategy and an exclusive EU competence implemented by the basic CFP Regulation cannot be placed on an equal footing.</p>

Amendment 2 – Article 1

linked to recommendations 1.2 and 1.3

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
This Regulation lays down specific conditions for the implementation of the Union support in accordance with the general objectives laid down in Article 2 of Regulation XX [NRP Fund], and in particular point (d) thereof. The Union support shall contribute <i>to the activities as set out in the European Ocean Pact</i> and to the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy.	This Regulation lays down specific conditions for the implementation of the Union support in accordance with the general objectives laid down in Article 2 of Regulation XX [NRP Fund], and in particular point (d) thereof. The Union support shall contribute to the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy.

Reason
See justification for amendment 1.

Amendment 3 – Recital 5

linked to recommendation 1.4

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
Small-scale coastal fishing is carried out by marine and inland fishing vessels of an overall length of less than 12 metres <i>and not using towed fishing gear</i> , and by fishers on foot, including shellfish gatherers.	Small-scale coastal fishing is carried out by marine and inland fishing vessels of an overall length of less than 15 metres, and by fishers on foot, including shellfish gatherers. <i>Given the extremely diverse nature of fishing fleets in the different Union sea basins, Member States may adapt the definition of ‘small-scale coastal fishing’ in their programmes, taking due account of the duration of the trip, the distance from the coast, the type of fishing gear and the links with local communities.</i>

Reason
The NRCPs should provide for specific support for small-scale fishing. The ICES Expert Working Group on Commercial Catches defines this as that carried out by commercial vessels with a length overall (LOA) of less than 15m, accounting for 88% of active fishing vessels ¹ . The FAO describes ‘small-scale producers’ as those who operate on a small scale, in contrast to industrialised producers. In practice, the boundary between small-scale and large-scale fishing is arbitrary: what is considered small-scale fishing in one country or region can be considered large-scale in another context. Nor does the WTO propose a universal definition of the term ‘small-scale fishing’, as its interpretation is debated and varies from country to country.

¹ https://academic.oup.com/icesjms/article/82/8/fsaf130/8224205?login=false&utm_source=chatgpt.com.

Amendment 4 – Recital 8

linked to recommendation 1.5

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
It should be possible to support actions related to fisheries, aquaculture and blue economy that contribute to the achievement of the environmental and climate change mitigation and adaptation objectives of the Union, including the <i>energy transition</i> for all sectors.	It should be possible to support actions related to fisheries, aquaculture and blue economy that contribute to the achievement of the environmental and climate change mitigation and adaptation objectives of the Union, including the <i>energy and digital transitions and decarbonisation</i> for all sectors. <i>In this context, and given that the EU’s fishing fleet has an average age of 31.5 years, it is imperative that Member States develop plans and measures to modernise and renew their vessels, with the aim of improving energy efficiency, on-board safety and working conditions, without increasing fishing capacity.</i>

Reason
Fleet modernisation is a necessary condition for moving towards more sustainable, safe and competitive fishing. The high average age of vessels compromises energy efficiency, crew safety and the sector’s ability to adapt to current environmental and technological requirements. Enabling and promoting investments in modernisation and renewal, in line with WTO rules, will strengthen the sector’s green transition and contribute to meeting the Union’s climate objectives, while helping to address the serious problem of lack of generational renewal.

Amendment 5 – Article 3

Linked to recommendation 1.2, 1.6 and 1.7

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
Support for the Common Fisheries Policy, <i>the European Ocean Pact</i> and the Union’s maritime and aquaculture policy 1. <i>Member States shall take into account in their NRP Plan</i> the specific needs of fisheries, aquaculture and coastal communities and in particular of small-scale coastal fishing in line with Article 22 (2)(i) of [the NRP regulation]. 3. Member States shall set out in their NRP Plan <i>the maximum aid intensity rates for the different categories of operations supported under the NRP Plan</i> . For operations related to small-scale	Support for the Common Fisheries Policy and the Union’s maritime and aquaculture policy 1. <i>In their NRP Plan, Member States shall dedicate an amount equal to or higher than the amount established in their respective national programme for the implementation of the EMFAF for the period 2021-2027 aimed at addressing</i> the specific needs of fisheries, aquaculture and coastal communities and in particular of small-scale coastal fishing in line with Article 22 (2)(i) <i>and Article 35(11)</i> of [the NRP regulation].

<p>coastal fishing, Member States may grant a maximum 100 % aid intensity rate.</p>	<p>3. Member States shall set out in their NRP Plan <i>a maximum aid intensity rate of 50% of the total eligible expenditure of the operation</i>. For operations related to small-scale coastal fishing, <i>the improvement of selectivity, the improvement of health, safety and working conditions on board fishing vessels, and actions implemented by producer organisations and/or associations</i>, Member States may grant a maximum 100 % aid intensity rate. <i>The Commission should assess and accept other maximum aid intensity rates proposed by Member States as exceptions to the general rule and duly justified, using the provisions of the existing EMFAF 2021-2027 as a reference.</i></p> <p>4. <i>Member States and their regions shall maintain a simple architecture without prescriptive measures and eligibility rules, especially for smaller projects, developing swift adoption processes with reduced bureaucracy for projects below EUR 150 000.</i></p>
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Reason
<p>The aim of this amendment is to prioritise financial resources for fisheries and aquaculture in an operational manner and to avoid them being diverted to other interests or priorities. This is essential given the drastic cut of 67% proposed by the European Commission to the funds reserved for the purposes of implementing the CFP.</p> <p>The amendment aims to maintain the spirit of simplification and reduction of bureaucracy at state level in the implementation phase.</p> <p>It also seeks to maintain a balance between the flexibility needed for Member States to adapt their NRCs to the specificities of their sectors and regions, and the need to establish common minimum standards at European level to ensure a level playing-field between EU fleets and operators. It is also considered appropriate that Member States may amend aid intensity rates only in duly justified cases and after notifying the European Commission, in order to ensure transparency and consistency in the implementation of the funds.</p>

Amendment 6 – Article 4

linked to recommendations 1.8 and 1.9

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
<p>1. Support <i>to fishing fleet or operators</i> that does not comply with the WTO agreement on fisheries subsidies <i>and with the objectives of the CFP as</i></p>	<p>1. Support that does not comply with <i>the criteria of the WTO agreement on fisheries subsidies or that is granted to fishing fleets or operators that</i></p>

<p><i>referred to in Article 43(2) TFEU, and Article 2 of the CFP Regulation shall not be supported.</i></p> <p><i>2. Beneficiaries shall be required to continue to comply with the CFP and not to commit any of the infringements and offences listed in Article 3 (4) points (a) to (c) within 5 years.</i></p> <p>3. The transfer or reflagging of fishing vessels to third countries, <i>including through</i> the creation of joint ventures with partners of third countries <i>and the transfer of ownership of a business</i> are not eligible to receive support.</p> <p>4. Deep sea mining shall not be supported.</p>	<p><i>have committed serious infringements of the rules of the CFP for the period set out in paragraph 2 or that are subject to an administrative or judicial decision shall not be supported.</i></p> <p><i>2. Union financial assistance towards operators shall be conditional upon their compliance with the rules of the CFP. Therefore, in addition to possible restrictions or prohibitions on access to public funding imposed by administrative or judicial decision, Member States shall ensure that the granting of Union financial assistance is conditional upon the operator not having been subject to penalties for serious infringements during the year preceding the date of the application for assistance.</i></p> <p>3. The transfer <i>of ownership of a business</i> or reflagging of fishing vessels to third countries, <i>except</i> the creation of joint ventures with partners of third countries, are not eligible to receive support.</p> <p>4. Deep sea mining shall not be supported.</p> <p><i>5. Unless otherwise expressly provided in this Regulation, all aid which is not expressly prohibited shall be deemed to be allowed, thereby ensuring legal certainty for both Member States and beneficiaries.</i></p>
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Reason
<p>The wording of the first paragraph is confusing. It is the aid and not the fishers who are required to be in line with the subsidies allowed by the WTO. The same could be said of the reference to the objectives of the CFP. It gives more legal certainty to refer to the fact that aid will not be allowed in case of serious infringements or administrative decisions.</p> <p>The Commission’s proposal implies that if a beneficiary commits a serious infringement, for example four years after the end of the project, it will be required to return the funds received. If the beneficiary is part of a cooperative or producer organisation, the whole cooperative or organisation could be penalised. No other sector in the EU is subject to such strict conditions.</p> <p>Maintaining this provision would still discourage fishers from applying for support as they would fear that any error – even if not related to the funded project (e.g. safety, environmental, innovation) – could have disproportionate consequences. A serious infringement can already result in heavy fines, seizure of vessels and withdrawal of licences; requiring the repayment of financial assistance adds an unnecessary and excessive level of penalty. This rule creates, and will continue to create, legal uncertainty in the sector, discouraging investment and leading to the insufficient use of EU funds. The EESC proposes a wording that is in line with the basic CFP regulation (Article 42(3)).</p>

In any event, according to Article 91b of Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009 on ‘Accompanying sanctions’, the sanctions laid down for serious infringements may be accompanied by a ban on access to public assistance or subsidies. Therefore, the reference to five years is disproportionate and unjustified. Clearly, it would be for the authority or the court to decide on such sanctions, depending on the nature, gravity, duration and repetition of serious infringements. They cannot therefore be set by default.

Paragraph 3 provides for penalties for investments in developing countries through joint ventures, which could discourage private sector participation in international cooperation projects. This provision creates a risk of excluding strategic opportunities that could contribute to the economic and social development of third countries, limiting the transfer of technology and experience and reducing the positive impact of European investment in emerging markets.

Paragraph 5 enhances legal certainty, while maintaining the spirit of the current EMFAF, which is based on the principle that aid that is not expressly prohibited is allowed.

Brussels, 21 January 2026.

The President of the European Economic and Social Committee
Séamus BOLAND
