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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Background note on Future support to EU fisheries
- Information from the Netherlands, supported by Belgium, Cyprus,
Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia,
Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Spain

Delegations will find attached an information note by the Netherlands, supported by Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Romania and Spain on the above-mentioned subject, with a view to the meeting of the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries) on 24 March 2025 where it will be presented under "Any Other Business".

AOB Agrifish Council 24 March 2025 – Future support to EU fisheries

Information from the Netherlands, supported by the delegations of Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Spain.

The European fisheries and aquaculture sector faces numerous challenges on generational renewal, energy transition, ageing fleet, digitalization, climate change, gender gap, third countries challenging traditional fishing rights, competition for space and biodiversity. It is of the utmost importance that the European Commission and Member States jointly support this sector in facing these challenges. The current EU Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) is halfway through and lessons should be drawn for the remainder of its term and beyond.

The average age of the European fleet is 31,5 years and innovation and investments are needed to support the fleet in its energy transition towards CO₂-neutral engines, decreasing pollution and adapted vessel design, including new hull materials. Support in this context should be focused on those fleet segments that do not have the necessary investment capacities. Fishing capacity ceilings must not be a barrier to energy transition of fishing vessels. Innovation and investments are also needed for the development of new and more sustainable fishing techniques. Furthermore, support is needed for the adaptation to climate and ecosystem changes, to help young fishers start their activities, improve working and safety conditions, and better support for the processing industry.

Although the EMFAF provides opportunities for support, it is not yet completely fit for purpose. The shortcomings in flexibility of EMFAF are magnified by the detailed and complex eligibility rules for articles that relate to decarbonization of the fishing fleet, within the EMFAF regulation itself but also in other regulations. The reasoning behind the detailed and complex eligibility rules is understandable: to prevent negative side effects of aid schemes. However, these rules often create excessive administrative burdens, limiting access to available funds. This risks to prevent utilization of the full potential of the fund. Furthermore, it impedes the achievement of EU climate targets in the fisheries and aquaculture sector.

To sustain the ecological wealth of the seas, it is essential to gather adequate data on fish stocks and enforce the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The current EMFAF contributes to these objectives by providing the necessary funding for data collection and control. However, it is clear that these important tasks are not limited to the current programming period and continue to be the foundation of the CFP. We need to ensure that we keep providing the necessary support to continue fulfilling these tasks beyond the current programming period.

There is a need for lower administrative burdens. Although various measures have already been taken to reduce the administrative burdens in the EMFAF-period, the monitoring and reporting obligations unfortunately have increased. We should not be afraid to look at all opportunities to increase the accessibility of EMFAF funding, including the use of financial instruments (loans and guarantees), facilitate public-private pilot projects and mitigate the conditions of the private energy transition investments in the framework of current CFP.

We invite the Commission to actively assess the best practices of the EMFAF and fisheries support policy in third countries, and to share its insights on the key challenges which the European fisheries and aquaculture sector are facing.

In order to respond to the issues raised above and in the European Parliament report (2021/2169(INI)) on the Common Fisheries Policy, we call upon the Commission to consider measures to support the energy transition and modernization of European fleet segments that lack investment capacity in the years to come. In doing so, it is essential to ensure that these measures provide meaningful support to the fisheries sector whose contribution to coastal communities and the blue economy is invaluable.
