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Commissioner Vella and Europêche hold an in-depth dialogue on fisheries affairs

-For immediate release-

Today, a delegation of fishing representatives from Europêche met with Mr Karmenu Vella, Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries to discuss the main topics at the top of the political and legislative fisheries agenda in the EU. Both Commissioner Vella and Europêche credited the great progress in achieving sustainable fisheries with already 97% of the landings in the North East Atlantic coming from EU managed stocks fished at Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) levels. The sector showed support to Commissioner Vella to continue proposing the necessary legislation to implement the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), however called for rational policies which take into consideration socio-economic aspects and that can be implemented in practice.

During the discussion on fishing opportunities, both Commissioner Vella and Europêche representatives welcomed the positive results yielded by the CFP, leading to higher levels of supply, better competitiveness of the fleets and greater levels of income for fishermen. In this sense, Europêche representatives put the focus on the need to concentrate efforts in the main target stocks to achieve MSY levels as quickly as possible. However, the sector requested more flexibility in terms of time and due consideration to socio-economic consequences of TAC cuts ahead of the Council negotiations.

Javier Garat, President of Europêche, declared: *"I am pleased to observe that both the European Commission (EC) and the sector agree that the CFP performance indicators cannot be solely based on the number of stocks fished at MSY levels but more comprehensively on the achievement of economic, social and environmental objectives contributing to the availability of food supplies."*

As regards the external dimension of the CFP, the delegation requested linking the negotiation of sustainable fisheries partnership agreements (SFPAs) with 3rd countries to regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs) discussions. Concerning the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), the sector appreciated the efforts made by the EC to safeguard the fishing rights of the EU sector and encourage them to continue working along this line. Europêche also praised EC's efforts to become a party to the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC) which is urgently needed to allow fishing operations as of July 2018. However, the outcome of ICCAT negotiations was unsatisfactory since the sector expected greater quotas for bluefin tuna and the adoption of a management plan in view of the positive scientific assessment.

Regarding the development of an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ), the sector expressed its rejection to include commercial fisheries under the scope of the new instrument as well as the possible establishment of a new overarching international body since fishing in the High Seas is adequately regulated and governed by existing RFMOs.

Furthermore, the sector especially welcomed the new mandate to renew the SFPAs and implementing Protocol with Morocco that will expire on 14 July 2018. Europêche representatives trust that a new agreement can be signed by both parties on fair terms, respecting international Law and improving the technical conditions for our operators before the expiry date. The industry stressed the need to renew important fisheries agreements with Guinea-Bissau, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea to consolidate a strategic network of SFPAs. The sector also requested the launching of negotiations with Mauritania as soon as possible and highlighted the added value created locally by the fishing industry in the country by the opening of a new factory to process fish for human consumption, many of which is sold in different African markets.

Europêche also stressed the importance of strong and quick actions from the EC to unlock the long-standing issue with Norway on snow crab fishing in the Barents Sea.

Coming back to European waters, the sector also referred to the legislative developments on a new regulation for the conservation of fishery resources which regulates how, where and when fishermen may fish. The industry called for maximum flexibility in order to comply with the landing obligation and achieving MSY levels by 2020.

To continue, both the Technical Measures Regulation and Multiannual Plans (MAPs) aim to achieve 'good environmental status' of the stocks as defined by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)¹. The sector stressed that the MSFD should not supersede the CFP and therefore if a stock is within the objectives of the CFP, it should be considered as healthy under the environmental policy.

Considering MAPs, the EC recently published a Plan for the Western Mediterranean as well as for the Western Atlantic. Europêche expressed that some adjustments were needed and committed to work with the EC in a concerted effort to ensure a reasonable and practical result.

In addition, the landing obligation is still seen as impracticable for some demersal fisheries, for which several actions, more data on choke species and full utilisation of the flexibility measures were called upon by the industry, in order to continue operating in 2019.

On a different topic, Europêche presented concerns on the new proposal for a Directive on Port Reception Facilities, as it requires all fishing vessels to pay a fee to the port irrespective of whether they generated the waste or not. As many fishing vessels participate in active and passive fishing for litter schemes, they cannot be punished for offering an environmental service to society; cleaning the seas.

Lastly, Commissioner Vella was applauded for the success in fighting illegal exports of glass eel to Asia. Europêche welcomed the EC position against an eel fishery ban which would be counterproductive since it would eliminate the eel restocking programmes where our fishermen participate.

Ends

Europêche represents the fisheries sector in Europe. Currently, the Association comprises 10 national organisations of fishing enterprises from the following 8 EU Member States: DE, ES, FR, IT, MT, NL, LV, PL.

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¹ 2008/56/CE