

Political agreement on new fisheries control rules

After 5 years of difficult and complex negotiations, the EU co-legislators have finally reached a political agreement on the revision of the fisheries control system. Europêche appreciates the role played by the Council and the Parliament to improve the rigorous proposal from the European Commission aimed at modernising the control and enforcement measures adopted back in 2009. The sector will now analyse the final text and assess whether the agreement finds a good balance between effective control rules on the one hand and the level of costs, bureaucracy and workability of the rules on the other.

Crucial decisions have been taken last night to make decisive progress towards a new EU control system. Policy makers overcame the remaining hurdles such as the installation of cameras on board or the permitted margin of error between the catch estimates made on board and the actual landings (margin of tolerance). Some of the main measures can be summarised as follows:

- Mandatory installation of cameras on board for vessels of >18 metres which pose a high risk of non-compliance with the landing obligation. Member states may impose the use of CCTV systems for other purposes and to smaller vessels.
- Mandatory introduction of engine power monitoring devices for certain vessels using active gears.
- Margin of tolerance of 10% per species, with certain flexibilities for catches below 100kg and for the small-pelagic and tropical tuna fisheries due to their specificities.
- Geolocation systems and electronic logbooks will be made mandatory for small-scale fishing vessels gradually, after transitory periods.
- Harmonisation of infringements and establishment of minimum sanctions, levelling the playing field in EU waters.
- Better import controls and increased consumer protection, via modern traceability tools such as the EU-wide digital database of catch certificates (CATCH).
- Better monitoring of recreational fisheries through registration, licensing and data collection of their catches electronically.

Daniel Voces, managing director of Europêche, declared: *“We appreciate the efforts made by the Parliament and the Council to reach compromises and introduce flexibilities for the implementation of the future control rules. However, the introduction of cameras and other control devices have been harshly criticised by the sector as being intrusive. A positive development was that live streaming was avoided. It is now time to check whether the political agreement sets the foundations for a clear and efficient system that guarantees a level playing field, workable rules, acceptable control devices and overall makes life easier for fishers”.*

Anne-France Mattlet, Europêche Tuna Director, commented: *“The control rule on margin of tolerance is currently incompatible with the conditions and specificities inherent to the fishing operations in the tropical tuna purse seine fishery. We hope that the new framework makes the margin of tolerance operational, stops unfairly penalising only EU operators and that the subsequent implementing legislation is quickly adopted and proportionate”.*

As next steps, the resulting political agreement has to be officially endorsed by the Council and the Parliament in second reading in the next few months. As for the entry into force of the new rules, for some of them such as the CCTV or the engine power monitoring devices, they will become mandatory in 4 years' time.