

Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
1049 Brussels, Belgium

Brussels, 9 November 2020

RE.: Conference on the entry/exit scheme and fishing capacity measurements

Dear Commissioner Sinkevičius,

The social partners of the sea-fishing sector (ETF, Europêche and Cogeca) have for a number of years raised awareness on the fact that the current fishing capacity parameters – Gross Tonnage (GT) and propulsion power (kW) - are not fit for purpose to measure the actual fishing capacity of a fishing vessel. Recent research and policy papers highlighted that the capacity policy under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) hinders improvements namely on safety and working conditions on board fishing vessels. In this context, the social partners believe it fundamental to hold an in-depth and science based discussion to explore ways to adapt EU fisheries policies and legislation to the fisheries reality with the goal to eradicate accidents at work, improve safety and working conditions for fishermen and make the sector more modern and attractive to young workers and hence bridge the generational and gender gap.

Recent studies¹ on the social impact of these capacity measurements have clearly shown that the gross tonnage limitation has a negative impact on crew safety and comfort as it penalises initiatives to add extra safety, comfort and quality measures to ships since the extra space involved has to compete with e.g. hold volume, volume of engine room or fuel tanks.

In light of the previous point, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)² urged the European Commission to identify alternative formulas for measuring fishing capacity, similar to those applied in Norway and Iceland, which exclude areas dedicated to relaxation, comfort and recreation from the calculation, on the basis of factors such as allocated quota or size of vessel.

Similarly, EU fisheries Advisory Councils are recommending to revise the definition of fishing capacity by for instance *“reinstate and extend the safety tonnage provisions in Article 11.5 of Council Regulation (EC) 2371/2002.”*³ Furthermore, current capacity measurements rules jeopardise women’s access to the sector since separate cabins, toilets and showers are needed to guarantee their privacy and well-being. With the demand to revise the calculation of the ceilings, the social partners do not intend to question the measures to ensure the sustainable exploitation of the fish resources as the spaces to be increased are to improve and

¹ Analysis on gross tonnage and propulsion power ceilings <http://www.chil.me/download-file/4bd3f613-0ecc-455b-a6ec-60262363eb24/analysis-on-gross-tonnage-and-propulsion-power-ceilings>

“Jauge Skil Faut” - Étude de l’impact des évolutions réglementaires sur la jauge des navires de pêche, dans le cadre de la PCP

² NAT/776 Social dimension of fisheries

³ Pelagic AC response to the Commission’s proposal on the conservation of fishery resources and the protection of marine ecosystems through technical measures COM (2016) 134 final <https://www.pelagic-ac.org/media/pdf/1617PAC%2034%20tech%20meas.pdf>

SWWAC Projet d’avis XX : Modernisation et amélioration des conditions de travail à bord des navires de pêche et plafond de capacité de pêche <https://www.etf-europe.org/modernisation-of-fishing-vessels-is-key-to-improving-safety-and-working-conditions/>

guarantee decent working and living conditions for fishermen on board, including comfort, that have nothing to do with the ability of the vessel to find, catch or store fish.

The fishing industry wishes to underline the clear contradiction between the terms of the CFP and the requirements set out in social legislation such as the ILO C188 Work in Fishing Convention, transposed in European legislation by Directive (EU) 2017/159. According to these legal texts, there is a requirement for more space on board, on a mandatory basis for vessels of 24 metres in length or over, while the fishing industry is prevented to increase space on board. Member States have to respect C188 standards, but the CFP rules make the obligation impossible to fulfil. This contradiction requires the full attention of policy-makers.

Moreover, under the revised Green Deal strategy, the EU has committed to reduce its greenhouse emissions by 55% and removing subsidies for fossil fuels. The good news is that emissions from the fishing vessels have already dropped by 40% if compared to 1990 levels. However, the industry is required to make an extra effort to achieve this target and reduce dependency on fossil fuels, with the objective to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. One of the main paths is moving towards gas or hydrogen engines. Pilot projects are being developed across Europe to apply this technology to fishing vessels, but these propulsion systems require more space on board and because of CFP capacity restrictions, in stark contrast with the shipping industry, our vessels can hardly adapt to these new technologies.

The fishing industry is fully aware of the ongoing discussions on the future European Maritime and Fisheries Fund as well as the future interim report on the functioning of the CFP expected by 2022. We think that a parallel policy discussion on the issue of fishing capacity would not be an obstacle to an agreement but rather an opportunity for a real debate on this fundamental point before formulating policy options.

The social partners recall that according to Art. 154 of the TFEU, before submitting proposals in the social policy field, the Commission shall consult management and labour on the possible direction of Union action. For this purpose, we call on the European Commission to organise a conference or forum where governments, social partners can openly discuss this important matter with a view to finding solutions and viable alternatives.

The social partners reiterate their commitment to long-term fisheries management that is consistent with the objectives of achieving economic, social, health, safety and employment benefits, and contributing to the availability of food supplies.

Yours sincerely,



Juan Manuel Trujillo Castillo
ETF Fisheries
Section Chair in the SSDC-F



Ment van der Zwan
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Spokesperson in the SSDC-F

Cc: Nicolas Schmit, Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights