

## **New fisheries technical and conservation rules**

**- For immediate release -**

Yesterday night in Strasbourg, the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission stroke a deal on a new EU law governing the conservation of fishery resources and the protection of marine ecosystems, the so-called 'technical measures' Regulation. Europêche welcomes the final adoption of this legislative file which, in the context of regionalisation, will bring simplification and decision-making closer to fishermen and coastal communities. The fishing industry will, however, be required to make an extra-effort to adapt to and comply with the introduction of a new set of stricter rules. Europêche regrets that the negotiations of this founding pillar of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) were overshadowed by radical environmentalists in an attempt to discredit the fishing fleet using electric pulse trawl gears and manipulate the public opinion with false slogans and vilifying campaigns.

After three years of hard negotiations and two failed past attempts in 2002 and in 2004 to revise these rules, the EU has finally succeeded to adopt a new technical measures' framework. The new legislation aims at modernising the existing rules on how, when and where fishermen may operate. The ultimate goal is to reduce catches of juveniles of commercial and non-commercial species, to improve species selectivity, to avoid catches of protected species, to reduce discards and to minimize environmental impacts.

Regarding the targets of the Regulation, the EU has adequately introduced performance indicators to assess the effectiveness in achieving the CFP objectives. However, in order to accommodate the Commission's demands to include quantifiable targets applicable across all EU seas, a new indicator called 'optimal exploitation pattern'<sup>1</sup> was incorporated. Europêche disagrees with the introduction of this measure which has never been tested as a policy tool (particularly in a mixed fishery context), lacks scientific and socio-economic analysis, and will even be stricter than the MSY policy.

Europêche welcomes the legislators' agreement to eliminate current complex rules limiting the species composition making up the catch of the fishing vessel which do no longer make sense in the context of the landing obligation. Concerning mesh-sizes, baseline measurements are being set for the different sea basins. Fishermen will only be allowed to use smaller mesh sizes provided they can avoid by-catch of certain non-targeted species. Europêche is eagerly waiting to analyse the final text to check whether current mesh sizes have been maintained.

Daniel Voces, Managing Director of Europêche, declared: *"We are convinced the EU has delivered an important contribution towards simplification, consolidating in one single law measures, which up until now, were scattered in 30 different EU regulations. Nevertheless, since under the landing obligation fishers are fully responsible for the catches taken, they should have been permitted to choose the most appropriate gears. This would have allowed achieving greater selectivity so as to reduce as much as possible unwanted catches and further mitigate any possible environmental impact."*

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<sup>1</sup> The 'exploitation pattern' is a measure of how fishing pressure is distributed over the length composition of the fish stock. It depends on the selectivity of the gears used in a fishery and on the extent to which particular age/size classes are targeted. The 'optimal exploitation pattern' defines the average length of capture that optimises the growth of individuals in a stock.

Policy-makers put special emphasis on the regionalisation of the framework in order to run-away from overly prescriptive rules and micro-management. For that purpose, it was agreed to prioritise tailor-made multiannual plans for each region. In absence of such plans, it appears that Member States may adopt regional measures through joint recommendations.

The agreement includes mitigation measures for the reduction of incidental catches of sensitive species that go beyond the existing rules. Europêche criticises the introduction of these measures in new sea areas adopted without a prior impact assessment confirming the need for such extension.

Policy-makers decided to ban pulse fishing in all EU waters as from 30 June 2021, with the possibility for the Member States to ban it in their territorial waters from the day of entry into force of this Regulation. Europêche regrets the negative socio-economic implications generated by this political decision which will affect 600 fishers and their families and lead to an economic loss of € 21.5 million. Additionally, the agreement sets stricter conditions for the use of this, or any other, innovative fishing gear for scientific research in order to ensure that knowledge development and innovation is not hampered.

*Daniel Voces concluded: "Our fishers will need to progressively adapt to the new legislative scenario, while at the same time facing Brexit uncertainty, coping with the full implementation of the landing obligation and the achievement of MSY exploitation levels for all stocks by 2020. We trust these measures will overall be capable of helping the industry accomplishing these objectives in the coming years."*

The political agreement will now have to formally be adopted by both the European Parliament and the Council.

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