

	Key note speech Veronika Veits, Director European Commission	Side Event FAO Rome 11 July 2018
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**"Ensuring socially, environmentally and commercially sustainable fisheries"
The social dimension of fisheries**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to attend to this side event and to discuss with you the social dimension of fisheries, and notably international safety and labour standards on board of fishing vessels.

Let me first thank the Kingdom of The Netherlands, the Holy Sea and the European Social Partners in the Fisheries Sector for co-hosting this event with the European Commission.

We all know only too well that fishing is not only a hard job, but it is also amongst the most dangerous professional occupations, where accidents can happen easily. We do have a collective responsibility – as States, as Institutions, and as ship-owners - to do the utmost in ensuring decent working conditions, vessel safety and safety for persons working on fishing vessels, wherever that may be.

Fishers also need to be well trained, certified and fit for the job.

For all this, the international community has managed to agree on joint standards as we have just heard before, notably with:

- the ILO Convention on Work in Fishing (C 188 - 2007),
- the IMO Standards in Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fisheries (STCW-F, 1995) and
- the Cape Town Agreement on the safety of fishing vessels replacing the Torremolinos Convention and Protocol.

We could also add SOLAS – the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (1974) and MARPOL, the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (1973) as relevant for safety and occupational health on board.

So the international rules, instruments and standards are there. However, and in sharp contrast to what we see in shipping, they are not sufficiently ratified. As we speak only 10 states have ratified C 188, 20 states have ratified the STCW-F, and the Cape Town Agreement is still awaiting a sufficient number of ratifications to enter into force. Therefore, these rules,

instruments and standards are far from being widely and harmoniously implemented on the vessels. As a consequence, the levels of protection vary considerably between fishermen/women of different countries and between fishermen/women and normal seafarers. This can hardly be justified. The low level of protection of fishers is all the more surprising as the global number of fishers is actually 10 to 20 times higher than the number of seafarers.

Even more worrying is that in recent years, news about labour exploitation and even forced labour and human trafficking in fisheries have been all over the news.

What does the EU do to tackle the social challenges ?

The European Union is taking these social challenges very seriously: the promotion of more safety at sea and better labour conditions for fisheries is part of our policy priority on better ocean governance within and outside the EU and it is in line with the EU's commitments under the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (SDG 8 and 14 notably).

Concerning the **international side** the Commission and the EU have committed to promote the ratification

and implementation of all relevant international Conventions in the context of our bilateral and multilateral relations around the world.

The Our Oceans Conference hosted by the EU in Malta last year had a strong social focus and many commitments were made in that area:

- by states, such as the USA¹ and Thailand who announced that it will ratify and implement relevant ILO Conventions (C 188),
- by international organisations like ILO,
- and importantly, also by also operators, for instance OPAGAC (the European Organisation of associated producers of Large Tuna Freezers).

I have mentioned forced labour and human trafficking before. Frequently, such behaviour goes hand in hand with illegal fishing operations.

You will be aware that the EU has a **very active policy to fight IUU fishing** and cooperates with many third countries to that end. Although labour and safety standards are not part of our legal and cooperation framework to fight IUU fishing, **cracking down on IUU**

¹ With a programme to combat forced labour and human trafficking on fishing vessels in the Asia Pacific region of 5 mio \$.

fishing is also reducing criminal behaviour, including labour exploitation.

In parallel, the EU is engaging in labour dialogues with critical states in the context of our decent work and human rights agenda.

So what do we do within the EU ?

Within the EU we have a strong legal and political mandate for managing marine biological resources with the objectives of achieving not only environmental and economic but also social benefits and a fair standard of living. This is part of the Treaty on the functioning of the EU and the EU's Common Fisheries Policy.

Both our fisheries conservation and structural policy contribute to the social dimension, including to the social sustainability of the seafood supply chain.

When it comes to labour and safety standards in fisheries things are a bit complicated in the EU since we are here in the area of what we call "mixed competence". This means that on the one hand the main part of the Conventions has to be transposed into EU law. On the other hand the international conventions need to be ratified by EU Member States

since the Member States are signatories to ILO and IMO².

Here the EU and its Member States have still some homework to do.

Therefore, we have been raising awareness of Member States on the need to ratify international conventions related to safety and working condition and promote ratification internationally. In this respect we have also worked closely with the European social partners and relevant stakeholders in the fishing sector. Our Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Mr. Vella is personally engaged to bring ratifications forward still under his term and he has written to our Member States to this end. I do hope that in our forthcoming report on the ratification of the STCW-F by EU Member States we will be able to show progress in ratifications.

Because, the more States have ratified the conventions and actually enforce them, instead of just a few, the better the protection of fish workers will be at a global level, and thus the level of playing field for our operators.

Ladies and gentlemen,

² C188 work in fishing: 9 ratifications: LT, PL, PT, DK, RO, BE, ES, LT, NL)
STCW-F: ES, PT, PL, DK, LV, LT..)

I hope that this side-event will help to raise awareness on the importance of the social dimension of fisheries.

What we ultimately want is to improve the lives and work of millions of on-board workers, and reduce accident risks and prevent labour exploitation.

We stand ready to cooperate and promote jointly the implementation and the respect of basic rules and obligations for well-being, decent work and safety and security on board fishing vessels.

We are also looking forward towards the reinforced co-operation between FAO, ILO and IMO, including for the follow-up to the Resolution of the 2017 Tripartite Meeting on Migrant Workers in Fishing to set up a roadmap for the ratification and implementation of the international pillar Conventions for the social dimension of fisheries.

Thank you very much for your attention

Defensives

Q How do you think we can persuade governments on the need to ratify and implement the instruments presented?

First and foremost, awareness raising is key. That is what we are doing here today. International events and multilateral meetings are an excellent opportunity for that. Peer pressure from those states that have already ratified is important as well. It is also in their interest to create a level playing field. Lobbies have their role to play in convincing governments and I would invite all governments to enter into a social dialogue with the operators.

But it needs more than awareness raising. It will also need to better explain the existing rules and how they can be implemented – here the international organisations are on call. In addition it may need support to the poorer states to help them transpose and implement the rules and set up the necessary administrative capacity.

Q What do you think is preventing them from ratifying? [maybe start with that]

It is difficult to say what prevents States from ratification. From our conversations with Member States there are a couple of reasons that appear (learned guesses)

- "Limited" economic importance of fisheries – fisheries makes normally up a small share in GDP although the overall economic importance may be high, notably at the local and regional level. In comparison, the economic relevance of container ships in combination with the assurance dimension if there problems with safety, is much higher. – im Vergleich dazu, bei einem Containerschiff z.B. gibt es eine ganz andere Versicherungsdimension (Verlust der Ware, Anschlusschwierigkeiten mit Versorgungsengpässen etc.) als wenn es ein Problem irgendwo mit einem Trawler gibt
- **Although the fisheries lobby I have to face is quite strong in comparison to other lobbies (shipping) it may not be enough to trigger government action. There is also limited peer pressure through other governments in view of the limited number of ratifications.** die Reeder (Europêche) auch noch nicht sehr lang für diese Dinge einsetzen (seit 3-4 Jahren vielleicht, vorher gab es eher Lippenbekenntnisse), ETF war da eher allein auf weiter Flur.
- There may be competence questions between the administrations of States. It could easily be that the lead administration for ratification (eg Transport) does not attach any priority to fisheries. Or that in the social administration other sectors get priority attention than fisheries. Eg within the Commission we have no competence in fisheries and maritime affairs for safety on board – that' DG MOVE.
- It may also be a question of costs: implementation of new rules is always related to additional costs, at least at the beginning.

We hear that always from our MS and operators when we introduce new rules, eg on control. This may in particular be a reason for developing countries to refrain from ratification.

- Finally there may be technical difficulties preventing ratification, eg a lack of clarity of rules and how they need to be implemented.

Q Would a resolution from FAO favouring the set up of a roadmap in close cooperation with other relevant stakeholders and UN agencies by for instance 2020 help?

The Tripartite Meeting on Issues related to Migrant Fishers taking place from 18-22 September 2018 adopted a resolution on migrant fishers in which ILO was invited amongst others to develop in close cooperation with other relevant agencies of the UN, an effective roadmap for rapid worldwide implementation of the international agreements relating to work in the fishing sector, in particular the Cape Town Agreement, the STWC-F, and C 188.

So we do already have such a resolution. What we should ask ourselves is whether the international community needs yet another resolution, or whether the existing one allows to start working right away instead of negotiating another resolution, e.g. if COFI expresses its support for this part of the resolution.

I have to stress here that we as Commission have not discussed this issue in the preparation of the COFI – so I do not represent here any official position but my personal opinion based on my past experience in international fisheries.

Q What would be the composition, mandate, expected results and date for the deliverables of the expert group implementing the road map?

See above. If COFI supports the resolution and since the roadmap would cover international agreements of both ILO and IMO it might be practical to ask the joint working group of FAO, ILO and IMO to look jointly into the composition, mandate, etc of an expert group.

However, we should be wary that such works should not be used as a pretext to slow down efforts. It would also be important that a roadmap includes measurable steps to assess progress, and makes states accountable. Link to PSM and IUU relevant.

Q What means can your organisation mobilise or contribute to achieve these objectives?

First and foremost we will continue our path towards promoting ratification within and outside the EU and towards transposition of the international agreements, where not yet done, in line with our commitments for better ocean governance. We will also endeavour to assist other states in that respect.

Again without prejudging any official position of the Commission and the EU and its Member States, it is most likely that we would be actively involved in bringing forward progress in the social dimension of

fisheries, including by looking into possibilities to support this process by more than participation.