



Europeche and ETF urge new policy direction to secure “Fishers of the Future”

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The Chair of the EU Social Dialogue Committee for Sea Fisheries¹, Cor Blonk, addressed the pressing challenges and opportunities facing the sector during the "Fishers of the Future"² conference. A study that examines the future role of fishers in society up to 2050. As part of the expert panel, Mr Blonk, emphasized the indispensable contributions of fishers and vessel owners in ensuring Europe’s food self-sufficiency and supporting coastal communities. He called for urgent, coordinated action from policymakers to secure the fleet’s future, with a strong focus on the social dimension, to support a thriving and resilient fishing industry able to offer quality and safe jobs.

The new Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans, Kostas Kadis, opened the event reminding that fisheries are integral to the socio-economic fabric of coastal communities, providing healthy food to European citizens. Despite their significance, fishers face numerous challenges, including labour shortages, an ageing workforce and a gender gap. These issues demand open communication between policy-makers and fishers, alongside policies that ensure competitiveness, resilience and sustainability. To address these concerns, the Commissioner emphasized the need to focus on building a resilient, adaptable future for the fishing sector, grounded in a clear understanding of its past, present and future trends.

Mr. Blonk, voicing the joint concerns of social partners, highlighted the fishing industry’s vulnerable position, facing a combination of economic, environmental and regulatory challenges. Rising operational costs and the influx of cheap imports from non-sustainable sources are undermining the market, while overregulation and excessive bureaucracy are problems to be addressed if we want to increase attractiveness of the sector for younger generations. Additionally, safety remains a critical issue, exacerbated by inconsistent training standards across Member States, further jeopardizing the well-being of fishers.

"The future of fishers starts today," remarked Mr Blonk. "While the industry has made strides in environmental sustainability, such as reducing by 52% its GHG emissions, the focus must expand to include profitability and the welfare of fishers themselves. Sustainability is not only about the planet and profit but also about people." He added, "Fishers should be recognized as key actors in securing healthy and nutritious food. They perform an essential role that benefits us all, and their work deserves to be appreciated and valued for the vital contribution they make to our society".

Despite these challenges, modernization presents a path forward. Upgrading fleets with safer, more efficient and greener technologies can transform the industry. However, significant barriers persist such as restrictive EU regulations that hinder fleet renewal. For example, outdated capacity

¹ Representing the social partners in the fishing sector https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/european-employment-strategy/social-dialogue/cross-industry-and-sectoral-social-dialogue/sea-fisheries-sectoral-social-dialogue_en

² https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/events/fishers-future-towards-2050-2025-01-14_en

definitions prevent the utilization of additional space needed to install new technologies or expand accommodation and comfort for diverse crews, further slowing progress.

Mr Blonk commented: *"We need to act at multiple levels. From fishing capacity to social conditions, everything must align to create equal opportunities for our fishers in a competitive global market."*

Optimism for the Future

Mr Blonk concluded: *"Times are challenging, but we remain optimistic. What we need is a policy framework that facilitates fishers and fishing vessel owners to do what they do best: deliver healthy seafood to our tables. We cannot stop the future, but we can influence the future. Let's do it together. In this regard, we welcome the new vision from the Commissioner and Commission officials on the social dimension of the Common Fisheries Policy, which offers hope for a more balanced and inclusive approach to fisheries policies."*

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