



Europêche welcomes von der Leyen's announcement of a full-time fisheries Commissioner

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With the European elections approaching, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has announced her commitment to appointing a full-time fisheries Commissioner for her second term. This role will focus on ensuring that the next generations can make a good living out of this craft and profession. The fishing sector represented by Europêche welcomes the announcement hoping that the new Commissioner brings back a balance between biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of natural resources and food security. The sector recalls the importance of placing fishers at the heart of EU policy making in the new Commission's mandate. Additionally, Europêche calls for primary food production and food sovereignty to be elevated on the Commission's agenda and structured at the Vice-Presidency level.

Preserving marine ecosystems is essential for sustainable fisheries. However, the current grouping of environment, oceans and fisheries under one portfolio within the Commission has failed to adequately address the balance between the pillars of sustainable development.

In recent years, fishers have confronted successive crises stemming from Brexit, COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine, with the rise in fuel prices and operating costs. Additionally, they faced significant challenges such as climate change, fleet decarbonization and the issue of generational renewal. On top of that, fishers had to put up with excessive EU regulations, unfair fishing area closures and unjustified fishing bans proposed by the Commission. As a result, the EU's fleet size decreased by 28% over the past 20 years, and its seafood self-sufficiency has been declining since 2018. All while the EU continues to support seafood imports from third countries with increasing tax exemptions and many of these imports do not adhere to the same sustainability standards required of EU fishers.

Javier Garat, President of Europêche, declared: *'Fishers provide one of the healthiest animal proteins with one of the smallest carbon footprints. They contribute to meeting the growing world demand for food. Fisheries is therefore a strategic sector for our society and one of the few exclusive competences of the EU. The EU must therefore prioritize support for its fishing sector to encourage the younger generation to enter this profession and to sustain rural coastal community areas. In this context, we appreciate von der Leyen's political commitment to creating a stand-alone portfolio on fisheries in the next European Commission.'*

He continued *'A Commissioner for Fisheries is fundamental, but it is equally important to place food production and food sovereignty high in the Commission's structure at the Vice-Presidency level. In a political reality where the reduction of dependencies from third countries is very high on the agenda, this only makes sense'*.

According to Europêche, the EU should focus on developing balanced legislation and financing instruments that strongly support the fisheries sector in its transition towards carbon neutrality. For that purpose, in light of the ongoing evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy, the new Commission must conduct a comprehensive impact assessment of all fisheries policies stemming from the Green Deal at the start of the next mandate. Garat concluded: *'While monitoring and reporting of fishing*

activities are necessary, the excessive administrative burden generated should be reduced and streamlined. Ambitious goals should be achieved through technological innovations, not bans.'

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