



Brussels, 21 March 2023

Member States and fishing industry meet to discuss the fisheries package and the future of bottom fisheries

One month after the publication of the European Commission 'Action Plan: Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries'¹, fishing industry leaders have met in Brussels and have invited Member States to jointly analyse the nature, impact, and consequences of this initiative. All parties agreed on the need to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems as well as sustainable fisheries and considered a different approach than that of the Commission to achieve this goal. Some Member States showed concerns about the European Commission proposal to gradually ban bottom fishing in 30% of EU seas by 2030, especially given the lack of socio-economic impact assessment and the necessary underpinning science. The legal nature, proportionality, and the timeline to implement the measures proposed by the Commission was also questioned by some countries. Member States also put emphasis on the need to guarantee food security at a time where the strategic autonomy of Europe is high on the EU agenda. Member States appreciated the constructive dialogue with the sector.

The fishing sector represented by the EBFA, Europêche, and EAPO would like to express its gratitude to EU governments for the continued dialogue in search of the best way to implement EU regulations and the CFP, identifying ways to effectively protect vulnerable marine ecosystems and feed a growing population whilst reducing our dependency from foreign seafood imports.

The sector unanimously feels that the Action Plan places a heavy and disproportionate burden on the EU fleet, which is still struggling with the consequences of Brexit, the Covid pandemic, inflation, and the energy crisis. Likewise, according to the sector, it also places additional stress on Member States that will have to deal with objectives not justified by science and bound to negatively affect entire fishing dependent communities under an unrealistic timetable.

The sector recalls that the bottom fishing ban is a completely new objective, not based on any international or European rule, that will not follow the ordinary legislative process. This approach limits the political debate, the opinion of national administrations, and the European Parliament in the decision-making process. For the sector, it is clear that if there is any change to the Common Fisheries Policy, the Commission must follow the established legislative process: Through the Council and the European Parliament.

Iván López van der Veen, Chair of EBFA, declared: *“National authorities have a specific mission and responsibility vis-à-vis their citizens to implement EU rules, secure jobs, and supply the market with sustainable seafood. It is therefore difficult to understand that the European Commission has chosen to adopt an Action Plan, without consulting Member States, despite putting them at the centre of the debate with the fisheries package. The legal nature of the instrument selected also raises legal questions. Since it is not EU law, citizens and companies, or even Member States, affected have no right to challenge in court the disproportionate impact of the Action Plan, leaving them defenceless. In a nutshell, no consultation, no debate, and no possible legal defence because of the path the Commission selected to bring its proposals forward”.*

¹ https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/publications/communication-commission-eu-action-plan-protecting-and-restoring-marine-ecosystems-sustainable-and_en

The sector therefore considers the prohibition of bottom mobile gears as an objective clearly disproportionate, unjustified, not based on the best available science, and contrary to international commitments. During the meeting, the sector reiterated its call on the Council and the European Parliament to halt the Action Plan as proposed by the Commission.

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