



ASSOCIATION OF NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS
OF FISHING ENTERPRISES IN THE EU

Europêche calls for fisheries to be fully integrated in EU trade policy

Brussels, 13 November 2025

Europêche, the leading representative body for the fishing sector in Europe, stresses the need to fully integrate fisheries into EU trade policy to safeguard fair competition, sustainable seafood and the long-term viability of the EU fleet.

Yesterday, Europêche held a constructive meeting with Mrs María Martin-Prat, Deputy Director-General at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Trade, and her team covering Asia and trade policy coordination. The dialogue focused on securing fair market conditions for EU seafood producers in ongoing trade negotiations — particularly with Thailand and North Atlantic partners — and ensuring that fisheries' competitiveness, sustainability and social standards are not undermined by trade liberalisation.

Javier Garat, President of Europêche, stated: *"We strongly support open and rules-based trade, but not at the expense of the future of our fishers. The EU cannot continue to tighten sustainability obligations on its own fleets while granting duty-free access to products caught or processed under far lower environmental and social conditions. Stronger coordination between DG TRADE and DG MARE is essential to ensure that trade policy upholds the same sustainability and social standards that guide the EU's fisheries policy and guarantees a true level playing field."*

EU- Thailand Free Trade Agreement between: Prevent unfair competition from low-standard tuna

Thailand is one of the world's largest tuna processors, producing around 450,000 tonnes annually yet exporting only about 10,000 tonnes to the EU due to existing tariffs. Europêche warned that eliminating or relaxing these tariffs under a future FTA would seriously distort competition, as tuna processed in Thailand often originates from fleets with weak labour and environmental standards, raising risks of IUU fishing and forced labour, but also production costs. It is twice more costly to catch one ton of tuna on a European vessel than on South-East Asian ones.

Europêche calls for applying extremely strict rules of origin, applying only to wholly obtained tuna and excluding cumulative rules, imposing binding ratification of ILO Fundamental Conventions 87 as a precondition for tariff benefits. Equally important is applying enhanced traceability and origin labelling to ensure EU consumers know the true source of imported tuna: the flag of the vessel and catch area.

Trade and Cooperation Agreement with United Kingdom: Ensure post-Brexit mutual access and fairness in marine environmental policies

Europêche welcomed the extension of reciprocal fishing access until 2038 under the EU–UK agreement but expressed concern over new Marine Protected Area restrictions. First implemented in Scottish waters and now projected in Southern UK waters, the impact of these measures falls disproportionately on European vessels, which suffer nearly five times greater economic losses

compared to UK vessels operating in the same areas. The organisation urged the Commission to ensure that MPA measures remain proportionate, non-discriminatory and compliant with the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), and to press the UK to reopen the sandeel fishery unjustifiably closed to EU vessels. DG TRADE showed interest in the concerns raised by Europêche and encouraged continued dialogue with DG MARE. The Directorate also expressed interest in receiving additional technical information to further inform its assessment of the issues.

Norway and Coastal States: Protect the EU market from catches originated from unilateral overfishing of shared stocks

Europêche denounced the unilateral quota increases by Norway, the Faroe Islands and Russia on key pelagic stocks, especially mackerel, herring and blue whiting, which have caused overfishing and a 70% drop in mackerel catches for next year. The organisation called on the Commission to trigger the EU's new Regulation on unsustainable practices against these actions and to also tackle the import of Russian-caught cod transiting through Norway that arrive to our market tariff free.

Furthermore, Europêche believes that time has come to look into the possibility of amending the fisheries cooperation agreement with Norway in a way that ensures EU-fishers access to Norwegian waters even if quotas are not in place by the first of January. This approach should be considered within a broader context of EU-Norway trade and cooperation.

New EU-Morocco trade and fisheries agreement: Preserving a strategic partnership and sustainable fisheries

Europêche welcomes the new EU mandate to negotiate a fisheries agreement with Morocco, a strategic partner for sustainable, science-based fisheries management and food security. For Europêche it is fundamental that future fishing opportunities reflect the good performance and sustainability of stocks in recent years, particularly the pelagic fishery. The sector urges the Commission to base future arrangements on scientific evidence and mutual economic benefit.

United States: Ensure reciprocal market access

The 15% tariff on EU seafood has created a new trade barrier, causing significant economic harm to European companies, while US exporters continue to enjoy duty-free access for a wide range of seafood products. Europêche called on the Commission to secure equivalent tariff exemptions for key European exports such as bluefin tuna, scallops, and hake, ensuring a level playing field and fair competition across the Atlantic. DG TRADE acknowledged that the 15% tariff represents a negotiated compromise, yet expressed openness to hold a technical meeting.

Autonomous Tariff Quotas: Prevent unfair competition

While access to non-EU raw materials is essential where there is no or insufficient EU production, tariff derogations such as Autonomous Tariff Quotas (ATQs) must be strictly linked to sustainability criteria and excluded for tuna, in order to safeguard fair competition and the long-term competitiveness of EU fleets.

Due Diligence: Equal rules for EU and non-EU operators

Europêche expressed concern that reporting obligations for non-EU operators have been postponed indefinitely, while EU fleets and processors will face these requirements from 2027. This asymmetry would undermine the level playing field and distort competition. Europêche urged the Commission to ensure that due diligence rules apply simultaneously and equally to all companies placing seafood on the EU market, regardless of origin.

WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement

Europêche stresses that the next phase must allow essential fleet renewal, safeguard the EU's sustainable funding model and Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements, and enable vital support measures during crises such as COVID or Ukraine.

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Press contacts:

Daniel Voces, Managing Director of Europêche: +32 489 26 81 07 daniel.voces@europeche.org

Anne-France Mattlet, Europêche Tuna Group Director +33 6 78 11 63 01: anne-france.mattlet@europeche.org