



EP(16)11

*Mr João AGUIAR MACHADO
Director-General for Maritime
Affairs and Fisheries
European Commission
1049 Brussels*

15th February 2016

Re.: Significant problems concerning fishing licenses in the framework of certain Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs)

Dear Mr Aguiar,

On behalf of the members of Europepeche, we would like to draw your attention to the worrying latest developments concerning the implementation of certain Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements, particularly Senegal, Madagascar, Guinea Bissau and Comoros.

As we had the opportunity to mention during our meeting held on 19th November 2015, despite current difficulties with the agreements with Morocco and Mauritania, we are, on the whole, satisfied with the performance of the DG MARE negotiating team of the Unit B/3, whose agreements have proven profitable for both the EU and third countries.

However, we are disappointed with the recent developments in the issuing of fishing licenses. Even though our EU ship-owners have applied for licenses in a timely manner (even 40-50 days before the deadline given), they have experienced unacceptable delays at the beginning of 2016 which have caused losses of several fishing days.

In addition, Guinea Bissau has imposed the compulsory installation of their own VMS system (ARGOS) when the Protocol clearly states that the VMS used up until now by the fishing vessels operating in those waters is perfectly valid.

As you can imagine, this situation is creating huge legal and commercial uncertainty for our operators and unnecessary delays in the issuing process, leaving them unprotected and suffering consequential loss and damages.

We therefore strongly demand that the European Commission (EC) as a matter of urgency:

1. Offer legal protection for all affected EU ship-owners and strongly urge the use of whatever means at their disposal to rectify the situation, to bring licences into line with the provision as mutually agreed. In addition, the EC should put in place as soon as possible the necessary proactive measures to avoid or minimise any similar incident in the future. We suggest that you consult your services to try to find adequate solutions to these problems. Furthermore, Europepeche is open to discuss and collaborate with you and your services for this purpose.

2. Generate the resources necessary to guarantee the proper implementation of the obligations contracted by the EU and third countries, particularly in view of the growing number of signed SFPAs. For this purpose, we reiterate our request to allocate more resources for Unit B/3 in order to proactively tackle these issues and allow for more agreements, blue growth and business opportunities.

We would be grateful if you could provide us with the plan of action that the EC will take since, as mentioned, this is regrettably not the first time this has happened.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Javier Garat', written over a horizontal line.

Javier Garat
President of Europepêche

CC: *Stefaan Depypere*
Roberto Cesari
Emmanuel Berck