

Commissioner for Health and Food Safety  
Mrs. Stella Kyriakides

Commissioner for the Internal Market  
Mr. Thierry Breton

Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries  
Mr. Virginijus Sinkevičius

European Commission  
Rue de la Loi 200  
1049 Brussels - Belgium

Brussels, 28 April 2021

**RE.: Specific vaccination protocol for fishers**

Dear Commissioner Kyriakides, Dear Commissioner Breton, Dear Commissioner Sinkevičius,

In relation to the vaccination process against Covid-19 that is being carried out in Europe, we want to draw your attention to the urgent need to develop and implement a specific vaccination scheme for workers in the EU fishing fleet, due to the special conditions of its activity.

In this way, **this sector, which has been recognized as an essential and strategic sector during the pandemic for its vital work in the supply of fish and food security, urgently requires the vaccination of fishers.** This is fundamental since the work of the crews takes place in confined spaces, where it is impossible to maintain physical distance and with the high risk of coronavirus transmissibility that this entails. In addition, in many cases, the long periods of stay on board ships makes it difficult to immunize them on the pre-established schedule for the general population. Furthermore, crews remain transmission vectors due to their international travels and their vaccination would help prevent the spread of variants.

We are increasingly facing infections on our international vessels in fishing areas located more than 48 hours from ports equipped with adequate medical facilities with oxygen (only recently two fishers died on board an EU tuna vessel<sup>1</sup>). The phenomenon is accelerating due to the increasing infection rate in some countries. EU fishers under the age of 60-55 cannot yet benefit from vaccines and non-European fishers on board of our vessels are subject to more aggressive variants like that of South Africa.

Furthermore, this petition aligns with five UN agencies<sup>2</sup> that are encouraging governments to *"give priority to fishers, seafarers and aircraft crews in their national vaccination programs."* In this context, we consider it crucial to follow the recommendations below to ensure the health and wellbeing of maritime professionals as they perform their key function:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://goodwordnews.com/after-two-sailors-died-of-covid-the-armaments-sound-the-alarm-brittany/>

<sup>2</sup> [Joint declaration signed by the ICAO, ILO, IMO, IOM and WHO](#)

### 1. Prioritize fishers' access to the vaccine

Member States, in planning for vaccination programmes in their own jurisdictions, should ensure that fishers can access vaccination as a priority, in order to safeguard their health and further facilitate the easing of restrictions currently faced.

There must be special arrangements for fishers giving them priority to receive their vaccination, not only in the flag State, but also in their country of residence and in port States. The latter should also apply to fishers who are aboard their vessels calling foreign ports.

This vaccination must be done for all crews operating under European flagged-vessels, whether the fisher is European or embarked because of bilateral fishing agreements.

We believe this is common sense, particularly for the numerous fishing crews working on vessels that operate for weeks without returning to port. If they are not vaccinated, those who are not immune are at risk as well as the coastal communities where they arrive. Furthermore, if the crew in command of the vessel get sick while on the high seas, this would create a serious safety and navigational hazard.

It is therefore necessary for the Commission to urge Member States to prioritise the vaccination to safeguard the health and wellbeing of fishermen, in addition to ensuring food supply and food security.

### 2. Free movement of fishers

Indeed, it is to be expected that the airlines and/or certain countries will require the vaccination (passport) of fishers in transit. This concerns in particular long distance fishing vessels where fishing operations cannot take place without the necessary crew changes.

### 3. Quarantine

Member States should exempt fishers from quarantine upon arrival in the jurisdiction in which they will sign on to their vessel.

### 4. Situation of workers in the sector by age groups

At the moment that vaccination is being formulated by age groups, it must be taken into account that as soon as it corresponds to the interval between 40 and 65 years there will be numerous cases that will correspond to the crew members embarked on long distance fishing fleets and that they will also be affected by not being able to enter their natural vaccination period.

### 5. Establishment of vaccination guidelines for fishing fleet crews

If the crew members had to follow different guidelines, by which each one had to go to different health centers, in different time frames, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to satisfactorily carry out the necessary vaccinations. As a matter of fact, in many cases, crew members will not be vaccinated. These vaccination guidelines could perfectly be coordinated through the national authorities with the support of organizations and associations in the fishing sector.

The special nature of this sector is evident thereby the absolute need to adapt the vaccination strategy as much as possible to the particularities of this collective. This requires a coordination effort on a vessel, port and fishing trip level.

#### 6. Use of single-dose vaccines for embarked crew members

It would be desirable for all crew members to be able to receive single-dose vaccines, particularly for those workers that remain on board for long periods. For those receiving a two-dose vaccine, it would be fundamental that the entire vaccination process can be completed prior to the departure date of the fishing trip.

#### 7. Designation of locations as vaccination sites

The COVID vaccine must be administered to fishers in health care facilities located in or near the coast, ideally in the fishing port of departure and in particular in the locations where international crew changes take place.

#### 8. Recording of the vaccine in the seaman's book

Finally, we would like the European Commission to consider the possibility of recording the administration of the vaccine in the seaman's book on a voluntary basis, which would provide legal security to guarantee the free movement of fishers.

We trust that the European Commission continue calling on EU Member States to support the "key workers" of the fishing industry during the coronavirus crisis and prioritise their access to the vaccine to keep essential fishing operations running.

Yours sincerely,



Juan Manuel Trujillo Castillo  
*ETF Fisheries Section Chair*



Ment van der Zwan  
*Europêche*  
*Spokesperson in the SSDC-F*