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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL

The common fisheries policy today and tomorrow: a Fisheries and Oceans Pact towards sustainable, science-based, innovative and inclusive fisheries management

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1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of the common fisheries policy (CFP) is to ensure long-term sustainability for fisheries and aquaculture, the availability of food supplies and a fair standard of living for fisheries and aquaculture communities. This includes everyone involved in the entire value chain, in order to preserve the socio-economic fabric of coastal communities.

By combining environmental, social and economic sustainability objectives, the CFP was a precursor of the European Green Deal[1] and its related strategies[2]. In turn, the European Green Deal strengthened the CFP approach, emphasising the triple contribution of fisheries and aquaculture to the economy and employment of coastal regions, food security in the EU and the protection of the marine environment.

Today, our seas, and their rich biodiversity that the socio-economic fabric depends on, are facing many complex challenges. They are facing the effects of maritime activities, pollution (e.g. nutrient enrichment and contaminants, marine litter, including plastics and micro-plastics, underwater noise, etc.), and climate change (such as the spread of non-indigenous species). The CFP and the fisheries sector have to do their part, but cannot address these challenges alone. It is just as essential to tackle the impact of human pressures other than fisheries on the marine environment and to facilitate the restoration of healthy oceans on which EU fishers and coastal communities rely.

This requires an integrated approach that is coherent with other policy domains, such as environmental, agricultural and energy policies. The implementation of all the strands of the European Green Deal, and in particular the 'Zero Pollution Action Plan'[3], are key in this regard. For example, in the Baltic, eutrophication and pollution have had a severe impact on the sustainability of the marine environment, including fish stocks. It is evident that fisheries management measures alone are not enough to improve the situation. Stakeholders across policy domains, therefore, have been joining forces to address common challenges, as illustrated by the signing of 'Our Baltic Declaration'[4]. In the Mediterranean and the Black

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1 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, The European Green Deal COM/2019/640 final.

2 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system, COM/2020/381 and Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 Bringing nature back into our lives, COM/2020/380

3 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Pathway to a Healthy Planet for All EU Action Plan: 'Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil' (COM/2021/400 final)

4 https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2020-09/ministerial_declaration_our_baltic_conference.pdf

Sea, the negative effects of pollution on the marine environment are of particular concern. In this regard, the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) will develop a regional adaptation strategy to cope with the potential effects of pollution, including plastic pollution, underwater noise, abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear, as well as nutrients and contaminants.

The purpose of this Communication is to report on the functioning of the CFP, as provided for in Article 49 of the CFP Regulation, and to set out a vision and a path toward sustainable and resilient fisheries of the future. It complements the action plan on protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries[5] (hereafter referred to as the marine action plan) and the Communication on the Energy Transition of the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture sector[6] (hereafter referred to as the energy transition initiative), which identify and prioritise concrete actions needed to address specific fisheries, environmental and climate challenges. In addition, a targeted report provides a comprehensive assessment of the common markets organisation (CMO)[7].

This Communication should be read together with its accompanying staff working document, which provides more detailed insights into the current state of CFP implementation, building on an extensive consultation process conducted since December 2021, various studies, resolutions of the European Parliament, and inputs from the Council and the Member States.

2. EMPOWERING PEOPLE IN FISHING AND AQUACULTURE COMMUNITIES

Fishing and aquaculture are professions with a long tradition deeply rooted in the European cultural heritage. According to the Annual Economic Report on the EU Fishing Fleet[8], in 2020 over 124 630 fishers were employed in EU commercial fisheries, equivalent to 82 272 full-time equivalents (FTE). According to the latest Economic Report on EU aquaculture, in 2018 the number of employees and FTEs in the EU aquaculture sector was estimated to be 69 000 and 39 000, respectively[9]. Both fisheries and aquaculture contribute to securing a wide variety of food and provide employment in many coastal communities. Therefore, the policy's social dimension should be given particular attention.

The farm to fork strategy recognises the strong link between healthy people, healthy societies and a healthy planet and the need to ensure the livelihood of primary producers to successfully transition to a sustainable EU food system. Therefore, providing sustainable jobs for fishers and aquaculture producers and all involved in the value chain depends on the

5 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - EU Action Plan: Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries, COM(2023)102

6 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the energy transition of the EU fisheries and aquaculture sector, COM(2023)100

7 Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council - The Implementation of the CMO Regulation, COM(2023)101

8 European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries, *The 2022 annual economic report on the EU fishing fleet (STECF 22-06)*, Virtanen, J.(editor), Guillen, J.(editor), Prellezo, R.(editor), Sabatella, E.(editor), Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

9 European Commission, Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) – The EU Aquaculture Sector – Economic report 2020 (STECF-20-12). EUR 28359 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021

sustainable use of the aquatic resources. An integrated analysis of the social dimension of EU fisheries is needed, so that data on employment, gender, vocational training or on peoples' dependency on fishing activities can be taken into account more effectively by policy makers when proposing conservation measures in fisheries management.

Generational renewal is key if we want to make sure that the EU fishing, aquaculture and processing sector and coastal communities have a viable future. However, it can only happen if the sector is perceived as attractive, if difficult working conditions are improved through innovation, if the marine environment is kept biodiverse, clean and healthy, and if our societies recognise fishers and aquaculture producers for the professionalism and service they provide. Fisheries have to be promoted as an attractive career choice, with fishers seen as 'stewards of the sea'. The chance to live an outdoor lifestyle or opportunities for innovative working arrangements, such as linking production to direct sales or tourism, should also be emphasised. Similarly, it is crucial to enhance and increase recognition of the important role of women throughout the EU seafood value chain, from the generation of wealth and employment to the sustainable use and conservation of aquatic resources.

The CFP provides tools that can help to improve the attractiveness of the fishing and aquaculture as a profession. For example, sustainable fisheries management ensures the long-term availability of healthy fish stocks, which is a precondition for business stability. The CFP also gives a prominent role to producer organisations, allowing them and their members to develop tailor-made actions and strengthen the place of operators in the overall value chain. In addition, the consideration of socio-economic impacts in management decisions allows for a fair standard of living for those who depend on fishing activities. The EU budget, particularly the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)[10] and its community-led local development (CLLD), provides significant financial support[11] for the improvement of safety and working conditions, development of skills, sharing of knowledge and making the sector more resilient overall.

Other EU policies have a role to play in maintaining the attractiveness of the sector and thus ensuring a prosperous future for the European fishing and aquaculture communities. Beyond the CFP, EU legislation follows ambitious international standards on safety and working conditions in the fisheries sector, including training for fishing crews[12]; efforts to eradicate modern slavery, illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing and promoting the development of social standards worldwide. These efforts foster international cooperation[13] and contribute to a global level playing field and fair competition with non-EU countries. They also promote a high level of ambition for the sustainable development of fisheries and aquaculture markets in free trade agreements.

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10 Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/1004

11 10% of the total EMFAF shared allocation

12 Adopted under the International Labour Organization (ILO) or the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), such as under the Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessels Personnel (STCW-F Convention).

13 EU involvement is crucial within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations and its specialised agencies, including the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO); in steering ambitious decision-making under Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) and at regional international level in the North-east Atlantic; as well as at bilateral level in the framework of SFPAs and other bilateral or trilateral agreements with non-EU countries.

All players in the field contribute to the profitability and attractiveness of fishing and aquaculture activities. The sector needs to make use of all the tools available to bring change through innovation, investment, cooperation and diversification. In particular, upgrading skills through initial and life-long learning, as well as training, along the objectives set out in the context of the European Year of Skills[14], will make fishers and aquaculture farmers more efficient and resilient, and less exposed to risks of accidents. Modernising the sector and opening it to wider social service is essential to increase its attractiveness, especially for the young generation.

The Commission:

- **Will conduct between spring 2023 and summer 2024** an EU-wide participatory **foresight project on 'Fishers of the Future'**, to forecast the crucial role of fishers in society, beyond the provision of high-quality seafood with a relatively low carbon footprint. On the basis of qualitative interviews on the ground, the project will identify the trends, opportunities and threats that determine the attractiveness of the fishing sector. In particular, the project will address:
    - the factors and trends influencing the long-term sustainability and profitability of the fishing sector and the well-being of fishing communities (e.g. impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, green and digital transition, skills, ageing workforce, market and trade developments),
    - the identity and role of fishers beyond their core business, particularly in the conservation and restoration of the marine environment, environmental tourism and the local development of coastal areas,
    - the challenges and opportunities resulting from cooperation and synergies between fishers and other maritime stakeholders, especially in maritime spatial planning, renewable energy deployment, organisation of the seafood supply chain, circular economy, and diversification in the broader context of the sustainable blue economy.

  The results of the project will contribute to future policy making, as well as business strategy development of the fishing sector.

- Calls on **Member States** to use, **as of 2023**, the **bottom-up approach** enabling local fishing communities to address social challenges and needs **through community-led local development** under the 2021-2027 EMFAF programmes.

- Asks **the scientific community,** and especially the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF), to further develop **social indicators** to be used in the analysis of socio-economic reports. This will feed into future proposals for fisheries management and conservation measures, as well as improve the assessment of the social and employment impacts of such measures. It will also help to identify how to programme resources and investments needed to foster the attractiveness of the sector.

- **Will consider proposing**, **after the adoption of the revised International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for**

[14] Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a European Year of Skills 2023, COM(2022)526

Fishing Vessel Personnel (STCW-F), a **directive to ensure its correct transposition** into the EU legal order and will assist Member States to accelerate ratification of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and International Maritime Organization (IMO) conventions.

3. CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROTECTION OF THE PLANET

With the CFP, the EU has established a stable legislative framework for fisheries management. Over the last 50 years, it has been the basis for developing high standards for the conservation and management of living marine resources, as well as to contributing to the protection of the marine environment.

The CFP sets clear objectives for the sustainable management of fish stocks. It bases decision-making on robust and internationally recognised scientific advice, collecting a wide range of data and providing for better modelling capacities that contribute to fishing opportunities proposals. Fleet management provides for a long-term balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities. Member States and stakeholders are closely involved in fisheries management, with decision-making based on regional considerations and specific characteristics. The policy is reinforced by a robust system of control, inspection and enforcement that includes the fight against IUU fishing activities through the Control[15] and IUU[16] Regulations; while the EMFAF encourages and financially supports the achievement of policy objectives.

A decade into the implementation of the reformed CFP, we see tangible progress towards more sustainable fishing. Fishers, civil society and Member States have contributed to rebuilding many critical fish stocks, such as hake in the Iberian Sea and Atlantic and seabass and have helped to halt the decline of stocks in the Mediterranean and Black Seas. At the same time, more progress and stepping up the ambition is needed in order to meet the CFP's environmental sustainability objectives in full.

Protecting marine ecosystems and resources

Fishing activities continue to adversely affect marine ecosystems, particularly through seabed disturbance, bycatch of sensitive species and effects on marine food webs. These effects, which are addressed in detail in the marine action plan, are combined with those of climate change and other pressures from human activities. At the same time, the poor status of marine ecosystems is also a direct threat to the sustainability of fisheries resources and aquaculture and to their related economic activities as well as to the wellbeing of communities dependent on them.

[15] Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009 of 20 November 2009 establishing a Community control system for ensuring compliance with the rules of the common fisheries policy, amending Regulations (EC) No 847/96, (EC) No 2371/2002, (EC) No 811/2004, (EC) No 768/2005, (EC) No 2115/2005, (EC) No 2166/2005, (EC) No 388/2006, (EC) No 509/2007, (EC) No 676/2007, (EC) No 1098/2007, (EC) No 1300/2008, (EC) No 1342/2008 and repealing Regulations (EEC) No 2847/93, (EC) No 1627/94 and (EC) No 1966/2006

[16] Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008 of 29 September 2008 establishing a Community system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, amending Regulations (EEC) No 2847/93, (EC) No 1936/2001 and (EC) No 601/2004 and repealing Regulations (EC) No 1093/94 and (EC) No 1447/1999

Changes in the state of ecosystems affect the short, medium and long-term productivity of fish stocks and increase short-term shocks, such as ocean heatwaves, ocean acidification, reproduction problems, toxic algal blooms, parasites or oxygen shortages. These changes and shocks may cause the collapse of fish populations or force them to move to northern, deeper and cooler waters, often in non-EU territory. Plastic, micro plastic and other pollution from human activities at sea and on land (e.g. agriculture, fisheries, industry, shipping, waste waters) also have a negative impact on marine ecosystems and, consequently, on fisheries and aquaculture activities. The combined effects of these challenges are unprecedented in magnitude. With the uncertainties brought by future climate conditions and the need for further research, it is difficult to fully assess and understand them, only compounding the situation.

Along with tackling the non-fisheries related pressures on the marine environment, full and forceful implementation of the CFP is needed to effectively address these challenges, especially by strengthening data collection and science, continuing to strive for evidence-based decision making and ensuring coherent and effective control and enforcement. Moreover, as reflected in the marine action plan, it means prioritising the most relevant actions for reducing the impact of fisheries on the marine environment. Particular attention is needed on:

- Reaching the 'maximum sustainable yield'

With the 'maximum sustainable yield' (MSY[17]) principle, the CFP has adopted an operational, measurable and science-based objective for fisheries management. Rebuilding stocks to MSY levels and above can reduce negative impacts on marine ecosystems, increase fleet profitability and decrease the carbon emissions of the fishing fleets. The EU is also committed to MSY in international agreements, such as the UN sustainable development goals. In areas where it has been implemented, stocks have recovered and catches and incomes have increased, while negative impacts on the marine environment have decreased. In recent years, more and more stocks have reached sustainable levels, with particularly good results in the Northeast Atlantic. However, additional efforts are needed. In the Mediterranean Sea, the situation is still concerning and improvements too slow, while the Baltic saw a reversal of recent improvements, due to other pressures on the environment and marine ecosystems[18]. It is crucial to continue and accelerate the work of rebuilding and keeping fish stocks above MSY levels.

- Strengthening the ecosystem-based approach through better science

Addressing environmental challenges to the marine ecosystems, fisheries and aquaculture starts with the work of the scientific community. Science enables policymakers to take informed decisions and to fully implement the ecosystem-based approach to fisheries and aquaculture management, one of the key principles of the CFP. This means taking into account the various types of human impacts and management systems on the use of natural

[17] MSY means the highest theoretical equilibrium yield that can be continuously taken on average from a stock under existing average environmental conditions without significantly affecting the reproduction process (Article 4(1)(7) CFP Regulation)

[18] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, "Towards more sustainable fishing in the EU: state of play and orientations for 2023", COM(2022) 253

resources and the marine environment, and, vice versa, the impacts of the state of natural resources on the fisheries sector.

To achieve the long-term sustainability of the use of marine resources, including from a socio-economic point of view, the scientific advice on which management decisions are based must reflect the full complexity of marine ecosystems[19], as well as the cumulative impact of pressures and mitigation measures. Therefore, it is necessary to continue efforts to improve the knowledge and data, so that the scientific advice can take into account the full context of marine ecosystems. This will feed into the reflections on whether to increase the number of stocks managed under multiannual quotas.

Improved data collection is constantly strengthening the evidence base of the policy[20]. The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) has already taken into account ecosystem considerations in its scientific advice. For example, it provides ecosystem overviews[21] for each ecoregion[22].

- Effective control and enforcement of commercial and recreational fisheries

To achieve the CFP sustainability objectives, it is important to keep in mind the impacts of all activities, both commercial and recreational, and to ensure effective control and enforcement by the Member States. The Control Regulation sets out detailed rules, especially for the commercial fleets. This is less so for recreational fisheries.

The CFP refers to recreational fisheries' possible 'significant impact on fish resources' and highlights the need for Member States to 'ensure that recreational fisheries are conducted in a manner that is compatible with the objectives of the CFP'[23]. The management of recreational fisheries requires a complete picture of the impact that such activity has on fish populations and ecosystems. It also needs to consider the specific nature of such fisheries and take into account other EU legislation applicable to these activities.

Reliable and uniform data collection remains a major challenge, making it difficult for the Commission to assess the impact of recreational fishing on specific stocks and to develop appropriate measures. The Commission's proposal[24] for the revision of the Control Regulation, currently being negotiated with the co-legislators, introduces a general requirement to monitor the number of recreational fishers through a licensing or registration

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19 With interactions between various species and ecosystem processes and a variety of pressures from different human activities

20 STECF 22-07 - Eval 2021 ARs DCF and data transmission.pdf - Data Collection Framework - European Commission (europa.eu)

21 https://www.ices.dk/advice/ESD/Pages/Ecosystem-overviews.aspx

22 ICES uses ecoregions as the spatial units to synthesize the evidence for the ecosystem approach. ICES ecoregions are based on biogeographic and oceanographic features and existing political, social, economic, and management divisions. They are developed through an iterative process of consultations between scientists and stakeholders led by ICES Advisory Committee.

23 Recital 3 of the CFP Regulation

24 Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009, and amending Council Regulations (EC) No 768/2005, (EC) No 1967/2006, (EC) No 1005/2008, and Regulation (EU) No 2016/1139 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards fisheries control, COM/2018/368 final

system, as well as the requirement for a data collection or catch registration system for all recreational catches, so as to improve control and monitoring.

- Innovation and funding

There is already a variety of pioneering projects and approaches in fishers addressing the reduction of pollution and greenhouse gas emissions and dealing with the impacts of climate change. Some focus on testing and using, out in the field, innovative solutions such as biodegradable nets, ropes and gear components, collection of marine litter[25] or on pollution prevention activities. The EU has also introduced regulation to improve the circular design and monitoring of fishing gears[26], in order to encourage their reuse and facilitate recyclability, and is working with standardisation organisations to implement it.

It will be equally as important to develop fishing vessels, which are much more energy efficient and fit for energy neutral compulsion, and fishing techniques, which limit harm to marine biodiversity, as well as to ensure overall that fishing activities have a limited impact on marine ecosystems and do not exacerbate climate change. This will allow the ecosystems to cope better with the impacts of climate change.

- Increasing policy coherence

More coherence is needed between the implementation of the CFP and EU environmental legislation, notably the Marine Strategy Framework Directive[27] and the Birds[28] and Habitats[29] Directives. More generally, this includes the objectives and deliverables of the biodiversity strategy for 2030 and the farm to fork strategy.

The biodiversity strategy includes important commitments to effectively protect 30% of EU seas and strictly protect one third of that area, in order to restore marine ecosystems for the benefit of people and climate and to protect sensitive species and habitats further. As one of the deliverables of the biodiversity strategy, the marine action plan aims to provide a framework for the implementation of those commitments, proposing actions to enhance synergies between fisheries and environmental policies and thus reinforce the CFP's contribution to the EU's environmental objectives. Furthermore, the goal of the farm to fork

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[25] For example, the 'Fishing for Litter' project, which is a good illustration of a more general contribution fishers can make in achieving a healthier marine environment, beyond their traditional fishing activities. They are then more able to collect and dispose safely of waste, including waste caught in nets during normal fishing operations, when they reach the ports.

[26] Directive (EU) 2019/883 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on port reception facilities for the delivery of waste from ships, amending Directive 2010/65/EU and repealing Directive 2000/59/EC (Text with EEA relevance) and Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/958 of 31 May 2021 laying down the format for reporting data and information on fishing gear placed on the market and waste fishing gear collected in Member States and the format for the quality check report in accordance with Articles 13(1)(d) and 13(2) of Directive (EU) 2019/904 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

[27] Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive).

[28] Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds.

[29] Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.

strategy is ensuring a neutral or positive environmental impact of all sectors involved in the food system, calling for an acceleration of the shift to sustainable fish and seafood production.

Coherence is also needed between the external dimension of the CFP and international environmental policy, for example in regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs), regional sea conventions, or sustainable fisheries partnership agreements (SFPAs).

The Commission:

- Calls on **Member States** to fully and urgently implement the measures outlined in the **marine action plan**;

- Calls on **Member States** to focus efforts on ensuring **the MSY objective is reached in all sea basins** in the discussions on 2024 fishing opportunities**;**

- **Will** focus efforts **in 2023 and 2024** on **developing scientific advice in support of the ecosystem-based approach** to EU fisheries management, through steering the dialogue with the **scientific community and stakeholders**;

- Calls on **Member States** to ensure the full and rapid implementation of the **Single-Use Plastics Directive;**

- Encourages **fishers**, in their role as 'stewards of the sea', to continue pursuing their involvement in the collection of marine litter and the use of biodegradable elements in fishing gears, with the support of training and the available funding sources;

- Will issue by 2024 **four guidance documents** as part of the implementation of the Commission communication on the **Strategic Guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021-2030**[30]. They will support the sector advancing in the following areas: i) good administrative and regulatory practices, ii) access to space, iv) environmental performance, and iv) climate mitigation.

Increasing selectivity of fishing gear and implementing the landing obligation

Unwanted catches contribute to the decline of marine resources. As an economic incentive to accelerate the transition towards more selectivity, the EU introduced in 2013 the 'landing obligation', which requires that all catches, including unwanted catches, should be landed. The landing obligation fully entered into force in 2019. It aims to reduce, and where possible eliminate, discards. The discards constitute not only a substantial waste of resources, but also negatively affect the sustainable exploitation of marine biological resources and marine ecosystems and the financial viability of fisheries.

In 2009, ahead of the 2013 CFP reform, it was estimated that in European fisheries 1.7 million tonnes (of all species) were discarded annually, corresponding to 23% of total catches. This

[30] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Strategic Guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2020-2030 (COM/2021/0236 final)

has a serious negative environmental impact, both on targeted species and non-targeted by-catch. According to the scientific advice[31], the levels of unwanted catches remain high in many mixed demersal fisheries in EU waters (between 20-30% in the Greater North Sea, Celtic Sea and Bay of Biscay and the Iberian coast). However, discard rates differ greatly depending on (targeted) fisheries and fishing fleet, while undocumented discarding continues to adversely impact data collection.

The findings of the audits launched by the Commission in 2020[32] show that the Member States audited have not adopted the necessary measures to ensure effective control and enforcement of the landing obligation. Traditional control tools (such as at-sea inspections and dockside/auction inspections of the landings/logbooks) are inadequate, as they only provide a very limited snapshot of compliance at the time of monitoring.

In its proposal for a revised fisheries control system[33], the Commission supports the use of modern control tools. It will continue working with the co-legislators to reach an ambitious agreement on this important legislation. As a result of not developing and using the most efficient control and enforcement means, such as remote electronic monitoring (REM) and other modern control tools, there are indications of widespread non-compliance and undocumented illegal discarding of catches[34]. This represents a significant risk – if the data reported does not reflect the actual catches, the quality of scientific advice is seriously undermined.

The Commission acknowledges the existing structural difficulties in the implementation of the landing obligation. However, despite the ongoing efforts and collaboration by all stakeholders to improve the situation, the shortcomings mentioned need to be addressed. The considerations that led to the introduction of the landing obligation in 2013 remain entirely valid and its principles, particularly regarding avoiding the waste of precious resources, are more relevant than ever.

Member States and the scientific community have to make more effort to collect the right data allowing them to analyse the challenges in the implementation of the landing obligation. At the same time, the benefits of a policy that avoids discards and unwanted catches need to be better highlighted to fishers. Furthermore, fishers themselves know best when and where to fish while avoiding unwanted catches. It is, therefore, key to entrust the use of selective fishing methods to fishers and to value their efforts to improve conservation. Fishers should demonstrate their commitment by ensuring full transparency of on-board operations, reporting their catches accurately and delivering results in terms of selectivity.

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31 STECF PLEN 22-01

32 For France and Spain see https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/inf_21_4681. For Ireland, Belgium and the Netherlands see https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/inf_21_5342

33 Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009, and amending Council Regulations (EC) No 768/2005, (EC) No 1967/2006, (EC) No 1005/2008, and Regulation (EU) No 2016/1139 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards fisheries control COM/2018/368 final

34 https://www.efca.europa.eu/en/content/compliance-evaluation; https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/publications/synthesis-landing-obligation-measures-and-discard-rates_en; https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/publications/synthesis-landing-obligation-measures-and-discard-rates-mediterranean-and-black-sea_en

The CFP aims at making fishing gear more selective, so that unwanted catches do not happen in the first place. Thanks to the fishers and Member States' efforts[35], there has been progress in the development of innovative and more selective gear. However, four years after the full entry into force of the landing obligation, much more is needed.

As outlined in the marine action plan, the actual use and take-up, in practice, of these new gears and of cutting edge fishing techniques should be widened. Member States should improve the use of targeted EMFAF support for this purpose. In addition, they should promote the broader use of new technologies for data collection and optimising fishing to minimise unwanted catches by fishers.

The Commission:

- Calls on **Member States, the scientific community, the Advisory Councils and producer organisations**, **by spring 2024,** to provide the Commission with the key data that would be required for an evaluation of the landing obligation. The Commission will provide guidance to that extent.

- Once the baseline is set for such evaluation and sufficiently reliable data is collected, will develop **by autumn 2024** the terms of reference for such evaluation of the landing obligation to better inform policymakers on the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, relevance and EU added value of the measures in place.

4. IMPROVING THE CFP GOVERNANCE

The CFP is guided by the principle of good governance. In this spirit, the regional approach introduced by the 2013 reform allows Member States to cooperate in regional groups and design regional conservation measures through joint recommendations. In addition, the CFP reinforces stakeholder cooperation through the involvement of Advisory Councils. These submit recommendations to the Commission, Member States and regional groups and provide stakeholder insights supporting the development of conservation and management measures.

At the outset, regional groups mostly focused on their set-up and the implementation of the landing obligation. Work on conservation measures under Article 11 of the CFP Regulation[36], necessary to ensuring compliance with the obligations stemming from the EU environmental legislation and the Technical Measures Regulation[37], started to accelerate only as of 2021. It has progressed at a very uneven pace in the different sea basins.

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35 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Towards more sustainable fishing in the EU: state of play and orientations for 2023. COM/2022/253 final

36 Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1954/2003 and (EC) No 1224/2009 and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 2371/2002 and (EC) No 639/2004 and Council Decision 2004/585/EC

37 Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on the conservation of fisheries resources and the protection of marine ecosystems through technical measures, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1967/2006, (EC) No 1224/2009 and Regulations (EU) No 1380/2013, (EU) 2016/1139, (EU) 2018/973, (EU) 2019/472 and (EU) 2019/1022 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 894/97, (EC) No 850/98, (EC) No 2549/2000, (EC) No 254/2002, (EC) No 812/2004 and (EC) No 2187/2005

As outlined in the marine action plan, Member States need to renew their commitment to increase the efficiency, speed and level of ambition of regionalised work, especially with regard to the implementation of environmental legislation under Article 11 of the CFP. For this purpose, Member States should address the lack of sufficient resources for the work in regional groups, further increase stakeholder involvement, and strengthen the scientific base. The Commission will assess progress in implementing the marine action plan in its mid-term review of the Biodiversity Strategy in the first half of 2024 and, depending on its assessment of progress made, and in line with its right of initiative, will consider whether further action, including legislative action, is needed.

The Commission:

- Calls on **Member States**, as of **2023**, to fully implement the governance actions set out in the marine action plan;

- Calls on the **Member States' fisheries regional groups**, as of **2023**, to better involve stakeholders, particularly the Advisory Councils, in the regional organisations to ensure involvement of both fisheries and environmental authorities;

- Calls on **Member States,** as of **2023**, to allocate adequate resources to the work in the regional groups.

Good governance also relies on more transparency. Article 17 of the CFP clearly requires Member States, when allocating fishing opportunities, to use transparent and objective criteria, including those of an environmental, social and economic nature. Stakeholders need to have clear information about how Member States allocate fishing opportunities and manage fleet capacity at national level. Therefore, the Commission will work together with scientific bodies and with Member States to further assess and ensure the transparency of those criteria and their conformity with the CFP provisions and to encourage the use of criteria that can foster sustainable fishing practices and support small-scale and coastal fishers, which represent nearly 75% of all fishing vessels registered in the EU and nearly half of all employment in the fishing sector.

While the European Market Observatory (EUMOFA)[38] already provides transparency on the market for fisheries and aquaculture products, more transparency is also needed to help consumers make informed choices. As announced in the farm to fork strategy, it is important to continue work on the sustainable food system initiative that the Commission plans to propose in 2023 for a harmonised EU approach to sustainable food production.

Finally, good fisheries and aquaculture governance requires a clear, stable and fair access to maritime space, taking into account the growing competition for its use among economic sectors. The Directive on maritime spatial planning[39] establishes the framework to reduce conflicts in the maritime space and foster synergies between different maritime activities.

[38] https://www.eumofa.eu/

[39] Directive 2014/89/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 July 2014 establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning

Moreover, by increasing predictability, transparency and legal certainty, it encourages investment.

Member States should build on this Directive to improve the coordination between fisheries management and maritime spatial planning processes. Furthermore, the increased use of the seas for purposes other than fisheries, such as marine protected areas (MPAs) or renewable energy, requires more regional alignment in maritime spatial planning, beyond Member State level.

The Commission:

- **Will ask the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) to analyse, in 2023**, the criteria used by Member States for the allocation of fishing opportunities at national level;

- **Will, in 2023, initiate discussions among Member States and stakeholders with a view to preparing a vademecum on the allocation of fishing opportunities in order to improve transparency, promote sustainable fishing practices across the EU, and support small-scale and coastal fishers.**

5. ADAPTING TO SHIFTING FISHERIES INTERESTS BEYOND EU-WATERS

Recent political and geopolitical developments, such as Brexit and Russia's brutal war against Ukraine, have underlined the impact of the changing geopolitical context in Europe on the EU's fisheries policy, as well as its close link to maritime security. Both events have led to a shift in the interests of certain Member States' fishing fleets, but also in the interests of other coastal states, impacting relations between coastal states in the area of fisheries.

The dynamic of fishing relations with and between coastal states in the Northeast Atlantic has been substantially reshaped. Before Brexit, the EU was managing 10 total allowable catches (TACs) jointly with Norway and three stocks with the coastal states. Today, 76 further TACs are shared with non-EU countries, with seven TACs entirely in the UK waters (while the EU has fishing rights to those). This new situation has created additional challenges to delivering on the core CFP objectives and principles. Following Brexit, the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) provides the structure for the EU-UK bilateral relationship. It integrates aspects of fisheries and trade and establishes the framework for annual consultations with the UK for setting fishing opportunities for the shared stocks. The EU is also finalising a new trilateral fisheries framework agreement with Norway and the UK. It will create a new platform for trilateral cooperation in the North Sea, with spin-offs for cooperation, working groups and annual consultations around our trilaterally shared stocks. These existing structures should help develop management measures for specific issues, whilst recognising regulatory autonomy of the parties.

Russia's ruthless military aggression against Ukraine has brought war back to Europe, with new dangers and negative spill-over effects on maritime security, which is facing challenges from territorial disputes, competition for natural resources and threats to freedom of navigation. This is creating new tensions in European sea basins. In such a changing geopolitical context, the EU will strengthen cooperation with like-minded partners in its own neighbourhood and in other maritime areas of strategic importance. It suspended bilateral

consultations with Russia for the Baltic Sea, as well as contacts in relation to RFMOs and the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea.

The evolving maritime security situation in the Black Sea is having negative economic implications for fishers and coastal communities in the EU Member States concerned. Because of security threats, the war in Ukraine has resulted in a disruption of fishing activities, for example, due to drifting floating mines. It has also led to a loss of biodiversity, particularly reflected by an alarming increase in the mortality of Black Sea cetaceans.

The nexus between climate change, environmental degradation of coastal and maritime areas, and maritime security will be addressed in the coming update of the European maritime security strategy and its action plan, as well as in the forthcoming Joint Communication on Climate Change, Environmental Degradation, Security and Defence.

The Commission:

- Will, **in 2023, update the European maritime security strategy and its action plan;**

- Will present a **Joint Communication on Climate Change, Environmental Degradation, Security and Defence.**

6. THE CFP TAPPING THE POTENTIAL OF SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION AND INVESTMENT

The profitability and attractiveness of the fishing and aquaculture sectors also rely on their capacity to innovate and invest. There is clearly a need for sustainable innovation and structural investment across the value chain, especially in regard to the improvement of energy efficiency, move towards more sustainable fishing gear, the reduction of the environmental and climate footprint, the improvement of safety and the promotion of well-being at work. The next generation of fishing vessels and aquaculture farms will have to operate with less impact, using less resources.

Moreover, technological innovation is key to developing new business opportunities and promoting economic diversification. Digital technology can provide a competitive advantage to fishers and aquaculture farmers, while also enhancing data collection, control and enforcement, traceability and consumer information and creating a new generation of jobs. It makes fisheries and aquaculture more efficient, facilitates direct sales and fosters transparent, efficient and user-friendly fisheries control and monitoring. Some examples are remote electronic monitoring (REM) systems, such as closed-circuit television and sensors, artificial intelligence, automated data analysis, continuous measurement and recording of engine power, and drones to ensure surveillance. Digital technology also presents opportunities for collecting a broader range of data to inform the scientific and decision-making processes, simplifying processes and reducing the administrative burden on operators in the data collection process. This is key to fostering a level playing field and providing a constant stream of quality information on fish stocks, consumer preferences and environmental conditions.

Member States should ensure that their EMFAF programmes deliver on the expected contribution for innovation, digitalisation and energy transition in the fisheries and

aquaculture value chains, complementing Horizon Europe and its mission 'Restore our ocean and waters by 2030'. For example, the European Digital Twin of the Ocean will combine data, models and other digital technologies, providing knowledge-based input relevant to fisheries management. The Commission invites Member States to contribute to the development of this digital knowledge system, in particular by making their monitoring data and assessment tools available through the Digital Twin of the Ocean and encourages them to make use of the mission projects and other actions to improve their marine monitoring capacity.

It is necessary to develop and test new technologies and techniques further, scale them up, develop a market for them, and make them affordable for investors. Stakeholders should enhance their collaboration on innovative projects by sharing best practices and co-developing new technology. They should tap into the existing collaboration processes and channels. For example, 'smart specialisation strategies' are a powerful enabler of innovation at regional level that can promote the competitiveness of the fisheries and aquaculture value chain and support their technological development. The Commission will continue to support this process through the smart specialisation strategies platform for the sustainable blue economy[40]. It has also launched the EU Blue Economy Observatory to provide near-real-time information and key socio-economic indicators on the EU blue economy[41]. Very importantly, Member States and stakeholders should use available funding sources to uncover untapped opportunities for business, investment and know-how, as well as to benefit from EU research facilities.

To encourage and support this process, the Commission will create an annual award for sustainable innovation in fisheries. It will showcase best practices from the sector and facilitate their dissemination. To this end, the Commission will invite the Advisory Councils to propose the award criteria and the criteria for the selection of an independent jury.

Innovation should lead to investment and generate prospects for profitability. As highlighted in the Communication on the Energy Transition Initiative, it is necessary to mitigate the fisheries and aquaculture sector's contribution to climate change and to reduce its costly dependence on fossil fuels. With the huge increase in energy prices experienced in 2022, most of the sector is still at risk of becoming economically unsustainable. Therefore, accelerating the energy transition of the value chain should focus on reducing operational energy costs, while at the same time contributing positively to the climate neutrality, pollution reduction and biodiversity objectives of the European Green Deal. The take-up of existing technology (e.g. electric, hybrid, wind and solar) needs to accelerate, while research and testing of emerging technology (e.g. hydrogen) needs to be boosted.

Overall, additional investments in design, technologies and advanced solutions are needed to make the 'vessels of the future' more energy efficient, with greater selectivity, optimisation and precision of fishing. The same is true of the "aquaculture farm of the future" that would increase production of shellfish and algae, thus reducing environmental and climate footprint of aquaculture. EU public funding can facilitate such investments. To tackle some of these challenges, the Energy Transition Initiative presents an enabling framework, identifying and addressing barriers, and creating structures for long-term cooperation in this area.

[40] https://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/

[41] https://blue-economy-observatory.ec.europa.eu/index_en

In addition to technological innovation, good practices leading to the reduction in the climate and environmental footprint of fisheries and aquaculture should be promoted. As part of the implementation of the EU Aquaculture Strategic Guidelines[42], the Commission will prepare a guidance document on environmental performance. It will cover, for example, the use of sustainable protein sources for feed, feed efficiency, energy efficiency and the use of renewable resources, as well as the promotion of low-trophic aquaculture production, such as mollusc and algae farming and integrated multitrophic aquaculture systems[43].

To enhance the fishing fleet's use of new technologies and, considering that some of them are heavier and require more space than the traditional ones, reflections are also needed regarding the volume[44] on board, which is also an important parameter for improving safety and working conditions. The CFP allows for private investment in new, sustainable and safe vessels, while ensuring that there is no increase of the fleet's overall fishing capacity. Member States can allocate their fishing capacity in a flexible way, within a ceiling established by the CFP and subject to the entry/exit scheme (i.e. any capacity entering the fleet must be compensated by an equivalent reduction of capacity). As highlighted in the 2019 evaluation of the entry/exit scheme[45], several Member States have a margin between the active capacity of their fleets and their fishing capacity ceiling. They can and should allocate this margin, where needed, to facilitate the modernisation of the fleet. In this framework, any reallocation of capacity should require a reliable monitoring of capacity, including engine power[46].

The Commission:

- Calls on **Member States**, **as of 2023**, to increase the transparency and flexibility of their fishing capacity management, in cooperation with the sector, and to facilitate its possible reallocation where it is needed for structural investment on board, including with EU and national financial support where eligible;

- Encourages the **Energy Transition Partnership** (established under the energy transition initiative**), Advisory Councils and social partners**, **by 2024**, to make concrete, practical and sustainable proposals for vessel modernisation to improve safety, energy efficiency and working conditions on board;

- Invites **Advisory Councils** to contribute in 2023 to the creation of an annual award for sustainable innovation in fisheries, with a view to handing it out for the first time in **2024**;

- Calls on Member States to support innovation and promote good practices in aquaculture, as well as low-trophic aquaculture production such as mollusks and algae farming and integrated multitrophic aquaculture (IMTA) systems.

42 See *supra* footnote 30

43 COM(2022) 592 final and COM(2021) 236 final

44 Volume (expressed in 'gross tonnage') is one of the parameters of the definition of fishing capacity, together with power (expressed in kW)

45 SWD(2019) 312 final

46 European Commission, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Study on engine power verification by Member States: final report, Publications Office, 2019, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2771/945320

7. CFP – A DECADE OF TANGIBLE RESULTS

The CFP reform of 2013 was a breakthrough. With the ordinary legislative procedure extended to fisheries, co-legislators agreed on a new legislative framework that, for the first time, brought together the social, economic and environmental dimensions of the EU fisheries policy. It allowed for increased ownership, including at regional level, and improved cooperation between the relevant fisheries sector and other stakeholders.

A decade later, we see tangible progress towards more sustainable fisheries on the ground. Fishers, civil society, Member States and the EU have contributed to rebuilding critical EU fish stocks and to bringing the fleets to profitable levels. In 2009 the EU had only five fish stocks harvested sustainably, in 2022 there are over 60, and improvements continue. Multiannual management plans with ambitious sustainability objectives now provide the basis for coherent annual decision-making on fishing opportunities. Fishers are continuing their efforts to make their activities more selective in order to reduce their impact on the marine environment[47].

These improvements in terms of environmental sustainability, together with increased predictability thanks to a stable legislative framework, have led to improved economic performance since 2013[48]. There is strong evidence[49] that the CFP has also resulted in efficient and well-organised seafood markets that contribute to the transparency and stability of the supply chain and, hence, to the food supply.

With its robust fisheries management framework, the EU also leads by example in driving sustainable fisheries worldwide. For example, EU efforts were instrumental in establishing a new and ambitious governance framework in the Mediterranean and Black Seas.

The EU has also spurred forward the RFMOs' agenda, which have significantly improved sustainability thanks to their fisheries management and control systems. In 2021, 54 out of 55 conservation measures adopted by RFMOs for the management of the stocks under their purview were in line with scientific advice. The EU has also been supportive of furthering ILO's work on social aspects in several RFMOs[50]. In the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, the GFCM 2030 strategy aims at advancing the principle of decent work, including through fair and safe working conditions and access to social protection.

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47 Examples include the new flatfish gear introduced in the Baltic Sea, the new nets in the Black Sea in turbot fishing to reduce the by-catch of sensitive species, and the new bottom gear in the deep-water shrimp fishery, which reduced the impact on the seabed and fuel consumption in the Mediterranean. In the Mediterranean, the experience of the Columbretes marine protected area in Spain and of the Jabuka/Pomo Pit fisheries restricted area in the Adriatic Sea are also examples of how to involve all players in the development and implementation of management measures. This paved the way for significant work in the GFCM in relation to the establishment of 10 fisheries restricted areas in the Mediterranean.

48 European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries, *The 2022 annual economic report on the EU fishing fleet (STECF 22-06)*, Virtanen, J.(editor), Guillen, J.(editor), Prellezo, R.(editor), Sabatella, E.(editor), Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

49 Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council - The Implementation of the CMO Regulation, COM (2023)101

50 such as the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)

In addition, the EU's involvement was crucial in bringing bluefin tuna from the brink of collapse to sustainable levels. 87% of commercial tuna catches worldwide now come from stocks at healthy levels of abundance. When it comes to the stocks fished by the EU fleet, 17 out of 20 tuna and tuna-like stocks under the purview of RFMOs are managed sustainably.

The EU has also played a key role in the decisive progress of the International Conference on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ). It leads the High Ambition Coalition of 50 countries, and it will deploy all necessary efforts to ensure a swift and ambitious agreement in 2023. Similarly, the EU was instrumental in the conclusion of the Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the central Arctic Ocean in 2018 and the WTO Agreement on the prohibition of certain fisheries subsidies in 2022. The EU is also leading efforts to designate new large-scale MPAs in the Southern Ocean. The EU's international leadership has also helped to ensure progress in fighting IUU fishing, for which it has demonstrated the highest performing record. Moreover, the SFPAs with non-EU countries provide mutual benefits both to the EU and to partner countries and their populations. The more recent SFPAs include human rights clauses and integrate the needs of local populations further.

For aquaculture, the 2013 CFP reform introduced new tools for promoting sustainable aquaculture. Coupled with EU funding, this has allowed for progress in terms of sustainability and competitiveness of this important sector. In 2021, the Commission adopted new strategic guidelines[51], and Member States, where relevant, updated their national strategic aquaculture plans accordingly.

The 2013 CFP Regulation provides the stability needed by the fisheries sector. Its cornerstones remain environmental, social and economic sustainability, effective regional cooperation and science-based decision-making. They are more relevant than ever for securing a local food production and decreasing environmental impacts and greenhouse gas emissions. Rebuilding fish stocks above MSY levels remains the basis for achieving these key objectives.

However, several challenges remain for the CFP to be fully implemented. Faster and more structural transformation is needed to reduce environmental and climate impacts of fishing and aquaculture. This is necessary to restore a healthy marine environment and ensure food security, as well as to help the sector become more resilient, increase energy efficiency and contribute to climate neutrality quickly. This will help to save on fuel costs and thrive on green energy.

This Communication points to a number of specific elements of the CFP, where implementation needs to be strengthened and/or further assessments and reflections are necessary to ensure that the sector, society at large and nature can fully benefit from the enormous potential of this policy. Some of these elements are also addressed in more detail in the marine action plan and the energy transition initiative.

They especially concern:

- the landing obligation and its costs and benefits for society and for fishers;

[51] See *supra* footnote 30

- the contribution to the implementation of environmental legislation and the related governance system;
- the improvement of the knowledge base and the strengthening of the ecosystem-based approach, keeping in mind both socio-economic and environmental objectives;
- the future of the profession and generational renewal;
- the use of the EU's research and funding opportunities;
- the allocation of quotas at national level and the transparency of the process;
- the fleet capacity framework and its relevance for structural investments on board, including in support of the sector's energy transition;
- improving the development of social indicators to increase the robustness of socio-economic reports that are used in the preparation of fisheries management and conservation measures.

8. A 'FISHERIES AND OCEANS PACT' TO PAVE THE WAY FOR THE FUTURE

Building on the progress achieved since its last reform in 2013, the CFP of the future is a policy that enables and supports: (i) fisheries and aquaculture in synergy with nature; (ii) fishing vessels and aquaculture farms that operate with less impact and fewer resources; (iii) the contribution of seafood to safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience and sustainability of food systems in the EU; as well as (iv) fishers and aquaculture farmers who can find fulfilment, recognition and economic well-being in their profession.

A future-proof CFP needs to cater to fishers and aquaculture farmers who are incentivised and supported to innovate and use the latest technology. Innovation will make fishery and farming activities more effective and profitable, ensuring a low-carbon food supply and contributing to the health of the ocean and waters, and the sustainability of the food system. Better protection of marine ecosystems will also help us to cope with unavoidable climate change impacts, such as marine heatwaves, change in trophic conditions and acidification.

The vessels and the fish farms of the future will eliminate the fisheries and aquaculture sectors' dependence on fossil fuels and become much more energy efficient. Vessels will be powered by renewable energies and fuels, clean and energy-neutral propulsion, thus addressing climate change and pollution at sea. They will also be more selective and make fishing more efficient thanks to latest technologies for precision fishing. Finally, the CFP will support the fishers of the future who will use more sustainable fishing gears and will be more agile in the face of climate change, biodiversity loss and changes at sea, able to switch temporarily to other blue economy activities and public services to alleviate the pressure on fish resources. Fisheries will be innovative and safe, providing the precious service of stewardship of the sea.

The starting point is to ensure proper implementation of the existing legislative requirements so that all the data, knowledge and input is available to feed into reflections with all relevant stakeholders. As detailed in the staff working document that accompanies this Communication, stakeholders are stepping up their cooperation to achieve the CFP objectives, paving the way for valuable cooperation in the coming years.

The extensive stakeholder consultation conducted to prepare this Communication made it very clear that only fisheries and aquaculture that are managed in a spirit of cooperation and trust between public authorities at all levels – the scientific community, fishers and aquaculture farmers and their organisations, and civil society – can deliver ambitious results in terms of both sustainability and profitability.

In light of the above, the Commission calls on Member States, fisheries stakeholders and the scientific community to join the Commission in a 'Fisheries and Oceans Pact', reconfirming the joint commitment to fully implement the current policy and contributing to necessary reflections and assessments of certain elements of the CFP. This will, then, contribute to a discussion between fisheries managers and stakeholders on future-proofing the policy in terms of both social and environmental resilience.

The Pact will be framed around the following key principles:

- full **compliance with the existing rules**, to ensure that fisheries are carried out at sustainable levels and to significantly reduce negative impacts on marine ecosystems;
- more **transparency** in terms of governance and decision-making to make sure all relevant stakeholders are involved in the process and have full information about the rules;
- **improved governance,** with closer links to other policy areas for the development of a more holistic approach that also addresses other pressures on the marine environment, and through further progress in EU cooperation with non-EU countries to ensure a level playing field;
- **recognition of the role of fishers as 'stewards of the sea'** and provision of a framework supporting the sector's socio-economic resilience, environmental sustainability and generational renewal;
- a **forward-looking approach thanks to more research and innovation**, allowing the sector to contribute to climate neutrality (including through 'vessels of the future' and more sustainable fishing gears and techniques); to facilitate the development of precision fishing; to design the fishers' profession of the future; and to collect the necessary data for future policy developments.

The current common fisheries policy, together with actions stemming from this Communication, the marine action plan and the energy transition initiative, allow for more engagement and investment in the future. The Fisheries and Oceans Pact is a call to work hand in hand to make the necessary improvements to the implementation of the CFP in the short term, and to open a new phase of discussion between all fisheries stakeholders. It is a call to calibrate the policy, where necessary, to help us deal with new challenges and realities and to build a mutual understanding of where we want to go. If all stakeholders join forces and do their part, the CFP will help optimise management and bring collective wins in response to the growing challenges fisheries and aquaculture, marine ecosystems and coastal communities face.