



The Acting Director General

Brussels,
MARE.C/BF

Dear Petitioner,

Thank you very much for the interest you have expressed in ensuring a sustainable use of our oceans. Please rest assured that the Commission takes your concerns very seriously.

In fact, the mission letter Commissioner Sinkevičius received at the beginning of his mandate from Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is very clear: *“Europe’s seas and oceans are part of our everyday lives. We rely on them for food, for transport and for the air we breathe. They are a driver of our economy and will be central to meeting our climate-neutrality commitments. At the same time, they also face a unique set of challenges that you must help address, from depleting fish stocks to increasing environmental pressures.”*

In this regard, the European Green Deal announced in December is a game-changer. It is an ambitious climate and environmental initiative that President von der Leyen has rightly referred to as “Europe’s man on the moon moment”.

We will look to our oceans to provide us with clean energy from wind, waves and tides. Oceans can also provide more climate-friendly alternatives to meat – whether from wild fisheries, aquaculture or new sources like algae.

But we are all aware that we need to keep this powerful resource healthy. That is why the Commission will put forward a new biodiversity strategy for 2030 in spring. We also want to increase the overall size of protected areas in European waters.

And we need to set fishing opportunities at sustainable levels. So far we have been making steady and encouraging progress, year after year. In fact, following the decisions taken by ministers in December, more fish will be fished at sustainable levels in 2020 than ever before! Ministers also agreed on Commission proposals to ensure that fishermen reduce their catches of stocks that are doing poorly, in particular of cod.

The Commission will continue to monitor the progress made and strive to make further progress where possible. For example, we still have too little scientific information on many stocks being fished, which prevents us from understanding how healthy they really are. Building up this knowledge base takes time and money, but it is an investment that we certainly won’t regret.

In addition, the Commission is currently evaluating the functioning of the landing obligation, which puts an end to the wasteful practice of throwing unwanted – often dead – fish back into the sea. We will report on this by mid-2020. By the end of 2022, we will also take a more general look at the EU’s Common Fisheries Policy to see how we are doing and where we can improve.

Thank you again for taking the time to express your concern. Oceans are crucial: for our climate, for our planet, and ultimately for the very survival of humankind. I am grateful to count you as an ally in our common mission to keep them healthy.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bernhard Friess', written in a cursive style.

Bernhard Friess
Acting Director General