

Stockholm & Brussels, 7 March, 2012

To: The Fisheries Ministers of EU Member States

**Re: Input to the EU Fisheries Council Meeting, 19–20 March 2012**

Dear Minister,

On behalf of the Fisheries Secretariat (FISH) and Seas At Risk (SAR) we enclose comments on the proposals for a regulation on the common organisation of the markets in fishery and aquaculture products (COM(2011)416), as well as for a new EU Maritime and Fisheries Fund (COM(2011)804). We ask you to support our recommendations in your deliberations at the Council in order to ensure more sustainable utilisation of our common marine resources.

**1. On the reform of the Common Market Organisation (CMO)**

Overall, we welcome the proposed shift from market interventions to a policy where the sector is given greater responsibilities to manage and adapt production. We also support the principles of better marketing standards and, particularly, improved consumer information. However, the Commission could have kept a greater focus on the overarching objectives of the CFP by supporting best practises and environmentally sustainable ways of production, recognising the seasonality of many fisheries by nature, rather than focusing so strongly on market stability.

We urge you to set strict conditions for the marketing and use of unwanted catches, to rule out operators yield a profit and incentivise fishers to minimise unwanted catches. Assisting PO members in implementing “best practices” and more selective gears, design catch patterns based on local knowledge that reduce bycatch, and coordinate the quota distribution according to vessels’ preferences should be made part of the POs’ new responsibilities.

We also ask you to ensure that in addition to the proposed consumer information such as date of catch, catch area, and whether a product has been frozen or defrosted, the fishing method is also displayed on the product. This will allow consumers to make informed choices in favour of more sustainably fished products.

Finally, we ask you to carefully consider the environmental effects of any market interventions, as well as an earlier phase out of the storage aid foreseen in the EMFF, making the storage mechanism fully a responsibility of the POs.

*See Annex 1 for more detailed comments on the proposal for a common organisation of the market.*

**2. On the new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)**

The reform of the CFP and its financial instrument offers a critical opportunity to eliminate subsidies which contribute to overfishing and instead support the transition towards sustainable fisheries and healthy marine ecosystems. The Commission proposal takes several steps in the right direction, but falls short of ensuring that public aid is used exclusively for creating public goods and services. In fact, the vast majority of the available funding will be allocated to

measures which often benefit a handful of individual operators rather than the entire fisheries sector or society at large.

Specifically, financial support for control and enforcement, and data collection is too limited. While the earmarking of funds should ensure that a minimum amount of the financial package is spent on control, enforcement and data collection, Member States should have the flexibility to shift more EU aid into these types of activities.

The Commission proposal states that investments on board vessels or for gear modernisation are not meant to *increase* the vessel capacity, however, it fails to address funding contributing to *maintaining* existing overcapacity. We therefore urge you to ensure that funding for fleets, vessels and gears are made conditional upon an adequate assessment of fishing capacity in relation to available fishing opportunities, in order to avoid that aid is maintaining excess capacity. In addition, we ask you to ensure that a number of capacity-enhancing subsidies included in the proposal, such as payments for processing and marketing measures are not endorsed.

The proposal also includes aid for investments on board or in ports to make best use of unwanted catches of commercial stocks or their marketing, with links to the new responsibilities of POs (see comments on CMO above). This funding will, most likely, undermine some desired impacts of a landing obligation, such as fishing in a more targeted and selective way in order to simply avoid unwanted catches. It would be preferable to direct funding to research and implementation of selective and environmentally friendly gear.

We urge you to defend and possibly strengthen measures to support biodiversity, including through management, restoration and monitoring of Natura 2000 sites.

We also ask you to support the proposal that funding to both Member States and operators will be conditional upon compliance with the objectives and rules of the CFP.

Finally, we are concerned about a number of measures which will indiscriminately promote and develop aquaculture without addressing environmental and social considerations, as these may lead to the same problems of over-establishment, negative environmental impacts and poor profitability that are currently found in the catching sector.

*See Annex 2 for joint NGO comments on the proposal for a new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.*

Yours sincerely,



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