Dear Commissioner Sinkevičius,

The failure to address equity in European fisheries policies has led to missed opportunities to deal with environmental degradation, economic disparities, and social injustices. Low-impact, small-scale fisheries (SSF) generate more jobs and greater added value per litre of fuel used whilst causing less environmental damage, in contrast to large-scale, high-impact fishing. Despite this, the sector has been starved of fishing opportunities and sectoral support over decades, impacting the overall resilience of European fishing communities.

We are calling on you to address the inequalities generated by European fisheries policies through a just transition that ends harmful subsidies and secures fair access for small-scale, low-impact fishers to financial support and fishing opportunities in Europe.

The potential of low-impact, small-scale fisheries to support livelihoods, local food systems, and socio-economic activities in coastal communities has not yet been realised. Due to the partial implementation of the 2013 Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), fisheries management in Europe continues to favour large-scale, high-impact fishing, a subsector causing environmental harm, driving overfishing and significantly contributing to the climate crisis. Harmful fuel subsidies continue to benefit and maintain larger, more polluting vessels, whilst fishing opportunities in Europe are concentrated in the hands of the wealthier, industrial, high-impact fishing vessel owners, due to allocations based on historical catch records.

By prioritising and providing policy support, low-impact, small-scale fisheries will play a key role in addressing Europe's overfishing, preserving marine biodiversity, reducing the fishing industry's carbon footprint, and tackling socio-economic challenges in the maritime sector.

The key to dealing with the critical state of EU fisheries and unlocking the potential of SSF is Article 17 of the CFP, which has lain dormant this past decade. By applying transparent and objective criteria of an environmental, social and economic nature to the allocation of fishing opportunities, the full application of Article 17 would reward sustainable practices and encourage a shift to low-impact fishing. The current focus on catch history as the basis for allocating fishing opportunities is deeply flawed, encouraging fishing companies to prioritise quantity over quality. Allocating the lion’s share of fishing opportunities to members of Fish Producer Organizations (FPOs) discriminates against smaller, low-impact fishing operators that don’t meet the high-catch volume requirements of most FPOs.

Additionally, by redirecting public money spent on harmful capacity-enhancing subsidies for larger-scale, high-impact fishing, the EU should support those within the fisheries sector who provide the greatest benefits for society and the environment and restore degraded marine ecosystems.

We, therefore, call on the Commission to:

- Establish a detailed and binding implementation plan for Article 17 along with clear guidelines on how to develop and apply transparent and objective criteria to reward sustainable fishing practices and protect ecosystems and local communities;
- End harmful subsidies and prioritise small-scale, low-impact fishing activities. In particular:
  - support SSF associations to form dedicated Producer Organisations and other marketing structures;
  - support the decarbonisation of the sector through the development of the most appropriate technology and infrastructure;
• increase the share and widen the scope of the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) used to promote nature restoration and regenerative practices;

• Ensure the processes of allocating fisheries subsidies and fishing opportunities are fully transparent and publicly accessible through the release of EU-level annual reports outlining how fishing opportunities and subsidies were allocated and to whom.

These actions, which we are asking you to implement, have become not only environmental but also socio-economic imperatives. The European Commission must urgently rethink fisheries management to drive a just transition away from an extractive industry supporting high-impact, large-scale fishing, towards one that champions the role of low-impact, small-scale fishers as guardians of the ocean.

We look forward to discussing these actions with you.

Signed by

European Association of Fishermen at the Black Sea
Association of Small Coastal Fishermen of the Adriatic
Scottish Creel Fishermens Federation
Snow change cooperative
Schleswig-Holstein Fisheries Protection Association
New Under Ten Fisherman’s Association
Pleine Mer
FSKPO
Mulleres Salgadas
Levende Hav
Casa dei Pesci
Renato Ricciardo
LIFE Netherlands
Irish Islands Marine Resource Organisation
Association des Ligneurs de la point de Bretagne
Plateforme de la petite pêche artisanale française
Asociación pescadores artesanales del parque natural cabo de gata nijar
Asociación de atuneros con línea de mano del mediterráneo

Medartnet Spain
Arts Menors Costa Brava
Miracanarias
Asociazione Pescatori Pantelleria
Darłowska Grupa Producentów ryb i armatorów od21 rybackich
The International Pole and Line Foundation
Erris Lobster Conservation and Restocking Association
Sveriges Yrkesfiskares Ekonomiska Förening
Pancypriot Association of Professional Coastal Fishermen
Zygi Fishermen Association
Prud’homie de Saint Raphael
Pescartes-Asociación pescadores artesanales del parque natural cabo de gata nijar
Fischereischutzverband Schleswig-Holstein
Wolińskie Stowarzyszenie Rybaków
Empesca’t
APS Fishermen’s Boxes Association
Cofradia la restinga (Nuestra señora de los reyes el hierro)

This campaign is supported by:

2. As per the SSCF definition in the EMFAF Regulation (Article 2.14), 'small-scale coastal fishing' means fishing activities carried out by a) marine and inland fishing vessels of an overall length of less than 12 metres and not using towed gear as defined in point (1) of Article 2 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1967/2006; or (b) fishers on foot, including shellfish gatherers.


17. LIFE (2022). Call to Action: Better implementation of the CFP through a differentiated Approach. Accessed on: 15/03/2024