

New fisheries agreement and protocol between the EU and Liberia

The first-ever EU fisheries agreement with Liberia and its associated implementation protocol were signed and entered into provisional application in December 2015. Their conclusion is now subject to approval by the European Parliament in a plenary vote.

Background

Atlantic tropical tunas are highly migratory species and, consequently, fishing vessels targeting them endeavour to follow their migration across the waters of different coastal countries and on the high seas. Liberia's waters are located on the migration path of three key tropical tuna species: yellowfin, bigeye and skipjack. Access to these waters is therefore of particular interest to the EU tuna fleet, and would allow it to follow the regional migration, increasing its operational efficiency.

The ex-ante [evaluation](#) carried out in connection with the preparation of the agreement shows that fishing in Liberian waters has been a significant part of EU tuna-fleet strategy for decades (though outside the framework of EU agreements), slotting in a regional network of fishing opportunities.

New partnership

The agreement with Liberia is the first EU agreement with a new partner country since 2007, and marks the beginning of a series of similar arrangements aimed at expanding the access of the EU fleet to new fishing grounds. This [Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement](#) (SFPA) and its protocol, negotiated by the Commission and endorsed by [Council Decision](#), were signed on 9 December 2015 and have applied provisionally since that date. The agreement is set to last five years and be renewable tacitly, whereas the associated protocol, setting out the implementation details, will apply until 8 December 2020.

The protocol offers opportunities to 34 tuna vessels from Spain and France (28 purse seiners and six long-liners), based on a reference tonnage of 6 500 tonnes per year. In return, the EU will pay an average annual contribution of €650 000, split equally between access rights and sectoral support for Liberia's fisheries policy. Under the SFPA, Liberia undertakes to make public all agreements authorising foreign fleets to fish in its waters, with a view to increasing transparency.

Position of the rapporteur

The rapporteur, Jarosław Wałęsa (EPP, Poland), considers the agreement to be of great benefit to both parties, promoting a partnership framework within which to develop sustainable fisheries and responsible exploitation of fishery resources in Liberian waters. He also notes that the SFPA should help the EU in its global fight against illegal fishing, by supporting the improvement of monitoring, control and surveillance in Liberian waters.

On a more general note, the rapporteur regrets that Parliament's role in the adoption of SFPAs is limited to a consent procedure. He believes that Parliament should have a more active role, and be fully informed at all stages of the procedures concerning SFPAs and their renewal.

Following the favourable opinions from the Committee on Budgets (BUDG) and Development (DEVE), on 19 April 2016 the Committee on Fisheries (PECH) recommended by a large majority that Parliament give its consent to the conclusion of the agreement and implementation protocol.

The [draft resolution](#) is expected to be voted in plenary in May 2016 (procedure file [2015/0224\(NLE\)](#)).

