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REPORT

on the impact on fisheries of marine litter
(2019/2160(INI))

Committee on Fisheries

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CONTENTS

	Page
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION.....	3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT	20
INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE.....	24
INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE.....	25
FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE	26

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the impact on fisheries of marine litter (2019/2160(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission communication of 11 December 2019 entitled ‘The European Green Deal’ (COM(2019)0640),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 11 March 2020 entitled ‘A new Circular Economy Action Plan: For a cleaner and more competitive Europe’(COM(2020)0098),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 May 2020 entitled ‘EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing nature back into our lives’ (COM(2020)0380),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 May 2020 entitled ‘A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system’ (COM(2020)0381),
- having regard to the Commission report of 23 March 2020 on the implementation of the Commission communication on a stronger and renewed strategic partnership with the EU’s outermost regions (COM(2020)0104),
- having regard to Article 191 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to Directive 2004/35/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004 on environmental liability with regard to the prevention and remedying of environmental damage¹ (European Liability Directive),
- having regard to Council Directive 91/271/EEC of 21 May 1991 concerning urban waste-water treatment²,
- having regard to Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora³,
- having regard to Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy⁴,
- having regard to 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

¹ OJ L 143, 30.4.2004, p. 56.

² OJ L 135, 30.5.1991, p. 40.

³ OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7.

⁴ OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1.

environmental policy⁵ (Marine Strategy Framework Directive),

- having regard to 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 policy⁶ (Fisheries Control Regulation),
- having regard to Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds⁷,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy⁸,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 508/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund⁹,
- having regard to Directive 2014/89/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 July 2014 establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning (Maritime Spatial Planning Directive)¹⁰,
- having regard to Directive (EU) 2015/720 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2015 amending Directive 94/62/EC as regards reducing the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags¹¹,
- having regard to Directive (EU) 2018/850 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2018 amending Directive 1999/31/EC on the landfill of waste¹²,
- having regard to Directive (EU) 2018/851 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2018 amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste¹³,
- having regard to Directive (EU) 2018/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2018 amending Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste¹⁴,
- having regard to 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 ships¹⁵,
- having regard to Directive (EU) 2019/904 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the

⁵ OJ L 164, 25.6.2008, p. 19.

⁶ OJ L 343, 22.12.2009, p. 1.

⁷ OJ L 20, 26.1.2010, p. 7.

⁸ OJ L 354, 28.12.2013, p. 22.

⁹ OJ L 149, 20.5.2014, p. 1.

¹⁰ OJ L 257, 28.8.2014, p. 135.

¹¹ OJ L 115, 6.5.2015, p. 11.

¹² OJ L 150, 14.6.2018, p. 100.

¹³ OJ L 150, 14.6.2018, p. 109.

¹⁴ OJ L 150, 14.6.2018, p. 141.

¹⁵ OJ L 151, 7.6.2019, p. 116.

environment¹⁶,

- having regard to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and in particular SDG 14: ‘Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development’,
- having regard to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report of 2005 entitled ‘Marine Litter – An analytical overview’,
- having regard to the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) adopted in 1973 by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), including Annex V thereto which entered into force on 31 December 1988,
- having regard to the European Environment Agency report of October 2020 entitled ‘State of nature in the EU – Results from reporting under the nature directives 2013-2018’,
- having regard to the results of the ‘Tackling marine litter in the Atlantic Area’ (CleanAtlantic) project, financed by the EU’s Interreg Atlantic Area Programme,
- having regard to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization’s Voluntary Guidelines for the Marking of Fishing Gear, adopted by the Committee on Fisheries in July 2018,
- having regard to the IMO Action Plan to Address Marine Plastic Litter from Ships,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 19 November 2019 on oceans and seas, addressing the formulation of an international agreement on plastic pollution,
- having regard to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention), the Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea (Bucharest Convention), the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area (Helsinki Convention), and the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR Convention),
- having regard to the Regional Plan on Marine Litter Management in the Mediterranean,
- having regard to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), to the Kyoto Protocol thereto and to the Paris Agreement,
- having regard to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD),
- having regard to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), adopted by the UN General Assembly on 16 November 1973,
- having regard to the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services published by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) on 31 May 2019,

¹⁶ OJ L 155, 12.6.2019, p. 1.

- having regard to the Ministerial Declaration of 28 September 2020 of the Ministers for the Environment, Maritime Economy, Agriculture and Fisheries of Baltic Sea Member States and the Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries,
 - having regard to the report entitled ‘Mission Starfish 2030: Restore our Ocean and Waters’ published by the Commission’s Mission Board for Healthy Oceans, Seas, and Coastal and Inland Waters on 22 September 2020,
 - having regard to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report entitled ‘Global Warming of 1.5°C’, its fifth assessment report (AR5) and synthesis report, its special report on climate change and land, and its special report on the ocean and cryosphere in a changing climate,
 - having regard to the UN Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter of 1972,
 - having regard to its resolution of 26 October 2017 on the application of Directive 2004/35/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004 on environmental liability with regard to the prevention and remedying of environmental damage¹⁷,
 - having regard to its resolution of 13 September 2018 on a European strategy for plastics in a circular economy¹⁸,
 - having regard to its legislative resolution of 4 April 2019 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Regulation (EU) No 508/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council (COM(2018)0390 –C8-0270/2018 – 2018/0210(COD))¹⁹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 28 November 2019 on the climate and environment emergency²⁰,
 - having regard to its resolution of 15 January 2020 on the European Green Deal²¹,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Fisheries (A9-0030/2021),
- A. whereas the marine waste visible on beaches, along coastlines, in coastal areas and on the surface of open bodies of water represents only a fraction of a much further reaching pollution phenomenon both in the water column and on the seabed; whereas this waste stems to the largest extent from activities on land (80 %), but also from activities at sea where there has been a significant increase in transport by large non-fishing vessels;
- B. whereas marine waste means all waste that has entered the marine environment,

¹⁷ OJ C 346, 27.9.2018, p. 184.

¹⁸ OJ C 433, 23.12.2019, p. 136.

¹⁹ Texts adopted, P8_TA (2019)0343.

²⁰ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2019)0078.

²¹ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0005.

whether intentionally or unintentionally, and is identified by size (nano-, micro- and mega-waste) and nature (containers, bulky waste lying on the ocean floor, plastics, fishing gear, wrecks of semi-sunken vessels, hazardous waste such as explosives and other war debris, textile fibres, microplastics, etc.);

- C. whereas 70 % of the marine litter that enters the sea ends up on the seabed and the cumulative mass of waste floating on the surface accounts for only 1 % of plastic in the ocean; whereas the latest scientific research shows that the level of plastic pollution in the ocean has been largely underestimated and whereas there are still major gaps in oceanographic knowledge; whereas research into the spread of marine waste in the ocean is vital in order to better understand the extent of marine pollution;
- D. whereas the world's ocean is a continuous body of water whose good environmental status is vital to ensuring its resilience and its continued provision of ecosystem services such as CO₂ absorption and oxygen production, and any change in marine and coastal ecosystems could diminish its role as a climate regulator; whereas marine waste poses a threat to the future of the fisheries sector in general, as only a clean, healthy, productive and biologically diverse coastal and marine environment can meet the long-term needs of people in general and fishers, shellfish gatherers and fishing communities in particular;
- E. whereas marine waste is a global challenge as it knows no borders and is carried by currents and wind over long distances around the world, affecting areas and sectors that are far away from its point of origin and that are not responsible for its production; whereas large quantities of waste are still being dumped directly into the sea all over the world; whereas a holistic approach must be taken to marine pollution by supporting action at all levels, from local to international level;
- F. whereas the pollution of the ocean and seas by plastic marine waste, and particularly microplastics, is compounded by meteorological phenomena that enable microplastics to spread via the air, rain and snow and that result in the pollution of environments once regarded as virgin, such as high mountains or the Antarctic, and even beyond the Arctic Circle;
- G. whereas 730 tonnes of waste are dumped in the Mediterranean Sea every day; whereas, according to a World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) report from June 2019, every year 11 200 tonnes of plastics dumped in the environment find their way into the Mediterranean; whereas the equivalent of 66 000 refuse collection trucks of plastic is dumped in the Mediterranean every year; whereas the microplastics in the Mediterranean are reaching record concentration levels, with 1.25 million fragments per km²; whereas small particles account for around 90 % of all the plastic floating in the Mediterranean, which means around 280 billion fragments of floating microplastics; whereas an average consumer of Mediterranean shellfish ingests on average 11 000 fragments of plastic every year; whereas the Mediterranean is therefore one of the most polluted seas in the world;
- H. whereas the best way to reduce the amount of marine plastic waste is to reduce and avoid its production and move towards recycling and reusing materials and products;
- I. whereas marine waste offers a surface to which many organisms and bacteria can cling,

which facilitates the introduction of invasive species that can alter the balance of marine ecosystems, and whereas bacteria on marine waste can also be ingested by marine wildlife when it mistakes waste for food;

- J. whereas marine waste has negative morphological effects, particularly on islands;
- K. whereas marine waste accumulates in particular around small remote islands and in coastal areas; whereas the outermost regions and overseas countries and territories host 80 % of Europe's marine biodiversity; whereas their economies are largely based on fishing and tourism;
- L. whereas the spread of marine waste around the world is affecting developing third countries, in particular coastal communities that depend on fishing and that do not necessarily have the capacity or means to effectively protect themselves;
- M. whereas the problem of waste at sea is to a large extent the result of poor management of waste on land, such as in water courses and rivers, poor management of waste water, illegal open landfills and landfills located close to water courses, littering and run-off phenomena such as storms and rainfall, and dumping of snow from roads and pavements directly into the sea;
- N. whereas diffuse pollution, such as treated or untreated waste water, which can contain chemicals or pharmaceutical waste, or water that runs off or leaches from the urban or agricultural environment, such as the discharge of nitrogen and phosphorus, threatens the marine environment with eutrophication owing to the high concentration of nutrients, which can eventually starve the seabed of oxygen, leading to the proliferation of 'dead zones' which have increased tenfold since 1950, cause the number of cyanobacteria to shoot up, contribute to the phenomenon of green algae and red algae, and more extensively contaminate marine plants and wildlife;
- O. whereas poor management of waste water networks places aquaculture producers and oyster farmers at risk as the quality of their products can be threatened by the presence of viruses and bacteria such as noroviruses, which can result in temporary bans on the sale and distribution of their products if they are no longer fit for consumption;
- P. whereas the COVID-19 crisis has shown how the poor management of waste on land can quickly lead to new waves of marine pollution, particularly due to the use of single-use products such as surgical masks and disposable gloves;
- Q. whereas a substantial proportion of the plastics and microplastics in the sea comes from land-based sources;
- R. whereas the volume of plastic in the sea also has a significant impact on fisheries, which is even greater and more costly where small-scale fishing is concerned;
- S. whereas, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), tobacco waste is the most abundant type of litter by count globally; whereas, according to the American NGO Ocean Conservancy, cigarette butts top the list of the 10 items most collected during international beach clean-up operations; whereas a single cigarette butt takes 12 years to degrade and contains nearly 4 000 chemical substances; whereas for every

cigarette butt that ends up in the oceans and rivers, 500 litres of water are polluted;

- T. whereas the presence of marine waste seriously undermines the resilience and productivity of marine ecosystems, particularly the most fragile, which are already facing many cumulative pressures, such as climate change, pollution, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, overfishing, and increasing activities such as maritime transport and tourism;
- U. whereas these increased pressures on marine ecosystems lead to biodiversity decline and the smothering of benthic organisms, and risk increasing the spread of disease owing to the presence of pathogens caused by the accumulation of marine litter on the seabed;
- V. whereas, although the EU has increasingly focused on tackling the problem of fishing gear lost or abandoned at sea, some abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) remains active for months or even years, as shown by the phenomenon of ghost nets, and indiscriminately impacts all marine wildlife, including fish stocks; whereas IUU fishing is recognised as one of the main sources of ‘ghost gear’;
- W. whereas marine waste poses a serious threat to a number of marine animal species, representing a risk of strangulation, suffocation, ingestion, injury and contamination, but also other animal species such as marine birds, some of which are already endangered or even critically so;
- X. whereas fishers, including small-scale fishers, and aquaculture producers are the first to feel the impact of marine waste, which puts their activities at serious risk, as this waste can act as an obstacle, get snarled up in fishing gear, damage gear and cause it to be lost, block vessels’ engines and cooling systems, pose a threat to the security of seafarers on ship, require seafarers to put in extra work to clean the gear and therefore generate significant economic losses;
- Y. whereas the impact of marine waste on the fisheries sector is felt more by small-scale fisheries than by industrial fisheries, since smaller vessels are more vulnerable to damage to their propellers, engines and fishing gear caused by waste and since marine litter is more concentrated in shallow marine waters, where most small-scale fishing takes place; whereas marine waste also impacts the quality of catches, which can be contaminated by this waste and rendered unmarketable, causing further financial losses to fisheries and aquaculture businesses;
- Z. whereas the fisheries sector has for some time acted as a first line of defence against pollution caused by marine waste, although this is only a small contribution to tackling the problem on a global scale, fishers and aquaculture producers having for some time played an active and proactive role in contributing to cleaner seas;
- AA. whereas marine waste has been calculated as causing revenue losses of between 1 and 5 % for the fisheries industry²²;

²² ‘Lost fishing gear : a trap for our ocean’, European Commission.

- AB. whereas only 1.5 %²³ of fishing gear is recycled and whereas there is an urgent need to provide appropriate economic support for the collection, recycling and repair of all fishing gear; whereas the sector could benefit from new economic opportunities by committing to a circular economy based on smart design, research and innovation;
- AC. whereas fishers who bring litter accidentally caught while fishing back to land and marine litter collection campaigns contribute to reducing the problem of marine waste and benefit the entire community;
- AD. whereas the direct costs of disposing of marine waste are very often covered, while labour costs, costs deriving from a lack of space aboard vessels, and costs relating to damage to fishing gear and engines are not;
- AE. whereas fishers and aquaculture producers cannot be expected to collect marine waste without a compensation mechanism tailored to their efforts; whereas it is estimated that up to 80 % of fishers would be prepared to take part in marine waste collection schemes if support mechanisms were established²⁴;
- AF. whereas fishers and fishers' associations are already working to collect waste, and solutions for recovering marine waste, particularly waste from fishing, already exist;
- AG. whereas the blue economy, which is expected to double by 2030, represents a real opportunity for the sustainable development of maritime and coastal activities, particularly through the development of infrastructure with a positive impact, such as artificial reefs and other innovations encouraging the reef effect and the reserve effect, which can help to restore ecosystems;
- AH. whereas the EU is seeking to promote an integrated approach to marine activities and whereas marine waste must be tackled by taking greater account of the spatial dimension of maritime and coastal activities and involving coastal communities and fishers, as fishing activity largely takes place in coastal areas, in the fight against marine litter to reflect the special characteristics of local communities;
- AI. whereas the deterioration of marine and coastal ecosystems, also due to marine litter, poses a risk to all economic operators in coastal areas and therefore threatens the sustainability, durability and attractiveness of coastal communities;

Improving the legislative framework and governance on marine litter and making them more effective

1. Points out that keeping marine ecosystems healthy and tackling marine waste are issues involving many existing laws, and that only an integrated and coherent approach to the European objectives will enable improvements to the existing legislative framework and better understanding of the extent of the cumulative pressures; stresses the need to revise the EU's integrated maritime policy with a view to establishing a more strategic framework, including on marine litter, that incorporates all waste and marine

²³ 'Lost fishing gear : a trap for our ocean', European Commission.

²⁴ <https://cetmar.org/resultados-cleanatlantic/>

environment laws;

2. Stresses the need to strengthen communication and coordination between the Member States and between sea basins so as to ensure an integrated approach, allowing fishing vessels to land marine waste in any Union port; urges Member States, in this regard, to implement, promptly and without delay, Directive (EU) 2019/833 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019, on port reception facilities for the delivery of waste from ships²⁵; calls on the Commission, in this context, to present implementing acts laying down eligibility criteria for a reduced charge for ‘green ships’ and to design appropriate incentives for the delivery of collected waste onshore, including a compensation mechanism tailored to fishers’ efforts and methodological criteria for calculating the volume and quantity of passively caught waste, so that the marine waste reduction targets, as laid down in the directive, can be implemented quickly;
3. Stresses the need to improve the European legislative framework in order to reduce financial costs for fishers who accidentally catch marine litter when fishing and to avoid presenting them with an excessive bureaucratic burden; stresses, further, that legislation on marine litter should pay greater attention to the social dimension of the problem;
4. Points out that the maritime vision urgently needs to be reinforced in the European Union’s new strategies, particularly the European Green Deal, the Biodiversity Strategy and the Farm to Fork Strategy;
5. Recommends strengthening the provisions of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive by harmonising the indicators of good environmental status, particularly those connected with descriptor 10, ‘marine litter’;
6. Calls on the Commission to extend the Marine Strategy Framework Directive to the outermost regions;
7. Calls for the framework of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive to be improved so that it takes account of the spatial dimension of the fight against marine waste;
8. Recalls that the issue of marine waste cannot be tackled effectively at national level alone but requires cooperation at all levels, including at global, European and regional level; calls on the Commission to champion an ambitious governance model in international UN negotiations on marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions and to recognise all seas and the ocean as a global common good, with a view to adopting a new approach that prioritises individual and collective responsibilities over the traditional principles of freedom and sovereign rights, as laid down in the Law of the Sea, and thus ensures that the sea is protected, including from the detrimental impact of marine litter;
9. Calls for the EU to reinforce international initiatives such as the Global Partnership on Marine Litter, launched by the UNEP, in order to achieve the SDGs, in particular SDG 14, ‘Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable

²⁵ OJ L 151, 7.6.2019, p. 116.

development', and SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production;

10. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to lead efforts towards an ambitious, legally binding agreement on plastic pollution at the UN Environment Assembly covering the full lifecycle of plastics, including shared global objectives for the reduction of plastic pollution at sea and a vision for a transition to a safe, circular economy for plastics, as well as effective global governance of lost fishing gear, or 'ghost gear', which represents a threat to all marine activities and ecosystems worldwide;
11. Stresses the need for the Commission and the Member States to step up the fight against IUU fishing, which is intrinsically polluting and contributes to marine litter and the deterioration of the marine environment, notably owing to the illegal discarding of fishing gear;
12. Emphasises that Resolution 2/11 of the UN Environment Assembly of the UN Environment Programme of 26 May 2016 recognised that the presence of plastic litter and microplastics in the marine environment is an issue of global concern that is rapidly becoming more and more worrying and that requires an urgent global response that incorporates a product life-cycle approach;
13. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to coordinate on the basis of a single timetable their work on laws such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the directive on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment, the directive on port reception facilities and the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive, with a view to making legislation in this area more consistent;
14. Calls on the Commission to increase the collection of data on the amount and type of litter in European waters and its effect on fishing, and also to increase the collection and harmonisation of data on the amount, quantity and quality of marine waste landed, disposed of and delivered for recycling, notably through the 'Fishing for Litter' (FFL) programme, including the volume, materials and types of item caught; calls for the data collected by Member States on the loss, marketing and collection of fishing gear and marine waste to be recorded in a database at national or sea basin level and harmonised in a single annual report at European level to make it easier to identify and tackle marine waste and ensure better monitoring and assessment;
15. Stresses the need for the annual mapping of marine waste collected through the FFL programme in relation to the various catchment basins, with a view to obtaining information on the origin of the marine litter caught and strengthening collection campaigns ; stresses that this must be linked to existing mapping efforts; urges the Commission to draw up an annual report on the amount of marine waste landed in ports through the FFL programme, including the volume, materials and types of item caught;
16. Encourages the establishment of cooperation networks between the governments of the Member States, fishers' associations, workers' organisations, waste water bodies, coastal stakeholders, ports, NGOs and regional conventions in order to strengthen a bottom-up approach based on dialogue and inclusion and promote practical solutions for workers in the fisheries sector, with a view to ensuring a more effective implementation of the rules and providing adequate resources in areas such as the collection, disposal

and recycling of marine litter;

17. Stresses the need to share best practices among all stakeholders, including citizens affected by the problem of marine waste, so as to encourage the fisheries sector to help protect the marine environment, tackle marine waste and therefore ensure the sustainable use of its resources; welcomes initiatives such as the ‘Plan Marlimpo’ (Clean Sea project) implemented by the Galician Government’s Ministry of the Sea (Spain), which aims to reduce the amount of waste in coastal areas;
18. Stresses that in order to improve and enhance the effectiveness of the legislative framework and governance relating to the collection, disposal and recycling of marine waste, it is essential to promote the greater involvement of all those working in the fishing sector and to broaden the existing awareness-raising, prevention and training projects with a view to ensuring the continuous exchange of information in order to support the preparation and updating of the relevant rules;
19. Calls on all other relevant stakeholders, namely the fisheries Advisory Councils, to support the reduction of marine waste through effective and efficient measures; calls on the Commission and the Member States to adopt the UN Food and Agriculture Organization’s Voluntary Guidelines for the Marking of Fishing Gear to promote responsible fishing gear management, improve efforts to identify lost gear and support the sustainability of fisheries through the reduction of ALDFG, also in line with the provisions of the Fisheries Control Regulation; calls on the Commission to support efforts to operationalise the marking and reporting of lost fishing gear in European waters and, through efforts at the International Maritime Organization, boost international cooperation with a view to tackling this source of marine plastic pollution;
20. Points out that marine protected areas can act as excellent laboratories for the implementation of solutions to tackle marine waste, enabling interactions between activities on land and those at sea to be taken into account and supporting cooperation between the various maritime and land-based stakeholders with regard to the challenges facing marine and coastal ecosystems;
21. Highlights the lack of efficiency of the European Liability Directive as regards marine litter, including in terms of its restricted scope and the difficulties in identifying the polluter and assigning responsibility; recalls that Parliament called for a vision of the European Liability Directive that would take into account the limits to its effectiveness;
22. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to better implement the ‘polluter pays’ principle;

Improving research and knowledge on marine waste

23. Urges the Commission to play a major role in the UN’s Decade of Ocean Science and to support digitalisation and the use of artificial intelligence with a view to improving our understanding of the seas and the ocean and the impact of marine litter on them;
24. Stresses that the shortage of available data and studies makes it difficult to quantify the exact extent to which damage caused by marine litter is affecting the fisheries sector and its negative economic consequences for fishers; calls, therefore, on the Commission

and the Member States to step up research finance and data collection on the amount and various types of litter in European waters and its impact on fisheries, aquaculture and ecosystems and to propose robust measures to address and prevent the impact of nano- and microplastics on both fishery resources and human health;

25. Points out that the directive on single-use plastics concerns waste commonly found on beaches; urges the Commission to step up existing measures on single-use plastics, drawing, in particular, on work to be done on waste in the water column and on the seabed as part of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and to consider phasing out expanded polystyrene containers and packaging from fishery products in line with the ambition of replacing single-use plastics with durable alternatives for the environment and fishers;
26. Calls on the Commission to act on the recommendations issued by Mission Starfish 2030 on tackling marine waste, and in particular to assess the proposal for the marking of fishing gear using new geolocation technologies in order to help locate and collect lost gear, where relevant and possible; highlights, in this regard, that the Commission should improve the marking of fishing gear following the Food and Agriculture Organization's Voluntary Guidelines for the Marking of Fishing Gear and making sure that fishers and aquaculturists are accompanied in the transition by appropriate funding programmes;
27. Calls for improved reporting on the loss of fishing gear at sea and highlights the need to include more information, such as vessel name, type of gear used, time and position of loss, and recovery measures taken, to enable the data gathered to be put to more effective use in tackling marine pollution through transparent and improved data-sharing and the exchange of best practices among Member States and EU agencies; stresses the need to develop new tools for identifying and tracking fishing gear lost at sea and recording data on marine litter, such as electronic applications for helping fishers to record data and systems for recording and reporting landings of marine litter, for example using waste delivery receipts as provided for in Directive (EU) 2019/883, which obliges port operators to issue such receipts to masters of vessels;
28. Welcomes the implementation of European projects such as 'CleanAtlantic', financed by the EU's Interreg Atlantic Area Programme, which aims to improve knowledge about and the capacity to monitor, prevent and reduce marine litter, and to increase awareness of its impact; urges the 19 project partners, from Ireland, France, Spain and Portugal, and in particular the project coordinator, the Centro Tecnológico del Mar (Cetmar), to continue their work and publish the project results;
29. Stresses the need to ensure properly managed logistics as regards waste and end-of-use gear collection in order to assist fishers in their largely voluntary endeavours; notes that this should include unified collection of the gear on board vessels in bags or containers, and provision of adequate facilities in ports;

Speeding up the development of a circular economy in the fisheries and aquaculture sector

30. Stresses that reducing the impact of marine waste is contingent on improvements to the circular economy on land, including phasing out unnecessary plastic and packaging and transforming waste into resources, and on the adoption of a life-cycle approach in the

fisheries and aquaculture sectors; underlines that the circular economy in the fisheries sector must be developed through greater support for solution finding, the smart design of fishing gear and innovation in fishing and aquaculture techniques in order to limit the dumping of waste, make collection operations more attractive and increase the development of efficient recycling channels;

31. Calls for the eco-design of fishing gear, which should be practical, safe and cost-effective, to be supported through the swift adoption of guidelines on the development of harmonised standards for a circular economy for fishing gear; supports the marking of materials used in fishing gear by means of product passports; supports the promotion of research and innovation seeking to find alternative and environmentally friendly materials to use in fishing gear, including polymers; highlights, in this regard, that pilot projects could be established to explore the reduction of materials, easier and faster disassembly and the testing of gear functionality to aid the transition;
32. Stresses the importance, as regards the circular economy for fishing gear, of fully involving fishers, fisheries and the aquaculture sector as a whole, start-ups, private initiatives and businesses, including rope and netting manufacturers from third countries, in identifying new materials, eco-design, the design of new fishing gear and the recycling of fishing gear; stresses the need, furthermore, to strengthen a model for synergy between fisheries and research areas; urges the Commission, therefore, to organise future projects for the circular economy for fishing gear in relation to existing EU funding programmes for research and innovation;
33. Stresses that in order to accelerate the development of the circular economy in the fishing and aquaculture sector, it is essential to plan future legislative solutions to the problem of marine waste collection and disposal in conjunction with the European Green Deal; urges Member States, in this regard, to swiftly follow up on the setting of national minimum collection rates for fishing gear containing plastic, as agreed to in the directive on single-use plastics; calls on the Commission to follow up on whether these national plans result in an increase in the collection and recycling of fishing gear in comparison with today's levels, and, in this regard, to draw up an appropriate and ambitious plan to support the development of a circular economy in the fisheries sector; highlights that there is a market for recycled fishing gear which offers potential for making the use of recycled material a legal requirement, together with the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) provisions on programming for shared management, which would represent an important incentive for fishers and a way to see the value of their contribution to recycling;
34. Calls for the use of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) to support the fisheries and aquaculture sector in the transition to more sustainable materials, including the acquisition of new, technically more efficient and less polluting vessels for small-scale artisanal fleets, in particular in the outermost regions;
35. Urges the Commission to create incentives for the circular economy along the entire production chain for fishing and aquaculture gear by promoting research and supporting businesses that recycle and reuse gear; calls on the Commission, therefore, to create a specific fund to support Member States that establish production chains for recycled and environmentally friendly gear, using resources such as those under the

NextGenerationEU instrument and from tax penalties imposed following infringement proceedings against Member States;

36. Highlights that many issues and differences still remain between the Member States in relation to port reception facilities, despite the important progress made on the entry into force of Directive (EU) 2019/883; stresses that in many Union ports it is still very difficult for fishers to locate these facilities, where they exist, and to have access to them; underlines that all this acts as a barrier and disincentive to fisheries operators from contributing to cleaner seas;
37. Supports the development and creation of efficient recycling channels through the upgrading of reception facility infrastructure at all European ports with a view to improving selective waste sorting; stresses the need, therefore, for greater efforts by the Member States to upgrade port logistics facilities through properly managed logistics as regards waste and end-of-use gear collection, unified collection of the gear on board vessels in bags or containers, and provision of adequate facilities in port to ensure appropriate reception and storage facilities are provided for the lost fishing gear and marine waste collected, sufficient space for separate storage of various types of marine waste, sufficient personnel for proper and safe treatment of landed waste, and supply to all vessels of containers for collecting marine litter; calls for collection operations to be made more attractive by taking measures involving reward schemes and incentives, such as financial incentives, to support fishers and aquaculture producers in collecting, disposing of and recycling waste caught at sea and bringing their end-of-life fishing or aquaculture gear back to port;

Collection and management programmes for marine waste

38. Calls on the Commission to draw up an EU-level action plan to combat littering in the Union's hydrosphere by reducing waste at its source, cutting down on plastic use and consumption, and tackling the pollution of rivers, water courses and coastlines due to littering, which can be drastically reduced in a coordinated manner; calls for the dumping of snow from roads and pavements directly into the ocean to be minimised, in particular by supporting alternative collection methods during exceptionally heavy snowfall;
39. Stresses that waste water networks and treatment plants must be upgraded in order to reduce the impact on aquaculture and the marine and coastal environment in general, and in particular the risk of contaminating aquaculture products;
40. Stresses that it is essential to address the issue of poor waste management on land, primarily inappropriate waste disposal in coastal cities, cities built along rivers and island cities;
41. Calls on the Commission to increase the awareness of maritime operators in all their potential interactions with the marine environment, in particular during the sale or leasing of ships;
42. Urges the Member States and regions to collect data on, monitor and take action to address the issue of poor management of waste on land, to clear up hotspot areas in rivers and estuaries where marine waste has accumulated and to introduce measures to

prevent marine waste from reaching the environment in the first place; urges the allocation of sufficient funding to clean up all types of plastic-derived pollutants;

43. Recalls that programmes for the collection of marine waste can cover different operations, such as the collection of marine waste in rivers, estuaries, bays or ports, research operations, and the identification of hotspots at sea, and can be carried out by fishers, civil society and local authorities; highlights that collection programmes should be sustainable, use appropriate equipment for the collection of waste, avoid producing further emissions as far as possible, be prepared to collaborate with actors who have a knowledge of marine ecosystems and require strategic identification of waste before action is taken; underlines that those collection programmes can be carried out not only under EU funding programmes but also at local, regional and national level in the Member States;
44. Stresses that only seven Member States have used resources within the framework of the current EMFF to fund marine waste collection programmes such as the FFL programme, and that most actions which make it possible to identify, collect and recycle marine waste consist of voluntary initiatives and programmes by fishers, civil society and local authorities;
45. Stresses that in order to reduce waste from fishing vessels, fishers need to be incentivised to bring waste to recycling facilities, including through financial incentives and reward schemes to encourage good practices; notes, therefore, that fishers should be compensated for the collection of lost fishing gear and other marine waste or at a minimum have access to free waste disposal at harbour facilities;
46. Stresses that fishers should be adequately trained on how to handle marine waste properly during collection, landing, disposal and delivery for recycling in order to minimise the health and safety risks;
47. Stresses that strengthening and extending existing good practices also involves the simplification and streamlining of administrative processes for all vessels participating in FFL campaigns, regardless of their home port or size; stresses the need, therefore, for harmonisation and a more complementary approach to the rules on the landing of marine waste collected during FFL actions in Member State ports;
48. Calls on the Commission and the Member States, therefore, to support the collection at sea by fishers of lost fishing gear or other marine waste, particularly plastics, by promoting best practices, incentivising voluntary participation in initiatives for the collection of sea litter and supporting the adoption of FFL programmes; urges Member States, in this regard, to establish a 'special fund for cleaning the seas', managed through the new European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) or other relevant budget lines, in order to finance the following actions: 1) the collection at sea by fishers of marine litter, 2) the provision of adequate on-board waste storage facilities and the monitoring of passively fished litter, 3) improvements in operator training, 4) the financing of the costs of both waste treatment and the personnel required for the operation of such programmes to avoid the increase in costs for fishers who participate voluntarily, and 5) investments in ports so that appropriate reception and storage facilities can be provided for the lost fishing gear and marine waste collected;

49. Calls on the Commission to conduct an assessment of the social and economic contribution of fishers through FFL projects, with a view to quantifying more accurately the contribution of the fisheries sector to action for cleaner seas;
50. Urges the Commission to go beyond the aims of Directive (EU) 2019/883, studying and quantifying in economic terms the environmental damage caused by man-made marine waste and setting up a 'Marine Litter Fund' to combat discharge of waste into the sea, mitigate damage to fisheries, and protect the seas and the ocean;
51. Calls on the Commission to urge the Member States to ensure proper management and adequate disposal of waste accidentally caught or collected during voluntary campaigns, so that responsibility for and the cost of delivery, management and disposal of such waste are not borne by fishers, and to avoid further damage to the environment; stresses, therefore, the need to establish effective systems for waste collection and disposal, ensuring, too, the presence of adequate port waste reception facilities;
52. Points out that the issue of marine litter is transboundary and that, in order to be more efficient, tackling marine waste must be a joint effort with European third countries; urges the Commission and the Member States to launch a plan for ridding the Mediterranean of pollution together with all the countries bordering the sea; calls on the Commission to put an end to the export of waste to third countries, as soon as possible;
53. Calls on the Commission to create a support mechanism for the collection of marine litter in the outermost regions, given the natural vulnerability of these regions, thereby providing them with infrastructure for their cycling of collected waste;
54. Calls on the Commission, in the EU accession negotiations, to demand full implementation of waste management legislation in candidate countries, including through the establishment of integrated waste management infrastructure;

Better understanding and limiting nano- and microplastic pollution

55. Stresses the need to increase knowledge and public awareness of nano- and microplastic pollution and its effect on the environment, the basis of the marine food chain, and ultimately on human health, and that further research should be conducted to better understand this pollution phenomenon; points out that the need for more knowledge and the lack of public awareness may make consumers distrustful of the quality of fishery and aquaculture products;
56. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote campaigns to raise awareness of the issue of marine pollution caused by plastics and microplastics, underlining the fact that fishers are also often affected by this phenomenon, especially in the case of microplastics;
57. Welcomes the preparatory work done by the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) on restrictions on microplastics intentionally added to products; calls on the Commission to be ambitious in following up this proposal with concrete and, where appropriate, legal measures, including by exploring the problem of the spread of nano- and microplastics in the water cycle, particularly those released into the environment unintentionally, and to propose measures for them to be phased out;

58. Calls on the Commission to tackle the problem of the loss and spread of microplastics, such as plastic pellets, in the environment throughout the supply chain, especially during land and sea transport, and the associated risks of spillage;

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59. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and to the Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Marine waste is one of the main problems to be overcome if we are to return our marine and coastal ecosystems to health. These ecosystems play a major role both in balancing the climate and in providing the basis for marine and coastal activities, including fisheries and aquaculture. Many societal, economic and environmental issues are part of the complex equation of the marine pollution phenomenon. What waste are we talking about, and what types of impact? The solutions to the problem – like its origins – are to be found partly at sea and partly on land and require a systemic approach to the subject.

I/ Better understanding the marine waste phenomenon

What types of waste are we talking about?

Marine waste visible on beaches and along coastlines represents only a tiny part of a much further reaching pollution phenomenon. The ‘visible’ waste is just the tip of the iceberg. The cumulative mass of waste floating on the surface accounts for only 1% of plastic in the ocean²⁶. The spread of marine waste and its geographic dispersion have been the focus of many studies and much scientific research. Waste accumulates at the surface, but also in the water column and even in deep-sea trenches such as the Marianas Trench, where waste has been found at depths of more than 10 000 metres²⁷. Marine currents transport waste to accumulation areas on the surface, but also downwards to hotspots on sea beds and underwater slopes, where there are up to 1.9 million microplastic particles per square metre²⁸.

Marine waste is also transported by ocean currents to the four corners of the globe and poses a threat to small isolated islands and coastal areas, which can do little to protect themselves against the large volumes of waste which accumulate. Condensation above the ocean leads to the contamination of territories that would otherwise be considered virgin, which goes some way towards explaining why researchers have found traces of microplastics in snow in the Alps and the Arctic²⁹.

Marine waste comes from a number of sources, such as polluted water courses and rivers, and may be the result of poor waste-collection management, but it is also caused by natural run-off phenomena, such as storms and rainfall that sweep waste out of urban areas towards the sea, and by littering and may even be accidental. While the fisheries and aquaculture sector is affected by marine pollution, it also contributes to it. According to the Joint Research Centre, fisheries and aquaculture waste accounts for 27% of marine waste. Waste from the sector includes crates, buoys and cages, along with fishing gear abandoned after becoming entangled on the seafloor or ripped underwater and lost following severe weather events, or following repairs at berth or aboard vessels, and, less often, gear which has been intentionally thrown

²⁶ *Plastic waste inputs from land into the ocean*, Science 13 Feb 2015: Vol. 347, Issue 6223, pp. 768-771

²⁷ *Human footprint in the abyss: 30 year records of deep-sea plastic debris*, *Marine Policy*, Volume 96, October 2018, Pages 204-212

²⁸ *Seafloor microplastic hotspots controlled by deep-sea circulation*, Science 05 Jun 2020, Vol. 368, Issue 6495, pp. 1140-1145

²⁹ *White and wonderful? Microplastics prevail in snow from the Alps to the Arctic*, Science Advances 14 Aug 2019: Vol. 5, no. 8,

away.

What impact does marine waste have?

The impact of marine waste accounts for between 1 and 5% of total revenue losses for fishery activities³⁰. Fishers have to deal with the risk of accidents or obstacles and have to clear their gear regularly to separate marine waste from their catches and, when necessary, repair torn or broken fishing gear. This wastes precious time on board. Marine waste can also harm the fishing vessel itself by damaging propeller systems and the structure of vessels but also by blocking cooling systems. Lastly, marine waste can have an impact on the quality of catches brought aboard, by coming into contact with them.

Marine waste also has an effect on ecosystems and marine wildlife: ghost nets, for example, continue to move around and indiscriminately catch, harm and kill many species, some of which are already endangered or critically endangered. Waste poses a particular threat to fragile biodiverse ecosystems such as patches of coral and sponges, which provide nursery environments which are essential to the proper renewal of fish stocks and therefore to the sustainability of the European fishing industry. According to one study, 11.1 billion plastic products are caught up in corals in Asia and the Pacific, and this figure is expected to rise by 40% in the next seven years³¹. The accumulation of this waste may also suffocate life on the seabed, play a part in the general degradation of the ecosystem, increase the risk of disease owing to the greater presence of pathogens, and even introduce alien species. These effects pose a threat to the resilience of marine ecosystems and a risk to the sustainability of fishing operations.

II/ A systemic approach to addressing the phenomenon

To tackle marine waste and address its impact on fisheries, we need to operate from upstream to downstream and take account of the lifecycle of waste and its link to the water cycle, whether natural or waste (diffuse pollution). For that purpose, we need: a better understanding of the phenomenon, a more effective legislative framework, a holistic and comprehensive approach to the lifecycle of waste, an action plan for land, including measures to combat littering – as litter enters water courses and then follows them into drainage basins – and, more specifically, nano- and microplastics, working towards the development of a proper circular economy in the fisheries and aquaculture sector, and by launching coordinated waste collection in water courses and estuaries and at sea.

Improving research and knowledge of the oceans

If we are to set targets and formulate ambitious public policies, we need accurate data. Although for decades we have had a political framework that encourages scientific research, little effort has been made to step up oceanographic research, and the lack of knowledge is slowing the development of new policies. Little is known about the impact of marine waste on fisheries,

³⁰ 'Lost fishing gear: a trap for our ocean', European Commission, DG MARE

³¹ 6 Plastic waste associated with disease on coral reefs, *Science*, 26 Jan 2018, Vol. 359, Issue 6374, pp. 460-462

and there is a dearth of accurate data on the consequences of marine pollution for both the fisheries sector and the resilience of ecosystems, which need to work in synergy if the sector is to be sustainable.

Improving the legislative framework and making it more effective

The EU has set up a legislative framework with a view to limiting marine waste pollution, whether from land or activities at sea. The framework directive on port reception facilities is designed to speed up the establishment of a recycling channel for fishing gear, while the directive on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment introduces an extended responsibility scheme for producers of fishing gear containing plastic, with the aim of covering its collection, transport and treatment costs and supporting awareness-raising efforts. It is also important to note that other texts, such as the Control Regulation, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, work in synergy with these objectives.

Full use must be made of the *acquis* and it must be upheld and strengthened in a coordinated way with a view to not watering down and recycling the good environmental status goals for marine and coastal ecosystems over the course of successive policy cycles. The launch of the Green Deal, the biodiversity strategy, the farm to fork strategy and the circular economy action plan represents a call to rethink the existing legislative framework, to shine a spotlight on its weaknesses and to formulate recommendations for the forthcoming policy cycle.

Supporting the introduction of a proper circular economy in the fisheries and aquaculture sector

There are many logistical challenges in the way of the establishment of a circular economy in the fisheries industry. Ways of identifying and collecting marine waste once it is at sea are limited and there is little incentive to bring marine waste to port, either actively or passively. Considerable structural challenges need to be overcome in the unloading and sorting stages at port facilities, in transport to treatment centres, in mechanical and chemical recycling operations and in the reuse of recycled materials.

While efforts to recycle fishing gear must be supported, this support must be coupled with research into the design and environmental footprint reduction of fishing gear. They are made of resistant and non-biodegradable polymers, and these polymers are generally mixed with other materials, such as lead in the case of gillnets, making disassembly and recycling operations more complex. Many fishing gear parts are imported from outside the EU before being assembled, which makes it difficult to monitor the supply chain and share information on the components. Lastly, the lack of European criteria and standards on the circularity of fishing gear also presents a considerable challenge for the sector.

Better understanding and limiting microplastic pollution

Invisible but pervasive pollution in the marine environment – nano- and microplastics – present a new challenge to efforts to combat marine pollution. They are less than 5 mm in size and can be primary, i.e. intentionally added to a product, or secondary, i.e. stemming from the degradation over time of waste that has been subjected to wind, waves, saltwater and ultraviolet rays. Microplastics have a number of specific characteristics which make their impact on the

environment and human health complex and still largely unknown. They may contain a mix of chemicals that could leech out once in contact with the aquatic environment and act as ‘pollutant sponges’, attracting persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic substances. They may also provide an environment for some organisms, such as viruses and pathogens, which can interact with aquatic species and the microbial balance of marine environments. Research efforts at EU level are needed with regard to some effects on genetic material and the passage of nanoplastics through cellular organisms. The micro- and meso-plastics problem may also make the wider public distrustful of the quality of fisheries and aquaculture products and pose a real economic risk to the industry.

Promoting proper collection of waste at sea

At sea, private waste-collection ventures are taking shape. These actions must be supported in a coordinated manner as a matter of urgency, with a view to developing genuinely effective ways of collecting marine waste on watercourses and in estuaries and of supporting waste-identification programmes. The appalling state of the marine environment calls for all of us to show individual and collective responsibility, but also necessitates coordinated European action to protect our common good and prevent waste from endlessly accumulating in our seas.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

Date adopted	22.2.2021
Result of final vote	+: 25 -: 0 0: 3
Members present for the final vote	Clara Aguilera, Pietro Bartolo, François-Xavier Bellamy, Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, Isabel Carvalhais, Rosanna Conte, Rosa D'Amato, Giuseppe Ferrandino, João Ferreira, Søren Gade, Francisco Guerreiro, Anja Hazekamp, Niclas Herbst, France Jamet, Pierre Karleskind, Predrag Fred Matić, Francisco José Millán Mon, Cláudia Monteiro de Aguiar, Grace O'Sullivan, Manuel Pizarro, Caroline Roose, Bert-Jan Ruissen, Annie Schreijer-Pierik, Ruža Tomašić, Peter van Dalen, Theodoros Zagorakis
Substitutes present for the final vote	Carmen Avram, Catherine Chabaud, Nicolás González Casares, Valentino Grant, Ivo Hristov, Ska Keller, Colm Markey, Gabriel Mato, Simone Schmiedtbauer, Raffaele Stancanelli, Stéphanie Yon-Courtin

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FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

25	+
ECR	Raffaele Stancanelli, Ruža Tomašić
PPE	François-Xavier Bellamy, Peter Van Dalen, Niclas Herbst, Francisco José Millán Mon, Cláudia Monteiro de Aguiar, Annie Schreijer-Pierik, Theodoros Zagorakis
RENEW	Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, Catherine Chabaud, Søren Gade, Pierre Karleskind
S&D	Clara Aguilera, Pietro Bartolo, Isabel Carvalhais, Giuseppe Ferrandino, Predrag Fred Matić, Manuel Pizarro
The Left	João Ferreira, Anja Hazekamp
Verts/ALE	Francisco Guerreiro, Rosa D'Amato, Grace O'Sullivan, Caroline Roose

3	0
ID	Rosanna Conte, Valentino Grant, France Jamet

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention