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REPORT

on rebuilding fish stocks in the Mediterranean: assessment and next steps
(2019/2178(INI))

Committee on Fisheries

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on rebuilding fish stocks in the Mediterranean: assessment and next steps (2019/2178(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission communication of 11 December 2019 on the European Green Deal (COM(2019)0640) and to Parliament's resolution of 15 January 2020 on the European Green Deal¹,
- 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 EU biodiversity strategy for 2030, set out in the Commission Communication of 20 May 2020 entitled 'EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 – Bringing nature back into our lives' (COM(2020)0380), in particular, to its point 2.2.6 on 'Restoring the good environmental status of marine ecosystems', 'including through providing financial incentives through the future financial instruments for fisheries and maritime policy for marine protected areas (including Natura 2000 areas and those established by international or regional agreements)',
- having regard to the Commission communication of 16 June 2020 entitled 'Towards more sustainable fishing in the EU: state of play and orientations for 2021' (COM(2020)0248),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 17 September 2020 entitled 'Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2021' (COM(2020)0575),
- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1967/2006 of 21 December 2006 concerning management measures for the sustainable exploitation of fishery resources in the Mediterranean Sea²,
- 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 environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive)³,
- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008 of 29 September 2008 establishing a Community system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing⁴,

¹ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0005.

² OJ L 409, 30.12.2006, p. 11.

³ OJ L 164, 25.6.2008, p. 19.

⁴ OJ L 286, 29.10.2008, p. 1.

- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy⁵,
- 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 Fund⁶ and 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),
- having regard to Council Directive (EU) 2017/159 of 19 December 2016 implementing the Agreement concerning the implementation of the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 of the International Labour Organisation, concluded on 21 May 2012 between the General Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives in the European Union (Cogeca), the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) and the Association of National Organisations of Fishing Enterprises in the European Union (Europêche)⁷,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2017 on the establishment of a Union framework for the collection, management and use of data in the fisheries sector and support for scientific advice regarding the common fisheries policy⁸,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2017/2107 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2017 laying down management, conservation and control measures applicable in the Convention area of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)⁹,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2019/1022 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 establishing a multiannual plan for the fisheries exploiting demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean Sea¹⁰,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2019/982 of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) No 1343/2011 on certain provisions for fishing in the GFCM (General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean) Agreement area¹¹,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2020/560 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2020 amending Regulations (EU) No 508/2014 and (EU) No 1379/2013 as regards specific measures to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak in the fishery and aquaculture sector¹²,
- having regard to the report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council of 25 June 2020 on the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework

⁵ OJ L 354, 28.12.2013, p. 22.

⁶ OJ L 149, 20.5.2014, p. 1.

⁷ OJ L 25, 31.1.2017, p. 12.

⁸ OJ L 157, 20.6.2017, p. 1.

⁹ OJ L 315, 30.11.2017, p. 1.

¹⁰ OJ L 172, 26.6.2019, p. 1.

¹¹ OJ L 164, 20.6.2019, p. 1.

¹² OJ L 130, 24.4.2020, p. 11.

Directive (Directive 2008/56/EC) (COM(2020)0259),

- having regard to the European Court of Auditors' Special Report 26/2020 of 26 November 2020 entitled 'Marine environment: EU protection is wide but not deep',
- having regard to the Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 9 February 2021 entitled 'Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood - A new Agenda for the Mediterranean' (JOIN(2021)0002),
- having regard to Articles 38 and 39 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP),
- having regard the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS),
- having regard to the mid-term strategy (2017-2020) of the GFCM towards the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries,
- having regard to the GFCM's 2018 report on the state of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries,
- having regard to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14, 'Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development', adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September 2015,
- having regard to the 2020 report of the Commission's Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) on monitoring the performance of the common fisheries policy (STECF-Adhoc-20-01),
- having regard to the Commission's retrospective evaluation study of the Mediterranean Sea Regulation of May 2016,
- having regard to the European Environment Agency report No 17/2019 entitled 'Marine messages II – Navigating the course towards clean, healthy and productive seas through implementation of an ecosystem-based approach',
- having regard to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention) and the related EU protocols and decisions,
- having regard to the MedFish4Ever Ministerial Declaration of the Mediterranean coastal states, adopted in Valletta, Malta, on 30 March 2017,
- having regard to the Sofia Ministerial Declaration of 7 June 2018,
- having regard to the Ministerial Declaration of 26 September 2018 aimed at implementing a Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale and Sustainable Fisheries in the Mediterranean and Black Sea,

- having regard to the 2019 global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES),
 - having regard to the 2019 special report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate,
 - having regard to Part II, Section 2 of the UNCLOS entitled ‘Limits of the territorial sea’,
 - having regard to the First Mediterranean Assessment Report (MAR1) by the independent network of Mediterranean Experts on Climate and environmental Change (MedECC),
 - having regard to the report of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the GFCM entitled ‘The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries 2020,
 - having regard to the report of its Committee on Fisheries on the consequences of rising seawater temperatures for fish stocks and fisheries (2019/2163(INI)),
 - having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Fisheries for the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development on a Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system (2020/2260(INI)) PECH_AD(2021)662054,
 - having regard to its legislative resolution of 17 April 2020 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) No 1379/2013 and Regulation (EU) No 508/2014 as regards specific measures to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak in the fishery and aquaculture sector (COM(2020)0142 – C9-0093/2020 – 2020/0059(COD))¹³,
 - having regard to its resolution of 21 January 2021 entitled ‘More fish in the seas? Measures to promote stock recovery above the maximum sustainable yield (MSY), including fish recovery areas and marine protected areas’¹⁴,
 - having regard to the present and long-term negative socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector, including retailers and the small-scale fresh food trade,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Fisheries (A9-0225/2021),
- A. whereas the Mediterranean Sea is one of the areas with the greatest biodiversity in the world in addition to being a basin that is home to coastal communities that depend largely on fishing, and particularly small-scale fishing; whereas its current worrying environmental status, partly as a result of overfishing, is seriously endangering not only

¹³ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0052.

¹⁴ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2021)0017.

biodiversity but also the survival of a sector whose loss of profitability may have extremely negative socioeconomic repercussions on fishing communities, the industry and its ancillary sectors;

- B. whereas fish stocks do not have unlimited reproductive capacity, and whereas demand for and consumption of fish is constantly increasing;
- C. whereas the Mediterranean — especially the western Mediterranean where new measures are being implemented, although it is too early to fully assess them since more initiatives are needed — and the Black Sea have remained broadly unchanged since data collection began in 2003, although there may have been a slight increase in biomass since 2012;
- D. whereas according to the 2020 GFCM report on the state of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries, in the Mediterranean the proportion of overfished stocks decreased from 88 % in 2014 to 75 % in 2018, clearly showing that much work remains to be done, but reflecting gradually improving results owed to the commitment of fishers across the region; whereas the situation of many stocks remains critical as more than 80 % of scientifically assessed stocks are exploited above maximum sustainable yield (MSY) levels, according to the STECF;
- E. whereas the Regulation establishing a multiannual plan for the management of demersal fisheries in the western Mediterranean was adopted in 2019, and whereas we need to wait and see what the effects of the measures adopted therein will be;
- F. having regard to the significant socioeconomic impact of restrictions on fishing activities, which undermine the profitability of thousands of companies to the point of endangering their very survival, with a potentially devastating impact on employment and social cohesion in coastal areas;
- G. whereas stock depletion and marine biodiversity erosion is threatening food security of coastal communities, jobs and incomes throughout the artisanal fisheries value chain;
- H. whereas the unequal levels of compliance with the restrictions on fishing activities precludes fulfilment of the stated aims, putting those who comply with them at a clear disadvantage;
- I. whereas the European Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund should be used both to mitigate negative socioeconomic effects and to diversify the sector;
- J. whereas the majority of the Mediterranean fishing fleet consists of small-scale artisanal fishing vessels, accounting for some 84 % of the fishing fleet and 60 % of jobs in the Mediterranean basin, and whereas although some fleets have decreased significantly, albeit to varying degrees across the EU and non-European countries with major impacts on local economies, the trends on the numbers of the vessels have remained relatively stable;
- K. whereas for most coastal and island areas, small-scale fishing is a traditional form of fishing which is part of a lifestyle and provides a significant livelihood which calls for specific measures and support to allow it to grow and develop;

- L. whereas healthy levels of fish stocks need to be reached to prevent the loss of jobs and to sustain important economic sectors that depend on fisheries;
- M. whereas, in addition to fishing, the factors exerting pressure on Mediterranean fish stocks and marine biodiversity include human-induced problems such as plastic pollution, fuel dispersion, habitat loss, maritime traffic, and climate change, and the proliferation of invasive alien species;
- N. whereas the statistics show a steady increase in consumption of fish products together with a relative increase in imports;
- O. whereas there is room for improvement in the labelling of European products with a view to enhancing the value of Mediterranean fisheries and improving traceability while combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing;
- P. whereas there has been a steady decline in production and measures are needed in order to restore the sustainability of resources;
- Q. whereas fishing and aquaculture are among the sectors hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, as demand has seen a sudden decline;
- R. whereas the Commission has proposed a range of temporary and targeted measures to address the challenges faced by the seafood community due to COVID-19;
- S. whereas the political instability and unrest in Libya are posing a tangible threat to EU fishers active in the southern Mediterranean, jeopardising their personal freedom and the safety of fishing operations;
- T. whereas while EU fishers are required to comply with rules for the conservation of fish stocks, those from other Mediterranean countries are not required to comply with the same rules, thereby undermining efforts to rebuild stocks while competing unfairly with EU fisheries;
- U. whereas the Mediterranean Sea is warming up to 20 percent faster than the rest of the world; whereas climate change could lead to the local extinction of up to 50 % of commercial fish and marine invertebrates by 2050, according to MedECC;

Improving legislative aspects

1. Calls on the Commission, after consulting the Advisory Council for the Mediterranean (MED-AC), to identify the obstacles to the process of rebuilding fish stocks, including an analysis of the implementation of the 2017-2020 GFCM strategy, with a view to including its findings in the 2021-2030 strategy, ensuring that practical steps are taken to rebuild fish stocks, including considering, if needed and found appropriate, both legislative and non-legislative actions;
2. Considers it necessary to ensure the effective consolidation and development of existing marine protected areas and the involvement of fishers in the preparation and management phase;

3. Emphasises the need to include the evaluation of the designation and success of such areas in the upcoming report on the functioning of the common fisheries policy (CFP); calls on the GFCM to draw on the successful example of the Jabuka/Pomo Pit fish stock recovery area;
4. Calls on the Commission to ensure a level playing field for all economic sectors in the implementation of effectively managed and connected marine protected areas (MPAs);
5. Urges the Commission to address the needs of Mediterranean countries by providing scientific and technical support for those countries to utilise regional and international funding mechanisms, and for developing sustainable development projects;
6. Calls on the Commission to assess whether new stock management plans are required to achieve the principles of social, economic and environmental sustainability set out in the CFP;
7. Recalls the objective of the CFP to achieve the maximum sustainable yield exploitation rate at the latest by 2020 for all stocks;
8. Notes with concern that there remain a great many stocks of unknown status; calls for a redoubling of efforts to improve data collection with a view to improving arrangements for devising the necessary management measures;
9. Recalls the objective of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive to achieve or maintain Good Environmental Status in the marine environment by the year 2020 at the latest;
10. Calls on the Commission to draw on the successful example of bluefin tuna by studying the introduction of total allowable catches (TACs) in the long term for some species including hake and to come forward with a proposal during the evaluation of the multiannual plan in 2024;
11. Recalls that the success of MPAs and other protected areas lies in them being embraced by fishers, coastal communities and other stakeholders; calls on the Commission to consider the need to facilitate the active participation of the fisheries sector, including its artisanal component, the local communities and all relevant stakeholders in the design, management and monitoring of MPAs;
12. Calls on the EU and its Member States to act to end ‘paper parks’ in the Mediterranean Sea and to establish MPAs as part of a coherent network of effectively managed and connected areas, including offshore and deep-sea areas; recalls the requirement to cease fishing with bottom-contacting gear below 400 m in areas where vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) are known to exist or are likely to occur;
13. Invites the EU and its Member States to expand the network of fish stock recovery areas under the CFP and under the GFCM, especially where there is clear evidence of heavy concentrations of fish below minimum conservation reference size or of spawning grounds; emphasises the need to include the evaluation of the designation and success of such areas in the upcoming report on the functioning of the CFP; calls on the GFCM to draw on the successful example of the Jabuka/Pomo Pit fish stock recovery area;

14. Regrets the lack of scientific data on recreational fisheries; calls on the EU Member States and the GFCM to fully assess the impacts and contribution of recreational fisheries on the management of fisheries resources and to include them in their management plans;
15. Stresses the importance of monitoring and control and effective regional cooperation on the management of marine biological resources;
16. Calls on the Commission to promote the objectives of the European Green Deal at the GFCM level and to support sustainable ocean governance and fish stock management through adequate funding;
17. Calls on the Commission to ensure that every legislative proposal aimed at increasing fish stocks which restricts fishing activities is preceded by a wide-ranging impact assessment to quantify its possible socioeconomic and environmental impact on coastal communities and on the productivity and competitiveness of EU fisheries undertakings and the production chain, and is supported by the best available scientific data shared with stakeholders related to the fisheries sector;
18. Calls, further, given the development of the European Green Deal and the Biodiversity and Farm to Fork Strategies that underpin it, and the major impact it will have on fishing activity in general and in the Mediterranean in particular, for a prior impact assessment of these measures and their implementation on the fishing and aquaculture sectors, in view of the Mediterranean's particular status as a sea shared with non-EU countries with different regulations;
19. Underlines the lack of precise quantification of the consequences for fish stocks of all possible impacts above and beyond fishing activities, such as pollution, global warming, alien species, exploitation of hydrocarbons, dredging and maritime transport; stresses that this lack of information does not allow for sufficiently adequate and effective decision-making to ensure the conservation of fish stocks and marine ecosystems;
20. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that all legislative and non-legislative proposals are shared with fishers' associations, including guilds (*cofradías*), under a co-management model;
21. Stresses that any future legislative measures to promote the recovery of fish stocks in the Mediterranean Sea that have an impact on the fishing activity of the European fisheries sector should be implemented gradually and in proportion to the sector's capacity for action; stresses, in addition, the importance of ensuring that any future legislative proposal does not impose an excessive bureaucratic and financial burden on the European fisheries sector, particularly on small-scale fisheries;
22. Emphasises that any legislative initiative aimed at protecting and rebuilding stocks in the Mediterranean Sea should not be limited solely to measures restricting fishing activities, but should take a holistic approach to the problem and jointly address all the threats to stock depletion;
23. Stresses the need to legislate on the basis of an eco-system approach which can be used to identify and analyse all interactions that have an impact on fish stocks, taking into

account not only fishing activities, but also other factors weighing in the balance and the presence of new invasive species;

24. Highlights the positive impact that the renewal of the very elderly fishing fleets operating in the Mediterranean, as regards both vessels and engine, would bring, as it would reduce their impact on the environment, foster fuel efficiency and decarbonisation of the vessels and improve safety and working conditions on board; recalls that the agreement on the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) facilitates support in this regard;
25. Calls on the Commission to safeguard the competitiveness and sustainable development of the entire fisheries sector and its production chain, enhancing the value of fisheries products and improving labelling and traceability and placing particular emphasis on measures to ensure that imported products comply with European standards;
26. Calls on the Council and the Commission to positively assess Parliament's position in the ongoing revision of Regulation (EC) 1005/2008 (IUU Regulation), and especially in relation to the proposal from Parliament to introduce safeguard measures, subject to certain conditions, under which preferential tariffs for fishery and aquaculture products are temporarily suspended from non-EU states that do not properly cooperate in combatting illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing;
27. Requests that the Commission and the Member States improve the labelling and traceability of all seafood products in order to provide consumers with clearer information regarding the origin of the product, species and information on other aspects such as production methods and the standards applied in respect of capture and processing including from non-EU imports;
28. Calls on the Commissioner responsible for fisheries and maritime affairs to establish a consultation body with the involvement of non-EU countries of the Mediterranean area with a view to reducing unfair competition and to securing a level playing field for European fishers and women working in the sector;
29. Calls on the Member States to fight IUU fishing by increasing transparency of fishing operations, and of monitoring and control efforts;
30. Calls on the Member States to enhance capacity for fisheries control and to facilitate the exchange of best practices and targets between Member States on a short-term tactical level, assisted by the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA);
31. Urges the Mediterranean Member States to establish additional number of GFCM fisheries restricted areas with immediate effect, for the sake of protecting overexploited marine ecosystems, taking into account the Jabuka/Pomo Pit fisheries restricted area as an example of best practice;
32. Calls on the Commission to consider integrating fisheries into the EU Neighbourhood Policy, as a tool for invigorating regional cooperation;
33. Insists that the proper, mandatory implementation of the CFP should have as its objective achieving the right balance between environmental, economic and social

sustainability;

34. Calls on the Commission to carry out an analysis of environmental and socioeconomic data concerning the local communities and the Mediterranean fisheries sector in order to assess the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the industry as well as on fish stocks, and for this assessment to be taken into account in future decision-making;
35. Calls on the Commission to use that analysis when developing policies, facilitating research collaboration and cooperating with all actors around the entire Mediterranean, including both EU and non-EU riparian countries, to assess and avoid potential disputes among fleets targeting the same marine biological resources, located in sensitive areas of international waters;
36. Calls on the Commission to analyse the social, economic and environmental impact, as well as the effects on fish stocks in the recreational fishing sector, with a view to incorporating this analysis into any measures that may be adopted;
37. Urges the Member States to make correct use of EMFAF resources to compensate small-scale fisheries that have to temporarily suspend their activity due to conservation measures, in line with the rules and provisions of the EMFAF;
38. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to foster the opportunities offered by co-management and ecosystem, adaptive and precautionary management with the ultimate aim of achieving sustainable management of fisheries resources, based on monitoring fishing efforts and ensuring selectivity in extractive fishing activity in the Mediterranean;

Tackling the impacts of other economic activities and pressures on fish stock recovery

39. Welcomes the work carried out at GFCM level since 2017 to develop and adopt strategies to cope with the potential effects of climate change on fisheries;
40. Calls on the Member States to adopt rules to put a ban on anchoring and mooring of large private vessels within 300 metres of the coastline and in protected habitats, on this 300 metre limit and in roadsteads, given their strong impacts on fragile ecosystems such as *posidonia oceanica* meadows;
41. Calls on the Commission to publish a study on the impact of the diverse human activities and sources of pollution, both terrestrial and marine, on fish stocks and on marine ecosystems;
42. Highlights the lack of resources to conduct scientific research and stock assessments in the Mediterranean Sea, especially human resources;
43. Calls on the Member States to finance the training of new scientific experts;

Reinforcing data collection and research

44. Stresses the need to promote small-scale coastal fisheries and low-impact fishing techniques in the Mediterranean, including making it mandatory for Member States to

allocate to these fisheries a bigger share of the fishing opportunities for the two fisheries where TACs have been introduced, in line with Article 17 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013;

Giving operators a greater role in decision-making and data collection

45. Calls on the Commission to carry out an economic analysis of the social and employment effects of the decline in fishery resources in the Mediterranean, with a view to identifying appropriate support measures to guarantee a fair and equitable transition to low impact fisheries;
46. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that both the analysis of the data and any measures that may arise from it can make use of EMFAF funds to support sustainability and innovation in and the diversification of the sector;
47. Calls for local and regional authorities and scientific institutes, as well as local operators to be more closely involved in the collection of data on selective fishing, in close cooperation with the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF);
48. Calls for the exchange of good practices and innovation regarding the development of more selective fishing gear and marine waste collection methods, recognising the role of fishers as 'guardians of the sea', in order to contribute to a healthier and cleaner marine environment;
49. Stresses that the full achievement of any objective relative to stock recovery in the Mediterranean and a proper implementation of the rules adopted by the European legislators is dependent on the effective participation of the fishing sector;
50. Calls on the Commission to improve and strengthen cooperation and dialogue with the advisory councils, fishers and professionals in the coastal community sector, taking due account of their views and acknowledging the importance of fishers, women working in the sector and relevant professional organisations and civil society organisations in the formulation of rules to be implemented and decision-making processes;
51. Urges the Member States to allow the establishment of co-management models for fisheries at local level based on participation, consultation and joint decision-making between relevant stakeholders; notes that such management plans require comprehensive monitoring of catches to ensure sustainable resource exploitation, as well as to ensure a fair balance of socioeconomic conditions within the fisheries sector with a view to offsetting differences between segments of the fleet;
52. Stresses that co-management models are based on the maintenance of ecosystem services and on conserving exploited ecosystems by safeguarding them, which means applying an ecosystem approach to fisheries and adaptive management, with the establishment of a permanent information, analysis and action system with ongoing learning and constant feedback and agile decision-making;
53. Welcomes the adoption of the 2018 Plan of Action to ensure a sustainable future for small-scale fisheries and the marine environment in the region as well as the launch of

the ‘Friends of Small-Scale Fisheries’ platform;

54. Stresses that any protection goals should be based on the best available scientific advice;

Upholding the rule of law

55. Condemns the ongoing violations of the law of the sea in the Mediterranean, including kidnappings, requisitions of vessels, illegal imprisonment, intimidation, controls, harassment, assaults and unfair trials against EU fishers for carrying out their work, in clear violation of international human rights obligations;
56. Calls on the Commission to analyse the situation in the Mediterranean and look into the possibility of setting up some form of operative arrangements to protect European seafarers and vessels;
57. Calls on the Commission to engage in a dialogue with those North African countries that do not comply with the UNCLOS and GFCM policies and decisions, ensuring safety and a level playing field for all EU fishers;
58. Calls on the Commission to encourage joint efforts with neighbouring countries to facilitate compliance with agreements concluded by regional fisheries management organisations and participation in the good management and recovery of fish stocks;
59. Calls on the Commission, through its agencies, to step up its efforts to monitor EU territorial waters in order to identify non-EU vessels illegally fishing in EU territorial waters and marine protected areas and make the conditions in which EU fishers work safer; stresses that it is essential to provide these agencies with adequate funding and manpower to this end;
60. Calls on the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to step up the Union’s efforts to uphold international law, security and the rule of law in the southern Mediterranean;

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

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

I/Introduction

Fish consumption has reached a new high in terms of kilograms per capita per year, further evidence that fishing is a strategically important economic and commercial sector whose survival must be guaranteed and protected at all costs so that it can meet the needs of an ever-growing population.

The Mediterranean Sea has been supporting coastal communities and the economies of the countries they belong to for millennia. As a result, it is also one of the most intensively fished seas, with catch levels of up to 80% for certain demersal species.

There are other environmental factors behind the decline of specific fish stocks, however. Fishing and its ecosystems have to deal with pressure and damage from a variety of sources, such as pollution, climate change, hydrocarbon exploitation, dredging and maritime traffic.

For these reasons, careful fisheries management, involving the use of specific instruments to maintain predetermined levels of fish stocks, is essential if the steady depletion of resources, which would have adverse economic, employment and environmental repercussions, is to be prevented.

While consumption of fish as food is a positive, the decline in stocks and the difficulties in rebuilding certain stocks in the Mediterranean are negatives which call for detailed analysis with the aim of identifying solutions that offer a fair standard of living to communities that depend on fishing activities, taking coastal fishing and the socioeconomic aspects into account.

The importance of the fisheries sector is demonstrated by its inclusion in almost every Commission operational programme, including the recent Farm to Fork initiative, which sets out strategic guidelines for sustainable development with a view to enhancing the sustainability and competitiveness of the sector.

The Commission's determination to set high environmental standards is entirely welcome and positive, but it should not come at the cost of increasing imports and reducing EU food production.

II/The current situation and the impact on the fisheries sector

The scientific community considers that the vast majority of Mediterranean fish stocks are heavily exploited beyond their biological capacity (STECF, 2020¹⁵). The research does not cover all populations, however; there is, therefore, an urgent need to fill this gap in our scientific knowledge so that the right decisions can be taken on sustainable fisheries management.

The consistency of the CFP with Union environmental legislation, in particular with the objective of achieving good environmental status, must be balanced against the profitability

¹⁵ Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) – Monitoring the performance of the Common Fisheries Policy (STECF-Adhoc-20-01). Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, ISBN 978-92-76-18115-6, doi:10.2760/230469, JRC120481.

of the fleets and the attendant economic, social and employment benefits. Some countries have seen their fleet sizes and crew numbers fall by half over the last 20 years, with production dropping by more than 50% to the benefit of imports, which currently account for around 85% of demand for small pelagic and demersal species. Measures to safeguard resources, on the one hand, and the profitability of businesses, on the other, must go hand in hand, so that the progress made to date is not squandered. Striking a perfect balance between environmental, economic and social sustainability may seem utopian, but it must be the primary objective of any policy affecting the maritime environment and businesses.

III/The current legislative system

The CFP safeguards fishing and aquaculture activities while imposing environmental sustainability requirements with the aim of securing economic, social and employment benefits and keeping food supplies available.

This approach, embodied in the TFEU (Article 39), seeks to strike a balance between the management of fishery resources and the conservation of marine resources, on the basis of the best available scientific advice. International cooperation on fisheries in the Mediterranean takes place in particular under the auspices of GFCM, a regional fisheries management organisation (RFMO) to which the EU is a contracting party. Recommendations adopted by the GFCM are binding.

The CFP applies the precautionary approach to fisheries management, and aims to ensure that exploitation of living marine biological resources restores and maintains populations of harvested species above levels which can produce the maximum sustainable yield.

At EU level, fisheries management is based on a combination of different approaches. Some rules, such as those on the fisheries control system and on national fleet capacity ceilings, apply across the board; others are designed to apply to specific regions or fishing activities. Regulation (EC) No 1967/2006 (the ‘Mediterranean Regulation’) is one of the main EU legislative frameworks for the management of fisheries in the area and lays down a number of technical measures, such as specifications on equipment and minimum sizes for fish caught (in particular, 9 cm for anchovies and 11 cm for sardines). The regulation was modified to bring it into line with the 2013 CFP Basic Regulation.

IV/Solution and proposals

Fishing is not the only cause of the problems affecting the seas. For that reason, what is needed is a proper eco-system approach which can be used to analyse all interactions that have an impact on fish stocks.

In the general interest and in order to safeguard resources and the profitability of businesses, all the regulations adopted must be harmonised in order to simplify fishing activities and not impose any additional burdens on fishers.

It is essential, more than one year after the entry into force of a regulation, to conduct immediate scientific research into the health status of the stocks in question in order to obtain data on the effectiveness of the restrictions applied and to verify that fishing activities have been suspended.

Greater involvement of practitioners in decision-making is vital, with a focus on:

- greater involvement of and co-management by stakeholders;
- cross-checking scientific data against stakeholder knowledge;
- improving knowledge and management of recreational fishing.

If only environmental data are taken into account every time, there is a danger that some very important aspects, such as the socioeconomic implications of restricting fishing activities, will be ignored.

Comparative analyses should therefore be carried out of environmental and economic data from the fisheries sector as a whole and from operators; this could provide a more complete picture of the situation and improve our ability to identify in a timely manner the critical issues to be resolved.

V/Safeguarding the principle of reciprocity and the rule of law

The majority of fishing vessels operating in the Mediterranean Sea come from third countries.

A range of conventions and treaties have been signed by Mediterranean countries, and not only on the management and safeguarding of fisheries, but they are enforced to widely differing degrees and their provisions are sometimes contradictory.

The GFCM is the Mediterranean RFMO. Its main objective is to promote the development, conservation, rational management and best use of living marine resources and, at the same time, the sustainable development of aquaculture in the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and associated waters.

Similarly, the MedFish4Ever project aims to build up Mediterranean fishery resources by means of an ambitious set of measures and objectives to be achieved by enhancing management and governance in the fisheries sector.

The prerequisites for genuine and effective cooperation in the management of Mediterranean fisheries are well known and have been clearly set out.

In order to ensure that the efforts required of EU fleets, which involve restrictions on their fishing activities that undermine their economic viability, are not in vain, all the countries that are signatories to the agreements must comply with their provisions and continuously monitor the activities of their fleets.

As laid down in Article 4 of the UNCLOS, signed at Montego Bay, every state is free to establish the breadth of its territorial waters up to a maximum of 12 nautical miles. Some states arbitrarily apply limits more than twice that, creating situations of very real danger. The coastal waters of EU countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea are constantly invaded by vessels from other countries, which approach to as little as 3 miles off the coast. These actions not only deplete the fish stocks of the countries affected, but also obstruct the normal activities of those fishers who are fully entitled to fish.

VI/Conclusions

It is essential to constantly collect and update scientific data on the situation of stocks and to involve local and regional actors directly in this process, as they can continuously monitor developments in stocks and fisheries. This well-structured coordination will guard against the use of a 'top-down' regulatory approach.

Equally important is the need to consider all different types of data by employing a holistic approach that takes account of all factors that affect the health of the sea.

Sustainable fishing means guaranteeing the sustainability of the entire fishing sector and the entire production chain, pursuing the common objective of generating socioeconomic benefits for the territories concerned.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

Date adopted	16.6.2021
Result of final vote	+ : 27 - : 0 0 : 0
Members present for the final vote	Clara Aguilera, Pietro Bartolo, François-Xavier Bellamy, Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, Isabel Carvalhais, Maria da Graça Carvalho, Rosanna Conte, Rosa D'Amato, Giuseppe Ferrandino, João Ferreira, Søren Gade, Francisco Guerreiro, Niclas Herbst, France Jamet, Predrag Fred Matic, Francisco José Millán Mon, Grace O'Sullivan, Manuel Pizarro, Caroline Roose, Bert-Jan Ruissen, Annie Schreijer-Pierik, Peter van Dalen, Emma Wiesner, Theodoros Zagorakis
Substitutes present for the final vote	Manuel Bompard, Raffaele Stancanelli, Annalisa Tardino

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

27	+
ECR	Bert-Jan Ruissen, Raffaele Stancanelli
ID	Rosanna Conte, France Jamet, Annalisa Tardino
PPE	François-Xavier Bellamy, Maria da Graça Carvalho, Peter van Dalen, Niclas Herbst, Francisco José Millán Mon, Annie Schreijer-Pierik, Theodoros Zagorakis
Renew	Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, Søren Gade, Emma Wiesner
S&D	Clara Aguilera, Pietro Bartolo, Isabel Carvalhais, Giuseppe Ferrandino, Predrag Fred Matić, Manuel Pizarro
The Left	Manuel Bompard, João Ferreira
Vers/ALE	Rosa D'Amato, Francisco Guerreiro, Grace O'Sullivan, Caroline Roose

0	-

0	0

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention