1.3.2022

OPINION

of the Committee on Development

for the Committee on Fisheries

Toward a sustainable blue economy in the EU: the role of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors
(2021/2188(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion: Caroline Roose
SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Development calls on the Committee on Fisheries, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

A. whereas increased competition for maritime space between blue economy sectors can undermine the livelihoods of coastal communities and small-scale fisheries, notably those of women; whereas the blue economy should follow a human-rights-based approach;

B. whereas over-exploitation, pollution and climate change are causing a serious loss of marine biodiversity, which is key for fisheries and coastal communities;

C. whereas sustainable fisheries partnership agreements (SFPAs) must guarantee appropriate and effective use, access and control of fishery stocks management by small-scale fishers;

D. whereas the over-exploitation of fish stocks, which leads to a lack of available resources for local people, including young people, can contribute to migration;

E. whereas bottom trawling represents the most widespread source of human-induced physical disturbance to global seabed habitats; whereas, in particular, recent estimates suggest that bottom trawling may release as much CO$_2$ as the entire aviation industry by disturbing seabed sediments that are critical reservoirs for long-term carbon storage, while contributing to ocean acidification and undermining marine productivity and biodiversity;

F. whereas climate change is increasingly changing the distribution and migratory patterns of various fish species and affects small-scale fisheries in developing countries that are more vulnerable to its effects;

G. whereas the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate gives evidence of the benefits of combining scientific knowledge with local and indigenous knowledge to enforce resilience;

H. whereas illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is a one of the greatest threats to the sustainable exploitation of fish populations; whereas tax evasion and corruption facilitate IUU fishing, which often coincides with human rights abuses, including human trafficking and modern slavery;

I. whereas the EU is a major market for West African fishmeal and fish oil;

1. Considers that the ocean is one global and continuous space; recalls the crucial role of fisheries, notably small-scale and artisanal fisheries, in food security and nutrition; underlines its support for the sustainable development of the fishing sector, notably small-scale fisheries and aquaculture, without any impact on the environment; notes the importance of timely and inclusive planning that takes into account the contribution of stakeholders in order to avoid potential conflicts between fisheries and other sectors of the blue economy; urges the EU to address these conflicts through transparent conflict
resolution mechanisms; stresses, to this end, the need to promote participatory maritime spatial planning, the creation of stakeholder forums for dialogue and the strict implementation of the precautionary approach, not limited to deep-sea mining, but expanded to the development of new blue sectors;

2. Stresses the importance of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors for the supply of protein, which is essential for food security, as well as the socio-economic development of local communities and job creation worldwide; recalls, in particular, that nearly one billion people, largely in developing countries, rely on fish and seafood for their primary source of animal protein; notes that more than 90% of the world’s capture fishers and fishing workers rely on small-scale fisheries; regrets that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on people employed in the fisheries and aquaculture sector;

3. Stresses the individual and collective responsibilities to preserve the ocean, including as a key climate regulator, and its ecological status; stresses, to this end, the need to implement an integrated ecosystem-based approach to all sectors of the blue economy, including the extractive industries; in particular, urges the EU and partner countries to support policies which tackle overfishing, IUU fishing and other fishing practices that have a negative impact on marine habitats and ocean ecosystems and compromise the sustainability of resources; insists on the need to eliminate harmful fisheries subsidies and work towards the adoption of science-based maximum sustainable yield targets for the management of all stocks, as required by 2020 by both the EU’s common fisheries policy and Aichi Biodiversity Target 6, and to enforce effective monitoring, control and surveillance;

4. Takes note of the new EU strategy for a sustainable blue economy; regrets the lack of specific targets for fisheries and aquaculture; underlines the need to minimise the environmental impacts of fishing on marine habitats and to develop a holistic approach to the blue economy focused on coastal preservation and restoration;

5. Recalls the EU’s important role and responsibility in global fisheries governance, which should prioritise the sustainable management of natural resources, including fishery resources, seafarers’ rights on vessels and the rights of fishers, notably small-scale and artisanal fishers whose use of and control over fishing resources should be protected; urges the EU, to this end, to scale up its financial support for the development of the entire value chain in small-scale fisheries, and to ensure the greater participation of women in decision-making, considering their crucial role in small-scale fishing, including pre- and post-harvest activities, aquaculture and inland fishing; underlines the need to involve women and coastal communities in fisheries management schemes and in the development of alternative income sources for fishers to effectively reduce overfishing;

6. Recalls the EU’s commitment to the principle of policy coherence for development and stresses the need to improve its contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the external dimension of the common fisheries policy; underlines that SFPAs must be consistent with best available scientific advice and neither undermine local food security nor threaten small-scale fisheries in non-EU countries by putting them in direct competition with EU vessels; points out the importance of these
agreements in terms of bilateral policy cooperation in the area of fisheries and calls for the agreements to be aligned with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and notably with SDG 14 (conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development), as well as with the EU environmental obligations and common fisheries policy objectives by increasing sectoral support and sustainability provisions relating to surpluses, discards and the precautionary approach; calls for the EU to cooperate with non-EU partner countries through its bilateral or multilateral relations in order to ensure that non-EU countries’ distant fleets apply the same sustainability standards as EU distant fleets;

7. Highlights that SFPAs must become a tool for the development of local blue economies; considers that insufficient data makes it difficult to evaluate the contributions of SFPAs towards the attainment of the SDGs in partner countries; urges the EU to increase the transparency, data collection (notably on catches, vessel registrations and labour conditions) and reporting requirements of SFPAs and establish a centralised socio-economic database for all EU vessels regardless of where they operate;

8. Stresses the need to include all stakeholders in the negotiations for and during the implementation period of SFPAs and to ensure that the needs of the communities most affected by these partnerships are taken into account;

9. Deplores the lack of monitoring of the implementation and proper use of funding; is worried that sectoral support under SFPAs often does not directly benefit small-scale fishers; calls on the Commission to link SFPAs closely with EU development aid with the aim of improving added value for coastal communities; calls on the Commission, furthermore, to proactively publish annual reports on the ways sectoral support is utilised to better track the use of EU public money;

10. Welcomes the role of regional sea conventions and regional fisheries management organisations; calls on the Commission to come forward with ambitious mandates for regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs) in order to protect fishery resources in developing countries and international waters, notably by improving stock management for species such as tropical tuna, reducing discards, applying the precautionary approach to ensure the conservation of endangered species and vulnerable marine ecosystems, and improving the available data, compliance and the transparency of decision-making;

11. Calls on the Commission to push for the integration of climate adaptation and mitigation goals in its SFPAs and in RFMO decision-making;

12. Calls for the EU and its Member States to step up their efforts to improve global fisheries governance, notably through mechanisms such as the Fisheries Transparency Initiative;

13. Stresses that the production of fishmeal and fish oil, among other things, can contribute to overfishing in developing countries, notably in West Africa; calls for mandatory due diligence measures to ensure that the whole seafood industry supply chain is fair, fully traceable, free of IUU fishing and not linked to human rights violations, including human trafficking and slavery; calls, more broadly, for the improvement of fisheries management practices, monitoring, the development of eco-labelling and new
technologies such as blockchain, in order to improve product traceability;

14. Stresses the size of the impact of EU aquaculture on non-EU countries, in particular the use of fish resources from these countries to feed predators in EU aquaculture; underlines that sustainable and controlled aquaculture should not create risks for surrounding ecosystems coupled with occasional disease outbreaks; calls for the development of sustainable aquaculture through sustainable fisheries management and best aquaculture practices by strongly reducing EU industry’s dependence on fishmeal and by promoting non-carnivorous species to this effect; also calls on the EU to provide technical assistance to developing country producers, especially small producers;

15. Recalls that all states involved in fisheries in West Africa should establish an RFMO – particularly for the exploitation of shared stocks, such as small pelagic fish – as required under international law, relevant national laws, pan-African and regional fisheries policies, and other instruments; believes that this management regime should comply with a precautionary and ecosystem-based approach, ensuring the total allowable catch is within safe biological limits;

16. Urges the EU to effectively promote and protect small-scale fisheries in Africa, which are the main providers of ocean livelihoods, as a cornerstone of the future ‘EU-Africa blue task force’, i.e. by funding the implementation of the Food and Agriculture Organization international guidelines on sustainable small-scale fisheries;

17. Urges the EU to develop a human-rights-based approach to ocean governance and the blue economy by empowering local communities and supporting fair supply chains, food sovereignty and sustainable economic development for local fishing communities;

18. Takes note of the objective of protecting 30% of the world’s oceans by 2030, but warns that it should not be done at the expense of food security, fishers and aquaculture producers, indigenous peoples and local communities;

19. Recalls that a growing body of research, notably the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate, shows that objectives regarding biodiversity and climate change mitigation and adaptation are better achieved when fishers and local communities have direct control over the management of the resources on which they rely; stresses that ecosystems managed by coastal communities are among the richest and most productive and also contribute to the adaptation of coastal areas to the consequences of climate change; highlights the risks of ocean grabbing linked to maritime spatial planning; stresses, accordingly, the need to secure small-scale fisheries, ensure the responsible governance of tenure, and hold the beneficiaries of EU undertakings operating in the blue economy sector to account if their activities violate human rights;

20. Highlights concerns that the development of new activities in the blue economy will lead to increased competition over space at the expense of more traditional activities, such as fishing; calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that private EU investors operate in a transparent manner, do not enter into competition with coastal communities and respect the SDGs; stresses, more broadly, the importance of strengthening bilateral partnerships with non-EU countries within the different sectors of the blue economy, in order to improve respect for environmental and social
standards;

21. Stresses that the blue economy must play an active part in combating climate change; calls on the EU and partner countries to rely on indigenous know-how in their climate mitigation strategies and to actively promote participatory management, which has proved to be effective in increasing the resilience of coastal communities;

22. Is concerned about cases of IUU fishing outside EU waters; recalls that IUU fishing, facilitated by the practice of flying a flag of convenience, damages food security and the livelihoods of people in coastal countries, while creating fertile ground for piracy; calls for a strong global system of deterrent sanctions and a multi-pronged approach to fighting IUU fishing; stresses the need to limit the use of flags of convenience and reflagging and to address trans-shipment at sea, as these are important tools for closing IUU loopholes; calls on the EU, more broadly, to strengthen anti-corruption capacity building by fostering national inter-agency cooperation, increasing international cooperation, improving oversight of fishery agents in developing countries with support from the EU, and supporting regional monitoring, control and surveillance centres and task forces;

23. Stresses that the governance of land-based activities is critical to achieving a sustainable blue economy, as living coastal resources are most threatened by land-based activities, with agriculture, ports, harbours and aquaculture being particularly impactful; urges the EU and its Member States to take all necessary measures to holistically address the root causes of marine pollution and fish depletion, and to reform their sectoral policies accordingly;

24. Takes note that the extractive industry is a growing sector in the blue ocean economy; emphasises the duty of states to refrain from taking measures, including large-scale development projects, that may adversely affect the livelihoods of inland and marine small-scale fishers, their territories or access rights, and their duty to conduct ex ante assessments of extractive industry projects operated by private entities in order to evaluate their possible negative human rights impacts on local fishing communities;

25. Calls for the EU to take action to tackle the detrimental impacts of fishing techniques such as bottom-contacting gear, dynamite fishing, improper trawling or fish aggregating devices on the climate, seaboards and bycatch by limiting their use; calls, in particular, on the EU to prohibit the use of bottom trawling in all marine protected areas; urges the EU to ensure that the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund is used to provide effective support for the transition to more selective and less damaging fishing techniques for EU fishing fleets;

26. Stresses the importance of applying the precautionary principle in deep-sea mining; reiterates, in particular, its support for an international moratorium on commercial deep-sea mining exploitation licences until such time as the effects of deep-sea mining on the marine environment, biodiversity and human activities at sea have been studied and researched sufficiently and all possible risks are understood;

27. Recognises that coastal tourism can have positive impacts on developing countries, but can be detrimental when mass tourism strategies are developed, leading to reduced food access and consumption for local consumers and to the destruction of the marine
environment and cultural identities; calls for the EU to promote fair and low-impact models of tourism.
INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

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| Result of final vote | +: 16  
|                     | −: 7  
|                     | 0: 3  |
| Members present for the final vote | Barry Andrews, Eric Andrieu, Anna-Michelle Asimakopoulou, Hildegard Bentele, Dominique Bilde, Udo Bullmann, Catherine Chabaud, Antoni Comin i Oliveres, Ryszard Czarnecki, Gianna Gancia, Charles Goerens, Mónica Silvana González, Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana, György Hölvényi, Rasa Juknevičienė, Beata Kempa, Karsten Lucke, Pierfrancesco Majorino, Erik Marquardt, Janina Ochojska, Christian Sagartz, Tomas Tobé, Miguel Urbán Crespo, Bernhard Zimiok |
| Substitutes present for the final vote | María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos, Caroline Roose |
## 10F I N AL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

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**Key to symbols:**
- + : in favour
- - : against
- 0 : abstention