



2023/2124(INI)

27.10.2023

OPINION

of the Committee on Development

for the Committee on Fisheries

EU Action Plan: protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable
and resilient fisheries
(2023/2124(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion: Catherine Chabaud

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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 the EU action plan mentions fishing techniques that are damaging for the seabed ecosystems, but does not specifically mention other destructive fishing techniques, such as fish aggregating devices, that contribute to the overfishing of tuna species and plastic pollution in the ocean, and harm marine ecosystems in developing countries' waters;
 - B. whereas several tropical tuna species are subject to overfishing in the Indian Ocean, notably yellowfin tuna, which urgently needs to have its catch reduced;
 - C. whereas the Food and Agriculture Organization has highlighted that overfishing of small pelagics and the development of fish oil and fishmeal factories in West Africa pose a threat to food security in the coastal countries of West Africa;
1. Recalls the vital importance of the ocean as a pillar of the climate and food systems, as it covers 71 % of the earth's surface, produces half of our oxygen and absorbs a third of CO₂ emissions; emphasises the need to develop policy and financing approaches for ocean conservation and sustainable use; calls for the global preservation of ocean-based livelihoods and ocean biodiversity; stresses the ocean's critical role, in particular in carbon sequestration, renewable energy development, job creation, poverty reduction, goods transportation and internet communications; warns of the interdependence between fisheries and food security, as 3.3 billion people depend on food from the sea to obtain at least 20 % of their animal protein intake;
 2. Stresses our individual and collective responsibility to preserve the ocean, which is our global common, as well as the seas and marine resources, and to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 14; calls for the EU to stand as a leader in protecting and restoring marine ecosystems and to formulate related policies that systematically reflect a global vision; stresses that sound and sustainable management of marine ecosystems requires the adoption of a global, ecosystem-based approach and a clear legal framework involving all sectors and stakeholders in the blue economy; regrets the fact that European public policies on the blue economy lack coordination and alignment and are currently managed in a compartmentalised way to the detriment of stakeholders who are thus placed in competition with one another; underlines the need to prevent and significantly reduce maritime pollution of all sorts, especially from land-based activities; calls for closer cooperation to improve waste and wastewater management and to urgently combat plastic pollution by reducing the use of this material and increasing recycling rates; welcomes the Commission's approach for a sustainable blue economy and its strategy to implement the ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management under the common fisheries policy; calls on the Commission to revise the strategy to extend this ecosystem-based approach beyond fisheries management to all sectors of the blue economy, including renewable energy and extractive industries, as part of an overarching legal and strategic framework;
 3. Emphasises the importance of the EU working with developing countries, in particular

the countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific Ocean, to prepare for the future development of renewable marine energy by sharing the EU's expertise in marine planning and industrial development; calls for the EU to scale up capacity building and financing for developing countries for improving ocean and coastal management, developing ocean economy strategies, bridging governance gaps and tackling illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and illicit trade in marine resources; underlines the importance of coming up with responses that meet local needs for zero-emission energy, that ensure marine ecosystems are protected and that preserve traditional activities such as fishing; stresses the importance of involving coastal communities in the implementation of these actions; highlights further the importance of supporting sustainable fishing practices in the outermost regions, based on the sustainable use of marine resources and management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism, as a way to ensure the long-term socioeconomic development of these regions;

4. Recalls that worldwide intensive exploitation of natural resources has been one of the main causes of marine biodiversity loss for the last 40 years, alongside others such as pollution, climate change and ocean acidification; stresses that immediate action must be taken to combat overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, given their negative impacts on coastal communities; calls on all countries to fully meet their obligations and to put an end to overfishing and destructive practices that threaten the survival of entire species; believes that limiting catches significantly and entirely stopping catches of species that are most at risk are necessary to preserve biodiversity; regrets that, despite the legislation in force, overfishing practices continue, and that certain countries do not apply the limits imposed by international regulations; stresses that the intensive aquaculture sector is highly dependent on fishmeal and fish oil from developing countries and, therefore, cannot be considered as a solution to overfishing; calls for the EU and its Member States to develop sustainable aquaculture by reducing EU industry's dependence on fishmeal;
5. Expresses its concern about the Japanese Government's decision to release radioactive water into the ocean; calls for the EU to press international institutions to monitor its real impact on the ocean, and to invite the Japanese Government to seek alternatives and conduct a comprehensive environmental impact assessment, as required by its international legal obligations;
6. Calls for the EU to support the creation of national inshore exclusion zones reserved for local and artisanal fishers in partner countries in order to protect the fisheries resources and livelihoods of coastal communities from the impacts of the growing number of foreign flag and foreign-owned industrial vessels;
7. Recalls that the action plan must take into account national, regional and local specificities in its concrete implementation, which should also involve civil society in co-creation processes for sustainable business models and solutions; 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 that are aligned with the social, economic and environmental principles in the common fisheries policy in order to protect fishery resources in developing countries and international waters, in particular by improving stock management for species such as tropical tuna, and to improve the available data,

compliance and the transparency of decision-making; stresses the need to base the protection and restoration of marine ecosystems on the best available scientific data;

8. Recalls that the protection and restoration of marine ecosystems require strategic and ambitious global ocean governance benefiting local small-scale fisheries and based on sustainable fishing practices in collaboration with coastal communities; insists on the importance of encouraging the decarbonisation of fishing vessels and, more generally, ensuring adequate EU support for sustainably developing the fishing sector, notably through its partnership agreements, while also protecting and helping fishing communities throughout this transition; highlights the link between healthy ecosystems and economic development and calls for the EU to ensure that transparency and non-discrimination clauses of sustainable fisheries partnership agreements are fully implemented and also apply to fishing resources caught by foreign fleets; recalls that all relevant stakeholders, including civil society representatives and small-scale fishing communities, should be consulted, informed and involved during both the negotiations for and the implementation of sustainable fisheries partnership agreements; stresses the need to develop new technologies to shift away from carbon-intensive, high-volume, high-impact fishing to low-carbon, low-impact fishing, to ensure developing countries' access to relevant technologies and to support research and innovation on ocean climate adaptation and the development of marine renewable energy sources; reiterates its positions on the Monitoring, Reporting and Verification Regulation¹ and the Emission Trading System Directive² that it is necessary to improve the energy efficiency of ships and support investments aimed at helping to decarbonise maritime transport, including investments in wind propulsion;
9. Welcomes the ambition stated in the action plan to strengthen the knowledge base for managing fisheries and protecting the marine environment and to step up research and innovation; calls on the Commission to provide technical and financial assistance for capacity building in research and development and for knowledge transfers with developing countries, in line with target 14.a of Sustainable Development Goal 14; emphasises how important such an approach is in making the oceans healthier and stepping up the contributions of marine biodiversity and the blue economy to the development of developing countries, especially small island developing states and the least-developed countries;
10. Points out that the development of marine protected areas (MPAs) provides an opportunity to step up cooperation among local stakeholders, fishers and coastal communities, and to build solutions that take account of specific local circumstances in order to better protect marine biodiversity and preserve the development of activities linked to the blue economy; highlights that MPAs should be designed with the involvement of small-scale fishers and coastal communities; calls on partner countries to involve these groups at each stage of the process, from the designation to the management of the areas; stresses that MPAs can contribute to delivering benefits for

¹ Regulation (EU) 2015/757 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2015 on the monitoring, reporting and verification of carbon dioxide emissions from maritime transport, and amending Directive 2009/16/EC (OJ L 123, 19.5.2015, p. 55).

² Directive 2003/87/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 October 2003 establishing a scheme for greenhouse gas emission allowance trading within the Community and amending Council Directive 96/61/EC (OJ L 275, 25.10.2003, p. 32).

marine ecosystems and local economic activities; recalls that effectively managed and sufficiently protected areas protect fish spawning and nursery locations and juveniles, reduce impacts on sensitive habitats and can minimise incidental catches of sensitive species; notes the fact that the action plan stresses the negative impacts of bottom trawling in MPAs; calls on the Member States to implement concrete measures to achieve conservation and restoration objectives specific to each MPA, starting with the most threatened areas, and to mitigate the effects of bottom trawling on seabed ecosystems; stresses that long-term visibility and financial support is needed to ensure a just transition that leaves no fisher behind; considers that the same objectives should be defended at the international level; recalls that target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework mentions that activity within protected areas must be fully consistent with conservation objectives; calls for the EU, in this regard, to capitalise on the potential and benefits of MPAs by supporting the establishment of a global network of MPAs or a 'Blue Belt', in particular by linking up the MPA managers networks, with a view to fostering the development of new cooperation arrangements and sharing solutions between the EU and its partner countries; notes that, in order to build the cooperation needed to create this global 'Blue Belt', the EU could focus in particular on the outermost regions and the overseas countries and territories in the Indian Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, the Caribbean and the Atlantic Ocean; reiterates its support for the prohibition of all environmentally damaging extractive industrial activities, such as mining and fossil fuel extraction, in MPAs and harmful industrial fishing techniques, in line with the guidelines from the International Union for Conservation of Nature;

11. Emphasises that the energy transition is an important and essential step that must be achieved; points out, however, that replacing fossil fuels is a formidable challenge, especially given the lack of development as regards appropriate technologies that could be used in the fisheries sector; points out that local small-scale fisheries need to be protected during the transition process, because it will be a major challenge for them;
12. Calls for the EU to promote transparency in fisheries and other extractive industries at sea in partner countries, as it is key to stopping overfishing, biodiversity loss and human rights violations; stresses that coastal developing countries can implement the standards outlined in the Fisheries Transparency Initiative and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative to improve transparency;
13. Calls for the EU to strive to enforce international regulations that limit flags of convenience and re-flagging and to take leadership in addressing transshipment at sea and improving inspections at ports, as these are significant ways of closing illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing loopholes; urges the Commission to ensure that the Member States comply with monitoring and control rules on fisheries when it comes to their external fishing fleets;
14. Reiterates the commitments of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the EU biodiversity strategy's objective of protecting at least 30 % of the EU's marine areas and strictly protecting at least 10 % of the EU's marine areas by 2030; calls for the EU to promote this objective at international level, with an emphasis on strong safeguards to secure the rights of indigenous people, local communities and small-scale fishers; recalls the EU's commitment to the principle of policy coherence for development and to aligning different EU policies, both internal and external, to

avoid siloed governance; highlights the need to include comprehensive human rights and rule of law clauses within sustainable fisheries partnership agreements, which should continue to be transparent and in line with the Sustainable Development Goals; insists that EU protein consumption must not undermine food security in developing countries, that priority should be given to fishing for direct human consumption and that sectoral support should contribute to the sustainable development and management of the fisheries sector and coastal communities in partners countries, notably small-scale fishers; underlines that the implementation of the action plan must promote and encourage the training of fishers;

15. Stresses the importance of the fish sector and small-scale fishers to coastal areas in developing countries; recalls the EU's responsibility to protect and support these sectors in developing countries in order to limit the exploitation of fish stocks and end overfishing; underlines that illegal fishing practices, including by European vessels, must be stopped;
16. Calls for mandatory due diligence measures to ensure that the whole fishery supply chain, including animal feed supply chains, is fair, fully traceable and free from illegal fishing and production linked to human trafficking or slavery;
17. Welcomes the objective of protecting 30 % of the planet, but warns that it should not be done at the expense of indigenous peoples and local communities, whose tenure, access and resource rights as regards the ocean should be protected, as embedded in the Food and Agriculture Organization's Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security and for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication, and in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; stresses that actions concerning indigenous peoples and local communities can only occur with free, prior and informed consent, as set out in International Labour Organization Convention No 169; calls, to this end, for the creation of robust human rights safeguards and an accountability and grievance mechanism;
18. Urges the mobilisation of sufficient funds to mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine on fishing communities; is concerned about the limited amount of the EU budget allocated to protecting and restoring marine ecosystems; deplores, in this regard, the lack of monitoring of the implementation and proper use of funding; stresses that particular attention should be given to gender equality and women's empowerment in view of the crucial role of women and young people, especially in the sustainable ocean-based economy and marine conservation areas;
19. Stresses that climate financing to developing countries should be used to restore and protect marine ecosystems, which are key for climate mitigation and adaptation;
20. Calls for the EU to provide financial support and technical assistance to developing countries to help them in implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the UN High Seas Treaty;
21. Welcomes the World Trade Organization Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, which marks a major step forward for ocean sustainability by prohibiting harmful fisheries

subsidies for fisheries targeting overfished resources and responsible for illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; calls, as a next step, for equally harmful subsidies that encourage overcapacity to be addressed, as they lead to ocean depletion worldwide.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	24.10.2023
Result of final vote	+ : 16 - : 0 0 : 1
Members present for the final vote	Barry Andrews, Dominique Bilde, Catherine Chabaud, Antoni Comín i Oliveres, Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana, György Hölvényi, Rasa Juknevičienė, Beata Kempa, Karsten Lucke, Eleni Stavrou, Tomas Tobé, Miguel Urbán Crespo
Substitutes present for the final vote	Ilan De Basso, Marlene Mortler, Caroline Roose, Carlos Zorrinho
Substitutes under Rule 209(7) present for the final vote	Karolin Braunsberger-Reinhold

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

16	+
ID	Dominique Bilde
NI	Antoni Comín i Oliveres
PPE	Karolin Braunsberger-Reinhold, György Hölvényi, Rasa Juknevičienė, Marlene Mortler, Eleni Stavrou, Tomas Tobé
Renew	Barry Andrews, Catherine Chabaud
S&D	Ilan De Basso, Karsten Lucke, Carlos Zorrinho
The Left	Miguel Urbán Crespo
Verts/ALE	Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana, Caroline Roose

0	-
-	-

1	0
ECR	Beata Kempa

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention