State aid rules applicable to the fishery and aquaculture sector encompass primary and processing activities and provide for sector-specific thresholds and ceilings. For example, the fishery de minimis regulation¹ applies to undertakings active in the production, processing and marketing of fishery and aquaculture products and differs from the agricultural sector, where processing is not subject to the specific agricultural de minimis regulation², but falls under the general de minimis regulation³.

State aid in the fisheries sector complements the already high level of public support through fund-specific regulations, which include processing and marketing measures⁴.

The characteristics of the fisheries and agriculture sectors are not the same. This is because fishers – unlike farmers – use a finite resource, i.e. fish stocks, whose conservation and management are of primary importance in the sector. As regards fish processing, higher ceilings entail a risk of indirect subsidisation of the primary sector considering that the two are closely intertwined due to significant on-board processing in some fleet segments.

Overall, higher ceilings and thresholds in the fisheries sector could increase fishing pressure and risk undermining key objectives of the Common Fishery Policy, in particular the sustainable exploitation of marine biological resources.