



14.7.2023

# MISSION REPORT

following the visit to Split, Croatia, 19-21 June 2023

Committee on Fisheries

Members of the mission:

Pierre Karleskind

Isabel Carvalhais

Ska Keller

Ladislav Ilčić

(Renew) (Leader of the mission)

(S&D)

(Verts/ALE)

(ECR)

## ***Introduction***

A delegation of the European Parliament's Committee on Fisheries (PECH Committee) visited Split in Croatia from 19 to 21 June 2023. The delegation was composed of Pierre Karleskind, Chair of the PECH Committee (Renew), Isabel Carvalhais (S&D), Ska Keller (Greens/EFA) and Ladislav Ilčić (ECR). The programme was organised by the PECH Secretariat in cooperation with the offices of Ms Keller and Mr Ilčić.

The purpose of this fact-finding mission, based in Split, was to allow MEPs to learn about the establishment of the Jabuka/Pomo Pit Fisheries Restricted Area (FRA) and other protected areas in the Adriatic Sea and the impact these areas have had on the marine environment, fish stocks and on local fishers. The mission included meetings with local authorities, research institutes, fisheries organisations, and NGOs.

## ***General background***

Croatia has a diverse maritime territory and an extensive coastline, which is the second-largest in the Adriatic Sea. In 2021, Croatia had a fishing fleet of 7 507 vessels. Of these, small-scale coastal fishing boats, less than 12 metres in length, make up 94 % of the fleet. However, the largest percentage of catches, more than 94 %, is made by purse-seiners that represent only 3 % of all fishing vessels. Croatia also has the largest boat charter fleet in the world with 40 % of the charter fleet.

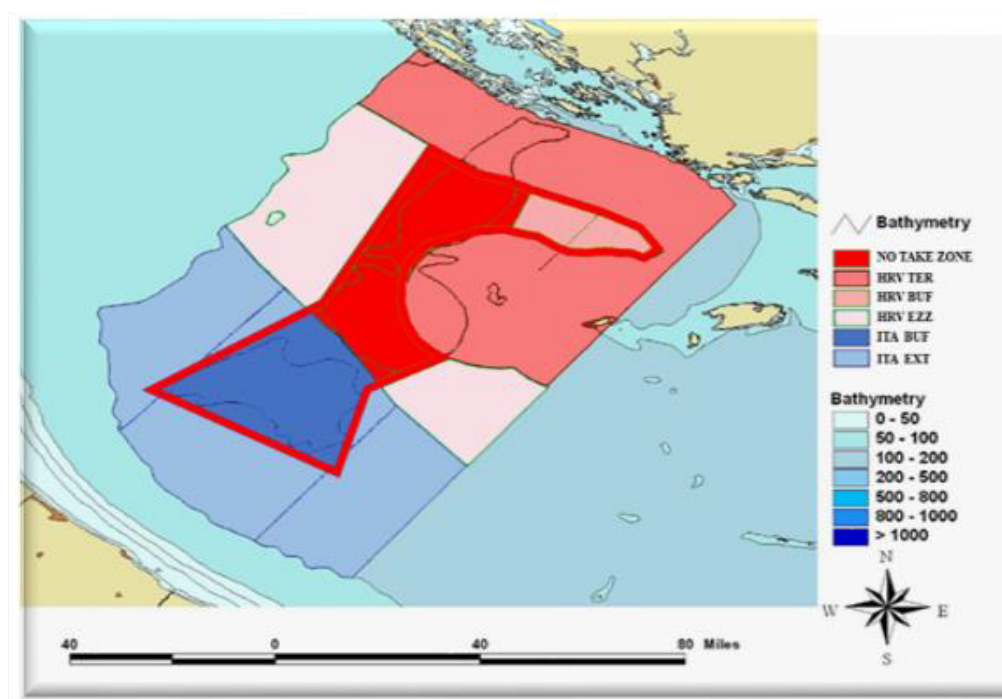
Croatia has a significant number of protected areas. Among the 409 protected areas in the country, 19 are designated as coastal-marine areas. These protected coastal-marine areas serve as important ecological havens, contributing to the conservation and sustainable use of the country's marine resources. The management bodies, known as Public Institutions, are responsible for protecting, maintaining and promoting these protected areas, while ensuring compliance with regulations. By continuously enhancing public participation and embracing proactive management approaches, Croatia aims to further strengthen the management and protection of its marine environment.

## ***DAY 1***

### **Introduction to the Jabuka-Pomo Pit Fisheries Restricted Area (FRA)**

Members started the mission in Split with a meeting with Ante Misura, the Deputy Minister with responsibility for fisheries in the Croatian Ministry of Agriculture and Nedo Vrgoc, the Deputy Head of the Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries. A representative from the Italian authorities also joined the meeting remotely.

Members heard that Jabuka-Pomo Pit in the central Adriatic has been recognised as a valuable marine habitat and a vital spawning ground for important demersal commercial species, such as hake, turbot, anglerfish, octopus and lobster. The Jabuka-Pomo Pit FRA represents an area of approximately 3 300 km<sup>2</sup> of which 1 500 km<sup>2</sup> is a no-take zone.



Jabuka-Pomo Pit Fisheries Restricted Area (FRA) zones

Owing to persistent overfishing, in 2015 scientists, fishers, NGOs, and authorities in Croatia and Italy decided to protect this area. This resulted in a breakthrough agreement when a FRA was established in 2017. Studies have shown that this conservation effort has had a major positive impact – fish populations are recovering at an impressive rate, especially in the no-take zone, as seen by an increase in biomass and in the length of the fish, which has benefited fishers who have seen an increase in their catches due to the spillover effect into adjacent areas. The FRA was so successful that in October 2021, the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) endorsed the proposal to make it permanent.

Additionally, fishers themselves have asked for other areas to be similarly protected. According to the Croatian authorities, one of the main reasons why this FRA has been such a success is the cooperation between stakeholders: scientists, fishers, civil society and the relevant Croatian

and Italian authorities. Despite these successes, the assistant Minister explained that fishers were concerned about the targets set out in the EU's Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the 2023 Commission communication entitled 'Action Plan: protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries'<sup>1</sup> and highlighted the importance of carrying out a socio-economic analysis both prior to and following the establishment of protected areas.

Mr Misura also explained that a rapid alert system that allows fishers to inform the authorities of the presence of juveniles has been put in place so a temporary fisheries ban can be implemented in the area in under 24 hours.

On Council Regulation (EC) No 1967/2006 concerning management measures for the sustainable exploitation of fishery resources in the Mediterranean Sea<sup>2</sup>, the Croatian authorities considered that the regulation was outdated, should be revised and should take a regional approach to take into account regional specificities. The quota system was also criticised as they considered that this was not always the best approach for the Mediterranean.



From left to right: Ladislav Ilčić, Ska Keller, Isabel Carvalhais, Nedo Vrgoc, Pierre Karleskind, Ante Misura

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2023)0102.

<sup>2</sup> OJ L 409, 30.12.2006, p. 11.

## DAY 2

### The impact of the Jabuka-Pomo Pit FRA on fishers

On the second day of the mission, the delegation met with Antonio Šunjić, President of the Guild for Fisheries, Aquaculture and Agriculture of Split-Dalmatia County and other local fishers. Mr Šunjić explained that initially fishers were against the establishment of the FRA, particularly Italian fishers, but after the first year, most Croatian fishers were supportive. The latter considered that fishers should be central to the discussion on marine protected areas, as they were able to see in real time what was happening to fish stocks and these areas could have a direct impact on their livelihoods. Mr Šunjić also explained that the increase in fish stocks was greater on the Croatian side, and he felt that this could be the result of greater fishing pressure in Italian waters owing to differences in fishing vessels (Italian vessels are larger and have newer technology), licensing practices and periods during which fishing is allowed. The fishers also voiced concerns about the proposed action plan and the recommended ban on trawling in marine protected areas. They considered that fishers already had to respect very strict measures, including on monitoring, and considered it unfair that new measures were being put in place at EU level without consulting them or taking into their regional specificities into account. In addition, they explained that they were facing unfair competition from recreational fishers who do not have to respect the same requirements.



PECH delegation with Antonio Šunjić, President of the Guild for Fisheries, Aquaculture and Agriculture of the Split Dalmatia County (fifth from right) and other local fishers

## Hvar and the Pakleni Islands

The delegation then travelled by boat to the island of Hvar and was welcomed by Rikardo Novak, the Mayor of Hvar. On the way to the Pakleni islands, the Mayor of Hvar explained that 40 % of the world's yacht charter fleet is in Croatia and that the population of the town of Hvar more than doubles in the summer. In the Mayor's view, one of the main issues of concern in the area was not related to the impact of fisheries, but rather to the impact of tourism on the marine environment. In particular, the management of waste and, more specifically, plastic pollution was an issue.



PECH delegation with Rikardo Novak, the Mayor of Hvar

In Palmižana on the island of Sveti Klement (St Clement), Jelena Kurtović Mrčelić from the Public Institution Sea and Karst presented the Pakleni Islands marine protected area (MPA). She explained that the MPA is a significant landscape consisting of 19 islands and islets covering 634.38 hectares and was designated a protected area given the important ecological role of its Posidonia meadows. The day-to-day management of the Pakleni Islands MPA is carried out by the Public Institution Sea and Karst, in collaboration with Split-Dalmatia County. She also stressed that the main issue in the area related to the anchoring and waste from recreational boats and explained that there have been calls to change the 'no-take zone' to a 'no-entry zone'.



Presentation of the Pakleni Islands MPA by the Public Institution Sea and Karst

### **Opportunities and challenges for marine protected areas in Croatia**

Representatives from the NGOs Sunce and WWF Adria agreed that the Jabuka-Pomo Pit FRA was a good example in terms of impact on the marine environment. However, they explained that in coastal waters the situation was different, given the complexity of the different stakeholders involved and the high level of pressures on the marine environment. As regards pelagic fish stocks, they also explained that the situation is not good and that according to reports by the Food and Agriculture Organization, these stocks are being overfished. They explained that fishing is one of the main pressures on fish stocks, and also considered that tourism has a major impact on the marine environment, particularly in relation to waste management, plastic pollution and anchoring. They also stressed that implementing restrictions in protected areas is difficult given the lack of resources, and although trawlers are monitored, the same is not true of other boats even if the authorities use drones.



PECH delegation with Rikardo Novak, Mayor of Hvar (fourth from the right) and representatives from the Public Institution Sea and Karst, the NGOs Sunce and WWF Adria and a local fisher.

Local fishers also explained that they are concerned about the different EU-level initiatives, including the Biodiversity Strategy<sup>3</sup>, the Action Plan to conserve fishery resources and protect marine ecosystems and the proposed Nature Restoration Law<sup>4</sup>, and what impact these EU initiatives could have on them. They also consider that they face unfair competition from illegal and recreational fishers.

A trawler fisher considered that they were being unfairly targeted by the EU Action Plan given that there are only 250 trawler vessels in Croatia, they can only fish two days a week in the buffer zone and all their activities are strictly monitored.

Given these issues and the lack of certainty concerning future requirements, a certain level of mistrust exists between the authorities and fishers in coastal areas.



PECH delegation with a local fisher and NGO WWF Adria

## DAY 3

### The Croatian exclusive economic zone (EEZ) as a no-take zone

On the third day of the mission, the delegation met with Professor Alen Soldo at the Department of Marine Studies of the University of Split. Prof. Soldo explained that a no-take zone is an area set aside by the government where no extractive activity is allowed. Extractive activities include fishing, hunting, logging, mining or drilling. The purpose of no-take zones is to protect the spawning and nursery grounds of many aquatic species and therefore the criteria to be used for defining no-take zones should be whether these areas are spawning and/or nursery grounds. In no-take zones, fish length, fish weight and fish reproduction rates increase by 28 %, 109 % and 175 %, respectively. The spillover effect also means that there is a larger number of adults in non-protected areas.

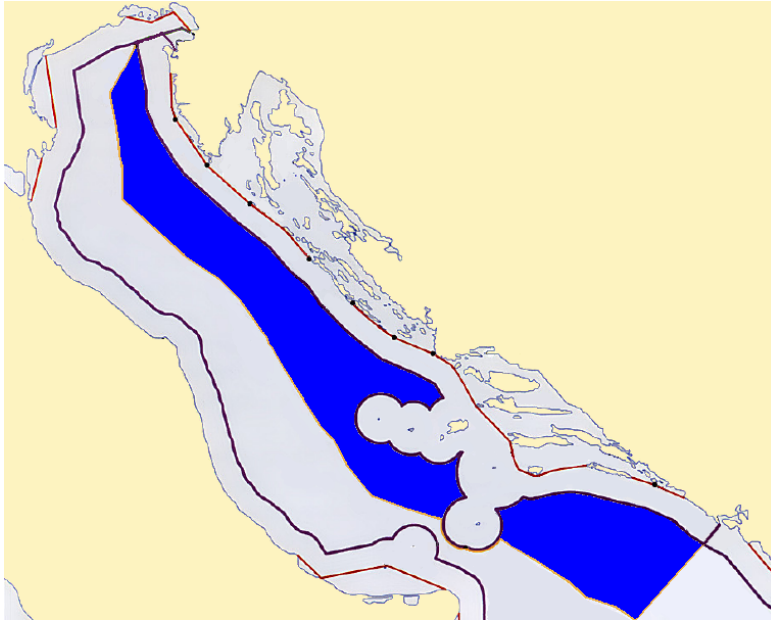
Prof. Soldo went on to explain that the Croatian EEZ was first proclaimed an Ecological and Fisheries Protection Zone (ZERP) in 2004, as the area is the spawning and nursery ground for

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<sup>3</sup> Commission communication entitled 'EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing nature back into our lives' (COM(2020)0380).

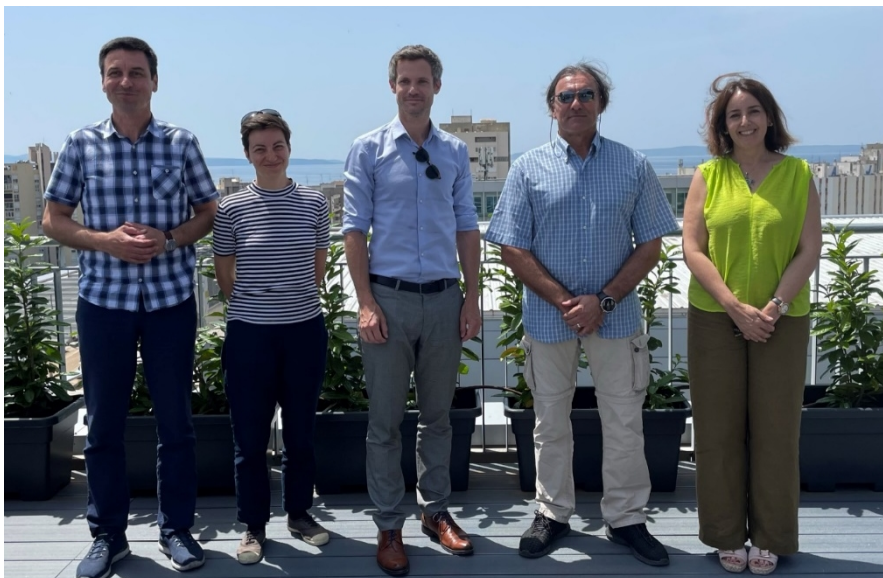
<sup>4</sup> Proposal for a Regulation on nature restoration (COM(2022)0304).

many species. He considers that the whole Croatian EEZ should be a no-take zone. Given that the EEZ covers 43 % of the total Croatian sea area this would mean that the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 objective of protecting at least 30 % of seas in Europe would be more than achieved.



Croatian Exclusive Economic Zone (in blue) in the Adriatic Sea

In addition, having the EEZ as a no-take zone would also not negatively impact Croatian fishers, given that 94 % of Croatian fishing vessels are less than 12 m in length and fish only in territorial waters. In addition, the spillover effect from the no-take zone would mean that they would have larger quantities and larger fish in territorial waters. Prof. Soldo also explained that the no-take zone mainly aims to protect demersal species and not migratory species, given that these species travel long distances and therefore restrictions in one area would have a very limited effect. Therefore, over certain periods purse-seiners could be allowed to fish in the no-take zone.



From left to right: Ladislav Ilčić, Ska Keller, Pierre Karleskind, Alen Soldo, Isabel Carvalhais

The PECH delegation then had the opportunity to visit a cutting-edge fishing boat simulator used for seafarer education and training at the Department of Marine Studies of the University of Split.



PECH delegation in the fishing boat simulator at the Department of Marine Studies, University of Split

## Main Findings and Conclusions

Following the delegation's visit to Split, the Members of the Committee on Fisheries:

- Expressed their profound appreciation for the open and frank exchanges with the Croatian authorities, fishers, scientists, civil society representatives and other stakeholders;
- Noted that the Jabuka-Pomo Pit fisheries protected area (FRA) was established by the relevant authorities of both Croatia and Italy by means of a bottom-up and participatory approach;
- Heard that all the main stakeholders, including fishers, considered the Jabuka-Pomo Pit FRA to be a success, with the strongest recovery in fish stocks occurring in the no-take zone, which had a positive spillover effect on the surrounding waters;
- Agreed that the Jabuka-Pomo Pit FRA represents a good model for the establishment of other FRAs in the future;
- Noted the concerns expressed by fishers concerning recent EU-level initiatives such as the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030, the Nature Restoration Law and the Action Plan to conserve fisheries resources and to protect marine ecosystems, and the potential impact these measures could have on their livelihoods;
- Took note that local fishers also considered that they faced unfair competition from recreational and illegal fishers;
- Considered that the establishment of marine protected areas in coastal areas represents specific challenges given the additional pressure on the marine environment from tourism;
- Noted that implementing restrictions in marine protected areas is difficult given the high level of resources needed to perform adequate checks;
- Heard that, to be successful, no-take zones should be established in areas that represent the spawning and nursery grounds of many aquatic species, and that the spillover effect would mean that larger quantities and larger fish are available for fishers in neighbouring waters; notes that the positive effects of such zones are smaller in the case of migratory species.

**Mission to Croatia  
Split and Hvar**

**PROGRAMME**

**19-21 June 2023**

	<b>Monday 19 June 2023</b>
<b>Travel Day</b>	<b>Arrival at Split airport</b> Departures from Brussels: BRU 09:20- <b>12:50 SPU</b> (via ZAG) – Croatia  <b>Check-in at the hotel:</b> Radisson Blu Resort & Spa, Split <i>Address: Put Trstenika 19, Split, 21000, Croatia</i>
<b>15:30</b>	<b>Meeting point in hotel lobby</b> and transfer to Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries by bus
<b>16:00-17:30</b>	<b>Welcome and meeting with Ante Misura, Assistant Minister with responsibility for fisheries in the Ministry of Agriculture, with remote connection with Italian counterparts</b>  Purpose: to learn about the legal framework in place and enforcement of the fisheries restricted area, as well as cooperation with the Italian authorities and GFCM  <i>Location: Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries, Šetalište Ivana Meštrovića 63, 21000, Split</i>
<b>17:30-19:00</b>	<b>Meeting with Nedo Vrgoc, Deputy Head of the Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries</b>  Purpose: to gain insights into the state of stocks in Jabuka/Pomo Pit and other protected areas, and into their recovery.  <i>Location: Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries, Šetalište Ivana Meštrovića 63, 21000, Split</i>
<b>19:00</b>	Transfer to Radisson Blu hotel and free evening

	<b>Tuesday 20 June 2023</b>
<b>08:30</b>	<b>Meeting point in the hotel lobby</b>
<b>09:00-10:15</b>	<b>Meeting with Antonio Šunjić, from the Guild for Fisheries, Aquaculture and Agriculture from Split Dalmatia County</b>  Purpose: to learn about the role fishers played in setting up the Jabuka/Pomo Pit Fisheries Restricted Area (FRA) and other protected areas, and how the protection of the areas has affected them  <i>Location: Croatian Chamber of Commerce - Split County Chamber, Obala Ante Trumbića 4, Split</i>
<b>10:15-10:45</b>	Bus transfer to Split harbour to board the catamaran to Hvar
<b>11:00-12:05</b>	<b>Boat trip from Split to Hvar (Jadrolinija)</b>  <i>Joined by NGOs Sunce and WWF Adria, Split-Dalmatia County (SDC) and the SDC Public Institution Sea and Karst (<a href="https://moreikrs.hr/">https://moreikrs.hr/</a>)</i>  <i>(Next boat crossing option 11:45-12:35)</i>
<b>12:05-12:45</b>	<b>Welcome by Rikardo Novak, Mayor of Hvar and transfer to Pakleni Islands, Palmižana</b>  <i>The <a href="#">Pakleni islands</a> are protected as significant landscape, while the marine area is a <a href="#">Natura 2000 site</a> in the process of becoming a zone of reinforced protection (significant landscape and marine reserve).</i>
<b>12:45-13:15</b>	<b>Presentation</b>  <i>The Pakleni Islands and the ecological role of Posidonia meadows by the SDC Public Institution Sea and Karst</i>  <i>Location: ACI marina Palmižana</i>
<b>13:15-13:30</b>	Transfer from Palmižana to Vlaka
<b>13:30-14:30</b>	<b>Light lunch joined by local fishers</b>  <i>Location: Restaurant Fishermen house <a href="https://www.pension-tonci.com/de/">https://www.pension-tonci.com/de/</a></i>

<b>14:30-16:00</b>	<b>Presentations and discussion</b>  <i>Opportunities and challenges of 30 % protection / 10 % strict protection – EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 by WWF Adria &amp; NGO Sunce</i>  <i>Case study of Pakleni Islands by NGOs Sunce &amp; SDC Public Institution Sea and Karst</i>  <i>Discussion</i>  <i>Group photo</i>  <i>Location: Coffee bar Fisherman's House <a href="https://www.pension-tonci.com/de/">https://www.pension-tonci.com/de/</a></i>
<b>16:00-16:45</b>	Transfer from Vlaka to Hvar
<b>17:00-18:30</b>	<b>Tour of the City of Hvar</b> <i>Accompanied by a professional guide with entry to the Arsenal and the Hvar Theatre courtesy of the Tourism Board of Hvar</i>
<b>19:00-19:50</b>	<b>Boat trip from Hvar to Split (MB Kapetan Luka TP)</b>
<b>19:50</b>	Transfer to Radisson Blu hotel by bus and free evening

	<b>Wednesday 21 June 2023</b>
<b>09:00</b>	<b>Check-out of hotel and meet in the hotel lobby</b> Transfer to University of Split with luggage on bus
<b>09:30-12:00</b>	<b>Meeting with Prof. Alen Soldo, Department of Marine Studies, University of Split and visit to the University facilities, including a fisheries simulator</b>  <i>Location: University of Split, Department of Marine Studies, Ruđera Boškovića 37, 21000 Split</i>
<b>12:30</b>	Transfer to Split Airport by bus  Departures: to Paris (Croatian) SPU 15:10 - CDG 17:30 to Brussels (Austrian): SPU 15:05 - BRU 19:15 (via VIE) to Lisbon SPU 17:05 - LIS 21:40 (via MUC)  <b><u>END OF MISSION</u></b>

*Annex II. List of participants*

**Mission of the Committee on Fisheries  
Split and Hvar  
Croatia  
19 - 21 June 2023**

**FINAL LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

**MEMBERS**

**(4)**

- |                              |    |
|------------------------------|----|
| 1. KARLESKIND Pierre (Renew) | FR |
| 2. CARVALHAIS Isabel (S&D)   | PT |
| 3. ILČIĆ Ladislav (ECR)      | HR |
| 4. KELLER Ska (Greens/EFA)   | DE |

**POLITICAL GROUPS**

**(3)**

1. ENGQVIST Isak (Renew)
2. STOCKHAUSEN Björn (Greens/EFA)
3. GULAM Anita (ECR)

**SECRETARIAT**

**(2)**

1. QUARANTA Claudio
2. SOTO RENOU Emma

**INTERPRETERS** FR+EN+HR (active) IT+PT (passive)

**(6)**

1. DULCIC Ivana, Team Leader
2. VILLALOBOS Gregorio
3. SANDERS John
4. BILLON Chloé Suzette Denise
5. MONTANI Andreja
6. MATVEEFF Laura Patricia Genevieve

**VALISE TECHNICIAN**

**(1)**

1. KISS Edgar

**Total (17)**

*Annex III. Press coverage*

- *Slobodna Dalmacija*  
<https://more.slobodnadalmacija.hr/om/vijesti/izaslanstvo-europskog-parlamenta-stiglo-u-hrvatsku-razgovarat-ce-o-podrucjima-s-ogranicenim-ribolovom-1299659>
- *Ekovjesnik*  
<https://www.ekovjesnik.hr/clanak/6340/podrucja-s-ogranicenim-ribolovom-tema-posjeta-izaslanstva-ep-a-hrvatskoj>