NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Subject: Petition No 1312/2021 by P.O.S. (Spanish), on behalf of the Vida Silvestre association, on overfishing in the Mediterranean

1. Summary of petition

The petitioner complains that Spain, France and Italy are allowing levels of overfishing that are breaching the limits of the EU’s common fisheries policy. He states that overfishing in the Mediterranean is affecting 80% of the demersal stocks that live and feed close to the sea floor, and he expresses his concern about the biological risk of stocks collapsing, which will directly affect fishers, undertakings and coastal communities that depend on these natural resources. Based on information from the OCEANA NGO, he states that 90% of stocks are being unsustainably exploited, and that this depletion of resources could lead to an unprecedented environmental crisis.

2. Admissibility

Declared admissible on 25 March 2022. Information requested from Commission under Rule 227(6).

3. Commission reply, received on 29 July 2022

The Commission’s observations

Two elements are raised in the petition: the level of overfishing in the Western Mediterranean Sea and the lack of compliance of Spain, Italy and France in implementing the Common Fisheries Policy. The petition’s concern is that together, those elements could lead to an unprecedented environmental and socio-economic crisis for the coastal communities of this

region within a very short period.

Regarding the level of overfishing in the Western Mediterranean Sea, the Commission follows closely the scientific evaluations carried out annually by the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF). For the Western Mediterranean Sea, the STECF experts have met 12 times since 2018, and all the reports of their meetings have demonstrated that ambitious management measures are required to reduce fishing mortality and secure the region’s recovery to healthy marine ecosystems, on which coastal communities rely. In December 2021, the STECF published its most recent stock assessment for demersal stocks in the Western Mediterranean Sea. This assessment shows that the levels of overfishing for many stocks in the region, including European hake, remain extremely worrying. However, the STECF assessment also shows that for other stocks, such as red mullet, fishing mortality has decreased allowing those stocks to start their recovery. This demonstrates that the management measures implemented in the Western Mediterranean Sea, in particular since the adoption of the European Western Mediterranean Sea multiannual management plan (West Med MAP)\(^2\) in 2019, are efficient and that management efforts need to be pursued for overfishing to stop and all stocks to replenish.

Regarding Spain, France and Italy, the Commission is very active at technical and political levels to discuss the implementation path and pace towards sustainable fisheries in the three Western Mediterranean Member States. Given the scientific advice clearly recommending strong actions for the reduction of fishing mortality in the region, the Commission proposal for the Fishing Opportunities in 2022\(^3\) included to make use of all available management measures under the West Med MAP in order to ensure stock recovery, reduce fishing mortality and secure the best protection of spawners and juveniles. The Commission’s approach remains to combine the objective of achieving sustainable fisheries at Maximum Sustainable Yield by 2025 at the latest with the need to minimise the socio-economic consequences during the sector’s transition to sustainability. In adopting Council Regulation (EU) 2022/110\(^4\), the Council supported the Commission’s approach. Overall, the implementation of the West Med MAP shows the political ambition of the management measures and represents a step in the right direction.

**Conclusion**

As the Commission attaches particular attention to the objective of environmental as well as socio-economic sustainability, it follows closely the West Med MAP implementation and adapts its proposals for the annual Fishing Opportunities regulations based on best available scientific advice. In addition, a number of technical and political meetings are organised with the three concerned Member States to discuss and provide support in the step-by-step implementation of the West Med MAP measures to achieve its objectives.

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\(^3\) COM(2022) 275 final.