P9_TA(2021)0017

Measures to promote the recovery of fish stock above MSY

European Parliament resolution of 21 January 2021 on More fish in the seas? Measures to promote stock recovery above the maximum sustainable yield (MSY), including fish recovery areas and marine protected areas (2019/2162(INI))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to Article 3(3) of the Treaty on European Union, and to Articles 11, 39 and 191 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),

– having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)¹,


– having regard to Article 13 TFEU, which requires that in formulating the Union’s policies on fisheries, among and other domains, the Union and the Member States must take into account the fact that animals are sentient beings and therefore pay utmost attention to the relevant animal welfare requirements,

– having regard to Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on the conservation of fisheries resources and the protection of marine ecosystems through technical measures³,


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protection of animals at the time of killing\(^1\), and in particular to Article 3 thereof, the key principle of which that animals ‘shall be spared any avoidable pain, distress or suffering during their killing and related operations’ applies to fish,


- having regard to Council Directive 91/676/EEC of 12 December 1991 concerning the protection of waters against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources\(^3\), in particular with regard to fertilizer run-off,


- having regard to the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030, set out in the Commission communication of 20 May 2020 entitled ‘EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 – Bringing nature back into our lives’ (COM(2020)0380),

- having regard to its resolution of 16 January 2018 on international ocean governance: an agenda for the future of our oceans in the context of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals\(^6\),

- having regard to the 2020 edition of the report of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on the State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA 2020),

- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 May 2020 entitled ‘A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system’ (COM(2020)0381),

- having regard to the Commission communication of 16 June 2020 entitled ‘Towards more sustainable fishing in the EU: state of play and orientations for 2021’ (COM(2020)0248),


– having regard to the 2020 report of the Commission’s Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) on monitoring the performance of the common fisheries policy (STECF-Adhoc-20-01),

– having regard to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and in particular to Target 11 of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, which are an element of the CBD Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020,

– having regard to the 2019 global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES),

– having regard to the 2019 special report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate,

– having regard to the 2016 International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) resolution on increasing marine protected area coverage for effective marine biodiversity conservation,

– having regard to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, on the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources,


– having regard to its resolution of 16 January 2020 on the 15th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity¹,


– having regard to the Special Report No 1/2017 of the European Court of Auditors of 21 February 2017 entitled ‘More efforts needed to implement the Natura 2000 network to its full potential’,


– having regard to the decision of the European Ombudsman in case 640/2019/FP on the transparency of the Council of the EU’s decision-making process leading to the adoption of annual regulations setting fishing quotas (total allowable catches),

– having regard to EEA report No 3/2015 of 1 October 2015 entitled ‘Marine protected areas in Europe’s seas: An overview and perspective for the future’,


¹ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0015.

having regard to the Commission communication of 16 June 2020 entitled ‘Towards more sustainable fishing in the EU: state of play and orientations for 2021’ (COM(2020)0248),

having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,

having regard to the report of the Committee on Fisheries (A9-0264/2020),

A. whereas the common fisheries policy (CFP) is aimed at ensuring that fishing and aquaculture activities are environmentally sustainable in the long term and are managed in a way that is consistent with the objectives of achieving economic, social and employment benefits, and of contributing to the availability of food supplies; whereas, in order to reach the objective of progressively restoring and maintaining populations of fish stocks above biomass levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield, the maximum sustainable yield exploitation rate had to be achieved by 2015 where possible and, on a progressive, incremental basis at the latest by 2020 for all stocks;

B. whereas SDG 14 calls for the oceans, seas and marine resources to be conserved and used sustainably;

C. whereas the aim of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) is to protect and preserve the marine environment, prevent its deterioration and restore marine ecosystems, and to achieve good environmental status (GES) for EU marine waters by 2020;

D. whereas under the MSFD, good environmental status is based on 11 descriptors; whereas descriptor 3 applies to populations of all commercially exploited fish and shellfish which are within safe biological limits, exhibiting a population age and size distribution that is indicative of a healthy stock;

E. whereas there are three primary assessment criteria under GES descriptor 3 – (I.) sustainability of exploitation, (II.) reproductive capacity and (III.) maintenance of the proportion of older and larger fish – but only 10.5 % of stocks can be assessed in the light of criteria (I.) and (II.) and there is no satisfactory common assessment methodology at European level for criterion (III.);

F. whereas the collection of data on some fish stocks needs urgent improvement, particularly stocks in the Black Sea, the Mediterranean and Macaronesia, with a view to carrying out a scientific assessment that is essential to the sustainable management of stocks;

G. whereas fisheries management measures adopted under the CFP are bearing fruit, as the number of fish stocks exploited at sustainable levels is increasing, making higher yields possible for stocks which were overexploited;

H. whereas still around 38 % of stocks in the North-East Atlantic and around 92 % of stocks that are scientifically assessed in the Mediterranean and Black Seas are overexploited, meaning exploited above maximum sustainable yield (MSY) levels,
according to the STECF, despite the legal requirement to stop overfishing by 2020; notes that 62.5% of stocks in the Mediterranean and Black Seas were overexploited in 2017, according to the FAO 2020 SOFIA report;

I. whereas the Commission’s proposed the total allowable catch (TAC) in the North-East Atlantic were in line with MSY for all 78 stocks for which scientific advice was available;

J. whereas in 2019, the Council set TAC for 62 out of 78 species in line with MSY; whereas it is therefore expected that in 2020, more than 99% of landings in the Baltic, North Sea and the Atlantic managed exclusively by the EU will come from sustainably managed fisheries;

K. whereas in the northeast Atlantic, biomass has continued to increase since 2007, and in 2018 was 48% higher than in 2003 for fully assessed stocks; whereas in the Mediterranean and Black Seas, the situation has remained essentially unchanged since the start of the data series in 2003, although since 2012 there may have been a slight increase in biomass;

L. whereas fishing at maximum economic yield (MEY) refers to the level of capture at which economic benefits for fleets are maximised, which improves the resilience of the sector, and at which stocks are maintained above MSY;

M. whereas for multispecific fisheries, species management based on the MSY model is impossible to apply, even in scientifically well-known and documented fisheries;

N. whereas scientific studies on the subject have raised concerns about the long-term negative impact that certain uses of fishing techniques, such as bottom-contacting gear and fish aggregating devices, have on stocks, ocean biodiversity and the marine environment;

O. whereas the CFP is not yet fully implemented and some of its measures such as the establishment of fish stock recovery areas have not been used;

P. whereas globally, 66% of the marine environment has been altered by human pressure, according to IPBES, and 34.2% of fish stocks are fished at biologically unsustainable, levels according to the FAO;

Q. whereas the IUCN advocates for the transformation of at least 30% of all marine habitats by 2020 into a network of highly protected marine protected areas (MPAs), among other efficient area-based conservation measures, the aim being to have no extractive activities carried out in at least 30% of the ocean, without considering the socio-economic consequences;

R. whereas the FAO 2020 SOFIA report reiterates that management is the best tool for conservation and the only path to sustainability and that stocks under effective management are increasingly sustainable, with 78.7% of current global marine fish landings coming from biologically sustainable stocks;

S. whereas the 2030 EU biodiversity strategy calls for a legally binding objective to protect at least 30% of the EU’s sea area, and for 10% of the EU’s sea area to be strictly protected;
T. whereas remote electronic monitoring, for example the through transmission of vessel position in close to real time, and the strengthening of on-the-spot controls play a positive role on the enforcement of MPAs;

U. whereas the loss of marine biodiversity has socio-economic impacts on the fishing sector, coastal and overseas communities and society as a whole, and should therefore be prevented; whereas rebuilding fish populations would bring larger economic benefits than the current state of marine fish populations, according to the World Bank;

V. whereas healthy habitats, including sandbanks, seagrass meadows and coral reefs, are essential to the restoration of marine ecosystem functioning and to the replenishment of fish stocks and to providing carbon sinks to mitigate climate change;

W. whereas well managed MPAs are essential to enhance biodiversity and preserve the natural habitats of other species such as birds;

X. whereas there is a strong scientific consensus that MPAs can be beneficial to fisheries because of their spillover effect and their positive effects on recruitment, for example through the protection of reproduction sites, juveniles and big mother fish with high reproductive capacities;

Y. whereas pollution originating from the land, especially in partially enclosed sea basins, and from other marine activities also has an impact on fish stock recovery;

Z. whereas the overall biomass of quota species within EU managed stocks was 48 % higher in 2018 than in 2003;

AA. whereas wild-caught fish is by far the healthiest and most environmentally friendly source of protein on earth thanks to the low carbon footprint of the fishing industry; whereas seafood is therefore the best choice for fighting climate change;

AB. whereas the European Ombudsman’s recommendation to proactively make public documents related to the adoption of the TAC regulations has so far not been followed by the Council of the EU;

AC. whereas fishing at MSY continues to bring positive results in the North-East Atlantic;

**Improving fisheries management to end overfishing**

1. Reiterates its call for full implementation of the CFP with the aim of restoring and maintaining populations of fish stocks above biomass levels capable of producing MSY;

2. Emphasises that nature, fish and other living organisms have an intrinsic value, even if they remain unexploited by human activities;

3. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to strengthen scientific coverage with the objective that 100 % of the fish stocks exploited in European waters be assessed at the latest by 2025 and that the MSY can be calculated for all these stocks, where scientifically possible;

4. Points out that the Member States are responsible for collecting data and that these data are essential to assessing the health of fish stocks; points out that under Article 23 of
Regulation (EU) 2017/1004, the Commission must submit to Parliament and the Council a report on the regulation’s implementation and functioning;

5. Calls on the Commission make its TAC proposals and on the Council to set TAC at MSY level, as provided for in the CFP Regulation;

6. Prompts the Commission, the Member States and the scientific community to develop a science-based model for the optimisation of the management and exploitation of multispecific fisheries; notes that this model should enable the application of similar management objectives to the use of MSY across the CFP, making it possible to follow the evolution of the implemented management rules;

7. Urges the Commission to strengthen the implementation of the ecosystem approach to fisheries management, including by increasingly applying multi-species approaches, in order to minimise the negative impacts of fishing activities and other factors such as climate change on marine ecosystems, fish populations and society and to ensure ocean resilience to climate change; reiterates that fully documented fisheries and quality data is key to improving fisheries management; calls on the Commission and the Member States to take the necessary steps in order to improve data collection on recreational fisheries, considering their environmental impact and socio-economic value;

8. Calls on the Commission to continue to support plans to improve selectivity and survival of non-target species, and with a view to implementing an ecosystem approach to fisheries management, to establish which practices are harmful to stocks, ocean biodiversity and marine environments and to introduce measures to limit and change them;

9. Considers that the EU, following the evaluation of the CFP by 2022, should, where necessary, adapt current fisheries management practices and accelerate the transition towards low-impact fisheries, in order not only to preserve fish stocks at current levels but also, more importantly, to rebuild fish stocks and restore marine ecosystems, in consultation with stakeholders, in particular the fisheries sector, and support such measures through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund;

10. Considers that attention and support should be particularly focused on small-scale fisheries, which are potentially less predatory and more sustainable, not only in terms of biological resource management but also from a socio-economic point of view;

11. Calls on the Commission to support the harmonisation of the indicators under criterion (III.) for GES under the MSFD, with the aim of setting benchmarks and an assessment methodology that are common across all Member States;

12. Calls on the Commission to study the relevance of using indicators other than MSY in fisheries management that would take into account species interactions and socio-economic factors as well as the effects of climate change and pollution; notes that other

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indicators such as MEY are being studied and implemented by some countries;

13. Points out that limiting the pressure of human activities requires more research and innovation in the fisheries sector with a view to developing good practices linked to the circular economy, sustainability and the selectivity of fishing gear;

14. Underlines the importance of small-scale coastal fishing and believes that this sector can significantly facilitate transition to sustainable fish stock management; calls on each of the Member States accordingly to increase the percentage of national quotas allocated to this sector;

15. Calls on the Commission to ensure that Member States adopt data collection programmes that cover the impact of fishing activities on the wider environment, including on the bycatch of sensitive species, and on the seabed;

16. Demands that the Council proactively make public all documents related to the adoption of TAC regulations, in line with the European Ombudsman’s recommendation, and comply with Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 and Regulation (EC) No 1367/2006;

Expanding the network of protected areas and improving its management

17. Emphasises that, while the European Union has made progress and met the target of designating 10 % of Europe’s waters as protected areas, the network of MPAs is far from being fully effective, and that only a very small share of the existing MPAs have management plans and protection measures;

18. Highlights that, when successful, MPAs offer large socio-economic benefits, especially for coastal communities and the fisheries and tourism sector, and that MPAs can perform key ecological functions for the reproduction of fish stocks (providing spawning grounds and nurseries) and improve their resilience;

19. Welcomes the Commission’s proposal, in its 2030 biodiversity strategy, to have at least 30 % of sea area in the EU protected, including through fish stock recovery areas, as provided for under the CFP, and areas where the most destructive fishing techniques and economic activities are restricted;

20. Calls for a third of this area (i.e. 10 % of European waters) to benefit from a high level of protection, including areas where all catches and all economic activities are prohibited (i.e. no-take zones);

21. Calls on the Commission to accompany any legislative proposal with impact assessments based on the best available scientific advice and in close coordination with local communities and authorities;

22. Urges the Commission to adopt guidelines for the MPA targets to be implemented in each EU maritime region, in order to ensure balanced geographic distribution and ecological representativeness;
23. Urges the Member States to continue to designate MPAs under the Birds\(^1\) and Habitats\(^2\) Directives and the MSFD, in order to achieve those objectives;

24. Calls for MPAs to be established as part of a coherent network of connected areas, including offshore and deep-sea areas; recalls the requirement to cease fishing with bottom-contacting gear below 400 m in areas where vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) are known to exist or are likely to occur;

25. Urges the Commission to set strong science-based MPA management guidelines for Member States and to establish a classification of MPAs taking into account their stage of establishment, management plans and ecosystemic benefits, drawing on existing guidelines such as the global standards of the IUCN;

26. Insists that the Commission must accompany fisheries agreements with third countries with management and governance measures such as protected marine areas, thus making it possible to improve fish stock management and tackle the many cumulative effects of these agreements, such as pollution, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and the development of some practices such as industrial fisheries that put the sustainability of some stocks at risk;

27. Urges Member States to set strong and effective management plans for the existing and future MPAs and to put in place stronger control, monitoring and surveillance measures to ensure that MPAs are respected;

28. Calls for both the commercial and recreational fisheries sectors, as well as the relevant organisations with competence in the management of human and economic activities at sea (e.g. regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs), or the International Maritime Organization) to be involved in the control, monitoring and surveillance of MPAs;

29. Stresses that greater scrutiny over fisheries management measures within Natura 2000 sites, submitted by EU Member States, is necessary in order to ensure that conservation objectives are achieved in line with Article 11 of the CFP,

30. Emphasises that the designation of areas and development of management measures should be based on the best available scientific advice;

31. Recognises that the success of MPAs and other protected areas depends on their having a firm scientific basis and on their acceptance by commercial and recreational fishers, coastal communities and other stakeholders, as well as on clear communication about what is being protected, how and why; calls therefore for the inclusion of the fisheries sector, including its artisanal component and scientific fisheries management bodies, as well as other relevant stakeholders, in the design, governance and monitoring of MPAs; calls for the participation of civil society to be encouraged through the establishment of marine education areas;

32. Stresses the importance of having a comprehensive and coherent approach when


establishing MPAs, by not only limiting commercial fishing activities but also tackling other activities such as fossil fuel exploration and exploitation, mining, large-scale aquaculture, dredging, offshore wind farms, transport, and recreational fisheries and other leisure activities;

33. Invites the Member States to expand the network of fish stock recovery areas under the CFP, especially where there is clear evidence of heavy concentrations of fish below minimum conservation reference size or of spawning grounds; emphasises the need to include the evaluation of the designation and success of such areas in the upcoming report on the functioning of the CFP;

34. Calls on the Commission and the Member States, in international negotiations on a treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction and in the framework of RFMOs, to champion an ambitious global mechanism to establish MPAs in the high seas or in areas beyond national jurisdiction, to take a proactive role, after an agreement on marine biological diversity beyond national jurisdiction has been found, in the creation of new effectively managed area-based management tools including MPAs in the high seas; recalls that the establishment of MPAs in areas beyond national jurisdiction must be supported by socio-economic and ecological impact assessments based on the best available scientific advice;

35. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote the idea that the ocean in its entirety provides humanity with ecosystem services, and that the ocean must therefore be recognised as a global commons in international negotiations under the auspices of the UN;

**Tackling other environmental factors threatening fish stock recovery**

36. Stresses that rapid and strong action to fight climate change is essential for the preservation of healthy marine organism populations and habitats, and therefore for the continuity of sustainable fishing activity and for food security in the long term; recalls that pursuant to Article 2 of the Paris Agreement on climate change, parties must aim at ‘increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development, in a manner that does not threaten food production’;

37. Underlines the positive contribution of MPAs to climate adaptation through strengthening ecosystem resilience; urges Member States to strengthen the role of MPA networks in their national climate adaptation strategies (NAS);

38. Stresses that the rebuilding of fish stocks and their maintenance at a sustainable level also require tackling some anthropogenic effects linked to climate change, such as oxygen depletion and acidification, as well as various mainly terrestrial but also marine sources of pollution that have a negative impact on the rebuilding of fish stocks or contribute to their fragility, such as nitrates, waste water, fertilisers, pesticides, toxic chemicals, pollution from industrial activity and mass tourism, residues from aquaculture, plastic and microplastic pollution, sun creams, hormones, noise pollution, oil leaks and lost or discarded fishing gear;

39. Calls on the Commission to publish a study on the impact of those diverse sources of pollution on the rebuilding of fish stocks and on marine ecosystems;
40. Underlines the need to involve fishermen in the fight against pollution of the seas and oceans; calls on the Commission accordingly to urge Member States to adopt legislation authorising fishermen to bring to land any waste caught at sea; considers that these provisions should introduce a system of incentives for fishermen and for the use of appropriate collection systems;

41. Stresses the importance of increasing the survival rate of non-target species by reducing injuries and stress caused during capture and release;

42. Calls on the Commission to consider these requests and to respond to them in its new action plan to preserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems, which it plans to present by 2021, and in its revision of the CFP, as well as in all forthcoming legislative proposals;

43. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission, and to the governments and parliaments of the Member States.