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Toward a sustainable blue economy in the EU: the role of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors
(2021/2188(INI))

Committee on Fisheries

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

Toward a sustainable blue economy in the EU: the role of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors (2021/2188(INI))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to the Commission communication of 17 May 2021 on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU – transforming the EU’s Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future (COM(2021)0240),

– having regard to Articles 3, 4, 38, 43 and 349 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,


– having regard to the Commission communication of 12 May 2021 entitled "Strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030’ (COM(2021)0236),

– having regard to the Commission communication of 11 December 2019 entitled ‘The European Green Deal’ (COM(2019)0640),

– having regard to 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 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 opinion of the Committee of the Regions regarding the communication on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU – transforming the EU’s blue economy for a sustainable future (COM(2021)0240),

– having regard to the Commission report of March 2021 on ‘The sustainability criteria

¹ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32008L0056
for the blue economy’,

– having regard to the Commission report entitled ’The EU Blue Economy Report 2021’,


– having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,

– having regard to the opinions of the Committee on Development and the Committee on Transport and Tourism,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on Fisheries (A9-0000/2021),

A. whereas the blue economy, and hence the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, must respect the environmental, social and economic pillars across the board in order to be considered sustainable;

B. whereas the common fisheries policy (CFP) seeks to guarantee the proper conservation and management of marine biological resources and ensure that fishing and aquaculture activities contribute to environmental, social and economic sustainability;

C. whereas, under SDG 14, it is imperative to conserve oceans, seas and marine resources and promote their sustainable use;

D. whereas the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity is fundamental to the health of the oceans, which contain millions of species, and hence to the health and survival of the planet;

E. whereas the collection of data for scientific monitoring and assessment of stocks in the seas and oceans is fundamental to the sustainable management of those stocks;

F. whereas fisheries and aquaculture are key sectors of the blue economy and are an important source of protein and micronutrients that are essential for food security and human health;

G. whereas the loss of marine biodiversity is having a major environmental, social and economic impact on the EU fisheries sector and on coastal and island communities and must therefore be reversed and biodiversity restored;

H. whereas, in 2018, the EU fisheries sector accounted for around 163 600 jobs, with fleets catching around 4.1 million tonnes of live fish in 2019; whereas, in the EU-27, 1.1 million tonnes of aquatic organisms valued at EUR 3.7 billion were produced in 2018;
I. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant economic impact on those employed in the fisheries and aquaculture sector owing to the combined effects of waning demand and supply chain disruption;

J. whereas oil and gas exploration, combined with the large-scale exploitation of offshore renewable energy resources, may generate competition and sea space management conflicts that mainly affect fishing activities, in particular small-scale fisheries and coastal communities;

K. whereas a proposal for legally binding nature restoration targets needs to be drawn up under the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030 in line with the objective of protecting 30% of the EU maritime area, of which 10% should be subject to strict conservation measures;

L. whereas there is a need for specific guidelines and sound planning for each of the EU’s maritime regions regarding the objectives to be attained in marine conservation areas;

M. whereas it is necessary to have a global vision for the management and conservation of marine resources;

N. whereas, when it comes to diversifying consumption, access to information about nutritional values, provenance or place of production is fundamental to consumer behaviour;

Global approach to the EU blue economy;

1. Welcomes the Commission's new sustainable EU blue economy strategy; regrets, however, the lack of specific objectives for the different sectors, in particular fisheries and aquaculture; points out that new action plans must always be based on the best available scientific knowledge and on environmental, social and economic impact studies;

2. Urges all blue economy stakeholders to base their activities on the responsible use of natural resources, decarbonisation and circular economy concepts;

3. Calls on the Commission to establish legally binding instruments to make the blue economy ‘greener’ and to align it with the overall objectives of the European Green Deal;

4. Stresses the importance of establishing bilateral partnership arrangements with third countries that enshrine labour standards guaranteeing a safe working environment and decent pay for all those working in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, as well as other sectors of the blue economy: stresses that bilateral partnership arrangements should always seek to respect the highest environmental sustainability criteria;

5. Considers that international ocean governance should adopt an intersectoral approach to environmental issues, ensuring equal treatment for all maritime economic activities and a level playing field;

6. Welcomes the role of regional sea conventions and regional fisheries management
organisations in strengthening governance based on the best available scientific knowledge;

7. Recalls that the sustainable management of resources based on the best available scientific knowledge must be a key priority in order to attain the goals on the EU strategic agenda and must also be included in bilateral partnership arrangements;

8. Emphasises that the blue economy comprises multiple activities over and above the traditional ones, that the development of new activities should always be accompanied by impact studies and that a transparent scientific approach must be adopted to facilitate the sustainable organisation of these activities within the blue economy;

Resilience, competitiveness and jobs

9. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to support the sustainable development of small-scale fishing value chains by promoting the harmonisation of selective, non-destructive and energy-efficient fishing methods;

10. Urges the Commission and the Member States to take the necessary measures to improve the collection recreational fishing data, bearing in mind the environmental impact and socio-economic value of this activity, in order to ensure fair and balanced management of the fisheries sector;

11. Notes with concern that the growth of new blue economy activities is resulting in to increased competition for space at the expense of more traditional activities, such as fishing; calls, therefore, for a strategy to promote interaction between the different maritime and terrestrial blue economy activities in a way that will benefit them all;

12. Calls for the creation of an EU forum for dialogue that is transparent and ensures a balance of power between stakeholders, in a bid to foster intersectoral cooperation, experience sharing and conflict resolution;

13. Urges the Commission and the Member States to take specific actions to boost investment in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors under the new European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), together with other EU programmes such as the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism;

14. Stresses the need to develop more comprehensive strategies to adapt the fisheries and aquaculture sectors to the fallout from climate change in view of its impact on communities and their livelihoods;

15. Considers that greater job security and better earnings in the fisheries sector are essential if it is to attract newcomers, thereby ensuring its rejuvenation and continued survival;

16. Stresses that, in order to improve the competitiveness and economic performance of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, it is necessary to focus on vocational training, lifelong learning, counselling services and the dissemination of technical and scientific knowledge and innovative practices;
17. Stresses that fishing and aquaculture play a key role in creating jobs and sustaining the economy in many parts of the EU, accounting for over half of local jobs in many coastal and island communities, particularly in the outermost regions;

18. Welcomes the role of women in sustainable fishing value chains and accordingly urges that they be guaranteed decent working conditions, as well as visibility and representation in decision-making structures and processes;

**Green transition**

19. Warns that the dumping of waste at sea is harmful to the environment, results in heavy economic losses to the fisheries sector and other activities, and affects human health through the entire food chain; welcomes EMFAF decision to provide funding for fishermen to recover and collect refuse and lost fishing gear;

20. Considers that the aquaculture sector should limit fish stocking densities as a way of reducing diseases and their spread, diminishing the need for antibiotics and lowering pollution levels;

21. Highlights the potential role of aquaculture, particularly in easing the transition to sustainable food systems, thereby reducing the pressure on marine resources and reversing the loss of biodiversity in the oceans and seas;

22. Stresses that sustainable food from the oceans, seas and freshwater sources must be produced by responsible fishing and sustainable aquaculture alone;

23. Believes it necessary to promote sustainable aquaculture models that could contribute to the conservation of ecosystems affording protection against the effects of climate change; underlines the importance of differentiating between production and protein-processing aquaculture, particularly when the latter involves practices that put pressure on the sustainability of marine resources in other parts of the world;

24. Calls for the CFP to be applied across the board to all EU fishing fleets, to reduce the impact of their particular activities on habitats, other resources and other species, while maintaining stocks above the biomass levels necessary to generate maximum sustainable yields;

25. Highlights the role of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in energy transition and combating climate change, through decarbonisation and through the promotion of activities such as marine refuse collection that are conducive to a circular economy;

26. Calls for legally binding EU targets for the recovery and conservation of marine biodiversity and the restoration of degraded ecosystems;

27. Calls for urgent measures to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, which is still one of the most serious threats to the health of ecosystems and the economic competitiveness of the fisheries sector itself;

**Cooperation, knowledge and innovation**
28. Calls for greater cooperation between academia, research and innovation centres, public authorities and industry to promote the use of equipment, methods, techniques and practices based on the best available scientific knowledge, capable of improving efficiency and safety at work, economic growth and competitiveness, as well as environmental sustainability;

29. Stresses the need to harmonise data collection on environmental monitoring as well as the monitoring of living ecosystems and fish stocks; stresses that the data collected should also be factored in so as to regulate the impact of other maritime activities;

30. Urges the European Commission, Member States and regions to work together in order to promote and support local initiatives to preserve livelihoods and traditions and cultural heritage associated with fisheries;

31. Considers it important to raise positive consumer awareness regarding the nutritional value of the various fishery and aquaculture products; points out that it is essential to educate consumers with regard to food in order to change their behaviour, particularly concerning food waste;

32. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee.
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Substance of the Proposal

On 17 May 2021, the European Commission presented a communication on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU (COM(2021)0240), in line with the provisions of the European Green Deal concerned with making our economy efficient and competitive while phasing out carbon emissions, protecting the environment and biodiversity and leaving no one behind.

This communication aims to set out a broad agenda for achieving these goals, replacing the idea of unregulated ‘blue growth’ with the idea of a ‘sustainable blue economy’ based on protecting the three pillars of sustainability: environmental, social and economic;

Position of the Rapporteur

Your rapporteur welcomes the Commission communication on a new approach to a sustainable blue economy in the European Union. She points out, however, that it falls short when it comes to indicating specific measures to protect fisheries and aquaculture as sectors of the blue economy.

The blue economy is a broad segment of our economy, covering all industries and sectors relating to oceans, seas and coastal areas, including land-based aquaculture and algae production. In the last decade, significant steps have been taken to modernise and diversify the various sectors, including the more traditional ones such as fisheries, in order to develop more sustainable blue economy models. However, it is also important to understand that, within the broad segment of the blue economy, various sectors can sometimes come into conflict with each other due to a lack of planning and strategic maritime space, which can be harmful to some of them.

The rapporteur stresses that fisheries and aquaculture are key to boosting employment and skilled labour, as well as reconciling economic development with protection of the environment and ecosystems, using resources responsibly and helping to achieve the ambition of zero pollution. She also underlines the importance of remembering that fisheries and aquaculture are responsible for providing protein and micronutrients that are essential for food security and human health.

She believes that specific strategic guidelines should be drawn up for the competitive and resilient development of fisheries and aquaculture, ensuring a supply of nutritious and healthy food and creating jobs, and for the promotion of research and innovation, while never forgetting the protection of the environment and biodiversity, in accordance with the European Green Deal.

She also emphasises the need for cooperation between Member States, regional governments and local authorities and for bilateral partnerships with third countries, geared towards achieving the highest sustainability standards wherever European fleets operate. This is the only way to make sure that we are all charting the same course.