



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

Maritime Policy and Blue Economy
The Director-General

Brussels
MARE.A.4/CVW

Mr. Guus Pastoor,
Chairman
Market Advisory Council
rue de la Science, 10
B-1000 Brussels

Subject: MAC Advice – Impact and Mitigation of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Seafood Supply Chain

Dear Mr Pastoor,

I would like to thank MAC for the detailed recommendations sent on 11 December 2020 on measures that could be implemented by the European Commission and Member States for improving economic perspectives for the sector, ensure the supply of the Union market with healthy and sustainable seafood, and support a green recovery.

DG MARE presented its reply to these recommendations to the MAC members orally, at the occasion of the meeting of Working Group 1 on 28 January. As announced, here are more specific indications on how the Commission will address or may have already addressed them.

As far as the recommendation on the opportunity to organise a pan-European communication campaign is concerned, I wish to inform you that on 1 February, the European Commission launched “Taste the Ocean”, a brand new communication campaign to promote the consumption of sustainably caught or produced fish and seafood. The campaign comes at a time when fishers and aquaculture producers are struggling, after nearly one year of lockdown or closure of restaurants and catering – the prime outlets for their products. Over the coming three months, top chefs (Michelin, Masterchef, etc.) from nine EU countries will share their recipes made with various kinds of fish or shellfish from fisheries and aquaculture.

The campaign will principally be promoted on social media. Follow on Instagram, Facebook or Twitter using #TasteTheOcean. More countries / species will follow in a next season, still planned for this year. A dedicated campaign website has been set up (<https://europa.eu/taste-the-ocean>), offering recipes, chef bios and easy-to-apply consumer guidance. The social media campaign will also feature profiles of EU fishermen and – women - to provide EU citizens with a better understanding of the “people behind the fish”. At the occasion of the campaign start, the season premiere of Euronews’ OCEAN series explores how EU regulation empowers European consumers to make informed seafood choices¹. Ahead of campaign start, DG MARE has already had very constructive conversations with i.e. EAPO and Europeche. Both organisations have

¹ Watch the latest episode of OCEAN here: <https://www.euronews.com/programs/ocean>

expressed their strong support for the campaign and stand ready to help its dissemination to reach national and local audiences in all the Member States concerned.

The MAC's call for improved traceability will be addressed through the ongoing revision of the control regulation, which will make the whole set-up more effective and efficient, in particular thanks to the wide digitalization of the process and procedures.

The MAC also recalls the need to ensure that the internal market and international trade continue to function despite the current (crisis) circumstances. There I can assure you that the Commission is continuously vigilant as to limit obstacles to the movement of goods and this goes for fishery and aquaculture products as well. Of course, in these times, priority is given to protecting the health of EU citizens, which may justify specific measures, but with as many sense of proportion and balance insofar as circumstances allow.

I also welcome the MAC's recommendations on the financial support for investments that contribute to a transition towards an environmentally friendly, sustainable, and low-impact seafood production, including through technological innovations and building of new skills. Such support is the cornerstone of the provisional agreement reached in December 2020 on the new European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF). In this respect, the EMFAF will strongly contribute to the objectives of the European Green Deal, in particular to the Biodiversity and Farm to Fork strategies. It will also support the key priority of digital transition, including through technological innovation and skills development.

The MAC recommends providing special attention to small-scale artisanal fisheries. On that topic I can inform you that the provisional agreement on the EMFAF includes a 100% rate of public aid for small-scale coastal fisheries (i.e. vessels less than 12m long that do not use towed fishing gears, and fishers on foot). It also requires Member States to address the specific challenges of small-scale coastal fishing in their programme, in particular through the identification of specific actions.

Let me also thank you for the recommendations on financial measures to mitigate the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on the seafood supply chain. I fully agree that a crisis management tool is essential. In this respect, the Commission has worked with the European Parliament and the Council to introduce a specific compensation scheme in the EMFAF for 2021-2027. This scheme is part of the provisional agreement reached in December 2020. Concretely, the scheme includes two types of financial compensations: first, for the economic losses and additional costs of individual fishers, aquaculture farmers and operators of the processing sector; second, for the activation, by producer organisations, of the storage mechanism under the Common Market Organisation. The scheme can be activated only in the case of an exceptional event generating a significant disruption of the markets. The occurrence of such an exceptional event has to be formally recognised in a Commission Decision.

I can assure you that the Commission will continue to closely monitor the situation of the markets in the upcoming weeks and take all the necessary actions within the 2021-2027 framework. Even if the new EMFAF does not enter into force as of 1 January 2021, the Common Provisions Regulation provides that expenditure will be retroactively eligible as of that date. In this context, the Commission Decision triggering the exceptional measures could also apply retroactively.

Aside these exceptional measures, the new EMFAF can support investments towards a stronger resilience of the value chain. In this respect, EMFAF support can foster collective organisation in the fishing and aquaculture sector, as a way to empower stakeholders to develop tailor-made solutions. For example, the EMFAF can support mutual funds, insurance instruments and other collective schemes to strengthen crisis management capacity on the ground. The EMFAF can also support the creation of producer organisations and the implementation of their production and marketing plans.

Last but not least, the EMFAF can support the adaptation of the supply chain to the health and hygiene requirements, for example through the purchase of personal protection equipment.

I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation and invite you to take contact with Ms Pascale Colson (Pascale.Colson@ec.europa.eu; + 32 2 29 56273) should you have any further question on this reply.

Yours sincerely,

Charlina VITCHEVA

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