

EP(20)28

Ms Veronika VEITS  
DG MARE Director  
European Commission  
Rue Joseph II 99  
B-1000 Brussels

Brussels, 10 April 2020

**Subject: Follow-up letter on the free movement of fishermen**

Dear Mrs Veits,

The European Social Partners in the fisheries sector thank you and the services involved in the swift response given by the European Commission to ensure the health and free movement of workers as well as the availability of goods and essential services, such as fishing. In this context, the industry truly appreciates the Communication on the Free movement of workers which identify fishermen as essential workers and grants free passage. However, these privileges can only be granted within the territory of the European Union. Furthermore, as social partners, we have identified a number of additional issues worldwide which require the urgent attention and action of European authorities.

It is clear that global problems require global action. United Nations bodies such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and International Labour Organization (ILO) have been at the forefront to tackle disruption and restrictions to travel, trade flows, global logistics and supply of food. An equal consideration and approach must be applied to the workers and operations performed by the fishing industry across the world. Annexed to this letter, you may find a series examples on the problems encountered by our fleets across third countries.

The EU fishing industry particularly welcomes the [Circular Letter No.4204/Add.5/Rev.1](#) which encourage Administrations to take a pragmatic and practical approach with regard to the extension of certificates and endorsements, as strictly necessary, in accordance with the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel Personnel (STCW F), 1995; and to notify vessels, fishing vessel personnel and relevant Administrations accordingly.

Equally or even more important is the [Circular Letter No.4204/Add.6](#) which sets a preliminary list of recommendations for Governments on the facilitation of maritime trade during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes measures to provide access to ports, facilitate operations and crew changes in ports and ensure health protection.

As a first and general step, the Social Partners call on the European Commission to ensure that all international health and safety measures taken for the transport workers to be applied to fishermen as well. This with the aim to afford them a special consideration, providing the necessary assistance and flexibility in order to ensure the free movement of fishing vessels' crews across borders as well as during crew changes, thereby ensuring the production of (sea)food which is fundamental as the first link in the food chain. In this context, the exceptions and privileges adopted for seafarers in the above

Circular letters and, in the European context, in key Communications<sup>1</sup> should be exactly the same for fishermen as well as access to port facilities and logistics. Accompanying this letter, there is a model proposal for an internationally recognised professional certificate developed by and for the fishing industry and based on the "Template of Certificate for International Transport Workers".

More specifically, in order to facilitate international free movement of workers, Social Partners believe it a good idea to identify a sufficient number of ports and airports around the world, in the main fishing areas, that agree to regulate in a pragmatic way crew changes, based on the IMO circular.

For this purpose, we encourage the Commission to use its External Action Service (EEAS) to lead a diplomatic initiative to implement this initiative and facilitate access of fishermen in the territory of the coastal state to allow crew changes. It is equally important that EU delegations in third countries assist EU companies to secure the inbound and outbound transportation of fishermen in good conditions, since commercial flights are heavily disrupted worldwide.

National and European authorities should also consider the issuance of a certification based on the vessel tracking records (VMS) to demonstrate that the vessel has factually been in quarantine due to the amount of time spent at sea before entering port of the coastal state. In the case of Peru, fishing trip tracking certificates for ships are already issued on a regular basis to facilitate access.

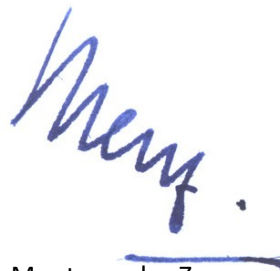
Please find attached, in Annex II, a list of international fishing ports that could be used for crew changes.

While the COVID19 crisis will have an unprecedented impact at all levels, it is vital to ensure that the industry can continue operating by urgently adopting the above-mentioned actions. This will secure the safety of our fishermen and the food supply to our markets.

Yours sincerely,



Juan Manuel Trujillo Castillo  
*ETF Fisheries*  
*Section Chair in the SSDC-F*



Ment van der Zwan  
*Europêche*  
*Spokesperson in the SSDC-F*

*Cc: Stefan OLSSON, Director DG EMPL*

*Magda KOPCZYNSKA, Director DG MOVE DDG2.D*

*Lotte KNUDSEN, Service of Deputy Secretary General for economic and global issues (ECO)*

*Isabel DE LA MATA BARRANCO, Principal Adviser for Health and Crisis management (SANTE.DDG1.PA01)*

*Pierre KARLESKIND, Chair of the European Parliament Fisheries Committee*

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<sup>1</sup> Communication on the guidelines on protection of health, repatriation and travel arrangements for seafarers, passengers and other persons on board ships;  
Communication on the implementation of the Green Lanes under the Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services.

## ANNEX I

Problems encountered by EU fleets across the globe (non-exhaustive list):

- Namibia: fishing has not been considered as an essential activity and the government has dictated the cease of fishing operation. Those with an authorisation to fish outside Union waters may be allowed to land the fish and receive supplies, but crew changes are being made impossible as fishermen from the Schengen Area and the United Kingdom are not allowed into the country. Those carrying out fishing operations under chartering arrangements in Namibian waters, in principle had to cease their activities, unless the vessel has been on the high seas for many weeks. However, also in this case, crews on board are neither permitted to get off the ship at all. As way of example, at least 20 Spanish vessels are tied up in port. In both cases, mechanics and technicians cannot be sent to carry out specific repairs or maintenance of the vessel.
- Peru: fishing activities are disrupted but still maintained, including the permission to land fish and provisioning of equipment and supplies. However, crews cannot be relieved, to the point that the majority of incoming relief crews were trapped in hotels in quarantine (confined for 2 weeks).
- Mauritania: fishing vessels continue operating but it is impossible to perform crew changes and fishermen are going on additional fishing trips.
- Senegal: fishing ports have been closed.
- French Polynesia: Papeete is a strategic fishing port for the fleet, but has banned the entrance of Spanish fishing vessels.
- South Africa, Côte d'Ivoire; Uruguay, Cape Verde, New Zealand, Seychelles, Ecuador, Madagascar: fishermen will have to go on additional fishing trips.

On an operational and crew level, the industry endures the following issues:

- Bans and restrictions on port in third countries
- Logistical difficulties for landing, storage and transport
- Restrictions on the shipment of seafood by air and sea due to reducing frequencies, destinations and offers
- Lack of regular medical care in foreign ports
- Quarantines and lack of protocol for action in the event of quarantine on European fishing vessels in foreign ports
- Temporary impossibility of repatriating fishermen or making crew changes
- Heavy disruption of commercial flights
- Medications supply shortages
- Difficulties to supply protection means such as masks, gloves, etc. to crews

## **ANNEX II**

List of international ports for crew changes:

- Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)
- Port Victoria (Seychelles)
- Antsiranana (Madagascar)
- Manta / Guayaquil (Ecuador)
- Montevideo (Uruguay)
- Nouakchott (Mauritania)
- Callao (Peru)
- IJmuiden, Scheveningen, Amsterdam and Vlissingen (Netherlands)
- Agadir (Morocco)
- Dakar (Senegal)
- Tromsø (Norway)
- Las Palmas, Canary Islands (Spain)
- Mayotte / La Réunion (France)
- Walvis Bay (Namibia)
- Mindelo (Cape Verde)
- Durban (South Africa)
- Auckland (New Zealand)