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Fishing Industry welcomes EU support to overcome the socio-economic turmoil caused by the COVID-19 outbreak

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Today, the European Parliament and this week, the Council of the EU, in a coordinated and concerted effort, swiftly adopted their position on the European Commission proposal establishing a set of ambitious measures under the European Maritime & Fisheries Fund (EMFF) to tackle the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in the fisheries sector. The EU Social Partners in the Fisheries Sector - Europêche and ETF - welcome the positive step forward towards the final adoption of this legislative proposal which will provide much-needed support to fishermen. The sector looks forward to a speedy and flexible implementation of the provisions in the Member States.

Just a couple of weeks ago the European Commission presented its proposal, putting forward the necessary legislative modifications to allow Member States more flexibility to reallocate funds under the EMFF so they could be destined to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus where needed. The Commission also modified EMFF-provisions to allow aid for those fleets forced to stay in the port due to quarantine measures, operational problems or market disruptions. Both the Council and the Parliament, in an unprecedented and rapid manner, not only endorsed the proposal but added further flexibility. These EU institutions included new vessels and fishermen on foot, who are mostly women, as eligible for support in case of temporary cessation as requested by the industry.

Ment van der Zwan, Europêche's spokesman on social affairs, declared: *"We welcome the extraordinary measures quickly adopted by EU authorities. We still urge the European Commission to take further steps to effectively cope with the crisis. These should include the possibility to transfer up to 25% of this year's unused quota to 2021, measures to compensate the loss of income of fishermen suffering a huge fall in first-sale prices and the injection of extra-funding for countries that have spent most of their available national funding under the EMFF. On top of this, we call on the Commission to launch a seafood promotion campaign in order to boost consumption levels throughout the EU and recognise the hard work and dedication of our fishermen."*

Juan Manuel Trujillo, workers' spokesman in the EU social dialogue committee on sea-fisheries, concluded: *"The financial package will certainly bring relief and stability to fishermen and their families. As food providers, they need to be identified as essential workers at all levels. In this context, we call on EU institutions to put all efforts to find solutions for the safe repatriation of fishermen who are enduring travel and disembarkation restrictions across the world, allowing for the necessary crew changes. Furthermore, they need priority access to Covid-19 tests and protection means such as masks and gloves."*

The EU Social Partners call upon the Member States to fully implement these extraordinary measures in an effective and balanced manner in order to compensate and relieve both operators and workers to guarantee a future for local fishing communities and the European industry overall.

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