

FISHERS' UNIONS ACROSS EUROPE MOBILISE TO DEFEND THEIR SECTOR

THE EU ACTION PLAN ON MARINE ECOSYSTEMS WILL HAVE DRAMATIC SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

1. The ETF and its affiliates organising fishers are obviously in favour of environmentally sustainable fisheries. Being at sea for many hours a day, for many days per year, make generations of fishers – the true guardians of the sea, mindful of the necessity to fish in a responsible way that can assure the future of their activity and make their income sustainable.
2. The European Commission adopted the “EU Action Plan: Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries” on 21 February 2023. This document aims, among other things, at **increasing the Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) from 12% to 30% of EU waters and phase out bottom trawling in all MPAs by 2030. Furthermore, bottom trawling shall not be allowed in any newly established MPA.**
3. This will have **enormous social and economic consequences on the sector**, in particular in the regions where bottom trawling represents a major part of the fisheries operations. Jobs will be lost, and trawlers will need to move to new fishing grounds, meaning longer and more trips, higher fuel consumption, more working hours for the crew, more fatigue, inevitable consequences on safety on board and thereby making the sector even less attractive to young workers. All this in a context where competition for marine space is increasing (in particular due to the installation of offshore wind farms and the development of other activities at sea) and fisheries are struggling to keep areas where they have operated for decades.
4. The ETF and its affiliates have argued for many years that the reasons behind the unhealthy state of some fish stocks go beyond fisheries. Other human activities, unfortunately, such as pollution, marine litter, etc... impact our seas. The climate change and its adverse effect on biomass are not attributable to fisheries. These circumstances requires an exosystemic approach: one that does not make fisheries pay the entire price of this situation and that instead includes measures addressing and reducing the harmful impact of the other factors.
5. The action plan of the Commission targets bottom trawling with the clear intention of scrapping it. In reality the consequences of bottom trawling are different on different types of sea beds and this should be taken into account. Instead of introducing a ban – with its critical social and economic consequences – efforts should rather be placed in the introduction of innovations in trawling that reduce contact with the seabed, that are more

selective and that decrease fuel consumption.

6. The Common Fisheries Policy is based on the three pillars of environmental, economic and social sustainability. A measure like the phase-out of bottom trawling in 30% of waters by 2030 clearly shows that the Commission approach is biased and unbalanced: economic and social implications are not sufficiently taken into account.
7. Though in general terms, fisheries represent a small part of the economy, they are vital for some local coastal economies, beside their traditional and cultural value. In addition, many satellite activities depend on fisheries, like tourism and the hospitality/catering industry.
8. The European Commission and the Member States shall have the duty of protecting and supporting the fisheries sector that offers jobs, healthy protein products with a low carbon footprint and contributes to European food security.
9. Indeed EU consumption of fish products is already reliant on an import total of 70%. Should the plans of the Commission be implemented, the EU will be compelled to import even more. European fisheries will lose jobs; more pressure will be put on a sector that is already struggling to survive and our fish consumption will be more dependent on imports from countries where environmental and social sustainability standards are questionable and lower than those applied in EU waters.

For these reasons, the ETF and its affiliates will organise, between the 2nd and the 9th of May, a series of actions at national level, to make sure that the voices of fishers are heard by the authorities, the actors of our sector and that the citizens are fully informed about the incumbent risks.