



Fishers across Europe protest in defence of their work and way of living

Brussels, 9 May 2023

During the past week, fishers across Europe protested against the EU policies that are putting the future of the sector at risk. Particularly, the European Commission's "Action Plan to protect marine ecosystems" that aims to prohibit bottom fishing in 30% of our seas and the Nature Restoration Law. The call from the European Bottom Fishing Alliance (EBFA) and the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF), supported by Europêche, EAPO and Cogeca, culminated today May 9th, the day of Europe. Instead of celebrating the historical unity of the peoples of Europe and social prosperity, fishers sounded the horn of their vessels, as a call of distress, to voice that the fishing fleet is gradually disappearing. The sector expects that this joint call is seriously taken by EU policymakers and stop the very policies that are triggering this crisis.

In an unprecedented manner, fishers and fishing communities across Europe have expressed their worry through local actions in ports and at sea. The goal: sending a clear message to the EU authorities that bottom fishing is on the brink of collapse. If the European Commission action plan and the Nature Restoration Law is implemented as proposed, Europe risks 25% of its seafood production, 7 000 vessels and 20 000 fishermen and women.

The sector recalls the enormous progress made in the last 20 years on the protection of the marine environment and the recovery of fish stocks. As way of example, almost 100% of the landings from EU-managed stocks in the Atlantic are sustainable, greenhouse emissions have been cut by 40%, thousands of Km² have been closed to bottom fishing and 28% of the fishing fleet has disappeared due to restrictions and fishing capacity adjustments. In the Western Mediterranean, the activity of bottom trawlers (days at sea) has been reduced by 30 % in the last 4 years, which in addition to further area closures, is driving most businesses below their breakeven point. But in the eyes of the Commission, this is not good enough.

According to the sector representatives: *"Fishers and their communities have spoken loud and clear. We cannot further tolerate policies from the European Commission that put our way of life and future generations in danger".* He continued: *"EU polices are bringing the sector to its knees. If we continue like this, we will only be able to consume seafood products from third countries, whose environmental and social standards are almost always lower than those of the EU. It is time for the EU to rethink where it wants the seafood to come from. The sector would like to remind the Commissioner of his mandate to maintain the profitability of the fleet and to maximise food production in the EU, as clearly stated in the founding treaties of the EU".*