



Resolution of the Social Partners in the Sea-Fisheries Sector on the decarbonisation in fisheries

29 June 2023

1. The Social Partners of the Sea Fisheries Sector, ETF and Europêche, welcome the Communication of the Commission “On the energy transition of the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture sector” published on 21 February 2023¹.
2. The Social Partners stress that both employers and workers are in favour of the decarbonisation in the sector and support measures that can make fisheries less impactful on the planet and on the marine ecosystems. They are committed to contributing to the technological, logistic, and policy processes that will translate the ambitious objectives into concrete steps.
3. Any plan or measure aimed at reducing the CO₂ emissions of the fisheries sector must consider the role our sector has in our society, which is to provide healthy food to people. Furthermore, it should be noted that the CO₂ emissions of the fisheries sector are lower than the CO₂ emissions of other sectors producing protein food. Hence, wild caught fish is the best option in terms of food security and fight against climate change.
4. To be successful and widely accepted the energy transition needs to be a just transition. This means that the process and the decisions taken need to be fair and inclusive and take into consideration first and foremost the people whose livelihoods depend on the fisheries sector.
5. The EU fishing sector is facing many difficulties, especially in some regions and some segments of the fleet that are struggling to remain profitable. We have an ageing workforce and a significantly high average age of vessels. This means that for many fishers it is hard to think in perspective and invest money in technologies to reduce CO₂ emissions. This also means that the financing of the energy

¹ [COM\(2023\) 100 Final](#)

transition needs to be based on different public or private funding, needs to be incentivised, and needs to be designed in a way that takes this reality into account. As a result, it is essential to put in place an EU fleet renewal plan. We cannot be a modern 21st-century fishery with 20th-century old vessels.

6. A large part of the EU fleet is small-scale. These small-scale vessels often operate from small ports and get maintenance in small shipyards. This corresponds to a dimension where fisheries do not only have an important economic and social role for small coastal communities, but also a structural, cultural, and touristic value. The supply of new technologies, alternative fuels, and adequate infrastructure in these local ports take is a precondition to achieve a complete decarbonisation. These workers and coastal communities shall not be forgotten by the transition.
7. Health and safety on board of the crew managing and stocking the new fuels and operating the new engines need to be addressed. Likewise, the upgrades can be a matter of concern for vessels' stability in extreme weather conditions, especially for vessels that were designed for different kinds of propulsion systems. The level of safety after the upgrade shall be the same or higher than before.
8. The fuel costs already represent a substantial part of operating a fishing vessel. The relevance of fuel costs has unfortunately recently been evidenced by the consequences of the energy crisis. That is why the costs of operating the vessels once upgraded need to be estimated and addressed prior to applying any measure. The Social Partners underline that imposing new taxation on fuel for fisheries at the present stage is not the way forward, because it will penalise the EU fleet given the lack of alternatives.
9. The use of innovative gears that can reduce fuel consumption (and hence the fisheries carbon footprint) should be promoted and supported. For example, the use of floating doors instead of bottom-contacting doors in bottom trawling can reduce fuel consumption and also the impact of bottom trawling on seabeds. The necessary and relevant skills need to be developed and supported to use these technologies optimally.
10. In parallel, the EU should incentivise circular economy initiatives on board vessels to reuse and recycle waste. In addition, EU and Members States must finance programmes to collect marine litter from the oceans. EU authorities must recognise the positive role played by bottom trawlers as marine litter collectors.

11. Some vessels have two engines, one for sailing and one for fishing operations. The energy transition needs to take this fact into account, because both engines should be upgraded and perhaps work with the same kind of propulsion power.
12. Experts highlight that both the stockage of alternative fuels and the replacement of old engines with more modern ones require more space on board. This clashes inevitably with the gross tonnage limitations and flags the need to review the definition of fishing capacity as provided in the Common Fisheries Policy in order to remove an obstacle to the transition.

The Social Partners for Sea Fisheries have been asked for years to exclude from the calculation of the gross tonnage the space reserved on board to the crew (including work spaces): This would create an incentive to vessels' owners to offer better living conditions on board for the present crew and to attract more young workers and women in the sector, while not increasing fishing capacity. The Commission has always refused to open up the definition and criteria used to measure fishing capacity.

The Social Partners would not endorse a strategy by which the gross tonnage limitation is opened up to incentivise the energy transition and in parallel it is not opened up to offer better living conditions for the crew. It would be inconsistent and unacceptable if such revision happens for the environment and not for the people. Using net tonnage would be a better option as it excludes crew accommodation and work spaces.

13. Skills of the crew will need to match the needs of the transition and of the implemented innovation. The crew has to be properly trained to ensure efficient and safe operations on board, for the other workers at sea, and for the workers in ports.
14. Although it will be a gradual process, the sector needs to find itself prepared when the transition begins. Training institutes and trainers need to be prepared and upgraded in a similar way across the EU, to make sure the transition takes place in a fair way without a competitive advantage or disadvantage of one country against another.
15. Social Partners welcome the multi-stakeholder partnership on the energy transition. In this regard, it is essential to consult not only the fisheries sector but also academia, engineers, specialists and ports in order to find concrete, practical, and sustainable solutions.

16. The Social Partners call for the development of European and international standards for sustainable fisheries training, under the IMO STCW-F. A sound process of including sustainable training in the education of fishers would benefit fishers, the fishing sector and the marine environment.

17. The sector is already facing difficulties in the EU. Brexit, inflation, high energy prices, the reduction of the fishing efforts, the competition from global actors, the ageing of the vessels, the extremely challenging demographic problem of the workforce are some among many factors that make the fisheries struggling nowadays in the EU. The decarbonisation process should not become an additional stress factor. Jobs should be preserved and protected and everything should be done to avoid that some segments of the fleet are pushed out of the market because of the decarbonisation requirements.

Social Partners believe that, until new propulsion technologies are commercially available and the legislative framework allows the use of such technologies, the EU and WTO should not introduce taxes on fuel. The opposite would only penalise the sector due to a lack of real alternatives.

Consumption of fish products in the EU already comes for more than 70% from imports: The energy transition objectives shall not be a reason to see that percentage to further increase.