



TO:

**Ms Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European
Commission**

Copy:

**Mr Raffaele Fitto
Executive Vice-President
for Cohesion and Reform**

**Mr Maros Sefcovic
Commissioner for Trade
and Economic Security;
Interinstitutional Relations
and Transparency**

**Mr Costas Kadis
Commissioner for Fisheries
and Oceans**

EU fisheries attachés

**European Parliament
PECH Committee**

Brussels, 2 March 2026

Subject: Alarming decline of the EU fishing fleet – EU urgent corrective action

Dear President von der Leyen

On behalf of the European social partners for sea fisheries – ETF, Europêche and Copa-Cogeca – we wish to express our serious concerns regarding the persistent and structural decline observed across all key socio-economic indicators of the EU fishing fleet, as evidenced in the latest scientific reports of the EU scientific committee for fisheries (STECF)¹. The report confirms deteriorating trends in income, profitability, employment and overall fleet viability. As STECF data are subject to a two-year lag, the 2023 figures represent the most up-to-date consolidated assessment — and they paint an alarming picture.

¹ STECF Annual Economic Report 2025 https://stecf.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/d/stecf/stecf_25-07

The long-term trajectory is deeply troubling. Revenues have been declining since 2016, reaching a historic low in 2023. Employment fell by 31% between 2013 — the year of adoption of the current Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) — and 2023.

The downward trend is accelerating. In 2023, the EU counted 42,600 active fishing vessels (excl. Greece). According to nowcast projections, this figure is expected to dramatically fall to 37,800 by 2025 — the lowest level ever recorded. Unlike previous crises, this decline cannot be attributed to extraordinary global disruptions; it reflects structural weaknesses within the policy framework itself. Scientific projections point that in 20-30 years, the EU fleet can be reduced to about 25% of its current size, unless appropriate policies are taken to reverse the negative trend.² Yet, despite this dramatic contraction, further capacity reductions continue to be encouraged by the Commission³.

This situation is not a cyclical fluctuation. It represents a failure to deliver on the socio-economic objectives enshrined in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which calls for ensuring a fair standard of living for the fishing community, stabilising markets, and securing the availability of supplies.

Market indicators further confirm the structural weakening of EU seafood autonomy. The latest European Market Observatory for Fisheries and Aquaculture Products (EUMOFA) report⁴ shows EU landings at historically low levels, with further deterioration expected. Particularly concerning are projections for critically low mackerel stocks by 2026 due to overfishing by non-EU neighbouring countries, against which the EU has not taken any measures despite repeated calls from the sector.

Even assuming all EU production remains within the internal market, domestic supply represents only 31.3% of total available supply. After accounting for exports, EU domestic production covers merely 14.2% of total EU consumption⁵. At the same time, approximately 50% of EU fisheries imports benefit from preferential conditions under EU free trade agreements, which reduce or eliminate tariffs and inevitably influence sourcing decisions. In several cases, these preferential conditions are not conditioned on compliance with equivalent sustainability and control standards (e.g., autonomous tariff quota), creating an uneven playing field for EU producers.

FAO data further underscore the gravity of the situation. Despite complying with some of the highest environmental and control standards globally, the EU is the only major region where aquatic production is in decline. Europe and Africa are the only regions where per capita aquatic food consumption is projected to decrease, while global consumption continues to grow⁶.

² Economic situation and Outlook of the EU fishing fleets, September 2025

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/398247905_Economic_situation_and_outlook_of_the_EU_fishing_fleets

³ https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-fishing-fleet-recovers-increased-profits-expected-2025-2025-11-28_en

⁴ The EU Fish Market 2025 Edition https://eumofa.eu/documents/20124/210402/EFM2025_EN.pdf/7e142aae-ec07-ec29-dbf4-35c7fc723fa1?t=1764600211543

⁵ RESEARCH FOR PECH COMMITTEE Assessing the impact of seafood imports on EU self-sufficiency [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2026/759344/CASP_STU\(2026\)759344_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2026/759344/CASP_STU(2026)759344_EN.pdf)

⁶ OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2025-2034

The EU is therefore the only major region where aquatic food production is declining while dependence on imports is increasing. This weakens our strategic autonomy, food security, local employment and coastal cohesion.

Under these conditions, the sector is increasingly unattractive to younger generations. Recent studies⁷ identify ineffective fisheries governance and excessively restrictive regulatory frameworks as the biggest obstacle to generational renewal. While environmental sustainability is indispensable, it cannot be pursued in isolation from economic and social sustainability. The three pillars must advance together.

The European Commission is currently evaluating the Common Fisheries Policy. However, our fishers cannot afford to wait for a lengthy, multi-year reform process that focuses primarily on revising the Basic Regulation while leaving unresolved the immediate regulatory bottlenecks, inconsistencies and implementation barriers that are already undermining fleet viability and economic sustainability today. Moreover, the Commission must go beyond administrative fixes and proactively propose and implement policies aimed at improving working conditions and enhancing the sector's attractiveness, ensuring a viable future for the next generation of fishers. We therefore call for the following immediate corrective actions:

1. The adoption of an Omnibus Regulation to address and correct systemic shortcomings and unintended consequences across CFP-related legislation (including control burdens, a review of gross tonnage limitations to exempt 'social tonnage'—aimed at improving onboard living and safety conditions— from capacity calculations, funding shortcomings, disproportionate technical restrictions or unjustified area closures).
2. Postpone the full implementation of secondary legislation — including the CATCH system, digital traceability requirements and new weighing rules — until the identified technical, legal and operational shortcomings have been resolved and any necessary targeted revisions have been adopted.
3. Concrete measures to restore EU seafood production capacity and strengthen food sovereignty, while maintaining high environmental and social standards.
4. An urgent, comprehensive Action Plan for the survival and competitiveness of the EU fishing fleet, its workforce and seafood value chain under the Vision 2040.

Without immediate corrective action, the continued contraction of the EU fleet will become irreversible, with profound consequences for coastal communities, employment, and the Union's food security. The EU cannot afford to neglect the significant multiplier effect generated by the fisheries sector. According to FAO, for each person employed in capture fisheries and aquaculture production, about three jobs are produced in the secondary activities, including post-harvest⁸.

⁷ Europe and Generational Replacement in Fishing: Analysis of the Scarcity of Studies and Proposals for Future Lines of Research <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/faf.70069>

⁸ <https://www.fao.org/4/i1820e/i1820e.pdf> (pages 6 and 29)

We stand ready to engage constructively with the Commission to develop practical and balanced solutions that restore confidence, profitability and long-term sustainability to the sector.

With our kindest regards,

Cor Blonk



Chair EU Social Dialogue Committee
for Sea Fisheries

Juan Manuel Trujillo Castillo



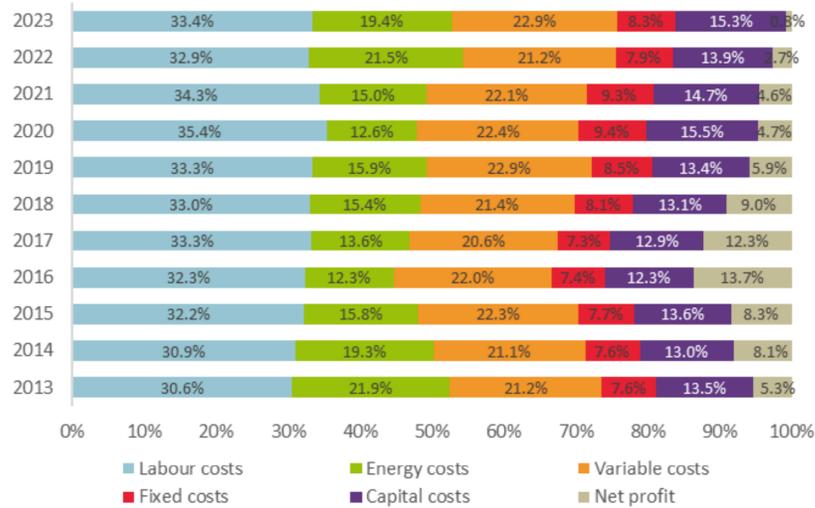
Chair ETF Fisheries Section



Elli Tsiforou
Copa-Cogeca Secretary General

ANNEX

Figure 2.3.11. Trends on costs as a percentage of revenue



Source: Member States data submissions under the 2025 Fleet Economic data call.

Table 2.2.2. Main results for the EU active fleet (excl. Greece) for 2013-2023 and nowcasts for 2024 and 2025.

EU (excluding Greece)		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	%Δ 2023-2022	%Δ 2023-avg 2013-2022	%Δ 2023-2013
Number of vessels	thousand	46.0	45.6	45.1	47.2	47.5	46.2	45.7	44.6	44.3	43.3	42.6	41.1	37.8	-1.7%	-6.5%	-7.4%
Total vessel tonnage	thousand GT	1,230.2	1,251.3	1,215.7	1,188.4	1,192.4	1,202.6	1,187.5	1,144.5	1,154.5	1,151.9	1,101.2	1,057.6	434.0	-4.4%	-7.6%	-10.5%
Total vessel power	thousand kW	4,506.1	4,507.1	4,447.7	4,400.8	4,400.9	4,341.4	4,352.7	4,187.5	4,222.6	4,182.0	4,053.6	3,857.4	1,850.3	-3.1%	-6.9%	-10.0%
Engaged crew	thousand	118.4	117.8	114.8	115.5	118.3	114.0	110.7	105.4	105.8	103.7	102.2	93.3	90.2	-1.4%	-9.1%	-13.7%
FTE national	thousand	84.3	84.3	85.2	84.6	82.9	80.5	76.6	67.2	69.2	65.1	62.1	58.0	57.9	-4.7%	-20.4%	-26.4%
Days at sea	thousand	4,754	4,644	4,585	4,603	4,476	4,320	4,181	3,693	3,930	3,679	3,729	3,720	3,402	1.4%	-13.0%	-21.6%
Fishing days	thousand	4,672	4,607	4,519	4,616	4,346	4,300	4,120	3,644	3,861	3,661	3,693	2,964	1,807	0.9%	-12.8%	-21.0%
Energy consumption	million litre	1,998	1,938	2,056	2,003	1,982	1,954	1,970	1,796	1,776	1,547	1,495	1,447	1,450	-3.3%	-21.4%	-25.2%
Live weight of landings	thousand tonnes	4,100	4,313	4,305	4,206	4,545	4,437	3,984	3,892	3,523	3,428	3,334	3,205	3,020	-2.8%	-18.1%	-18.7%
Value of landings	million EUR	7,367	7,578	7,227	8,074	7,937	7,709	7,146	6,311	6,684	6,705	5,856	5,641	5,604	-12.7%	-19.5%	-20.5%

CHART 65
TOTAL LANDINGS
IN THE EU

Source: EUMOFA, based on EUROSTAT (online data code: [fish_ld_main](#)) and national sources' data. More details on the sources used can be found in the Methodological background. Values are deflated by using the GDP deflator (base=2020).

