

9 February 2022

Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
European Commission
1049 Brussels
Belgium

Object: Revision of EU Fisheries Control Regulation can make a big difference for biodiversity and climate if done right

Dear Members of the European Commission,

Almost half of all marine ecosystems have been seriously degraded by human activities, contributing to the enormous loss of marine biodiversity in what has been declared as “the 6th mass extinction”¹. In the EU, unsustainable and illegal fishing is the main driver of marine biodiversity loss. To add to this, the bycatch of sensitive species such as marine mammals (e.g. porpoises, dolphins and whales), sea turtles, seabirds, certain tropical tuna² and elasmobranchs (rays and sharks) is not taken seriously, despite these species being protected under EU and international law. The lack of effective fisheries and ocean governance seriously undermines the ability of the marine environment to mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts, leaving our seas in desperate need of help. All this has been acknowledged in the EU’s Biodiversity Strategy for 2030³. This urgency for action is also clear at the global level, with much attention raised in Glasgow at COP26 and at phase one of COP15 in Kunming. However, although these various initiatives and strategies sounds promising on paper, there is a stark disconnect between commitment and action.

A clear example is the approach to the revision of the EU Fisheries Control Regulation. The ongoing trilogue negotiations provide the opportunity to future-proof the EU’s fisheries control system for the years to come. It therefore must ensure that EU fisheries will be properly and sustainably managed with the aim to minimise environmental impact of fishing activities, and thus create more climate resilient and healthy marine ecosystems in line with the Biodiversity Strategy goals. We, civil society organisations, are calling on you to translate these ambitions into a sound revision of the Control Regulation which will make a difference for biodiversity and climate.

Several simple, effective, and financially viable solutions exist. If well implemented, they can strengthen the environmental sustainability of the EU fishing fleet, avoid the death of protected species, and contribute to a level playing field for EU fishers.

The undersigned NGOs call on you to **ensure that the revised EU Fisheries Control Regulation contributes to sustainable fisheries management that reduces the impact of fisheries on the marine environment and promotes the protection of species and ecosystems.** We urge you to:

- Ensure that **all catches are correctly reported** and taken into account. This means no increase in the so-called ‘margin of tolerance’ allowed when fishing operators estimate and report their catches. Sustainability of EU fisheries is only possible if scientists and decision makers actually

¹ Accelerated modern human-induced species losses: Entering the sixth mass extinction:

<https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.1400253>

² The EU purse seine fleet in the Indian Ocean: Legalising the misreporting of catches must not be the solution to a technical problem

³ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030_en

know what has been caught. Rewarding EU fleets that misreport catches of similar looking species because they use cheaper, yet unselective fishing practices is irresponsible and dangerous. Legalising misreporting of catches would be a massive driver of biodiversity loss, would undermine efforts to protect EU marine ecosystems and would see the EU lose its pioneering position and international credibility in fisheries management.

- Ensure that sufficient and robust fishing data are collected on board of all EU fishing vessels, including the recording of incidental catches of sensitive species. The revised Control Regulation should require the reporting of all bycatch in **electronic logbooks** on all EU vessels, including those fishing beyond EU waters. To be able to verify logbook data, **Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM)**, including CCTV cameras and net sensors, should be mandatory on all vessels above 12 metres in length as well as those vessels below 12 metres that are at high-risk of bycatching sensitive species and/or not complying with the Common Fisheries Policy⁴.
- Ensure that vessel tracking systems are installed on all EU fishing vessels, independently of their size. **Vessel tracking** plays an essential role in collecting environmental data and enforcing protection measures, including e.g. avoidance of protected areas, and is key for analysing the spatial vulnerability of sensitive species to fishing activities. It also contributes to safety at sea.
- Ensure that non-compliance with EU environmental legislation is considered a **serious infringement**, including fishing in areas that are closed for protection of species and habitats as well as failing to implement measures to reduce bycatch. This approach to non-compliance will further incentivise low impact fishing and deter environmentally destructive fishing within the EU.
- Ensure a **digital traceability system** covering all fish and seafood products available on the EU market (including preserved and/or processed products) which will promote transparency and sustainability of seafood not only within the EU but also in the global fisheries sector.

The climate and biodiversity crises are affecting each and every one of us. As the guardian of European treaties, citizens and civil society organisations count on you to fight for an ambitious, revised EU fisheries control system that fully protects the marine environment in line with EU environment and fisheries law, and that contributes to the success of the Biodiversity Strategy and of the European Green Deal.

We remain at your disposal if you wish to discuss this further or require any additional information.

With kind regards,



Monica Verbeek
Executive Director
Seas At Risk



Ariel Brunner
Senior Head of Policy
Birdlife Europe and Central Asia

On behalf of:

⁴ AT A GLANCE 2021, [Electronic technologies for fisheries: Systems adapted for small-scale vessels](#). Requested by the PECH committee

