CPMR Reaction

European Commission’s [Roadmap](#) for an Action plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems

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**In brief**

The European Commission has opened a public consultation on a [Roadmap for an Action Plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems](#). This initiative is one of the deliverables of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and is linked with the EU environmental legislation, notably the Birds, Habitats and Marine Strategy Framework Directives. It is connected with the Common Fisheries Policy and the [Technical Measures Regulation](#) (Regulation (EU) 2019/1241) which was adopted in 2019 and which sets methods to reduce the negative impacts of fisheries on sensitive species (prohibition of fishing gear, closure of areas, etc.) and sets a governance method to monitor the effectiveness of such measures.

This document displays the CPMR’s contribution to the consultation on the Roadmap for an Action Plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems, based on previous political declarations related to maritime affairs and fisheries.

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1. **On the added value of an Action Plan to reduce the impact of the fisheries sector on natural ecosystems**

   The CPMR

   - **Calls** on the EU to seize the enormous opportunity for sustainable development represented by seas and oceans and to make this a key element of its project for the future, as stated in CPMR Declaration in 2017. In this respect, we highlight the efforts made regarding the management of EU fish stocks at the Maximum Sustainable Yield, according to the European Commission’s Communication “Towards a more sustainable fishing in the EU” COM(2020) 248, in particular in the North Atlantic and adjacent areas, as well as in the Baltic Sea and the North Sea.
- **Recalls** that the fisheries activities are already regulated by a series of policies. Legal obligations exist for Member States to report the state of balance between fishing capacity and fishing possibilities. Article 22 of Regulation 1380/2013 requests Member States to submit an annual report on the balance between fishing capacity and fishing possibilities. Article 31 of the Technical Measures Regulation requires the Commission to publish a report every three years starting in 2020 on the implementation of the Technical Measures, and requesting non-compliant Member States to put in place a plan to effectively meet the objective of the Regulation within 12 months. The Control Regulation, currently under negotiation, will also further harmonise and increase the control of the fisheries activities.

- **Questions** thus the *added value of the new Action Plan compared to existing legislation*. Despite the fact that some of these regulations predate the new EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, which guides the development of the Action Plan, the CPMR fears a *duplication of existing measures*, which would complicate their implementation on the ground.

- **Calls** into question the decision taken by the EC to not go through an ex-ante impact assessment instead preferring to use the result of the report assessing the implementation of the Technical Measures Regulation. In this respect, the CPMR highlights that the European Commission should assess the socio-economic impacts of such a measure, especially in a post-Brexit and COVID-19 context, as fishing activities are a significant source of employment and social cohesion in many regions.

- **Shares the objective to progressively reduce bycatch**, notably targeted by the landing obligation measure of the Common Fisheries Policy, as stated in the CPMR Madeira Declaration of 2019.

- **Draws** however attention to the technical impossibility for the fishing sector to implement these measures in the short term, especially in the context of Brexit that impacts the sector. Therefore, CPMR **continues** to propose to **concentrate efforts on the selectivity of fishing gear**.

- **Welcomes** in this respect the new EMFAF and its contribution to more selective gear. **Questions** however whether the different timeframes to report on the balance of fishing capacity and fishing opportunities is adequate with the time needed to instruct an application for EMFAF grant, the signature of the convention, and the payment. The analysis on the state of the balance may not be accurate, as it does not take the results of the latest grants supporting the selectivity of fishing gears.

### 2. A comprehensive ecosystem-based approach to protect fisheries resources and the marine environment

The CPMR

- **Notes** that the Roadmap indicates that the Action Plan may only focus on the impact of the fisheries sector on biodiversity. However, the impact of pollution from plastics, or oil spills for example, or other sea-related activities on marine ecosystems should be monitored.
- **Expect**s the European Commission to facilitate a more global debate on the Action Plan including a variety of stakeholders at local and regional level to share concrete actions to conserve fisheries resources on the bases of existing best practices.

- **Stresses** that regional and local communities have the ability to bring together people from different backgrounds to achieve this eco-systemic approach to conserve coastal and maritime ecosystems. This facilitates the ownership at local level of decisions related to biodiversity conservation, while adapting them to the socio-economic needs of such local communities. These initiatives should be supported with financial, human and technical resources to increase the capacities of co-management bodies at European level.

- **Highlights** the importance of training the new generation of fishermen, for example via an improved links with European funds such as the European Social Fund +, to ensure the adoption of sustainable practices, the valorisation of catches and the diversification of activities, to enrich the economies of coastal areas, and to maintain the competitiveness of the processing sector.

### 3. Governance schemes for a comprehensive protection of fisheries resources

The CPMR

- **Draws attention** to the fact that protection of ecosystems will only be achieved through close coordination with users of the sea, including the EU external neighbourhood, as fisheries resources are not bound by borders.

- **Highlights** existing governance schemes which enable stakeholders’ involvement in the sustainable development of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, such as the Fisheries Local Actions Groups (FLAGs) which gather local private and public stakeholders, or the Advisory Councils, which are stakeholder-led organisations that provide the Commission and EU countries with recommendations on fisheries management matters.

- **Recalls** that the coastal, island and outermost regions of the EU, often interlinked with their external neighbourhoods, should play a key role in maritime governance, promoting sustainable fishing, combating illegal fishing and developing their communities through links with other economic sectors, such as tourism and culture.

- **Points out** that the Regions are still too little involved in the work of the Advisory Councils.
The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) represents more than 150 regional authorities from 24 countries across Europe and beyond. Organised in Geographical Commissions, the CPMR works to ensure that a balanced territorial development is at the heart of the European Union and its policies.

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