



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels,
C(2012) 7246 final

Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Senato della Repubblica for its Opinion on the proposal for a regulation on the Common Fisheries Policy {COM(2011) 425 final} and apologises for the long delay in replying.

The Commission would like to stress that the Proposal seeks to balance the different dimensions of sustainability. Healthy stocks and seas are a prerequisite for fisheries and for sustainable production of fish. This is why the Union puts emphasis on conservation strategies that would allow for exploitation rates that are maximized within environmental sustainability boundaries. Reaching Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) means optimizing the output with a long-term stock conservation perspective. Maximizing yields from fish stocks also implies maximizing returns economically and socially, including maximizing supplies of food to our citizens.

The Commission appreciates the recognition of the need to conserve the marine biological resources, including the target of reaching MSY. The Commission takes note of the Senate's views on our ambition with regard to the timeline for the necessary changes, both regarding reaching MSY and the elimination of discards. MSY is an obligation we have committed to long ago and time is running out. Progress is already clearly visible for a number of stocks. As for the Mediterranean, the lack of information should not become a reason for further delays. It is necessary to counteract and prevent overfishing while providing high long-term yields and maintaining, to the extent possible, the stocks size of harvested species at least at levels which can produce the MSY. In cases like the Mediterranean fisheries, which are highly mixed, we are working on intelligent and proportionate solutions regarding the target of MSY.

The Commission agrees that for the Mediterranean these efforts need to be developed in an international context. Retailers, restaurants and consumers also need to be responsible and no longer drive a market for juvenile fish. In order to do that the Commission is in the process of devising the adequate frameworks for multi-annual management, and we hope that discussions with Member States on the development of such frameworks will allow achieving this goal. On discards the Commission's proposal is ambitious but realistic. The practice of discards is environmentally unsustainable, and public opinion is quickly building up against it. This is a complex issue that requires a number of actions, including legislative changes, introduction of incentives, financial assistance and, in particular, strong efforts from fishermen to

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find practical solutions to avoid unwanted catches, which should build on good pilot-schemes that have already been initiated by fishermen. Already existing obligations to avoid undersize specimens of several species provide a good stimulus for improved selectivity. Furthermore, the landing obligation will be a drive for change in this context. The Commission is open to cater for specific problems related to the discards policy, especially for certain fisheries.

The Commission takes good note of the concerns expressed by the Senate on transferable fishing concessions (TFC). The current CFP has failed to resolve the problem of over-capacity, however, and the Commission proposal draws on the positive experience of a number of Member States, with TFC-like systems.

The Commission agrees with the Senate on the importance of small-scale fishing and of the coastal fishing sector. The Commission underlines that conservation is as important for small-scale coastal fleets as it is for other fleet segments – in particular taking into account the vulnerability of coastal areas.

However, in other areas we envisage policy elements that would strengthen the small-scale fishing and coastal fishing sector. Notably the proposal for the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund provides for specific measures in support of small-scale fleets. As for the definition of small-scale fleets, the Commission has proposed the continued use of the currently applicable definition. Consultations carried out in preparation of the proposal have shown on the one hand that a wide variety of definitions is possible (and advocated throughout the Union), but that it is virtually impossible to reach agreement with stakeholders on one single definition that is simple and allows for adequate application and control. Therefore, and to ensure a level playing field, the current definition is maintained. The proposal for the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund also sets out that there would be support for the implementation of the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy and the transition to sustainable fishing and reduction of impacts on the ecosystem, which would also include the need for improved scientific information. We will invest in economic potential and growth, both in aquaculture and in support of coastal fishing communities. Analysis has confirmed that costly funding of schemes for decommissioning, replacement of vessel engines and support of temporary cessation have not had the desired effect on the fleet (over-)capacity. In light of the limited availability of resources, it is proposed that these provisions be eliminated, and that there should be a focus on innovation, selectivity, reduction of discards and diversification of jobs within and beyond the fisheries sector.

The Commission hopes that these explanations address the main concerns raised in your Opinion and looks forward to continuing our political dialogue.

Yours faithfully,

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Vice-President*