



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Senato della Repubblica for its Opinion relating to the Commission's communication concerning a consultation on Fishing Opportunities for 2015 under the Common Fisheries Policy {COM(2014) 388 final} which described the basic principles for setting fishing opportunities in the proposal for a Council Regulation fixing for 2015 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks, applicable in Union waters and, for Union vessels, in certain non-Union waters and repealing Council Regulation (EU) No 779/2014 {COM(2014) 670 final}, which was adopted by the Council on 19 January 2015.

As the Senato della Repubblica notes there is a clear need to have complete and updated data concerning the catches of commercial species to be consistent with the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) objective established in the Regulation on the new Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The Commission, as in previous years, based its proposal on the best available biological advice, and aims at the long-term sustainability of the fisheries concerned. For many important commercial stocks, advice allows the Commission to propose total allowable catches (TACs) in line with the objective of the new CFP to manage stocks at the level which ensures MSY. For so-called data limited stocks, the quality of the advice is also improving. For MSY stocks, the Commission proposal aimed to achieve Fishing mortality providing Maximum Sustainable Yield (FMSY) in 2015. For data limited stocks, the Commission applied the advice on a case-by-case basis – moving in the direction of the advice. This precautionary approach is still based on science.

In making its proposal, the Commission takes into account the potential adverse socio-economic impact of significant cuts to TACs. At the same time, a long-term perspective and the health of the stock are important considerations as well. Both biological considerations and socio-economic impacts were at the heart of the discussions about key stocks during the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 15 and 16 December 2014. At the same time, the Commission expects the Member States concerned to provide concrete proof of adverse socio-economic impacts. Indeed, the CFP Regulation states in recital 7 that achieving MSY exploitation levels after 2015 "should be allowed only if achieving them by 2015 would

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seriously jeopardise the social and economic sustainability of the fishing fleets involved"¹. For several of the stocks mentioned in the Opinion, the reductions agreed by the Council were considerably reduced. In the case of the TACs jointly agreed with third countries such as Norway, a good outcome was achieved during the Council meeting in December 2014 for some stocks, whereas other negotiations are continuing into 2015. As in the past, the Commission aims to achieve an outcome that is sustainable and positive for our fishermen.

The Commission believes that the final outcome of the Council negotiations on the Commission's proposal for Fishing Opportunities for 2015 reflects a responsible decision by Council that takes into account the science behind the Commission proposal and is in line with the sustainability objectives of the new CFP.

In this regard, the Commission agrees with the Senato della Repubblica as to the importance of continuing and further strengthening cooperation with Member States' scientific entities and structures, inter alia through the works carried out by the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries.

With regard to the outcome of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) on the allocation of quotas for bluefin tuna, the Commission would like to confirm that the allocation of the fishing opportunities to each fishing sector within each Member State, while being governed by ICCAT provisions (capacity limits, capture rates for the various types of vessels), remains a national competence.

The Commission notes the statement of the Senato della Repubblica concerning the need to strengthen the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises to achieve sustainable fishing models. Small-scale coastal fisheries – a core segment of the EU fishing fleet of high economic and social importance in the Mediterranean – have been placed centre stage by the newly reformed CFP. The Commission will continue to work with the industry, notably through the Advisory Councils.

Further to the recent political agreement on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), in Member States possessing over 1,000 small vessels, an action plan for the development, competitiveness and sustainability of this segment shall be included in their EMFF Operational Programme, providing for specific measures and actions to be taken.

The EMFF provides a wide range of alternative growth potential for small-scale coastal fisheries including incentives for the diversification of fishermen's activities and the creation of new forms of income from complementary activities (for example fishing tourism, restaurants, environmental services and educational activities on fishing) as well as support to innovative on-board investments improving quality and adding value to fisheries products, in particular by allowing fishermen to carry out the processing, marketing and direct sale of their own catches.

1 Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1954/2003 and (EC) No 1224/2009 and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 2371/2002 and (EC) No 639/2004 and Council Decision 2004/585/EC.

In the framework of the support to community-led local development, incentives can be provided for the creation of jobs, life-long learning, promotion of social well-being and cultural heritage in fisheries areas as well as strengthening the role of fisheries communities in the governance of local fisheries resources and maritime activities.

The Commission agrees with the Senato della Repubblica as to the need to act in close cooperation with the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) in order to ensure, to the extent possible, a level playing field with the countries of the Southern borders of the Mediterranean Sea. To this end, at international level, in coherence with the provisions of the new CFP and as a Member of the GFCM, the EU is fully committed to act, inter alia, within the GFCM with the aim of adopting the appropriate measures to ensure compliance with its recommendations to deter and eradicate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activities. This objective has been included in the text of the Amended GFCM Agreement which was negotiated and endorsed by the Contracting Parties during the plenary meeting in May 2014 (Article 5, point f of the Amended agreement, which is currently in its ratification process).

The Commission hopes that these elements clarify and address the issues raised by the Senato della Repubblica and looks forward to continuing our political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*

*Karmenu Vella
Member of the Commission*