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SCIAENA  
Associação de Ciências Marinhas e Cooperação



To: Mr. Virginijus Sinkevičius, European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries

Copy: Director General Charlina Vitcheva, Acting Director Maja Kirchner, Members of PECH Committee

Brussels, 12 May 2021

Dear Commissioner Sinkevičius,

We are writing to you because last Monday 10 May, the European Commission representative attending [the Fisheries Committee](#) stated that “when you as consumers go to your local fishmonger or retailer, and you choose a certain fish, you have a 99% chance that the fish you have bought on that day actually comes from a sustainable source”. This statement is not only misleading, but far from the truth and represents a hurdle on the path to improving the sustainability of fisheries in the EU. How can we ever end overfishing if the Commission acts like this has already been achieved, when according to the STECF the progress is too slow or in some cases even regressing?

This is not the first time NGOs are asking the Commission to stop using the 99% bulk figure to report on progress towards ending overfishing. As explained in more detail [in this briefing](#) and highlighted [in this video](#), this statistic is extremely misleading since it focuses on the volume of landings rather than the number of stocks as required by the CFP, excludes numerous stocks for which MSY-based scientific advice is not available and it only takes into account those stocks that are managed through Total Allowable Catches and fished by the EU alone. Conflating this landings figure with marketing figures is even more misleading.

In practical terms this means that a lot of weight is given to a few stocks which account for the bulk of landings, while others, in many cases depleted stocks primarily taken as bycatch and/or stocks without MSY-based advice, are ignored.

It is even more stunning as the Commission representative was commenting on the [most recent STECF report](#) which clearly shows that 43% of the assessed North East Atlantic fish stocks and 83% in the Mediterranean are overfished based on the most recent data available. More concerning is the conclusion that despite the overall long-term progress, some aspects have gone backwards in the most recent year (2019), especially in the North Sea, Baltic and stocks outside EU waters. In fact, the number of stocks outside safe biological limits (17) for 2019 is the same as in 2013 when the reform of the CFP was agreed. The misleading 99% figure repeatedly used by the Commission is in stark contrast to this situation.

The Commission’s annual communication on the state of the policy and fish stocks in June is a good opportunity to rectify such misleading statements and highlight that more action is overdue to finally end overfishing.

If the Commission is serious about meeting the objectives set out in the European Green Deal and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, it needs to eliminate the threat that overfishing poses to the health of the ocean. This can only be done by accepting scientific assessments that tell us more efforts are needed and not by pretending that the progress made to date is enough.

This letter will be published online.

Rebecca Hubbard, Program Director, Our Fish

On behalf of: ClientEarth, Seas At Risk, Dutch Elasmobranch Society, Sciaena, Oceana, and Birdwatch Ireland.