



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels  
MARE.D.3/ER (2021)

Dear petitioner,

Thank you for the interest you have expressed in protecting the ocean by urging the European Commission, the European Parliament and the EU Member States to take action to prevent and reverse the nature and climate crisis by ending destructive overfishing, and supporting a just transition to ecosystem-based fisheries management. We take your concerns very seriously.

Sustainable fisheries, delivered through the Common Fisheries Policy, are necessary for increasing resilience and delivering the European Green Deal, in particular the Farm-to-Fork and EU Biodiversity Strategies. In addition to increasing the effective management and coverage of (new) marine protected areas for safeguarding biodiversity and the health of marine ecosystems, the full implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy<sup>1</sup> (CFP) will lead to sustainable fisheries and sustainable food supplies for coastal communities.

More specifically, the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy aims at the protection and restoration of marine and coastal ecosystems, ensuring that the state of the marine environment improves. The European Union, its Institutions and Member States, attach great importance to this topic. Seas and oceans are some of our most valuable resources, in environmental, economic and social terms. The CFP is an instrument that helps achieve a balance between these areas, and balancing the targets of sustainable ecosystems and sector profitability is exactly the approach promoted under the European Green Deal. The CFP is based on the idea of sustainability – sustainable use, sustainable management and sustainable growth, all of which are necessary for increasing resilience and delivering the European Green Deal. As announced in the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, and explicitly referred to by the European Parliaments' resolution, a new action plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems is foreseen for the beginning of next year. It will look into possible measures to limit, where necessary, the use of fishing gear most harmful to biodiversity, including on the seabed.

The Commission continues to monitor the progress made and strives to make further progress where possible. Let me underline that in the December 2020 Council and the Commission managed to achieve an important increase in the number of total allowable catches (TACs) set in line with precautionary advice. I am referring to TACs managed by the EU on its own. The figures improved as compared to previous years. For the Skagerrak and the Atlantic, almost half of the TACs<sup>2</sup> are set in line with precautionary advice issued by the International Council for Exploration of the Sea (ICES). In the

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<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy

<sup>2</sup> 6 out of 13 TACs

Baltic, the majority<sup>3</sup> of the precautionary TACs are set in line with scientific advice, while Eastern Baltic cod has been subject to an unavoidable bycatch allowance in line with scientific advice and recovery measures. For deep-sea species, the majority<sup>4</sup> of the TACs have been set in line with scientific advice and deep-sea sharks have remained prohibited to fishing.

At international level, including in the many Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) it is a member of, the EU also actively supports putting an end to overfishing. For example, at the recent meeting of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, the EU was instrumental in finding an agreement on yellowfin tuna, a stock overfished and subject to overfishing. In doing so, the EU has accepted a further reduction of 6% in its catches, summing up to a total reduction of 21% compared to our 2014 catch levels. As such, the EU is the main contributor to the catch reduction scheme in the Indian Ocean.

In closing, let me refer to the recently adopted European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund<sup>5</sup> (2021-2027), which is the main financial instrument supporting the delivery of the main goals of the CFP. The fund provides financial support for developing innovative projects ensuring that aquatic and marine resources are used sustainably and help to achieve sustainable fisheries and conserve marine biological resources. Linked with the important matters raised in your petition, the fund fosters sustainable fishing activities in the long term promoting low-impact and selective fishing techniques, and it can be used to reduce the carbon footprint of fisheries and aquaculture.

We will continue to work and take action on this important matter of sustainability – an integral part of the CFP. It is of utmost importance that all stakeholders participate in this endeavour. Your active voice and contribution is of the essence and much appreciated, now but also in the future!

Yours sincerely,

Charlina VITCHEVA

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<sup>3</sup> 3 out of 4 TACs

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<sup>5</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/1004