



European Parliament takes a decisive step to improve fisheries management in the Mediterranean

-For immediate release-

Yesterday, the European Parliament Committee on Fisheries adopted its position on the European Commission proposal establishing a new multiannual management plan of demersal fisheries in the Western Mediterranean that affects the fleets, mainly trawlers, from Italy, France and Spain. Europêche welcomes the positive step forward towards the final adoption of this legislative proposal which, in the context of regionalisation, will provide more stability and bring decision-making closer to fishermen and coastal communities. While welcoming the general results of yesterday's vote, there are two main issues that still trouble the European fishing industry: the introduction of a severe trawl restriction and the harsh reduction of the activity at sea from the first year of implementation of the new rules. These measures can undermine the efforts made so far and the viability of the Mediterranean fleets, who have already suffered a considerable decline in the number of fishing vessels and jobs in recent years.

The Parliament's position builds on the Commission's proposal which aims at ensuring that fishing activities are environmentally sustainable in the long term. The Fisheries Committee has positively put special emphasis on the need to achieve socio-economic and employment benefits.

The Mediterranean Sea counts with twenty two coastal countries, of which only eight belong to the EU. In the area covered by the management plan, non-EU fleets represent 30.3% of the total bottom trawling fleet, having a direct impact on the state of the fish stocks. Europeche stresses that the EU should seek consistency with the measures approved by the international community within the framework of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM). For that reason alone, Europêche applauds the Committee's rejection of the Commission's attempt to introduce management measures based on total allowable catches (TACs); which would not work under this management plan.

In addition, the Fisheries Committee has granted a certain degree of flexibility to the Commission's proposal to ban the use of trawl nets at depths above 100m for three months each year by taking into account geographical and scientific factors. The fishing body stresses, however, that there is no need for such a prohibition since there are already sufficient guarantees in the EU and in national law to prevent trawling from being used on vulnerable grounds. Likewise, the proposed ban would *de facto* translate into the impossibility to fish for many trawlers, particularly smaller ones which cannot operate in deeper waters due to safety hazards. Instead, Europêche favours establishing specific closed areas, duly justified from a scientific point of view, such as those already proposed by the fishing sector itself in several EU countries.

Javier Garat, President of Europêche, declared: *"We are convinced the Fisheries Committee has delivered an important contribution towards better conservation and sustainable exploitation of demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean. Fishermen believe that there is still room for improvement and further flexibility in order to adapt the plan to the Mediterranean specificities. Particularly, the introduction of restrictions on the fishing activity and fishing gear bans would put in jeopardy not only entire fishing communities but also the ports, auctions and ancillary industries*

depending on the daily fresh landings provided by our fishers. Small-scale bottom trawlers are one of the main food suppliers in the Mediterranean. Therefore, if trawlers are to stop fishing activities for three months each year, these sectors will be deeply affected and consumers will certainly feel the repercussions.”

Mr Garat concluded: *“On a more positive note, the sacrifices and efforts made by our fishermen are already paying off. According to GFCM, overexploitation of fish stocks in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea dropped from 88% in 2014 to 78% in 2016. This is an encouraging trend that we believe is even more positive nowadays.”*

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Press contacts:

Daniel Voces, Managing Director of Europe che: +32 2 230 48 48 daniel.voces@europeche.org