

Fishermen reject further fishing effort cuts in the Mediterranean for 2021

-For immediate release-

Last year the EU adopted a Multiannual Management Plan (MAP) of demersal fisheries in the Western Mediterranean that regulates the fleets, mainly trawlers, from Italy, France and Spain. Back then, the sector criticised the introduction of severe spatial-seasonal trawl closures and the harsh reduction of the activity at sea from the first year of implementation of the new rules. The fishing industry strictly complied with these measures even though undermined the viability of the Mediterranean fleets. Fishermen, now facing the consequences of the COVID-19, fear further cuts which would lead to a considerable decline in the number of fishing vessels, jobs and fish supply.

The pioneering Mediterranean MAP regulates key demersal fish stocks through a fishing effort regime combined with closure areas. EU legislators also agreed that Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) levels shall be achieved on a progressive basis by 2025 in consideration of the socio-economic impact a faster achievement may have.

The sector recalls that an effective implementation of the MAP requires better understanding the state of demersal stocks, including juveniles and spawners. For that reason, Europêche reminds that before proposing further measures or even considering fishing effort cuts, it is fundamental to assess the effects of the restrictions recently put in place by the Mediterranean MAP.

The sector also alerts on the socio-economic consequences of the second COVID-19 wave. According to Europêche, the pandemic is putting to the test European economies that see once again in many countries the closure of HORECA channels, lack of tourism, extremely low fish prices and health problems. This is causing a major impact in the income of fishermen and it does not seem likely to improve in the short or medium-term, particularly in the Mediterranean.

Under these exceptional circumstances, Europêche calls on the European Commission to be sensitive and as flexible as possible in the implementation of the newly adopted MAP in a way that does not aggravate the socio-economic consequences caused by this pandemic.

Daniel Voces, Managing Director of Europêche, declared: *“The sector scrupulously complied with the area closures and the target of reducing fishing effort by 10 % during the first year of implementation of the plan. Certain trawl fleets in Spain even reached reduction levels above 20%. Now, we hear that the European Commission is considering to further cut fishing effort in 2021 for EU trawlers operating in the Western Mediterranean by 15%, disregarding the flexibility to achieve MSY levels by 2025. This would definitely put a final nail in the coffin of many fishermen in the Mediterranean. Our fishermen more than ever need to keep working to overcome the catastrophic socio-economic consequences brought about by this horrible pandemic.”*

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