











Procedure file

Basic information		
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2019/2160(INI)	Procedure completed
The impact on fisheries of marine litter		
Subject		
3.15.04 Management of fisheries, fisheries, fishing grounds		
3.15.06 Fishing industry and statistics, fishery products		
3.70.05 Marine and coastal pollution, pollution from ships, oil pollution		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	 Fisheries	 CHABAUD Catherine	09/01/2020
		Shadow rapporteur	
		 MONTEIRO DE AGUIAR Cláudia	
		 BARTOLO Pietro	
		 GUERREIRO Francisco	
		 CONTE Rosanna	
		 STANCANELLI Raffaele	
		 HAZEKAMP Anja	
European Commission	Commission DG	Commissioner	
	Maritime Affairs and Fisheries	SINKEVIČIUS Virginijus	

Key events			
19/12/2019	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
22/02/2021	Vote in committee		
03/03/2021	Committee report tabled for plenary	A9-0030/2021	Summary
24/03/2021	Debate in Parliament		
25/03/2021	Results of vote in Parliament		
25/03/2021	Decision by Parliament	T9-0096/2021	Summary
25/03/2021	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2019/2160(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 54
Other legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 159
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	PECH/9/01968

Documentation gateway					
Committee draft report		PE658.857	06/10/2020	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE660.312	13/11/2020	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A9-0030/2021	03/03/2021	EP	Summary
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T9-0096/2021	25/03/2021	EP	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		SP(2021)345	03/08/2021	EC	

The impact on fisheries of marine litter

The Committee on Fisheries adopted the own-initiative report by Catherine CHABAUD (Renew Europe, FR) on the impact on fisheries of marine litter.

Marine waste means all waste that has entered the marine environment, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and is identified by size (nano-, micro- and mega-waste) and nature (containers, bulky waste lying on the ocean floor, plastics, fishing gear, wrecks of semi-sunken vessels, hazardous waste such as explosives and other war debris, textile fibres, microplastics, etc.). 70 % of the marine litter that enters the sea ends up on the seabed and the cumulative mass of waste floating on the surface accounts for only 1 % of plastic in the ocean.

Improving the legislative framework and governance on marine litter

Members stressed the need to revise the EUs integrated maritime policy with a view to establishing a more strategic framework, including on marine litter, that incorporates all waste and marine environment laws. In addition, they stressed the need to improve the European legislative framework to reduce financial costs for fishers who accidentally catch marine litter when fishing and to avoid presenting them with an excessive bureaucratic burden.

In order to improve and enhance the effectiveness of the legislative framework and governance relating to the collection, disposal and recycling of marine waste, the report stressed that it is essential to promote the greater involvement of all those working in the fishing sector and to broaden the existing awareness-raising, prevention and training projects with a view to ensuring the continuous exchange of information in order to support the preparation and updating of the relevant rules.

Improving research and knowledge on marine waste

The shortage of available data and studies make it difficult to quantify the exact extent to which damage caused by marine litter is affecting the fisheries sector and its negative economic consequences for fishers. The Commission and the Member States are called to step up research finance and data collection on the amount and various types of litter in European waters and its impact on fisheries, aquaculture and ecosystems and to propose robust measures to address and prevent the impact of nano- and microplastics on both fishery resources and human health.

The report called for improved reporting on the loss of fishing gear at sea.

Circular economy in the fisheries and aquaculture sector

The report stressed that reducing the impact of marine waste is contingent on improvements to the circular economy on land, including phasing out unnecessary plastic and packaging and transforming waste into resources, and on the adoption of a life-cycle approach in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. In order to accelerate the development of the circular economy in the fishing and aquaculture sector, it is essential to plan future legislative solutions to the problem of marine waste collection and disposal in conjunction with the European Green Deal. Member States should swiftly follow up on the setting of national minimum collection rates for fishing gear containing plastic, as agreed to in the directive on single-use plastics.

Members called on the Commission to create a specific fund to support Member States that establish production chains for recycled and environmentally friendly gear, using resources such as those under the NextGenerationEU instrument and from tax penalties imposed following infringement proceedings against Member States.

Collection and management programmes for marine waste

The report called for the drawing up an EU-level action plan to combat littering in the EU's hydrosphere by reducing waste at its source, cutting down on plastic use and consumption. It urged Member States and regions to collect data on, monitor and take action to address the issue of poor management of waste on land, to clear up hotspot areas in rivers and estuaries where marine waste has accumulated and to introduce measures to prevent marine waste from reaching the environment in the first place. Members urged the allocation of sufficient funding to clean up all types of plastic-derived pollutants.

Members stressed that fishers should be adequately trained on how to handle marine waste properly during collection, landing, disposal and delivery for recycling in order to minimise the health and safety risks.

Member States are urged, in this regard, to establish a special fund for cleaning the seas, managed through the new European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) or other relevant budget lines, in order to finance the following actions: (1) the collection at sea by fishers of marine litter, (2) the provision of adequate on-board waste storage facilities and the monitoring of passively fished litter, (3) improvements in operator training, (4) the financing of the costs of both waste treatment and the personnel required for the operation of such programmes to avoid the increase in costs for fishers who participate voluntarily, and (5) investments in ports so that appropriate reception and storage facilities can be provided for the lost fishing gear and marine waste collected.

The impact on fisheries of marine litter

The European Parliament adopted by 646 votes to 3 against, with 39 abstentions, a resolution on the impact on fisheries of marine litter.

The marine litter visible on beaches, coasts, shorelines and at the surface comes mainly from activities on land (80%), but also from activities at sea due to a significant increase in transport by large non-fishing vessels. 70% of the litter thrown into the sea ends up on the seabed, with the cumulative mass of litter floating on the surface representing only 1% of plastic dumped in the ocean. 730 tonnes of litter are dumped in the Mediterranean Sea every day.

Improving the legislative framework and governance on marine litter

Members stressed the need to revise the EU's integrated maritime policy with a view to establishing a more strategic framework, including on marine litter, that incorporates all waste and marine environment laws.

The Commission and Member States are invited to:

- advocate an ambitious governance model in international UN negotiations on marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions and recognise all oceans and seas as a global common good;
- coordinate efforts to adopt an ambitious and legally binding agreement on plastic pollution at the UN Environment Assembly;
- coordinate different pieces of legislation such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the directive on the reduction of the environmental impact of certain plastic products, the Directive on port reception facilities and the Directive on maritime planning, all within the same timeframe;
- adopt the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Voluntary Guidelines on Marking of Fishing Gear to promote responsible management of fishing gear with a view to achieving a reduction in abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear.

Improving research and knowledge on marine waste

The shortage of available data and studies make it difficult to quantify the exact extent to which damage caused by marine litter is affecting the fisheries sector and its negative economic consequences for fishers. The Commission and the Member States are called to step up research finance and data collection on the amount and various types of litter in European waters and its impact on fisheries, aquaculture and ecosystems and to propose robust measures to address and prevent the impact of nano- and microplastics on both fishery resources and human health.

The resolution called for better reporting of lost fishing gear at sea and suggests developing new tools for identifying and tracking lost fishing gear at sea and recording data on marine litter.

The circular economy in the fisheries and aquaculture sector

The resolution stressed that the development of the circular economy in the fisheries sector must include increased support for research into solutions, smart design of fishing gear and innovation in fishing and aquaculture techniques to limit the discharge of waste, enhance the attractiveness of collection operations and the development of efficient recycling channels.

Parliament called for the eco-design of fishing gear to be supported as well as the promotion of research and innovation seeking to find alternative and environmentally friendly materials to use in fishing gear, including polymers. Member States should swiftly follow up on the setting of national minimum collection rates for fishing gear containing plastic, as agreed to in the directive on single-use plastics.

Members called on the Commission to create a specific fund to support Member States that establish production chains for recycled and environmentally friendly gear, using resources such as those under the NextGenerationEU instrument and from tax penalties imposed following infringement proceedings against Member States.

Collection and management programmes for marine waste

Parliament called on the Commission to draw up an EU-level action plan to combat littering in the Union's hydrosphere by reducing waste at its source, cutting down on plastic use and consumption, and tackling the pollution of rivers, water courses and coastlines due to littering.

The upgrading of wastewater treatment plants and sewage systems is also imperative to reduce the impact on aquaculture and the marine and coastal environment in general. Members called for sufficient resources to be devoted to cleaning up all types of polluting materials derived from plastics.

Member States are urged, in this regard, to establish a special fund for cleaning the seas, managed through the new European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) or other relevant budget lines, in order to finance the following actions:

- (1) the collection at sea by fishers of marine litter,
- (2) the provision of adequate on-board waste storage facilities and the monitoring of passively fished litter,
- (3) improvements in operator training,
- (4) the financing of the costs of both waste treatment and the personnel required for the operation of such programmes to avoid the increase in costs for fishers who participate voluntarily,
- (5) investments in ports so that appropriate reception and storage facilities can be provided for the lost fishing gear and marine waste collected.

Lastly, Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to promote awareness-raising campaigns on the issue of marine pollution from plastic and microplastic.