**Follow-up to the European Parliament non-legislative resolution
Towards a sustainable blue economy in the EU: the role of fisheries and aquaculture**

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**2. Reference number:** 2021/2188 (INI)/A9-0089/2022/P9\_TA(2022)0135

**3. Date of adoption of the resolution:** 03 May 2022

**4. Competent Parliamentary Committee:** Committee on Fisheries (PECH)

**5. Brief analysis/assessment of the resolution and requests made in it:**

The resolution is a policy response to the Commission Communication “[A Green Recovery for the Blue Economy – Transforming the EU's Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future](https://ec.europa.eu/oceans-and-fisheries/ocean/blue-economy/sustainable-blue-economy_en)” of 17 May 2021. It addresses all aspects of the blue economy in coastal areas, but also touches upon issues beyond the scope of the Commission Communication.

The resolution contains numerous calls on the Commission for ambitious action in a wide range of policy areas. This includes sustainable fisheries, where the resolution calls for support for small-scale and more selective fisheries as well as for more sustainable fisheries in Western Africa and restrictions to bottom trawling. Other areas dealt with are maritime tourism, the energy sector, extractive activities and research. The resolution sets high ambitions on climate mitigation, marine litter and marine protected areas.

**6. Response to requests and overview of action taken, or intended to be taken, by the Commission:**

The Commission welcomes the Parliament’s resolution and agrees with most of its findings.

In line with the findings of the resolution, the Commission underlines that the EU has shifted over the years from “blue growth” to “sustainable blue economy”, a concept which has the sustainable use of our marine resources at its centre. Indeed, all maritime activities are dependent upon the natural capital held in Europe’s seas. In parallel, human activities exert multiple pressures on the marine environment and its ecosystems, and cause them a range of widespread impacts. Therefore, the Commission Communication on sustainable blue economy aimed to address all those challenges and ‘put blue into the green’.

The Commission concurs with the resolution on an inter-sectoral approach for the blue economy (paragraph 2) and therefore agrees that the sustainable blue economy in the EU as a driver of economic growth should address Atlantic, Mediterranean, Black Sea, North and Baltic Seas as well as Outermost Regions, supporting all sectoral and intersectoral activities related to oceans, seas and coastal areas on a sea basin and macro-regional level.

The Commission agrees that new projects and instruments are needed for all blue economy stakeholders (paragraph 11). The Commission believes that new technologies, innovation and digitalisation will boost the green transition of the blue economy, also for those sectors considered ‘established’, such as fisheries and aquaculture. However, in order to fully realise this potential, significant investments in innovation are needed in our coastal regions, including the outermost regions. To that end, the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund with a total budget of EUR 6.1 billion, will contribute to the horizontal priorities of resilience, green and digital transition by supporting innovative projects. In addition, there are other key funding sources put in place to support the sustainable blue economy: the other EU structural and investment funds, the BlueInvest scheme together with its scale-up the BlueInvest pilot fund, the new InvestEU Blue Economy instrument as well as the new dedicated financial instrument established together with the European Investment Fund.

On the issue of fisheries and other upcoming economic stakeholders in the blue economy (paragraph 83), the Commission will set up a moderated “blue forum of sea users”, open for all stakeholders, and which will have the objective to coordinate a dialogue between offshore operators, stakeholders and scientists engaged in fisheries, aquaculture, shipping, tourism, renewable energy and other activities. It will develop synergies between their activities and reconcile competing uses of the sea. This approach was already announced in the Commission Communication “[A Green Recovery for the Blue Economy – Transforming the EU's Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future](https://ec.europa.eu/oceans-and-fisheries/ocean/blue-economy/sustainable-blue-economy_en)”.

On marine tourism (paragraphs 77, 80, 84 and 131), the Commission aims to develop new forms of sustainable maritime and coastal tourism, boost new forms of tourism activities, focusing also on enhancing maritime cooperation. In cross-border areas, such as in coastal and insular communities, it could be beneficial to develop a comprehensive strategy at a sea basin or at a macro-regional level, aligned with the existing initiatives that should be the case also for the outermost regions. Under the concept of the New Approach for a Sustainable Blue Economy in the EU, the Commission aims to encourage and support stakeholders to create skills partnerships under the Pact for Skills in the industrial ecosystems relevant for the sustainable blue economy. Under the European Maritime, Aquaculture and Fisheries Fund, a new call for proposals on blue careers and a specific call for proposals on women are aiming at increasing women’s representation in the workforce and raising their profile in the formal governance of the blue economy. The Commission is promoting interregional innovative partnerships for diversified tourism products, alternative forms of tourism and smart business models in the concept of Smart Specialization Strategies and interregional innovative partnerships.

The Commission agrees that priority projects on the trans-European transport network should be completed in time (paragraphs 51 and 52). All ports are cross-border points and gateways for trade. It is crucial that ports are well connected to the hinterland, and that congestion is prevented both inside and outside of ports. This has been addressed extensively in the proposal for a new Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Regulation with the establishing of the European Maritime Space as the maritime dimension of the TEN-T. The greenhouse gas emissions from the EU transport sector have increased and represent 25% of the total EU emissions. While the European Green Deal calls for a 90% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from transport until 2050, the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy of the Commission sets specific targets for the sector. Short sea shipping shall increase with 25% by 2030 and with 50% by 2050 (in comparison to 2015). An increase in short sea shipping will help to reduce congestion on the roads, and that will in turn reduce the emissions from the transport sector. Therefore, the Commission has proposed to facilitate financial support for maritime transport projects. For instance by allowing ports on the comprehensive network to become eligible for co-funding from the Connecting Europe Facility when establishing short sea connections, without necessarily including core network ports. Furthermore, the Commission has proposed to make projects where domestic maritime links are established eligible for co-funding. The Commission agrees that ports can be used to boost the blue economy, and that ports play vital roles in the international supply chains. This became evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, during the blockage of the Suez Canal in 2021 and during the ongoing war in Ukraine. Ports are transitioning into becoming energy hubs and industrial clusters. It is therefore important to ensure that their connectivity to the rest of the European transport network is effective and efficient. The European co-funding of transport infrastructure is an important component in the realization of the core and comprehensive networks. Reallocation of available funds to maritime transport is however subject to negotiations and agreement between the Commission and the Member States.

On deep sea mining (paragraph 120), indeed, marine minerals in the Area as defined by Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea cannot be exploited before the effects of deep-sea mining on the marine environment, biodiversity and human activities have been sufficiently researched, the risks are understood and technologies and operational practices are able to demonstrate that there is no serious harm to the environment, in line with the precautionary principle.

On fisheries and in particular the rights of third country nationals (paragraph 24), the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation aims to provide a “fair standard of living for people who depend on fishing activities”. The main international instrument on work in fishing is the ILO (International Labour Organisation Work in Fishing Convention C188. The Commission is working towards the improvement of the rights and conditions of all those working in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors through engagement with the social partners and following up on the compliance of the transposition of the Convention into the national legal orders.

The Commission agrees with EU level discussions on fishing capacity (paragraph 91) and therefore supports EU-wide discussion with representatives of the fishing sector by facilitating meetings of the social dialogue committee three times per year and financing joint projects. Member States have the power to regulate the allocation of fishing capacity within their sector. The rules on fishing capacity ensure that marine biological resources are not being overexploited by a fleet with an excessive capacity. In 2019, the Commission concluded in an evaluation that the entry/ exit scheme, which forms part of these rules, is fit for purpose as an instrument to prevent fishing capacity from increasing. On the issue of gross tonnage related to fishing capacity (paragraph 127), it needs to be highlighted that many Member States have additional capacity at their disposal that could be used to increase the capacity of vessels to improve safety, living and working conditions or for the installation of more energy efficient propulsion systems which may require more space (such as liquefied natural gas - LNG). The European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) includes financial support for these type of improvements, and the rules allow it. The Commission encourages Member States to consider allocating available capacity at national level to facilitate such improvements.

As called for in the resolution (paragraph 137), the Commission actively supports and promotes the activities of Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGS). These activities are representative of the community and their traditions which are maintained through the employment generated by local fisheries and aquaculture businesses. The Commission has maintained a support unit financed under the European Maritime Fisheries and Fund (EMFF), and subsequently the EMFAF that provides dedicated administrative and networking support to the FLAGS across the EU to help their local communities flourish.

Regarding the support for small-scale fisheries (paragraph 113), the Commission is working with the Member States to ensure that each programme of the EMFAF places an appropriate emphasis on reducing environmental impacts, making gears more selective, and enabling the green and digital transitions of the sector to deliver a more modern and resilient sector over the next decade.

In line with paragraph 56 and through the support provided by the EMFAF, the Commission and the Member States promote the sustainability of the entire fisheries product supply chain, from the fisher or farmer all the way through to the consumer. The social and economic sustainability of the livelihoods of the fishers, farmers, processors, vendors, and their communities are all supported at the level of skills and knowledge building, networking, diversification and value adding. The viability of the community and supply chain are dependent on the environmental sustainability of the fisheries resources. This is supported by incentivising structural changes to continuously improve the ways fishing and farming is conducted, and to build a strong scientific base on which decisions can be taken with greater certainty, facilitating the reduction of administrative burden.

The Commission fully agrees with the concept of sustainability indicators (paragraph 105) and has therefore launched work with its scientific, technical and economic committee (STECF) to develop sustainability indicators for wild fisheries and aquaculture. The indicators and their underlying methodologies should be equally suitable for EU products and imports. In the context of the European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy, the work on these indicators could feed into a horizontal food sustainability labelling framework or revised EU marketing standards for seafood.

The resolution calls for tackling the various detrimental impacts of certain fishing techniques, such as bottom trawling, including by limiting their use, and for prohibiting the use of detrimental techniques in all marine protected areas (paragraphs 116 and 118). The Commission agrees with the importance of the question and will, as it committed to in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, introduce, where necessary, measures to limit the use of fishing gear most harmful to biodiversity, including on seabed. Bottom trawling is indeed the most damaging activity on the seabed, which is why the Commission is currently looking into concrete measures to reconcile the use of this fishing practice with biodiversity goals, in a fair and just way for all, in the context of the preparations for the Action Plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems. The Commission endeavours to present the Action Plan in autumn. The Commission also takes note of the call for the EU to prohibit all environmentally damaging extractive industrial activities in marine protected areas (paragraph 119), and notes the Member States competence to decide on this matter in full compliance with relevant EU environmental legislation.

The Commission agrees that Regional Fisheries Management Organisations are crucial to promote science-based conservation and the sustainable management of fish stocks. Therefore, the Commission will continue efforts to upgrade the existing regional fisheries body in West Africa in line with the Commission’s Ocean Governance Communication (paragraph 43). It needs to be underlined that the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements that the EU concludes with third countries aim towards resource conservation and environmental sustainability. The financial compensation targets also the sustainable economic and social development in those third countries (paragraph 34).

The Commission agrees that sustainable aquaculture should play an important role in terms of food security, employment and sustainable food systems in the EU (paragraphs 56 and 60). In this regard the Commission Strategic Guidelines of 2021 provide concrete recommendations and actions. The development of algae production (paragraph 107) is still a largely untapped sustainable alternative raw material for many industries, including food and feed. Therefore, the Commission will come forward with an EU algae initiative in line with the Farm-to-Fork-Strategy before the end of the year.

The Commission recognises that recreational fisheries (paragraph 60) can impact marine, freshwater and diadromous fish stocks. Therefore, the Commission works towards more reliable and uniform data collection and reporting systems to assess recreational fisheries’ real impact and set appropriate measures. For the marine and diadromous stocks, the EU and the Member States enhance data collection of overall catch and releases and biological parameters through the Data Collection Framework, regional coordination, and in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and data end users. Moreover, in its proposal to review the EU fisheries control system, the Commission is defending its proposal for enhanced rules for the control of recreational fisheries (e.g. registration or licensing system for recreational fishers and obligation to collect and report data for all recreational fisheries catches). The EU is also promoting digitalisation by supporting the development of an integrated EU catch reporting system for recreational fishing – the [RecFishing.eu](https://recfishing.eu/). The freshwater stocks are under the national competence and in the scope of environmental legislation.

Regarding climate mitigation (par. 30), the Commission will in its upcoming report on the functioning of the Common Fisheries Policy particularly assess how the Common Fisheries Policy caters for the changes in marine ecosystems that are likely to stem from climate change, looking at both mitigation and adaptation needs. The Commission has also launched two studies to assess impacts of climate change on the policy and how it can be made more resilient, while mitigating the climate footprint of fishing and postharvest activities.

With regard to climate adaptation (paragraph 132), in the 2021 EU Adaptation Strategy the importance of adaptation measures to protect coastal communities as well as habitats and biodiversity to the impacts of climate change, such as sea level rise, storm surges, warming and acidification of sea water is well recognised. Therefore, the Commission is working on improving the collection of marine data and investing into research and innovation with regard to coastal protection and ecosystem restoration and management. Many of these actions are financed through Horizon Europe, which also includes the Mission Restore our Oceans and Waters. In addition, the Commission promotes nature-based solutions for adaptation. It does so among others by incentivising and assisting Member States to rollout nature-based solutions through assessments, guidance, capacity building and EU funding. Through the Flood Directive, Member States assess the present and future risk of flooding, including for its coasts, and develop appropriate measures, which are incorporated in their Flood Risk Management Plans.

Regarding more frequent storms and floods (paragraph 132), [Climate-ADAPT](https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/metadata/adaptation-options/establishment-of-early-warning-systems) includes information on early warning systems. Setting up an alert and observation system on more frequent storms and floods may be a task for the Member States e.g. using national TV channels, partly because such systems already exist i.e. the “[European](https://www.efas.eu/en) and [Global](https://www.globalfloods.eu/technical-information/glofas-30day/) Flood Awareness Systems”, the medium-range flood forecasts ([GloFAS](https://www.globalfloods.eu/technical-information/glofas-30day/)), and Copernicus data for the [attribution](https://climate.copernicus.eu/prototype-extreme-events-and-attribution-service) of extremes to climate change. With respect to the call on the Commission to assess different scenarios and measures to address possible sea level rises and the intensification of severe weather events, it has to be noted that, following on its commitment from the Adaptation Strategy, the Commission prepares the first ever EU-wide forward-looking climate risk assessment that will among other draw upon information on the projected changes in heavy precipitation and floods as well as the projected changes in sea level and coastal floods (part of the initial list of chapters). This implies assessing existing information but no further modelling. On sea level projections, see IPCC AR6 WG II Chapter 3[[1]](#footnote-1). On the related call to *provide adequate environmental and health monitoring and conduct research into early warnings (paragraph 132),* the Commission, in partnership with European agencies and international health organisations, launched in February 2021 the [European Climate and Health Observatory](https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/observatory) to pool and exchange knowledge and solutions on climate change-related health risks. This includes the development and provision of related surveillance, early warning and modelling tools. To date, this observatory provides links to [existing European early warning systems](https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/observatory/evidence/health-early-systems/european-early-warning-systems), the newly developed [European Climate Data Explorer](https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/knowledge/european-climate-data-explorer/), monitoring and projection tools like the [ECDC Vibrio map viewer](https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/observatory/evidence/projections-and-tools/ecdc-vibrio-map-viewer), and [indicators on climate change and health](https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/observatory/evidence/indicators_intro). In cooperation with the Lancet Countdown it is also developing a European climate and health report.

The Commission is committed to delivering on the objectives of the Biodiversity Strategy, including by presenting the necessary legislative and non-legislative initiatives (paragraph 121).

The Commission is equally concerned about marine litter (paragraph139) in particular the plastic pollution problem in our seas and ocean. In this regard, the EU has adopted a number of policies and instruments such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (which is in the process of being reviewed), the Single-Use Plastics Directive and the Port Reception Facilities Directive, to address the issue. The EU is also continuously working with citizens and particularly with fishers, who are ready and willing to minimise the negative impacts of marine litter. Fishers have long been witnessing the growing marine pollution and they are already paying its costs, when they fish litter instead of fish or when their propellers are damaged. The Commission, in line with the Port Reception Facilities Directive, supports passive fishing for litter, i.e. collection and delivery to ports of litter collected during normal fishing activities. With the support under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, fishers are provided with special bags to collect plastics, lost or abandoned fishing gear and other litter caught up in their fishing nets. The Fund also provides support to investments for collection facilities and equipment in ports, as well as for the processing of marine litter. On the regional front, Regional Seas Conventions have also been very active in the fight against marine litter and in mobilising funds to promote regional cooperation to further prevent and reduce pollution from land and sea-based sources. In the Mediterranean, for example, under the Barcelona Convention, parties adopted an updated Action Plan against Marine Litter in 2021, which the Commission supports technically and financially. The Convention also addresses the broader aim of combatting plastic pollution in the Mediterranean by looking at the production and disposal of plastic products and circular economy models in the region. The Commission has initiated various initiatives to enhance the dialogue between all relevant stakeholders, including with fisheries and aquaculture stakeholders and associations. For example, the Commission services regularly engage and discuss with Advisory Councils that provide the Commission and EU countries with recommendations on the implementation on measures regarding marine pollution. It is essential that the regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs) work closely with Regional Seas Conventions against marine litter. At multilateral level, the Commission, will negotiate, on the basis of a Council mandate, a new legally binding UN agreement on plastic pollution, which will consider the entire lifecycle of plastics, from its production, to product design, to waste management, and which should be concluded by 2024.

Regarding a scientific research programmes to map carbon-rich marine habitats in EU waters (paragraph 118), it is emphasised that under the Horizon Europe work programme 2021-2022 there is a topic of EUR 15M on understanding the oceanic carbon cycle and more research topics on blue carbon science are envisaged for the work programme 2023-2024. Furthermore, under Horizon Europe there are other relevant topics focused on understanding and valuing marine biodiversity and ecosystem services. Horizon Europe Mission “Restore our Ocean, Seas and Waters by 2030” is supporting the implementation of the European Green Deal and the Biodiversity Strategy and more specifically the establishment of marine protected areas and the restoration of marine ecosystems. For example, under the Mission work programme 2021 the European Blue Parks topic (EUR 17 million) focuses on innovation actions on the protection, conservation and enhancement of the EU's blue natural capital that have the potential to be up scaled and reproduced at European level and beyond. This topic is continued under the Mission work programme 2022. Under the Mission work programme part there are also relevant topics supporting the restoration of marine and coastal ecosystems and increased climate resilience.

Paragraph 127 calls on the Commission to further develop and enhance scientific knowledge hubs such as the Copernicus Marine Service and the European Marine Observation and Data Network. The Commission is fully committed in providing access to reliable, quality-controlled, harmonised and standardised ocean data and observations, open access and free of charge, not only to facilitate the transformation of the blue economy but to also support marine Research & Innovation, coastal and marine policy development and Ocean literacy. This access is ensured by the Commission’s permanent marine knowledge infrastructures: the Copernicus Marine service, in charge of providing satellite marine observation and forecasting and the European Marine Observation and Data network, in charge of aggregating, standardising, harmonising and making available in-situ multi-disciplinary marine data and observations. The Marine Strategy Framework Directive creates a legal obligation for collection and coordination of data on quality of marine environment. Addressing a wide stakeholders request, the Commission is working on an Ocean Observation initiative that aims to create a more transparent and collaborative landscape in European ocean observation. The purpose would be to create the conditions for synergies, economies of scales, further harmonisation and sharing of ocean data across the European Union. The development of the European Digital Twin Ocean under the Mission Ocean framework is designed to make FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) ocean data, as well as advanced tools and applications based on this data, widely available for a wide array of uses, aiming directly in increasing marine knowledge/ understanding and supporting the transformation of the Blue Economy. The actions planned for the European Digital Twin Ocean will further enhance Copernicus Marine Service and the European Marine Observation Data network and provide the incentive for adapting fully the Commission’s marine knowledge hubs to the requirements of the European Digital Strategy, in support of the European Green Deal.

1. [AR6 Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability — IPCC](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-ii/) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)