
Without fishers, there's no fishing

- Fishers should be seen as guardians of the sea and its resources -

Brussels, 5 November 2020

At the Plenary meeting held yesterday, the EU Social Partners in the Fisheries Sector – Europêche, Cogeca and ETF - welcomed the presentation of the Parliamentary draft report “*Fishers for the future: Attracting a new generation of labour to the fishing industry and generating employment in coastal communities*” of the Member of the European Parliament, Manuel Pizarro. While acknowledging the report as an important step in the right direction, social partners call on the policy-makers to recognize the key social dimension of fishing, thus improving the health and safety of fishers and attracting youth to the sector.

The report addresses important difficulties faced by the EU fishing industry owing to the ageing of the workforce, high rate of accidents at sea, absence of harmonized training standards, poor image of the sector, lack of recognition of fishers' qualifications at EU level, low women's employment rate and lack of attractiveness of the sector for young fishers.

Social partners believe that the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) must ensure that fishing activities are environmentally sustainable in the long-term while achieving economic, social and employment benefits and contributing to the availability of food supplies. Unfortunately, trying to achieve this already complex balance often leaves out the protection and wellbeing of fishers. The Social Partners regret that the fishing industry performance is repeatedly assessed in terms of 'money' and 'planet', but neglecting the 'people' who bring seafood to our tables.

Mr Pizarro and the Social Partners agree that prosperous and sustainable fishing requires specific attention and regulation to address issues not sufficiently covered by current fisheries policies, such as the social dimension of fishing. They pledge to work together to close existing legislative and policy gaps that, for far too long, have existed in the CFP.

Ment van der Zwan, Europêche's spokesman on social affairs, declared: *“The report is an important step in the right direction. However, we feel that more attention is needed towards the ratification and implementation of internationally agreed social and safety standards that protect fishers in all aspects of their work. For that reason, we call on all Member States to ratify the pioneering Work in Fishing Convention No 188. We also request the European Commission to propose a Directive to establish a harmonised inspections system on control and enforcement of social provisions. It is equally important that the Commission proposes a Directive to ensure harmonised training and safety standards in the EU by transposing the IMO STCW-F Convention”.*

Juan Manuel Trujillo, workers' spokesman in the EU social dialogue committee on sea-fisheries, stated: *“We endorse the objectives set in the report. Additionally, it should underline the clear contradiction between the CFP and the requirements set out in social legislation such as the ILO C188. While the latter requires more space on board for the benefit of the crew, the CFP prevents the increase of space on board, even when the goal is to improve working and living conditions. We, therefore, urge the European Commission to identify alternative formulas for measuring fishing capacity that exclude areas for leisure and comfort from the calculation. Recreational space on board has nothing to do with the ability of the vessel to find, catch or store fish. Furthermore, the current capacity measurement rules jeopardise women's access to the sector since separate cabins, toilets and showers are needed to*

guarantee their privacy and wellbeing. In particular in certain regions, such as the Mediterranean, the decreasing profitability of the sector due to the continuous reduction of fishing opportunities is a major obstacle for young workers to get in the fishing sector”.

Mr Pizarro concluded: *“We need adequate social policies to guarantee better working and living conditions on board fishing vessels not only to attract young people to the activity but also to improve the safety and wellbeing of fishers. Despite technological improvements already introduced, still many accidents occur at sea, many of them related to human errors”.* He continued: *“It is equally important to debunk the myths and misconceptions surrounding the sector. Fishers should be seen as guardians of the sea and its resources. Only a positive perception of the profession that can offer a bright future to young people can secure the generational change of fishers”.*

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