

Open letter to Commissioner Sinkevicius criticising the spread of damaging information

Last Friday an “explanatory note” on the revision of the EU-fisheries control system¹ was reportedly circulated by the European Commission services to a few Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), mainly within the Committee on Environment. The note sounded the alarm about the position democratically adopted in the Committee on Fisheries (PECH) which “*could reward and legalise underreporting, lead to massive overfishing and allow illegal discards to continue undetected and threaten the sustainable exploitation of marine biological resources*”. According to Europêche, these statements unfairly put into question the good record of compliance of EU fleets, damages the image of the sector, lacks empathy with fishers and connection with fisheries’ realities. On top of that, the note clearly interferes the independent co-legislator role of the European Parliament.

Beyond the skewed content of the note that contains half-truths and apocalyptic statements not based on factual data, what is most shocking to Europêche is the fact that the note seems to be aimed only at a reduced group of like-minded MEPs, not specialized on fisheries-related issues, with the sole apparent goal of generating political support and momentum to crush the Parliamentary position democratically adopted by the Members of the PECH Committee.

Against this scenario, European fishers have sent an open letter² showing their irritation towards a European Commission who portrays its own fishing industry as illegal predators and structural rule-breakers. Europêche perceives this attitude as a seed of an increasing anti-EU sentiment among fishers.

Daniel Voces, managing director of Europêche, declared: “*EU fishers and their organisations wish to have a continued constructive partnership with the European Commission, but this seems increasingly difficult when DG MARE considers and describes its own industry as a destructive force*”.

These unfounded allegations add up to the long list of existing problems that the EU fishing industry must already cope with and for which it needs the political support of the European Commission and its Fisheries Commissioner. The Brexit outcome, the implementation of the post Brexit situation in the North Sea and the NE Atlantic, the spatial claims on fishing grounds by renewable energy and marine protected areas as well as the on-going market impact of Covid-19, just to name a few of them.

In light of the above, Europêche urges the Commission to stop casting a shadow of suspicion on the sector and its compliance as a whole as well as to respect the democratic decisions adopted by specialized Parliamentary Committees. “*The debate on complex and technical issues, such as the control regulation, should be done in a transparent manner and always seeking the outcome of rational policies which, in the end, will have to be applied by fishers*”, concluded Mr Voces.

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1. See link <http://europeche.chil.me/download-doc/342909>

2. See link <http://europeche.chil.me/download-doc/343366>