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Decisive step forward towards the adoption of EU-Morocco fisheries agreement

- For immediate release -

This morning, the European Parliament (EP) Committee on Fisheries gave its consent to conclude the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement (SFPA) between the EU and the Kingdom of Morocco. Europêche welcomes the important step forward towards the final adoption of the fisheries deal. The agreement not only promotes sustainable and responsible fisheries for the EU and Morocco, whilst securing mutual benefits, but also contributes to the strict observance of international law. However, a last and critical step is still required, the final approval of the EP in plenary session in mid-February 2019. Europêche calls on all political groups to back the agreement to continue strengthening the good cooperation and business partnership in fisheries with our strategic neighbour which dates back to 1995.

Last week the European Parliament in plenary session adopted the agriculture agreement between Morocco and the EU, passing it by a large majority. The deal represents a culmination of a long process of technical negotiations, political consultations and legal validations between both parties. The fisheries agreement has experienced the same checks and now it is time for the European Parliament to scrutinise the final result.

The Committee on Fisheries followed the conclusion of the European Commission and Council that the geographical scope of the agreement can be extended to the territory of Western Sahara, without contradicting the conclusions of the Court of Justice ruling. This is particularly important given that about 90% of the catch volume by the EU fleet is taken in the waters adjacent to Western Sahara. For that purpose three conditions had to be respected. Firstly, the explicit mentioning of Western Sahara in the agreement text. Secondly, the deal must bring about a benefit for the local populations and the territory. Thirdly, the socio-economic and political actors must be consulted and must favour the outcome of the fisheries agreement. Following extensive investigations and consultations performed by the European Commission services, it was concluded that all these conditions were successfully met.

Europêche recalls that fisheries and fish processing are the most important industries in this territory in terms of employment and exports. The new agreement will continue playing a fundamental role in fostering sectoral support with an average contribution of €19 million per year out of an average total financial envelop of €52 million per year. On top of this, there is as well the contribution of the ship-owners in terms of license fees which amounts to an average of €12 million per year.

According to Javier Garat, President of Europêche: *“The proposed EU-Morocco Fisheries Agreement not only guarantees respect for international law, but also clearly benefits local communities in Western Sahara thanks to the EU fishing activities, landings and investments. This agreement will continue contributing to improve the sustainable management of fish resources in these rich fishing grounds and is crucial for the activity of up to 128 vessels from 10*

EU countries¹, 700 fishermen and 3.500 workers ashore. We are committed to continue creating wealth and employment in the area. We therefore urge the Parliament's plenary to be coherent and consistent in their decisions and largely support the fisheries agreement as it was the case with the agriculture under the same circumstances."

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¹ Ireland, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom