



## **EU fishing sector denounces lack of transparency and expertise in developing EU taxonomy standards for fishing**

- **Recommendations are a wish-list of unrealistic and unachievable targets far from the fisheries realities**
- **An unworkable EU Taxonomy will impact on the ability of operators to attract funding for their sustainable fishing activities**

Brussels, 19 September 2022

The EU Taxonomy aims to become a tool for companies and investors to help identifying those projects and economic activities that have a substantial positive impact on the climate and the environment. In 2020, the European Commission set up expert groups to produce criteria to categorise environmentally sustainable economic activities for each sector. However, the expert group for fisheries did not include any fishing industry stakeholder, only NGO representatives. As a result, the group produced unrealistic recommendations to the European Commission who is now working on a new bill.

Javier Garat, President of Europêche, declared: *“This unbalanced situation has led to significant gaps in the platform’s knowledge and expertise about the fisheries realities. Likewise, this serious deficiency in the composition of the platform puts into question the legitimacy and validity of the work delivered by the expert group for fisheries”*. Mr Garat continues: *“We note with concern that the European Commission has ignored our call to re-open the expert group’ member list to industry representatives (i.e., fishing vessel owners, producer organisations, trade unions, specialised financial services, fish processing companies and retailers)<sup>1</sup>. Regrettably, the debates and discussions held within the Platform are not disclosed nor publicly available”*.

The sector reiterates that the European Commission must consult relevant EU Advisory councils<sup>2</sup> specialised in fisheries, before submitting any “expert” outcome to the scrutiny of the public or as a recommendation to the European Commission.

Esben Sverdrup-Jensen, President of EAPO, commented: *“European fishers are global leaders in sustainability, and we are more than interested in documenting and proving this fact. But the effect of this lack of expertise can be read throughout the sections in the report and annex concerning fishing with unworkable criteria and unachievable targets that go way beyond existing EU legislation, internationally agreed standards and the fishery reality. These include 100% observers on board, no-take zones, no discards and rejection by definition of bottom trawling as a sustainable activity. As a result, the vast majority of the EU fishing industry will not be able to reach alignment with the criteria, especially small-scale artisanal vessels”*.

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<sup>1</sup> Europêche response to the European call for feedback by the Platform on Sustainable Finance on the draft report on preliminary recommendations for technical screening criteria for the EU taxonomy EP(21)33.

<sup>2</sup> [https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/fisheries/scientific-input/advisory-councils\\_en](https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/fisheries/scientific-input/advisory-councils_en).

Europêche and EAPO unanimously concluded: *“It is rather strange that the NGOs participating in the expert group (and the European Commission at this stage) are reluctant to reform the current CFP basic regulation<sup>3</sup> while, in the taxonomy, NGOs propose the introduction of completely new standards based on cherry-picking science. To the point that some of the studies referenced as scientific basis are, in reality, reports conducted by the very same NGOs participating in the expert group (e.g., Birdlife, Bycatch Mitigation FACT-SHEETS 2014). Isn’t it biased that a member of the platform is quoting its own study to underpin the recommended policy criteria? Isn’t this a conflict of interests? We can only conclude that the proposed criteria appear is a “wish list” of NGO claims that tried without success to insert them in other EU legislative acts (e.g., fisheries control regulation, multiannual management plans) and now, once again, within the framework of the taxonomy without any real debate”.*

Lastly, Europêche and EAPO question the auditability of the proposed criteria. Particularly given the fact that the bodies providing scientific advice to the EU do not provide the level of detail for the information required under the screening criteria.

While appreciating the timely updates on the state of play of taxonomy by DG MARE, the industry fails to understand how and why the Directorate on financial affairs (DG FISMA) did not request any stakeholder representation from the fisheries value chain at any point.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.birdlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2022-02\\_CFP-joint-NGO-PR.pdf](https://www.birdlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2022-02_CFP-joint-NGO-PR.pdf).