

European Association of Fish Producers Organisations
Association Européenne des Organisations de Producteurs dans le secteur de la pêche



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DG MARE - European Commission
Attn. Mr. Francisgos Nikolian
Head of Unit A4: Economic Analysis,
Markets and Impact Assessment
1049 BRUSSELS

EAPO20-14

Oostende, 2 April 2020

Dear Mr. Nikolian,

Subject: EAPO statement on the importance to ensure fishing continues during the COVID19 crisis

EAPO is following up on the coordinated *Industry response on the impact of the COVID19 crisis* communication of March 17th 2020. Fisheries provide for local, healthy, high quality products that allow for food security of EU citizens. Ensuring continuous availability of such products is paramount in times of crisis and of increased stress on the food markets. Fishers are ready to make efforts to continue providing essential food for the population. For this to be possible, the following actions have been identified as urgent to be taken.

1. On EU and Member States' level, fisheries should be defined as a vital sector of the economy (being part of the food supply) and therefore fishermen should be defined as vital professionals for which specific measures have to be devised in order that they can continue to work.
2. As the COVID19 pandemic spreads in Europe and the world, countries have been restricting movements of people, establishing rules of social distancing, and closing borders. In addition, as seafood products prices went down and markets are disturbed, a number of ports have been closing. The combined effect of this results in huge difficulties faced for crew changes similarly to the ones encountered by the shipping industry¹. EAPO is thankful to the Commission for including fishermen in the Communication C(2020) 2051 final with guidelines concerning the exercise of the free movement of workers during COVID-19 outbreak. We acknowledge this is addressing travel to and from the fishing vessels and border crossings for essential workers. However EAPO finds that it could also be useful to extend the exception

¹<https://www.itfglobal.org/sites/default/files/node/news/files/Joint%20open%20letter%20to%20UN%20agencies%20from%20global%20maritime%20transport%20industry%20and%20seafarers.pdf>

for EU entry ban to fishermen mirroring what is done for transport personnel engaged in haulage of goods. The fishing industry employs international crew members that should not fear being stuck at borders with all papers in order, regardless of their nationality. In that context, maintaining ports open is also a key condition for disembarking crew.

3. Fish producers' organisations and companies have been pro-active on the application of preventive measures on board vessels. It is necessary for crew safety and the continuity of fishing operations. The development of a standardised procedure for incoming crew, at sea health-monitoring, arrival in port and disembarking crew needs to be developed and supported by Member State's administration. Health authorities of Member States should develop precise guidelines and provide support on the attitude to follow at sea and in case of a suspected case of COVID19.

The fishing industry remains dedicated to delivering food supplies. In the meantime, it is urgent to act on consequences, streamline crew changes, and clarify procedures to follow on board. We would welcome support from DG MARE on those topics and would appreciate if you could share those concerns with your relevant colleagues in the EU institutions. While the COVID19 crisis will have an important impact on the sector, it is vital to ensure that fisheries can continue operating in order to provide food for the European citizens.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive 'P' followed by the name 'P. VISSER' written in a smaller, more legible font.

Pim Visser

President