

## European Association of Fish Producers Organisations

### Association Européenne des Organisations de Producteurs dans le secteur de la pêche



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### **EAPO feedback on the Contingency Plan for Ensuring Food Supply and Food Security** **Roadmap**

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The European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO) welcomes the initiative to develop a contingency plan for ensuring food supply and food security. The Roadmap published by the Commission on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November presents the creation of a permanent forum to work on a common EU food crisis response mechanism and develop a set of broad guidelines and recommendations to improve coordination.

Fisheries have been hit by the COVID crisis at an unprecedented scale. The trade and value chain disruptions, collapse of demand and prices, and temporary cessation of fishing activities exposed the lack of resilience of the EU food system.

More specifically, the fishing sector has suffered from a huge level of pressure as a result of the crisis. It had to face issues regarding crew changes (in connection with closed borders, travel restrictions, and quarantines), the lack of available protective personal equipment (masks, gloves...) at the beginning of the crisis, in certain cases, staff shortages because of self-isolation/sickness, shortage of physicians for cases of repatriation of sick or injured and regular medical care in foreign ports. Fishermen had to face the disappearance of large sections of demand: in the HORECA sector (affecting a number of key, high-value species that do not always have another market), schools, factories, and administrations during the lockdown periods, outdoor local markets and the drastic reduction of tourism. Loss of demand also appeared for fisheries selling in third-countries, sometimes linked to important loss of consumer purchasing power (African market for instance).

In time of crisis, the timeliness of the answer is key. Not all companies have the same ability to handle crisis and this poses a risk to employment. An effective response is needed to alleviate the threat to livelihoods and ultimately to the EU's food security.

As the COVID-19 crisis unfolded, EAPO has quickly alerted the Commission about the need for a swift answer to ensure that fishing continued during the crisis. A series of measures have been proposed to tackle the issues faced as soon as March 2020. The crisis showed the urgent need for the EU to support the sector in order to ensure food security and sovereignty. Fishermen suffered from the collapse of demand and prices, leading to increase storage needs. New rules allowing for increased financial support of storage (storage aid rate increased) and for increased use of storage mechanism were instrumental to help overcome this issue. Financial support was also allowed for through temporary cessation schemes but were not always sufficient at national level. The new fund, EMFAF, has included new measures to help fishermen respond to exceptional crises such as storage aid and compensations to operators for their income foregone or additional costs. This step goes in the right direction. Nevertheless, long term effects of crisis also need to be accounted for and support should be provided in that sense. One measure helpful in that regard has been called for by EAPO from the start and consists in launching an EU wide communication campaign reaching out to a wide audience, promoting seafood consumption. A joint communication strategy would be needed to coordinate it with local communication and promotion initiatives. This will contribute to help reboot the sector.

EAPO welcomes the Commission's initiative on EU food crisis preparedness and response mechanism proposed in the Roadmap and look forward to the permanent forum's first meeting that should include stakeholder's representation.