

**European Association of Fish Producers Organisations**

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

**EAPO / AEOP**  
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**Mr. Virginijus SINKEVIČIUS**

European Commissioner  
Environment, Oceans & Fisheries  
European Commission  
1049 BRUSSELS

EAPO23-56

Oostende, 28 September 2023

EU Transparency Register number: 46491656228-65

Dear Commissioner Sinkevičius,

**Subject: Extension of the reference period for the use of BAR funds**

I am contacting you on behalf of the European Association of fish Producers Organisation (EAPO), regarding Regulation (EU) 2021/1755 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 October 2021 establishing the Brexit Adjustment Reserve (BAR). As you are aware, Brexit had, and continues to have, huge implications for the EU fishing fleet, as a direct and indirect consequence of the loss of fishing quotas and the ongoing divergence between EU and UK policies. With several Member States' BAR envelopes underutilised, EAPO believes that an extension of the reference period for the use of the BAR is warranted.

The Commission set up the BAR to provide support to counter the adverse economic and social consequences for those highly dependent on fishing activities related to stocks shared with the United Kingdom. For this, the EU set aside more than 5.4 billion euros, on top of the existing EU budget. EAPO members welcomed this fund, while being aware that its success would depend on the implementation by Member States and their respective policy choices.

Funds were allocated to Member States for a reference period from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2020 to the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2023. National administrations were required to carry out extensive verifications to ensure their schemes were compatible with EU law, especially state aid aspects.

In some Member States, this resulted in the desired compensation or support of EU fishers. It is always difficult to see vessels being decommissioned, but it was positive to see some of our members' fishers being given the opportunity to exit the industry relatively unharmed financially.

The reference period is now coming to an end and even after the redirection of funds from the BAR to the Recovery and Resilience Facility/REPowerEU, substantial underutilisation remains. Unfortunately, policy choices in Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Sweden have limited the possibility of (fully) using national BAR envelopes for the aim of the BAR, which is to support those most affected by Brexit. In fact, by for example steering funds away from certain fleet segments or by taking away individual fishing rights when decommissioning, they are hindering the mitigation of the impact of this unfortunate event, they are affecting the level playing field, and they are reducing the fleet's resilience that is so badly needed for the upcoming transitions.

With this in mind, we would like to call on the Commission to extend the reference period to allow for the full use of the BAR and to call on the Member States to ensure their national BAR envelopes are fully in tune with the aim of the BAR; an aim which you as Commissioner have underlined so well on many occasions.

Finally, we want to stress again that Brexit has impacted all EU fishing businesses, small and large. Alas, Some Member States' implementation of the BAR limits the possibility for non-SMEs to benefit from EU funds and to alleviate Brexit's adverse economic impacts. EAPO members appeal to the Commission to allow for non-SMEs to access EU funds and support measures aimed at mitigating Brexit's adverse economic impacts on the fishing industry.

Members of EAPO would greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss this very important matter with you and your services without delay.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Esben Sverdrup-Jensen', written in a cursive style.

Esben Sverdrup-Jensen  
President