DG MARE

Commissioner Virginijus SINKEVIČIUS
Environment, Oceans and Fisheries

Meeting with the Spanish Federation of Fishermen associations
(Federación Nacional de Cofradías de Pescadores - FNCP)

Brussels, 18 November 2022 (physical meeting)
15h30-16h15
BERL S7

BRIEFING
[Introduction]

- Welcome the meeting and the opportunity to exchange directly and personally.
- Recall that you are always available to discuss and explain our policies.
- Welcome this personal meeting as an opportunity to get to know each other, to clarify and explain in more detail our policies and ultimately to try to re-establish trust.
- Recall the key principles that guide you in your policy making, and which are the basis for the common fisheries policy:
  - a sound balancing of environmental, social and economic elements, which are all three self-standing pillars of sustainability.
  - a science-based approach.
  - a level-playing field and fairness, with regard to Member States and to sea basins.

[Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems – VMEs Implementing Act]
I am fully aware of all the challenges faced by the sector, including the recent fuel crisis, which is a direct consequence of the war in Ukraine.

Fuel prices currently impact the fleet more than anything else.

The Commission has reacted quickly to the socio-economic consequences of the war in Ukraine, and two years earlier of the pandemic, proposing two emergency packages in 2020 and 2022 respectively to support the fisheries sector. Member States need to use this support and make sure the sector can benefit from it.
On the Western Med MAP, I am aware of your position and I am willing to continue dialogue and seek together with you and with the Member States the best way forward in the implementation of the MAP.

The latest scientific advice includes data until 2021 and shows that the MAP measures work: half of the West Med stocks have started their recovery. However, several stocks remain severely overfished and are estimated below biological reference point (the so-called “B-lim”).

Scientific advice is clear: we need to continue our effort and develop additional measures focused on the most overfished stocks, such as hake and deep-water shrimp stocks.

For 2023, the Commission proposal therefore builds on the measures implemented in previous years to decrease fishing mortality in the West Med. We will again go for a package approach, proposing various management measures, as this allows us to factor in socio-economic considerations. Proposing various different measures, beyond effort reduction, will allow us to stay on track for reaching MSY, but at the same time to distribute management measures on all gears generating fishing mortality, and not only on one.

I am aware that you disagree, but this is a moderate approach, which was supported for 2022 by all Member States - except Spain.

Regarding the compensation mechanism, which we are happy to continue, there is room for more Spanish vessels to increase selectivity and benefit from the extra fishing days, even with support from EU funds to change gear.

In addition, we see now the success of large closure areas, such as the one in the Gulf of Lion, where juvenile hake are more numerous and bigger.
• It is important that Spain follows the best available scientific advice to improve the existing closure areas. This will also allow the Spanish sector to benefit from additional fishing days via the compensation mechanism.

• It is important to involve all stakeholders in Spain for the monitoring and enforcement of the measures resulting from the Western Med MAP. Controlling whether the trawling effort and maximum catch limits are properly implemented is the best way to secure a level playing field between fishers.

[Action Plan]

• We are currently finalising our internal work on an Action Plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems, which we plan to adopt early January.

• This Action Plan will contribute to implementing both fisheries and environmental legislation, and one of its main objectives is to increase coherence between these two policies.

• Legislation already exists to protect our marine environment: notably the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), the Habitats and Birds Directive, and CFP legislation that contributes to the environmental objectives.

• The Plan will cover how to improve the selectivity of fishing gear, how to limit impacts on sensitive species and how to protect sensitive habitats. It will also address how to improve scientific data, outreach and governance.

• As regards seabed protection, bottom-contacting fishing gear is not the only fishing gear or activity at sea of concern, but we do need to recognize that bottom-contacting gear has in some areas a major impact on seabed ecosystems. For instance, science demonstrates that 90% of seabed disturbance and damage in the North Sea comes from bottom-contacting gear.
• We know that **bottom trawlers form an important part of the European industry**, by providing direct employment on-board (24 200 jobs full time equivalents (or 25% of EU fleet employment)) as well as ancillary employment in fishing communities (total employment amounts to 36 000 jobs).

• I can reassure you that in this Action Plan I will ensure a **balance between immediate socio-economic challenges and urgent protection of the marine environment**

[Decarbonisation Plan]

• Fuel prices impact the fleet 10 times more than the management measures in the Western Med..

• Therefore, **key to address the issue of decarbonisation** of the fishing fleet.

• We are working on an action plan to support the decarbonisation process and have **just launched the call for evidence** on our website.

• **Encourage them to participate** and to send their contribution within the deadline of 5 December.