Report of the meeting between Commissioner and the European Association of fish Producers Organisations (EAPO)

2023-02-06

*Purpose of the meeting (initiated by EAPO): to establish at what stage of development the Marine Action plan is and how EAPO can facilitate and help with the implementation.*

- **The Commissioner** presented the upcoming fisheries package and the idea behind the Marine Action Plan - to increase coherence between fisheries and environmental policies. He highlighted the necessity to reconcile bottom-contacting fishing gear with biodiversity goals.
- **EAPO** welcomed the move towards greener approach that promotes more selective gears but voiced the need for a clear framework to support that transition.
- On maritime spatial planning, **EAPO** thought there was too much focus on the negative impact of fisheries, less so on that of the offshore wind farms. They believed that the impact of other activities needs to be measured to achieve balance.
- **The Commissioner** noted that the offshore farms are regulated in a different way (conducting impact assessment before allowing to operate). He agreed, however, that with renewable energy projects there needs to be a delicate balancing act and reassured that the Commission is outreaching to member states. Some countries have more inclusive conversations with stakeholders than others. There is strong call from the Council to make permitting of some of the energy projects faster, but strategic impact assessment for the environment needs to be done. We need energy independence, but we also must properly consult and assess beforehand. The Commissioner expressed worry that the funding for the national permitting institutions is not growing despite them needing to increase the pace of work.
- **EAPO** said it is hard to assess the impact of how well the businesses have fared in becoming more sustainable (need scientific data) and asked if there has been a stocktaking of what has been reached and how far we still are from the targets.
- **Commissioner** said that there are many good practices that will be considered in all three documents of the fisheries package, but still more progress needs to be done.
- When asked why the CFP has not been opened for revision, the **Commissioner** explained it was too early for a reform. There are still important implementation gaps and we need to see what we can still realistically achieve in this mandate. The Commissioner reassured that the CFP is not closed for changes and that the Communication prepares the ground for further evaluations and reflections and possible next steps in the next mandate.
- **EAPO** said that eventually, it will be possible to fish in a carbon neutral way. But the technology is not yet there. Regulations should be more liberal and not as detailed – they threaten to create barriers to innovation and development of new types of vessels.
- **EAPO** asked how the Commission is going to involve the key stakeholders into the facilitation of implementation of the Marine Action Plan and asked if the Commission would still take action if progress was too slow, noting the example of eels, where ultimately an overarching regulation has been imposed on MS.
- **Commissioner** said that there will be a joint expert group created, where he hoped EAPO would also engage actively, and confirmed that progress would be assessed before the end of the mandate and if the Action Plan is not going to bring desired results, Commission might follow a similar course of action as with eels.