

FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE NEWSLETTER

MAY 2014



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Upcoming Events

This month was an important month for the whole of the European Union, with the elections on the 22-25th May. Its results will have an impact in EU policies and will influence the leadership of the European Commission, possibly changing the political agenda of the EU. Regarding fisheries issues, the month of May started with the Seafood Expo Global on the 6-8 May, a conference which brought together thousands of stakeholders from industry, governments and others. Regarding aquaculture, a now integral part of the Common Fisheries policy, an interim Executive Committee for the new Aquaculture Advisory Council was set up. Lastly, the sector was caught off guard with the decision of European Commissioner, M. Damanaki, to propose a complete ban on the use of driftnets in all EU waters as of January 2015.

In this month's edition, you will read about the European Elections and the next steps, the recent developments on aquaculture and the issue of the ban on driftnets.

Enjoy the reading and with best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Despina Symons'.

Despina Symons
Director, EBCD

The European Parliament makeover

From the 22nd to the 25th of May of this year, European citizens were invited to come to the ballot box to vote their representatives for the European Parliament.

This year, after the entry into force of the Lisbon treaty in 2009, European citizens not only voted the new European Parliament but will indirectly influence the choice of next President of the Commission.

However democratic it may sound, these elections took place when the public confidence in the European Union is in its historically low levels: according to the results, 60% of Europeans do not trust the EU and 56.91% did not vote.

Besides this ever-growing euro scepticism, results highlighted once again the dichotomy between European citizens in favour of austerity measures on the one hand and those more inclined to fiscal stimulus package to boost growth, employment and confidence on the other hand.

	EPP Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)	214	28.50 %
	S&D Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament	191	25.43 %
	ALDE Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe	64	8.52 %
	Greens/EFA The Greens/European Free Alliance	52	6.92 %
	ECR European Conservatives and Reformists	46	6.13 %
	GUE/NGL European United Left/Nordic Green Left	45	5.99 %
	NI Non-attached Members – Members not belonging to any political group	41	5.46 %
	EFD Europe of freedom and democracy Group	38	5.06 %
	Others Newly elected Members not allied to any of the political groups set up in the outgoing Parliament	60	7.99 %

After three voting days all over the European Union (starting on 22nd May in UK and

Netherlands), you can check the results on the chart above.

Towards a new coalition?

After the elections and as of the 2nd of June, the European political groups will be constituted during separate meetings to be held in Brussels, as well as various parts of the EU.

From 1-3 July the first European Parliament plenary session of the 8th Parliamentary term (2014-2019) will take place in Strasbourg, where amongst others, MEPs will elect the European Parliament president and Vice-Presidents as well as decide on the constitution of the various committees. The constitutive meeting of the new fisheries (PECH) committee is scheduled for the 7th of July and its first meeting will be held on the 22nd of July.

Once the political groups have been formed and the Committees have appointed their Chairs and Members, the new Parliament will be tasked with the selection of the President of the Commission (plenary of the 14th-17th of July). For this post, amongst the candidates put forward by the 5 main political groups (EPP, PES, ALDE, European Greens, European Left), 6 are the frontrunners: centre-right Jean-Claude Juncker (EPP), centre-left Martin Schulz (S&D), liberal Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE), Alexis Tsipras (European Left) and Ska Keller with José Bové (Greens).

Amongst these 6 candidates, the Council will nominate one for the European Commission presidency, taking into account the results of the elections, as stated in the Lisbon treaty, or

propose another candidate which the Parliament most likely will not accept. Then, to be elected, the winning candidate will need “half plus one” of the European Parliament’s seats. Due to the close votes between the two main political groups, a coalition between them is very plausible. It is also likely that the liberals would not want to be in the opposition and decide to join the aforementioned coalition. This three-group coalition would therefore gather 484 seats (64 %). This system of alliances is actually nothing new but it sends a confusing signal to the voters who were expecting a political change.

In parallel to this process, the 28 Member States (MS) will propose their Commissioners for the 27 portfolios (1 portfolio for each MS + the President of the European Commission). The new President of the European Commission will then negotiate with MS the portfolios of the Commissioners, who in turn will be subject to hearings at the EP, where their suitability as a whole will be put to a vote.

If all goes well, the new Commission will take over by November 2014, but should complications occur, the process can be delayed by months.

Driftnet ban

The European Commission, on the 14th May 2014, put forward a proposal for a regulation prohibiting the use of driftnets in all EU waters from January 2015.

Why now?

According to the European Commission, the reason for the proposal of this regulation are the high number of by-catches of protected species (in particular cetaceans, sea turtles and seabirds)

attributed to the use of this particular fishing gear, its devastating effect on wildlife and their habitats and the fact that controlling and monitoring the use of driftnets, especially when it comes to small scale fisheries, is difficult. In 2002, the European Commission had banned the use of driftnets for certain migratory species (tuna and swordfish, mostly) and from 2008 it has been prohibited to keep on board or use any kind of driftnets in the Baltic Sea.



The proposal

The proposal sets a ban on the use of driftnets in all EU waters as well as bans the storing of driftnets on board a fishing vessel. It also sets a revised and more comprehensive definition of the word “driftnet” to close any possible existing loophole (a ‘driftnet’ means a net made up of one or more walls of netting, hung jointly in parallel on the headline(s), held on the water surface or at a certain distance below it by floating devices and drifting with the current, either independently or with the boat to which it may be attached. It may be equipped with devices aiming to stabilise the net or to limit its drift such as a sea-anchor or an anchor on the bottom attached at one single end of the net.)

The proposal was supported by the outcome of a roadmap, based on a public consultation launched

in April 2013 and 2 scientific studies (*"Identification and characterisation of the small scale driftnet fisheries in the Mediterranean"* and *"Study in support of the review of the EU regime on the small-scale driftnet fisheries"*). According to the roadmap published by the European Commission this ban will contribute to achieving Good Environmental Status as envisaged in the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and will not result in a corresponding reduction of vessels and fishers since the majority of driftnets fisheries identified are seasonal, and the participating fleets are comprised of polyvalent vessels (using more than one fishing gear).

Currently, countries still using driftnets are Bulgaria, France (and outermost regions), Italy, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and the UK.

The Fisheries Fund will provide a way out

The European Commission suggested that the European Maritime Fisheries Fund can be used to support the transition towards a total ban, such as changing the fishing gear as long as a fishing licence allows it and the new gear is more selective and the change is made before the entry of the ban.

Vessels potentially using driftnets are in Bulgaria, Italy, Greece, France, Denmark, Ireland, Sweden, The Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, Portugal and United Kingdom.

The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisation from the United Kingdom claimed that this ban will affect some artisanal fisheries using this traditional fishing method and which do not have significant unwanted bycatch problems. Spain, on the contrary, welcomed the ban as by

the elimination of this gear bycatches are reduced as well as discrimination among European fleets.

From NGOs side, Oceana is concerned that *the measures proposed by the European Commission could penalise thousands of sustainable artisanal fishing boats and open once again the potential for massive subsidies fraud rather than targeting the few vessels that have continued illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing activities and that should have been officially blacklisted years ago.*

Next steps:

European Commission has forwarded the proposal to the European Council, where Member States will start looking into it in the upcoming weeks. EC intends to ask all EU Member States to provide their knowledge of the driftnet fisheries stemming from the data they are collecting on this activity.

European Parliament will have to deal with this issue as soon as a new PECH committee has been set up.

Aquaculture in the EU



In the European Union, aquaculture provides 20% of fish production and employs about 80 000 people (source: European Commission). Under the new Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), aquaculture is an integral part of the fisheries policy and its development is promoted to ensure a sustainable future. This was not the case before when it was mainly the responsibility of the Member States.

Aquaculture Advisory Council

Following the dismantle of the Advisory Committee of Fisheries and Aquaculture (ACFA) one year ago and according to the new CFP, an Advisory Council on Aquaculture (AAC) will have to be formed. It will be an advisory body tasked with addressing the concerns of the sector and providing solutions and recommendations (freshwater, marine, shellfish aquaculture, etc.)

Following the request from the European Commission to make a proposal for the establishment of the AAC and after several stakeholder meetings amongst the industry, NGOs and other interest groups, it was decided on the 27th May 2014, to set up an "Interim Executive Committee (ExCom)" to pave the way forward. Hence, a group of 10 members have been appointed, tasked with drafting a statement of objectives, its operating principles, a provisional list of organisations, a provisional program to be forwarded to the General Assembly, once it has been set up and running, rules of procedure and statutes, deciding the AAC's country of base of operations (*Brussels being the best candidate proposed*), a budget that will be in line with the recommended operations and the formulation of a number of optimal Working Groups, that will cover all areas of the aquaculture sector.

This interim ExCom will follow the same composition rules as laid down in the CFP (60% producers' organisations- 40% other interest groups):

- 60% group- 6 members:

Federation of European Aquaculture Producers (FEAP), European Feed Manufacturers' Federation (FEFAC), European Fish Processors Association (AIPCE-CEP), Copa-Cogeca, European Mollusc Producers Association and **Jean Claude Cueff (*Chair of this Interim ExCom*)**- former Head of Unit A/2 Common Fisheries Policy and Aquaculture of DG Maritime Affairs.

- 40% group- 4 members:

North Sea Foundation, Seas at Risk, Association nationale de défense des consommateurs et usagers (a *workers' organisation*) and the **European Bureau for Conservation and Development (EBCD)**, which undertook the task of Secretariat of this interim ExCom.

NGOs and aquaculture

Ahead of the establishment of the AAC and the recent developments, NGOs, under the leadership of Seas At Risk, have taken a more hands-on approach to addressing the environmental aspects of the sector. Most NGOs have criticized fish farming as a practice that is detrimental to the environment (degrading water quality, destabilizing the habitat of other species, escapes), but most of the times, without taking into account the importance that aquaculture plays in the economy of coastal areas (jobs, increasing water quality) and food security (safe and healthy products). In this regard, NGOs, spearheaded by Seas At Risk, jointly decided to draft a position paper laying

down some ground rules to protect the environment, whilst simultaneously promoting socio-economic growth. This paper has caused controversies, even amongst NGOs, as it has been characterized as out-of-date, too ambitious and unrealistic. Although so far this paper has not seen the light of day, discussions are still underway and is expected to be published soon.

European Commission and aquaculture

The European Commission (DG Maritime Affairs) published, in 2013, a communication paper with “Strategic Guidelines for the sustainable development of EU aquaculture”¹ to help increase the sector’s competitiveness and production, by reducing administrative burden and allowing maximum allocation of space. At the same time, the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), under DG Environment, address issues related to aquaculture.

As part of the follow-up to these guidelines, both DG Environment and DG Maritime Affairs of the European Commission are in the process of jointly developing guidance documents addressing the requirements of the aforementioned Directives in relation to aquaculture. The aim of these documents will be to assist Member States and the industry in the implementation of EU legislation and illustrate how environmental protection can be compatible with sustainable aquaculture.

1

http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/aquaculture/official_documents/com_2013_229_en.pdf



June 2014			
9/13-Jun	FAO/COFI	31st Session	Rome, Italy
11-Jun	RACMED	Executive Committee	
16/17-Jun	EU Council	Agriculture and Fisheries Ministers' Council	Luxemburg
16/19-Jun	UN/BBNJ	2nd BBNJ meeting	New York, USA
18-Jun	NSRAC	Executive Committee Meeting	Brussels, Belgium
23/28-Jun	CBD/SBSTA	18th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (EBSA)	Montreal, Canada
25-Jun	Baltic Sea AC	Executive Committee	Copenhagen, Denmark
30-Jun	DG MARE	Re-energising the oceans- Global Ocean Commission	Brussels, Belgium