



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

Maritime Policy and Blue Economy
Director

Brussels,
MARE.A/BF

Ms Joelle Philippe
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on behalf of 16 small-scale fishermen organisations,
environmental and development NGOs

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Subject: Your call to the European Commission for an Inclusive Ocean Strategy, our ref. Ares(2019)7196153

Dear Ms Philippe,

Thank you for sending to Commissioner Sinkevičius “the call to the European Commission” on an Inclusive Oceans Strategy to Secure Sustainable Fishing Communities signed by 16 small-scale fishermen organisations, environmental and development NGOs. The Commissioner has asked me to reply on his behalf.

The Blue Economy includes all economic activities relating to the oceans, seas and coasts. It covers a wide range of interlinked established and emerging sectors¹, with coastal tourism and port activities as the biggest jobs providers before fisheries and aquaculture (marine living resources). The European Commission’s 2012 Blue Growth strategy² focused on making sure that emerging sectors develop in a sustainable way.

The Commission addresses the development of small scale-scale fisheries through the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and supports it through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). These tools need to be seen together to understand the importance granted by the Commission to fishing and aquaculture communities.

The Commission is fully aware of the importance of small-scale fisheries in the EU. Small-scale fisheries make up 80% of the EU fishing fleet, half of the total EU fleet effort, and contribute to 48% of employment in EU fisheries. They shape the socio-economic life of coastal communities and provide us with healthy food. A number of provisions in the CFP include the specificities of small-scale coastal fisheries. For

¹ [European Commission: The EU Blue Economy Report. 2019.](#)

² COM(2012) 494 final of 13.9.2012.

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instance, Article 5(2) stipulates that Member States may grant preferential access to fishing vessels that traditionally fish in those waters from ports of the adjacent coast in the 12-nautical miles coastal band. Aside from this, the small-scale fleet is exempted from certain obligations that apply to larger vessels, such as the ones of fishing authorisations, landing declarations, sales notes and separate stowage.

The current EMFF is also directed towards investment and financial support for the small-scale fisheries sector. If an EU country has a small-scale fleet of at least 1,000 vessels, it has to have an explicit action plan targeting that fleet. This is the case for 12 Member States right now. Moreover, the standard 50% ratio of public support can be increased to 80% for projects managed by small-scale fishermen, and to 90% if it also concerns control and enforcement. Article 63 of the EMFF regulation, also supports Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) in local fisheries and aquaculture areas. The objectives of that support are, among others: adding value, creating jobs, attracting young people and promoting innovation; supporting diversification inside or outside fisheries; enhancing and capitalising on the environmental assets; promoting social well-being and cultural heritage in fisheries and aquaculture areas, including fisheries, aquaculture and maritime cultural heritage; or strengthening the role of fisheries communities in local development and the governance of local fisheries resources and maritime activities. Recital 56 and following of the EMFF regulation recognise the relevance of ‘blue growth’ initiatives to foster growth and jobs in such areas.

You can find short descriptions of various CLLD projects, which often have a close link to the development of the local blue economy, on the FARNET website www.farnet.eu. FARNET also developed recommendations in 2018 on how Fisheries Local Action Groups –who manage projects under CLLD – can better support small-scale coastal fishing. It appears that Member States and stakeholders are not taking full advantage of the numerous existing funding possibilities under the EMFF in favour of small-scale coastal fishing via CLLD.

With its proposal on the post-2020 EMFF, the Commission aims to tackle even further some of the identified challenges of small-scale fishing. The proposal entitles small-scale vessels to receive 100% of public aid for their projects, while the standard rate is 50%. Moreover, certain investments, such as engine replacement and acquisition of a second-hand vessel, are reserved to the small-scale fleet. Thirdly, the Commission has proposed that each Member States develops an action plan on small-scale coastal fishing, strengthening the existing action plan under the current EMFF.

Let me also address your concern about the use of gross value added (GVA) in the Commission’s assessment. As the economic indicator that best reflects the economic contribution of a sector to the flow of goods and services in an economy, it is true that it is incomplete and does not take into account the use of natural resources and ecosystem services. Nor can it be used to measure trade-offs, particular for non-market assets and services. In that respect, the EU Blue Economy Report 2019 already included a chapter on natural capital and ecosystem services. We intend to develop that chapter further in the 2020 edition, including if possible indicators and values.

Last but not least, and as you referred to Africa: we are aware that in most African countries, small-scale fisheries are the main component of the blue economy, both in terms of jobs and poverty reduction. Therefore the only “blue economy” projects that the European Commission (DG DEVCO) has been supporting in Africa have focused on fisheries and aquaculture. Given the importance of these traditional sectors, any

diversification of the African economy should fully take them on board and build on them.

You will have seen that the European Green Deal, adopted by the Commission on 11 December 2019, sees a central role for a sustainable ‘blue economy’ “in alleviating the multiple demands on the EU's land resources and tackling climate change”. The Green Deal Communication also refers to the use of aquatic and marine resources.

I look forward to continuing this exchange with you as we develop a “new approach to a sustainable blue economy” with our new Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries. I would like to encourage you to continue to put forward your valuable input and suggestions via the Advisory Councils.

Yours sincerely,

Bernhard FRIESS

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