



17th of May 2021

Re: Meeting request to discuss the Revision of the EU Fisheries Control Regulation (1224/2009)

Dear Minister McConalogue,

We write to you today to encourage you to take an active role in working with the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU in advancing towards a transparent EU fisheries control system. A system that secures sustainable and fully documented fisheries, levels the playing field for fishers and helps build up the resilience of our ocean.

As the success of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) depends on effective monitoring, control and enforcement, a robust Fisheries Control Regulation is crucial. Fisheries control rules can help achieve the European Green Deal by requiring the use of technology that facilitates monitoring and credibly deters illegal fishing practices, and by establishing fisheries control rules that ensure that the CFP is consistently implemented across the EU.

We therefore ask that you support a Council position that:

- Does not legalise underreporting of catches. Up to [40% of catches \(and up to 50% in the case of tuna\)](#) could be omitted from the EU fleet's records under the European Parliament's proposal. We are concerned by reports that some members of the Council could be open to allowing catch reporting to be significantly weakened. These proposals to increase the 'margin of tolerance' for a broad range of EU fisheries would undermine scientific data to evaluate the status of fish stocks, render fisheries control efforts ineffective, and put decades of progress for seafood sustainability and marine species' recovery at risk.
- Supports the installation of vessel tracking and catch reporting systems on all EU vessels, including mandatory reporting on all sensitive species bycatch, such as cetaceans and seabirds. This will improve fisheries management and fishers' safety and income.

- Ensures that Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM), including on-board CCTV, is required on all large-scale vessels (over 12 metres) and on small-scale vessels at high risk of non-compliance with the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy, including those at risk of catching sensitive species.
- Supports improved and digitised seafood traceability for all products, since the EU, as the world's largest seafood market, has a responsibility to strengthen its ability to verify that the sources of seafood available in its market are legal and sustainable.
- Ensures that essential information on the monitoring and control of fisheries in Member States is publicly available in aggregated form, allowing EU decision-makers, fishers and civil society to assess whether the rules for controlling fisheries and related EU subsidies are fully implemented.
- Creates a level playing field across the EU and ensures environmental rules are effectively enforced in every Member State to create a culture of compliance among EU fishers through uniformly applied sanctions for infringements.

An ambitious revision of the EU Fisheries Control Regulation presents a 'golden opportunity' to close knowledge gaps and achieve truly sustainable fisheries¹.

A robust and transparent fisheries control system can empower Ireland to make evidence-based decisions that ensure productive, healthy and resilient seas, and thus help Ireland achieve the climate and biodiversity ambitions of the European Green.

As the Portuguese Presidency is seeking to adopt a general approach by the end of May, we, the undersigned NGOs, strongly count on your responsibility as a minister to safeguard the future of our seas and the communities that depend on them, including Irish fishers.

We would be delighted to have a meeting with you and your services to discuss the recommendations we include in the attached annex.

Yours sincerely,

¹ "Promote sustainable and circular agriculture and fisheries, food systems, [...] as well as a sustainable bioeconomy, including with a focus on guaranteeing food supply and the integrity of food supply chains in times of crisis, animal welfare and further hope to bring the 8th Environmental Action Programme to fruition", General Secretariat of the Council of the EU, 'Taking forward the Strategic Agenda. 18-month Programme of the Council (1 July 2020 - 31 December 2021)'.

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Annex: Our recommendations on 6 priorities for the revision of the Control Regulation.

Annex: Our recommendations on 6 priorities for the revision of the Control Regulation to ensure it will secure sustainable fisheries, healthy seas and a prosperous fisheries sector.

Margin of Tolerance: Increasing the amount of fish that can be underreported would significantly undermine accurate reporting of seafood catches. Up to 40% of catches (and up to 50% in the case of tuna) could be omitted from the EU fleet's records under the European Parliament's proposal. Moreover, and based on the last two progress reports, the Council appears to be open to allow reporting of the catch composition of [unsorted](#) landings as the captain deems appropriate. This would mean that, when landing e.g. 1000kg of mixed fisheries such as anchovies and sardines, the operator will be allowed to report 100kg of sardines and 900kg of anchovies even if the real proportion was the opposite. Such proposals would undermine scientific data to evaluate the status of fish stocks, render fisheries control efforts ineffective, and put decades of progress for seafood sustainability and marine species' recovery at risk - as the European Commission itself has warned.

Small-scale fisheries: We urge you to be ambitious and mandate the use of vessel position data systems on small-scale fishing vessels. These devices are small, cost-effective, improve fishers' safety - as they help locate fishers in case of need - and do not interfere with the safe operation of the vessels and gears, as our [fact sheet](#) explains. Having such systems in place will help you better manage your fisheries, and will reduce the cost of control activities in the long term. We also ask you to require a fully electronic fishing logbook for small-scale vessel operations, including mandatory reporting of sensitive species bycatch. The application of VMS and electronic logbooks by small-scale fishers is successful and supports their long-term livelihood and sustainability, as demonstrated in our short videos from [Andalusia](#), [Croatia](#) and [Galicia](#).

REM: We urge you to support proposals to make the use of Remote Electronic Monitoring, including CCTV cameras, mandatory for all fishing vessels of 12 metres length or more and on small-scale vessels at high risk of non-compliance with the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy, including those at risk of catching sensitive species, like cetaceans and seabirds. REM has been [successfully tried and tested around Europe](#). Our analysis identifies best practices from around the world that can address [privacy](#) concerns, [level the playing field](#) and [increase profits](#) for European fisheries, and curb [bycatch of sensitive species](#). Our [short video](#) shows this as well.

Traceability: We ask you to support the mandate for a digital traceability system that ensures that all the data elements necessary to establish a transparent supply chain are recorded and transmitted at each step of a seafood product's journey. Previous suggestions to exclude certain products from the scope (i.e. processed and prepared products, or CN codes 1604 and 1605) from the traceability requirements, as well the suggestion to maintain a paper-based system, would exempt a great deal of products which are vulnerable to illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing from traceability requirements and would create opaque supply chains. This would be to the detriment of EU fishers who will be competing on an unlevel playing field, of EU consumers who will not have access to clear product information, and of the fight against IUU fishing. For more information, see WWF's paper '[1 in 6 seafood products at risk of being untraceable](#)' and the [joint statement](#) with Europêche.

Transparency: The implementation of the Control Regulation at the Member State level is currently opaque. You do not know what your fellow Member States are doing in terms of their control efforts. We therefore ask you to support the European Parliament proposal to publish annual numbers (not names) on (a) the fisheries control budget, (b) the controls performed, (c) the fisheries infringements detected, and (d) the sanctions given. Moreover, we call on you to support the proposal by the European Parliament that Member States should state their reasons for vetoing the publication of environmental data by the European Commission. See [here](#) for more information, as well as our [animation](#).

Sanctions: Member States' application of sanctions differs greatly; and sanctions are not always dissuasive, proportionate and effective. The [European Court of Auditors](#) and the [European Commission](#) have concluded that this absence of standardisation has undermined the enforcement of the CFP. Indeed, throughout the EU, fishers feel that they are treated unequally and unfairly. We thus ask you to further standardise enforcement measures in order to create a level playing field for fishers and a culture of compliance.

Should you have any questions about the above, please do not hesitate to contact us.