EU/Cook Islands Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement: extension of the implementation Protocol

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PURPOSE: to conclude the Agreement in the form of an Exchange of Letters between the European Union and the Government of the Cook Islands concerning the extension of the Protocol implementing the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Government of the Cook Islands, which expires on 13 October 2020.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Decision.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: Council may adopt the act only if Parliament has given its consent to the act.

BACKGROUND: on 7 July 2020, the Council adopted a mandate authorising the European Commission to open negotiations for a new protocol to the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Government of the Cook Islands and for the possible prolongation of the current protocol to that Agreement, which will expire on 13 October 2020.

In view of the complexity of the negotiations on a new Protocol to the Partnership Agreement on sustainable fisheries between the European Union and the Government of the Cook Islands, the two parties agreed on an extension of the current Protocol for a maximum period of one year, in accordance with the Council mandate.

This extension was established by an Agreement in the form of an Exchange of Letters, initialled on 29 July 2020 in Brussels and Rarotonga (Cook Islands). The extension of the Protocol to the existing Agreement would make it possible to avoid interrupting the fishing activities of European vessels when the protocol expires on 13 October 2020, pending the finalisation of the negotiations on the renewal of the protocol.

CONTENT: the Commission proposes that the Council decide to approve, on behalf of the Union, the Agreement in the form of an Exchange of Letters between the European Union and the Government of the Cook Islands concerning the extension for one year of the framework established by the Protocol expiring on 13 October 2020.

The aim of the Agreement is also to strengthen cooperation between the European Union and the Government of the Cook Islands, thereby creating a partnership framework within which to develop a sustainable fisheries policy and sound exploitation of fishery resources in the fishing zone of the Cook Islands, in the interests of both parties.

The current EU-Cook Islands protocol allows the EU fleet to fish in the Cook Islands waters for tuna species, for indicative annual fishing opportunities of 7 000 tonnes.

The annual financial contribution from the European Union is EUR 700 000, based on:

(a) an annual amount for access to fishery resources for the categories provided for in the Protocol, set at EUR 350 000 for the duration of the extension to the Protocol;

(b) support for the development of the Cook Islands' sectoral fisheries policy amounting to EUR 350 000 for the duration of the extension to the Protocol. This support meets the objectives of the Cook Islands' national policy on the sustainable management of their maritime fishery resources for the entire duration of the Protocol.