

# The impact on fisheries of marine litter

2019/2160(INI) - 25/03/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 646 votes to 3 against, with 39 abstentions, a resolution on the impact on fisheries of marine litter.

The marine litter visible on beaches, coasts, shorelines and at the surface comes mainly from activities on land (80%), but also from activities at sea due to a significant increase in transport by large non-fishing vessels. 70% of the litter thrown into the sea ends up on the seabed, with the cumulative mass of litter floating on the surface representing only 1% of plastic dumped in the ocean. 730 tonnes of litter are dumped in the Mediterranean Sea every day.

## *Improving the legislative framework and governance on marine litter*

Members stressed the need to revise the EU's integrated maritime policy with a view to establishing a more strategic framework, including on marine litter, that incorporates all waste and marine environment laws.

The Commission and Member States are invited to:

- advocate an ambitious governance model in international UN negotiations on marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions and recognise all oceans and seas as a global common good;
- coordinate efforts to adopt an ambitious and legally binding agreement on plastic pollution at the UN Environment Assembly;
- coordinate different pieces of legislation such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the directive on the reduction of the environmental impact of certain plastic products, the Directive on port reception facilities and the Directive on maritime planning, all within the same timeframe;
- adopt the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Voluntary Guidelines on Marking of Fishing Gear to promote responsible management of fishing gear with a view to achieving a reduction in abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear.

## *Improving research and knowledge on marine waste*

The shortage of available data and studies make it difficult to quantify the exact extent to which damage caused by marine litter is affecting the fisheries sector and its negative economic consequences for fishers. The Commission and the Member States are called to step up research finance and data collection on the amount and various types of litter in European waters and its impact on fisheries, aquaculture and ecosystems and to propose robust measures to address and prevent the impact of nano- and microplastics on both fishery resources and human health.

The resolution called for better reporting of lost fishing gear at sea and suggests developing new tools for identifying and tracking lost fishing gear at sea and recording data on marine litter.

## *The circular economy in the fisheries and aquaculture sector*

The resolution stressed that the development of the circular economy in the fisheries sector must include increased support for research into solutions, smart design of fishing gear and innovation in fishing and

aquaculture techniques to limit the discharge of waste, enhance the attractiveness of collection operations and the development of efficient recycling channels.

Parliament called for the eco-design of fishing gear to be supported as well as the promotion of research and innovation seeking to find alternative and environmentally friendly materials to use in fishing gear, including polymers. Member States should swiftly follow up on the setting of national minimum collection rates for fishing gear containing plastic, as agreed to in the directive on single-use plastics.

Members called on the Commission to create a specific fund to support Member States that establish production chains for recycled and environmentally friendly gear, using resources such as those under the NextGenerationEU instrument and from tax penalties imposed following infringement proceedings against Member States.

### ***Collection and management programmes for marine waste***

Parliament called on the Commission to draw up an EU-level action plan to combat littering in the Union's hydrosphere by reducing waste at its source, cutting down on plastic use and consumption, and tackling the pollution of rivers, water courses and coastlines due to littering.

The upgrading of wastewater treatment plants and sewage systems is also imperative to reduce the impact on aquaculture and the marine and coastal environment in general. Members called for sufficient resources to be devoted to cleaning up all types of polluting materials derived from plastics.

Member States are urged, in this regard, to establish a 'special fund for cleaning the seas', managed through the new European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) or other relevant budget lines, in order to finance the following actions:

- (1) the collection at sea by fishers of marine litter,
- (2) the provision of adequate on-board waste storage facilities and the monitoring of passively fished litter,
- (3) improvements in operator training,
- (4) the financing of the costs of both waste treatment and the personnel required for the operation of such programmes to avoid the increase in costs for fishers who participate voluntarily,
- (5) investments in ports so that appropriate reception and storage facilities can be provided for the lost fishing gear and marine waste collected.

Lastly, Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to promote awareness-raising campaigns on the issue of marine pollution from plastic and microplastic.