EU/Cook Islands Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement: implementation of the Agreement 2021-2024. Protocol

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PURPOSE: to conclude, on behalf of the European Union, the Protocol (2021-2024) on the implementation of the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Government of the Cook Islands.

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: the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement (SFPA) between the European Union and the Cook Islands Government was signed on 3 May 2016 and 14 May 2016 respectively and entered into provisional application on 14 May 2016 for a period of eight years. The agreement is renewable by tacit agreement and is still in force.

The first 4-year protocol on the implementation of the SFPA entered into provisional application on 14 October 2016 and expired on 13 October 2020. Both the agreement and the protocol entered into force on 10 May 2017.

In July 2020, the Council authorised the European Commission to open negotiations for a new protocol to the SFPA between the European Union and the Government of the Cook Islands and a possible extension of the protocol to the SFPA which was due to expire on 13 October 2020.

Due to the complexity of the negotiations, the protocol was extended for one year from the date of signature of the exchange of letters by both parties, i.e. 14 November 2020. As a result, the current protocol will expire on 13 November 2021. This extension was established by an agreement in the form of an exchange of letters, initialled on 29 July 2020.

The Commission conducted negotiations with the Cook Islands with a view to concluding, on behalf of the European Union, a new protocol implementing the SFPA. Following these negotiations, a protocol was initialled by the negotiators on 28 July 2021. The new protocol covers a period of three years from the date of provisional application, i.e. the date of signature by both parties.

CONTENT: the purpose of the proposal is to **authorise the conclusion of the Protocol implementing the SFPA between the European Union and the Government of the Cook Islands**.

Objective

The objective of the Protocol is to enable the Union and the Cook Islands Government to continue to work together to **promote a sustainable fisheries policy** and the responsible exploitation of fisheries resources in Cook Islands fishing waters and to allow Union vessels to fish in those waters.

The agreement and the protocol will also contribute to the **better management and conservation of fisheries resources**, through financial support (sectoral support) for the implementation of programmes

adopted at national level by the partner country, in particular the global plan for fisheries, the monitoring of and fight against illegal fishing, and support for the artisanal fishing sector.

Fishing opportunities

The new Protocol to the Agreement between the European Union and the Cook Islands allows the EU fleet to fish for tuna in Cook Islands waters and provides for the following fishing possibilities:

- 4 purse seine tuna vessels with access to the Cook Islands fishing zone for 100 days per year;

- the possibility for the Union fleet to have an additional 110 days per year, if requested.

Financial contribution

The EU's annual financial contribution amounts to **EUR 700 000**, based on:

- an annual amount for access to fisheries resources, for the categories provided for in the Protocol, set at EUR 350 000 for the duration of the Protocol;

- support for the development of the sectoral fisheries policy of the Cook Islands for an annual amount of EUR 350 000 for the duration of the Protocol. This support should meet the objectives of the Cook Islands' national policy on the sustainable management of fisheries resources for the entire duration of the Protocol.