Toward a sustainable blue economy in the EU: the role of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors

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The European Parliament adopted by 494 votes to 66, with 66 abstentions, a resolution on 'Toward a sustainable blue economy in the EU: the role of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors'.

Members welcomed the Commission's new strategy for a sustainable blue economy in the EU but deplored the lack of specific objectives for the different sectors, in particular **fisheries and aquaculture** as important sectors of the blue economy.

Comprehensive approach to the EU Blue Economy

Parliament advocated a definition of the blue economy that is broad enough to include all sectoral and cross-sectoral activities related to oceans, seas and coastal areas, including direct and indirect support activities, and to take into account the fisheries sector. It stressed the need to promote an integrated approach to the different sectors of the blue economy, while emphasising that support for the blue economy is an **essential component of revitalising the economy** as a whole and improving the social and economic situation in several sectors, such as **transport and tourism**, which have been hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Members consider that the blue economy should be given appropriate financial support to enable large-scale investment in research, technology and infrastructure at EU and Member State level. They therefore called on the Commission and industry to assess the potential benefits of creating a **European partnership for maritime transport**, including with the private sector, at EU and international level.

The Commission is invited to:

- develop **new projects and instruments** to ensure that all blue economy stakeholders base their activities on the responsible and sustainable use of natural resources, decarbonisation and the circular economy;

- propose **legislative and non-legislative initiatives**, based on assessments of their impact on the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, and to ensure that the blue economy becomes the fundamental pillar for achieving the objectives of the European Green Deal;

- **assess the particular needs** of the fisheries sector in the context of financing the blue economy, in order to realise its potential for growth and job creation.

In particular, the resolution stressed the need to:

- improve the implementation and better coordination of the different **financial instruments** available, including the structural and investment funds, to better promote the blue economy strategy;

- **involve coastal and island communities**, in particular those linked to fisheries, at all stages of the development of the blue economy;

- conclude bilateral partnership arrangements with third countries, in particular agreements for sustainable fishing partnerships and the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing; bilateral partnership arrangements should seek to comply with the **highest environmental, economic and social sustainability criteria** and be based on the best available scientific advice;

- establish a level playing field with **products imported from third countries** and ensure that all fisheries and aquaculture products consumed in the EU come from sustainable food systems and meet the objectives of the Green Deal;

- closely link Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs) with **EU development aid** to improve their added value for coastal communities, and promote small-scale fisheries in Africa;

- propose ambitious mandates for RFMOs to protect fisheries resources in developing countries and in international waters;

- complete the priority projects included in the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) for the Atlantic, Mediterranean and Baltic Seas and promote the development of the TEN-T motorways of the sea.

- devote more EU funds to improving the efficiency of transport and accessibility to the main TEN ports.

Resilience, competitiveness and employment

Recognising that the EU's recovery efforts must be focused on sustainability, competitiveness and growth objectives, Parliament stressed the need for **sustainable financing instruments** to drive this transition, in particular through increased public and private investment. It called on the

Commission and the Member States to support the sustainable development of the small-scale fisheries and aquaculture value chains from fisher to the consumer. It also stressed the need to recognise the socio-economic value of recreational fisheries and their contribution to a blue economy.

The resolution stressed that **offshore wind farms** should only be built if it can be guaranteed that there will be no negative environmental and ecological impacts, or economic, socio-economic and socio-cultural consequences on fishers and aquaculture producers.

Members advocated the creation of an **appropriate financial framework** to stimulate the development of the blue economy and job creation, which integrates and coordinates the various financial instruments available – the structural and investment funds (EMFAF, ERDF, ESF, Cohesion Fund), Horizon Europe 2021-2027 and others. They supported the existence of specific support for the revival and modernisation of the shipbuilding industry in the Member States.

According to Members, **greater job security**, occupational safety, healthy oceans providing better earnings and social security in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors are essential to attracting women and younger generations, thereby ensuring its rejuvenation and continued survival.

The Commission is also called upon to develop **new forms of sustainable maritime and coastal tourism** , to support initiatives that encourage the diversification of coastal, maritime and marine tourism and make tourism activities and jobs less seasonal.

Blue transition

Members called for the development of instruments to enable sustainable exploitation of maritime resources and diversification of the maritime economy. They stressed the role that aquaculture can play, particularly in creating jobs and food security, but also in the transition to sustainable food systems.

The resolution emphasised the importance of fisheries and aquaculture for **protein supplies**, which are essential for food security, as well as for the socio-economic development of local communities and job creation worldwide. It called for **sustainable aquaculture models** that can contribute to the conservation of ecosystems that provide protection against the effects of climate change.

Parliament called on the EU to urgently address the adverse effects on the climate, seabed integrity, fish populations and sensitive species of fishing techniques such as bottom-contacting gears, driftnets, drift nets, demersal seines or fish aggregating devices, including by limiting their use.

In particular, the EU is invited to (i) prohibit the use of **harmful techniques in its strictly protected marine areas**, based on the best available scientific advice; (ii) prohibit all environmentally damaging extractive industrial activities, such as mining and fossil fuel extraction, in marine protected areas.