



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE/D3/PCO/mbe/Ares(2020)

Mr E. Brouckaert
NWWAC Chairman
c/o Bord Iascaigh Mhara
Crofton Road
Dun Laoghaire
Ireland
nwwac@bim.ie

Subject: Impact of COVID-19

Dear Mr. Brouckaert,

Many thanks for your letter dated 1st April 2020 on the COVID 19 and its consequences. The COVID-19 outbreak is a severe public health emergency for our citizens and societies with infections in all Member States. It is also a major economic shock to the European Union. The fishery and aquaculture sectors have been hard hit by disruption to the market, as demand has seen a sudden decline. To tackle this unprecedented situation, the Commission has proposed a range of actions addressing the urgent challenges that our seafood community faces. These measures will help to protect thousands of jobs in the EU's coastal regions and maintain food security.

Firstly, the Commission proposed on 13 March a package of measures (the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative) concentrated on the immediate mobilisation of EU structural funds, to allow for a prompt response to the crisis. It aimed to unlock €8 billion of immediate liquidity to accelerate up to €37 billion of European public investment. The scope of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) was also extended to allow compensations to fishermen and aquaculture farmers for economic losses caused by a public health crisis through mutual funds and insurance schemes respectively.

Secondly, the Commission adopted on 19 March a new Temporary Framework for State Aid. Section 3.1 of that framework enables Member States to provide relief to economic operators active in the fishery and aquaculture sectors hit by the crisis through State aid (national funding) up to a level of €120,000 per undertaking. Aid can be granted until 31 December 2020 to undertakings that face difficulties as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak. Upon notification of the measures by the Member State, the Commission has put in place procedures to enable very swift assessment and decision-making.

On 2 April, as part of the Coronavirus Investment Initiative Plus, the Commission adopted an additional set of proposals to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the coronavirus in the fishery and aquaculture sectors. This initiative introduces additional

measures and provides flexibility to the rules governing expenditure under the EMFF. This package of specific temporary measures includes:

1. support to fishermen for the temporary cessation of fishing activities due to coronavirus;
2. support to aquaculture farmers for the suspension or reduction of production due to coronavirus;
3. support to producer organisations for the temporary storage of fishery and aquaculture products;
4. a more flexible reallocation of financial resources within the operational programme of each Member State and a simplified procedure for amending operational programmes with respect to the introduction of the new measures.

The proposed measures, once approved by the European Parliament and the Council, will be eligible retroactively as of 1 February 2020 and will be available until 31 December 2020. I therefore invite Member States to start selecting beneficiaries to ensure that public support is mobilized as quickly as possible.

The Commission will use maximum flexibility in applying EU spending rules and make all coronavirus crisis related expenditure, including healthcare costs, eligible under structural funds. As a result, Member States will also be able to use money from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Cohesion Fund and the European Social Fund (ESF) to invest in their healthcare systems and disease prevention; purchase devices, health and protective equipment, and secure the working environment in the sector. They will be able to use the ERDF to help companies tackle short-term financial shocks linked to the Coronavirus crisis, and the ESF to temporarily support national short-time working schemes to help cushion the impact of the shock.

Over the last weeks, my services, my team and I have been in close contact with representatives of the sector, national authorities, Fisheries Ministers and the Fisheries Committee of the European Parliament. I have listened very carefully to all your reports about the state of play on the ground and to your various requests for targeted mitigation measures that would further support the fisheries and aquaculture sector. I believe the different packages adopted by the Commission between 13 March and 2 April, address the most important issues raised and constitute altogether a very balanced and effective set of measures and tools that will allow Member States to rapidly address the most serious economic consequences of the coronavirus crisis on the fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

The Regional Groups are already working on the various joint recommendations focused on the specifications of the landing obligation, the technical measures, or on directed fisheries in accordance with the Common Fisheries Policy and the Technical Measures Regulation. The STECF timetable for assessing those joint recommendations is expected to remain unchanged. Any potential updates will be announced in due time. This has also been communicated to the Regional Groups.

The Commission will continue to closely monitor developments in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in the coming days and weeks and will consider all relevant actions to address the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak.

I thank you again for your position paper and invite you to contact Ms Pascale COLSON, coordinator of the Advisory Councils (pascale.colson@ec.europa.eu; +32.2.295.62.73), should you have any question on this reply.

Yours sincerely,

Bernhard FRIESS
Acting Director-General