



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,  
MARE/MARE-D3/MLD (2021)

**Subject: Reply to the NWWAC advice on the impact of Climate Change on fisheries in the North Western Waters**

Dear Mr. Brouckaert,

I would like to thank you for the detailed NWWAC advice from 12 May 2021 on the impact of climate change on fisheries in the North Western Waters. Let me first share my satisfaction to see stakeholders engage in this topic of utmost importance. The workshop organised in November last year, where scientists and experts came to discuss the regional implications of climate change on local fisheries, showed how relevant the issue is from a policy-making perspective. My services are fully committed to taking this question forward and welcome your timely input. Let me react briefly, in the paragraphs below, to some of the points made in your advice.

The Commission acknowledges that, while there is indeed clear scientific advice that large-scale changes in marine ecosystems – including biomass shifts and decline in the productivity of some stocks – are likely to stem from climate change, such changes are difficult to forecast. In this regard, the EU has financed research on how climate change impacts will affect the fishing and aquaculture sectors<sup>1</sup>. In respect to such uncertainty, the long-term perspective in the implementation of the CFP calls for a precautionary and flexible management to allow stocks to resist and recover from abrupt or long-term environmental changes.

The EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) provides management tools for the climate-proofing of fisheries management to improve ecosystem resilience, in particular by reducing fishing pressure and governing EU fleets. Its objectives include the reduction of exploitation rates to those needed to catch the highest long-term yields (maximum sustainable yield rates)<sup>2</sup>, which is indeed of key importance to counter the cumulative

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<sup>1</sup> The CLIMEFISH and CERES projects have contributed to closing the knowledge gap on climate change and adaptation in Europe as regards the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. The BlueAction project provides a climate service to forecast spatial distribution of pelagic fish in the Atlantic.

<sup>2</sup> Article 2 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013.

Mr E. Brouckaert  
NWWAC Chairman  
emiel.brouckaert@rederscentrale.be  
Crofton Road c/o BIM Dun Laoghaire  
Co. Dublin A96 E5A0  
IRELAND

effects of overfishing and warming waters on stocks. This has been nearly achieved for the stocks managed by the EU in the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters<sup>3</sup>.

The CFP provides also tools to assist adaptation in response to shifts in stock distribution and adverse climate impacts by means of science-based management strategies, flexible quota management<sup>4</sup> and targeted EMFF (European Maritime and Fisheries Fund) support.<sup>5</sup> The EMFAF (European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund) will be a key contributor to the European Green Deal, supporting low-impact and sustainable fishing gear and techniques as well as actions that contribute to a good environmental status in the marine environment. It will be therefore instrumental in reaching the 30% climate target and 10% biodiversity target set for EU expenditure under the period 2021-2027, thereby beefing up the resilience of marine ecosystems to impacts of climate change. Besides, international negotiation processes and the fixing of multilaterally agreed fishing opportunities, including through the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement, help prevent conflicts over the access to the resource.

Undoubtedly, further research needs to be carried out to assess the implications of climate change for fishing and make sure we come up with the right management response. By the end of 2022, the Commission will present a report on the functioning of the CFP, looking at potential implementation gaps. As indicated in Commissioner Sinkevičius' mission letter, this report will consider, among other aspects, how the CFP caters for climate-induced changes in marine ecosystems, from both mitigation and adaptation perspectives. In this framework, the Commission has launched two studies to assess possible impacts of climate change on the CFP and how it can be made more resilient to current and forthcoming impacts while also mitigating the climate footprint of fishing. My services will come back to you in the coming months as part of the targeted consultation for this report.

I look forward to our continued cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Ms Pascale COLSON, coordinator of the Advisory Councils ([Pascale.COLSON@ec.europa.eu](mailto:Pascale.COLSON@ec.europa.eu); +32.2.295.62.73), who will forward it to relevant colleagues.

Yours sincerely,

Charlina VITCHEVA

c.c.: Mo Mathies [mo.mathies@nwwac.ie](mailto:mo.mathies@nwwac.ie)  
Matilde Vallerani [matilde.vallerani@nwwac.ie](mailto:matilde.vallerani@nwwac.ie)

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<sup>3</sup> More details in the Commission's Communication "Towards more sustainable fishing in the EU: state of play and orientations for 2022", published 09.06.2021, COM(2021) 279 final and SWD(2021) 122 final.

<sup>4</sup> i.e. quota swaps pursuant to article 16 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013.

<sup>5</sup> Article 35 and 57 of Regulation (UE) No 508/2014.