



Ms Charlina Vitcheva
Director-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
European Commission
Jozef II-straat 99
1000 Brussels
Belgium

Dun Laoghaire, 16 March 2022

Dear Ms Vitcheva,

Subject: Aid for fisheries sector to tackle current crisis

Following from the joint NWWAC/NSAC letter regarding fuel provisioning affecting fisheries submitted to you on 14 March 2022, the members of the North Western Waters Advisory Council strongly believe this issue to be most critical and deserving of an additional urgent advice.

Fishers as well as other primary food producers and indeed the general public are very concerned regarding the potential impact on European food security due to the war in Ukraine. Most commodity prices for supply to vessels in order to perform fishing activities are reaching all-time highs. As you will be aware, fuel for most fishing vessels constitutes a high percentage of the operating costs, and market prices and in some cases supply issues result in vessels staying in port. The current fuel prices make trips to sea economically unviable for fishers. More and more ports report unavailability of fuel.

The current situation may paralyse the fishing industry and result in reduced catches which can lead to a shortfall of seafood supply within Europe. Unfortunately, as most market processes do not enable a quick adaptation in first sales fish prices, these cannot cover the increased production costs. Fishing vessels currently do not have alternatives for fuel. Novel technologies such as hydrogen, ammonia and other alternatives are not yet sufficiently developed as also mentioned in the NWWAC feedback on the initiative “CO2 emissions of engines – methodology for their reduction” ([link](#)).

The socio-economic impacts of this crisis cannot be underestimated. Inability to fish in a cost-efficient way will directly lead to a loss in income and could mean the end of many family-owned businesses. This will greatly affect many coastal communities. Prior to the current fuel crisis fishers were already experiencing difficulty in meeting operating costs also due to the impacts of Brexit and the COVID-19 crisis.





Therefore, the NWWAC advises that the European Commission urgently addresses this situation by creating specific aid schemes and ensuring speedy and constructive handling of aid schemes by Member States. We are aware and appreciate the Commission's contact with the European Parliament, Member States and stakeholders to jointly find solutions for this crisis. Input from NWWAC members could contribute to the search and therefore we advise to include the following in the DG MARE's preparations:

- Arrange compensation to cover production costs so that employment, prices and food security can be guaranteed and protected;
- Enable short term financial aid to assist Europe's fishing communities to adequately survive this crisis. In the longer term, it is important to take into account that many current commodity prices will lead to increased operating costs;
- Include fuel for fishing vessels in the EU resilience plan to address energy price crises;
- Enable aid to ensure the supply of fishing operations with fuel, for example through additional local and regional fuel storage solutions;
- Undertake marketing initiatives both at EU (CMO) and national level to increase fish prices, i.e., returns, to the primary producer. The industry is a price taker not a price setter and has no capacity to pass costs onto customers. Considerations could include reinstating minimum prices at first sales;
- Encourage Member States to adopt additional measures such as reduction in social security contributions, suspension of fish auction taxes, an extension period for COVID loans or a suspension/reduction of VAT on fish and shellfish;
- For vessels not finding solutions to be able to continue operating, enable temporary cessation schemes as compensation;
- Reinstate the possibility for aid to facilitate necessary temporary storage of seafood products by producer organisations;
- Under the de minimis framework the increase of the state aid limit to up to €500,000 per vessel should be considered;
- Member State emergency plans should address logistics services to ensure transportation and distribution of catches and seafood products at fair prices without abuse to either producer or consumer/sale price;
- Ensure continuance of the fisheries products supply chain;
- Ensure adequate controls on fish imports and a potential ban of imports from specific countries.





The NWWAC would like to reiterate the immediate urgency of this issue and kindly ask that this is addressed by the Commission without any delay. Fishers are very much aware of the final competence of the EU in establishing effective aid in the short term and of the potential opposition to apply public funds to enable them to continue their operations. Such aid is required to assist them to continue taking into account the sustainability objectives.

We are aware that initiatives around this topic are taken in other ACs and will contact them to suggest a coordinated follow-up. The NWWAC stands ready to meet with the European Commission and Member States representatives to elaborate on this advice and discuss how to contribute to the urgently required initiatives. We note in that respect the AGRIFISH Council starting on 21 March and hope that addressing this issue will be an important part of the contribution by the Commission.

Thank you for your urgent attention on this matter, and we look forward to your suggestions and actions.

Yours sincerely,

Emiel Brouckaert
NWWAC Chairman

