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Multi-AC letter on the future of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

The recent communication of the Commission titled “*The road to the next multiannual financial framework*”¹, outlines a comprehensive overview for the post-2027 multiannual financial framework (MFF) and for the next generation of funding programmes. The eleven Advisory Councils (ACs) believe it is essential and timely to recall the importance of a dedicated financial instrument for fisheries, aquaculture and maritime affairs. The current European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), and those that preceded it (EFF 2007-2014, FIGF 2000-2006) have played a decisive role in structuring the sector.

It is particularly important to emphasize the role that these sectorial funds have played, since 2007, in supporting the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in the EU. Although challenging aspects have emerged from the practical implementation over the years (e.g., bureaucratic complexity, limited resources towards technological innovation, allocation and uptake, among others), the strengthening and the need of additional funding is undeniable and vital for the future of the primary production. It is also important for the entire value chain to support and accelerate their transition to sustainability, while ensuring resilience and guaranteeing the continued viability of fishing and aquaculture supply chains and the health of our seas.

The key topics identified by stakeholders that the EU Commission must address under the next funding period include but are not limited to:

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_25_486



- Assistance to coastal and rural communities
- Support for generational renewal through greater incentives
- Training courses for young people
- Ensuring food security and safety in the EU through the provision of healthy and affordable aquatic foods
- Supporting health and safety onboard fishing and aquaculture vessels, on aquaculture sites and in processing factories
- Supporting the development and uptake of selective and low impact fishing and aquaculture gears
- Upholding EU's commitment to healthy, safe, and sustainably managed seas and oceans
- The modernisation and decarbonisation of the fishing and aquaculture production and processing factories.
- Sustainable development of aquaculture

Additionally, the ACs wish to highlight the importance of maintaining and enhancing the participation by stakeholder organisations in the EU decision-making process. Collectively, we would remind the Commission that, as foreseen in Article 43 of the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation (CFP), the ACs provide the Commission and Member States with valuable recommendations/advice on fisheries, aquaculture, and markets management, considering socio-economic, and environmental aspects. The ACs are stakeholder-led, comprising representatives of the fisheries and aquaculture value chain (e.g., primary producers, processors, retailers, trade unions) and Other Interest Groups (e.g., environmental and



development NGOs, consumer groups, NGOs for animal welfare, recreational fishers, women in fisheries and aquaculture).

Moreover, the EU should recognise the role of the ACs as bodies pursuing an aim of general EU interest. During the past 20 years, ACs have been essential in providing technical knowledge and expertise to decision-makers. Given their broad representation, ACs are among the most representative bodies for consultation and gathering of information, observations, knowledge and on-ground experience from the sector and other affected stakeholders.

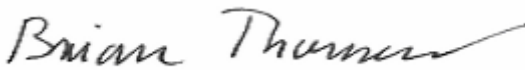
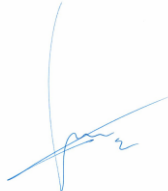
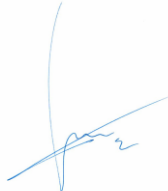
As the ACs bring together all stakeholders to address the challenges of the sector and ecosystems, they are crucial players in the governance of the CFP. This has benefitted in the implementation of the CFP by providing for continuous stakeholder engagement, lending it legitimacy and relevance, and improving compliance. Moreover, the ACs play a key role in the context of regionalisation as they have the knowledge and experience needed for the decision-makers to prepare new and informed management and conservation measures concerning different EU sea basins.

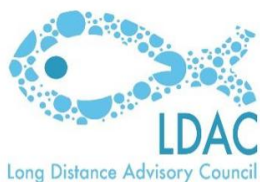
We strongly believe that the ACs' experience and transdisciplinary expertise will continue to be crucial for upcoming political priorities of the European Commission, such as the European Ocean Pact and the Energy Transition Partnership, following the lines of participatory governance and Better Regulation principles. The European Ocean Pact is expected to mark a new phase of stakeholders' cooperation for a common vision on Ocean policy, including on the future of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. Through the Pact, and in the context of the outcomes of the ongoing evaluation of the CFP, the inclusive, representative, and relevant role of the ACs can be further recognised. This will lend the ACs as platforms to a variety of social, science and policy actors to strengthen and make their advisory contributions more robust, improving compliance through bottom-up approaches.



To ensure that ACs can continue their mission of providing high-quality advisory role to the policy decision-makers, it is imperative that appropriate funding is allocated to these stakeholder bodies and to the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Sector (DG MARE), to strengthen their human and financial capital. The reallocation of EU expenditure through a single fund under a unique national programme per Member State would be detrimental and contrary to the necessary targeting of support.

Adequate financial support is fundamental for the continuation of sectoral and environmental management to sustain fisheries and aquaculture value chains from sea to consumer, Producer Organisations, and the conservation and sustainable exploitation of marine habitats and species. This will ensure strong and meaningful stakeholder engagement, while improving the effectiveness and efficiency of policymaking at large.

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