

Joint statement by France, Italy and Spain

"Situation of the fishing sector in the Mediterranean Sea – Request for a moratorium on management measures for 2025".

France, Italy and Spain would like to jointly raise the attention of the Council regarding the future steps of implementation of the West Med Multi Annual Plan (WESTMED MAP) for demersal stocks. Indeed, the transitional period of the plan is ending on the 31th December 2024 pushing the Commission to follow the MSY approach from the 1st January 2025. The AgriFish Council of December is going to be crucial for the Western Mediterranean Sea and for the implementation of the management plan.

Trawling fleets have made considerable efforts since 2020, and European experts have now underlined in a recent report that some of the stocks targeted by the management plan are recovering reassuringly. While, some other species, and particularly hake and a few stocks of deep-water shrimps, will not reach the MSY on the 1st January 2025 as mentioned in the objectives of the management plan. On this regard, France, Italy and Spain are strongly worried about the following steps of the implementation of the WESTMED MAP by Commission and particularly on reducing the fishing effort for trawlers.

In recent years, we have seen an increasingly serious crisis, which has hit the European fisheries sector very hard, particularly in the Mediterranean. The restrictive management measures for the protection of fish stocks have been joined by other unpredictable factors such as the Covid19 pandemic and the ongoing conflicts, not to mention climate changes, affecting fishermen. Given the significant socio-economic consequences of the implemented measures, it is necessary to reflect on the future implementation of the MAP, particularly regarding the diminution of fishing effort.

The proof lies in the substantial adherence to the calls for permanent cessation both those provided for under the previous fund, the EMFF, and those provided for under the current fund, the EMFAF. A part of the fishermen have now no other choice than think about permanent cessation as it is a direct consequence of the fact that management costs have

now become higher than the possibility of doing business, linked with the decrease of fishing effort.

Fishing economy has always been a leading economic sector and we are ready to demonstrate that there are alternatives to drastic measures in reduction of fishing effort to reach F_{msy} for all stocks, which can contemplate compliance with management measures that would protect the resource, the environment as well as workers of the sea.

As underlined by Europeans experts, the implementation of the West Med MAP is ongoing, with the first measures implemented in 2020. The time required for restoration of ecosystems has been underestimated or will not be achieved due to climate change and it is therefore necessary to allow time for all significant positive effects on stock dynamics to become visible. Some measures may take time to demonstrate their effects, as it is the case for hake, which has a long biological cycle. More time is needed to observe significant results regarding the increase of biomass, which seems not completely correlated to the decrease in fishing mortality, and more time should be given to the stocks (particularly hake) to respond to the management measures.

Implementing the management plan and particularly article 6, with a strict reading of the scientific advice could result in measures which are not acceptable for our national and local economies and cannot guaranty a decent revenue for fishermen. Indeed, a shutdown of fishing effort for trawlers in 2025 will have an irreversible impact on this fleet but also for the whole European fishery industry in the western Mediterranean and will also undermine the supply of healthy food to the European Union citizens. Trawlers represent the backbone of the fishing economy ensuring a structured sector and representing most of the contribution in terms of landings and value. Moreover, due to the different crises from the recent years and the 40% reduction in fishing effort, trawlers will not be able to bear any additional reduction. The West Mediterranean fishing sector, regarding the trawler fleet, could not handle any additional reduction of their fishing days. Huge efforts have already been made by the profession during this first phase of the implementation of the plan: reduction in the number of vessels, reduction of fishing days, implementation of important spatial-temporal closure areas, implementation of catch limits for deep-water shrimps and work on selectivity measures, both for coastal and particularly for

deep-water shrimps fisheries. It is necessary to recognize the efforts made so far by fishermen to protect a resource that is a source of livelihood for many families who live from the fishing economy, as well as a source of safe food supply. All French, Italian and Spanish fishermen, joined by Croatian, signed a declaration calling for a moratorium on management measures, maintaining the same levels of fishing effort and catch limits as in 2024. This request cannot be ignored. For all these reasons, and to avoid drastic measures for the profession, **France, Italy and Spain are asking for a freezing of the current fishing effort for 2025 but also restart negotiations in order to adapt the WestMed MAP.**