

A Socially Sustainable EU Common Fisheries Policy:  
Workers' organisations' participation in the fisheries, aquaculture  
and processing sectors

## **Final Strategy Report: Demands for mainstreaming Social Sustainability in the EU Common Fisheries Policy**

**October 2019**

---

Prepared for ETF-EFFAT by CHARMELIAN



**European Federation of Food, Agriculture  
and Tourism Trade Unions**

---

## Introduction

Following an 18 month process with ETF, EFFAT and their Affiliate Trade Unions this document presents urgent priorities that must be acted on for improving the social sustainability of the [Common Fisheries Policy \(CFP\)](#). The CFP impacts workers in the seafood sector (identified in this work as encompassing fishing, aquaculture and seafood processing), both within the EU and through the influence of international supply chains feeding the EU market, the world's biggest seafood market.

**The vision is for an EU Common Fisheries Policy that includes social objectives, which protects workers, includes the views of worker representatives in decision making and understands the impacts of policy decisions on workers and communities. The CFP must value workers in fisheries as well as the environment**

The next review of the functioning of the CFP begins in 2020 and presents an opportunity to address the weaknesses in its social policies and meet the vision of bettering the CFP to become more socially inclusive. The Trade Unions have come together via ETF and EFFAT to agree and articulate the 'Asks' presented in this strategy paper to identify the priorities for meeting this vision.

From March 2018 to July 2019, a series of seminars and steering group meetings took place under three core themes (noted below). The seminars and meeting attendants discussed in what ways each theme area might be improved to include social elements and, where possible, presented examples to illustrate potential changes. Each seminar was followed by an outcomes paper which brought together the principle discussion points and priorities of the meeting group.

The **three themes** under which the priorities were formed are:

- **Fisheries Management and Financial Instrument**
- **Health and Safety, Working Conditions, Organising and Collective Bargaining in the Fish Industry**
- **Market, Trade and International Dimension of EU Fisheries**

Subsequent to the seminars a final meeting was arranged to review the outcomes and discuss potential solutions with the European Commission. The final meeting of this project was held in Brussels on the 24<sup>th</sup> September 2019, the agenda and presentations made by Trade Unions are available from the Secretariat. The meeting was attended by ETF-EFFAT Affiliates, EC DG MARE, DG EMPL, EUROPECHE and NGOs.

The first draft of this paper was prepared in advance of a meeting between ETF-EFFAT Affiliates and the European Commission in September 2019, Brussels. The meeting discussed the outcome papers from each of the three seminars and presentations heard from the Trade Unions on each theme. Roundtables were facilitated by the project team to review the priorities of the Trade Unions and explore solutions.

The European Commission highlighted existing mechanisms within the CFP available to the Trade Unions to promote social sustainability. However, the Trade Unions explained to the European Commission that these were not working due to many factors, examples were provided during the meeting and details are available in this paper. The European Commission suggested formally bringing these cases to their attention so that they can help to resolve them. However, this alone does not solve the situation that fishery workers are in. More fundamentally, as demanded herein by the Trade Unions, it is essential to level the playing field in the CFP and put social side by side with environment in all aspects of the policy. The CFP review taking place in 2020 must therefore act on these demands made by the Trade Unions representing fishery workers.

## Priorities by Theme

The Seminars were an opportunity for Affiliates to develop greater partnerships which might work together to accelerate inclusion of social issues in the CFP; to identify and expand plans to work together across organisations; and to share experiences. In particular, they sought to share best practice in integrating social issues in the EU seafood sector.

Each seminar raised valid and constructive dialogue from participants as to how to improve the social sustainability aspects of the CFP.

Noted below are the priorities that came from the seminars, and which represent concrete asks for the Trade Unions to demand of the next CFP. They follow the main themes and are drawn from the facilitated discussions between the participants during each Seminar.

## Theme One: Fisheries Management and Financial Instrument

**Overarching aim:** Fisheries should aim to provide the maximum social benefit to seafood workers and communities; realising decent and safe work, while maximising provision of environmentally-appropriately managed and harvested nutrition to the market.

### Asks, for inclusion in the CFP

**Ask 1:** There must be high-level overarching social objectives in the CFP, alongside the existing environmental objectives such as Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY). These objectives must, for example, consider the economic and social wellbeing of seafood workers, their families, and communities so as to maximise their benefit alongside ensuring good management measures.

**Ask 2:** Social targets and indicators need to be included within all aspects of the CFP. Inclusion of social objectives as a pillar of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF); and impact assessment of all management measures should be standard to effectively manage the social impacts of fishery instruments (quotas and multi-annual plans).

**Ask 3:** To achieve social objectives, the EU must embrace fisheries co-management systems and workers' voices must be made more influential (through Trade Unions) within the CFP architecture: the Advisory Councils and the Scientific Technical Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) committee must include scientists skilled in human rights and social issues relevant for the fishery industry.

### Key Challenges

*The current CFP lacks social objectives to maximise benefit to workers and limit negative impacts. The considerations of workers, their safety, fishing communities and the viability of the value chain is not consistently included in the development of fishing measures, or funding, for the industry. This is contrary to the CFP's own objective that "The CFP aims to ensure that fishing and aquaculture are environmentally, economically and socially sustainable".<sup>1</sup> Currently the lack of recognition of social objectives creates imbalance between these three different pillars is leading to social inequity. Especially when considering the*

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp_en)

Mission Letter for the Commissioner for Oceans<sup>2</sup> with an overall aim to ‘speak and listen more to one another’ there is an immediate and urgent need to listen to the Trade Union’s representing fishery workers and mainstream their demands in all elements of Common Fisheries Policy.

*CFP objectives have been established exclusively around environmental and economic criteria without accounting for impacts on workers and communities, be those in the EU or elsewhere. The well-being of 350,000 seafood sector workers within the EU and the many thousands in third-countries supplying the EU is not yet a priority of the CFP, despite this being a clear objective of the Policy. Managing fisheries to the best benefit of society; understanding environmental, social and economic well-being, must be added to the top-level objectives of the CFP.*

Due to a lack of social targets and indicators, *social issues are not routinely, consistency or effectively addressed within the design, assessment or funding of fisheries management measures.* For example, the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) currently only uses 2 social indicators (focused on employment) compared with 38 environmental indicators when assessing the effectiveness of the CFP. Social objectives and indicators are not included as a measure of success of EMFF funds, or as a conditionality for companies seeking to access funding (for example, safeguarding workers’ rights or social impact assessments might be future requirements of those seeking funding). Setting social targets and indicators linked to overarching social objectives within the CFP would allow for social sustainability to be mainstreamed and considered as integral rather than an afterthought. These need to include not only jobs and fishery dependency; but also worker protection, education and training, earnings and safety.

The scientists that are part of STECF do not include social scientists with experience of human rights and labour rights in fisheries. These experts must be included since without them it is not feasible for a group of environmentalists and economists to represent the social elements of the fisheries sector.

*Workers are under-valued in EU fisheries management systems.* The EU needs to recognise that ETF and EFFAT affiliates who represent the seafood sector are an essential part of the conversation, and need more weight within key bodies such as the ACs and the STECF which give advice on fishery management based on key indicators and research. The limited resources available to Trade Unions to be represented on these bodies and to have effective influence are a real challenge that weakens the social performance of the CFP. Strengthening Trade Union influence and enabling indicators and research to be developed will ensure workers and community are taken into consideration when decisions are being made.

*The CFP is not supporting the seafood sector as a viable, valuable, safe employment opportunity that provides a positive contribution to the blue economy and to food security. It is increasingly difficult to recruit into the capture, processing and aquaculture sectors in the EU. DG Employment (EMPL) needs to be part of the conversation looking to the EU seafood sector’s future so they can help innovate and diversify intake across the sector. Cooperation to change the negative perceptions associated with fishing; and ensure effective training, safety and job-security are key. Fishing is often associated with environmental impacts, but recent studies have shown that, for example, sardine fishing has a lower ecological impact than soy farming; and reports for future food security, such as EAT-Lancet, cite seafood as critically important. Therefore ensuring well trained, proud, seafood workers for the future is vital. There is no evidence that DG Employment and DG Mare are considering this cooperative work to address recruitment.*

---

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/mission-letter-virginijus-sinkevicius\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/mission-letter-virginijus-sinkevicius_en.pdf)

Beyond DG EMPL, it is recommended that *DG MARE should look at the wider need for coordination across EU institutions around seafood workers*. Critical to the EU's nutrition and wellbeing, DG Mare must look for support across DGs and other institutions so that 'working to provide seafood' is seen as attractive, safe and meaningful.

*"To ensure the future of the whole fish industry, we can't do it ignoring the most important stock, the fishery workers."*

(Quote from a delegate at the Seminar)

## Theme Two: Health and Safety, Working Conditions, Organising and Collective Bargaining in the Fish Industry

**Overarching aim:** Prevention of injuries, accidents and loss of life; and to ensure workers are supported through effective training and compliance.

### Asks, for inclusion in the CFP

**Ask 4:** Undertake a Europe-wide study to establish the health and safety needs of seafood workers, how this can be included in the CFP and the budget needed to implement it. The study must determine how to monitor ongoing performance (e.g. through the Data Collection Framework) since health and safety in the seafood sector is currently under-reported, lacking critical data.

**Ask 5:** The CFP must provide financial support for Member States to fund critical basic training for all seafood workers at minimum levels both **before** entering in to work and **during** the course of their work. It is proposed that training is directed through the Unions to support a greater representation of workers by the Trade Unions, while enabling data gathering and compliance-monitoring.

**Ask 6:** Make worker safety and trade union representation a key priority of the CFP with performance objectives such as reductions in injuries, agree critical standards that must be met and how these can be applied within the CFP. The project's Seminar 2 provided a useful list of factors including training, worker organisation, occupational disease, arduous work, and retirement age, on which ETF-EFFAT are well placed to advise on.

### Key Challenges

*Data on accidents in the capture sector is poor; training is underfunded; there is a lack of consistent approach across the EU; and requirements within the current CFP are wholly inadequate.* The seafood sector has considerable risk associated with it. Studies are out of date, but report as many as 1,347 accidents in the fisheries sector in any one year (European Parliament, 2000) and between 13 and 18 lives lost from fishing vessels per year across the EU (Lloyds Register, 2018; Marine Accident Investigation Branch, 2008). It is thought the situation is likely to be worse due to the lack of data and under-reporting.

It is likely that a lack of health and safety training is contributing directly to the risks, accidents and deaths in the seafood sector. [The Health and Safety Authority \(2014\)](#), indicate that most accidents across the EU on fishing vessels occur as a result of fatigue, poor decision making and failing to follow basic precautions, such

as safeguarding machinery<sup>3</sup> ([European Parliament, 2000](#)). This number could be reduced with robust health and safety standards, training and regular inspections. Figures for aquaculture and for processing are likely to be aggregated in to other sectors.

Health and safety is not funded adequately for the commercial fishing profession, which is considered one of the most dangerous. There is no conformity across the EU on funding for health and safety in the seafood sector, or in the responsibility for training which ranges from the individual, to companies, up to the Member State. Some countries (such as Denmark) subsidise training and ensure a minimum standard is met for each worker. The EU could take a positive stance within the CFP by setting clear objectives for health and safety and ensure that Member States co-fund training. This could be delivered through Unions, thereby also strengthening collective bargaining of seafood workers. The Trade Unions could then assist in helping to ensure more and up-to-date reporting.

There is a need to clearly and specifically understand health and safety risks in the seafood sector, not to have underreporting or to have figures hidden in other data sets. A lack of data, particularly for accidents or 'near misses', is potentially hiding a much bigger problem. For instance, Health and Safety data is aggregated with agriculture data at the EU level together. It needs to be separated out to show a clear picture of the seafood sector alone, and then split in to fishing, aquaculture and seafood processing sub-sectors.

The conclusions of the study '[Training of Fishers](#)' from 2018, calling for developing harmonised training standards across MSs, should be taken on board by the European Commission.

### Theme Three: Market, Trade and the International Dimension

**Overarching aim:** All fish on the EU market, wherever it is produced or processed, meet the same labour standards and fishery workers are assured of their human and labour rights.

**Asks, for inclusion in the CFP,** in order to create a level playing field, so that the good labour practices within the EU are not undermined by poor practices outside and that the EU market can protect workers supplying seafood from human and labour rights violations:

**Ask 7:** Update the IUU Regulation (1005/2008) so that 'human and labour rights violations' are included in the definition of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing within the EU's IUU Regulation. Countries that are found to ignore or permit human and labour rights violations of fisheries workers should be yellow or red carded and their fishery products not permitted access to the EU market until the matter has been satisfactorily addressed.

**Ask 8:** Use the ILO Work in Fishing Convention (ILO C188) seafood labour standard as a benchmark for importing countries. Countries supplying the EU with seafood must ratify the Fundamental ILO Conventions 87 and 98 and encouraged to ratify the ILO C188 in the same way that EU member states have been required to do so by [Council Directive \(EU\) 2017/159](#).

**Ask 9:** Develop a European mechanism/institution and procedures which enable compliance of the companies with IUU fishing regulation as well as human rights and international labour standards, with an

---

<sup>3</sup> European Parliament (2000): Safety and the Causes of Accidents in the Fisheries Sector

authority to consider and investigate complaints and restrict EU market access for products of the companies in breach of these laws and standards.

### Key Challenges

The EU cites fighting IUU fishing as a priority and there is a generally accepted link between IUU fishing and human and labour rights violations. However the current EU IUU Regulation only seeks to ensure that illegally caught fish does not enter the EU; it does not ensure that fish associated with illegal human and labour rights violations is also banned from import. The EU considers fish to be illegal if it does not meet the regulation. There should be formal recognition that fish produced where decent work and human rights are not observed is also illegal.

The EU definition of IUU fish is as follows and needs to change to incorporate human and labour rights:

**“The EU rules to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) depletes fish stocks, destroys marine habitats, distorts competition, puts honest fishers at an unfair disadvantage, and weakens coastal communities, particularly in developing countries.”<sup>4</sup>**

Recent studies have shown a symbiotic relationship between IUU fishing and human and labour rights violations<sup>5</sup>. These studies show that the global decline in fish stocks have made it harder for many fishing businesses to be profitable, encouraging some to go further out to sea and fish for longer periods of time using unsustainable methods. These may fall under IUU (Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated) fishing parameters. Further that distant water fishing has higher costs associated with its operations and to compensate the increase in costs, operators often seek cheap labour leading them to illegally traffic migrant workers and other vulnerable groups. The global problem of IUU fishing is therefore simultaneously contributing to the exploitation of workers in the fishing sector.

IUU fish is not the only high-risk area for workers. Fish products imported into the EU may come from countries with lower social, labour and safety requirements both in the capture, farming and processing sectors; meaning that there is a lack of level playing field for those catching, farming and processing within the EU. This also means that EU consumers cannot be confident that imported fish is not produced at the expense of vulnerable workers in third countries. Additionally EU operators, who need to demonstrate good worker conditions to their buyers, lose out by having to compete with non-EU companies with lower costs due to weaker regulations. Ultimately this could lead to businesses in the EU failing; workers losing their jobs; or EU operators tempted to take inappropriate risk to compete with lower priced products.

It is therefore proposed that the CFP only permit import of fishery products into the EU which originate from countries that can demonstrate they meet ILO C188, whether ratified or not, to mirror the regulatory requirements of EU Member States.

---

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, IUU Fishing: [https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/illegal\\_fishing\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/illegal_fishing_en)

<sup>5</sup> William D. Moreto, Richard W. Charlton, Samuel E. DeWitt & Christina M. Burton (2019): The convergence of Captured Fish and People: Examining the Symbiotic Nature of Labor Trafficking and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing. DOI: 10.1080/01639625.2019.1594587

Rashid Sumaila, Jack Alder (2008): Global Scope and Economics of Illegal Fishing. DOI: [10.1016/j.marpol.2005.11.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2005.11.001)

OHCHR (2013): Tragedy in the Marine Commons: The Intertwined Exploitation of Ocean Ecosystems and Fisheries Workers.

As the world’s largest seafood market, the EU has a responsibility to use its influence for good. In setting standards for imports, the EU and its partners can work closely with businesses: many of which are global players with operations both within and outside the EU.

## Next Steps

This paper will be used to lead conversation, aimed at building consensus, around the priority Asks of the Trade Unions to the European Commission to improve the CFP. This will enable the groups to agree on priorities and begin to carve out their next steps as the EU moves toward reviewing the functioning of the CFP beginning in 2020.

## Summary Table of Themes and Priority Asks

The following table summarises the key challenge relating to the three Themes of the project and relates them to the proposed Objectives and Asks developed by the dialogue. In addition further asks have been summarised; for more information on these please refer to the full Outcomes papers that detail the views of the Trade Unions captured during the Seminars.

Item	Fisheries Management and Financial Instrument	Health & Safety, Working Conditions, Organising and Collective Bargaining	Market, Trade and the International Dimension
<b>Key Challenge</b>	CFP lacks social objectives so that impacts and benefits to workers are not considered.	The seafood sector has high risks, but health and safety is not sufficiently recorded and training compliance monitoring is insufficient and variable across the EU.	The EU is vulnerable to importing seafood products that are illegal in terms of ‘human or labour rights violations’ or do not meet the same social standards required of EU operators. The lack in a level-playing field disadvantages EU operators.
<b>Objective</b>	Maximum social benefit returned to seafood workers and communities.	Prevention of injuries, accidents and loss of life and ensure workers are supported through effective training and compliance.	All fish on the EU market meets the same labour standards and is free from human and labour rights violations.



Item	Fisheries Management and Financial Instrument	Health & Safety, Working Conditions, Organising and Collective Bargaining	Market, Trade and the International Dimension
<p><b>Priority Asks</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. High level social objectives in the CFP.</li> <li>2. Social targets and indicators defined.</li> <li>3. Fisheries co-management implemented with greater representative of workers.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Undertake an EU-wide study to establish health and safety training needs and best-practice.</li> <li>5. Dedicate funding for safety training directed through the unions.</li> <li>6. Set worker safety and trade union representation as key priorities for improvement in the CFP.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Update the IUU regulation so that ‘human and labour rights violation’ is included in the definition of illegality.</li> <li>8. Require all seafood imports to meet the ILO c188 seafood labour standard.</li> <li>9. Develop a European mechanism/institution and procedures which enable compliance of the companies with IUU fishing regulation as well as human rights and international labour standards.</li> </ol>

Item	Fisheries Management and Financial Instrument	Health & Safety, Working Conditions, Organising and Collective Bargaining	Market, Trade and the International Dimension
<p><b>Further Asks</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased influence of Trade Unions at the Advisory Committees.</li> <li>• Rework technical measures within fisheries management.</li> <li>• Job sustainability, including compensation for termination of fishing activities.</li> <li>• Simplifying the bureaucratic processes to avoid ‘red tape’.</li> <li>• Strengthening the EMFF to become more accessible.</li> <li>• Social criteria in place in order to access the funds.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trade Unions to better represent the workers and more uniformly.</li> <li>• Promote collective organisation to support health and safety initiatives.</li> <li>• Mandatory, enforceable risk assessments for fish workplaces.</li> <li>• Health and safety training for all seafood workers.</li> <li>• Certain disorders to be formally registered as occupational diseases linked to the fishing sector.</li> <li>• A unique retirement age for workers in the seafood sector.</li> <li>• A simple, mandatory database for the reporting of accidents.</li> <li>• Inspection and enforcement of existing laws around health and safety to ensure compliance.</li> <li>• Specific strategies for organising processing, aquaculture and fishing as health and safety strategies can no longer apply to multiple disciplines.</li> <li>• Gender and equality to improve specific gender issues</li> <li>• Apply a grassroots bottom-up approach to setting regulations to be more inclusive.</li> <li>• Consider a Trade Union ‘fish labour standard’, relating to labelling that also enables organising.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More collective representation of seafood workers.</li> <li>• Create conditionality around issues related to social issues and worker’s rights to be embedded.</li> <li>• Increased data to push specific issues and strategic concerns.</li> <li>• Enforce regulations on external EU fleets.</li> <li>• Maximising value of the fishery and supply chain to ensure a smooth supply which is practical.</li> <li>• Third party countries should have to apply the same regulations or risk importing seafood without the same levels of control.</li> </ul>